VOL 47, APRIL 2024

TESTING TIMES

Crisis communication strategies and responses in the spotlight

KEY LEARNING POINTS

- FOCUS ON THOSE AFFECTED
- BE CAUTIOUS WHEN SHARING IMAGES
- USE TRUSTED SOURCES OF NEWS
- REMAIN ALERT TO THE THREATS
- BE AWARE OF FAKE NEWS

Amanda Coleman
COMMUNICATION

WHAT HAPPENED?

On Friday 22 March gunmen stormed Crocus City Hall in Moscow, Russia and opened fire on the concertgoers before setting the building on fire. At least 137 people died, and experts have suggested that number could rise. There are more than 90 people in hospital and around 180 people who were injured.

There were images very quickly shared of the moments the attackers stormed the building and of the aftermath of the attack. Initially Russian President Vladimir Putin initially suggested the blame lay with Ukraine and that the attackers had been trying to flee to Ukraine. This was despite Islamic State group quite quickly claiming responsibility for the attack. On Monday 25 March Putin said the attack was the work of 'radical Islamists' as four people accused of the attack appeared in court.

Reporters questioned the information and version of events that was shared from the Kremlin with one stating that it was all taken 'with a pinch of salt'. This situation has highlighted the challenge for people of navigating the news, fake news and disinformation that may be shared. It puts additional pressure on both the mainstream media and on consumers of news. Following the attack details of the US authorities warning Russian authorities on March 7 about a possible attack emerged. Russian authorities refused to comment. There was an increase in the threat level in Russia and France following the attack.

What was the communication response and what could it have been?

Communication was almost instantly shared about the attack taking place. Images of the moment the attack began as well as of the aftermath of the events were circulating on social media. Additional footage was circulated by Islamic State group which the media were careful to use in a limited way.

This was a reminder of the visual impact on crisis communication and the importance of understanding how and when images are used. At the heart of this situation were the people who were attacked and affected, and their loved ones. This should be remembered by not just the media, but everyone who may be sharing details on social media. We all have responsibilities as consumers of news events and reporting.

There was also a significant issue of disinformation and the use of deepfake technology. The Russian commentary on the attack was given little credibility by the media but it is unclear the impact it had and how it was received by the public.

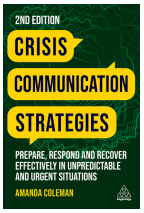
BBC Verify also highlight what appeared to be a video involving a Ukraine official talking about the attack as disinformation that was using deepfake technology. The video had been widely circulated on Russian state TV.

Subscribe to my crisis comms newsletter https://underpressure.substack.com/

What do we need to remember in this situation?

- Educate yourself and others about the potential of disinformation – this is a hugely important piece of work that is just starting to be highlighted. The challenge from deepfakes and disinformation is going to become obvious during 2024 with elections around the world.
- Keep your focus on the people who have been affected – whatever the circumstances that surround events the first thoughts should always be to those caught up in emergencies and disasters. The communication must have them in mind.
- Take care on the circulation of images – as well as the challenge from deepfake images it is important to remember that people have lost loved ones in such incidents and what we share and how we talk about it must be sensitive.
- Read widely and use trusted sources – gone are the days of looking at one source for news. When events occur, we need to look at a range of sources and focus on those that are trusted.
- Be prepared for terror attacks – there was a terrible time in 2017 with a number of attacks which increased awareness and helped people to recognise the importance of being prepared. The incident in Russia reminds us all to be aware of the threat and to report any concerns.
- Remember the advice of Run, Tell, Hide – the advice was shared widely in the UK in previous years and remains important for everyone.

For advice on issues management get a copy of Everyday Communication Strategies



For more case studies and crisis communication tips get a copy of Crisis Communication Strategies by Amanda Coleman available at book stores and on Amazon.