Public Relations Review xxx (xxxx) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Public Relations Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/pubrev

Full Length Article

Managing a crisis: A framing analysis of press releases dealing with the Fukushima nuclear power station crisis

Jinbong Choi[a,*], Seohyeon Lee[b]

[a] Sungkonghoe University, Dept. of Media & Communication, Republic of Korea
[b] Jeju National University, Dept. of Journalism & Public Relations, Republic of Korea

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Fukushima nuclear crisis
TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company)
Press releases
Frame

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore how TEPCO used press releases which dealt with the Fukushima nuclear crisis that occurred in March 2011 attempting to restore its reputation by analyzing frames used in the press releases. To conduct this research, 300 press releases from the TEPCO website were gathered during an approximately one-month time period (March 11, 2011 to April 5, 2011) after the earthquake and tsunami first struck Japan. According to the findings of this study, TEPCO utilized the official updates frame predominately more than the other three frames: attribution, announcement, and apology. By providing official updates, the company consistently attempted to keep the public informed in order to avoid information gaps. Furthermore, TEPCO used the attribution frame more than the apology frame. More precisely, the organization evaded its accountability by assigning blame to the earthquake and apologized only when definitely necessary—such as regarding a loss of employees and discomforts caused by the crisis. With regard to the announcement frame, the company recognized that only a small amount of information was necessary for the public.

1. Introduction

On Friday, March 11, 2011, the largest earthquake in the history of Japan struck the country, at a measurement of 9.0 on the Richter scale (Jones, 2011). The aftermath of the quake, which was also one of the largest recorded worldwide, was felt across the country in the form of aftershocks, some reaching an intensity of 6.3, and a tsunami that swept across the eastern coastline of Japan ("Japan Earthquake," 2011). As a result of the natural disasters, the tsunami in particular, reactors of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) began to deteriorate. As the Fukushima plant suffered a cooling system failure, a state of emergency was declared ("Japan Earthquake," 2011). Three explosions occurred within the plant from Saturday, March 12 to Tuesday, March 15. From Tuesday to Wednesday, March 16, two fires were also discovered within the Fukushima plant (Jones, 2011).

After all the explosions and fires were reported, almost 200,000 people were forced to evacuate a 12-mile radius, with those remaining in a 19-mile radius recommended to stay indoors (Jones, 2011). According to TEPCO, early Saturday, March 12, people from at least 6 million homes in and around Tokyo were reported to have been without power because of TEPCO's inability to regain control of the Fukushima plant. This number represented close to 10% of Japan's households. Later that evening, the company announced that that number had dropped to almost 5 million homes (Jones, 2011).

By the end of March, high levels of radioactivity in liquids, in such sources as seawater, and radiation had been discovered in and

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: choi0126@gmail.com (J. Choi), popoyami@jejunu.ac.kr (S. Lee).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.09.004
Received 13 October 2016; Received in revised form 22 March 2017; Accepted 13 September 2017
0363-8111/ © 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

around the Fukushima plant, in some instances as far as 25 miles away (Jones, 2011). TEPCO had been found to have inaccurately measured the levels of said radiation and radioactivity because of human error, as well as failing equipment. TEPCO has been blamed for the outcome because of construction and storage decisions; ultimately, for clustering reactors and fuel sources. The damage done to these reactors and fuel sources is so severe that the Fukushima plant may never be available again for future use (Jones, 2011).

TEPCO has also been blamed for not releasing prior knowledge of the possibility of the company's potential undoing because of tsunami damage until just 4 days prior to the tsunami which greatly damaged the Fukushima plant. The company is said to have had this information since 2008 ("3/7: Tepco," 2011). The company defended itself by claiming that the Japan Society of Civil Engineers, which is responsible for natural disaster prevention for nuclear plants, should have evaluated the plant's safety before they were to take the responsibility of publicizing the aforementioned information ("3/7: Tepco," 2011). By the end of March 2011, shares in TEPCO had fallen by upward of 75% ("Disaster," 2011).

Because of the magnitude of the destruction of the Fukushima plant and TEPCO's inability to stabilize conditions, the government was the only entity that could prevent the company from folding ("Power," 2011). The manner of saving the company is a bill that would allow TEPCO to compensate those affected by the disaster with money received from the government, and other nuclear operatives if needed ("Power," 2011). The government would then be reimbursed by TEPCO's future profits. Therefore, TEPCO's means of resolving the issue of negative public perception would involve monetary compensation. Another way that TEPCO attempted to carry out public relations damage control was by continuing to clean and contain the radiation being emitted from the plant, and by keeping the public informed of said cleanup plans ("Cleanup," 2011). By doing this, the company would hope to regain confidence and support from the country that it affected by allowing its residents to return to their homes and communities over time. And finally, during the aftermath of the tsunami, TEPCO kept its consumers informed of the status of the reactors by sending out updates in the form of press releases. These press releases were available via the company's website. TEPCO also sent out numerous press releases per day, depending on the amount of activity and information that needed to be communicated. That is, TEPCO tried to use press releases to overcome the natural disaster crisis and repair its damaged image during the disaster.

By visiting the Tokyo Electric Power Company website and selecting the "TEPCO News" tab, it was able to be determined that from February 2010 to February 2011, a one-year time span, 84 press releases were made available to the public by TEPCO. No more than 11 press releases were publicized per month. However, from March 11, 2011, to April 5, 2011, less than one month, 306 press releases were published via TEPCO's website, due to the company's necessity of keeping the public informed. The most press releases published in a one-day time span during this period were 34, which occurred on March 12, the day after the earthquake and tsunami struck Japan. In short, TEPCO immediately used press releases as a major damage control method as soon as the earthquake and tsunami disaster occurred.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how TEPCO used press releases as one of its main damage control strategies to overcome the nuclear disaster crisis. This study also explores how TEPCO used press releases to keep its consumers informed, and how the company attempted to repair its reputation that endured damage from the crisis over time.

2. Literature review

2.1. Press releases

A press release can be defined as an organization's primary method of communication with the media, and interaction with the public through news media (Choi & Park, 2010; Sleurs, Jacobs, & Van Waes, 2003). The function of a press release is to publicize information from an organization; particularly, information that may have an impact or be of interest to a large group of people (Morton & Ramsey, 1994). According to Strobbe and Jacobs (2005), a press release sent out via the Internet is considered an "e-release," which is the method that TEPCO used to send out information about the company. Research indicates that companies have increasingly begun method of delivery over time (Catenaccio, 2008). The Internet could potentially have an effect on press releases in the form of e-releases by companies using a less traditional news format when sending out releases via the Internet (Strobbe & Jacobs, 2005).

Results from studies conducted by Strobbe and Jacobs (2005) also show that the language of press releases is typically organized in such a way that lessens the burden of work on the journalists who adapt it for their own news reporting: for example, using the third-person instead of the first when referring to itself as a company and pseudo-quotations, which as has been seen, after studies, as being more complex than generally assumed (Sleurs et al., 2003). The results of the Sleurs et al. (2003) study aligns with research done by Strobbe & Jacobs in the sense that both studies indicate that the construction of press releases is one that is clearly pre-formulated, on behalf of both the newspaper and the company. The newspaper benefits are due to the press releases being constructed in a similar format to its own, therefore allowing news reporters to simply copy the work into print (Sleurs et al., 2003). In this regard, the findings of news coverage studies (Sachsman, 1976; Sigal, 1973; Turk, 1986) indicated that more than 50% of news coverage is written based on the press releases.

The company benefits by being able to retain most, if not all, of the information that it intends to deliver to the public. From another company-to-newspaper relationship angle, a study led by Choi and Park (2010) shows that journalists and editors of newspapers, especially at the local level, take the advertiser into consideration when selecting press releases to run in the newspaper. The results of this study also indicate that the newsworthiness of the press releases being sent to newspapers is also a contributing factor to whether or not it will ultimately be published (Choi & Park, 2010). Considering these factoring elements, it can be speculated that the best option in order for a company to have its press releases consistently publicized, is to simply distribute them themselves. In eliminating the newspaper as the middleman by releasing their own information via the Internet, organizations and

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6575914

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/6575914

Daneshyari.com