

Course Outline

COM5403 - Crisis Communication and Management
Instructor: Dani Madrid-Morales (dani.madrid@cityu.edu.hk)
Monday, 9:00am – 11:50pm | M4003

Course Description

Not a single company, organisation, government or individual is immune to being affected by a crisis. Crises come in multiple shapes and forms, often when least expected: a malfunctioning product; a fatal accident; a poorly handled natural disaster; a publicly misbehaving CEO; an intercultural mishap that escalated on social media... The possibilities are countless, and yet, when a crisis strikes, many organisations are unable to respond effectively and fail to communicate in a timely manner.

Can companies prepare for unforeseen crises? What are the most effective strategies to manage a crisis? What can be done to turn crises into opportunities? What is the first thing an organisation should do when a crisis hits? How can social media be of use when communicating crises? By the end of this course, not only will you be able to answer all of the previous questions; but you will also be comfortable designing and implementing a crisis communication plan, and analysing and learning from previous crises.

This course takes a two-step approach to the study of communicating and managing crises. First, it familiarises you with some of the most often used theories and models in the field. Theory-driven management helps minimize the costs during a crisis and it contributes to maximizing the opportunities for growth after it is resolved. Second, this course will teach you how to apply those theories in the analysis of real cases of organisations and institutions hit by a crisis, some of which were successful and some of which were not.

The focus of this course is on crisis communication and management in Greater China. Therefore, we will mostly discuss cases from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China. You will have the opportunity to study these cases in detail and, of course, to compare them with those from other parts of the world. Special attention has been paid in choosing recent examples that help understand the impact that new media, particularly social networks, have on the way crises are managed.

Recommended Texts

There is no textbook that covers all the content we will review in this course. There are, however, some highly recommended books that deal with large parts of it. You can find copies of these books in the reserved section of the library. Some copies are also available for purchase from the bookstore. When available, you are free to read the Chinese version of a text, but do make sure you familiarize yourself with the English terms of key concepts and theories.

- Coombs, W. T. (2015). *Ongoing crisis communication: planning, managing, and responding* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

- 库姆斯, 林文益, & 郑安凤. (2003). 危机传播与沟通: 计画, 管理与回应. 台北市: 风云论坛. (Translated from the 1999 edition of Coombs' *Ongoing crisis communication*)
- Fearn-Banks, K. (2016). *Crisis communications: a casebook approach* (5th ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Zaremba, A. J. (2010). *Crisis communication: theory and practice*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the semester, you will need to demonstrate having acquired the following skills and abilities, which are aligned with the learning outcomes described in the course guide:

- 1) Explain what crises are and select appropriate procedures to communicate and manage different types of crises.
- 2) Apply relevant theories and models in the analysis of crises.
- 3) Employ strategic public relations to contribute to the prevention of crises, and value the importance of strategic communication during a crisis.
- 4) Develop a crisis communication and management plan, part of which should reflect the use of new media.

Evaluation and grading

This course combines lectures, group discussions, case studies and analyses. In order to get a good grade, you are expected to come to class regularly, to participate in discussions and to take an active role in the learning process. This means that you will need to keep up with the assigned readings every week. All readings are available online through the CityU library. Your knowledge and understanding of the readings, alongside your command of the theories and concepts presented in class, will be tested in a two-hour final exam.

You will also be required to select a case study from a list provided by me, prepare a two-page executive summary of the case and lead a class discussion about it. At the end of the semester, you will present a crisis communication and management plan for a medium-sized company, which you will prepare in groups. Finally, you will work individually on a one-page analysis on how social media was used during a recent crisis.

This is a detailed breakdown of the weight that each assignment and task carries in the final grade.

| Task | Weight | Due date |
|---|------------|--------------|
| Final Exam | 40% | TBC |
| Assignments | 30% | |
| Group case study (see below for possible cases) | 15% | See schedule |
| Individual social media analysis | 5% | 11 March |
| Spokesperson simulation | 5% | 3 April |
| In-class participation and attendance | 5% | 3 April |
| Group Project | 30% | |
| Crisis communication and management plan | 25% | 8 April |
| In-class presentation | 5% | 10 April |

All assignments must be computer typed, include a cover page and be professionally looking. Hand written assignments will not be graded. Please pay attention to grammar and spelling. Points will be deducted for poorly written and/or formatted assignments. You should also make sure that your assignments include a list with all the references you used to write them.

Case Studies

One of the most effective ways to learn how to manage and communication crises is by studying what organisations and institutions did in the past when facing one. This is why a substantial part of this course will be spent on analysing cases. You will be responsible, in groups of 4, to research one case study and to deliver a two-page executive summary to the class to trigger a discussion. All case studies are due on Saturday at 8pm, the week before they are to be discussed in class. See the schedule below for details on when each case study will be discussed.

By week 2, you must have formed groups and decided which case study you want to work on. Please assign yourself to a group on Canvas before coming to class on week 2. I will randomly assign students without a group to groups with less than 4 members. If two or more groups want to do the same case study, a lucky draw will be used to assign the cases. We will discuss case studies on weeks 4, 5, 8, 10, 11 and 12. A case study template will be available on Canvas. Groups presenting on weeks 4 and 5 will be required to submit a shorter version of the executive summary.

The executive summaries will be posted on Canvas each Saturday evening and ALL students are expected to read them before coming to class. From time to time, I may quiz you on the content of the case studies prepared by your classmates. Your score in these quizzes might be used when computing your attendance and participation grade.

The case studies you can choose from are the following:

- 2008 – Tainted Milk Scandal (China) [2008 年中国奶制品污染事件]
- 2008 – Wenchuan Earthquake (China) [2008 年汶川大地震]
- 2008 – Liu Xiang and Nike (China) [2008 年刘翔耐克广告]
- 2011 – Guo Meimei and the Red Cross (China) [2011 年郭美美红十字会事件]
- 2011 – Zhejiang High Speed Train Crash (China) [2011 甬温线特别重大铁路交通事故]
- 2012 – KFC Food Safety Crisis (China) [2012 年肯德基食品安全事件]
- 2012 – Dolce & Gabbana Photo Spat (Hong Kong) [2012 年 D&G 禁止香港人摄影风波]
- 2012 – Lamma Ferry Crash (Hong Kong) [2012 年南丫岛撞船事故]
- 2013 – Apple Warranty Issues (China) [2013 年苹果中国保修问题事件]
- 2013 – VW Faulty Gearboxes (China) [2013 年大众 DSG 变速箱投诉事件]
- 2015 – Tianjin Port Explosions (China) [2015 年天津滨海新区爆炸事故]
- 2016 – Qiaobi TV Commercial (China) [2016 年俏比洗衣溶珠电视广告]

Deadlines

All submission for this course will be due on Saturdays at 8pm (晚上八點). For instance, the deadline to submit the individual social media analysis is March 11, 8pm HKT. The

same applies to group case studies. If your group is preparing the case study for the 2012 KFC food safety crisis in China, the executive summary must be submitted before February 11, 8pm HKT.

I am very strict when it comes to deadlines. A communications officer or a PR practitioner cannot be late. When a crisis strikes, timely responses are very important. Out there, in the real world, if you send your press release one minute too late, you can risk the future of the company you are working for. That is why you will be penalized for any late submissions. If you submit your assignment anytime between 1 minute and 1 hour late, I will deduct 10 points from your grade. Between 1 and 3 hours, I will deduct 20 points. If you are late by more than 3 hours, you will get 0 points for that assignment.

I do not make any exceptions to this rule. You have a detailed calendar from day 1, so plan accordingly. **I insist: there will be no exceptions.**

Canvas

We will be using Canvas as the main tool to communicate during the semester (<https://canvas.cityu.edu.hk>). Please make sure to login regularly. After 48 hours of posting an announcement on Canvas, I will assume that you have all read it. Announcements might include changes in class assignments, special arrangements or other similar matters. I tend to respond to your messages fairly quickly. However, do not expect me to be online all the time. If you have questions or problems regarding an assignment/submission, get in touch with me at least 48 hours before the deadline.

All your work will be submitted electronically on Canvas. Submissions sent to me by email will not be accepted. This is a paperless course. Do not submit hardcopies.

Attendance

You are expected to come to class every week, to arrive on time and to stay until the end of the class. During the semester you will be required to complete in-class assignments, discuss case studies and learn by interacting with each other. Absences will greatly hamper your learning progress so you should do your best to come to class regularly. If you need to miss a class, please let me know in advance. More than **three unexcused absences** will result in a significant grade decrease. I will keep attendance records and will use them in determining borderline grade decisions. If you are not in class when I am taking attendance, I will consider you absent.

In-class etiquette

Refrain from using your mobile phones in class, as they are a major source of distraction. If you have something really important to post on Weibo or WeChat (such as how cool this course is), you can do that during the break. At times I might ask you to use your phone for in-class assignments. Only at that point the use of mobile phones would be justified. **I might request you to leave the room if you use the phone repeatedly.**

We will spend considerable time in this course discussing cases. When doing so, please show respect to your colleagues and refrain from talking when they are presenting their work. Also, when engaging in debates show respect for other people's opinions/views and be ready to defend your arguments in a civilized manner. Laughing at or mocking your peers will not be accepted.

Plagiarism

As students of CityU, you have all been introduced to the concept of academic honesty and the problems associated with plagiarism, which is defined as using others' ideas, texts, video or audio as your own in your school projects. By now you must be familiar with plagiarism in academic writing. If you are not, please review the contents of CityU's academic honesty portal (<http://www6.cityu.edu.hk/ah/>).

Also, it is not acceptable to reuse your previous work for this course. All the assignments you submit for COM5403 must be original, must be your own creation and must not use any materials that are copyrighted. Even if you violate any of these premises unintentionally, it will still be considered as a form of plagiarism. If you have doubts as to what constitutes plagiarism, ask me. **Any case of plagiarism will be reported to CLASS and your grade will be severely affected.**

Language of instruction

English will be the only language of instruction for this section and all of the assignments will have to be completed in English. Discussions will always be conducted in English. You are free to use literature in Chinese for the assignments, but make sure that these references are properly cited in your work. Whenever quoting Chinese sources, please provide English translations, as there might be students in class who are not proficient in Chinese.

Schedule

This schedule is subject to changes based on how the semester goes. Any updates to the schedule will be published on Canvas.

Week 1 | 9 January: What is crisis communication?

We will spend the first half of the class getting to know each other and familiarizing ourselves with the assignments for the semester. During the second half of the class, we will define the word "crisis" and explore the concept of "crisis communication." We will also look at a crisis very close to us, the 2016 roof collapse at CityU.

Week 2 | 16 January: Crisis communication theories I

This week you will be introduced to some of the most commonly used theories in crisis communication. You will be able to apply the theories to the analysis of a case study in class, the 2008 Carrefour boycott in China.

- Reading: [Coombs 2010](#)
- Tasks: Decide what case you want to analyse, arrange groups of no more than 5 people and assign yourself to a group on Canvas. This must be done by Saturday, January 14 (8pm).

Week 3 | 23 January: Crisis communication theories II

We will continue discussing some frequently used theories and models during the first half of the class. We will use the second half of the class to talk about how to prepare a case study and we will learn how to apply the case study template to an international crisis.

- Readings: [Pratt 2012 \(part I\)](#)

Week 4 | 6 February: Prevention

The most effective way to manage a crisis effectively is to prevent it from happening in the first place. This week we will learn what strategies can be used to prevent crises from happening. In class, we will discuss two cases of large foreign corporations in Mainland China, Apple and Volkswagen.

- Case study I: 2013 Apple warranty crisis [[Background](#)]
- Case study II: 2013 VW gearbox problems [[Background](#)]

Week 5 | 13 February: Preparation

Sometimes crises cannot be prevented. However, organisations and institutions can prepare themselves for the arrival of a crisis. This week we will talk about measures institutions can take to be better prepared for unexpected crises. During the second half of the class we will talk about food safety crises in China: one affecting KFC and the other affecting the milk industry.

- Reading: [Jacques 2010](#)
- Case study I: 2008 Tainted milk scandal in China [[Background](#)]
- Case study II: 2012 KFC food safety incident [[Background](#)]

Week 6 | 20 February: Preparation I

Sometimes crises cannot be prevented. However, organisations and institutions can prepare themselves for the arrival of a crisis. This week we will talk about the crisis communication plan, the most often used tool in crisis preparation.

- Reading: [Seeger 2006](#)

Week 7 | 27 February – READING WEEK

We will not meet this week. Use the “free” time to catch up with readings and to work on your individual social media analysis. You should also choose with your group members what is the company for which you will be preparing the crisis communication and management plan.

Week 8 | 6 March: Preparation II & Recap

This week we will finish up our review of how to draft a crisis communication plan. We will also work in class to define objectives, strategies and goals. During the second part of the class we will review some of the theories we learnt in class and apply them to specific cases.

- Case study I: 2011 Guo Meimei and the Red Cross Society [[Background](#)]
- Case study II: 2008 Liu Xiang and Nike [[Background](#)]

- Task: Post on Canvas the name of the company for which you will design a crisis communication and management plan. This should be submitted by 8pm on Saturday, March 4.

Week 9 | 13 March: Response

When a crisis strikes, there are multiple ways to manage the situation and to communicate it to stakeholders. We will spend this week looking at ways in which organisations can respond to a crisis. We will use some famous cases to learn the basic concepts.

- Task: Submit the social media analysis on Canvas by Saturday, March 11 (8pm).

Week 10 | 20 March: Postcrisis & Social Media

OK, your company survived a major crisis. So, what is next? Once the storm has passed, what are organisations supposed to do? We will spend this week talking about postcrisis response. We will also look at how social media transformed the way organisations communicate with publics. We will debate in class about two crises that grew on social media, one in Hong Kong and one internationally.

- Reading: [Coombs 2007](#)
- Case study I: 2012 D&G Photo Spat in Hong Kong [[Background](#)]
- Case study II: 2016 Qiaobi TV Commercial [[Background](#)]

Week 11 | 27 March: Crisis communication in Greater China

This week we will discuss how crisis communication and management differs across countries in the Greater China region. We will also talk about some of the current debates in the field and reflect on the impact of cultural norms in the way crises are communicated. The two cases we will review this week will help us understand how the Chinese government has managed crises in the past.

- Readings: [Huang et al. 2016](#)
- Case study I: 2011 Zhejiang High Speed Train Crash [[Background](#)]
- Case study II: 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake Response [[Background](#)]

Week 12 | 3 April: Spokesperson simulation

We will spend the first half of the class talking about the last two case studies of the semester, the 2015 explosions at Tianjin's port and the crash of a ferry close to Lamma Island (南丫島) in Hong Kong. During the second half of the class, we will simulate a press conference and learn how spokespersons are supposed to respond during crises.

- Case study I: 2015 Tianjin Port Explosions [[Background](#)]
- Case study II: 2012 Lamma Island Ferry Crash [[Background](#)]

Week 13 | 10 April: Group Presentations

This week you will present the main points of your crisis communication and management plan. Each presentation will last for 10 minutes. Be ready to address difficult questions.

Schedule at a glance

| Topic | Required reading(s) | Case Study 1 | Case Study 2 | Assignment | Recommended texts | | |
|-------|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|------------------|--------------|
| | | | | | Coombs 2015 | Fearn-Banks 2015 | Zaremba 2010 |
| W1 | Introduction | | | | Ch.1 | Ch. 1 | Ch. 1 & 2 |
| W2 | Theories I | Coombs 2010 | | Select Case | | Ch. 2 | Ch. 3 |
| W3 | Theories II | Pratt 2012 | | | | Ch. 2 | Ch. 3 |
| W4 | Prevention | | 2013 Apple Warranty | 2013 VW Gearbox | Ch. 3 & 4 | Ch. 3 | Ch. 4 |
| W5 | Preparation | Jacques 2010 | 2008 Sanlu Milk | 2012 KFC Crisis | Ch. 5 & 6 | Ch. 3 & 14 | Ch. 4 |
| W6 | Response | Seeger 2006 | | | Ch. 7 & 8 | Ch. 4 | Ch. 5 & 6 |
| W7 | READING WEEK – NO CLASS | | | | | | |
| W8 | Guest Speaker | | 2011 Guo Meimei | 2008 Liu Xiang & Nike | Select organization | | |
| W9 | Postcrisis | Coombs 2007 | | | SNS Analysis | Ch. 9 | |
| W10 | Social Media | | 2012 D&G Controversy | 2016 Qiaobi TVC | Ch. 2 | Ch. 5 | |
| W11 | Greater China | Huang et al. 2016 | 2011 Zhejiang Train Crash | 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake | | | |
| W12 | Spokesperson | | 2015 Tianjin Blast | 2012 Lamma Ferry Crash | Submit Crisis Plan | | |
| W13 | GROUP PRESENTATIONS | | | | Present Crisis Plan | | |