

Framing #crisis perceptions through user-generated content:
An exploratory case study examining the crisis message frames in the Mexican blogger Marcia
Macias crisis

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Abstract

New emerging media such as mobile applications and social media have allowed users the opportunity to interact and engage in dialogue with others while sharing information (both textual and visual) in their respective digital communities. Social media is about “people” (Marken, 2007), and the technology not only provides means for establishing and maintaining relationships, but also allows users to create their own content to share with others in the online community (user-generated content; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009).

The personalized access to information and real-time focused approach in connecting with the human social and digital network of individuals and information has given journalists the ability to frame their crisis messages specifically towards the intended audiences. Journalists have used these third party sources (ex. Citizen journalists) as a resource in reporting “eye witness” accounts from various social media platforms like Twitter (Laricy, Avery, Sweetser, & Howes, 2009). These emerging technological and communication tools have allowed people to feel they have more control over the crisis as well as more connection to the community (Shklovski, Burke, Kiesler, & Kraut, 2010).

Mexico is currently experiencing a chaos-driven society combatting multiple battles and violence with the drug cartel in real life and in the digital world. While journalists and Mexican citizens are using social media to share updates and safety information with each

other, the drug cartels are implementing these new technologies to initiate intimidation techniques to raise fear and bring the terror of violence to individuals directly to their computer or mobile devices (“Mexican drug cartels’ new target: Bloggers,” October 13, 2011). According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), there have been 59 journalists who have been murdered in Mexico since 1992, and about half (25) were killed due to their occupation (“Mexican newspaper editor Marcia Macias found decapitated,” September 25, 2011).

This work-in-progress exploratory case study will focus on the analysis of the crisis framing messages coming out from US newspapers and blogs, Mexican newspapers and blogs, and US/Mexico Twitter accounts. Six initial themes emerged when looking at the coverage of the murder of Mexican blogger and journalist Marcia Macias in September 2011 includes the following: 1) blame towards “social media” and its role in the murder 2) Reliance of social media (Twitter in particular) for safety information in Mexico 3) Inconsistency with conceptualization between traditional social media (blogs) versus social media 4) Less blame placed on using social media itself – sometimes placed on the government for creating this environment, other times on the killers themselves; 5) A need for restoration of journalist’s ability to report to the news without fear both in traditional and social media outlets and 6) Crisis messages from drug cartel involves the use of intimidation, propaganda and fear presented both in textual and visual formats shared through social media. Professional implications, best practices involving citizen journalism with social media and future research ideas in this area will be discussed.

Key terms: crisis communications, new media, citizen journalists, crisis fram

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