
THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION MESSAGES AT GREECE'S TOURISTIC REPUTATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the impact of digital communication messages about the Greek economic crisis on Greece's reputation. How much has this kind of messages impacted Greece's tourism industry? Can such messages restore Greece's reputation? Content analysis was used to evaluate publicly available social media messages posted on an international online newspaper "The Telegraph". We took into account articles that had to do with the Greek economic crises, published from January 2014 to May 2014. Additionally, we examined articles presented on international media, selected by a site referring to the Greek crisis (www.greekcrisis.net), published from March 22nd to April 24th 2014. These articles came from six (6) different international sources: 'Wall Street Journal', 'Bloomberg', 'Reuters', 'Financial Times', 'Economist' and 'AEIdeas'. In total, sixteen (16) articles from the particular source were judged adequate to be taken into consideration for the purposes of this research.

The main general conclusion coming from our research is that people outside Greece have nowadays a positive attitude towards the Greek crisis problem and the efforts of the country to find a solution. Actually most of the internet users, that are also the potential country's tourist, seem to little by little appreciate that we are talking about a global economic crisis that has a greater impact on south European countries, and most

importantly Greece. Nevertheless, even if Greece's reputation is being restored, there is much to do to ameliorate the situation, a brand image might help.

Key Words: Crisis communication, Social media, Tourism industry, Interculturality

INTRODUCTION

Crisis is defined as an unpredictable event that threatens stakeholders and can generate negative outcomes that might impact an organization's performance and reputation (Coombs, 2007). Crisis communication is a rapidly developing field of research. The focus of crisis communication research is how communication is used in attempts to manage information and meaning during a crisis (Coombs, 2009; Coombs and Holladay, 2014). Crisis communication messages are mainly designed to protect and defend an individual, company, or organization facing such a challenge to its reputation. Researchers in the past have focused on the messages sent by the crisis managers (Lee, 2004), but also on people affected or interested by the crisis reactions (Coombs and Holladay, 2014, 2006, 1996; Jin and Pang, 2010; Jin and Cameron, 2007).

The attended effects of crisis communication messages are generally to minimize the reputation damage that a crisis situation might cause. Nevertheless, speaking about a global economic crisis and digital media that can include different voices, things might be different. Digital media can either damage or restore the country's reputation.

The Greek economic crisis is part of the Eurozone and the global economic crisis. It is said to have been directly caused by a combination of structural weaknesses of the Greek economy along with a decade long pre-existence of overly high structural deficits and debt-to-GDP levels on public accounts (Wikipedia, 2014). Austerity measures, privatization of government assets, implementation of outlined structural reforms, are some of the conditions for the bailout loan that was given to Greece. This no stable condition has caused great problems to Greece's reputation and less people started to visit Greece. In June 2012 and a few months before, the international press mounted a negative campaign against Greece. Tourists were actually afraid to visit a turbulent country, when the media focused on protests around the central square of Athens, Syntagma square. Greece seemed to accept quite passively that it could not solve its problems by itself at the time. More precisely, it didn't try to invest in its critical role in global politics (its location in a complex geographical zone including the Balkans, the Black Sea region, the Mediterranean and the Middle East). Tourism, as long as with other industries, suffered the bad crisis

consequences. Euro, with its high rate, was and continuous to be an additional disadvantage to persuade tourists visit the country. The question of the digital media impact on potential tourists' views was refined into two (2) research questions:

RQ1. What is the public view (positive – negative comments) about Greece nowadays, after almost 6 years of obvious crisis effects?

RQ2. Do these viewpoints have an impact on the country's reputation?

Methodology

We have chosen to study the viewpoint of people living outside Greece with the help of social media. Social media development has permitted many opportunities for every community to communicate about the crisis and other crisis-related news. Types of social media include social networking sites, discussion boards, blogs, content sharing sites, and micro-blogs. Social media allow more actors to become 'involved', which means become information-providers, critics, or supporters, in a crisis situation and take the role of a crisis communicator (Coombs and Holladay, 2014).

We have chosen to examine digital crisis communication messages expressed by people and media outside Greece. People expressing their point of view might have already visited Greece in the past or/and might visit it in the future; in either way for the purposes of this research they are considered potential future tourists. We have chosen content analysis to evaluate publicly available social media messages posted on an international online newspaper "The Telegraph" (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/greece/>), taking into account articles published from January 2014 to May 2014 that have to do with the Greek economic crises. As we know, qualitative research is known as a justifiable and legitimate means of gathering information for additional insights and theory development (Burgess, 1984; Bryman, 1988; Hammersley 1992, and Silverman, 1993). Via this multi-vocal approach, we expected to get different perceptions and reactions about the Greek economic crisis, so to understand the nowadays perception of Greece's possible tourists (people living outside Greece).

People responding to a particular newspaper article can be recognised as blog users (those who read and respond to blog posts). We examine public published posts by blog users, as reactions to digital journals articles about the Greek crisis. These people can be a valuable

source of information to understand how people react to a crisis situation (positively or negatively) (Kent, 2005). Additionally, blog users tend to be homogenous in their interest for the blog topic and supportive. By examining their posts we can have an idea of how to create a crisis messages response strategy (Coombs & Holladay, 2014).

The postings on online news outlets can attract a more diverse set of people. Readers post their point of view to the online story and create a forum to discuss the article and the situation proposed by it. This is how we can understand peoples' reaction to different situations. Different social media channels are one method of distinguishing sub-arenas. Each social media channel establishes boundaries and can be treated as a sub-arena (Coombs and Holladay, 2014; Coombs et al., 2013). Additionally, from the perspective of the RHETORICAL ARENA[1] approach, publics that communicate during crises should be considered crisis communicators as well (Coombs and Holladay, 2014). As Coombs and Holladay (2014) claims, from the moment that we accept that social media comments created by people about an event have the potential to impact this event, we should consider how publics are using social media to create their own crisis messages and to respond to "official" crisis communication efforts. This is why crisis managers should use the feedback provided by social media comments to refine their crisis messages in specific sub-arenas.

Our sample included articles that had strictly to do with the Greek economic crisis. Although we found many articles about Greek neo-fascist party "Golden Dawn" and the recent story (February 2014) with a little girl that was stolen and found at a Greek Roma camp, events that had certainly a great impact to the Greek touristic market, analyzing such stories was not in the purposes of this paper. We have taken into consideration the articles date, title, subtitle, its photo comments, but most importantly the readers' comments. We have examined 164 comments in total, coming from 5 different articles, with the following dates: 10 Apr 2014, 08 Mar 2014, 03 Feb 2014, 22 Jan 2014 and 02 Jan 2014. The comments were rated in three (3) categories: favourable (positive), unfavourable (negative), or neutral. Favourable comments were in principle positive/supportive about the Greek situation. Unfavourable comments were critical about the way Greece and Greeks have treated the economic crisis and the reactions before the actual crisis. Neutral comments are either judged out of the subject, or they are giving very general views or posing questions to other blog users. The favourable comments of the articles were 92 (56%), the unfavourable 43 (26%) and the neutral 29 (17,6%) (table 1) .

Table 7 separation of the article comments in positive, negative and neutral.

Online newspaper "The Telegraph"	Favourable comments	Unfavourable comments	Neutral comments
	92 (56%)	43 (26%)	29 (17,6%)
Total of comments	164		

It would be also interesting to take a look at the titles, subtitles of the particular articles (table 2).

Table 2 Article titles' from January 2014 to May 2014 concerning the Greek economic crises from the international online newspaper "The Telegraph".

Date	Title	Subtitle
10 Apr 2014	Greece ends exile with €3bn bond sale	Interest rate of 4.95pc shows high demand for Greek debt, despite country still being mired in mass unemployment and deflation
08 Mar 2014	Greece to miss deadline for rescue loan deal	Capitalisation of country's banks is key issue for European Union and International Monetary Fund officials
03 Feb 2014	Eurozone paves way for third Greek bail-out	Leaked German finance ministry paper estimates Greece needs a further €10-20bn to service its debts
22 Jan 2014	Greece high court reverses troika-imposed wage cuts	Council of State rules that pay cuts on police and armed forces workers were unconstitutional, ordering that they be reimbursed in full
02 Jan 2014	Can Greece repair its reputation?	Is Greece, the country that nearly brought Europe to its knees, fit to take over the EU presidency?

As we can make out, judging by the article and its title and subtitle, they refer to the country's actual condition (reputation, unemployment, deflation). Despite the fact that the situation still remains crucial, digital media 'designs' a Greece that finally makes positive efforts towards its problems solutions. This seems also positive for the country's tourism industry.

The 10th of June 2013, Dimitris Avramopoulos, Greece's foreign minister, during an interview on CNN, claimed that the crisis has helped the country as it "HAS PUT AS IN FRONT OF OUR RESPONSIBILITIES". Even if, "WE STILL HAVE A LONG WAY TO RUN, WE ARE OPTIMISTIC FOR THE FUTURE". "IT'S ON THE TRACK AGAIN" restructuring the administration, encouraging investments, tackling bureaucracy'... Event if Greek people have not really seen this kind of positive changes in their everyday lives, the outcome for tourists and investments remains positive.

Our next attempt to examine the internet users' view on the economic crisis is the observation of sixteen (16) articles presented on international media, selected by a site referring to the Greek Crisis www.greekcrisis.net. The articles were dated from March, 22 to April, 24 2014, coming from six (6) different international sources: 'Wall Street Journal', 'Bloomberg', 'Reuters', 'Financial Times', 'Economist' and 'AEldeas'. In table 3 we can see the source, the date and the articles title.

Table 3 Article titles and dates, coming from 'Wall Street Journal', 'Bloomberg', 'Reuters', 'Financial Times', 'Economist' and 'AEldeas'.

	Date /Journal	Title
1	April 24, 2014/ Bloomberg	Athens Lacking Only Elgin as Windows Erase Crisis
2	April 23, 2014/ Wall Street Journal	EU Confirms Greece Beat Its Budget Targets in 2013
3	April 16, 2014/ Reuters	Greece to stabilise this year, but recovery road will be long
4	April 13, 2014/ Wall Street Journal	The Tide Is Turning for Greece—and the Euro Zone
5	April 13, 2014/ Financial Times	This could be the moment for Greece to default
6	April 10, 2014/ Wall Street Journal	For Bond Investors, Greece Is The Word

7	April 14, 2014/ Economist	Greece's return to the markets: The prodigal son
8	April 11, 2014/ AEIdeas	Is Greece really out of the woods?
	April 10, 2014/ Wall Street Journal	Trouble Brews for Greece Despite Good News on Bond Sale
1	April 10, 2014/ Wall Street Journal	Greece Triumphs in Bond Odyssey
1	April 10, 2014/ Wall Street Journal	Greece Gets Strong Demand for Bond
1	April 9, 2014/Wall Street Journal	Greece to Issue First Long-Term Bond Since Bailout
1	April 8, 2014/ Reuters	Greek rebound is astonishing
1	April 4, 2014/ Wall Street Journal	Greece Nears Bond-Market Resurrection
1	March 23, 2014/ Wall Street Journal	Greece Able to Call Its Own Tune
1	March 22, 2014/ Wall Street Journal	For Greek Workers, a Dreaded Day Arrives

As we can understand only by taking a look at the articles titles, they are mostly referring to Greece's crises stabilisation - amelioration. We can then make out that as the time goes by there is a more positive climate concerning the Greek crisis that is more and more considered a global phenomenon that couldn't be avoided and that Greeks are doing their best to ameliorate the crucial situation.

Nevertheless, even if Greece's reputation is being restored, there is much to do to ameliorate it, and a brand image might help to restore Greece's reputation. As Markessinis A. (n.d.) claims, we do need to brand Greece. Before the counties Olympic Games in 2004, he wrote that the country must have a brand to communicate to the world audience Greece's characteristic values that make up its essence. The louder and clearer this message is broadcasted, the better Greece would emerge among the nations. Branding process for Greece should improve Greece's damaged image abroad and boost the National self-esteem as well.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to evaluate the impact of digital communication messages about the Greek economic crisis on Greece's reputation. By the evaluation (content analysis) of publicly available social media messages posted on an international online newspaper "The Telegraph" published from March 22nd to April 24th 2014 and articles presented on international media about the Greek economic crises (published on 'Wall Street Journal', 'Bloomberg', 'Reuters', 'Financial Times', 'Economist' and 'AEIdeas'), from January 2014 to May 2014, we can make out that any kind of information proposed by the digital media has a great impact on Greece's tourism industry.

The main conclusion is that nowadays, people outside Greece have a positive attitude towards the Greek crisis problem and the efforts of the country to find a solution. Nevertheless, even if Greece's reputation is being restored, there is much to do to ameliorate it, and a brand image might help to restore it.

Some of the research limitations/Implications we have to refer to, is that there were only two communication channels were analyzed, one online journal outside Greece and an internet site containing articles of 'Wall Street Journal', 'Bloomberg', 'Reuters', 'Financial Times', 'Economist' and 'AEIdeas'.

Judging by the impact of social media on crisis situations, more research of this kind should be done in the future by crisis communicators to evaluate and respond in a crisis situation. Social media should always be taken into consideration, as each and every individual using them might be a potential crisis communicator.

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-April 16, 2014/ Reuters, Greece to stabilise this year, but recovery road will be long

-April 13, 2014/ Wall Street Journal, The Tide Is Turning for Greece—and the Euro Zone

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[1] The rhetorical arena is conceptualized by Coombs and Holladay (2014), as a set of sub-arenas because there are multiple places where people can discuss a crisis event. The capacity of social media to fragment media use provides a mechanism to define the boundaries of sub-arenas