



The Role of Virtual Social Networks in Crisis Management of Firefighting in Rural Areas of Lali Township

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Mass media in today's world are considered one of the most essential pillars of information dissemination and cultural development in any society. These tools not only contribute to raising public awareness but also influence how citizens interact, shape social behaviors, and strengthen social cohesion. Through their various functions, mass media can lay the foundation for the emergence of new norms and social values and facilitate changes in both individual and collective behavior. The media play a vital role in the formation of new regional and global cultures, as well as in the management of various types of crises. Gerbner defines crises as "natural or man-made events that pose serious threats to the life, property, or psychological well-being of a large number of people." Crises often occur suddenly and may involve events such as the assassination of political leaders, earthquakes, space explosions, bombings, and more. Their characteristics typically include sudden onset, uncertainty, emotional reactions, and threats to life and property. During critical times, mass media serve as key sources of information and interpretation, as people rely on them to access news and guidance for appropriate responses. The main objective of crisis management is to prevent crises from occurring, reduce damages if they do occur, and restore conditions to normal. Effective crisis management should also be capable of securing resources, optimizing activities, and even transforming the crisis into a constructive opportunity. Within this context, the role of the media becomes particularly prominent in calming the public, amplifying or downplaying the crisis, and shaping public opinion. Although every crisis has unique features depending on its intensity, history, geographic setting, and consequences, certain traits are common to all: limited duration, ineffectiveness of regular regulations, heightened public attention, urgent need for information, and necessity of swift decision-making, time constraints, and the impossibility of accurately predicting outcomes.

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Methodology

This study is applied in terms of its objective and descriptive-analytical in terms of its type and nature. Data collection was conducted using both documentary and field methods. The statistical population of the research includes village council members, district office experts, village administrators (Dehyars), and literate residents of Lali Township and its rural districts, specifically the villages of Taraz, Poli, Sarkamari, Hosseinabad, Pachekola, Iranshahr, Sarkoli, and Anbar Sefid. From this population, a total of 384 individuals were selected through convenience sampling.

To address the research questions, the collected data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS statistical software, employing both descriptive and inferential statistics. In the descriptive dimension, statistical indicators such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated. In the inferential dimension, confirmatory factor analysis and multivariate regression tests were employed.

Results and Findings

The objective of this study was to examine the role of virtual social networks in fire crisis management in rural areas. As indicated in the research findings, the regression analysis predicting the role of virtual social networks in crisis management across different dimensions—including educational, physical and infrastructural, participatory and social, economic and welfare, and cultural—proved to be statistically significant in the rural areas of Lali Township ($F = 14.32$, $p < 0.0001$). Therefore, the main research hypothesis is confirmed.

The educational dimension showed a standardized beta coefficient of 0.31, followed by the physical and infrastructural dimension ($\beta = 0.17$), participatory and social dimension ($\beta = 0.11$), economic and welfare dimension ($\beta = 0.31$), and the cultural dimension ($\beta = 0.06$). These results suggest that virtual social networks can influence these dimensions and thus contribute to crisis management and its prediction.

Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that 31% of the variance in crisis management can be explained by the influence of virtual social networks on the aforementioned dimensions.

Among the studied dimensions, the physical and infrastructural dimension obtained the highest mean rank (3.99), indicating that, from the perspective of experts, council members, village managers (dehyars), and literate residents, this is considered the most significant factor. Following this, the most important dimensions in descending order are: educational, participatory and social, economic and welfare, and finally, cultural.

The obtained Chi-square value is 849.83, which is significant at an error level below 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). The significance of the Friedman test indicates that the ranking of the dimensions of the role of virtual social networks in fire crisis management in rural areas is statistically meaningful. This suggests that the respondents provided significantly different rankings of the crisis management indicators.

Conclusion

In general, it is expected that media—particularly modern media—have a profound impact on audiences and society during times of crisis. Among these, social networks can play a significant role in promoting stability, peace, and calm under crisis conditions. Social media platforms can also have a prominent function in the pre-crisis phase, potentially preventing the emergence of crises altogether, due to their increasingly influential role in recent years.

Declarations

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Keywords: Social Networks, Crisis Management, Firefighting, Rural Areas.

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