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COMMUNICATING THROUGH A CRISIS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
MISSISSIPPI'S INITIAL COVID-19 CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

By
Sydney Waitley

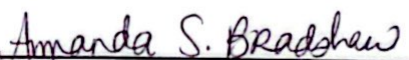
A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford, MS
May 2022

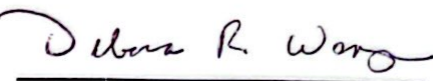
Approved By



Advisor: Professor Deborah Hall



Reader: Professor Amanda Bradshaw



Reader: Professor Debora Wenger

ABSTRACT

Communicating through a Crisis: An Analysis of the University of Mississippi's Initial COVID-19 Crisis Communications
(Under the Direction of Deborah Hall)

This thesis, in effort to examine modern-day crisis communications, focuses on the analysis of University of Mississippi's initial crisis communications during the COVID-19 pandemic during March 2020. The purpose of this research was to evaluate the university's communication efforts during this crisis in order to determine the effectiveness of the University of Mississippi's initial COVID-19 crisis communications. First, the researcher analyzed historical case studies on three notable crisis communications (the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol Crisis of 1982, the United Airlines Crisis of 2017, and the Crock-Pot Crisis of 2018). From these case studies, qualities of good crisis communications were determined for comparison with the University of Mississippi's crisis communications. The next step for defining strong crisis communications was an interview with Jon Haber, an Adjunct Lecturer in Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government who provided insight on the historical crises as well as commentary on crisis communications in the modern day. Harvard University is known for teaching the Johnson & Johnson case study as a main portion of their crisis communications classes which led me to finding Haber who teaches crisis communications at the university. After compiling this information on crisis communications, federal and local statistics from March 2020 were accessed to describe the state of the pandemic during this month. The next step included gathering federal, state, and local communications were gathered to better understand what was occurring outside the University of Mississippi at this point of COVID-19. Also for comparison with the University of Mississippi's communications, communication departments at other SEC universities (Auburn University, University of Missouri, and University of Georgia)

were contacted in order to request archived communications that they were sharing with their audiences during this time. The final aspects of research included one interview with three key members behind the University of Mississippi's crisis communications efforts as well as analyzing the emails shared by the university regarding COVID-19 during March 2020. I reached out to the University of Mississippi's Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, Jim Zook who additionally brought the university's Strategic Communications Director, Lisa Stone, and the university's Emergency Management Coordinator, Josh Glasz, into the interview as well. This study showed that the University of Mississippi had key components of strong crisis communications (they were audience-focused, consistent and constant with updates, and had timely, genuine, and helpful communications) as well as illuminated the importance of using social media and modern-day communications to an organization's advantage when dealing with a contemporary crisis.

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INTRODUCTION

0.1 Importance of Crisis Communications

A crisis handled the wrong way can easily destroy even a top brand or company and a crisis can happen at any time, to anyone. A key aspect of being able to make it through a crisis successfully is communicating effectively as an organization. Crisis communications is an extremely important tool that every organization should be prepared with for any situation they might face. It is impossible to know exactly everything that your company may face, but putting time and effort towards a crisis communication plan makes handling crises much less challenging. As historical cases have shed light on how impactful a strong crisis communication plan can be when dealing with a situation, there has been much more focus on and discussion about planning and preparing for essentially the unknown. While planning for the unknown is not always exact, having a core plan of the most important aspects of your communications ensures that your company communicates in a way that is appropriate and along the lines of your core values and beliefs as an organization.

A crisis is defined as “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 2). A crisis communication plan is insurance for your company to be more well prepared at the very beginning of a crisis. When faced with a crisis “emotions are on edge, brains are not fully functioning, and events are occurring so rapidly that drafting a plan during a crisis is unthinkable,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 2) which shows the importance of having a crisis plan prior to the actual crisis. The crisis communications process allows you to find the most likely and most devastating crises which helps you put more focus towards those situations while still creating a basis of communications for a crisis that can be adapted and used for other

crises if needed. In the best-case scenario, a strong crisis communication plan done effectively can “eliminate the crisis but also can sometimes bring the organization a more positive reputation than it had before the crisis,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 2). The communication from an organization during a crisis can strongly influence their publics’ opinions of them, positively or negatively. This is why crisis communications is such an important aspect of an organization since it has the power to have such an effect on their audiences. Crisis management, which is the planning process and management of crisis communications, is defined as “a process of strategic planning for a crisis or negative turning point, a process that removes some of the risk and uncertainty from the negative occurrence and thereby allows the organization to be in greater control of its own destiny,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 2). Crisis communication planning gives organizations security in an unpredictable world. Dr. W. Timothy Coombs developed the Situational Crisis Communication Theory which “provides an evidence-based frame-work for understanding how to maximize the reputational protections afforded by post-crisis communication,” (Coombs, 2007, p. 163). His research has helped in developing crisis plans and how to go about creating a crisis communications plan. Coombs explains that “to be ethical, crisis managers must begin their efforts by using communication to address the physical and psychological concerns of the victims” which is a key aspect of his theory (Coombs, 2007, p. 165).

The COVID-19 pandemic showed the true importance of having a strong crisis communication plan. This was a crisis that affected everyone and every organization. COVID-19 required strong communications during this time as public panic and nervousness were also components to deal with. An article on Harvard’s website entitled “Crisis Communications for COVID-19” described the Coronavirus situation as “extremely uncertain, ambiguous, even

chaotic” and said that “leaders and their organizations will need to operate in an agile, problem-solving mode for an indefinite time to come,” (Leonard et al. 2020, p. 1). This unprecedented time called for organizations to have adaptable communications to keep up with an ever-changing situation while still having their publics in mind during this difficult time. During a period of shut downs and decreased social interaction, online communication became a sole source of continuously updating and staying in contact with their publics in order to keep an organization running. Especially during a time of social distancing and separation during COVID-19, online communication was largely the way that people and organizations were communicating. For an institution such as the University of Mississippi with multiple key stakeholders, communicating was crucial during this crisis.

0.2 Methodology

The researcher will be conducting an analysis of these communications from the University of Mississippi regarding COVID-19 during March 2020 in order to determine the effectiveness of the communications. In order to do this, the researcher will begin by defining what good crisis communications is. By looking at historical cases of crisis communications and their strengths and weaknesses, the researcher will be able to see what the core components of successful communication during a crisis are. The main three crisis communication situations the researcher focused on are the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis of 1982, the United Airlines crisis of 2017, and the Crock-Pot crisis of 2018. Through secondary research on these case studies and an in-depth interview with a Crisis Communications lecturer from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, the researcher will be able to determine some of the key aspects seen in successful crisis communications.

After my analysis of historical crisis communications, the researcher compiled information on the time period of March 2020, utilizing both federal and local COVID-19 statistics to better understand the fuller context of the Coronavirus situation was over the course of that month. The researcher analyzed the communications that were issued federally and within the University of Mississippi's county, Lafayette, and city, Oxford. Federal communications were found through the White House Archives, state communications were found through Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves' press releases, and local communications were found through *The Daily Mississippian*, a student run newspaper at the University of Mississippi that covers events in the town of Oxford. The data compiled regarding federal and local COVID-19 information allowed the researcher to analyze the timeliness of the University of Mississippi's communications during this time. By seeing what information was going out from other sources surrounding the university, the researcher can then determine how their communications line up with what was going on in the world around them at that point which will assist in the analysis of the University of Mississippi's crisis communications.

Another source of communication the researcher referenced for comparison with the University of Mississippi was communication from other SEC universities with their students. SEC universities were chosen for comparison due to their close proximity to the University of Mississippi and similar environment institutionally. Through connecting with communication directors at other SEC universities and requesting their archived COVID-19 communications with students, the researcher was able to see how the University of Mississippi's communications correlates with the schools around them. This provided the researcher with insight on how similar organizations were communicating with their student public during this time and how the University of Mississippi compares.

Finally, the researcher looked at the University of Mississippi's communications with students, with archived emails to students as the main communication focus. The researcher chose to look at emails, as many of the social media posts and other communications during this time with students were developed based on the email content, specifically the official university messages and the COVID email newsletter. The researcher looked at the emails' content while also considering them on a timeline with all of the previous information related to March 2020. The researcher conducted an interview with the Chief Marketing and Communications Officer at the University of Mississippi, along with two more members of his communication team, to gain more information about the school's early communications during COVID-19 and the school's crisis communication plan itself.

These research steps provided in-depth information on good crisis communication in general and insight into the University of Mississippi's process and act of communicating during this crisis. This allowed the researcher to perform an analysis of the University's crisis communications during this time and conclude on the effectiveness of the University of Mississippi's initial COVID-19 crisis communications.

CHAPTER 1: Defining Good Crisis Communications

1.1 Historical Case Studies

In this chapter, the researcher analyzed historical cases of crisis communications. Specifically, the researcher looked for strengths and weaknesses in order to determine what the qualities of successful crisis communications are. The researcher looked at the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis of 1982, the United Airlines crisis of 2017, and the Crock-Pot crisis of 2018.

1.2 Johnson and Johnson Tylenol Crisis of 1982

When considering historically successful crisis communications, the researcher started with the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis.

1.2.1 The Crisis

In 1982, Johnson & Johnson had built a reliable reputation for families everywhere. They were known for a variety of health and baby products and were a household name. They had a credo that they turned to for everything which “said that the company had four responsibilities in the following order of priority: to the consumer, to the employees, to the communities, and to the stockholders,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 91). They had a strong loyalty from their customers, good relationship with their employees, and a great media reputation.

On September 30, 1982, Johnson & Johnson was made aware of a tampering issue with one of their products, Extra Strength Tylenol. A reporter had reached out to the company and “explained there had been reported deaths from the intake of Extra Strength Tylenol,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 91). On September 30, there were two victims of cyanide poisoning traced back to Extra Strength Tylenol capsules at first and there would end up being seven total victims. This was a situation that no one at Johnson & Johnson saw coming. In the 1980s, “the corporation had no specific crisis communications plan - few companies did at the time,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 91). Johnson & Johnson was faced with an unprecedented and unimagined situation with no crisis plan in place to turn to.

1.2.2 The Response

Johnson & Johnson acted fast and “immediately set up a seven-member crisis team,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 93). On this team, they had chosen Lawrence Foster to lead it “who had the skills, the experience, and the reputation to set the tone and have it executed and supported

by everyone at Johnson & Johnson,” (Adubato, 2008, p. 13). This made sure that this situation had one sole person leading the communications who had the trust and support of everyone at the company, especially those in high positions. At this point in the crisis, they had no idea what was exactly going on and the company “had one overriding priority: Warn the public,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 93). Before even gaining anymore information on the tampering and how far spread it was, Johnson & Johnson “immediately recalled all Tylenol capsules from stores in the Chicago area, where the original deaths occurred,” (Adubato, 2008, p. 13). This decision showed that even in a time of extreme crisis, Johnson & Johnson was sticking to their company credo and putting their responsibility to their consumer before anything else. As they recalled the capsules to investigate the tampering further, Johnson & Johnson found that “two were found to contain cyanide,” (Adubato, 2008, p. 14). After this discovery, they followed their top priority of warning the public and began to craft specific communications to ease the anxiety and panic of their key publics which were:

1. News Media
 2. The General Public, Including Longtime Consumers of Johnson & Johnson Products
 3. Johnson & Johnson Employees
 4. The Government
 5. Medical Professionals
- (Adubato, 2008, p. 15)

By quickly communicating with key audiences that would be troubled in this situation, the organization was able to foster a much more cooperative relationship with them during this crisis. Johnson & Johnson would continually update these groups as they found more information which furthered their image of being transparent with their publics.

In order to continue their open communication with their public, they were quick to correct false statements whenever more information would come to light. There was a point at which crisis team leader Lawrence Foster “issued a statement to reporters that there was no cyanide in the

manufacturing plants,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 97). After being approached afterwards by the Associated Press about this comment, Foster checked again and “discovered that indeed a small amount of cyanide was used in the manufacturing plant for quality-assurance testing of some kind,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 97). This cyanide that was found was held separately from Johnson & Johnson’s production line and “there was no way that it could have gotten into the capsules accidentally,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 97). Even though there was no possibility that this was the cyanide that could have gotten into the Extra Strength Tylenol capsules, “Foster called the Associated Press and told it the truth,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 97). He explained the full situation of where the cyanide was at the facility and how it could not have been the source of the cyanide in the Tylenol capsules and the Associated Press “agreed not to run the story - unless some other news outlet got the information, too,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 98). Eventually, the *Newark Star-Ledger* got information of the cyanide as well. Foster spoke with them as well with the same information he gave the Associated Press and asked them not to run the story and they too “agreed because it was understood that there was no direct connection between its presence in the plant and the cyanide lacing of Tylenol,” (Adubato, 2008, p. 17). Continuing his open relationship with the media, Foster communicated with the Associated Press that the *Newark Star Ledger* had the information and the Associated Press still “agreed once more not to run the story,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 98). After *The New York Times* ended up with the cyanide information Foster made the decision to call “both the Associated Press and the *Star-Ledger* and asked them to use discretion in running the story,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 98). The way that Foster handled this situation with constant transparency and honesty with the media completely impacted the way these stories were put out. The stories put out about the situation “had very little impact” and “were run in insignificant places in the Sunday newspapers, and the facts were

not blown out of proportion (as had happened with other crises),” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 98).

The decisions made in these situations continued growing the trust between the public and media and Johnson & Johnson as a company.

As investigations of the actual tampering continued, “the FBI and the FDA never found any evidence of tampering at the two Johnson & Johnson plants,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 98). They had discovered that “the contaminated capsules had come from both plants - one in Texas, the other in Pennsylvania,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 98). This finding showed that “no person at Johnson & Johnson had ever been in contact with all the capsules” and “it was not an inside job,” (Fearn-Banks 98). The tampering was done by someone outside of the company who laced the capsules with the cyanide and put it back on a store shelf. After the crisis team was made aware that the contamination was done outside of their facilities, “the task of the team now turned to saving Tylenol and restoring sales,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 98). The company had lost significant amounts of money from their recall in the Chicago area and a decline in sales from public fear about the situation.

On October 5, there was “a copycat crime that took place in Northern California” and after that “all Tylenol products were removed from stores nationwide,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 99). After the complete recall of their product, Johnson & Johnson made the decision to repackaging. They had created a “60 second television commercial featuring the medical director at McNeil notifying consumers of the upcoming return of Tylenol,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 99) and aired it in households nationwide. They had created a “triple-seal safety package,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 99) and publicized it everywhere. Not only did they have lots of media coverage on their new, safer packaging, but Johnson & Johnson CEO at the time Robert Burke “also announced the availability of coupons that could be used toward the purchase of any Tylenol

product and a special toll-free telephone number through which consumers could learn about their special promotion,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 99) continuing their open dialogue with their consumers. Johnson & Johnson got great media coverage on this decision and received lots of positive response from the media and public regarding the new packaging. Their trustworthiness they built over the course of the crisis with the decisions they made allowed people to continue being receptive of what they say and believe it.

Overall, “the crisis cost the company more than \$100 million,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 99). Due to Johnson & Johnson’s handling of the situation and crisis communication decisions, “Tylenol regained 100% of the market share it had before the crisis,” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 99) and “Extra Strength Tylenol and other Tylenol products remained one of the strongest sellers in the pain-relief market,” (Adubato, 2008, p. 19). Johnson & Johnson had fully bounced back from the crisis and not only held onto their trusted and respected reputation, but grew it even more through their open and honest communication during a difficult situation.

1.2.3 Analysis

There are a lot of key lessons seen here in how Johnson & Johnson handled their crisis. They responded as soon as they heard about the potential of a problem which allowed them to be more prepared to communicate about the crisis from the beginning. By creating a smaller team within the company to specifically handle the situation, they had a group of people constantly monitoring and dealing with next crisis management and communication steps which allowed Johnson & Johnson to be constantly updated on the crisis at hand and next steps they needed to take. Through choosing a trusted spokesperson on that team to lead the crisis communications, Johnson & Johnson was able to have someone consistently fostering an open line of

communication with media and those media relationships were extremely beneficial and crucial to the company getting out of the crisis and improving their public image.

Lawrence Foster, the crisis team lead for the Tylenol case, had said that there were three main things that made Johnson & Johnson successful in dealing with the crisis:

1. The company was open to the media.
 2. It was willing to recall the product no matter what that meant to the company.
 3. It appealed to the American sense of fair play and asked for the public's trust.
- (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 93)

All of the things that Foster lists as reasons for Johnson & Johnson's success were centered around an open and honest communication with their main publics. The crisis team had decided from the beginning that decisions that they made with their crisis management and communications about the situation would all be centered around Johnson & Johnson's credo which stated they had four main responsibilities, in this order, "to the consumer, to the employees, to the communities, and to the stockholders," (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 91). By having this guide all of their decision making, they were constantly thinking about their audiences which led them to communicate in a way that put their publics first before anything else. That facilitates trust between the public people and a large corporation. Trust is what helps a company thrive and when communicating with an audience during a crisis, trust is crucial. The Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis showed how powerful the trust of your audience can be and how crucial it is to emerge from a crisis in a positive light.

In an interview done by The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, James Burke, Johnson & Johnson CEO at the time of the crisis, said:

"Trust has been an operative word in my life. [It] embodies almost everything you can strive for that will help you to succeed. You tell me any human relationship that works without trust, whether it is a marriage or a friendship or a social interaction; in the long run, the same thing is true about business," (Pandya et al., 2012).

Trust is imperative when it comes to handling a crisis and organizations build it by giving their key stakeholders a reason to trust them. Johnson & Johnson is an example of how communicating with a mindset centered around building trust with your audience can not only save a company from a crisis but it can also create a more positive image of the company in the end. Communications that are focused on an organization's key publics is a key component of having successful crisis communications.

1.3 United Airlines Crisis of 2017

In contrast with the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis, United Airlines gained lots of negative responses from the public and damageable coverage in the media. The United Airlines crisis is a much more recent crisis, and social media played a large role in how the crisis played out.

1.3.1 The Crisis

On April 9, 2017, "a United Airlines passenger was pulled from his plane seat and forcibly dragged off the aircraft - due to the airline overbooking the flight," (*Fox News*, 2017). The incident was filmed and the shocking videos of the situation quickly went viral. Members aboard the flight were clearly disturbed and appalled in the videos and "the man was left bleeding from the head after his face was smashed against an armrest during the scuffle," (*Fox News* 2017).

The flight had been completely booked and United was attempting to make room for four employees to fit on the plane. They had gotten two people on the flight to accept \$800 vouchers and "when there were no additional takers, United supervisors shifted to an electronic process to determine who would next be removed," (Hearit, 2021, p. 1). This led to a flight passenger named Dr. Dao along with his wife to be chosen through this process to leave the plane. After

“claiming he needed to return quickly to Louisville to treat his patients, Dao refused to leave,” (Hearit, 2021, p. 1). After his refusal to leave the plane, “the Chicago Aviation authorities were called and Dr. Dao was removed by force, suffering a broken nose, two lost teeth and a concussion,” (Hearit, 2021, p. 1). With this alarming situation quickly gaining traction and publicity through social media, United Airlines had a major crisis that was growing fast.

1.3.2 The Response

On the afternoon of April 10, 2017 United Airlines released their first statement about the crisis through the United Airlines Twitter account:

“This is an upsetting event to all of us here at United. I apologize for having to re-accommodate these customers. Our team is moving with a sense of urgency to work with the authorities and conduct our own detailed review of what happened. We are also reaching out to this passenger to talk directly to him and further address and resolve this situation.” - Oscar Munoz, CEO, United Airlines

This initial response that the airline released about the incident did not effectively take responsibility for the crisis it was acknowledging. United realized that the statement had been ill received by the public and released the following statement to their Twitter account the next day on April 11:

“The truly horrific event that occurred on this flight has elicited many responses from all of us: outrage, anger, disappointment. I share all of those sentiments, and one above all: my deepest apologies for what happened. Like you, I continue to be disturbed by what happened on this flight and I deeply apologize to the customer forcibly removed and to all the customers aboard.

No one should ever be mistreated this way.

I want you to know that we take full responsibility and we will work to make it right. It's never too late to do the right thing. I have committed to our customers and our employees that we are going to fix what's broken so this never happens again. This will include a thorough review of crew movement, our policies for incentivizing volunteers in these situations, how we handle oversold situations and an examination of how we partner with airport authorities and local law enforcement. We'll communicate the results of our review by April 30th.

I promise you we will do better.

*Sincerely,
Oscar”*

United Airlines had missed the prime time to handle their crisis in an effective manner and took two days to release a statement that acknowledged the seriousness of the situation that occurred and their responsibility as an airline to their customers. In addition to the time it took for the airline to release an authentic apology about the horrifying event, on the same day that CEO Oscar Munoz sincere apology went out “a leaked company memo on April 11 showed that Mr. Munoz initially supported the actions of the airline employees,” (Varma, 2020, p. 1). In this memo to airline employees Munoz had stated:

“Our employees followed established procedures for dealing with situations like this. While I deeply regret this situation arose, I also emphatically stand behind all of you, and I want to commend you for continuing to go above and beyond to ensure we fly right.”

With this memo leaked to the public, statements made by the United Airlines CEO had lost all credibility. By ‘commending’ his employees for ‘continuing to go above and beyond’ after he had just released a statement about the ‘truly horrific event’ and extended his ‘deepest apologies,’ United Airlines’ audiences had no idea what to believe from their statements. There was no consistent theme throughout their communications and it was seemingly adapting as public reactions occurred rather than being proactive and ahead of their publics.

In another news release on April 13, “Mr. Munoz apologized publicly again expressing his sincerest apology to Dr. Dao” and “United conveyed the steps it would take to prevent the recurrence of such an event,” (Varma, 2020, p. 1). After these statements, United spent time working on changes in response to the crisis as they had expressed that they would. On April 27, “Mr. Munoz followed through with his promises of making changes to policies and shared it with the media and the public” and “announced 10 substantial changes to its policies, some of

which were effective immediately,” (Varma, 2020, p. 1). These changes included things like “limiting use of law enforcement to safety and security issues only” and “not requiring customers seated on the plane to give up their seat unless safety or security was at risk,” (Varma, 2020, p. 1). After struggling to successfully communicate with their initial statements during the crisis, United Airlines followed through and made the changes they claimed they would, which was a step towards gaining public trust again. Eventually on May 3, “Mr. Munoz took personal responsibility for the incident at the congressional hearing and shared the airline's failure in handling the incident,” (Varma, 2020, p. 1). It took almost an entire month for United Airlines leadership to take full responsibility for the disaster situation that had occurred and acknowledge their fault in how he handled and communicated about the crisis. The airline ended up facing a lot of rage on social media “with the hashtag *#BoycottUnited* utilized 3.5 million times in the first few days of the crisis,” (Hearit, 2021, p. 1). The videos and overall handling of the crisis significantly damaged the reputation of United Airlines and the CEO who handled it.

1.3.3 Analysis

The crisis communications done by United Airlines clearly show the importance of having a clear communication focus from the second a crisis starts. United Airlines communicated as the public would respond to them, rather than working to be a step ahead and communicate effectively and openly over the entire course of the situation and how it is being handled. There was a lack of consistency in internal and external communications, and that negatively affected the airline’s image. It is important to have specific communication goals for those key publics that mean the most to your organization in order to craft consistent, clear, and audience-focused communications.

This crisis specifically shows the true importance of when a crisis first begins. Especially with the effect of social media in the modern day, public panic can grow fast and information spreads extremely quickly. By taking so long to release a genuine apology statement, United's audience lost confidence and trust towards them. Especially in the midst of a crisis, it is difficult to earn those things back. Timeliness is a crucial part of communicating effectively during a crisis. When a company does the right thing and responds to a crisis in a meaningful, timely, and genuine way from the beginning of a crisis, the chances of their successfully making it out of that crisis while minimizing damage are much higher than if they fail to communicate at the start of a crisis. United Airlines learned from their mistakes and eventually released a genuine apology, but that first communication when a crisis starts happening is largely the most meaningful and impactful.

An important lesson to take from the United Airlines crisis is to be aware of the importance of those first communications during a crisis. These initial communications set the foundation for how the rest of the crisis is going to go. Public opinion is a powerful thing and if an audience does not feel a company is being genuine, then their distrust and animosity towards the company may continue to grow. This is why a crisis communications plan is so crucial. By having a set plan already in place, you already have a head start on communications the second that a crisis hits and can make sure that those first communications are not only impactful, but also align with your company's values and beliefs. Crises are emotional and stressful, and having a crisis plan in place helps organizational representatives to make faster decisions that represent the company well and communicate effectively with key stakeholders from the start of a crisis.

1.4 Crock-Pot of 2018

The Crock-Pot crisis that occurred in 2018 is another modern-day example of enacting a crisis communications plan. In this situation, Crock Pot was able to handle the crisis in a way that received lots of positive reactions. This was a crisis that shows the impact that social media has on crisis communications in the modern day.

1.4.1 The Crisis

On January 23, 2018, an episode of acclaimed NBC drama *This is Us* premiered an episode entitled “That’ll be the day.” This episode revealed the “long-awaited explanation of the death of family patriarch Jack Pearson,” a cause that remained unknown and built-up great suspense among viewers over two previous seasons (Handley, 2018, p. 1). *This is Us* was an extremely popular show and was “the top-rated show on television, with approximately 32.7 million viewers for the “Super Bowl Sunday episode,” (Foss, 2019, p. 1). There were tens of millions of people watching the fictional drama that were waiting and invested in the explanation of the main character’s death.

In the long-anticipated episode, “Jack is seen cleaning in the kitchen and turning off a “Slow-Cooker” kitchen device” and “after Jack is back in bed, the camera pans to the slow-cooker to show the switch was faulty causing it to spark catching the nearby towel and kitchen curtains on fire,” (Hornsby & Groover, 2020, p. 22). Viewers had found out “that a faulty knob on a slow-cooker sparked a fire that would ultimately kill Jack Pearson,” (Foss, 2019, p. 1). While the episode never mentioned ‘Crock-Pot,’ the slow-cooker that caused the fire “looked very similar to a Crock-Pot” and “fans associated the slow-cooker with Crock-Pots and immediately took to Twitter to discuss their sadness of the incident and their hatred and/or fear of Crock-Pots,” (Hornsby & Groover, 2020, p. 22-23). Just a few days after the episode aired,

“stock for Newell Brands, the maker of Crock-Pot, dropped 24% - despite no real-life evidence of the kitchen appliance as a fire hazard,” (Foss, 2019, p. 1). This wildfire spread of misinformation on social media created a unique and sensitive crisis for Crock-Pot. The popular television show created this crisis for Crock-Pot when there was never any connection to the brand in the first place. Crock-Pot took the situation seriously and met their concerned and panicked audience where they were, on Twitter.

1.4.2 The Response

Prior to this crisis and the public spread of misinformation about Crock-Pot, “the brand wasn’t even on Twitter,” (Handley, 2018, p. 1). The company decided that this would be the first communication step they would take regarding the crisis. Without any experience or standing on the social media app, “this brand used this new, to them, medium to respond to the attacks against it and in an effort to repair its image with the handle @CrockPotCares,” (Hornsby, Goover, 2020, p. 32). Its first tweet in response to concern about Crock-Pot products said:

“Jack was one of our favorites too! Don’t worry, you can still make your favorite comfort food in your #CROCKPOT with confidence. We want to assure you we rigorously test our products for safety. DM us and we’d be happy to tell you more about our safety standards.” Twitter 2018 Hornsby, Groover 32

Even though Crock-Pot began sharing messages such as this one in response to worried tweets, “some Twitter users were still posting their plans to either throw their Crock-Pot in the trash or never use it again,” (Hornsby, Groover, 2020, p. 32). In an attempt to protect their brand from lingering public concern, Crock-Pot continued sharing messages that acknowledged the show and situation while still providing the real facts. As an example, one tweet from the @CrockPotCares account read:

“Crock-Pot understands the concerns brought up by last night’s episode of ‘This is Us’, and we too are heartbroken by the latest developments in Jack’s storyline. However, it is important that our consumers understand and have confidence that all Crock-Pot slow

cookers exceed all internal testing protocols and all applicable industry safety standards and regulations as verified by independent third-party testing labs...In addition, and most relevant to the concerns consumers are having after watching the most recent 'This is Us' episode, our Crock-Pot slow cookers are low current, low wattage appliances with self-regulating heating elements," (Hornsby, Groover, 2020, p. 33).

Crock-Pot explained in this statement that they would “work with the team at “This is Us” to provide factual information about the product’s safety,” (Hornsby & Groover, 2020, p. 33). This led to the creation of a Crock-Pot advertisement supported by the *This is Us* show creators. In this commercial, “Milo Ventimiglia (who plays Jack) speaks directly to the camera about family unity and then dishes himself a bowl of chili from a large slow-cooker, ending with the Crock-Pot logo and #CrockPotIsInnocent,” (Foss, 2019, p. 1). This furthered the spread of information that Crock-Pots are safe and there is no reason for consumers to panic or relate the show’s episode back to the Crock-Pot brand.

In February 2018, “the brand still incorporated #CrockPotIsInnocent in many of its tweets” and by mid-February, “the organization’s account no longer referred to the “This is Us” episode or #CrockPotIsInnocent” and “begun to include messages focusing on answering questions from customers and replying to those who tagged Crock-Pot in tweets related to what they had cooked in their Crock-Pot,” (Hornsby & Groover, 2020, p. 34).

When the next episode of *This is Us* aired in February after depicting the scene of the slow-cooker fire, the episode ““Super Bowl Sunday’ clearly conveyed that Jack died from cardiac arrest, not directly in the fire” and “viewer online response shows a shift in attributing blame,” (Foss, 2019, p. 1). With this assistance from the show itself, Crock-Pot was able to largely shift away from the blame for a beloved TV character’s death. By focusing on their consumers’ needs and emotions over the course of handling this crisis, Crock-Pot was able to make it out of the situation in an extremely successful way.

1.4.3 Analysis

The Crock-Pot crisis of 2018 is a great example of crisis communications in the modern day. Social media interactions have added another level of communication and individual needs and expectations when it comes to communicating, which is important to keep in mind when communicating during a crisis in this environment. Mass media communication has created a unique type of interaction, known as ‘parasocial interaction’. The term was created by Horton and Wohl in 1956. “One of the most striking characteristics of the new mass media - radio, television, and movies – is that they give the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer,” (Hornsby, Groover, 2020, p. 25-26). As exhibited through the public outrage and true sorrow towards the death of the fictional *This is Us* character, people have started feeling a real connection and relationship between the people they see on screen due to our mass forms of communication. Social media has furthered this, making people feel personal connections to the celebrities, influencers, and brands they are following and watching through social media. This type of relationship between brand and consumer has changed the consumer’s expectations of brands and “as evidenced by recent reports indicating that over one half of consumers now anticipate brand responses to consumer comments,” (Labrecque, 2014, p. 1). The “parasocial interaction (PSI) theory is used to help explain a brand’s success in developing strong ties with consumers through social media and provides insights on how to preserve intimate relationship feelings in light of the increasing movement towards response automation,” (Labrecque, 2014, p. 1). Consumers want to feel like they are being heard by a brand and with the addition of social media adding a new, easy line of direct communication, consumers are now expecting to be heard. This is extremely important to keep in mind when dealing with modern day crisis communications.

Crock-Pot did a great job of joining the ongoing social conversation through creating a Twitter account and responding to specific tweets that expressed concerns about the Crock-Pot brand and the safety of its products. While not only directly communicating with worried consumers, Crock-Pot also made sure to match their consumers' emotions around the subject. Even though technically the facts fully showed that Crock-Pot has no relation to or business being involved in this crisis, they decided to appeal to the emotions that their audience was sharing on social media. This paid off well, and gave the brand a compassionate and trustworthy image.

The role of social media is important to consider when dealing with modern day crisis communications. As seen in both the United Airlines crisis in 2017 and the Crock-Pot crisis in 2018, social media can have a large impact on a company during a crisis and depending on how communications are handled, it can either be a great asset in handling a crisis as Crock-Pot did or social media can further negative opinions towards your company like what happened with United Airlines. The key to using social media to your advantage in a crisis is considering this parasocial interaction. When thinking about your online relationship with your consumers this way, you can craft much more meaningful and impactful communications that actually mean something to your audience. This new level of personal relationship that companies are creating with their audience means that there have been changes in the audience's expectations of a company and their communications. This is no longer solely a business relationship with consumers, but a more personal and invested one. This is an important new change in crisis communications. In order to successfully communicate during a crisis in the new modern world of social media, organizations are going to have to consider their relationship with their audience

as a more personal one than it has been in the past and communicate in a way that is more engaging and authentic to match audiences' expectations.

1.5 Professor Haber Interview

The next step in my research regarding the basics of good crisis communications was an interview with Jon Haber, an adjunct lecturer in public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government where he teaches Crisis Communications. Haber is a professional in the field of communications with extensive knowledge and experience in the subject, such as serving as the president of strategic communications consultancy Cascade Strategy, Inc. and formally being a senior partner at worldwide public relations and marketing company Fleishman-Hillard. When asked about the historical case studies I was analyzing he made the following comments about the new aspect of modern-day communications to take into consideration when analyzing recent crisis communications:

"I think something's happened in the last five or six years to crisis, which is happening everywhere else in society, which is the impact of social media. And what that has done is a couple of things: it has sped up how quickly word gets out and how fast people respond. And it also means that people think they have a personal relationship with the company and so they expect something more."
(0:46)

In dealing with any crisis, Haber explained the importance of planning prior to the crisis and the designation of authority with responsibilities given to smaller teams of people. He explained the following about preparing for a crisis:

"First of all, we want to create a process, we want three decision makers. If you're the communications person you don't want to have to run around to 25 people and get approval, right? You can make a decision and act within the hour, you can bring in whoever you need, then you also create sort of teams and train people."
(13:20)

"You figure out a system, you think about who you need to inform. Students, faculty, the outside, how do they get information? If it was today, students get it through text or Twitter, a lot of different ways. Faculty probably gets it through email."
(14:10)

He described the importance of knowing each of your key audiences and how to individually reach each of them effectively and build your communication teams and efforts off of that. There are four main components of strategic communications that Haber mentioned: “goals, audiences, messages and strategy,” (Haber 26:15). When developing crisis communications, it is crucial to have strongly considered and developed these key parts of communication. Haber reinforced the findings from my historical case studies regarding strong crisis communications: make communications audience-focused, and communicate in a timely and effective manner that is meeting expectations of communication.

1.6 Final Conclusion

All three of these historical cases of crisis communications and my interview with Haber consistently showed one important aspect and crucial aspect of crisis communications: focusing on your audience. In order to fully come out of a crisis successfully, the support of the public and a positive public opinion towards your company can make a huge difference. There are three core lessons in the Tylenol, United, and Crock-Pot cases that exhibit important qualities of successful crisis communications.

1. Communications should be focused on the needs of your audiences
2. Timeliness and genuineness is crucial - first statements set the course for the rest of the crisis
3. Be aware of modern-day audience expectations - they feel a more personal relationship with their companies

The Tylenol crisis was a great example of communicating in a way that puts their audiences before the company itself. They created an open line of dialogue with their key publics that was sharing information that could hurt Johnson & Johnson but showed their dedication to their integrity as a company and the safety of their consumers. This care for their consumers and focus on being open and honest created relationships that helped them navigate the crisis and

come out even stronger than they were before. Even if it is more difficult to do in the moment, communicating with audiences in mind pays off in the end and builds a more trustworthy reputation as a brand.

In the case of United, that crisis showed how important and impactful your first statements regarding a crisis are. It showed that not only is it extremely important to respond to a crisis in a timely manner, but also how important it is to make sure that those initial responses are genuine and meaningful enough to make the impact on the audience that they should. United showed that when done incorrectly, your first responses to a crisis will affect how the audience interacts with you for the rest of the crisis. Even when United started being more heartfelt in their statements on the situation, people remembered how it was handled at the beginning of the crisis which tainted their view of United from then on.

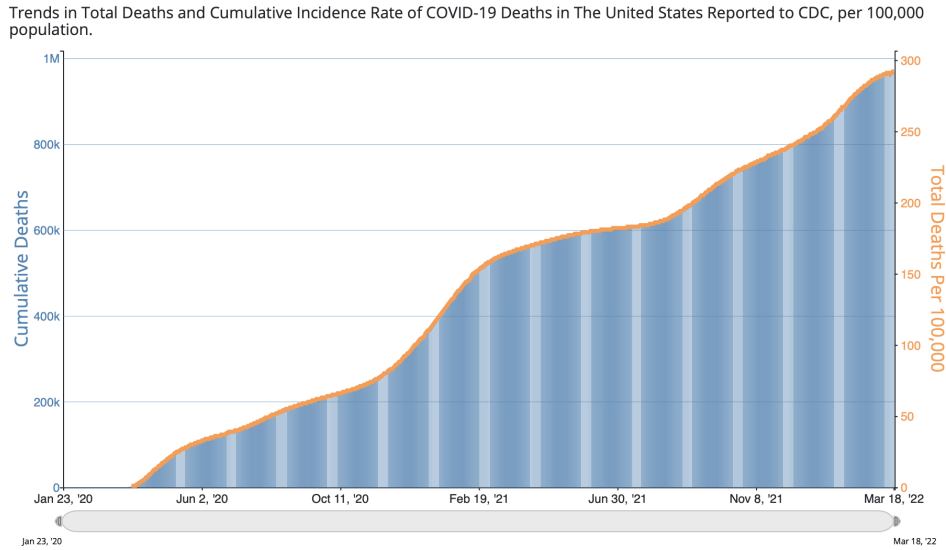
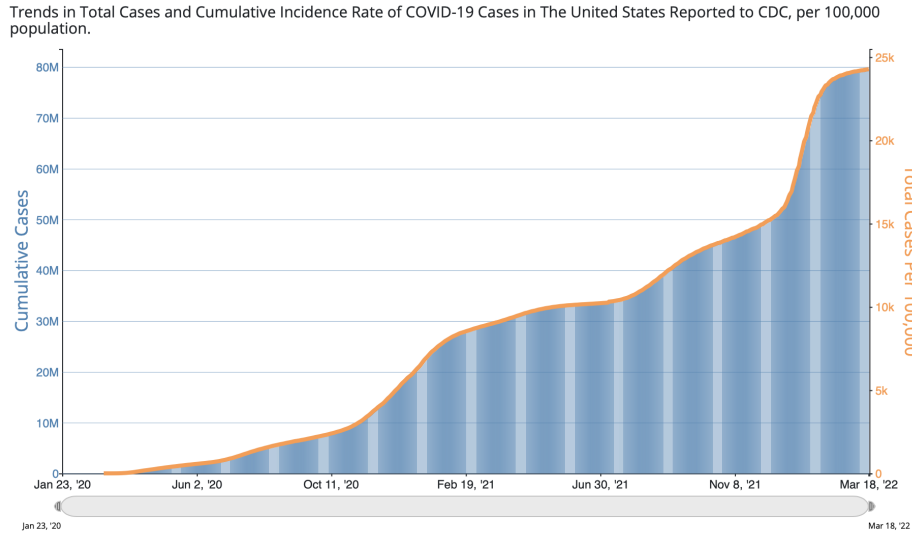
The Crock-Pot crisis demonstrated the way to handle a crisis in this age of modern technology and its effect on audiences' needs. This more direct two-way line of communication between consumer and company enabled by social media has altered people's expectations of a company and they expect much more personally and emotionally than in the past. As seen by how Crock-Pot handled their crisis by joining and interacting with stakeholders on Twitter, when you meet your audience where they are, you can have an extremely powerful impact in handling a crisis. It is crucial to remember the personal relationship consumers feel towards their companies which causes a crisis in those circumstances to be more emotional, whether it's logical or not. This simplified direct communication can be helpful or detrimental to a company in crisis so being aware of its effects and power can help a company use it to its advantage. These are three key aspects of good crisis communications that the researcher focused on when analyzing the University of Mississippi's crisis communications regarding COVID-19 in March

2020 including: 1) the promptness of their communications and 2) the focus of the communications and 3) compassion and genuineness. Especially during an emotional crisis such as COVID-19, compassion and openness towards an audience is even more crucial to the crisis communications. By looking for the timeliness, genuity, and audience centered communications, I will be able to evaluate the quality of the University's initial COVID-19 communications.

CHAPTER 2: Time Period Description - March 2020

2.1 Federal Statistics

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there were a total of 88 COVID-19 cases in the United States on March 1, 2020. By March 31, 2020, there were a total of 212,514 COVID-19 cases in the country. On March 1, 2020, there were a total of two COVID-19 deaths. However, on March 31, 2020 there were 4,954 total deaths in the country from COVID-19. As you can tell from both the cases and deaths graph from the CDC, COVID-19 began picking up in the country during March 2020 only to continue growing more and more over the next few years. As evidenced on the 'Total Deaths' graph, the death numbers rose dramatically going into April 2020 which demonstrated the nature of the virus and the effects that it was going to have. This made March 2020 the prime time for crisis communications regarding COVID-19. As both numbers and public panic began increasing during this time period, it was crucial for strong communications to be going out during this time.



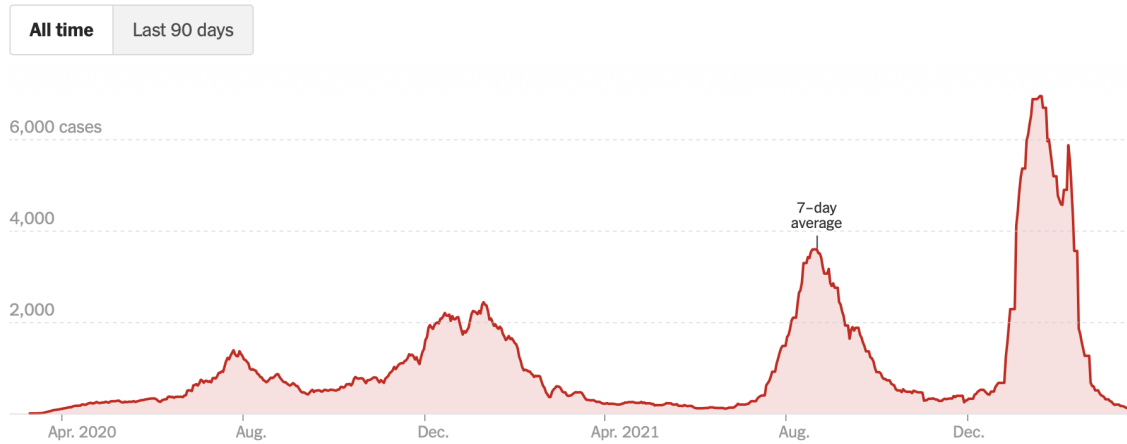
(Figure 1 and Figure 2 from covid.cdc.gov)

2.2 State and Local Statistics

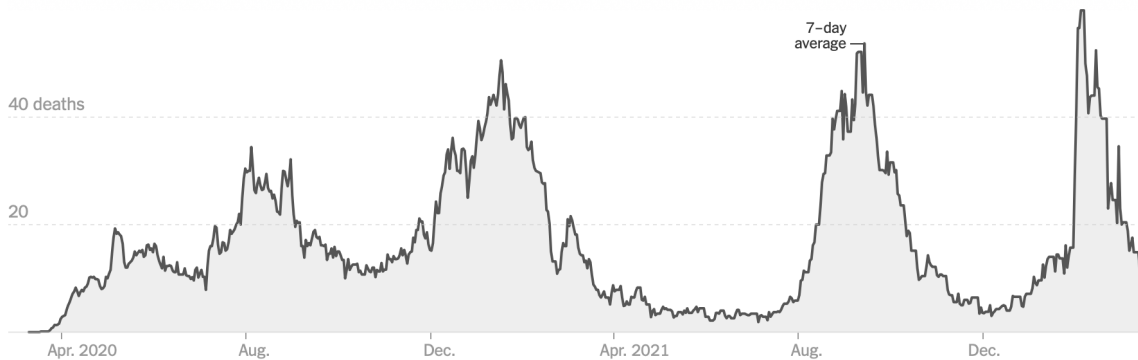
According to *The New York Times*, on March 11, 2020 Mississippi had a daily average of zero new cases and a daily average of zero deaths. By April 1, 2020, Mississippi had a daily average of 100 new COVID-19 cases and a daily average of 2.4 deaths. Reported cases would go on to fluctuate in the future, but this beginning time period of 2020 exhibited the first increase in

both COVID-19 cases and deaths in the state making this a problem that was going to affect institutions, companies, and people in the state.

New reported cases



New reported deaths by day

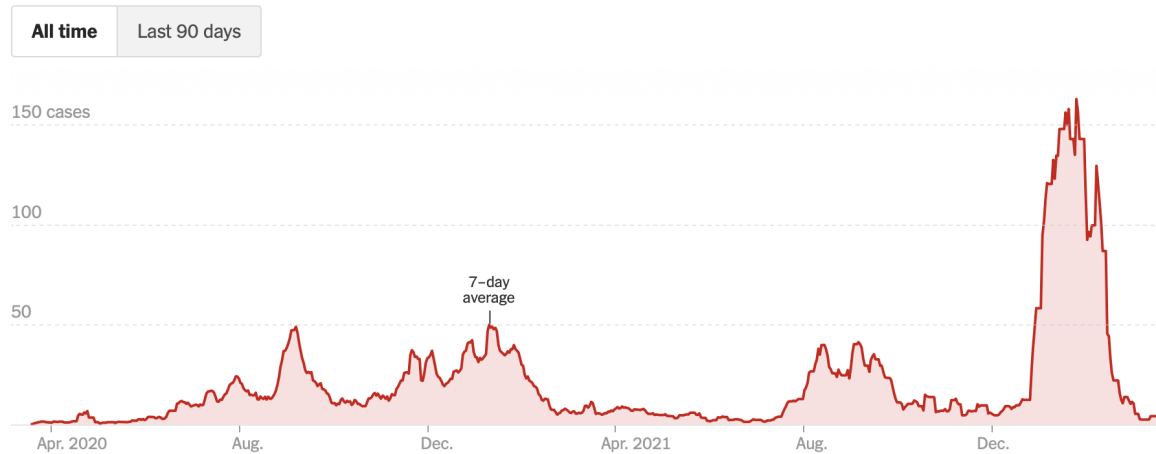


(Figure 3 and Figure 4 from nytimes.com)

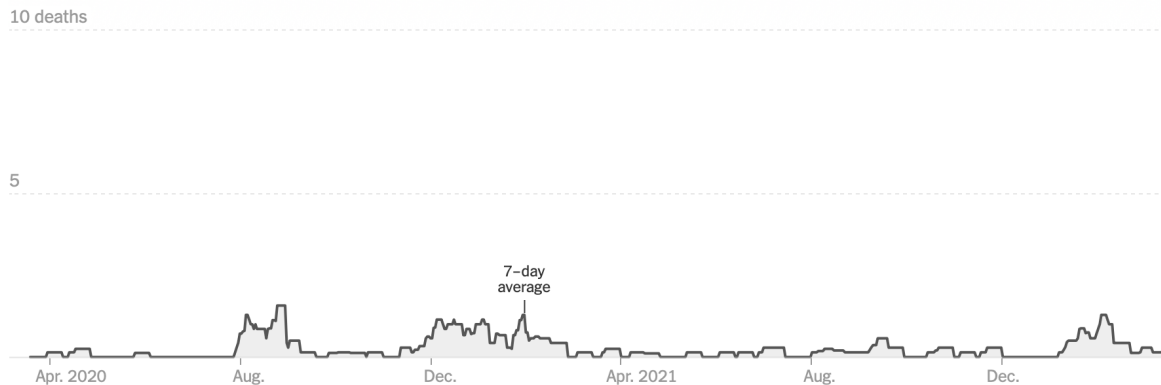
When looking at the county that the University of Mississippi is in, Lafayette County, *The New York Times* reported that they had a daily average of zero new cases and zero deaths on March 20, 2020. On April 1, 2020, Lafayette County had an average of 1 new case daily and a daily death average of .1. The county numbers were smaller, but picking up during March 2020 and showed that it was just going to continue increasing over time. Once cases began occurring

as close as the county of the University, it was important for communications to be impactful and meaningful as this was a virus that truly began affecting people's lives.

New reported cases



New reported deaths by day



(Figure 5 and Figure 6 from *nytimes.com*)

The graphs and data provided by the CDC proved that March 2020 was the point of the COVID-19 pandemic where it completely began spreading. The county itself was not as affected as other areas in the country, but the University of Mississippi is home to people from all over the United States and world. As this virus began growing nationally and internationally, it was becoming something that the University had to acknowledge and provide statements about. It

was important for their communications to be appropriate and strong enough for their audiences who were all being affected by the virus in one way or another at this point.

CHAPTER 3: Federal Communications

3.1 National Emergency - March 13, 2020

March 2020 was also an important and crucial time during the COVID-19 in terms of federal communications. The “Proclamation on Declaring a National Emergency Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak” was given by President Trump on March 13, 2020. At this point, COVID-19 was considered a National Emergency and called for it to be treated as such. The Proclamation explained that “on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced that the COVID-19 outbreak can be characterized as a pandemic, as the rates of infection continue to rise in many locations around the world and across the United States,” (Proclamation No. 9994). By March 2020, the virus was affecting people internationally and all over the United States. This was becoming a crisis that was going to affect everyday life and was going to affect everyone. At this point of the pandemic, President Trump said:

“The spread of COVID-19 within our Nation’s communities threatens to strain our Nation’s healthcare systems. As of March 12, 2020, 1,645 people from 47 States have been infected with the virus that causes COVID-19. It is incumbent on hospitals and medical facilities throughout the country to assess their preparedness posture and be prepared to surge capacity and capability. Additional measures, however, are needed to successfully contain and combat the virus in the United States.”
(Proclamation No. 9994)

This marked a point where the COVID-19 pandemic became a crisis that all companies, institutions, universities, and everyone else had to not only figure out what to do in this unprecedented time but how to also communicate during it in order to stay afloat. After being declared a National Emergency, public panic and nerves about the situation only grew which affected the extent of communication that needed to be going out during this time from all levels.

Because of the added gravity to the COVID-19 situation after this Proclamation deemed it to be that serious, March 2020 was a turning point for the University of Mississippi and all other organizations across the country and required strong crisis communications during this time.

CHAPTER 4: State/City Communications

4.1 Governor of Mississippi Press Releases

On March 6, 2020 (about a week before COVID-19 was declared a national emergency), Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves declared Mississippi in a state of emergency. A press release from Governor Reeves said that he had “declared a state of emergency to further ramp up Mississippi’s coordinated response across all levels of government and provide health officials and administrators with the necessary tools and guidance to combat the spread of COVID-19,” (Governor Reeves Press Release 2020). The governor was quick to declare a state of emergency to protect the state of Mississippi as national numbers were growing and this affected everyone in the state, including the University of Mississippi. Governor Reeves said in his press release,

“I urge all Mississippians to use caution. This is not a time to panic—we are acting calmly and steadily. In this state, we were prepared. We have a pandemic plan that is being followed to the letter. We have tremendous experts who are operating in a way that will protect the public health and save lives. We are listening to those experts, and following their lead every step of the way.”

(Gov. Reeves PR 3/6/20)

The governor furthered his efforts in the state over the course of March 2020 and signed two executive orders by March 16. Executive Order No. 1459 “activates the Mississippi National Guard to support mobile testing units and support Mississippi State Department of Health and Mississippi Emergency Management Agency at the testing locations,” and Executive Order No. 1458 “allows state agencies to determine which state employees are essential and send everyone else home” and “the Governor encouraged other businesses in Mississippi to do the same with

their employees,” (Gov. Reeves PR 3/16/20). Specifically dealing with schools within the state, Executive Order No. 1458 asked schools “to begin working with the Mississippi Department of Education to develop distance learning protocols as the state determines how long schools should remain closed,” (Gov. Reeves PR 3/16/20). At this point, the state of Mississippi was requesting schools to begin working towards transitioning education online during this point in the pandemic.

This point in time became a crucial stage in the pandemic where schools were forced to fully alter their way of education to a remote learning environment to keep people safe during the pandemic. For a lot of people, schools and universities are a safe place for them and the decision to shut them down impacted people and students all over the country. This required schools to have been prepared to deal with this sort of shutdown and have some sort of plan in place to be able to act quickly and communicate with all of the important groups of people that they have to. During the course of the pandemic and especially during the month of March 2020, the virus was moving fast and constantly changing which required everyone, especially those trying to keep businesses and organizations running, to be constantly aware of the current state of the virus and effectively be communicating during this uncertain time.

4.2 The Daily Mississippian – March 2020

The Daily Mississippian is an independent, student-run newspaper at the University of Mississippi; this publication covered the COVID-19 pandemic in Oxford extensively. Their articles were a good reference for understanding more of what was happening specifically around the University of Mississippi and in Oxford, Mississippi during March 2020. In their first article of March 2020 about COVID-19, *The Daily Mississippian* covered when the University suspended travel to countries being affected by the virus. On Thursday, March 5, 2020 *The Daily*

Mississippian reported that “the University of Mississippi announced on Wednesday that it is canceling or suspending all university-related travel to China, Italy, Japan, Iran and South Korea - countries under varying levels of government warning,” (Carpenter 2020). The article included an interview with a student who said “Ole Miss took longer than she expected to make the decision to cancel its study abroad program in Italy,” but also went on to explain that “Coronavirus is not an immediate threat to Mississippians,” (Carpenter 2020). As seen in the graphs in the previous chapter, Mississippi did not have any COVID-19 cases at this time. The next *The Daily Mississippian* article regarding the virus was on March 10, 2020 about the University preparing for online courses. The article explained that an email was sent out to faculty from Provost Noel Wilkin on March 6, 2020, which was the day that Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves declared Mississippi in a state of emergency and a week before President Trump declared the pandemic a National Emergency. The article included the following from the email to faculty:

“In the email, Wilkin wrote that “now is a good time to begin planning for how you (faculty) would respond to the potential impacts of COVID-19, if it becomes necessary.” He added that a committee to “address the continuity of academic planning” has been formed and will be chaired by Tony Ammeter, associate provost and director of outreach and continuing studies. The email also contains a link to a university web page that provides faculty with resources on how to teach classes online.”
(*Daily Mississippian* 2020)

By March 12, 2020, the University had shared with students that spring break would be extended and when classes began again they would be held online. The *Daily Mississippian* said the following:

“The Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning Board of Trustees announced that all eight public universities in the state, including the University of Mississippi, will extend spring break by one week to “allow faculty members time to prepare to offer classes remotely” and prohibit the spread of the coronavirus.”
(*Hitson* 2020)

The Daily Mississippian also explained that “the IHL decision comes the day after the Mississippi State Department of Health reported the state’s first presumptive positive case of the virus,” (Hitson 2020). At this point, the University of Mississippi was beginning to encourage students to return to their homes so the university could move towards closing down the campus as COVID-19 began moving closer. The next article on March 16, 2020 entitled “Cancellations and delays as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic” detailed a list of closings and changes occurring due to the virus including the closing of University housing, closing of the Ole Miss Student Union, canceling of all large gathering and events, and other University-related cancellations and delays.

The Daily Mississippian communicated a big University update on March 19, 2020 when they shared that commencement was going to be postponed and classes were going to stay virtual for the rest of Spring 2020 semester, a little less than two weeks after communicating to staff to begin transitioning their classes online. The article said:

“In a campus-wide email, Chancellor Glenn Boyce confirmed the inevitable: students will not return to campus for the remainder of the semester. Boyce also

announced that commencement ceremonies will be postponed, not canceled, with the hope that they can be postponed to a later date in the summer.”
(Daily Mississippian 2020)

The same day the University announced that classes were going to remain online, *The Daily Mississippian* also covered the first case of COVID-19 in Lafayette County. *The Daily Mississippian* said the following on March 19, 2020 about the first COVID-19 case in Lafayette county:

“The first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Lafayette County this morning, according to Baptist Memorial Hospital and the Mississippi Department of Health.

“While today is the first time that we can positively confirm the coronavirus in our community, we’ve known this day was coming, and we’ve prepared for it for weeks,” Mayor Robyn Tannehill said in a video released Thursday morning.

*The total number of cases in Mississippi is now more than 50.”
(Payne 2020)*

By the time COVID-19 had hit the University of Mississippi’s county, they had already communicated and planned for being completely online to help prevent further spread of the virus. Three days after the University of Mississippi had announced that school would stay virtual and continued urging students to return home and social distance as much as possible, Oxford passed an order requiring residents to stay home. *The Daily Mississippian* said the following on March 22, 2020 about the order:

“The mayor and Board of Aldermen passed a resolution, effective immediately, ordering citizens to stay in their homes except for essential needs at a special meeting on Sunday evening amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Not following the order is a misdemeanor, though the city will focus on voluntary compliance, according to a statement clarifying the measure released alongside the resolution.”
(Payne 2020)*

As COVID-19 numbers continued growing, restrictions in the city of Oxford began getting stricter. The University had been urging students to return home for about 10 days before the city issued these constraints as an attempt to help slow the spread of the virus. The order was to be in effect until April 6, 2020 at this point. While many students living on campus were able to return home as the pandemic continued escalating, there were many unable to do so which led to there still being some students on the University’s campus. *The Daily Mississippian* shared on March 25, 2020:

“When the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning Board of Trustees announced on March 12 the university’s extended spring break and switch to online classes, an approximate 4,100 students living in university housing were displaced from their Oxford

residences. Over 94% of these students returned to their family homes or found another place to stay for the remainder of the semester, but according to John Yaun, university director of student housing, roughly 230 students are riding out the coronavirus pandemic and Oxford's resulting stay-at-home order in on-campus housing.” (Hitson 2020)

The University was able to get a large percentage of their on campus students to return home and leave the campus, but there were still students that needed housing support during this difficult time. *The Daily Mississippian* also included in their March 25 article regarding on-campus housing at this point in the pandemic:

“In order to remain on campus, Yaun said applications had to show whether a student was housing insecure, if the student did not have internet in order to be able to continue online courses, if the student were unable to travel home or another extenuating circumstance.

When asked whether there were any instances where a student did not meet requirements or had to be turned away from university housing, Yaun did not answer.” (Hitson 2020)

By the end of March 2020, the University had a system in place for handling students who needed housing through keeping six dorm buildings open and instating health precautions to keep everyone that is on campus safe.

CHAPTER 5: SEC Universities' Communications

The next step of research was talking with communications professionals at other Southeastern Conference (SEC) institutions about their March 2020 communications. By gaining this information about other similar universities, I would have communications with which to compare the University of Mississippi. These are all relatively close, similar universities which makes them a good comparison for both timing of the communications and communication content and strategies.

After gaining archived emails from the communication departments at Auburn University, the University of Missouri, and the University of Georgia, I used their emails for timeline and content comparison.

5.1 Auburn University

Auburn University sent out an email on March 2, 2020 “recalling all of its travel abroad students and suspending all official international travel for students, faculty and staff until further notice given the global outbreak of COVID-19,” (Auburn, 2020, p. 1). This move was done two days before the University of Mississippi began their travel restrictions. On March 12, 2020, Auburn had announced that the University would begin transitioning online. On March 20, 2020, Auburn had communicated that remote learning would continue through the rest of semester and commencement would be postponed.

Auburn was sending at least one email a week regarding COVID-19 at the beginning of March 2020 and continued increasing their level of communication throughout the month, sending out at least one email a day regarding the virus by the end of the month. Auburn University also began an informational website for COVID-19 during March 2020. Additionally, that month, Auburn created an “Auburn Experts Take on Coronavirus” website. On this page, professors at the university were able to use their individual expertises and experiences to share information and advice regarding the virus on a variety of topics including, “Home”, “Health and Medical Solutions”, “Economic Analysis”, “Community Impact”, and “Education and Learning Techniques”. This type of website centered around the pandemic was an interesting and unique idea that I discovered doing this part of my research. I feel like this was a creative way for Auburn University to use the knowledge and expertise they had to their advantage and continue constantly pushing out as much information to their publics as possible.

5.2 University of Missouri

On March 5, 2020, the University of Missouri sent out an email regarding restrictions being put in place for university related travel. The University of Missouri sent out an email on March 11, 2020 announcing the beginning of the transition to remote learning. Two days later on March 13, 2020, the University of Missouri announced that online learning would be extended for the rest of the semester. This was done days before the University of Mississippi, the University of Auburn, and the University of Georgia announced the same extension.

At this point, the University of Missouri was directing people to their ‘muhealth’ and ‘mualert’ websites for specific pages created for COVID-19. The University of Missouri was sending multiple emails a week regarding the virus from the second week of March. The University of Missouri did a good job of providing constant updates on the area surrounding the university including emails like “University responds to Boone County’s first case” (3/18/20) and “University responds to Columbia stay-at-home order” (3/24/20). The university was sympathetic to their students and expressed that in their emails. In an email update on remote learning sent out on March 15, 2020, they acknowledged that “we want you to know that we understand your concerns and frustrations, particularly in terms of the transition to fully remote instruction for the rest of the spring semester,” (3/15/20). In the same email, sent out by Chancellor Dr. Alexander N. Cartwright and Provost and Executive Chancellor for Academic Affairs Dr. Latha Ramchand said:

“We write to thank our entire campus community for your hard work, resiliency and adaptability over the past several days as things changed; and changed quickly. Your efforts have been nothing short of inspiring.”
(3/15/20)

As the situation continued developing and growing, the University of Missouri included an inspirational and supportive voice in their emails being sent out. In an email sent out on March 18, 2020 about the university's county's first case, the university ended their email with:

“The University of Missouri extends our support to our community members who are affected and to those facing this challenge around the world. We have an amazing community, and we are united by the compassion and respect we show for each other. This spirit is what makes Mizzou so special, and it is how we will continue to look out for the well-being of everyone.”

(3/18/20)

The university extended lots of emotion towards their effective communities and that was visible through their specific communication choices, mainly the voice and word choices they used in their emails. After making the decision to have school fully online for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester, the University of Missouri was making clear efforts to support, encourage, and be there for their publics and community.

5.3 University of Georgia

The University of Georgia announced their transition to online classes on March 12, 2020. The university extended this transition for the remainder of Spring 2020 on March 16, 2020. Following the announcement of COVID-19 being a National Emergency on March 13, 2020, the University of Georgia was sending multiple emails a day regarding the virus for the next week. The university moved towards about one email a day being sent out for the rest of the month.

The University of Georgia did a good job with providing emails about resources often to students. Sometimes two or three emails a day, the University of Georgia was constantly providing their publics with information on university operations, COVID-19 information and status, and other relevant information that their audience should know.

The University of Georgia also used a sympathetic tone when communicating. In an email sent to faculty, staff, and students on March 16, 2020 the university said:

“As we stated last Friday, the situation we are facing marks an unprecedented time for our University and for our state, nation, and world. Although we are in uncharted territory, we want to assure you that one commitment remains first and foremost in our planning: the health, wellbeing, and safety of our campus community.”
(3/16/20)

In another email sent to university students and parents/guardians on March 20, 2020 the university ended their email with:

“Once again, thank you for your understanding during this unprecedented and challenging time. We are strengthened by witnessing the undaunted determination of students and their families to continue learning, to progress in their education, and to make this the best educational experience possible. Our faculty and staff are earnestly working alongside you in this effort. Thank you.”
(3/20/20)

By adding a personal, appreciative, and encouraging voice in their communications, the university has a much higher chance of gaining more patience from their audience as everyone was navigating this difficult time. The University of Georgia made it clear that their priority was their community and was working diligently to accommodate everyone in the constantly changing situation.

5.4 Final Conclusion

Auburn University, the University of Missouri, and the University of Georgia all exhibited different key components of good crisis communications. Auburn University worked quickly to use the resources they had to their advantage to their COVID-19 website including information and articles from their variety of experts on campus. In a crisis like COVID-19 where information was constantly changing, this was just another way that they were able to

keep their audience updated at all times with useful information on a variety of different aspects being affected by the virus. The University of Missouri and the University of Georgia had a strong, personal voice in their email communications. At an institution like a university, people feel a deep connection to the organization which is why this type of encouraging and sympathetic voice when communicating can be helpful in cultivating support towards the university and its decisions from their key publics during this time. Even though it was a crucial decision to transition classes online at this point in the pandemic, the decision impacted many students, professors, families of students, and others in a difficult and negative way. Acknowledging the disappointment and struggles that occurred because of this decision is an important way to frame the urgency of this situation in order to assist in the transition as much as possible.

CHAPTER 6: University of Mississippi Communications

6.1 University of Mississippi Communications Interview

In order to be able to do a full analysis of the University of Mississippi's communications, I decided an important part of that research would be looking at the university's actual crisis plan that led the communication process during COVID-19. The plan that you have in place before a crisis happens is especially going to have an impact on those initial decisions at the beginning of the crisis so to better understand the university's early COVID-19 communications during March 2020, I reached out to the university's Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, Jim Zook. After reaching out, I had the opportunity to interview Zook, Strategic Communications Director Lisa Stone, and Emergency Management Coordinator Josh Glasz, each of whom gave me lots of insight into the university's thought process and communication decisions when it came to handling the COVID-19 crisis.

One of the first things that they shared with me was that the university uses the Incident Command System from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The Incident Command System comes from FEMA's National Incident Management System, NIMS. On the FEMA website, NIMS is described as "a comprehensive, national approach to incident management that is applicable at all jurisdictional levels and across functional disciplines," (FEMA NIMS: FAQ p. 1). The purpose of NIMS is to have a consistent plan for responding to all kinds of crises no matter the circumstances. In a section explaining why we need NIMS, the Department of Homeland Security said:

"NIMS provides a consistent nationwide framework and approach to enable government at all levels (Federal, State, tribal, and local), the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to work together to prepare for, prevent, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of incidents regardless of the incident's cause, size, location, or complexity."
(NIMS: FAQ p. 1)

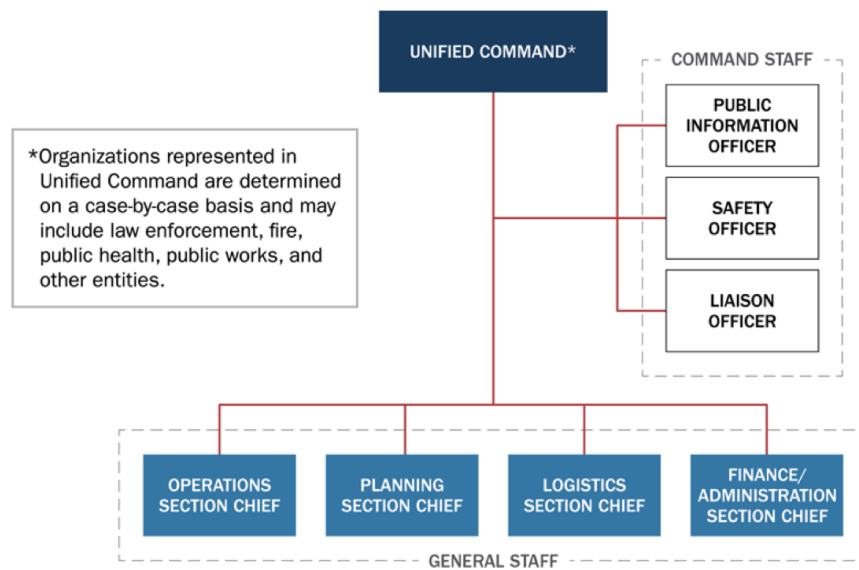
NIMS has five main components: Preparedness, Communications and Information Management, Resource Management, Command and Management, and Ongoing Management and Maintenance. One of the key parts of the Command and Management component is the Incident Command System that is used by the University of Mississippi. The Command and Management section is there to "enable effective and efficient incident management and coordination by providing a flexible, standardized incident management structure," (NIMS: FAQ 3) which is the purpose of the Incident Command System. The Department of Homeland Security explained the ICS as:

"The ICS is a widely applicable management system designed to enable effective, efficient incident management by integrating a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure. ICS is a fundamental form of management established in a standard format, with the purpose of enabling incident managers to identify the key concerns associated

with the incident—often under urgent conditions—without sacrificing attention to any component of the command system.”
(NIMS: FAQ p. 3)

NIMS and the ICS are the foundation of crisis management at the university but they are flexible depending on the situation at hand. In the interview, Glasz explained that “you have some flexibility as long as the concepts are still there and what you do from there it really can be flexible, it’s made to provide a common language more than a common operation,” (Glasz 1:15). In developing communications during a crisis Glasz described how “you have to be communicating to the news, the press about things that are occurring, but then you also have the general notification to your community and things such as that” (Glasz 1:50) and FEMA helps with communicating in both of those ways. Glasz said “the number one thing is always getting the accurate information to the right people as quickly as possible” (1:20) and “the FEMA model shows you a good foundation, and then it kind of branches out and shows you several difference things that can be done, the number one thing is knowing it’s flexible to meet your needs,” (Glasz 4:26). The major purpose this type of crisis plan serves for the university is to “provide that language so everybody is speaking in the same way and looking in the same directions,” (Glasz 4:45). The ICS communication model is largely focused on is overall consistent communication which can be helpful in a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic when things were constantly changing and public panic was high.

The command organization that the University of Mississippi uses from ICS is the Unified Command Composition. A unified command is organized as:



(Figure 7 from NIMS pg 26)

In a unified command, “the individuals designated by their jurisdictional or organizational authorities (or by departments within a single jurisdiction) jointly determine priorities and objectives, allocate resources, and work together to ensure the execution of integrated incident operations and maximize the use of assigned resources,” (NIMS 26). Glasz explained that even when a crisis is not occurring, this organization of command is still there in place so when it is needed it’s already ready. Specifically for COVID-19, individuals at the university were divided into response groups:

COVID-19 Event Response Groups	
Command Team (Unified Command):	Provost Office, Health Services, Marketing & Communications, and Emergency Management
Activated Incident Response Team (IRT) Members by Departments/Offices:	
Department / Office / Area	Essential Support Function Category
Academic Affairs	ESF 6 Housing, Human Services, & Academics
Administration & Finance	ESF 16 Finance and Resources
Athletics	ESF 6 Housing, Human Services, & Academics
Contractual / Food Services	ESF 3 Water, Facilities, & Campus Services
Counseling Services	ESF 8 Health Services
Emergency Management	ESF 5 Emergency Management
Enrollment Management	ESF 6 Housing, Human Services, & Academics
Environmental Compliance	ESF 10 Hazardous Materials
Facilities Management	ESF 3 Water, Facilities, & Campus Services
General Counsel	ESF 15 Public & External Affairs, ESF 6
Health Services	ESF 8 Health Services
Human Resources	ESF 6 Housing, Human Services, & Academics
Information Technology	ESF 2 Communications
Landscape Services	ESF 7 Logistics and Support
Marketing & Communications	ESF 15 Public & External Affairs
Outreach & Continuing Education	ESF 6 Housing, Human Services, & Academics
Parking & Transportation	ESF 1 Transportation
Provost Office	ESF 6 Housing, Human Services, & Academics
Psychological Services	ESF 8 Health Services
Research & Sponsored Programs	ESF 6 Housing, Human Services, & Academics
Student Affairs	ESF 6 Housing, Human Services, & Academics
Student Housing	ESF 6 Housing, Human Services, & Academics
Study Abroad / Global Engagement	ESF 6 Housing, Human Services, & Academics
Telecommunications	ESF 2 Communications
University Airport	ESF 1 Transportation
University Veterinarian	ESF 11 Animals & Natural Resources
UPD & Campus Safety	ESF 13 Law Enforcement

(Figure 8)

Since a university has so many different moving components, a unified command structure to follow the Incident Command System allowed for different departments to be able to carry out their individual responsibilities while still being consistent and working together when handling a crisis. The university had their Command Team at the top, composed of the Provost Office, Health Services, Marketing & Communications, and Emergency Management, leading this crisis and managing decision making while other departments organized by their ‘Essential Support Function Category’ had responsibilities within their respective areas as well. The Incident Response Teams, along with ‘task forces’ that were more specific working groups, reported back to the Command Team who led the crisis communication and management efforts.

An important aspect of this crisis management model that was especially crucial in March 2020 was consistent and constant meetings within the team to stay on top of the situation and make sure everything is always updated. Stone explained that “for a while we were meeting daily, if I remember correctly, both the IRT and then the command team, even through the weekends in March, in particular March 2020,” (Stone 16:26). At that point in the pandemic, “there was so much going on, you had to have those meetings daily, because they were changing so fast so getting those real time reports from all across campus was really critical,” (Stone 16:45). When discussing early COVID-19 communications during the beginning of March 2020, Stone explained that the university began initially communicating early that year before March with an initial email to the community acknowledging the virus and that there was something happening, the university was just not fully sure what yet at this point. Stone said that, “I think you start to see in March 2020, there’s letters from the chancellor, letters from the provost, we started the COVID newsletter,” (Stone 18:45). In my interview, I found these were some of the main forms of communication the University was sending out about COVID-19 during this time:

1. Chancellor letters and Provost letters sent through email (official university messages)
2. Social media posts
3. Coronavirus website
4. Chancellor’s newsletters
5. FIN (chatbot for freshman living in on-campus housing)

6.2 University of Mississippi Emails to Students

Students were mainly reached through social media and student-specific email communications, such as the Powder Blue and the Student Newsletter. For my research that is focused on crisis communications with the student group, I have decided to use the emails from the university that are archived on the university’s Coronavirus website. This website has all official university messages that were sent out during the pandemic, including the messages from

the Chancellor and Provost. In the following chart, I organized the official university messages from March 2020 with basic information laying out the timeline and content:

Date	Title	Message From	Summary
3/4	University Coronavirus Update	Provost	No cases in Mississippi, announced travel restrictions, update on safety precautions
3/12	University Update on COVID-19	Chancellor	Classes canceled for the week after spring break, announced transition to online class until further notice, encouraged students to return home, provided guidance for on campus students, encouraged social distancing
3/14	University Health Services Update to Students	Student Health Service	Shared COVID-19 hotlines, urgent care appointment updates
3/15	University Health Services Update to Faculty and Staff	Employee Health Service	Urgent care visit updates
3/19	Important Update About Spring 2020 Semester	Chancellor	Announced extension of online classes for the rest of the semester, postponed commencement
3/27	Provost Message About Academic Updates	Provost	Announced all Summer terms would be online

The university, as seen in their March 2020 email communications, consistently had messages coming from three main sources: the Chancellor, the Provost, and Health Services. These were all components of the Command Team in the university’s ICS model. The university included resources in their emails regarding campus updates and restrictions and COVID-19

updates and safety precautions. They updated their recommendations as information on the virus came out but consistently encouraged social distancing and self-monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms. They provided phone numbers and websites in each email directing their audience to more resources, information, and assistance regarding aspects of COVID-19. The university was encouraging to its audience throughout these emails. In the first email of March 2020, Provost Dr. Wilkin closed his email with:

“The safety, health and well-being of the university community remain our highest priorities. This includes being supportive, respectful and compassionate of all members of our university community during the uncertainty and anxiety that accompanies widespread illness. Please visit the [COVID-19 Update Page](#) for the most up-to-date information from the university on this topic. We will continue to monitor the developing situation and provide updates to the campus community as needed.”

Chancellor Boyce closed his March 12 email with:

“We recognize that these actions create significant challenges for students, faculty, staff and families, and many questions remain to be answered. We ask for your understanding and patience as we all respond to this evolving pandemic. Thank you in advance for your support.”

In his email on March 19 announcing that the remainder of Spring 2020 would be online, Chancellor Boyce ended his email with “And, as we always do, I know the Ole Miss family will come together and support each other through these uncertain times,”.

Another important form of communication that the university began sending out in March 2020 on top of the official university messages was their COVID-19 Newsletter, which was sent out by email to students. Beginning March 13, 2020, the university released a newsletter every single weekday for the entire month of March 2020. The emails provided constant updates on the state of COVID-19 in the state and country as well as updating information divided into the following categories: University Updates, Students, Faculty, Staff, and Other Things to Know. These newsletters sometimes included Chancellor messages and important information and would end

each newsletter with ‘a lighter note’ including things like “Need plans for the weekend? Disney’s newest Pixar release, *Onward*, will be available for streaming Friday night.” (3/20) and “On the lighter side: Two Broadway composers have created a new hand-washing song called “Twenty Seconds” to give people an alternative to singing “Happy Birthday,” (3/21). This form of communication allowed the university to be in constant communication with their students, faculty, and staff with relevant information as things were constantly changing during this time. They provided resources for the transition to online school, campus updates and plans, and overall updates on COVID-19 effects on the town of Oxford, Mississippi.

CHAPTER 7: Analysis of Communications

The analysis of the university’s communications will be broken into two sections: timeliness and the content and quality. For timeliness, the researcher examined at a timeline comparison of the University of Mississippi’s emails with federal and state communications and COVID-19 updates as well as the other SEC universities’ emails. For content and quality analysis, the researcher tied back to the three characteristics of good crisis communications discovered through the case studies and Haber interview and look for those qualities in the University of Mississippi’s crisis communications that they sent out.

7.1 Timeline

I developed the following timeline based on the emails I received from Auburn University, the University of Missouri, and the University of Georgia. It includes what days each university sent an email out on as well as marking the email that announced the transition to online school and the email that announced that classes would be online for the remainder of Spring 2020 semester, both key decisions and communications that occurred during March 2020.

March 2020

1	2 Auburn 1 UGA 1	3	4 Ole Miss 1	5 UGA 2 Mizzou 1	6	7
8	9 Mizzou 2	10	11 Mizzou 3 ¹ , 4	12 Ole Miss 2 ¹ Auburn 2 ¹ Mizzou 5 UGA 3, 4 ¹ , 5	13 Mizzou 6 ² UGA 6, 7, 8	14 Ole Miss 3
15 Ole Miss 4 Mizzou 7, 8	16 UGA 9, 10, 11 ²	17 Auburn 3 Mizzou 9, 10 UGA 12, 13	18 Mizzou 11, 12 UGA 14	19 Ole Miss 5 ² Mizzou 13 UGA 15, 16	20 Auburn 4 ² Mizzou 14, 15 UGA 17, 18, 19, 20	21 Auburn 5
22 Auburn 6	23 Auburn 7 UGA 21	24 Auburn 8 Mizzou 16 UGA 22	25 Auburn 9 UGA 23	26 Auburn 10	27 Ole Miss 6 Auburn 11, 12, 13 Mizzou 17, 18, 19 UGA 24	28 Auburn 14
29	30 Auburn 15 Mizzou 20, 21 UGA 25	31				

Key

¹ Announced transition to online school

² Online school for remainder of Spring 2020 semester

Notes

March 6: Mississippi is declared to be in a State of Emergency

March 13: COVID-19 is declared a National Emergency

(Figure 9)

As seen in the calendar, the University of Mississippi announced the transition to online school consistent with the other SEC universities, the day before COVID-19 was declared a National Emergency. On top of these official university messages from the University of

Mississippi depicted in the calendar, the university was also sending out their ‘COVID-19 Newsletter’ every single week day. The University of Mississippi responded quickly as the COVID-19 situation became increasingly threatening and continuously updated their public throughout the course of the pandemic during the critical time of March 2020. Since COVID-19 was a continually changing, unprecedented crisis, constant communication was a crucial component to communicate effectively with updates, new information, and resources as needed.

7.2 Quality and Content

When looking at the quality of crisis communication I decided on three main components of good crisis communication from my historical case studies. These three components were:

1. Communications should be focused on the needs of your audiences
2. Timeliness and genuineness is crucial
3. Be aware of modern-day audience expectations

Mainly through their COVID-19 Newsletter, the University of Mississippi was communicating with their audience in mind as seen through their constant sharing of resources and information. The COVID-19 pandemic, especially at its beginning, was a time of uncertainty and so the university providing their publics with information, resources, and updates as often as possible was an important aspect of making sure to communicate effectively during this time in order to support their publics and continue running as a university. In order to make it through this crisis, it was crucial for everyone to be on the same page with updated information and that was done by the university through their newsletter updates. The university also would be personable, acknowledging the difficult situation and unpredictability of the times and often providing a ‘lighter note’ or encouraging message from the Chancellor. People feel emotionally tied to their university of choice so this type of voice in the communications, especially during a crisis, is important for the university’s publics to feel cared about during the strenuous time of

COVID-19. By having official university messages and the newsletter sent through email consistently coming from the same few sources, the university also develops a more dependable and less confusing line of communication. University publics were receiving information constantly from the same places which is a key aspect of developing that personable voice that's important during crisis management.

The University of Mississippi had COVID-19 emails going back to the end of January 2020. As soon as the university was aware of a potential situation, they began communicating with their publics with whatever information they had. As the COVID-19 situation escalated during March 2020, the university also escalated the rate at which they were communicating. As the pandemic situation and circumstances began changing day to day, the university kept up when they began sending out their newsletter daily for the second half of March 2020. After being declared a national emergency, the University of Mississippi stayed in constant communication with their publics providing new resources and COVID-19 updates as they had them.

Modern-day audiences expect more information than historical audiences as people in the 21st century have become accustomed to online information constantly. Especially at a university with such strong emotional ties from their publics, there was a high need for that continual updating which the university did through their COVID-19 newsletter. The university was persistent in their email updates to students; however part of handling modern-day audience expectation also includes meeting the audience where they are, which in the case of college students is social media. The University of Mississippi shared 12 posts on Instagram during March 2020. Of these posts, three posts were regarding COVID-19 or school transitioning online and one post was providing tips for students in the transition to online school. Social media is

where the college student age group looks for updates and information and emails can often miss some of this age group. Through employing social media more during the month of March 2020 on top of the emails being sent out, the university could have provided people that the emails missed with resources and help during this difficult point of COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the University of Mississippi displayed multiple good characteristics of strong crisis communications. They had a plan in place that they understood and stuck to which helped them provide constant and consistent communications with their publics. In a crisis with information changing all the time, these constant updates were crucial for successful crisis communications for the COVID-19 pandemic. The university was constantly providing their publics with resources and guidance to navigate this difficult time and was communicating as openly and transparently as they could with the information at hand. All of these are key components of good crisis communications. My conclusion is that the University of Mississippi communicated in an effective way during their initial COVID-19 crisis communications.

For modern day crisis communications, social media is a new crucial tool that should be used as extensively as possible. This is something this research shows could be further analyzed and studied. Especially when dealing with a younger age group as one of your key audiences, social media is the best way to spread and share information, updates and resources in order to reach as many people in that age group as possible. Social media is a strong tool for building that relationship between an organization and its audiences and I think that is something that the University of Mississippi could have used to their advantage more. The email updates were a strong way to spread as much information as often as possible, but key resources and student-

specific information and help could have been shared through social media more to be able to get knowledge and guidance to as many students as possible.

Certain components of good crisis communication will never change: communicate with your audiences in mind, be genuine and personable rather than robotic and systematic in your communications, and create timely and consistent messages. Audiences expect you to communicate where they are. Especially the upcoming generations that have grown up in a time of online communicating, they are looking at the internet and social media for updates and information. It is important for organizations and companies dealing with this age group to be aware of this since social media can be helpful or detrimental during a crisis depending on how it is used. A major component of handling a crisis effectively is meeting those audience expectations and it is crucial that contemporary crises be handled in a way that still includes those basic aspects of good crisis communication while also successfully fulfilling the modern-day audiences' communication needs.

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