Effective Use of Social Media in Crisis Communication: Recommendations for Norwegian Organisations

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Executive summary

This project has been conducted in collaboration with the strategic communications agency JKL, and the overall purpose was to find evidence to help convince Norwegian organisations of the need to integrate social media in their crisis communications plans.

To understand the relationship between crisis communication and social media, an initial secondary research was conducted in terms of a literature review. Key characteristics of effective crisis communication and social media were identified, and a framework of recommendations for each stage in the crisis management process was developed.

Further, a qualitative research was conducted. A selection of three case studies from the international arena was produced, and later evaluated in in-depth interviews with communication managers in Norwegian organisations. The interviews also uncovered Norwegian organisations’ approach to social media as a crisis communication tool.

The overall findings from the interviews were compared with secondary data from the global arena. It was found that organisations, both in Norway and internationally, are aware of the threats and opportunities social media pose as a crisis communication tool. Still, many had not sufficiently prepared in terms of crisis planning and training.

In conclusion, there seems to be no considerable gap between international and Norwegian organisations. Organisations need to acknowledge that in order to be sufficiently prepared, social media must be integrated in the crisis communication plan. Being present and understanding the medium is not enough: in the complex and time-pressured situation of a crisis an updated crisis plan can save valuable time and confusion.
Recommendations made to JKL’s clients and Norwegian organisations have therefore focused on implementing social media in the crisis communication plan, test and update it regularly. It has also been recommended to prepare employees in terms of brief social media trainings to ensure that the whole organisation has a mutual understanding of the power of social media, and how to utilise it.

Ultimately, the project can be used as a guiding tool for JKL’s clients in convincing clients of the importance of taking a strategic approach to social media as an effective crisis communication tool.
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1 Introduction to the study

This section provides an initial understanding of the project by presenting JKL’s background and the current industry context in order to identify the management problem, and further the aim of the study.

1.1 Company background
The project is done in collaboration with the Oslo office of JKL Group, which is part of the global communication group Publicis Groupe, and one of the leading strategic communication agencies in the Nordic region. JKL’s Oslo branch primarily deals with Norwegian companies, as well as foreign companies with a presence in Norway (JKL 2011). JKL’s clients are from a range of industries, and JKL delivers advice to management on how effective communication can contribute to reach their business goals. Guidance is provided in several communication areas, such as financial communication, media relations, public affairs and crisis management. Crisis management is a central area as it is a fundamentally important function for all organisations: every organisation will at some point find itself in a crisis (Coombs 2011).

1.1.1 Current industry context
The evolution of social media has made crisis management a more complex field, and contributes to organisational crises happening more often and with greater magnitude than before (Coombs 2011). Norway is a country with widespread social media use; over half of the population is present on Facebook and other networks (Mediefakta 2010). Norwegian organisations hence face new challenges in performing effective crisis management.
A recent example of social media’s pervasiveness is Norwegian’s use of social media under and after the ‘Oslo and Utøya’ attacks 22 July 2011. Social networks saw a massive engagement. Twitter was exploding with news updates from eyewitnesses, real-time messages from victims while the shooting was happening, and others searching for missing loved ones, asking for retweets of their message (Grolid 2011). When following the national crisis in real time on Twitter, it became evident that social media changes the way we receive, and share information in a crisis. Instead of getting the latest news from traditional media outlets, Twitter was the medium breaking news far before broadcast media, and several people are of the opinion this event caused ‘a media revolution’ in Norway (Grolid 2011). The usual process of traditional media publishing news to the people was turned upside down, and news was reported to the world directly and unfiltered from the people themselves. Social networks got thousands of new Norwegian users the following days, and traditional media covered the social media use (Grolid 2011). This recent example shows how social media gains new ground and more influence in Norway today. Social media is getting more pervasive in people’s media behaviour, and makes communication with stakeholders, especially in a crisis, more complex.

1.2 Problem identification
This development has caused a rising need for guidance in how social media can be used effectively in crisis communication for JKL’s clients. JKL suspects that Norwegian organisations are lagging behind international organisations in preparing for social media use in a crisis, and that very few, if any of them have incorporated social media in their crisis communications plans.
Management problem:

• To find evidence to help convince Norwegian companies of the need to integrate social media in their crisis communications plans.

Objectives:
To solve JKL’s management problem, the following objectives were set:

• Identify examples of international companies’ use of social media in crisis communications.

• Examine the use of social media in Norwegian companies to identify a possible gap between international and Norwegian practice.

• Develop a consultant model of JKL’s crisis management process to identify where social media fit into this.

• Develop a framework of best practice for use of social media in a crisis, to make recommendations to Norwegian organisations.

A report that shows the best practice of crisis communications in social media, as well as the pitfalls to avoid, will be valuable for JKL to convince its clients of the need to implement social media in their crisis communication plan.
2 Literature Review

In order to develop recommendations to Norwegian organisations it was necessary to have an in-depth understanding of the field. A literature review of crisis communication and social media has therefore been conducted to act as a guide for the further research of the project. The aim was to get an understanding of the foundations of crisis communication, and further to identify how social media influences it, what opportunities and challenges it represents, and why is it important for an organisation to integrate social media in the crisis management plan. Insight into these matters will be used to summarise a framework of best practice in crisis communication in social media channels, which from now will be described by the term ‘crisis communication 2.0’.

2.1 What is a crisis?

There is no universally accepted definition of a crisis, and ranges of definitions exist in the literature (Coombs 2010). Sellnow et al. (2011) find that most crisis definitions describe it as events characterised by threat, surprise and short response time. Coombs (2011) provides a widely accepted definition:

The perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes (p. 2).

An essential word in this definition is ‘can’. Several authors (e.g. Coombs 2010; Benoit 1997; Heath 2010) view a crisis as a perception: a socially constructed phenomenon. In a crisis it is not the facts, but how they are framed and interpreted by stakeholders that matters: if the stakeholders believe a crisis exists, then a crisis exists (Coombs 2011).
2.1.1 Crisis as an opportunity
This also implicates that if a crisis is managed effectively, is may not seriously impact the organisations negatively. Several writers view a crisis as an opportunity for the organisation. Sellnow et al. (2011) find that a crisis is a ‘dangerous opportunity’ (p. 3), and argue that while crises are inherently threatening events, they can lead to positive outcomes when managed effectively. Also Fearn-Banks (2007) makes the same argument; effective crisis management does not only help to alleviate or eliminate the crisis, but can also help the organisation get a more positive reputation after the crisis than before. This would necessarily involve stakeholders having a favourable perception of the organisation’s handling of the crisis, as a reputation consists of stakeholders’ perception of the organisation (Coombs 2011). A stakeholder is defined as ‘a person or group that is affected by or can affect an organization’ (Coombs 2011 p. 2), but in this report the term focuses on the primary stakeholders the organisation communicates with through social media in a crisis.

2.1.2 Sudden and smouldering crises
There are numerous descriptions of different crisis types in the literature. Hayes and Wooten (2010) identify two main types of crises. *Sudden crises* are situations that occur unexpectedly, without significant warning signs. Typical examples are natural disasters, sabotage, product tampering and terror attacks: events almost impossible to prepare for. *Smouldering crises* on the other hand, are situations that start of as small issues, and present warning signs. When they are allowed to grow, they can escalate into a crisis. Hayes and Wooten (2010) state that almost three-quarters of all organisational crises belong to this category, such as corporate frauds, lawsuits, misdeeds by management or employees and so on. Smouldering crises gives management a chance to stop the crisis from escalating, or at least prepare for it. This can be done by effective crisis
management, which as Fearn-Banks (2007) puts it ‘allows the organization to be in greater control of its own destiny’ (p. 9).

2.2 Crisis management and communication

The overall aim of crisis management is to ‘prevent or lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis’ (Coombs 2011 p. 5). A fundamental feature of crisis management is crisis communication: the dialogue the organisation has with its stakeholders before, during, and after the crisis (Fearn-Banks 2007). In performing crisis communication, the main aspects are to provide information to stakeholders, and further to protect and maintain the image and reputation of the organisation (e.g. Coombs 1995; Fearn-Banks 2007).

2.2.1 The crisis management process

A range of writers takes a life cycle approach to crises, and view effective crisis management as not only action in the heat of a crisis, but a constant, everyday process (Coombs 2011). An established way of handling a crisis is the three-step model of crisis management, which Coombs (2011) divides into three interdependent stages with more specific sub-stages.
In the *precrisis* stage, scanning and monitoring media and environment is important to detect crisis signals. Most crises have warning signs, and if the organisation can identify these early they can sometimes be avoided (e.g. González-Herrero & Smith 2008). A vital part of preparation is to develop a crisis communication plan. This involves developing portfolios of possible crises that can hit the organisation, train crisis teams and spokespersons, and develop communication strategies (Coombs 2011). The plan must be flexible and easy to update for changes: what Coombs (2011) calls a ‘living document’ (p. 106). He further states that it is absolutely vital that the plan is tested and rehearsed regularly, in order to uncover weaknesses and flaws in both competence and the plan.

During the *crisis*, the organisation must first acknowledge that a crisis exists, and get hold of all relevant information to be able to make accurate decisions. In this phase effective internal and external communication is vital, and the organisation must decide
how to respond, and to whom. In the crisis response, there are four widely accepted rules: no silence, quick response, accuracy and consistency (Coombs 2010 pp. 28-29). The aim of the response is first to instruct information, adjust it and further work to restore reputation and trust with stakeholders (Coombs 2011).

Post-crisis, when the crisis is seen to be over, the crisis management efforts should be evaluated, and learning points should be integrated in the crisis communication plan to improve future crisis management. Follow-up communication to stakeholders is also important; they should be kept updated on the recovery of the crisis and corrective actions taken to restore trust with stakeholders (Coombs 2011).

2.3 Social media

Social media represents a whole new field both for stakeholders and organisations and has great implications for crisis management. The technology enables crises to spread and develop in new ways, and there is great agreement in literature that social media changes the conditions of crisis communication before, during, and after a crisis (e.g. Veil et al. 2011; Birgfeld 2010).

2.3.1 What is social media?

Social media is a collective term of ‘web.2.0.’ technologies, which are all characterised by participation, openness, conversation, communities and connectedness (Coombs 2011 p. 21). Overall, they facilitate conversations and interaction between users, and enable them to create, comment on, and share content with each other (e.g. Scott 2010; Kietzmann et al. 2011). Social media allows everyone to become information sources, enabling users ‘sharing opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives with others’ (Marken 2007 p. 10). Additionally, social media knows no time or space limits: user
generated content is distributed and disseminated across borders and time zones within seconds (e.g. Qualman 2009).

2.3.2 Social media categories

Today’s many social media platforms vary in their use and functions, and facilitate different forms of text, audio, video or multimedia (e.g. Kietzmann et al. 2011; Scott 2010). Although the social media landscape develops constantly, a category system is useful for crisis communication, as it can clarify what opportunities and challenges the platforms represent. In a crisis, some platforms will be more relevant than others, dependent of the target stakeholders and the response message, as well as the nature of the crisis (Coombs 2011). The following categories therefore demonstrate distinct characteristics of the platforms, but many overlap with more than one category (Hanna et al. 2011).

1. Social networks (share content and communicate with connections, e.g. Facebook, Google Plus.)

2. Blogs (online journals open for comments, private or corporate.)

3. Topic discussion sites (share and discuss content, e.g. Digg.)

4. Content communities (create and comment on content, e.g. YouTube and Flickr.)

5. Microblogs (share small amounts of information in real-time, e.g. Twitter.)

(Coombs 2011; Kietzmann et al. 2011).
2.4 Social media: A double edged sword

Several authors (e.g. Mei et al. 2010) recognise new media, and hence social media, as a double-edged sword that pose both opportunities and threats for organisations. They find that to be able to fight the threats social media represent, organisations must first acknowledge its impact in today. González-Herrero & Smith (2008) find that the Internet can act both as a trigger, and as a facilitator of crisis:

Internet-based technologies can act either as a trigger of crises or as a simple enabler of them, as a new cause for crises, or as an additional channel through which the company’s stakeholders obtain their information (González-Herrero & Smith 2008 p. 152).

As a facilitator, social media reports the same crises as mainstream media, but at a faster pace, which changes the strength and velocity of the crisis. But while social media accelerates the new cycle, it still acts as an additional tool to mainstream media: ‘The same crises would most probably occur without the existence of Internet’ (González-Herrero & Smith 2008 p.145).

As a trigger, the Internet, and here social media, has a different potential than traditional media in that it can provoke and cause crises ignited by social media content: rumours, disclosed sensitive information and stakeholders that mobilise online. González-Herrero & Smith (2010) sum up how social media poses new challenges for crisis communication: today’s stakeholders have immediate access to information have a fragmented use of online media, using a range of information sources. They are empowered in the way they can mobilise online against organisational interests, and in addition, traditional media’s gatekeeping function disappears: stakeholders are free to find unfiltered sources of negative information about the organisation (González-Herrero & Smith 2010), as well as sharing them. Traditional media is here, and in this
report, defined as media outlets run by news organisations, as opposed to social media where everyone can be an information source (e.g. Veil et al. 2011). Some of the above points will be elaborated in the following sections.

2.4.1 Active stakeholders
Coombs (2011) notes that ‘social media has the potential, even if remote, to create a crisis’ (p. 15). One of the reasons is that social media provides different means for stakeholder expression, and lets stakeholders go from a passive to an active role (Hearit 1999). As an unfiltered channel, employees, activists and consumers can voice their concerns and easily find like-minded people to mobilise together against an organisation (González-Herrero & Smith 2010). According to a recent survey, 74% of global issue activist groups actively use Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to organise and inform digital activists (Lawrence 2011). This makes activist groups, and stakeholders in general more powerful than ever, while the organisation relinquishes control and becomes more vulnerable.

2.4.2 Word-of-Mouth
Word-of-mouth refers to ‘comments stakeholders make about organizations’ (Schultz et al. 2011 p. 23), and can easily hurt an organisation’s reputation as it spreads quickly, widely and publicly (Coombs 2011). Brown (2009) finds that among consumers, one of the most significant motivations of online communication with others is dissatisfaction. He cites social web analytic Philip Sheldrake: ‘The discontented spread their discontent. The neutrals say nothing. The content say nothing. The delighted spread their delight’ (Sheldrake 2008, cited in Brown 2009 p. 86). Brown (2009) further finds that the discontented consumers spread their dissatisfaction a lot more eagerly and widely than others. The empowerment of stakeholders in social media thus makes it critical for the organisation to monitor and engage with stakeholders on an on-going basis, and to give
‘a quick, clear, honest response (…) to prevent issues from becoming crises and facts from becoming distorted by rumours’ (González-Herrero & Smith 2008 p. 147).

2.4.3 The double crisis
To fail in handling social media correctly, or not being present in social media at all, can result in what Johansen and Frandsen (2007) define as a double crisis. A double crisis occurs when the original crisis is overshadowed by a ‘communication crisis’ because the organisation has failed to perform the expected communication practices (Johansen & Frandsen 2007 p. 79). Not to be present or to not respond in social media may thus quickly result in a double crisis. If the crisis is not mentioned in the organisation’s online channels, it can be seen as ignoring the crisis (Coombs 2010). As Taylor and Perry (2005) notes, ‘no response online may become synonymous of no comment’ (p. 216), which is one of the fundamental “don’ts” in crisis communication practice. Silence signifies an organisation that is not in control of the situation, and control is vital for maintaining stakeholder’s trust (Coombs 2011).

In total, social media pose significant challenges for organisations. Yet, the above sections show that the question should not be whether or not to use it. An increasing amount of people are active social media users and discuss organisations online, which makes it vital to interact on these platforms and a great risk to ignore it. The discussion will therefore go on to examine not whether, but how to harness social media in a crisis response.
2.5 Effective crisis communication 2.0.

Several authors argue that while social media make crisis management more complex, it also represents new tools for crisis management (e.g. Solis 2008; Mei et al. 2010). Sellnow et al. (2011) argues that social media should be part of any crisis response: combined with effective crisis communication strategies it provides an opportunity for a closer connection with stakeholders, as well as a chance to lessen, or even prevent a crisis. Solis (2008) also argues: ‘Many, if not a majority of potential crises are now avoidable through proactive listening, engagement, response, conversation, humbleness, and transparency’. This is related to taking a proactive approach, especially in smouldering crises where monitoring and scanning can detect warning signals.

In sum, González-Herrero & Smith (2010) conclude that many of the social media tools that threaten organisations can conversely be exploited to assist the organisation in successful crisis communication. Among the factors can be utilised in crisis communication online are more direct, faster and wider communication, easier to understand stakeholders and engage in dialogue with them, and to communicate directly to stakeholders without media as a gatekeeper (e.g. Solis 2008, Schultz et al. 2011). The following sections will expand on some of these opportunities.

2.5.1 Immediate information

In a crisis information is critical: stakeholders need to know what is happening and what is action is taken (Fearn-Banks 2007). The first priority in the initial response is therefore to inform stakeholders as soon as possible; especially in crises regarding public safety, stakeholders need immediate information on how to protect themselves (Coombs 2011). A quick response is thus absolutely critical, and the ‘golden hour’ rule that traditionally has been used can in social media be down to a matter of minutes.
Coombs (2011; Donnelly 2010). Coombs (2011) states that the faster the response, the better the organisation shows it is in control of the situation, and can frame the crisis from its own perspective. When the organisation is the first to inform about the crisis, ‘stealing thunder’, it is also found that damage to the reputation is reduced (Coombs 2011 p. 188). Veil et al. (2011) further find that easy updates and real-time messages is one of the main benefits of using social media in a crisis. Donnelly (2010) finds that because of the aim for speed in the initial response, inaccuracy may happen, but in social media it is easy to correct the initial message. Organisations should hence leverage social media as a channel for disseminating the response quickly and broadly.

**Stakeholder endorsement**

Sellnow et al. (2011) find that stakeholders can function as support for an organisation in a crisis, yet this is dependent on an already existent relationship. The fact that social media is an ‘opt-in service’ means that when the organisation disseminates messages, the receivers already have an interest in the organisation. This can further encourage sharing information with others (Veil et al. 2011). Such endorsement can be attained from loyal brand advocates, as well as employees engaging in social media (Lawrence 2011).

### 2.5.2 Two-way communication

Today’s stakeholders expect the organisation to listen and engage in a dialogue with them (Hanna et al. 2011). The enabled two-way communication between organisations and stakeholders makes it easier for organisations to engage in a dialogue, to build relationships and be more personal in its communication efforts. These factors are all important in a crisis: Fearn-Banks (2007) finds that companies with on-going two-way communication are proven to either avoid crises, or experience smaller or shorter-lasting crises. To be present on social media platforms stakeholders engage in is thus
critical to build relationships and trust, and learn to speak the stakeholders’ language (Veil et al. 2011). The Edelman Trust Barometer (2011) also found that openness and transparency has become more important for stakeholders to have trust in organisations, which is again tied into a strong reputation.

2.5.3 A human voice

While information is critical in a crisis, the organisation is also expected to show concern and empathy in its response (e.g. Coombs 2011). Veil et al. (2011) find that social media is ‘at its core human communication’ (p. 110): it facilitates tools that can make the response more personal and sincere. New ways of showing concern and empathy, such as multimodal functions like video and audio contribute to showing a human side of the organisation in the midst of a crisis. Having a personal tone when communicating with stakeholders is also especially important in social media: González-Herrero & Smith (2008) find that in the online environment ‘people expect authentic, transparent conversation in a human voice, not company messages delivered in a corporate tone’ (p. 144).

2.5.4 Respond where the action is

Coombs (2011) states that the crisis response should appear in all social media platforms the organisation was active prior to the crisis. The initial response should be where the issue started or where it received most attention: if the crisis started with a mocking video on YouTube, then the initial crisis response should be on YouTube. He further recognises that while the organisation’s response video or social media site may not become as popular and commented on as the other content, it is vital to have the message out there; it makes it more likely that stakeholders find the organisation’s content along with the ‘crisis-inducing’ message (Coombs 2011 p. 27).
2.5.5 **Social media platforms as crisis response tools**

The landscape of social media is in constant change, but understanding how the current most widely adopted platforms can be used is vital for effective crisis communication. Schultz *et al.* (2011) find that while social media can play a significant role in the social construction of crises, it can also help organisations in the social deconstruction of the same crises. But to do this, they need to understand the tools. Hanna *et al.* (2011) find that a majority of companies don’t fully realise the fundamentals of social media, and therefore fail in managing it effectively. As social media provides a way to reach stakeholders directly, organisations should utilise this to tell their own story. The following sections therefore go into more detail of the currently most widely adopted social media platforms.

**Microblog: Twitter**

The micro-blogging service Twitter disseminates real-time messages (tweets) of maximum 140 characters that can easily be commented on and shared (retweeted), by users following the organisation (Shultz *et al.* 2011). As an open network, Twitter content shows up in search results and the organisation’s messages have great potential for wide reach. Twitter users are also often characterised as influencers and opinion leaders, and found to often share information via various other channels (Schultz *et al.* 2011). Twitter is, because of its speed and potential for wide reach, considered by many social media’s best single crisis warning system (Birgfeld 2010).

**Social network: Facebook (Google Plus)**

Among the many social networks available, Facebook is by far the most popular on a worldwide-basis (Mediefakta 2010). Facebook is in many ways a blend of all the other social media platforms: organisations can be present with a site, and the many functions facilitate sharing information and links, discussion threads as well as engaging with
stakeholders on the ‘wall’ (e.g. Hanna et al. 2011). The organisation can connect with stakeholders interested in the organisation, but it is the stakeholder that has to approach the site, the organisation cannot ‘push’ its messages to everyone on the network. It is also a closed network, which means the organisation can only reach Facebook members. Google’s new social network ‘Google +’ has many of the same facilities as Facebook, but are by some recognised as filling a niche for news between Facebook and Twitter (Coddington 2011). Facebook is still the primary social network, but it will be important for organisations to keep up with the uses of different social networks.

**Content community: YouTube**

The video-channel YouTube is frequently advised as important for publishing a public statement or apology in a crisis, either from the CEO or another credible spokesperson in the organisation (Coombs 2011). Edelman’s 2011 Trust Barometer found that CEOs are seen as more credible than before, which implies that the CEO also should be more visible in crisis efforts (Edelman 2011). A YouTube video contributes to show a human face of the organisation, and can be effective in framing the crisis and telling the organisation’s own story (e.g. Coombs 2011). Another benefit is that content sites, compared to social networking sites, don’t have the same need for followers and content before the crisis (Coombs 2011).

**Blog**

If the organisation has a blog (corporate, leader or employee blog) it can tell its story in a much more authentic and personal voice than the organisational web site (e.g. Schultz et al. 2011). If it is a leader blog, it also shows management taking control, and a more human side to the organisation (Fearn-Banks 2007; Borremans 2010). Yet, the blog should already be established and have followers before the crisis; a new blog has not
built trust or followers, and will probably not be seen to have the same credibility nor the same impact (Borremans 2010).

2.5.6 Separate business and crisis

Several authors (e.g. Coombs 2011; Donnelly 2010) recommend that a dark site or social media hub should be created for the crisis. A dark site is an inactivated part of the website, or a separate site prepared to use in a crisis. The site has content such as background information, maps, contacts etc., and in a crisis, the dark site can be made accessible to take over the organisation’s regular website (Coombs 2011). Crisis-specific information can then be added in a much higher speed, as templates etc. are already prepared. A social media hub can also be established to concentrate all efforts on one platform (Donnelly 2010). This would direct stakeholders to a platform where the organisation is in more control, and separates the crisis from the normal business operations. The corporate social media accounts should be used to link and direct traffic to the microsite or dark site (Donnelly 2010). Another alternative is to establish separate Twitter/Facebook accounts etc. with the name of the crisis, which also serves to separate business and crisis messages.
3 **Crisis Communication 2.0 framework**

The review of the literature has given an insight to the crisis management process, the “rules of crisis response” and how social media influences crisis communication efforts. The following ‘Crisis Communication 2.0’ framework summarises the findings, extracts the main points and integrates the crisis communication process with the characteristics and functions of social media. However, as Seeger (2006) recognises, it is critical to be aware that crises are inherently dynamic, uncertain and chaotic. A framework of best practices be therefore only be used as a general guideline as the most effective communication will vary in each case; no size fits all.

![Crisis Communication 2.0 Cycle](image)

*Figure 2 Crisis Communication 2.0 Cycle.*
3.1 Precrisis

1. Listen

- **Monitoring and scanning**: Along with traditional media, monitoring and scanning in social media can identify issues at an early stage. ‘Listening’ to conversations in social media can also give a greater understanding of its stakeholders (e.g. Parent *et al.* 2011), which can be used to communicate appropriately.

2. Prepare

- **Update and drill**: The crisis management plan must be updated to integrate social media, and regularly be tested and rehearsed in crisis drills (Coombs 2011).

3. Engage

- **Be present before the crisis**: Consider what channels stakeholders engage in and what platforms are more suitable for different forms of strategies, messages and to facilitate dialogue (e.g. Hanna *et al.* 2011; Kietzmann *et al.* 2011).

- **Establish relationships and engage in dialogue**: Establishing relationships with stakeholders online and engaging in a mutual dialogue will build trust that can protect the organisation when the crisis hits (e.g. Coombs 2011).

3.2 Crisis

4. Respond

- **Be quick**: Social media has dramatically cut down the time for response; Donnelly (2010) estimates the ultimate time of response is no longer in hours,
but minutes. After the initial response, social media channels facilitate a continuous flow of information and updates of messages (e.g. Veil et al. 2011).

- **Be where the action is:** The initial response should be in the same channel the crisis started or where the most action is, and consistent messages should be disseminated in all relevant channels (Coombs 2011).

- **Be open and accurate:** With social media, the world becomes ‘one gigantic glasshouse’ (Qualman 2009 p. 204): the organisation is more transparent than ever. Being open, and disseminating accurate information shows that the organisation does not have anything to hide, which can build trust with stakeholders (Veil et al. 2011).

- **Tell your own story with a human voice:** Make use of multimodal facilities to humanise the message and show concern and empathy; audio, video etc. can be used to inform, explain, apologise if necessary and give a human face to the organisation (e.g. Coombs 2011).

- **Separate business and crisis:** Establish a dark site or social media hub dedicated to the crisis, or make separate crisis accounts in the social media where already present (e.g. Coombs 2011).

### 3.3 Post crisis

#### 5. Follow-up

- **Evaluate:** The organisation’s crisis management efforts should be evaluated. Social media sentiment can also be used to analyse how stakeholders regard the crisis response. Learn from the findings, and implement changes of strategy in the crisis communication plan (e.g. Coombs 2011).

- **Follow-up communication:** Continue to interact with stakeholders after the crisis, and provide follow-up information about corrective actions.
• **Rebuild the reputation:** Proactive effort by the organisation is visible to stakeholders, and Mei *et al.* (2010) argues this can help restore confidence in the eyes of stakeholders, and further aid the recovery phase.

• **Continue monitoring:** the cycle starts again.
This chapter will explain and clarify the choices made during the research process; how the research will study the research problem (Silverman 2005). The following sections will explain what approach is taken, methods of data gathering and analysis, as well as justifications for the choices made.

To fully understand the purpose and reason for the research, this chapter must first introduce the research problem that derived from JKL’s management problem.

4.1 Research problem

- To gather evidence of successful or poor use of social media in a crisis from the international market.

4.2 Research design

The research design functioned as a general guide for conducting the research needed to answer the research question (Malhotra 2009). First of all, the study has adopted an interpretive approach to theory and findings, which goes in line with the overall approach to the crisis as a social construct. In order to meet the objectives, the research adopted a combination of exploratory and descriptive cross-sectional design (Saunders et al. 2009). Descriptive research in terms of literature review and case studies was important to get an accurate insight into the current situation. This was useful before conducting exploratory research in terms of expert interviews, which sought a more practical understanding of the problem at hand (Saunders et al. 2009; Malhotra 2009): Norwegian organisations’ current approach to use of social media in crisis communication, in order to give further recommendations.
4.3 Research strategy and method

The research strategies found most appropriate to answer the question and objectives were a mix of multiple case studies and in-depth interviews. Using multiple qualitative data collection techniques can provide greater and richer data, which offer a better certainty that the findings can be trusted and used for interpretation (Saunders et al. 2009).

4.3.1 Case studies

For the purpose of the research question, producing case studies was a necessity. Daymon & Holloway (2002) find that case studies can attain knowledge of a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context. Saunders et al. (2009) further note that case studies can be very helpful in investigating existing theory and challenging it, which can lead to new research questions. This made it possible to test the findings from the initial literature review, and identify problems at hand to further approach in the interviews.

4.3.2 Interviews

Qualitative case studies are often combined with conducting interviews (Silverman 2005), and give an opportunity to explore the relationships between the data and literature (Daymon & Holloway 2002). As Malhotra (2009) finds, in-depth interviews can give additional insight and understanding for the exploratory research. Conducting interviews was therefore chosen as the best way to evaluate the findings from the secondary data, and to get expert opinions and practical insight from the Norwegian industry.
4.4 Sampling: size and method

In line with what is often characterised by qualitative research, the project focused on a smaller sample; as Saunders et al. (2009) state, it is more important what information and insight the data represent, than the actual sample size.

4.4.1 Case studies

Data for three case studies were collected. The sampling for the case studies was purposeful; collecting data for fewer studies meant it was possible to go into them in more detail (Saunders et al. 2009). Still, multiple cases gave an opportunity to gather diverse insights, as all crises are unique, and also an attempt of generating findings of wider relevance in the field (Daymon & Holloway 2002). The case studies chosen to go in-depth were recent crises in large, international organisations: Domino’s, Nestlé and Toyota (see appendix 1, 2 and 3). These cases fulfilled the criteria that the crisis should have either started or escalated in social media, and that the international organisation gave a significant crisis response in this channel. The case studies also illustrate some of the different challenges and opportunities of crisis communication 2.0. that were identified in the initial exploratory research.

4.4.2 Interviews

Convenience sampling was employed for the interviews (Daymon & Holloway 2002); the interviewees were identified through personal contacts and JKL’s network. Six Norwegian communication managers were interviewed, which was found to be an appropriate size to get the sought expert point of view; Daymon & Holloway (2002) state that a small sample is sufficient as long as ‘saturation occurs’ (p.163). The respondents were contacted by e-mail, and all persons approached agreed to participate. All the interviewees had central communication roles in some of Norway’s largest organisations. Several of the organisations attract great public interest, and are
consequently more exposed to, and experienced with crises. The interviewees were therefore highly qualified to give expert opinions, evaluate the framework and case studies, and give further insights to the Norwegian context.

4.5 Data collection

4.5.1 Secondary data
Secondary data had several advantages for the study; it provided contextual data to put the theoretical framework into context, and as mentioned an option to triangulate the findings (Saunders et al. 2009). An initial exploratory literature review was conducted to gain an understanding of the research problem. Information for the case studies was identified through the literature revised, as well as online news media and practitioner blogs. A disadvantage with the data collection for the case studies was that someone else had already interpreted the data. They were hence subjective as the original purpose of the data affected its presentation (Saunders et al. 2009). Especially online blogs and practitioner articles may suffer from personal bias as they are written with less objectivity than in academic journals and reports (Kumar 2011). To overcome this, the data was carefully evaluated and analysed, and multiple sources were used to validate the information: the case studies chosen had received considerable media attention, which meant it was possible to gather information from a range of sources.

4.5.2 Primary data
Five one-hour interviews were conducted in Oslo, Norway, over a two-week period. Three of the interviews were held face-to-face in the interviewees’ offices and two by videoconference because of different whereabouts at the time. An interview guide was developed to ensure coverage of the key areas of desired information (Daymon & Holloway 2002), as well as more efficient use of the assigned meeting time. The guide was e-mailed to the interviewees in advance, along with the case studies and proposed
framework. The interview guide evolved after each interview, as new themes to discuss with the rest of the respondents appeared, to evaluate whether they were widespread or more individual findings.

4.6 Data analysis

Triangulation refers to using different methods to look at various findings, and further combine these to try to get a more wholesome understanding of the situation (Silverman 2005). The findings from secondary and primary data together made for rich data collection for analysis.

4.6.1 Case studies

The case studies were analysed through the ‘Crisis Communication 2.0’ framework that derived from the literature review. Looking for information about actions in each step of the crises, the case studies were presented in the interviews, where the interviewees further gave their expert opinion of the overall crisis communication, evaluated mainly from findings in the framework.

4.6.2 Interviews

To analyse the interviews, template analysis was employed, as the size of the data was appropriate to employ the level of analysis the method proposes. The analysis process involved transcribing the interviews, to further to identify and code themes of discussion (King 2007). Some ‘a priori’ themes, key points in the ‘Crisis Communication 2.0’ framework, were decided in advance for the purpose of evaluating the framework. It was also important not to let the research question guide the analysis too strongly, to be able to find new, important themes identified by the respondents (King 2007). To get insight in the practical experience of the experts, it was thus both focused on recurrent across the interviews, as well as welcoming new themes of interest.
4.6.3 Validity and reliability
As the study took an interpretive approach, the specific cases and populations in focus were purposeful and not representative for all crises or organisations (Daymon & Holloway 2002). Daymon & Holloway also note that in qualitative research, validity is seen as a more relevant measure than reliability, and the study aimed to achieve a certain extent of generalizability by employing methodological triangulation. Evaluating the findings from literature and case studies with several experts has provided a richer data collection and a more complete picture, making it possible to extract some general findings from the study to apply to a wider context (Daymon & Holloway 2002).

4.6.4 Ethical considerations
The interviewees were promised full anonymity unless given written permission. Anonymity for participants and organisations has been obtained by using numbers, not names, as well as general roles instead of specific job descriptions (Daymon & Holloway 2002).

4.6.5 Limitations
In all qualitative research, a limitation is the bias by the researcher. In line with the project’s interpretive approach, it is also important to highlight that both analysis and conclusions inevitably are the result of how the researcher interprets and understand the findings. Another central criticism of qualitative research is that the findings can be too specified and restricted, which leads to problems of generalisation (Daymon & Holloway 2002). While recognising this, the concern of generalizability is also central when it comes to crises in general. Though recommendations of best practices can be developed, all crises are unique and complex; hence generalizability to all crises is neither possible nor desirable. Still, as rich information as possible has been gathered, analysed and evaluated to be able to provide general recommendations.
Findings and Analysis

The Crisis Communication 2.0 Framework summarised the findings from the literature with how social media should be used through the stages of a crisis. Assuming this framework is valid, case studies and expert responses have been evaluated against the initial framework of recommendations to identify the most important themes, and reflect back on it with practical judgements. The chapter will start with a presentation of the interviewees and their organisations, their current approach to social media and level of related crisis planning. These findings will further be discussed in relation to the gap JKL suspected, before continuing to more practical findings.

5.1 Interviewee profile

Six persons in five of Norway’s largest organisations were interviewed. All held central communication manager roles and had considerable experience in communications and crisis management.

- Interviewee 1 worked for Norway’s largest supplier of meat and eggs. The organisation is organised as a cooperative. Present on Facebook and Twitter.
- Interviewee 2 worked for Scandinavia’s leading road transport fuel retailer, operating full-service (fuel and convenience) stations across Europe. The organisation recently went public. Present on Facebook.
- Interviewee 3 worked for Norway’s largest food production organisation, and is organised as a cooperative. Present on Facebook and Twitter.
- Interviewee 4 and 5 were engaged in respectively crisis communication, and corporate communication in a large, Norwegian based oil company that operates internationally. Present on Twitter and YouTube.
• Interviewee 6 worked for a large contractor and developer company, operating in Scandinavia. The company is public, and many of the employees are shareholders. Present on Twitter, YouTube, and a leader blog.

5.2 Current approach to social media

The interviewees’ approaches to crisis communication were diverse as they represented organisations in various sectors, and their perception of what constitutes a crisis thus differed. While the business-to-customer (b2c) organisations were more worried about rumours, recalls and damage to the brand, the business-to-business organisations (b2b) focused on a crisis as when something is happening; when there is a danger to human lives, environment and further materials. All organisations recognised a threat by various activist groups.

As the organisations focused on stakeholders with dissimilar information needs in crisis, their approach to social media also varied. All the organisations were present and active on social media, Interviewee 3 the most recent with organisational presence on Facebook since June 2011.

• Facebook was found by the b2c organisations to be a platform ‘you just have to be present on’ because ‘half of Norway is there’. It was recognised as a platform more relevant for consumer-oriented communication: a place for engaging in a dialogue with customers, answering enquiries and building relationships. The b2b organisations did not feel it is relevant for them, because they didn’t engage with consumers as such.

• Twitter was mostly used as a channel for newsfeed and linking to press releases. The b2c organisations used it to engage in a dialogue with stakeholders, and answer enquiries. The b2b organisations did not engage with others to a large
extent, and mostly use the account for pushing out information, not a two-way dialogue.

- *YouTube* was used by the two b2b organisations for posting videos about the company and its work, interviews with employees etc. None of them had yet used it in a crisis.

- *A leader blog* was very profiled for one of the b2b organisations. The CEO of the organisation writes regularly, and in a recent crisis the organisation faced this platform was used intensely.

### 5.2.1 Attitudes to use social media in a crisis

- All of the interviewees perceived social media as a useful communication tool in a crisis.

- Both the b2b organisations were certain that they would use social media in a crisis, as every channel that is available for them to get their message out will be used.

- The b2c organisations said they would probably use it, but to what extent would be assessed in each situation: dependent on resources available, the extent of the crisis and the stakeholders they needed to reach.

### 5.2.2 Crisis planning and training

- All the organisations had a crisis management plan.

- Both of the b2b organisations had integrated social media in their crisis plan, while Interviewees 2 and 3 were on the verge of integrating a crisis in their social media strategies. The organisation of Interviewee 4 and 5 has prepared for a crisis by establishing a dark site, which would take over the business web site and integrate messages to be pushed out on all social media platforms.
Two of the organisations will include social media in their next crisis trainings. Interviewee 2 will train on social media scenarios such as Facebook and YouTube attacks, while Interviewee 4 and 5 will include social media as communication channel as an important part of the crisis exercise.

5.3 Is there a gap between International and Norwegian organisations?

Having lined up the organisations general use and approach to social media as a crisis communication tool, the ‘gap’ JKL suspected can be examined. The interviews showed that while the organisations generally had a good idea of use of social media as a crisis communication tool, only two of them had integrated it in their crisis plans, both were large b2b organisations working in oil and construction. This can be related to what stakeholders they foresee they need to communicate with during a crisis, and what sort of crisis and the extent of it they “expect” to hit their organisation, in terms of danger to people, environment or materials.

5.3.1 International findings

A recent global survey conducted by the public relations agency Burson-Marsteller found that over half of the 800 business leaders asked felt their business was more vulnerable to a crisis than before, mainly because of the threats posed by the digital world (Burson-Marsteller 2011). But, despite acknowledging the powerful role of digital media, the majority were not prepared for a crisis escalated by the real-time speed and reach of new media. Over half the businesses did not have a basic tool to monitor their reputation online and did not feel confident in handling new media during a crisis. Most importantly, only one third of the companies had prepared a digital crisis communications plan (Burson-Marsteller 2011). Another recent survey by the global communications firm Fleishman-Hillard made the same findings; its respondents from
U.S. and Canadian businesses recognised the potential impact of social media in crisis, but nonetheless very few had updated their crisis plan to incorporate social media (Fleishman-Hillard 2011).

5.4 Most businesses are not sufficiently prepared
Although a small sample, the findings suggest that there is no considerable gap between international and Norwegian organisations. The reality seems to be that most companies are not sufficiently prepared to handle a crisis with the extra pressure of social media, or have planned for how to utilise it efficiently in a crisis.

The chapter will therefore proceed with uncovering the interviewees’ perception of social media, as well as their evaluation of the Crisis Communication 2.0 framework and the case studies that were presented as vehicles of discussion during the interviews. All interviewees agreed on the general outline of the Crisis Communication 2.0 framework, but also proposed some alterations and additions deriving from practical experience. The following sections will therefore attempt to discover the opportunities and barriers Norwegian organisations find most important in using social media as a crisis communication tool, as well as potential differences in Norwegian practice.

5.4.1 Listening: advanced issue management
All the organisations monitored social media to be able to identify issues early and to know ‘what’s moving out there’. It was found important to have a competent person monitoring who understood the extent of things, as it was seen as a great challenge to decide what content deserves a response: what will become an issue, and what will not:
To get an understanding of the potential of the case, and how large it can grow – to do that in an early phase is a significant part of the challenge (…). Perhaps even more important in social media because it has such tremendous speed and wide reach (Interviewee 3).

Another interviewee thought monitoring in social media was simply ‘advanced issue management’:

It is really just to be a bit proactive and be attentive. But my experience is that a real crisis comes so suddenly and unexpectedly that you cannot foresee it. Social media is great in more smouldering issues, but in a real crisis I would prioritise nationwide media (Interviewee 1).

Domino’s (see appendix 2) was found as an example of the importance of monitoring, as well as of having the urge to react. As Interviewee 2 stated, Domino’s rationale of ‘not adding more fuel to the fire’ worked the exact opposite way than it was intended, and is always a risky move in social media. Several interviewees found that Domino’s underestimated the potential of the videos when it rationalised that while 1 million had seen it, it was ‘only on social media’. Interviewee 2 summarised what he found to be the key lesson of the case: ‘If you’re in doubt, go after the worst-case scenario. It is seldom wrong to overreact, compared to underreact’. He found that if you wait it could build up enormous pressure, spread with a rapid speed, also to traditional media, and result in serious damage to your brand.

Organisational attitude
One interviewee doubted that her organisation would be able to respond fast enough to an issue in social media, feeling it was too ‘large and heavy’ to for a quick reaction (Interviewee 1). Her organisation did not feel social media as ‘urgent enough’, and she therefore thought she would be the same place as Domino’s in waiting to deal with the issue:
I’m pretty sure that if something similar happened to us; I wouldn’t be able to get enough support internally to act on it before it exploded in VG [Norway’s largest newspaper]. I don’t think my organisation sees this as a big enough threat yet (Interviewee 1).

This suggests that while communicators may have an open approach to social media, it can be hindered if upper management is not of the same opinion. It can also be related to what several interviewees pointed out: that social media has a somewhat ‘fluffy’ image in Norway and with Norwegian leaders, which may result in it being taken less seriously. Several of the interviewees also found that national media was the first priority in a crisis, which connects to the prevailing idea of both the interviewees and literature in general; that it is traditional media that determine what constitutes a “real” crisis.

5.4.2 Be present: learning by doing
All interviewees agreed on the importance of being present in social media to be ready for a crisis response. Still, an important consideration was the target stakeholder aimed to reach:

It depends on the type of crisis. If it is consumer oriented, striking a greater part of the consumers, I think social media is more relevant to use, as certain groups are more active on social media than others (Interviewee 1).

Being active was first of all seen as important to learn and master the tools: ‘In the case of a crisis we have the account and know how to use it’ (Interviewee 1). Another interviewee was of the opinion that being present was also the most important part of preparing for a crisis, compared to planning:
We are an organisation that is extremely dependent on our reputation with Norwegian consumers, and very vulnerable for a crisis and the consequences of damage to our reputation (...) I think that a crisis today will be a lot bigger because of social media. The competence about how social media works is the best state of preparedness we can have (Interviewee 3).

While being present was seen as the basis, one interviewee highlighted what he felt was a very important nuance between being present and being accessible: ‘It is not enough to be present: you must also be proactive, show responsibility, and get the message out early’ (Interviewee 5). This was related to the point in the initial framework about engagement: to be active, build a relationship with stakeholders and engage in a dialogue with them, which builds trust and more credibility before a crisis.

5.4.3 Be proactive

To several of the organisations, dealing with activist groups was a persistent issue. Interviewee 4 recalled an environmental crisis a couple of years ago, when the organisation got into a confrontation with Greenpeace and a polarised debate in the news media. This was before social media was in common use, and he thought that if the same thing happened today, they could be a lot more proactive:

I’m positive we could have been a lot more present, and a lot more proactive in that debate; on what happened, what we did and surveys we did with experts, and pushed it all out with fact-based information (Interviewee 4).

Many of the interviewees were almost shocked when reading Nestlé’s Facebook dialogue in the Greenpeace confrontation (see appendix 1). The lessons found by the interviewees in this case were many: don’t censor, don’t put just anybody to handle social media (it is still a spokesperson), have a polite and professional tone, and so on. As one interviewee recognised, the case showed that in social media the basic rules of PR and crisis communication are still fundamental:
‘The users you engage in dialogue with in social media are your customers, and must always be treated in a professional manner. This is perhaps even more important in social media, as all your communication is public’ (Interviewee 2).

5.4.4 Create a dialogue

The Nestlé case illustrated how social media can be used as a digital form of ‘tree hugging’, providing a new way for activist groups to organise coordinated attacks on organisations online (Owyang 2010). In relation to this, several of the interviewees highlighted how social media opened for inviting opponents to a civil debate: to contact them immediately and take them seriously. As Interviewee 5 put it, it is about creating a dialogue to immediately stop the issue from developing further:

We are incredibly open in terms of being present, we answer, we thank people for their engagement, inform with neutral hard facts, and at the same time we underline our point of view; why we think what we are doing is right. Sharp, passionate comments will be replied to in a neutral, open and explaining manner in relation to our perspective (Interviewee 4).

Another interviewee expected to be under fire from certain activist groups the next couple of months because of a change in production practice:

We know we will get a lot of attention around this. And no, we’re not really well prepared enough. Or, we think we are, but none of us has thought of social media regarding this issue (Interviewee 1).

Realising how social media can be used as a proactive tool also for the organisation, the interviewee decided the organisation should get a balanced story on YouTube before the critics. She found that in taking a proactive approach the organisation gets to frame the issue, and that it also reflects an organisation in control: ‘This is a case where I’m sure the one that does this first gets to set the tone’ (Interviewee 1).
5.4.5 Time and knowledge management

All the interviewees maintained that time to get your response out quickly was most important in a crisis:

To get our message out in those channels that are available is extremely important, and something we hope we are never satisfied with in terms of how fast we do it (Interviewee 4).

Though the immediate speed could in such be an advantage, it was also found to be a challenge to balance getting all accurate information about the situation before responding with time pressure:

It is very often a dilemma: whether we have to respond straight away or if we can take some time to make a strategy. In social media the time-factor pressures you even more, at the same time you are uncertain and have to manage it right to not make it bigger than it already is (Interviewee 3).

Another issue was how much resources should be used on social media in a crisis. While some of the interviewees felt using resources on updating social media in a stressful situation would not be prioritised, Interviewee 2 found that continuous updates could serve as part of the solution to the time vs. knowledge issue:

When you don’t have the answer, or the final decisions, then you can, say update Twitter or Facebook regularly with what the CEO and key persons are doing right now (….) To say nothing is to leave it to everyone else (Interviewee 2).

Providing updates was in such seen as a way of keeping the organisation’s story in the information stream, filling the information void and showing that the organisation was working to solve the problem:

If you have the resources, be there minute by minute, and get respect for it. One or two persons can do a great lot. I believe it’s a sin to not have those people there in a crisis today (Interviewee 2).
5.4.6 Tell your own story

The opportunity to circumvent the media as middleman and reach stakeholders with your own story was seen as a great benefit by all interviewees:

In our recent crisis, I thought ‘Thank God for social media’. Not only to be able to get the message out quickly, but also to have the opportunity to tell your own version, that everyone can comment on, and not risking to be edited and quoted out of context (Interviewee 6).

As several of the interviewees found, in social media you can get your story across in a much more controlled way. YouTube was found to be an opportunity to produce your story in a much safer context (than when filmed by a news team) and balance your poor TV appearances with a good YouTube video:

In traditional media we just have to put it with what is published, we can’t control anything (…). We value social media as an opportunity to skip that link between the receiver and us (Interviewee 5).

The interviewees found Toyota (see appendix 3) to have done a great job in getting its story across in multiple social media channels in its recall crisis, especially the YouTube apology. The YouTube apology of Domino’s U.S. president came across as less sincere with all interviewees. The fact that he read from autocue was seen to weaken the message. All the interviewees recognised the importance of being perceived as open and real in all communication in social media: ‘It’s a characteristic of social media that you lose credibility if it appears very controlled’ (Interviewee 3).

The value of a YouTube response

Some of the interviewees were of the opinion that though a YouTube video could get the story out, it would still not be very efficient: a short-lived thing that would not reach a lot of people. They also found that it would personally be a big barrier to respond on YouTube. Interviewee 6 had a more positive view:
Though perhaps not too many watch it on YouTube, it will be there every time someone googles your company. Journalists are always updated, which can get it media coverage – then it’s not the details of the video that matters, but the fact that you apologised on YouTube, and all of a sudden a lot of people know after all (Interviewee 6).

Also Interviewee 4 and 5 found a YouTube statement to be something they could consider in a crisis, as they already practiced on TV interviews in crisis drills:

We want to show that management is concerned and take the situation seriously. Until now we haven’t used YouTube for it, but we have the equipment and could definitely do that in the heat of a crisis (Interviewee 4).

5.4.7 A human voice

Producing YouTube statements were also considered to be great in terms of giving the company a human face and showing concern and empathy. A human and personal tone of voice was pointed out as very important by all the interviewees; they all aimed to achieve a personal and sincere tone with stakeholders, and to be perceived as an open organisation. Interviewee 6 found the organisation’s leader blog was great to give the organisation a human face and an authentic voice, which the Twitter account could not achieve. The YouTube apologies by Toyota and Domino’s were also found to be good crisis efforts because they showed the face of the leader. As Interviewee 2 found, there is something very reliable and trustworthy when the leader of an organisation, ‘a person with president in his title’ sits down on YouTube to talk to you in person. He further found that the matter of personality was important:

To show the CEO is talking directly to you in a sincere way works if it is a person that can handle it. Most Norwegian CEO’s would be untrained compared to Toyota and Domino’s. Yet, in Norway we often like people that flaunt themselves and perhaps are a bit clumsy; but many would not make their CEO do it (Interviewee 2).
Several of the interviewees made the same conclusion about a human face when communicating with Norwegian stakeholders; in Norway it is better to be open, informal and perhaps a bit awkward, than ‘slick and corporate’.

5.4.8 Employees as potential advocates
Several interviewees also found it very important that those communicating on the social media platforms be employees of the company, familiar with its tone and approach. When necessary to hire external resources in a crisis, this was found to be vital: ‘The consultants that work for us must know who we are and how we talk. We have our way’ (Interviewee 2). Interviewee 4 and 5 also highlighted a great importance in focusing on employees, and declared this as their main point:

Almost two-thirds of our employees are active in social media. It is vital to provide them with information, and prepare them to respond to questions and comments from their network. It is also very important so that they can be good ambassadors for our organisation, to know our values, our attitude and what we stand for (Interviewee 5).

This was a proactive measure to avoid such employees starting, or escalating crises as Domino’s and Nestlé, as well as being able to utilise employees as advocates in a crisis.

It was also related to what the initial framework found about being consistent: messages in all channels speaking with one voice.

5.5 Overall view of social media: hype or revolution
Several of the interviewees were of the opinion that social media was a bit hyped, and preferred to view it as a new communication channel: ‘Our work with crisis communication is very extensive, social media is really just a new set of tools’ (Interviewee 4).
On the other hand, social media was also recognised to have another dynamic than other communication tools, which implied it needs a different approach:

> It is easy to take a wrong step: to not understand the extent of what you’re doing and what it can result in – that it can have other consequences than you expected. Social media has another dynamic, and other consequences than communicators are used to’ (Interviewee 3).

Overall, the interviewees stated that the same basic rules of crisis communication applied in social media, but that some factors were more important: to be open, to be personal and to be honest; what you do or say stays online forever and can come back and ‘get you’ when you least expect it (Interviewee 6). They also recognised social media as having great opportunities for effective communication in a crisis, but some found it a great challenge to utilise the tools without taking a wrong step in a dynamic and more unpredictable medium.

Several interviewees also stated that though a crisis is inherently a negative experience, it could also be an opportunity for the organisation. In a crisis, the organisation has a chance to ‘show what it’s made of’, as Interviewee 2 found Toyota did through social media when going out broadly in its recall crisis:

> It’s about having a proactive attitude: in a crisis there is a potential to show who you are and what you’re made of. If you’re ambitious you aim to take the full potential of the situation, and dedicate time to be visible and accessible to people in the channels they engage in (Interviewee 2).

As he continued, social media provides an opportunity to show a high level of ambition. This further indicates that the organisation is in control, and makes it look responsible and trustworthy. Social media was viewed as having potential for more effective crisis communication, and to strengthen the organisation’s reputation in terms of trust and credibility.
5.6 Conclusion of findings

Overall, the interviews uncovered that Norwegian organisations have a fairly good understanding of social media’s role in crisis communication. Still, their approach to social media varied: what they found more important and how many resources social media justified in a crisis. From these findings, which have given a useful insight into some Norwegian organisations, the discussion will go on to take a wider perspective of social media’s role in crisis communication.
6 Discussion

The discussion of whether social media is merely another communication channel or a channel with a distinctively different nature that requires a whole new approach is ongoing. In one way, it is appropriate to demystify social media as something one needs to be an expert to manage. But on the other hand, as shown it does require a different approach: it is a transparent, public, interactive channel where content and consequences reach wider than in other communication channels. When using social media as a communication tool, especially in a crisis, communicators must be aware that the arena is in many ways different and requires some changes in the mindset and approach to crisis communication.

6.1 Preparing for the unpredictable

However, an updated mind-set is not enough to be prepared to use the tools the most effectively in a crisis. In the already stressful time of a crisis, when the response time is down to a matter of minutes, being sufficiently prepared and understanding the medium is critical; the online world is not merciful with organisations taking a wrong step. The case studies presented in this report are just a handful of the ranges of examples of international organisations trying to handle social media in a crisis. When looking at the less successful cases of such as Nestlé, who probably thought they knew what they were doing at the time, one may wonder why many organisations don’t prepare more strategically in terms of crisis planning and training. This is especially as they evidently are very aware of the threats and challenges social media can pose.

A prevailing idea for some of the interviewees was that because of social media’s dynamic nature it was not possible to plan for crisis communication 2.0; it was like preparing for something inherently unpredictable. However, if we go back to the definition of a crisis, this is something that characterises all crises, and is not unique to
social media. And while having a great understanding of social media tools is an
indispensable skill, the crisis literature shows evidence of the importance of the crisis
management plan (Coombs 2011). How well the organisation anticipates and prepares
for a crisis will improve its ability to manage it efficiently. To be able to utilise social
media’s opportunities and attempt to avoid the threats, social media must be integrated
in the overall crisis management efforts, and further in the crisis management plan.

6.1.1 A two-sided coin
Going back to the definition of a crisis, stakeholders were found to be the deciding
factor, and are therefore the most important part of crisis communication. Also in social
media, it is the users, the stakeholders, which are in focus; in reality social media are
the users (Scott 2010). Effective crisis communication further puts a strong emphasis on
information, listening to stakeholders, building trust and relationships. Social media
allows the organisation to do exactly this, in a completely different way than traditional
one-to-many media. This illustrates that the nature of social media and the important
features of crisis communication are two sides of the same coin: a crisis creates a great
need for fast, accurate information to all relevant stakeholders, and keep them updated.
Social media as a crisis communication tool makes this possible in a new way,
facilitating immediate speed, potential for wide reach and an opportunity for the
organisation to tell its own story.

6.2 A holistic approach
An important point to make is that while this report has focused solely on social media,
it is not the alpha and omega tool of crisis communication. A well-known fact today is
that people increasingly use more media as sources and more media simultaneously:
using social media does not mean one stops consuming traditional media (Statistics
Norway 2011). People are getting and sharing their information faster, and from a much
larger number of sources, which implies that they form their perception of a crisis based on a combination of offline and online sources, one of them social media.

This interconnection between traditional and social media shows that organisations must take a holistic approach to crisis communication channels, and integrate them in a total “crisis communication package”. Though there may be some exceptions, it can be argued that today chances are quite small organisations won’t have to engage in both worlds, when news and content crossover all the time. The crisis response must therefore be coherent in all channels: the organisation must talk with one, consistent voice in press releases, interviews and social media. The fact that the organisation should not be seen as silent is another important point to not ignore social media even if the most important stakeholders in the crisis are not considered to engage a lot on these platforms. If present and active on social media, the crisis response must also occur in these channels.
7 Recommendations and conclusion

7.1 Failing to plan is planning to fail

As evident from the discussion, the main recommendation to Norwegian organisations is first and foremost to integrate social media in their crisis plan, to save time and reduce chaos in a crisis. Further, an obstacle in making crisis scenarios for social media is that it is in constant change. Crisis scenarios are therefore very likely to be out-dated when needed. The plan should therefore be tested and updated regularly. Crisis communicators should generally keep updated on social media development and crisis cases, such as those presented in this report to integrate new learning points and guidelines in the plan.

Employees should receive rich and accurate information, and be enabled to act as brand advocates in social media in a crisis. To avoid employee mistakes, a social media policy should be in place. Employees should also receive short, basic social media practices, so that the organisation as a whole has the same mind-set and approach to social media, and a thorough understanding of its power and transparency.

Finally, while a crisis communication plan integrating social media in prepared, it can by no means provide step-by-step instructions or guarantee success. Every crisis is unique, and in the rapid development of social media the conditions change constantly. Monitoring, acting on issues early and meeting critics in an open dialogue are measures that can protect the organisation from a serious crisis. Further, being present, being accessible, and being ambitious in using social media shows an organisation that is in control, and can contribute to build trust. Finally, evaluating and learning from both others, and own crises, and updating the crisis plan with new insights constitutes an organisation better prepared for future crises.
7.2 Conclusion

This project started with the overall purpose to find evidence to help convince Norwegian companies of the need to integrate social media in their crisis communications plans. Through the report, it has become evident that social media constitutes a paradox when it comes to an organisational crisis. On one hand, social media can trigger, worsen and prolong the crisis, leaving the organisation with less control. But on the other hand, social media has characteristics suitable to be utilised in effective crisis communication.

This realisation made it important to provide a balanced view of social media as a crisis communication tool, and case studies illustrated how social media can be a double edge sword: Nestlé was attacked by activists and created a double crisis, Domino’s did not act fast enough and underestimated the power of social media, while Toyota aimed to show what it was made of by using all the channels it had available to tell its own story in a personal and transparent way.

Valuable learning points were extracted from these crises in in-depth interviews with communication managers in Norwegian organisations. The interviewees also largely agreed with the ‘Crisis Communication 2.0.’ framework that summarised the initial findings. The interviewees’ approach to social media differed to a certain extent, as they perceived different groups as their primary stakeholders. While some of the organisations had integrated social media in their crisis communications plan, as well as planning trainings on it in the near future, it varied how important they perceived it to be as a communication channel in a crisis. Secondary findings from the international
arena found that also globally, most organisations acknowledged the threats of the
digital world, but were not sufficiently prepared to manage a crisis in social media.

Overall, the picture seems to be that many organisations, both in Norway and globally,
are still in the trial and error phase. They need to take a more strategic approach to this
communication channel to be able to utilise it effectively in a crisis. It has therefore
been recommended that Norwegian organisations take a holistic approach to crisis
communication, integrate social media in their crisis plan and regularly rehearse on and
update it.

Ultimately, the report has given an insight into Norwegian communicators’ perceptions
of a crisis. The report can be used as a guiding tool for JKL’s clients in an attempt to
convince their clients of the importance of taking a strategic approach to social media as
an effective crisis communication tool.

7.3 Limitations and proposed further research

While valuable findings and insights have been uncovered in this work, it has also had
several limitations, and gaps for future research were uncovered.

- The field of social media practice is ahead of theory and information quickly
gets out-dated. Only since the project started, new platforms have arrived and
the widely adopted platforms regularly make changes to applications. This also
means that the social media platforms discussed will be changed only a short
time from now. This point also re-emphasises the importance of frequent
updates and rehearsals of crisis communication plans.
• The study only adopted qualitative research and only six persons were interviewed, all representing some of Norway’s largest organisations. The findings are therefore not representative for other Norwegian organisations. It would be interesting to investigate whether smaller organisations have the same understanding and formal preparedness to use social media in a crisis, and a quantitative survey would be valuable to give a broader view of Norwegian organisations’ level of implementation of social media in crisis communication plans.

• The study took a general approach to organisational crises. It was found that the kind of organisation and the sector it operates in influences its approach to crisis management and planning. An interesting further approach could focus on differences of approach between different industries, or on more specific types of crises.

• All the interviewees were communication professionals. It would be interesting to get the view of board members and chief executives, to get their view on social media as a crisis communication tool, and the need for planning.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1. Nestlé- Greenpeace Case Study

Background
In March 2010, the global activist group Greenpeace started a campaign against Nestlé for their use of palm oil in several products, among them the popular chocolate bar Kit Kat. Greenpeace asserted that Nestlé’s palm oil supplier, the Indonesian company Sinar Mas, were involved in illegal clearance of the Indonesian rainforest (Tabacek 2010). The campaign played of both on- and offline, but it was in social media the campaign generated most attention (Steel 2010).

The social media crisis
Greenpeace challenged Nestlé in a range of social media channels: YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Flickr. The campaign had a clear call to action: to ‘Ask Nestlé to give Rainforests a break’, playing on the Kit Kat slogan (Greenpeace 2010). A microsite was established with the same title, which also featured a mocking video of a Kit Kat commercial that compared eating a Kit Kat to killing an orang-utan. 17th March 2010, Greenpeace uploaded the video on YouTube.

Figure 3 'Have a break?' video (Greenpeace UK 2010).
Nestlé reacted promptly got YouTube to remove the video, citing Intellectual Property Infringement. However, the removal of the video sparked massive online outcries of censorship and gave Greenpeace and the campaign massive free publicity (Gibbons 2010). The video was soon uploaded on Vimeo, another video-sharing site, as well as several spin-offs on YouTube. All the publicity drove a massive audience to view the video, as well as people sharing it with online connections (Greenpeace 2010). According to Greenpeace, the total number of views of all versions of the video was by the 17th of May 2010 over 1, 5 million.

**The Facebook crisis**

Facebook was a key area of Greenpeace’s campaign. Nestlé was already present in social media, and had its own Facebook fan page. Many users left comments, both fans supporting Nestlé, as well as Greenpeace activists and other non-supporters. Many of the users leaving comments had altered Nestlé logos as their profile pictures, featuring the Kit Kat logo spelling ‘KILLER’ (Steel 2010).

![Figure 4 Altered Kit Kat logo (Flickr 2010).](image)

This made the moderator comment:

> To repeat: we welcome your comments, but please don't post using an altered version of any of our logos as your profile pic – they will be deleted’ (Leonard 2010)
After this comment, the tone in the conversation on Nestlé’s Facebook wall changed. Many users reacted negatively, accused Nestlé being ‘big brotherish’ and cited their right to free speech. This is when the tone of the moderator also changed, and started engaging in a heated discussion (Gibbons 2010).

An excerpt of the dialogue:

Paul Griffin: Hmm, this comment is a bit "Big Brotherish" isn't it? I'll have whatever I like as my logo pic thanks! And if it's altered, it's no longer your logo is it!

Nestle: @Paul Griffin - that's a new understanding of intellectual property rights. We'll muse on that. You can have what you like as your profile picture. But if it's an altered version of any of our logos, we'll remove it from this page.

Paul Griffin: Not sure you're going to win friends in the social media space with this sort of dogmatic approach. I understand that you're on your back-foot due to various issues not excluding Palm Oil but Social Media is about embracing your market, engaging and having a conversation rather than preaching! Read www.cluetrain.com and rethink!

Nestle: Thanks for the lesson in manners. Consider yourself embraced. But it's our page, we set the rules, it was ever thus.

Darren Smith: Freedom of speech and expression

Nestle: You have freedom of speech and expression. Here, there are some rules we set. As in almost any other forum. It's to keep things clear.

Paul Griffin: Your page, your rules, true, and you just lost a customer, won the battle and lost the war! Happy?

Nestle: Oh please .. it's like we're censoring everything to allow only positive comments.

(Source: Leonard 2010).
What followed was a flood of anti-Nestlé comments on Nestlé’s wall as well as all over the web: the crisis turned viral. The comments by the official Nestlé moderator caused a ‘double crisis’ for Nestlé: the following day, the crisis crossed from social media to traditional media (Gibbons 2010). Several newspapers reported the Facebook dialogue, like Wall Street Journal, Sky News and the Guardian, and the attention went from the root of the problem to Nestlé’s social media failure, insulting customers. Realising its mistake, Nestlé changed the welcome message on its fan page: ‘Social media: as you can see we're learning as we go. Thanks for the comments’ (Leonard 2010). Further, the moderator apologized:

March 19 at 12:29pm Nestle This (deleting logos) was one in a series of mistakes for which I would like to apologise. And for being rude. We've stopped deleting posts, and I have stopped being rude (Leonard 2010).

After the apology, Nestlé continued its regular updates. The social media buzz continued for weeks, also on Twitter, and the video was uploaded several times on YouTube, making it impossible to remove (Steel 2010).
Appendix 2. Domino’s Case Study

Background

Domino’s Pizza is a world leading food delivery company, present in over 60 countries worldwide (Domino’s 2011). 13th of April 2009, a U.S. Domino’s employee posted five videos on YouTube (Weiss 2009). The videos featured her, Kristy, and her colleague Michael preparing food at a Domino’s restaurant in full uniforms. They had filmed themselves doing disgusting things with the food: Michael putting cheese up in his nose before putting it on a sandwich, farting on salami etc. The meals were said to be sold to unknowing Domino’s customers, with Kristy’s voice stating:

In about five minutes, they'll be sent out to delivery, where somebody will be eating these, yes, eating them. And little did they know that cheese was in his nose and that there was some lethal gas that ended up on their salami. That's how we roll at Domino's (Gregory 2009).

Figure 5 'Disgusting Domino’s People' (Hooper 2009).

Domino’s management was quickly informed of the videos by the consumer affairs blog ‘The Consumerist’ who had discovered the videos first and posted them online (Jacques 2009). The two employees claimed it was only a prank and that the food was never sold to anyone (Solis 2009), but the damage to the brand was already done: repulsive pictures were stuck in the minds of customers.
**Course of events**

**Tuesday April 14**th

The YouTube videos reached 250,000 views (Jacques 2009). Domino’s got YouTube to remove them, but numerous copies were still online. Domino’s fired the two employees and issued a Domino’s issues a statement on its website saying:

> The opportunities and freedom of the internet is wonderful, but it also comes with the risk of anyone with a camera and an internet link to cause a lot of damage, as in this case, where a couple of individuals suddenly overshadow the hard work performed by the 125,000 men and women working for Domino’s across the nation and in 60 countries around the world (Weiss 2009).

While issuing the website statement, Domino’s did not respond in any other channels than to an individual at the Consumerist blog (Holtz 2009a). On the choice of not issuing a traditional press release when the YouTube videos reached a million views, Domino’s VP of Communications Tim McIntyre stated that while a lot of people had seen them, there are 307 million people in America, most of who hadn’t (Jacques 2009). He found that such a response ‘would be like putting out a candle with a fire hose’ (York 2009a), and only alert more people to the negative story. The rationale was to not add more fuel to the fire, hoping the attention would stay on YouTube and eventually fade away.

The same day, also Twitter started buzzing. Domino’s monitored the chatter, and found that the chatter was not only about the videos, but more about whether Domino’s knew about it, what they were doing about it and why they didn’t respond (Jacques 2009).
Wednesday April 15th:

Domino’s surpassed Paris Hilton on Google search, which grabbed the attention of mainstream media: news outlets such as The New York Times, Sky, BBC and Advertising Age reported on the videos (Holtz 2009b). The YouTube videos then reached 1 million views (Jacques 2009), and Domino’s recognised that the videos required a stronger response. Trying to stop the damage to the brand to go further, Domino’s responded in social media 48 hours after the YouTube videos first were uploaded (York 2009a).

**YouTube**

An apologetic video response was issued on YouTube, featuring Domino’s U.S. president Patrick Doyle (Weiss 2009).

![Disgusting Dominos People - Domino's Responds](image)

*Figure 6 Domino’s president on YouTube (Swiftallon 2009).*

In the response, Mr. Doyle apologised and described the corrective steps Domino’s were taking to clean up, and prevent it from ever happening again:
We sincerely apologize for this incident. We thank members of the online community who quickly alerted us and allowed us to take immediate action. Although the individuals in question claim it's a hoax, we are taking this incredibly seriously (Swiftallon 2009).

He continued saying that the store from the food violation videos had been shut down and sanitized, and that Domino’s were reviewing their hiring practices ‘to make sure that people like this don't make it into our stores’ (York 2009b).

**Twitter**

Domino’s created a separate Twitter account, ‘@dpzinfi’, to reassure the public that the food violation was an isolated incident (York 2009a). The account focused on sharing information in a personal tone about Domino’s and its preventive actions, as well as linking to the YouTube apology (Weiss 2009). Domino’s also asked its employees to tweet links to the YouTube response, and further used the account to promote positive coverage by thanking tweeters for support and retweeting positive customer tweets (York 2009a).
Appendix 3. Toyota Case Study

Background
In August 2009, four people died in a car crash in California, US. The crash was caused by a pedal entrapment by the floor mat in the Toyota Lexus they were driving (Kim & Bailey 2010). This accident sparked a global crisis for Toyota, one of the world’s leading automotive companies and respected brands. After admitting the risk that floor mats could trap the accelerator pedal in several Toyota models: the ‘sticky pedal issue’, Toyota recalled 3.8 million U.S cars in October 2009, and further 5 million more cars in the U.S in January 2010 (Kim & Bailey 2010). The problem also struck globally; February 9, 2010, utterly 500,000 new Prius and Lexus hybrid cars was recalled globally for braking problems, and all production and sales of the cars stopped (Connor 2010). As a result, Toyota faced U.S. congress hearings, lawsuits, operating losses and falling market shares (Kim & Bailey 2010). The recall crisis struck at the heart of Toyota’s brand values and strong reputation; a brand built on reliability and quality (Johar et al. 2010).

Social media
The recall crisis created a critical need for information for Toyota’s customers. Safety was a major concern; it was vital that all owners of the recalled vehicles were accurately informed and reassured. To combat greater damage to its reputation, Toyota recognised the opportunity of social media to inform, engage in dialogue and rebuild trust with consumers (Bush 2010). In the beginning of February 2010, after the second recall, Toyota established a social-media response room in Los Angeles, U.S. where a group monitored and responded to the online conversations about Toyota and the recall 24/7 (Bush 2010). The strategy behind using social media aggressively was that it made
Toyota able to counter false claims and rumors, reassure the public, as well as backing up the key messages given to mainstream media. In addition, it could tell its own story to stakeholders, both the media and consumers (Brownlee 2011). As a basis, Toyota created a dedicated recall microsite on their corporate website. The site featured detailed recall information, videos, customers support etc. A broad range of social media platforms were used to direct stakeholders to this recall site, where Toyota was in control (Levick 2011).

Facebook

The Toyota Facebook page was used to provide information, answer questions, surveys and a place to encourage dialogue (Bush 2010). It also directed people to both the Toyota Twitter account and the recall microsite (Levick 2011).

Twitter

Twitter talk about Toyota boomed the day after the January 21 recall; the number of tweets increased from 100 to over 3200 in a day (Bush 2010). Toyota used its Twitter account to direct stakeholders to the recall microsite, responding to enquiries and sharing information, links and positive Toyota stories. A Twitter chat with Jim Lentz, the U.S. president of Toyota was also created, which gave people the opportunity to communicate with the leader directly (Bush 2010).

YouTube

1. Information about safety: The YouTube channel ToyotaTV was used to post up advice and information about safety to consumers. The YouTube videos combined factual information, e.g. explaining the technical pedal issue in easy terms with
drawings, as well as showing empathy and concern (Turner 2010). The videos also gave clear links to the recall site and contact numbers.

2. Corporate apology:

February 1, 2010, Toyota posted a video apology with Toyota’s U.S. president Jim Lentz on YouTube:

First, I want to sincerely apologise to Toyota owners. I know our recalls have caused many of you great concern, and for that I am truly sorry. Toyota has always prided itself on building high quality, durable cars that customers can depend on. And I know that we’ve let you down (ToyotaUSA 2010).

Lentz further talked about corrective action, gave information about the recall, and finally asked people to give Toyota a chance to earn their trust back.

Branded news channel (Tweetmeme)

A branded live channel called ‘Toyota Conversations’ was established through Tweetmeme (a site that collects the most popular links on Twitter). The life feed collected the top tweeted news, videos, press releases and images about Toyota, and both Toyota’s Twitter channel, as well as the corporate website linked to the live feed.
Most of the news was positive towards Toyota, as it is possible to fix Tweetmeme settings to pick up certain sources (Rao 2010). The channel also concentrated the online buzz in one place, which made it easier for Toyota to respond directly.

![Figure 8 Toyota Conversations (Toyota 2011).](image)

**Digg**

During the peak of the recall, Jim Lentz also attended a live social media interview hosted by the news discussion site Digg. In the interview he answered the most popular questions posed by the Digg members, engaging in a ‘live’ conversation with stakeholders. Over one million viewers saw the video the first five days (O’Leary 2010). According to Toyota, it used ‘Digg Dialogg’ as an opportunity to humanise the brand, as well as part of the strategy of being as transparent as possible in relation to the recall (O’Leary 2010).
Campaign for brand advocates

During the recall crisis, loyal Toyota consumers used social media to support the brand and create popular online conversations. When Toyota acknowledged this significant base of ‘online brand loyalists’, it asked them to share Toyota’s online content; tweets, videos and blogs posts, on their own social media platforms (Bush 2010). Toyota further proactively produced a collection of video interviews, which it posted on its YouTube channel, and links on other social media channels. These videos featured brand advocates such as customers, employees and dealership personnel, who told their positive stories about Toyota to counter negative news and respond to the issues (Bush 2010).