

Utilizing Social Media Platforms for Online Crisis Management: Focus on Always Pads Crisis of 2019

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Abstract

This paper is an in-depth analysis of how social media platforms can be used for online crisis management. It addresses an online social media crisis that involved Always sanitary products that trended on Twitter due to allegations of bad product quality. A popular hashtag #MyAlwaysExperience appeared on the Twitter timeline, with the first tweet in this thread coming from Kenyan activist Schaeffer Okore. The product manufacturers, Procter & Gamble initially tried to deny claims that some women's pads were problematic, but this only caused the social media campaign to gain more attention. This research study adopted a case study research design and employed a semi-structured interview guide to collect data from the respondents. The study focused on social media support, social media influencers, sensitization, diversification, and advertising as potential strategies for managing online crisis. The study recommends that when handling online communication crisis, companies should use a multi-pronged approach whereby they use as many social media platforms as possible and several messaging and strategies at the same time.

Keywords: *Social media, crisis management, Twitter, Always sanitary products*

1.0 Introduction

Crisis management is a proactive process that involves dealing with crises before, during and after the crisis. It aims to prevent or mitigate the damage that a crisis may cause to the organization and its stakeholders, and to mitigate the negative consequences of the crisis (Zamoum & Gorpe, 2018). One of the main platforms currently used to manage crises is the social media platform described in depth in this article. Social media is defined as a group of platforms that have been designed on the internet as applications Ability to create and exchange content generated by users based on ideas and Web 2.0 based technology (Farha 2015).

The use of social networks to respond to and manage crises has become a new global phenomenon (Kaewkitipong, 2012). Procter & Gamble (P&G) is one of the world's leading consumer products companies, operating in Africa since the early 1990s. The company has grown, with more than 300 brands in its product portfolio and offices in 80 countries worldwide. The organization's portfolio includes products such as Pampers, Always, Safeguard, Gillette, Vicks and Oral. B, Ariel and Procter And Gamble products reach more than 4 billion people worldwide. Mainly specializes in large-scale detergents, personal hygiene products and hygiene products (Khan, 2017).

In 2019, a popular hashtag with the hashtag #MyAlwaysExperience appeared on the Twitter timeline. The first tweet in this thread comes from Kenyan activist Schaeffer Okore, who talked about huge and painful rashes, itching, strong burning sensations, and unpleasant smells, which are the characteristics of her use of Always pads. The first tweet collected 77 retweets and 112 replies. Procter & Gamble initially tried to deny claims that some women's pads were problematic, and the social media campaign gained attention.

Twitter is a popular platform for companies and customers such as Kenyan women with apparent dissatisfaction with Always pads (Ombaka,2019). The platform generates much-needed buzz for the companies, which then shape their engagement and response agenda (Burton and Soboleva 2011). On the other hand, the choice of social media by women underlines the value they associate with the fast responses and dedicated engagement with the companies. Twitter more than any other social media platform is used for communication in the event of a crisis. Overall, the choice of Twitter and rampant use by women shape the crisis management plan. Twitter shapes both reactive and interactive crisis management approach against frequent users such as women.

2.0 Literature Review

Web 2.0 technology and social networks are important platforms for organizations, which can not only respond in the fastest and most direct way, but also spread information to audiences around the world (Farha, 2005). Web 2.0 is a term for today's interactive Internet as opposed to static internet that was being used in the 1990s. With these illustrated technological advancements, how a crisis rolls over therefore is greatly dependent on response time, crisis management systems that are put in place in the pre-crisis stage, during the crisis and post crisis by said institution/organization.

Crisis management strategies play a critical role in how a social media crisis is handled. Knowledge on what the appropriate social media platform to be used any social media crisis is also key in the crisis management process. Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter provide a great platform for universities to communicate and maintain trust with students (Bouvier, 2015). Especially in crisis situations, social media can communicate directly and quickly with stakeholders.

Research shows that students are more likely to leave messages when communicating via Twitter than Facebook. "In their statement, the organization prefers Twitter for crisis communication." The study also showed that students may share information conveyed by the dean, which was also supported by Freberg, Graham, McGaughey and Freberg (2011), and Turk. (2012). Austin et al. (2012) also conducted a study on "How audiences find crisis information: exploration of crisis communication models in social networks". When

asked about the crisis through a third party via social media, study participants were more likely to seek interpersonal communication with social media sources. Participants were most likely to obtain information through traditional media when hearing the crisis through traditional media through a third party. Participants were most likely to use the same type of media in the crisis to find information. However, the first exception for participants about the crisis, primarily through social media, was in interpersonal communication.

Crisis management is understood as strategies, processes, and countermeasures to deal with crises that are planned and implemented (Glaesser, 2006). A strategic response should therefore be employed to deal with each crisis uniquely. Situational crisis communication theory proposed by Timothy Coombs in 1995 prescribes crisis response strategies that should maximize protection from crises using organizational responsibility for crises. According to Coombs, an organization must provide information about the physical and psychological risks that crisis victims may face; subsequent communication should focus on protecting reputation (Lauran et al., 2019). He pointed out that every crisis has a unique response method that can potentially reduce the escalation of the crisis.

The Social Mediation Crisis Communication (SMCC) model provides a model that can identify demographic data that can help improve communication strategies and components (Austin, 2012). This model believes that in the world of social media in crisis situations, there are several "audiences" or "audiences" such as: An influential person who produces information that can be accessed by others. Followers: These people follow influencers, and they have access to scattered information. Active Members: Individuals who do not get information directly from social networks, but instead search for information from other sources or contact indirectly through social networks. Liu, Austin, and Jin (2011) mention "the importance of strategically matching the format and source of crisis information when an organization responds to a crisis." The need for a crisis communication model that can explain and predict "how the public creates, consumes, and / or shares crisis information through social media and other sources" has emerged (Horner&Palmkvist,2016).

Informing this research paper as well is the Framing theory that was developed by sociologist Irving Goff in 1974. Entman defined the framing of selecting certain aspects of perceived reality in a way that promotes the definition of a particular problem, interpretation of causality, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendations and make them more prominent in the communication text. When it comes to media, Goffman believes that the editing of media content is the highlight of the most meaningful action.

Crisis management is understood as strategies, processes, and countermeasures to deal with crises that are planned and implemented (Glaesser, 2006). A strategic response should therefore be employed in order to deal with each crisis uniquely. As earlier proposed in the theoretical framework, (Liu *et al.*, 2015) Situational Crisis Communication Theory presents a good opportunity of covering three components: (1) Instructing stakeholders to briefly explain the crisis situation; (2) Coordinating information to enable stakeholders to respond psychologically to the crisis; (3) Reputation management (Coombs, 2014), which means the actual response that an organization uses to resolve a crisis to protect its stakeholder.

Crisis causes reputational damage and reputational capital is lost. A favorable dictionary (pre-crisis) reputation is a buffer against reputation capital lost during a crisis. Organizations with a good pre-reputation will still have a strong post-crisis reputation because of pre-reputation disadvantages or spending more prestige capital than neutral organizations. Image Restoration (Repair Theory): The Benoit image restoration strategy is a prestige restoration strategy that can be used after a crisis, arguing that successful crisis resolution requires honest and ethical communication between crises. Image restoration theory offers several crisis response strategies. This has a variety of possibilities, from "denial" to "responsibility avoidance" to "attack mitigation" (Zamoum & Gorpe 2018).

Organizations adopt different crisis strategies on social media, which border justification, excuses, scapegoat, attack accuser, and denial. Organizations use the online environment to manage and minimize reputation threats on social media platforms (Lambret and Barki 2017). However, the strategy increases the unpredictability of the corporate crises as the response strategy changes with the nature of the comments and negative buzz by the consumers. The online crisis management approaches as the negotiation process to gain credibility online and offline Pang, Hassan, and Chong (2014). The lack of proper gatekeeping on social media platforms such as

Twitter means that organizations must expect crises to arise to the extent of prompting them to reclaim legitimacy through the same platforms.

Coombs and Holladay (2008) pointed out that researchers overemphasized the use of apology/humiliation as the "best" response to a crisis and used widely different definitions of apology. Several additional factors can be added to this definition, including expressions of regret/sympathy, expressions of regret, and preventive and corrective measures (Benoit, 2004). Park and Avery (2018) conducted a study on the "influence of media channels, crisis types, and demographic data on the audience's intention to follow instructional information during a crisis". In the study Situational theory of crisis communication (SCCT), it has been determined that different types of crises require different information strategies; different types of crises may also require different channels to maximize their scope and effectiveness. When issuing instructions to the public to respond to crises that threaten their safety, the most strategic information is particularly important; revealing the most effective combination of information and media can increase the motivation to implement recommended behaviors.

The conceptual framework recognizes the message content in terms of language, angle, and framing to expedite the pursuit of online and offline legitimacy among customers. The message content informs effective crisis management on social media by acknowledging the source, information form, and the overall crisis response by the organization (Jin, Liu, and Austin 2011). However, relaying the message may require the incorporation of traditional media and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) to manage the emotions of the customers. Framing the message with the right language and angle is imperative for organizations. According to Xiao, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) framing the messages with humor as opposed to hearsay could create a better organizational reputation and decrease the perceived crisis severity. Proper message content aligns with the expectations of the public and boosts the perceived organizational responsibility for a crisis.

Social media as previously discussed include platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Each social media platform serves a specific purpose with unique content being shared. (Snoeijsers *et al.*, 2014) carried out a study on the "effect of source, social media type, and information of a crisis message through social media on students' secondary crisis communication". The research tested three factors and developed hypothesis on them: social media type, source, and crisis information. The experiment conducted the following tests between (social media platform: Facebook and Twitter), (source: university and dean), (crisis information: guidance and adaptation). The data set contains 336 participants (65.8 men). Their median age was 22 years old, and 80.2% were 25 years old or younger. The study was carried out via email, through questionnaire, whereby the participants were presented with an online scenario. Twitter was found to be most favorable compared to Facebook, in obtaining responses. Compared to universities on either platform, when the dean sends a message, students are more likely to share the message or discuss the event with friends. Studies have shown that in terms of secondary communication, Twitter is the preferred platform for crisis communication (Liu *et al.*, 2016).

3.0 Research Methodology

The design that was adopted in this study is a case study design. A case study is a detailed investigation of a specific research question rather than an exhaustive statistical investigation and comprehensive comparative investigation (Biba, 2013). This is often used to narrow down a very broad field of study to one or a few easily researchable examples. The research process involves new questions and steps. Data was typically collected from the participant's settings. The final report has a flexible structure. Those who participate in this form of exploration support the importance of rendering the complexity of the situation, focusing on the individual meanings of the method of looking at research that respects inductive style.

The target population was women based in Nairobi County. The choice of location being Nairobi to directly reach a group of women with diverse ages, social media use and needs in terms of sanitary products. The number of women that were directly targeted in the study was 25. The sample population of 25 was to decrease any chances of vague answers. The interviewees being targeted were sanitary products users and social media users. The Interviews provided firsthand reaction and opinions of how social media has been used in crisis management. It was also to give a feel of how effective these crisis management.

This research used purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling refers to a variety of selection techniques in which sample members are selected with the sole intention of making specific generalizations (Omona 2013). The women interviewed were purposively picked by location, however each needed to be on a social media platform and use sanitary products during menstruation. There is need to specify the products used as there are many products that can be used during menstruation. Products like Tampons, menstrual cups, and period panties. The sites that were studied included Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The investigation garnered insights that built an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of crisis management through social media. On the other hand, using a purposive sampling method provided several advantages to the research.

This research took up the interview questions as the instrument of collecting data from the women being interviewed. It was a semi-structured interview. A semi structured interview provided the interviewees and informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms while providing the interviewer structure. It contained key questions which covered the scope of the areas that the study needed to explore. It also allowed for the research to explore the subject matter

The research relied on primary data. The data was collected through an interview guide. The guide was administered through a sit-down interview with the respondents. The instrument was used as it provided precision, through the questions being asked to follow up questions can be administered in the semi structured interview. The interview apart from the structured questions the respondent is at liberty to add any further comments.

Third-party recruitment was used to find the interviewees from Nairobi. Using referrals as third party reduced the attrition rate and increase the response rate in the study. The parties used word of mouth to explain to the target informants about the research. The snowballing technique enabled the research maximize the response rate and willingness of the participants to provide accurate information about the phenomena of interest as recommended by Shamoo and Resnik (2015). Furthermore, it was easier to follow-up with the participants for clarification.

Upon completion of the interview session the data was analysed through thematic analysis. The data was read and reread to capture a theme in the responses. Then the data was then labelled according to the wider themes captured in the responses. The data is then read again just to confirm that the thematic labels indeed fit the responses. A write up is then presented with coherent quotes from the interviewees. According to the authors of Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke and qualitative researchers in psychology, "Thematic analysis continues between the complete dataset, the coded extraction of the data being analysed and the analysis of the generated data.

This research adhered to all ethical principles required when carrying out a research. The respondents were allowed to participate on a voluntary basis only, without any coercion. They were then informed concerning their consent to participate in the research. Their consent meant that their responses were to be used in the research and would be published as well. The confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents was upheld throughout the interview process. Thereafter the outcome of the research was shared with the respondents after successful completion of the research project.

The research observed the ethical principle of beneficence, privacy, and deception when collecting information from social media users. Beneficence ensured the researchers did not collect information that could harm the informants psychologically and emotionally. The qualitative research prevented any professional harm against the respondents who revealed their views on the online engagement by P&G after the Always pad crisis. The interviewing process involved all the covid protocols, social distancing during the interview sessions. Substituting face to face interview with online interviews.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The researcher had a sample size of 25 female students from Nairobi County. Females were singled out because they are the ones who experience menstrual cycles hence have an experience with sanitary pads. However, out of the issued questionnaires, 17 were returned duly filled signifying a response rate of 68%, which was adequate for statistical analysis, as noted in Mugenda & Mugenda (1999), a response rate of 50% or higher is considered good.

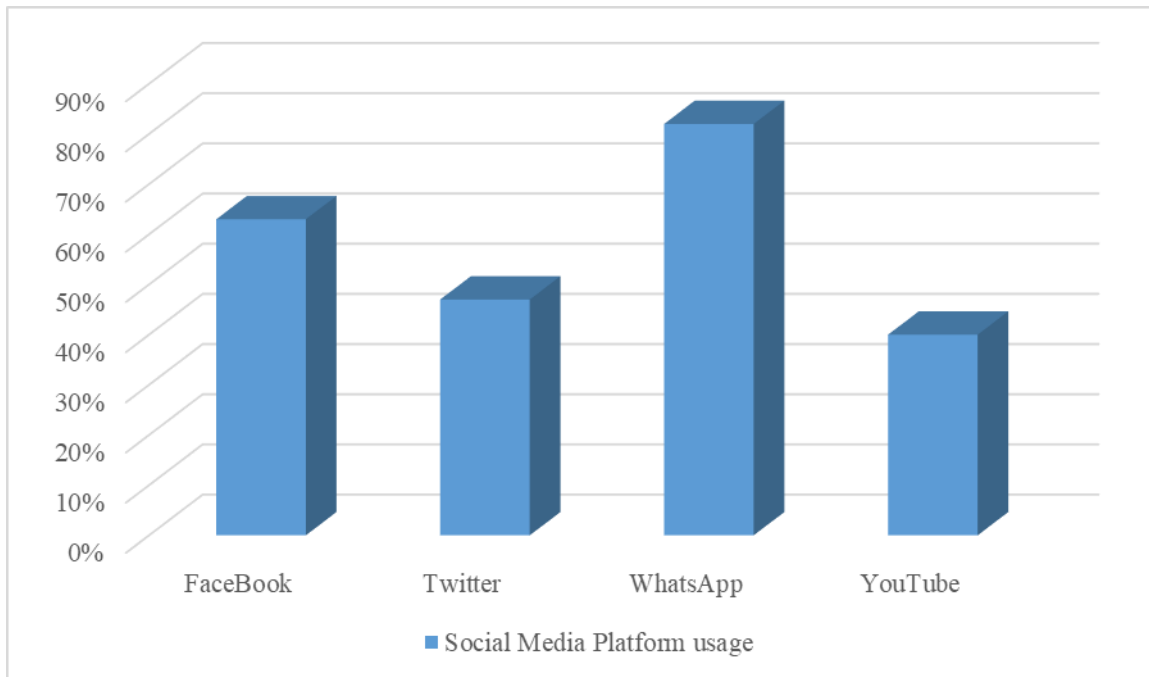


Figure 3.1 Social media platform usage

As shown in figure 3.1 WhatsApp emerged the most used platform among respondents with 82% indicating they used it mostly, 63% indicated they frequently used Facebook while 47%, and 40% indicated they used Twitter and YouTube respectively. The most widely used platform was WhatsApp, however this platform does not offer a means through which communication and adverts from non-group members can be shared therefore inadequate for public communication.

Facebook's prominence as a social media platform can be ascribed to the fact that it is very simple to use, offers platform for private communication between individuals and groups, allows access to multimedia content which include videos, audio, text and graphic and allows for interaction with general content from the public. Otiende, (2018) concurs that Facebook is so prominent that it has become part of the mandatory applications that come with phones. Some mobile network providers offer this platform for free just to entice their clients. Twitter is comparable to Facebook; however multimedia content is limited in size. It's mostly used to interact with text where feedback is encouraged. YouTube provides video content, but it is limited in terms of interaction because it is one-sided, with little input from the viewer. YouTube is suitable for long videos, so it is used when the viewer has time to devote to that content, whereas Facebook allows for short interactive videos that require less effort to consume.

Information Seeking on Social media Platforms

The study sort to determine if respondents used social media for market and product research prior to making a purchase, as well as which medium they thought provided the best platform for gathering as much information as possible.

The researcher asked respondents if they used social media for market and product research prior to buying a product. The purpose of this question was to determine if buyers consider social media as a source of credible information that they can rely on to make proper purchase decisions. 68% of the respondents use social media while 32% don't use social media for research.

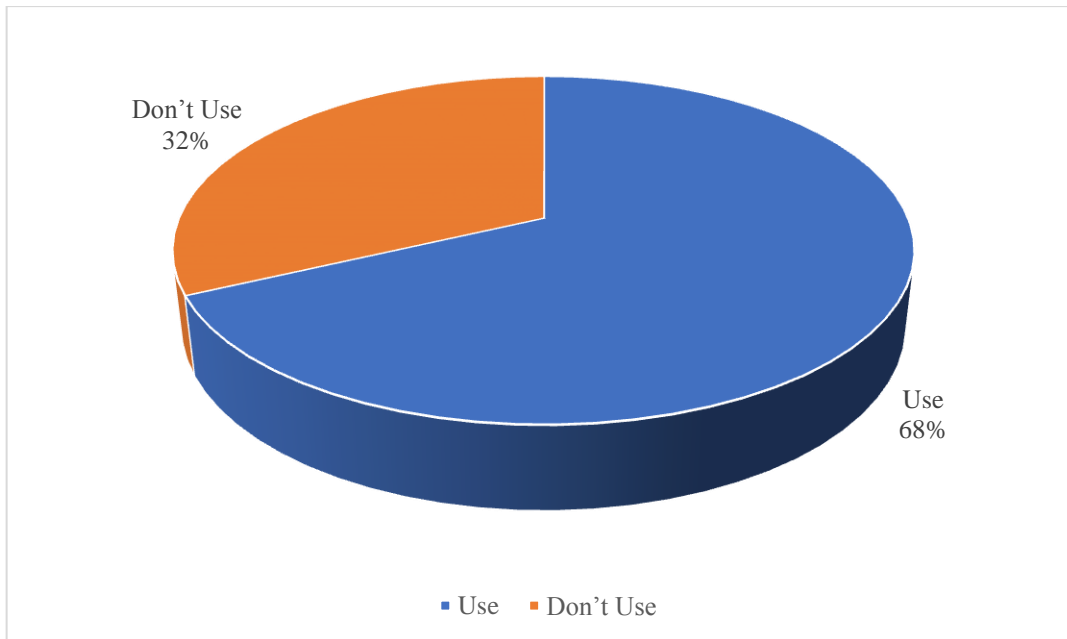


Figure 3.2 product research on social media

Figure 3.2 showed that most of the respondents indicated that they use social media as a source of information. It was however noted that respondents did not rely on social media as a standalone source of information but rather complimented it with company websites and referrals. Mwendwa, (2017) suggests that social media platforms are highly used as means of market and product research, with ages between 18 and 40 years being the most dominant group. This corresponds with the findings of this study that social media is an avenue through which market research is done by Shoppers. On the question of which social media they thought provided the best platform for gathering as much information as possible, 42% of the respondents indicated they preferred Facebook page, 15 % indicated they preferred YouTube while 21% preferred Twitter Page.

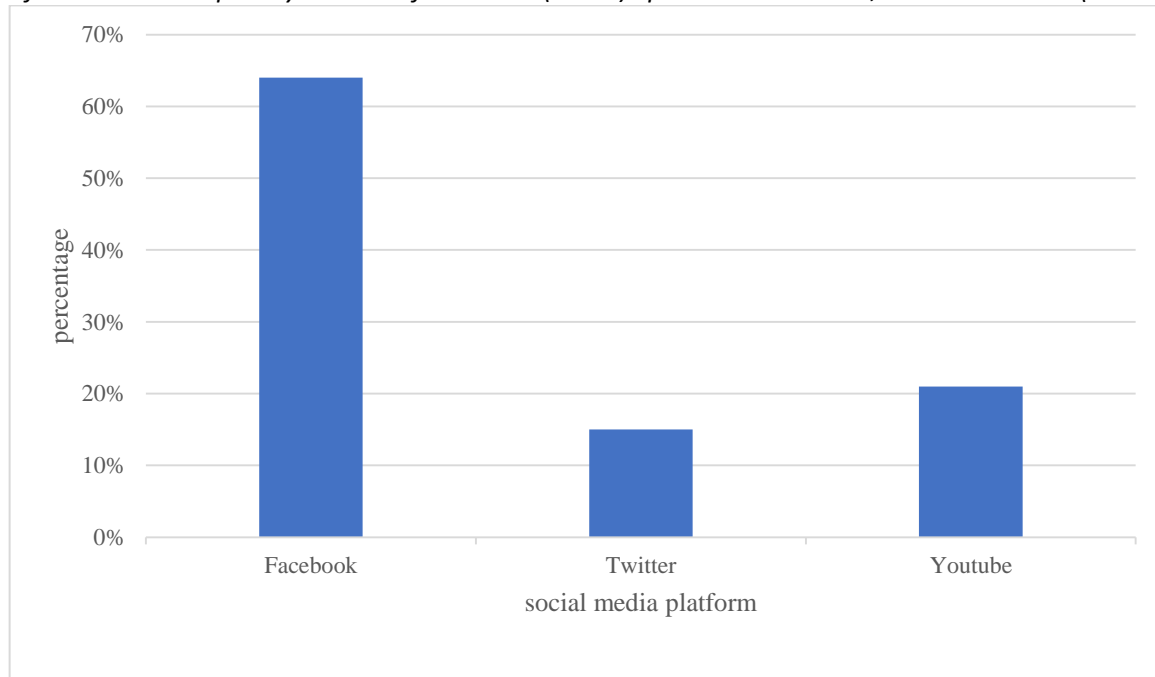


Figure 3.3 Social Media Platform

These findings indicate that the majority of the respondents used Facebook to get information that helps them make shopping decisions. Twitter is the least used since its content are brief in nature. Respondents use YouTube when they have been directed by links or referred to a company page.

The study sought to find out the social media platforms P&G used for online management of the Always Pads crisis in Kenya. On which social media platforms uses to communicate with its publics, it was ascertained that it had presence in the following: Facebook under P&G, Twitter under @ProcterGamble, Instagram under proctergamble and YouTube under P&G (Procter & Gamble). From the findings, P&G uses most of the prominent social media platforms to reach its target audience. P&G has online presence in Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and twitter.

On which social media platform P&G had the highest reach, the following were the findings; Facebook had 5,641,884 followers, Twitter had 216,900 Followers, Instagram had 163,000 followers and YouTube had 64,400 subscribers. From this findings Facebook had the highest reach while YouTube had the lowest reach. This indicates that, if P&G aim to reach as many people as possible, they should use Facebook. The findings agree with Ochieng', (2019) who found that social media platform is necessary if you are to reach very many people within a short period of time.

It was ascertained that P&G used YouTube as the social media platform to reach out to its target audience and manage the crisis. Regarding which social media platform P&G should use to communicate with consumers about the crisis, 41% of the respondents preferred a combination of all media, 32% preferred Facebook, 16% Twitter, and 11% YouTube.

On the question of which media, the respondents preferred P&G to use, in communicating to them about the crisis, 41% chose all media, 32% chose Facebook, 16% chose twitter and 11% chose YouTube. This finding show that most online audiences have preferred social media platforms and so in order to reach many people, companies should use the various sources simultaneously. This validates Otiende, (2018) findings that each social media platform has its core users who rarely visit other sites, and so to get to them, diversify the platforms.

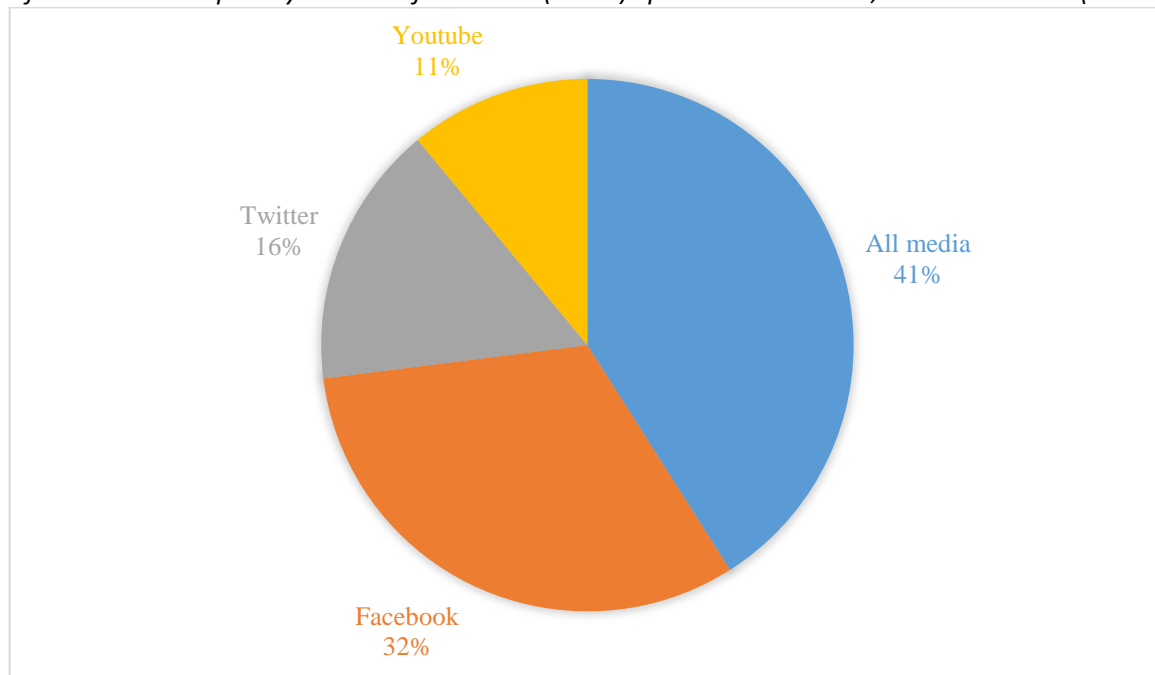


Figure 3.4 Preferred social media

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings, it was determined that P&G uses the following social media sites to connect with its target audience: Facebook under P&G, Twitter under @ProcterGamble, Instagram under proctergamble, and YouTube under P&G (Procter & Gamble). Facebook had the most reach, while YouTube had the least. It was ascertained that P&G used YouTube as the social media platform to reach out to its target audience and manage the crisis. Regarding which social media platform P&G should have used to communicate with consumers about the crisis, Majority of the respondents preferred a combination of all media. However, if they were to choose one, majority preferred Facebook. This study thus found out that P&G used YouTube as the social media to respond to the crisis despite them having higher audiences in Facebook.

The study looked into social media support, social media influencers, sensitization, diversification, and advertising as potential strategies for managing online crisis. Each strategy is suitable for a particular situation and so applied as such. The researcher sorts the views of the respondents as to which strategy would be most suited for this crisis. Majority preferred sensitization and advertisement. Regarding the social media strategy P&G used to manage the crisis, it was found that P&G used influencers and messaging. The messaging was #feel good with always.

It is recommended that when handling online communication crisis, companies should use a multi-pronged approach whereby they use as many social media platforms as possible and several messaging and strategies at the same time. The various social media platforms will enable them to reach many and diverse target audiences thus maximising their reach. The various strategies will ensure that they not only appeal to a certain section of the target audience rather to all audiences regardless of the diversity.

Businesses need to monitor social media in order to quickly respond to any looming crisis. It is important that this response is adapted to the channel, which means that it should not coincide with the message that is transmitted to traditional media in a press release, for example. The answer must also be given in a friendly and humane way. On social media, people want a human response, not the voice of the company. Social media is a viable medium of crisis management. Message packing is a valuable way to communicate during a crisis, to avoid creating controversy. Engaging diverse social media crisis management techniques also assists in reaching a wider online audience.

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