The Dual Axis Contingency Continuum: Website

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Honors Thesis

https://trinitytransmedia.com/dacc/
The pressure for companies to speak up on current events is fueled by the unfettered access the internet provides consumers to these businesses. Old public relations strategies on the correct way to respond in a crisis don’t account for the immediacy and frequency of responses facilitated by social media. The dual-axis contingency continuum was built to help public relations professionals reframe their response strategies in the face of changing social culture.

Learn about how the continuum was created by studying company responses to the Black Lives Matter movement in June 2020.

Explore examples of real corporate responses and how they would fit on the dual axis contingency continuum.

Train your employees to integrate the continuum into your crisis communication plan.
Learn

Part One – Background

The goal is to understand the new and unique role social media has played in the relationship between public relations and social justice, and how that presented itself in the Black Lives Matter Movement of June 2020.

Initially, social media sites, such as Instagram and Facebook, were built with the intention of connecting individuals with one another. As with many things in the United States, the service was quickly commodified. Direct access to consumers is seen as a blessing to many professionals, but it also means that they can be easily criticized, called out, or called upon to voice their opinion on a tough subject matter.

According to a study published on June 10, 2020, “on May 28, nearly 8.8 million tweets contained the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag” which was “the highest number of uses for this hashtag in a single day since the Center started tracking its use.” There was also a massive push for companies to release a statement about their viewpoints on the subject of Black Lives Matter.

Part Two – Data Analysis

The purpose of the study was to see if the contingency continuum was still the best model for analyzing companies’ crisis communication plans, or if strategies had changed in such a dramatic way after the murder of George Floyd that a new model was needed.
The Contingency Continuum

Contingency Continuum

The contingency theory of communication was proposed by R. E. Cartwright in 1957. The contingency theory a strategy for resolving competing and accommodating to another party's interests over a continuum or a continuum between pure advocacy and pure accommodation. This model represents how PR professionals should structure their communications response.

Problem One

The first issue is the expansion of the terms in Cartwright's model. As listed earlier, the terms are not detailed and often repeat (i.e., competitive, compromising, accommodation), the terms overlap terminologies, and poorly described the terms in the data.

Problem Two

The second issue was how the scale failed to provide enough distinctions to accurately describe the behaviors of the companies. Often, two companies would be placed on the same point of the spectrum even though their responses were very different. This suggested that the existing scale was not detailed enough to measure behaviors.

The Dual Axis Continuum

The Dual Axis Contingency Continuum

The Dual Axis Contingency Continuum both mitigates the problems with the continuum and better represents the communication environment and strategies present in and around the height of the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement.

The new model is still a continuum, or gradual scale, as the first model was. This ensures that the original problems with normative theory are still solved, and the suggestions of binary or simple solutions are still dismissed.

The new model represents the frequency of messaging with the furthest point down on the axis representing no messaging from the company, and the highest point represents frequent and consistent messaging over time.

To learn more, download the full report below.

Downloadable File: Dual Axis Contingency Continuum - [Download Link]
Explore

Click on a company logo to see where it falls on the dual axis continuum.
Train

Training #1 – What is the Dual Axis Contingency Continuum? (2.5 min)
This short video provides an introduction to the dual-axis contingency continuum, which is a framework for understanding crisis communication in context with digital social justice advocacy. By the end of this training, you should be able to understand why the theory was developed, what the model consists of, and how your company can use this model in your own strategic communications.

Training #2 – Variables to Consider When Using the Dual Axis Contingency Continuum (4 min)
This video overviews different variables to consider when handling crisis communication, and how those variables relate to the dual-axis contingency continuum. By the end of this training, you will be able to understand how the dual-axis contingency continuum works within existing crisis communication plans, and how it makes those plans stronger.
About

About the Author

Erin Eckert is a senior in the Department of Communication at Trinity University in San Antonio, TX. (Class of 2021). This website is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for undergraduate graduation with departmental honors. The project in full represents a year’s worth of research and effort dedicated to the study of crisis communication in context with digital social justice advocacy.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about this content, please reach out at erine2017@gmail.com.

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