Introduction

We all scream for ice cream, especially when it is taken away. Blue Bell Creameries (Blue Bell) is a Texas-based frozen treats company that first opened in 1907 (Carper, 2015). The company sells its products in 23 states (Carper, 2015), and has "acquired immense popularity and a cult following" (Ahmed & Natarajan, 2016, p. 68). Despite being a national company, Blue Bell has been able to keep a "homely small-town image" (Ahmed & Natarajan, 2016, p. 68).

This romantic image was threatened in 2015 when a series of *Listeriosis* illnesses in Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, and Arizona were linked to a contamination in Blue Bell's Texas and Oklahoma plants (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2015b). *Listeriosis* is caused by eating food contaminated with bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes* (CDC, 2015b). The disease primarily affects those with weakened immune systems such as pregnant women, newborns, and older adults (CDC, 2018). *Listeriosis* usually causes a fever and diarrhea, but can be life threatening (CDC, 2018). The outbreak caused 10 total illnesses, including three deaths in Kansas (CDC, 2015b). Following several small recalls, Blue Bell voluntarily recalled all of its products on April 20, 2015 (CDC, 2015a). Sales did not resume until August 31, 2015 (Elkind, 2015).

The outbreak provoked many consumers to voice their reactions on social media (Swartz, 2015), namely on the Blue Bell Ice Cream Facebook page in response to posts made by the company. Ahmed and Natarajan (2016) found that Blue Bell's response to the crisis, in particular its interaction with consumers through social media, and its long-standing strong brand relationship lessened the potential harmful impact of the crisis to the company's image. The researchers of this article used media dependency and reputation management theories to further explore the relationships between agriculture, social media, and crisis communication.

Literature Review

The voluntary total recall of all Blue Bell Creameries products in 2015 (CDC, 2015b) came as a shock to many customers. Social media, particularly Facebook pages, became a sounding board for many of those affected by the recall. Facebook was also a primary outlet for Blue Bell to connect to its customers during the crisis.

Media Dependency Theory

In order to understand the Facebook reactions to the Blue Bell recall, it is important to understand why followers would react at all. The media dependency theory states that dependency on media is heightened "…when a relatively high degree of change and conflict is present in society" (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976, p. 7). Heightened media dependency has cognitive, behavioral, and affective affects (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

One cognitive effect that can occur is the creation and resolution of ambiguity. Ambiguity is defined as having insufficient or conflicting information (Ball-Rokeach, 1973; Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Some consumers were unsure which products were safe in the early days of the crisis due to multiple recalls. The first news stories and press releases featuring the *Listeria* outbreaks were confusing for consumers because Blue Bell did several small recalls before recalling all of its products (Brooks, 2017; Elkind, 2015; CDC, 2015b). The public continues to look to the media for clarification until the ambiguity is resolved (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Blue Bell stakeholders likely continuously followed the progress of the crisis on social media until sales resumed.

Many consumers were upset, even angry, about the recall. This could be considered an emotional reaction which is an affective result of media dependency and leads to an attitude formation (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Some expressed these feelings online by commenting on Blue Bell's social media pages.

A behavioral effect is what an audience member will do in reaction to media information (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). This study researched the affective and behavioral effects, and subsequent attitude formations of the public, during Blue Bell's recall.

Media dependency has previously been used to understand social media's role during agricultural crises. In Charanza and Naile's (2012) study, participants recalled how much time they spent on different media channels looking for information during a beef industry food safety incident. They found that consumers did not indicate high levels of media dependency during a food safety outbreak, but concluded this could be due to the last major food safety event occurring more than seven years prior (Charanza & Naile, 2012). Crisis response on social media is now expected, but more research into social media's effects during and after a crisis is needed (Irlbeck et al., 2013).

Reputation Management Theory

Blue Bell had created a strong reputation throughout its 108 years of business prior to the 2015 crisis. A Dutch study of agri-food industries' communication found that this is important for reputation management (van Woerkum & van Leishout, 2007). Van Woerkum and van Leishout (2007) suggested that a company will experience successful reputation management during a time of crisis if they are also transparent during normal times prior to the crisis.

However, defending a reputation is just as important as building one (Davies & Miles, 1996). As stated by Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004), reputation management consists of "the collective representation of multiple constituencies' images of a company built up over time and is based on a company's identity programs, its performance and how constituencies have perceived in behavior" (p. 369). A threatened reputation can imperil an organization's future (van Woerkum & van Leishout, 2007). An organization, particularly in the agri-food industry, should work to prevent tarnishing its reputation by "reacting appropriately and in a timely manner to (even small) changes," (van Woerkum & van Leishout, 2007, p. 356).

Agriculture and Social Media

Agriculturalists implement social media into their marketing strategies for reasons differing from non-agricultural organizations (White, Meyers, Doerfert, & Irlbeck, 2014). After conducting interviews of agriculturalists who use social media for marketing purposes, White et al. (2014) found that the participants felt the need to use social media to address negative or incorrect information about agriculture. "All of the participants said the primary motivation for beginning their social media presence was to provide audiences with accurate information about agriculture" (White et al, 2014, p.81). White et al. (2014) also gave multiple suggestions for content on agriculturalists' social media accounts. The suggestion most relevant to this study was to share what audience members want or need in a way that is understandable and shareable and to respond to readers' questions and concerns (White et al., 2014).

Although social media is still relatively new technology, they are widely used and continue to grow in terms of users, platforms, and usage (Pew Research Center, 2017). Despite their

popularity, more research is needed to determine the uses and strategies for agriculture on social media platforms (Gibson, Ahrens, Meyers & Irlbeck, 2012; White et al., 2014; Irlbeck et al., 2013).

Crisis Communication in Agriculture

There is a great deal of literature on crisis communication in agriculture (Irlbeck et al., 2013; Coombs, 2014; Palmer, Irlbeck, Meyers, & Chambers, 2013), although little of it mentions social media (most likely because social media did not exist or was not as popular at the time of other crises). Although these studies do not incorporate social media specifically, they are still valuable resources for this study.

For example, Palmer et al. (2013) provided certain "do's and don't's" for crisis communication during a foodborne illness outbreak. Some of the "do's" included practicing two-way communications and providing timely and accurate information (Palmer et al., 2013). "Don't's" included lying or being dishonest, ignoring key audiences or stakeholders, staying silent, and downplaying public health (Palmer et al., 2013).

Crisis Communication on Social Media

Wagler and Cannon (2015) also studied reactions to an agricultural crisis on social media in a qualitative case study. The researchers studied Twitter conversations that occurred during the 2012 drought in Nebraska (Wagler & Cannon, 2015). They found that organizations can be "established as thought leaders on social networks, providing timely information about complex and important issues facing the public" (Wagler & Cannon, 2015, p. 57). Although these strategies were meant for university organizations (Wagler & Cannon, 2015), we believe they can be used by other organizations wanting to be seen as a leader during a crisis. The suggestions included building brand equity through content marketing, engaging with the audience, using big data to plan for the next crisis, and framing conversations to seem more personal and genuine (Wagler & Cannon, 2015).

Prior to Wagler and Cannon's (2015) study, Irlbeck et al. (2013) called for more research on the "implementation of social media during a crisis and the effects that it has on consumers' confidence and loyalty once the crisis is over" (p. 28). This is part of what the current study aimed to do. Coombs (2015) found that when organizations have a social media presence prior to a crisis, social media should be used in response to the crisis. Ten common crisis communication postures used by organizations are listed and described in Table 1 (Coombs, 2015). Coombs (2015) also notes that social media use during a crisis is not one-sided; social media gives voices to stakeholders who support an organization during a crisis, which can create a "positive echo on the Internet" (p. 156).

Table 1.

Crisis Response Postures as proposed by Coombs (2015).

Crisis Response Posture	Explanation
Attacking the Accuser	The crisis manager confronts the person or group that claims that a crisis exists. The response may include a threat to use force (e.g., a lawsuit) against the accuser.
Denial	The crisis manager states that no crisis exists. The response may include explaining why there is no crisis.
Scapegoating	Some other person or group outside of the organization is blamed for the crisis.
Excusing	The crisis manager tries to minimize the organization's responsibility for the crisis. The response can include denying any intention to do harm or claiming that the organization had no control of the events that led to the crisis.
Justification	The crisis manager tries to minimize the perceived damage associated with the crisis. The response can include stating that there were no serious damages or injuries or claiming that the victims deserved what they received.
Compensation	The organization provides money or other gifts to the victims.
Apology	The crisis manager publicly states that the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks forgiveness.
Reminding	The organization tells stakeholders about its past good works.
Ingratiation	The organization praises stakeholders.
Victimage	The organization explains how it too is a victim of the crisis.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to further analyze Blue Bell's crisis response postures through social media posts and consumers' reactions during the 2015 major agri-food crisis in order to understand how this contributed to the perseverance of Blue Bell's reputation. To achieve this purpose, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1: What themes were found in Blue Bell's Facebook posts from March 13 – August 31, 2015?

RQ2: What themes were found in audience feedback (comments) on posts from RQ1?

Although this study is similar to the one conducted by Ahmed and Natarajan (2016), this study focuses on the crisis communication strategies Blue Bell used on social media during the crisis and how customers reacted. Ahmed and Natarajan (2016) looked to add more information

on the "impact of a product harm crisis on a regional brand of ice-cream" during a product-harm crisis (p. 68).

Methodology

The researchers conducted a qualitative content analysis to answer the research questions. Content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 24). The researchers analyzed the posts that Blue Bell made on its public Blue Bell Ice Cream Facebook page as well as the comments these posts received on the page. Facebook was chosen as the social media platform to study because it has the most users (Pew Research Center, 2017). Also, a good deal of the public relies on social media to get their news (Grieco, 2017). Information about a crisis is considered imperative news to stakeholders. Many of Blue Bell's stakeholders most likely turned to social media platforms for news during the *Listeria* outbreak since twenty-six percent of American adults get news from two or more social media sites (Grieco, 2017). Of these social media platforms that consumers are turning to for news, Facebook claims the largest share of social media news consumers (Grieco, 2017). The posts studied were from March 13, 2015, when the first *Listeria*-related post was made, through August 31, 2015, when Blue Bell Ice Cream returned to stores.

The researchers examined the response strategies of the posts and how followers responded using topic coding after the crisis. Only the first 10 comments from the "Top Comments" section of each post were used because each post had several hundred, or even thousand, comments. This resulted in a mix of both Texan and non-Texan commenters being included in the study. Posts and comments were coded by the researchers according to which crisis response strategy (Table 1) they reflected. Additional response strategy themes emerged from the data and were added as needed. Comments and posts could be labeled as more than one category.

To ensure trustworthiness, the researchers sought to achieve credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was ensured through peer debriefing and triangulation of two different sources and three different investigators (Denzin, 1978). Transferability was established through an adequate description of data as well as a thoroughly maintained database. Dependability overlapped the credibility efforts, but more specifically, two inquiry teams analyzed the data, and then met to discuss any discrepancies. This also helped accomplish inter-coder reliability. Confirmability was established through an audit trial that included the raw data, process notes, and the coding spreadsheet. All the researchers currently live in Texas and have purchased Blue Bell Ice Cream. The researchers were aware of the recall and followed its progress as it was happening.

Results

RQ1: Themes Found in Blue Bell Creameries' Facebook Posts

The following themes were found in Blue Bell Creameries' Facebook posts: Informational, Ingratiation, Improvement, Justification, Reminding, Apology, and Victimage (Table 2).

Table 2

Themes Found in Blue Bell Creameries' Facebook Posts.

Theme	Explanation	Posts by Blue Bell
Informational	Straightforward statements that provide pure facts to the public	"For information about our voluntary recall click on the link below."
Ingratiation	The organization praises stakeholders	"We've heard from so many of you and wanted to say thank you…We've been humbled by your support and kind words and want to be back in your freezer this summer…"
Improvement	The organization provides details about improvements to food safety practices	"We wanted to update you on our fresh start. We're embarking on an intensive cleaning program while we simultaneously conducting a new training program for employees at all four of our production facilities."
Justification	The crisis manager tries to minimize the perceived damage associated with the crisis	"…This withdrawal in no way includes our half gallons, quarts, pints, cups, three gallon ice cream or the majority of take-home frozen snack novelties…"
Reminding	The organization tells stakeholders about its past good works	"For the first time in 108 years, Blue Bell announces a product recall…"
Apology	The crisis manager publicly states that the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks forgiveness	"A message from our CEO and President. [Video of the CEO apologizing for the outbreak]."
Victimage	The organization explains how it too is a victim of the crisis	"It's a sad day for Blue Bell. To ensure that we can come back in the future, we have made the agonizing decision to reduce the size of our work force and take other cost-cutting measures…"

The researchers labeled posts "informational" that contained straightforward facts about the recalls or crisis. This included multiple links to press releases and CDC documents informing the public on new recall information, giving answers for questions from the public (i.e. why are Blue Bell trucks on the highway if there are not any Blue Bell products?), and announcing the return of Blue Bell products to stores. Although Informational was not one of the response strategies proposed by Coombs (2015), the researchers noted that several of Blue Bell's Facebook posts during the crisis consisted of pure information such as the example shown in Figure 1.
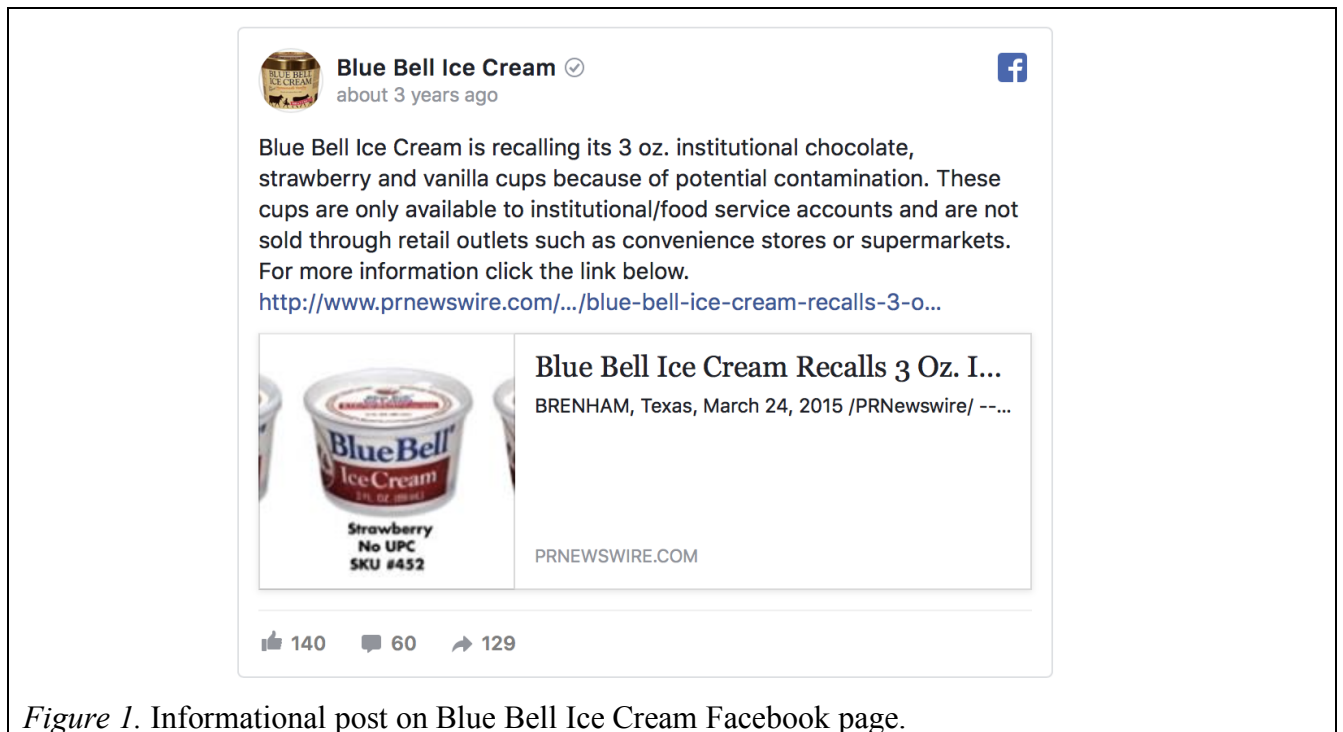

Figure 1. Informational post on Blue Bell Ice Cream Facebook page.

Posts that contained ingratiation themes were also frequently used by Blue Bell. These posts thanked Blue Bell's customers and other stakeholders for their support and loyalty. One post thanked Gallery Furniture, a Houston furniture store, for running an advertisement in the *Houston Chronicle* in support of Blue Bell during the crisis (Figure 2).
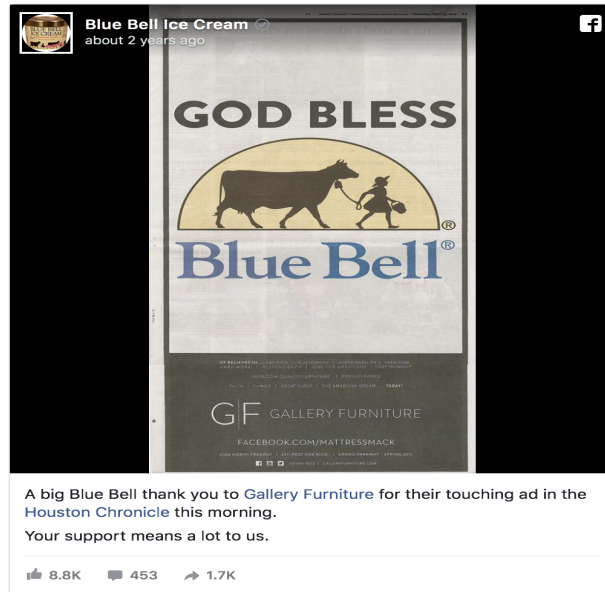
Figure 2. Gallery Furniture advertisement from the *Houston Chronicle*.

Blue Bell also thanked stakeholders for their loyalty through posts featuring their employees. A photo of employees was posted on April 24, 2015 (Figure 3) and several long-time employee testimonials were compiled into a video that was also posted on April 24 (Figure 4).


Figure 3. Photo of Blue Bell employees posted to Facebook.

Figure 4. Screenshot of video featuring Blue Bell employees.

The researchers found another theme repeatedly throughout the comments: Improvement. These posts highlighted Blue Bell's improvements to, and cleaning of, facilities to prepare to resume production. Posts with this theme created transparency for the consumers by letting them know what Blue Bell was doing to recover from this crises and prevent future ones (Figure 5). Some of these posts also answered questions from followers such as why Blue Bell started production at its facilities in Alabama rather than in Texas where the company's headquarters are located (Figure 6).
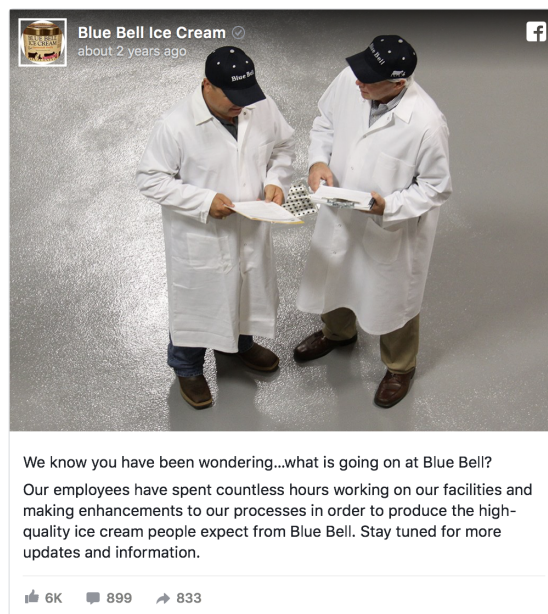
Figure 5. Example of an Improvement post by Blue Bell Ice Cream on Facebook.

Figure 6. Example of an Improvement post on Facebook in response to questions.

It is important to note that none of Blue Bell Creameries' Facebook posts were classified as Attacking, Denial, Scapegoating, Excusing, or Compensation; only the themes of Justification, Apology, Reminding, Ingratiation, Victimage, Informational, and Improvement were found.

RQ2: Themes Found in Comments

The following themes were found in Facebook comments posted by followers of the page: Loyalty, Question, Thank You, Denial, Religious, Justification, Other, Texas Should be First, Reminding, Victimize, Irrelevant, Attacking, Scapegoating, and Excusing. Many posts fit into multiple categories. The five most prevalent categories are listed in Table 3 with examples. An overwhelming trend found in the comments during this time period was loyalty.

Table 3

Themes Found in Comments.

Theme	Explanation	Example
Loyalty	Showing devotion to the company and/or its products	My husband has brought other so-called ice cream but I am faithful to Blue Bell
Question	Any reaction that includes a question directed to the company and/or other followers of its social media platforms	Is any of the Blue Bell Ice Cream bought in the Houston area from grocery stores from OK factories? How do we know the bacteria hasn't reached your other factories and are those being checked, too?
Thank You	Thanking the company for their reaction to the crisis	Thanks for being cautious and doing the right thing by your customers…
Denial	Denying that there is a crisis	Reading the [product recall press release] while finishing a bowl of Homemade Vanilla. Going back tomorrow for another ½ gallon!
Religious	Making any reference to a religious figure or practice in relation to the crisis	Praise God [that Blue is being distributed]!!!!! And we trust you Blue Bell can't wait to get my first spoon full [sic]

The loyalty theme was created when the researchers found a continuous tendency of comments to include support and loyalty for Blue Bell. Loyalty is defined as a "customer's commitment to do business with a particular organization, purchasing their goods and services repeatedly, and recommending the services and products to friends and associates" (McIlroy & Barnett, 2000, p.348). Examples of loyalty varied in this content analysis. One consumer replied to an April 6, 2015 post with, "please lord don't let me eat off brand ice cream…..I choose listeria poisoning." Statements by consumers refusing to buy any other brand of ice cream was a repeated form of loyalty. One consumer summed it up with the comment, "None like Blue Bell, none till Blue Bell!"

Another frequent theme found in the comments was "Question." These were posts that asked a question of Blue Bell. Questions about the outbreak, such as how to check for contaminated containers or which factories' ice cream was contaminated, were common. Unexpectedly, a vast number of comments that contained questions also incorporated loyalty. For example, one customer asked if Blue Bell had any merchandise they could purchase in the meantime to support the company financially. Another asked if Blue Bell was looking for any samplers to test their first batches after cleaning the production facilities. A different consumer asked when ice cream would

start being produced again and added that they were willing to drive to a factory themselves to get it.

A religious theme emerged from the comments as well. Any mentions of religious figures, faith, and prayer were included. For example, statements such as "God Bless Blue Bell" or saying they were praying for Blue Bell or its employees were fairly common. One example was a comment a Blue Bell employee added to an August 17, 2015 post: "So excited for our return, God bless blue bell they are an awesome company!!!!!! So ready to go back to work and deliver smiles to all our customers!!!!!!" Another stakeholder replied to a May 7, 2015 post with, "A summer without Blue Bell? Lord have mercy."

Many commenters thanked Blue Bell, which compelled the researchers to add the "Thank You" theme. These comments included consumers who were thankful Blue Bell was "taking care of the problem" or keeping the consumers informed. "Thank you" comments were identified as any comment that included the words "thank you." Many of these comments were also paired with loyalty such as a comment on June 25 that said the commenter could not wait to have Blue Bell again and appreciated the company's efforts in ensuring food safety. A similar comment appeared on a June 19, 2015 post: "Thanks for keeping us informed! We will be there when you start selling our beloved Blue Bell Ice Cream again!"

The last theme researchers added was "Texas Should be First." These comments were solely in response to posts made by Blue Bell on July 8, July 22, and August 5, 2015. The posts explained that production was starting in Alabama, machines were up and working in Alabama, and they were "cranking out ice cream" in Alabama, respectively. Comments ranged from saying "Texas should come first" to asking why the company would start somewhere else when Texas had been so loyal. One follower wrote, "Blue Bell ice cream from Alabama instead of Texas, what's the world coming to?" Another follower stated that she would wait to purchase Blue Bell ice cream that was produced in Texas.

Although rare, the researchers did find other posts that exhibited negative reactions to the crisis including themes of Victimize and Attacking. One commenter blamed upper management at Blue Bell for "putting production numbers over safety and quality." Another stated that they were angry the ice cream was unsafe and thereby putting their daughters at risk; the commenter told Blue Bell they "should be ashamed of the name [they're] giving the company."

Limitations

The first limitation of this study was the possibility that some comments may have been deleted by users or the Facebook page host before the researchers were able to review them. Comments that were made to posts after they were shared to private Facebook profile pages were also not available for researchers to analyze. Lastly, there was no way to view every post and comment on Facebook that was made about Blue Bell during the product recall unlike other social media platforms such as Twitter.

Conclusions

Many Blue Bell customers had an emotional reaction to this food crisis. This reaction is expected during a conflict such as a major *Listeria* outbreak and recall (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). This led to the behavior effect of posting emotionally-driven comments, which is to be expected when reacting to information about a conflict (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Blue

Bell predominantly posted messages that included Informational, Ingratiation, and Improvement themes during this crisis. Their consumers responded with comments containing overwhelming Loyalty themes as well as Questions and Thank Yous.

Blue Bell, whether knowingly or unknowingly, followed many of the recommendations of existing literature on crisis communications. Blue Bell was able to share information that its customers wanted and needed in an understandable way and responded to stakeholders' questions and concerns, which is what White et al. (2014) recommended. Blue Bell also practiced two-way communications by answering questions and comments in a timely manner, which Palmer et al. (2013) suggested doing during a foodborne illness outbreak. Blue Bell's social media also avoided lying, being dishonest, ignoring its stakeholders, staying silent, or downplaying public health. This may have been detrimental to its recovery after the crisis (Palmer et al., 2013). Wagler and Cannon (2015) proposed that engaging with the audience and framing conversations to seem more personal and genuine would help establish an entity as a leader during a crisis. Blue Bell kept its social media genuine, transparent, and frank and answered questions and concerns that customers had.

Blue Bell had built a strong brand image and reputation long before this crisis occurred (Ahmed & Natarajan, 2016). The company is known for being extremely transparent, even opening its factories to the public for tours for decades. The company was also transparent during the crisis. Many of its Facebook posts included information, interviews with upper management and employees, and videos of improvements Blue Bell was making to its factories to avoid another agri-food crisis. Van Woerkum & van Leishout (2007) stated that to maintain a reputation during a crisis, a company first has to be transparent during normal times. This transparency before and during the crisis may have significantly helped Blue Bell maintain its brand reputation among its customers throughout the crisis.

Discussion

As residents of Texas, including one Texas native, the researchers also believe the amount of loyalty and support Blue Bell found through this crisis was at least partially due to Texans' loyalty to Texas companies. A viral Facebook post by Texas resident Lindley (2015) epitomized this sentiment:

> Let me break this down for Northerners who can't understand the tragedy
> of recent events: The Blue Bell recall doesn't mean we're down a brand of
> ice cream. We don't BUY other brands of ice cream. The Blue Bell recall
> means WE ARE OUT OF ICE CREAM.

Texas is unique in that many of its citizens, current or past, tend to exhibit a great amount of pride in the state (Gittinger, 1940; Robinson, 1988; Fernandez, 2016). Although Blue Bell also received support from stakeholders outside of Texas, because Blue Bell was so strongly branded as a small, Texas-based company (Ahmed & Natarajan, 2016; Swartz, 2015), the researchers believe Texans stood up for, and supported, one of "their own" during the crisis.

It should also be noted that the comments in response to news media Internet posts covering the Blue Bell crisis of 2015 were not nearly as positive as those found on the Blue Bell Ice Cream Facebook page. Many of these comments reflected anger at, or distrust of, Blue Bell Creameries. The researchers believe three phenomena could explain this difference in response: 1) Fans of Blue Bell ice cream "liked" their Facebook page and continued to show support, whereas followers of

news media Facebook or web pages may not have supported Blue Bell to begin with 2) The researchers did not find many negative comments because they only viewed "top" comments or 3) Blue Bell edited comments during the crisis to eliminate a majority of negative comments.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend other agri-food companies operate transparently before, during, and after a crisis. Blue Bell had already established strong branding and transparency before the crisis. The researchers agree with Ahmed and Natarajan's (2016) findings that interaction with consumers on social media and a strong brand minimized damage to Blue Bell's image following the crisis. During the crisis, Blue Bell communicated Informational and Improvement messages through social media, which increased its transparent image.

Many agri-food companies wait until during or after a crisis to become transparent, if at all. It is imperative to create a feeling of transparency with stakeholders before and during a crisis. Although tours on the production line are no longer given, Blue Bell maintained transparency with its customers by offering factory tours for decades. Transparency creates brand trust, which can lead to brand loyalty (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001).

Companies in crisis with loyal consumers should take precautions to appear just as loyal, if not more, to their stakeholders than the stakeholders are to them. Blue Bell could have further bolstered transparency by explaining why Blue Bell production resumed in Alabama before Texas prior to stakeholders asking questions. Some stakeholders questioned whether their loyalty to Blue Bell was not going to be reciprocated. One stakeholder replied to a post announcing production that production would be starting in Alabama on July 8, 2015 by saying "Your TX supporters have been loyal to you. Can't believe you are starting anywhere else." Others stepped in to explain on behalf of Blue Bell: "People you don't get it. Alabama is a manufacturing location…that doesn't mean Alabama will get ice cream before TX. It means TX cream will come from Alabama manufacturing site. Blue Bell is a loyal company and will take care of Texas and ALL its faithful supporters."

Agri-food companies should avoid Coombs' (2015) themes of Attacking, Denial, Scapegoating, and Excusing on social media, much like Blue Bell did. The researchers agreed that although Blue Bell did not distribute Compensation messages, it could be a good strategy to use depending on the situation.

Additional research should be conducted to compare comments on news media's Facebook posts about the recall to the comments on the Blue Bell Facebook page during the same time period. It would be beneficial to know how the general public reacted to the recall versus followers of Blue Bell's social media. In any agri-food crisis, it is important for researchers to conduct a content analysis on news organizations' and companies' social media posts.

References

Ahmed, I., & Natarajan, V. S. (2016). Blue Bells of alarm: Can a strong brand relationship mitigate a product harm crisis? *Proceedings of The Association of Collegiate Marketing Educators*, *42*, 68-69.

Argenti, P. A., & Druckenmiller, B. (2004). Reputation and the corporate brand. *Corporate Reputation Review*, *6*(4), 368-374.

Ball-Rokeach, S. J. (1973). From pervasive ambiguity to a definition of the situation. *Sociometry*, *36*(3), 378. doi:10.2307/2786339

Ball-Rokeach, S. J., and DeFleur M. L. (1976). A dependency model of mass-media effects. *Communication Research*, *3*(1), 3-21. doi:10.1177/009365027600300101

Brooks, B. (2017). *A comparative content analysis of news stories and press releases during the 2015 Blue Bell ice cream recall.* Unpublished master's thesis. Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.

Carper, J. (2015). Blue Bell blossoms across the nation. *Dairy Foods*, *116*(2), 42-44, 46.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015a). *Listeria and Blue Bell ice cream: Contaminated production facilities and illnesses linked to Blue Bell Creameries*. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/listeria/pdf/bluebell-listeria-outbreak-infographic-508c.pdf

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015b). *Multistate outbreak of Listeriosis linked to Blue Bell Creameries products (Final Update)*. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/listeria/outbreaks/ice-cream-03-15/index.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018). *Listeria (Listeriosis) Questions and Answers*. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/listeria/faq.html

Charanza, A. D., & Naile, T. L. (2012). Media dependency during a food safety incident related to the U.S. beef industry. *Journal of Applied Communications*, *96*(3), 38-50. doi:10.4148/1051-0834.1145

Coombs, W. T. (2014). *Applied Crisis Communication and Crisis Management: Cases and Exercises*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Coombs, W. T. (2015). *Ongoing Crisis Communication*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Davies, G., & Miles, L. (1996). Reputation management: Theory versus practice. *Corporate Reputation Review*, *2*(1), 16-27.

Delgado-Ballester, E., & Munuera-Alemán, J. L. (2001). Brand trust in the context of consumer loyalty. *European Journal of Marketing*, 35(11), 1238-1258.

Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical orientation to sociological methods*. McGraw-Hill, New York.

Elkind, P. (2015, September 25). How Blue Bell blew it. *Fortune*. Retrieved from http://www.fortune.com

Fernandez, M. (2016, May 11). Readers from around the world express their love (or not) for Texas. *The New York Times*, p. A10.

Gibson, C., Ahrens, C., Meyers, C., & Irlbeck, E. (2012). Selected GO TEXAN members' online presence: A communications audit. *Journal of Applied Communications*, *96*(3), 26-37. doi:10.4148/1051-0834.1142

Gittinger, E. A. (1940). *The colonization of Texas: 1820-1830* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from Loyola eCommons.

Grieco, E. (2017, November). More Americans are turning to multiple social media sites for news. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org

Irlbeck, E., Jennings, J. F., Meyers, C., Gibson, C., & Chambers, T. (2013). A case study of the crisis communications used in the 2009 Salmonella outbreak in peanut products. *Journal of Applied* Communications, *97*(4), 19-32. doi:10.4148/1051-0834.1125

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry* (Vol. 75). Sage.

Lindley, J. S. [Jayson Seth]. (2015, April 21). Let me break this down for Northerners who can't understand the tragedy of recent events: The Blue Bell recall doesn't mean we're down a brand of ice cream. We don't BUY other brands of ice cream. The Blue Bell recall [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/jlindley

Krippendorff, K. (2013). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Mcllroy, A., & Barnett, S. (2000). Building customer relationships: do discount cards work? *Managing Service Quality*, 10(6), 347-355.

Palmer, A., Irlbeck, E., Meyers, C., & Chambers, T. (2013). A case study of the risk and crisis communications used in the 2008 Salmonella outbreak. *Journal of Applied Communications, 97*(1), 38-49.

Pew Research Center (2017). *Social Media Fact Sheet*. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org

Robinson, W. B. (1988). Pride of Texas: The state capitol. *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly, 92*(2), 227-246.

Swartz, M. (2015, June). Rocky Road. *Texas Monthly*. Retrieved from http://www.texasmonthly.com/

Van Woerkum, C. M. J., & van Lieshout, I. M. (2007). Reputation management in agro-food industries: Safety first. *British Food Journal*, *109*(5), 355-366.

Wagler, A., & Cannon, K. J. (2015). Exploring ways social media data inform public issues communication: An analysis of Twitter conversation during the 2012-2013 drought in Nebraska. *Journal of Applied Communications*, *99*(2), 45-60.

White, D., Meyers, C., Doerfert, D., & Irlbeck, E. (2014). Exploring agriculturalists' use of social media for agricultural marketing. *Journal of Applied Communications*, *98*(4), 72-85.