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Digital Communication Strategies for SMEs in Crisis: Resilience, Trust-Building, And Ethical Media Practices in 2025

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Abstract

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Ukraine operate under ongoing crisis conditions caused by war-related disruptions, economic instability, and high information uncertainty. These factors influence how businesses communicate and adapt their digital strategies. The findings are informed by interviews and one-on-one consultations with numerous Ukrainian SMEs conducted between 2022 and 2025 as part of several advisory and mentoring projects, providing first-hand insights into their communication needs during crisis periods. We examine digital communication approaches that strengthen resilience, trust-building, and ethical media practices for SMEs. The research highlights the importance of continuous crisis communication: when national or local disruptions occur, businesses must adjust communication plans, monitor the information landscape daily, and maintain transparent dialogue with clients and partners. In this context, trust-building becomes an essential component of communication resilience. A multi-channel approach is critical, especially as younger audiences increasingly rely on short-form video content on Instagram and TikTok. Established brands must adapt their content strategies to remain relevant and emotionally sensitive. We also explore ethical media practices, including responsible AI use and protection of personal data. It is significant for SMEs, as trust is key to maintaining market stability during prolonged crises. Another challenge is the performance of paid promotion in crisis conditions. Advertising campaigns often become less effective due to information noise and shifts in public sensitivity, as audiences prioritize safety, essential needs, and official information. Overall, SMEs that adopt flexible digital strategies, ethically grounded communication, and real-time responsiveness are better positioned to maintain resilience and sustain meaningful audience relationships.

Keywords: Crisis Communication; Digital Strategies; SMEs; Social Media Communication, Paid Advertising Performance