Community Crisis Recovery and Renewal in the New Media Environment:
How Facebook Groups Initiated Crisis Responses After the Louisiana Flood of 2016

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Abstract

Crisis communication research is an important and growing field, especially given the increasing frequency and scale of crises. Yet, most crisis communication research has been concerned with organizational responses to crisis and issues of image repair. An alternative approach to crisis emphasizes opportunities for growth and renewal after a crisis. Crisis communication as it pertains to communities has not been adequately addressed. This study examined community crisis responses and crisis renewal in the Facebook groups that formed after the 2016 flooding in Louisiana. This study presents how these groups used social media to encourage and facilitate crisis recovery and renewal. This study extends crisis communication research to a community-based event and illustrates how crisis renewal may occur using social media technologies.
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Between August 11 and August 14, 2016, more than 20 inches of rain fell in southeast Louisiana. Roads turned into rivers, interstates flooded and businesses and homes became submerged as the rain continued to fall. According to the National Weather Service, the severe flooding that affected Louisiana should statistically occur only once in a thousand years. The disastrous storm began in the same geographical area where hurricanes form, but never became a hurricane. Despite the significance and destruction, there was little media coverage, likely because of a few factors. Without a name or category distinction, the storm and its destruction were not widely covered by the national news outlets (Hersher, 2016). Media focused on covering the upcoming presidential election and the 2016 summer Olympics, which resulted in a widespread lack of awareness of the devastation (Pallota, 2016). Local weather services issued warnings and advisories, but evacuations did not commence until after the most intense rainfall began. As a result of the flooding, 13 people died and more than 100,000 homes were damaged (Hersher, 2016). Communication before, during and after an event such as a devastating flood is an important part of response and recovery, making it an important topic of study for public relations research. Effective communication among government and organizational leaders and community members can limit damages, save lives and utilize opportunities during recovery to build a better community after the crisis.

Almost immediately after the flooding began, volunteer groups of community members formed to rescue people trapped in the flooding and assist in recovery and rebuilding. State rescue personnel, the Louisiana National Guard and the United States Coast Guard mobilized to rescue people using high-water vehicles, helicopters and boats (Gutierrez, Vinograd &
Fieldstadt, 2016), but calls for rescue outnumbered what authorities could respond to. Citizen volunteers in fleets of flat-bottomed boats headed into the flood water to collect stranded residents. The “Cajun Navy” responded to rescue requests on Facebook and used mobile communication apps to coordinate rescues (Morris, 2016). The “Cajun Army” provided assistance on the ground, helping residents gut and rebuild homes (Hunter, 2016a). This historic flooding event demonstrates community-initiated crisis responses that contributed to recovery, rebuilding and renewal of devastated parts of Louisiana.

Crises, according to the academic literature, are “non-routine events in societies or their larger subsystem that involve social disruption and physical harm” (Seeger & Griffin-Padgett, 2010, p. 128). Crises typically involve high levels of uncertainty, severe threats to goals and values, and a short time in which to respond. High levels of uncertainty create an intense need for information in a time when communication technologies may be non-functional. After crises occur, the public often call on officials and spokespeople to explain how the crisis happened or what caused the crisis and questions of responsibility and blame arise. Even when there is not an organization at fault for the crisis, such as in the case of natural disasters, publics blame organizations for failed response efforts or delays in recovery (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). For example, after Hurricane Katrina, a Category 5 hurricane that struck the Gulf Coast in 2005, publics criticized local, state and federal governments for their responses to the disaster. The storm’s large death toll has been blamed on ineffective leadership, delayed disaster responses and miscommunication (Hsu, 2006).

Crisis communication research has predominately been interested in studying the strategies used to answer blame accusations and repair organizational image and reputation after a crisis event. The communication strategies suggested by these theories include denial,
counterattack, evasiveness and apology (Seeger & Griffin-Padgett 2010). These strategies recommend retrospective responses and communication may result in controversy or tension (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016).

Renewal is an alternative approach to image repair-focused crisis communication theories. Crisis renewal research goes beyond image restoration to study the ways strategic communication can contribute to recovery, rebuilding and growth after crises (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007, p. 319). Characteristics of renewal identified in research and case studies include strong community and organizational values, community and stakeholder relationships, and an attention to the needs that emerge in the wake of a crisis (Seeger & Griffin-Padgett 2010). Renewal can be defined as a new sense of purpose and direction discovered after a crisis (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2009). Instead of focusing on mitigating threats and managing responsibility and blame, crisis renewal identifies new opportunities organizations and communities have to rebuild and grow after a crisis.

Crisis renewal was first identified in organizational crisis communication research. It has been applied to case studies of private companies rebuilding after industrial accidents, responding to outbreaks of food-borne illnesses, and the recovery of American organizations after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. More recently, crisis renewal has been expanded to cases of community crisis recovery (Seeger & Griffin-Padgett, 2010).

Research on this optimistic crisis approach has primarily explored management responses to crises and has not been extensively applied in the new media environment (Liu & Fraustino, 2014). New media refers to communication via digital technologies, such as social media. Social media have potential to facilitate multi-vocal responses from organizations and publics and creates new opportunities for recovery and renewal after crisis (Liu & Fraustino, 2014). For this
study, social media are defined as interactive digital or mobile tools that allow users to access, create and influence content. These tools offer two-way communication capabilities and a forum for dialogue and content exchange. During crisis situations, social media may be used for rapid information seeking and sharing and result in positive outcomes, such as support for organizations in crises (Liu, Fraustino, & Jin, 2016). Despite the potential social media hold as tools for positive crisis outcomes, research has not yet addressed how social media function in cases of community renewal after a crisis.

This purpose of this study is to address the aforementioned research gap and provide insights into how social media may be used to facilitate crisis recovery and promote a more optimistic response to crisis. Analyzing crisis communication in the new media environment using the lens of renewal could provide insight into how social media may be used to facilitate crisis recovery and promote a more optimistic response to crisis. Previous research on crisis, as well as research on social media, has mainly focused on the organization’s communications as opposed to the audience or community’s crisis response and communication. This study provides a new perspective to crisis communication research by examining crisis communication and recovery on the community level. Specifically, this study will examine the volunteer groups, the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army, that formed after the Louisiana flooding and how they may have contributed to crisis renewal using social media tools. Through a case study analysis of the volunteer group’s social media posts and community news coverage of the “Great Flood of 2016,” this study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) what elements of renewal can be found in community news coverage of the Louisiana event?; (2) how did community crisis communication via social media contribute to recovery and renewal in Louisiana?; and (3) what elements of renewal can be identified in the community response to the Louisiana flooding?
Case Background

On August 5, 2016, a slow moving, low-pressure weather system formed over the Florida Gulf Coast, prompting the National Hurricane Center to take notice. The storm had the potential to form a tropical storm or hurricane, but did not develop the wind speeds characteristic of a cyclone. Instead, the system slowly moved across southern Louisiana, where local weather offices recognized its potential flood risk. On August 8, the New Orleans/Baton Rouge National Weather Service Weather Forecast Office began issuing advisories and warnings about heavy rain. By August 11, flash-flood warnings were elevated to flash-flood emergencies, which are only issued for weather events that cause significant and immediate threat to life and property. The weather system did not have a name or a category distinction, and authorities struggled to accurately communicate its threats without historical precedents to reference (Hersher, 2016).

The unnamed storm caused a record amount of rain, with as much as two feet of rain falling in 48 hours on southeast Louisiana. The intense rainfall overwhelmed drainage systems, leading to immediate flash flooding in small streams, creeks and neighborhoods. Floodwater then flowed into river systems, reaching record heights and spreading the flooding farther across the state (Schleifstein, 2016). Louisiana residents in the most affected parishes were urged to evacuate, but over a hundred roads throughout the state were closed due to flooding and people were left stranded in their homes and cars. The Louisiana National Guard, and the United States Coast Guard, along with emergency responders, rescued over 20,000 stranded residents (Gutierrez et al., 2016).

In addition to the official rescue efforts, an informal volunteer group called “The Cajun Navy” rescued thousands of stranded residents. “The Cajun Navy” formed via social media as residents responded to calls for help on Facebook. Volunteers from Louisiana and Mississippi
turned their personal boats into a rescue fleet and used their experiences with hunting and boating to safely navigate the floodwaters. The group responded to requests for help made via Facebook and used Zello, a central dispatch communication app, and Glympse, a location sharing app, to coordinate its rescue efforts (Lohr, 2016; Morris, 2016). After the rescues slowed down, the group transitioned to coordinating and distributing supplies to those in need, as well as working with efforts to rebuild (The Cajun Navy, 2016).

A week after the flooding, Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards stated that many people had been slow to realize the flooding’s impact and predicted that the recovery process was going to take many months (Kennedy, 2016). An economist from Louisiana State University estimated it would take a year for the most devastated areas of the state to fully recover, but Retired Lt. Gen. Russel Honore, who coordinated military response after Hurricane Katrina, predicted a full recovery could take up to 10 years. Many flood-damaged homes weren’t in designated flood zones and had not historically experienced flooding. As a result, homeowners did not carry flood insurance policies and have had to request funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for financial assistance for repairs (LaRose, 2016). After the floodwaters receded, residents returned to their homes to clean out damaged belongings and begin rebuilding their homes. To assist in recovery efforts and coordinate volunteers, another group called “The Cajun Army” formed via Facebook. The Cajun Army takes a “boots on the ground” approach and has delivered food and supplies, as well as helped residents gut and rebuild their homes.

The Louisiana Flood case was selected for study as it provides examples of communities self-organizing to recover and renew after crisis using social media technology. A literature review will provide a brief overview of dominant crisis communication theories before reviewing renewal literature. Literature regarding community resilience and social media usage
after a crisis will also be included in the review, as these are pertinent to the case selected for study.

**Literature Review**

The literature review will begin by defining the general area of focus of this research: crises and disasters. An overview of dominant crisis communication theories, including corporate apologia, image repair theory and situational crisis communication theory will provide background on the field of crisis research and illustrate why a different approach to crisis communication is valuable. Crisis renewal, a newer approach to crisis communication, will then be presented. Exploring previous research applications of crisis renewal will illustrate how renewal has been used by organizations and communities to take advantage of opportunities inherent in crises and encourage positive outcomes. This will also identify current gaps in crisis renewal research, which include research from a community perspective. Relevant literature from outside the public relations field will introduce the concept of community resilience, which scholars have suggested is important to community crisis recovery. Because this research seeks to apply crisis renewal to a case involving social media, literature regarding uses of social media during crises will be included in this review.

**Defining Crises and Disasters**

Disasters and crises are characterized by high levels of uncertainty, severe threats to high priority goals and values, and a short or restricted response time (Seeger & Griffin-Padgett, 2010). Some communication scholars distinguish between the terms disaster and crisis, viewing crises as events affecting organizations and disasters as events affecting communities or the general population (Fraustino, Liu & Jin, 2012). Classic crisis definitions are organization-based and emphasize the role of threats to an organization’s reputation during crises. Therefore,
dominant crisis communication strategies focus on an organization’s response to crisis. Organizations primarily are concerned with alleviating threats by protecting organizational image and restoring stability (Ulmer 2012; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). By the classic definition, an example of a crisis would be an outbreak bacteria contamination at a restaurant and communication strategies would likely focus on regaining customer trust and support. Disaster, on the other hand, has been defined as a disruption to the functioning of a community or society, causing widespread losses that exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources (National Science and Technology Council, 2005). For example, a major adverse weather event can cause physical destruction to a community and external intervention is often required for the community to make a full recovery. In the case selected for study, the flooding event would fit this definition of disaster as it caused widespread losses and full recovery will depend on federal funding.

Disasters may prompt organizational crises, while organizational crises often impact communities and societies, due to a growing dependence on organizations (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2011). Despite these distinctions, the terms disaster and crisis have been used interchangeably, and the term crisis has been used to describe events that disrupt regions and communities, as well as organizations. Seeger and Sellnow (2016) explain that the difference between the terms is usually one of emphasis. A crisis is often contained in scope and impact, while a disaster is a more widespread event impacting societies or communities. These events usually have social, economic and political impact, whether they are described as a crisis or a disaster (p. 13). Ulmer (2012) argues that narrowly defining a crisis as a threat to an organization has limited research opportunities and communication choices during a crisis and has excluded research questions that may help both communities and organizations communicate more
effectively after a crisis (p. 526). This study will use a broader definition of crisis to expand crisis communication research to a community-based event. With the definition of crisis established, dominant crisis communication theories will be reviewed before crisis renewal research is presented.

**Dominant Crisis Communication Theories**

Crisis communication research has grown as a field of study in response to the frequency and scale of crises, driven in part by aging infrastructures, growing populations, greater technological dependence and environmental changes (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016, p. 7). Crisis communication research has remained organization-based and predominately focused on protecting or repairing organizational image (Ulmer et al., 2009). Blame narratives frequently emerge after crises as publics, organizations and government agencies look for a party to hold responsible (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). Dominant crisis communication theories have developed in response to accusations of blame and responsibility. These include corporate apologia (Hearit, 1994), image restoration theory (Benoit, 1997) and situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2007). An overview of these theories will illustrate typical organizational crisis responses.

Almost all crises cause physical or economic harm or losses and create confusion as affected individuals and organizations struggle to make sense of what happened (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). After a crisis, affected individuals, groups or organizations often question who is to blame for the event. Attackers may seek to bring public outrage against an organization or agency deemed responsible for causing the crisis and demand it be held accountable. Parties that feel they have been blamed unfairly generally counteract accusations through through self-defense speech. Response strategies aimed at reducing blame are referred to as apologia (Seeger
Apologia is not exactly an apology, but rather a response to criticism that seeks to give a compelling competing account of organizational accusations (Hearit, 2001, p. 502). Organizations may defend themselves by denying involvement, shifting blame to a different individual or organization through a scapegoating strategy, or directing blame at a larger industrial or societal problem (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). An example of apologia can be found in the aftermath of the 1997 Red River Flood. Cities along the border of North Dakota and Minnesota were faced with managing one of the most damaging floods in recent history. The National Weather Service was unable to accurately predict flooding levels and had to correct flood risks communicated to the public multiple times, resulting in uncertainty and frustration. Floodwaters reached levels that had not occurred in over 100 years and the financial impact of the flood was estimated to be $5 billion. The National Weather Service was blamed by city officials, city officials were criticized by residents, and residents blamed each other for intensifying flooding, creating multiple instances of self-defense and apologia (Ulmer et. al, 2011).

Image repair theory moves beyond self-defense speech as offered in apologia literature to offer strategies on repairing damaged reputations (Benoit, 1995). Image is how stakeholders and publics perceive an organization; it is considered a valuable commodity for organizations as they depend on stakeholders for survival (Seeger & Griffin-Padgett, 2010). Benoit (1995) describes five strategies to repair image: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification. Denial and evasion of responsibility strategies attempt to repair image by convincing the public the organization was not involved or should not be held accountable. Reducing offensiveness for harm created can minimize damage to an organization’s image. Corrective action makes amends for the crisis by promising to prevent another crisis from
occurring. Mortification is a complete acceptance of responsibility and request for forgiveness. After Hurricane Katrina, involved parties, including FEMA, the Bush Administration, the city of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana engaged in image repair strategies of denial, blame shifting, evasion and mortification (Ulmer et al., 2009). President Bush and New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin did not create consensus or a plan for rebuilding New Orleans. Rather, leaders concentrated on strategic rhetoric to bolster their images after disaster responses failed. Public conflicts surrounding issues of race, class and poverty dominated post-crisis communication, instead of plans to rebuild and renew New Orleans (Ulmer et al., 2009).

According to Coombs (2007), situational crisis communication theory is a synthesis of corporate apologia and image restoration theory. Strategic responses are recommended based on the threat level and threat type a crisis poses to an organization’s reputation (Coombs, 2007). Threats to organizational reputation are evaluated by crisis type, crisis history and the organization’s prior reputation. Response strategies are similar to those image restoration theory offers but are tailored to the specific situation (Coombs, 2009). For example, situational crisis theory recommends providing instructions and expressions of sympathy to potential victims or victims of a crisis and adding use of a compensation strategy when victims suffer significant harm (Coombs, 2009).

Apologia, image restoration and situational crisis communication have generated a large body of research, created guidelines for public relations communication, and served as a general model of post-crisis communication (Seeger & Griffin-Padgett 2010, p. 132). Despite this, image repair and related theories approach complex, dynamic crises in a reductionist manner and are mainly concerned with organization-based crises. Organizations tend to interpret accusations of wrongdoing as threats to an organization’s image instead of as problems of substance within an
organization. Responses are aimed at repairing reputations, not on solutions to mistakes or system failures.

Furthermore, because image repair is strategic communication, it can be interpreted as public relations “spin” and may ignore other post-crisis communication needs. (Seeger & Griffin-Padgett 2010, p. 132). In crisis situations that directly threaten stakeholders and communities such as oil spills, nuclear meltdowns, sexual abuse scandals or natural disasters, prioritizing the organization’s image over ethical communication stakeholders is an inappropriate and unethical communication strategy (Ulmer, 2012). Apologia, image repair, and situational crisis communication are focused on how organizations should respond to accusations of blame to maintain or improve their reputation and image. An alternative approach to crisis communication centered around opportunities and the ways in which organizations and communities can renew after a crisis will now be presented.

**Crisis Renewal and Opportunities Inherent in Crises**

Crisis negatively impact individuals, stakeholders, communities and countries through physical, emotional and economic damages (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). Effective crisis communication has the potential to save lives, build resilient organizations and communities, and encourage growth and learning after a crisis. Despite this potential, typical crisis communication does little to relieve the impact of crises on stakeholders or create resolution. Instead, it remains concerned with repairing organizational image and responding to blame accusations (Ulmer, 2012). According to Seeger and Sellnow (2016), after crises, blame narratives often dominate public arguments, distracting from efforts to aid victims, rebuild systems and learn from the event. Contrasting typical responses to crises is an alternate approach to crisis communication that addresses the opportunities inherent to crises.
Scholars have described crisis renewal as “discourse of renewal” (Ulmer et al., 2007; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002) and as “renewal narratives” (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). The term discourse of renewal is more frequently used in studies of organizational crises to describe communication messages and strategies that aim to give an organization a new purpose and direction after a crisis (Ulmer et. al, 2011). Seeger and Sellnow (2016) apply the concepts of discourse of renewal to their analysis of crisis narratives. To paraphrase Seeger and Sellnow, crisis narratives are stories people use to shape understanding and meaning in response to the disruptions and damages crises cause (2016, pg. 31). Renewal narratives are focused on rebuilding and recovering stronger than before the crisis. These narratives may help organizations and communities take advantage of opportunities inherent in crisis, as well as facilitate self-organization and the development of more resilient organizations and communities (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016).

Crisis renewal was first applied to organization-based crises, but has recently been expanded to communities and societies. Renewal focuses on opportunities for repair, rebuilding and growth after a crisis (Ulmer et al., 2009). The development of the renewal approach to crises and subsequent research is associated with a small group of scholars in the public relations and crisis communication research fields. Seeger and Ulmer (2001) first proposed a renewal framework in their case study of Malden Mills and Cole Hardwood, in which CEOs responded to industrial crises with commitments to support their stakeholders and rebuild factories (Seeger & Ulmer, 2001). Continued development crisis renewal identified four dominant features of the communication approach: opportunities inherent in a crisis, a prospective focus, provisional, rather than strategic responses, and ethical communication grounded in core values (Seeger & Griffin Padgett, 2010; Seeger & Sellnow, 2016; Seeger & Ulmer, 2001; Ulmer et al., 2009).
Opportunities for growth, learning, restoration and renewal to occur exist after a crisis causes severe disruption to a region, community or organization. Organizations and communities can reemerge or reinvent themselves after a crisis without previous constraints or limitations (Seeger & Griffin Padgett, 2010). When elements vital to normal functioning, such as services, operations and structures, are broken down by crisis, opportunities for change and new forms of stability arise (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). Crises caused by natural disasters, such as floods, hurricanes or tornadoes, damage important infrastructure, such as electric grids and transportation systems, but may be more conducive to renewal as they create a need to rebuild and an opportunity to do so better than before (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016; Ulmer et al., 2009). For example, after a tornado struck Greensburg, Kansas in 2007, destroying 95 percent of the buildings in the city, survivors were left without housing, electricity, or running water. Citizens were stunned by the loss; still, the town was able to reshape its identity through its recovery and rebuilding process. Today, Greensburg is a green community with several eco-homes powered by solar and wind energy (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2011).

Natural disasters are not the only crises that create opportunities for an organization or a community to identify mistakes, confront problems and learn from failures to strengthen future activities. For example, Odwalla was able to learn and renew after a food-borne illness crisis. After its unpasteurized apple juice led to a deadly *E. coli* outbreak in 1996, the juice producer Odwalla quickly recalled the juices and made substantial changes to its production processes. Two months after the outbreak, Odwalla introduced a new flash-pasteurization technique that revolutionized the entire juice industry. Odwalla was able to retain the majority of its accounts after the crisis and has not experienced another major recall since adopting flash pasteurization (Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 107).
Contrasting other crisis communication theories that have a retrospective vision and a focus on issues of blame and fault, renewal communication uses prospective vision and an optimistic tone proposing a better future (Ulmer et al., 2009, p. 306). As Seeger and Griffin-Padgett (2010) describe, a prospective vision of the future can create a renewed commitment from stakeholders, giving organizations support to move forward while avoiding questions of responsibility and accusations. For example, after a fire at Cole Hardwood destroyed its lumber mill, the CEO and owner Milt Cole immediately announced plans to rebuild the mill and was able to reconstruct the businesses without losing employee support and without facing questions of responsibility or blame. While the mill was still on fire, Cole announced that he would continue to pay employees as a new mill was constructed with state-of-the-art equipment and a more efficient design (Ulmer et al., 2011, p. 96). Hope for the future can motivate communities affected by crises to rebuild and emerge stronger after a crisis (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016).

Ethical communication grounded in core values such as honesty, openness, responsibility and accountability builds strong stakeholder relationships, creating a resource for organizations to utilize during crisis recovery. In renewal discourse, provisional responses drawn from ethics and values are emphasized over strategic, calculated messages. In turn, effective organizational rhetoric motivates stakeholders to support an organization through a crisis. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, government, military and private industry leaders demonstrated ethical communication through provisional responses. Instead of strategic, calculated rhetoric, communication messages emphasized the nationwide values of patriotism and independence to encourage Americans to return to prior lifestyles and thus minimize the economic impact of the assault (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002).
Strong stakeholder relationships build reservoirs of goodwill that are valuable resources to organizations recovering from crises. Stakeholders also may be a part of rebuilding and growth. After a plant fire destroyed Malden Mills, putting thousands of employees out of work, stakeholders supported the CEO Aaron Feuerstein with more than $300,000 in donations and letters of support to employees. Prior to the fire, Feuerstein had built strong relationships with his employees and customers, sponsored job-training problems, and extended lines of credit to community businesses. The relationship building efforts Feuerstein engaged in created goodwill with his stakeholders, which resulted in stakeholder support after the mill fire (Ulmer et al., 2009, p. 306).

Goodwill can also develop as a consequence of crisis out of feelings of sympathy and support and can manifest in volunteerism (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). Individuals and groups responding to a crisis or disaster scene are often not part of official emergency management systems. Many are unofficial, yet concerned volunteers who wish to help out of personal identification with victims (Fernandez, Barbera & van Dorp, 2006). Spontaneous volunteers often self-organize to address perceived needs and address problems that formal response groups fail to solve. Volunteer groups are able to apply new technologies, strategies and tools. For example, after the September 11 World Trade Center attack, a group of telecommunication professionals self-organized to create and deploy a victim tracking system on cell phones (Fernandez et al., 2006, as cited in Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). Informal, citizen volunteers can play vital roles in response and recovery efforts after emergencies and disasters by providing necessary manpower and support to emergency personnel (Fernandez, Barbera & van Dorp, 2006). Despite their potential, informal volunteers are often undervalued by professionals and official agencies responding to crises and disasters. Whittaker, McLennan and Handmer (2015)
have argued that informal volunteers will provide much of the capacity required to respond to more frequent disasters in the future. Volunteer efforts are most visible immediately after a crisis or disaster, but volunteerism can extend over a significant period of time as individuals and groups continue to support rebuilding efforts (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016).

In the case selected for study, a devastating flood created physical disruptions to elements of normal life. Homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed by flooding, forcing Louisiana residents to rebuild and giving them an opportunity to rebuild into better, more resilient communities. Old relationships became valuable resources to residents in need of assistance rebuilding and new relationships formed via Facebook groups. These Facebook groups are also examples of goodwill manifesting into informal volunteerism, as citizens used their personal resources to rescue people stranded in flooding and help rebuild homes. To apply crisis renewal to the Louisiana Flood of 2016, this study asks what themes and aspects of renewal can be found in community news coverage of the event and in the messages of the Facebook groups that formed in response to the event.

**Community Crisis Recovery and Resilience**

Ulmer (2012) has suggested that while theory development and research to guide *organizational* recovery and renewal is important, *community* crisis recovery also needs to be developed. He stated that communities cannot wait for organizations to provide crisis messages and must prepare to serve as their own resources of support. Communities must be able to utilize resources, citizens and organizations to develop communication infrastructures in the aftermath of a crisis. Micro-infrastructures, such as interpersonal relationships, and meso-infrastructures, such as organizations and communities, can provide crisis information, coordinate community responses and build community resilience (Ulmer, 2012).
Community resilience is a process that links capacities and resources, such as economic development, social capital and information and communication, to adaptation after disaster (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche & Pfefferbaum, 2008). Similar to the way ethical communication and stakeholder relationships can help an organization affect renewal and growth after a crisis, a community can adapt and survive disasters and crises through engagement of local people, use of social support, and strong communication. In particular, citizen engagement and participation, which often occurs through volunteerism, is an important factor in community disaster resilience (Whittaker et al., 2015).

A case study of the 2005 school shootings in Red Lake, Minnesota (Littlefield, Reierson, Cowden, Stowman & Long Feather, 2009), applied themes of renewal to community crisis recovery. The study identified elements of renewal in media coverage of the shootings on the Red Lake Indian Reservation. Examples of forward thinking, strong leadership and attention to stakeholder needs in the community’s responses were identified in the case, suggesting that renewal can be extended beyond organizations to communities and cultural groups. Crisis renewal suggests that organizations and management lead renewal efforts, but stakeholders also have the ability to enact renewal responses post-crisis (Littlefield et al., 2009). This suggests that renewal should not only be examined from an organizational or ownership perspective and should be extended to cases of community crisis responses.

Through a case study analysis of marginalized communities recovering from crises, Reierson and Littlefield (2012) proposed a community model of crisis renewal which expanded existing organizational renewal theory. Their analysis of the 2005 Red Lake school shooting incident and of recovery from Hurricane Katrina found that the crisis renewal model based on organizational crisis recovery did not accurately reflect community crisis renewal. Cultural
heritage and past traditions were found to be central to the sense-making process of community groups. Analysis suggested that communities may use shared cultural heritage to build cohesiveness and investment in rebuilding the community. Additionally, a common vision and a focus on healing and higher values appeared as key components to community renewal and were incorporated into the community crisis renewal model (Reierson & Littlefield, 2012).

Due to the framework’s origin in organization-based crises and the tendency of scholars to view crises as organization-based events, renewal has not been extensively applied in community-based crises. Additionally, renewal has not been applied to cases in the new media environment, in which digital technology and social media have created an interactive platform for communication (Liu & Fraustino, 2014). Social media was utilized as a communication tool in the Louisiana flooding case selected for this research. An overview of social media and crisis communication will summarize existing literature on social media and crisis and illustrate how social media is used by publics after crises.

**Crisis Communication in the Age of Social Media**

Social media are digital tools that enable interactive communication between and among audiences and organizations, and can be used to build mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and publics (Austin, Liu, & Jin, 2012; Smith, 2010). New media create opportunities for crisis preparation and recovery, and social media can facilitate multi-vocal responses from publics and organizations (Liu & Fraustino, 2014). Research on effectively incorporating social media into organizational crisis responses is limited and mainly focused on websites and blogs. Traditional blogs are now less popular than social networking sites, such as Facebook, as well as microblogging sites, such as Twitter – indicators that crisis communication researchers must shift their focus to other new media (Austin et al., 2012, p.189). New media
crisis communication studies have examined how practitioners and organizations use social media, rather than focusing on audience use (Austin et al., 2012, p.189). As Schultz, Utz and Gortiz (2011) have argued, crisis communication research has largely depended on organization-centered models of communication. These models focus on the recipient’s constructions of crisis responsibility and infer stakeholder reactions. Crisis communication research should account for the complexity of interactive communication between organizations and stakeholders, and examine communication from stakeholders as well as organizations.

Social media use increases during times of crisis as publics clamor for information, and may be perceived to be more credible than traditional media (Austin et al., 2012, p.191). According to Fraustino, Liu and Jin (2012), publics may prefer social media during crises for the sake of convenience and for access to timely, unfiltered information. Social media also provides a way to check in with friends and family, maintain a sense of community and social support, and self-mobilize during a crisis. Motivations for publics’ social media use in the aftermath of a crisis are not related to organizational image or blame narratives, but organizations nevertheless remain focused on post-crisis image repair. Additionally, Liu and Fraustino (2014) have suggested that image repair theories developed before the emergence of these new media technologies may no longer be applicable given the complexities new media has brought into communication. Therefore, crisis communication research must evolve as the media environment has and should explore other uses for social media communication aside from image repair.

In addition to the communication and information tools social media provides to online publics, social media also provides publics with a platform for becoming active communicators and conducting public relations roles after a crisis (B. Smith, 2010). In 2010, Twitter users in Haiti fulfilled public relations roles after a 7.0-magnitude earthquake destroyed the capital city of
Port-Au-Prince. The earthquake killed an estimated 200,000 to 250,000 people and caused up to $14 billion in damages. After the earthquake, messages from non-organizational publics, groups who may not have a defined role or interest in an organization, influenced the reputations of organizations involved in the country’s recovery and reflected the online relationship strategies of communicated commitment and conversational human voice. Twitter users communicated commitment through declarations of support and intention to donate, and added real human voices to the earthquake response by offering candid, real-life perspectives to organizational efforts. Smith (2010) called this user engagement a “socially distributed model of public relations,” in which individuals with little stake in an organization initiate public relations activities via communication technology and user interactivity (p. 333). In social public relations, sharing messages is made easy. The functional interactivity of social media provides tools to rapidly disseminate messages. For example, a social media user can easily retweet messages on Twitter, transmitting them instantaneously to all individuals who follow the user’s account. These messages can associate users with an online community, communicate in ways organizations cannot, and fulfill or impede public relations efforts (B. Smith, 2010, p. 332).

Not only does social media technology enable citizens to be active communicators, but it also provides them with new opportunities for active participation after crises and disasters. Examples of “digital volunteerism” range from using sites like Facebook to share information, to complex crowdsourcing, data mining and crisis mapping (Whittaker et al., 2016, p. 364). After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, digital volunteers created a crisis map using data sourced from hundreds of online sources. Using an open-source mapping software, volunteers were able to create a map showing the extent of the damage and the affected population’s needs. The crisis map eventually expanded to integrate text messages from Haitians reporting their locations and
needs. Digital volunteerism allows citizens to participate in crisis and disaster management in other countries, and is likely to become more prevalent in disaster management (Whittaker et al., 2016).

As this research seeks to explore the use of social media in a case of community crisis recovery, this study asks how social media was used after the Louisiana flooding to facilitate crisis recovery and renewal. To expand crisis renewal research into the digital communication sphere new media environment and analyze what themes of crisis renewal apply to social media communication, this study also asks what elements of renewal can be found in the community’s social media response to the Louisiana flood.

**Study Justification**

Renewal is an emerging framework that provides an alternative to image repair strategies after crisis. It has been of practical use in guiding organizational communication strategies to renew, grow and learn after a crisis, but has been limited in research applications. Coombs (2009) views renewal as restricted approach to crisis communication because it is not appropriate for all crisis responses. Renewal highlights the value of positive communication, but successful renewal is dependent on the nature of the crisis and the organization in crisis (Coombs, 2009, p. 246). Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2009) state that privately owned organizations may be more capable of utilizing renewal theory because of a sense of autonomy and entrepreneurial spirit in their leadership. Consequently, case study applications have primarily focused on privately owned organizations, leaving public organizations and communities relatively understudied.

Further, crisis communication research on renewal remains management focused and mainly provides insights on how organizations can best communicate after crisis. Research on community instances of renewal is limited to a few case studies, including the Red Lake School
shootings and the community recovery of Oklahoma City after the Murrah Federal Building was bombed in 1995 (Littlefield et al., 2009; Veil, Sellnow & Heald, 2011). Renewal has not been applied to cases in the new media environment, where digital tools and social media have created new communication opportunities and complexities (Liu & Fraustino, 2014). Examining community recovery in the new media environment through the theoretical framework of renewal, as this study proposes, will provide insights into how communities can use new media and communication to encourage resilience, renewal and growth after a crisis.

Methods

This research project will examine Louisiana community crisis responses and recovery efforts after the 2016 historic flooding event. An in-depth case study will provide insights into how community groups used new media tools and technology to communicate, utilize resources and contribute to renewal and growth after the 2016 historic flooding event in southeast Louisiana.

Case Studies in Crisis Communication Research

The case study research approach has the ability to explore, describe and explain the dynamics of a crisis situation (Littlefield et al., 2009, p. 366). Case studies are useful when researching complex processes that are not easily isolated from the social context in which they occur (Cutler, 2004 p. 367). This research will analyze communication material from the 2016 Louisiana flooding using renewal framework. The case study approach will allow this research to explore community recovery in the new media environment in a real-life context and provide insight into how communication can facilitate recovery and rebuilding after a crisis.

As demonstrated in the literature review section, renewal as a crisis communication response has been relatively understudied; research has primarily been conducted by the scholars
who first identified renewal, Ulmer and Seeger (2001). Renewal offers an alternative to image-repair-focused crisis responses but it has been used in limited applications outside of organization-centered crises. This makes it particularly well-suited to a case-study methodology, as Eisenhardt (1989) argues that case studies are most appropriate in the early stages of research or when providing a new perspective to an already researched topic (p.548). Case studies have been criticized for their descriptive nature (Coombs & Holladay, 2008) and for a lack of generalizability (Cutler, 2004). However, case studies can be used to develop analytical generalizations by comparing a case to an existing theory, which can build support for that theory (Cutler, 2004, p. 369). This research intends to compare the Louisiana flooding case to an existing crisis renewal framework, which may build support for or expand crisis renewal. Prior research has successfully been used to explore cases of renewal (Littlefield et al., 2009; Reierson et al., 2009)

In addition to providing new perspectives, case studies also have the ability to synthesize multiple data sources from real-world crisis situations (Len-Rios, 2010, p. 268). For this study, data sources will include Louisiana news media content and Facebook content. Media content from selected Louisiana community news outlets will capture pre-crisis messages, messages during the crisis and post-crisis recovery messages and provide background and perspective to the case. Local news was an important source of information during the flooding crisis, as national media outlets were late to start covering the flooding (Hersher, 2016). Examining the Facebook accounts of the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army groups will provide insight into how community groups used new media to form communication networks and utilize community resources to recover and rebuild after the 2016 flooding.
Research Questions

While the focus of this research is primarily on how community group used social media to communicate during a crisis event and encourage renewal, examining local news coverage will provide important background information and context to this case study. According to Creswell (2013), successful qualitative case studies require an in-depth understanding of the case and use multiple forms of data to accomplish this (p. 98). Other case studies examining crisis communication and renewal have utilized media coverage as a data source (Littlefield et al., 2009; Len-Rios, 2010; Barone, 2014). Additionally, disaster management researchers and practitioners often state that “all disasters are local,” and indicate that the public prefers information from local sources rather than national sources (Liu, Fraustino & Jin, 2015).

RQ1: What elements of renewal can be found in community news coverage of the Louisiana event?

The goal of this research is to explore a case of community crisis recovery and renewal in the new media environment. Therefore, examining community social media accounts for messages with elements of renewal will give insight into how the renewal framework applies in a community crisis recovery.

RQ2a: What elements of renewal can be found on messages on the Facebook groups that formed in response to the 2016 Louisiana Flooding?

RQ2b: How did community crisis communication via social media contribute to recovery and rebuilding after the Louisiana Flooding?

In addition to looking for elements of renewal, this study seeks to explore how communication can lead to action and recovery. More than 60,000 homes were destroyed by flooding, creating an opportunity for rebuilding and renewal. The Cajun Navy and Cajun Army
were not the only groups engaged in relief and recovery efforts, but they were the main informal volunteer groups active on social media. Examining how community crisis communication operated in Louisiana may provide insight into how other communities could employ similar strategies to recover and renew after a crisis.

**Data Collection**

This case study will use qualitative content analysis to examine communication materials from Louisiana news outlets and Facebook posts from the Cajun Army and Cajun Navy group pages from August 8 to November 8. Creswell describes the process of qualitative data analysis as consisting of preparing and organizing data, reducing data into themes using a process of coding and representing the data in figures, tables or discussion (2013, p. 180). Data is typically organized into files before researchers read the database in an initial exploration. After reading, researchers describe, classify and interpret the data, forming codes. Coding aggregates data into small categories of information and looks for evidence supporting the code in the database before assigning a label to the code. Preexisting codes may be used to guide the coding process, but Creswell encourages researchers using preexisting codes to be open to additional codes that emerge during analysis (2013, p. 184). For this study, a coding frame with elements of renewal identified by other scholars will be used to guide data analysis, but the coding frame will be modified as other themes and patterns emerge from the analysis.

Text material referencing the flood published online from August 8, 2016 to November 8, 2016, will compose the media database for this study. This three-month period will capture news of immediate crisis messages, initial relief responses, and longer recovery tactics. The Creole, an online newspaper, WAFB Channel 9, a Louisiana news network, WBRZTV Channel 2, Baton Rouge’s television news source, The Advocate, Louisiana’s largest daily paper, and NOLA.com,
the website of the Times-Picayune serve as data sources. These outlets were selected because they represent local newspapers and television news stations that serve the areas of southeast Louisiana affected by the flooding.

**Procedures for Collecting News Coverage**

The media database for this study was composed of coverage from local Louisiana news sources, including an online newspaper, websites of daily newspapers and two television news sources. The traditionally used news database LexisNexis did not provide access to the local newspapers selected for this study and does not include results from television news sources. NewsBank America’s News had archived copies of the Times-Picayune and the Advocate, but did not have search tools available to sort results by topic. Therefore, news databases were not utilized for data collection. Instead, multiple procedures were used to gather data from each selected source. A total of 817 articles were collected using the following specific methods.

To collect data from the Creole, an online newspaper that covers Ascension Parish, an area of Louisiana south of Baton Rouge, the search term “flood” was plugged into the site’s basic search engine used to obtain archived news posts. Search terms including “Louisiana” did not yield any results. 111 articles were published to the Creole website between August 8 and November 8. These results were then saved as .html files and imported into MAXQDA for coding.

To collect data from The Advocate, Louisiana’s largest daily newspaper, which is based in Baton Rouge and serves south Louisiana, the website’s advanced search was utilized to narrow results by date and type of results. The search terms “flood,” “Louisiana flood” and “Louisiana flooding” were entered into an advanced search narrowed by the three-month period of interest and by “article.” The search was repeated using the difference search terms, but
duplicate results were omitted from collection. 222 articles referencing the research topic were
saved from the Advocate.

To collect data from NOLA.com, the website of the Times-Picayune, a daily newspaper
based in New Orleans which serves Baton Rouge as well as New Orleans, the search term
“Louisiana flood” was entered into the site’s built in search engine. This search lead to an
archived topic page with all of the articles the Times-Picayune published tagged “Louisiana
Flooding.” This topic page was then utilized for data collection, which resulted in 180 articles.

WBRZ-TV Channel 2 is an ABC affiliate and locally owned and operated television
news source based in Baton Rouge. It serves south-central and southeastern Louisiana. To collect
data from WBRZ-TV, the search terms “Louisiana flood” and “Louisiana flooding” were entered
into the website’s basic search engine. These searches resulted in 229 articles posted between the
dates of interest.

WABF Channel 9 is a CBS affiliate news station based in Baton Rouge. To collect data
from WABF, the website’s built-in search engine and the search terms “Louisiana flood” and
“Louisiana flooding” were used. The search engine was difficult to use as it limited results to 50
items and did not sort results by date, making it difficult to obtain data from the time period of
interest. The different search terms yielded slightly different results, but only 75 articles from
WABF Channel 9 were collected due to the search engine limitations.

Procedures for Collecting Facebook Posts

The posts to the Facebook group pages of “The Cajun Navy Relief” and the “The Cajun
Army” between August 8, 2016 until November 8, 2016 were used as the social media data
sources for this study. There are videos, photographs and Facebook Live video posts to these
pages, but only text material were analyzed to keep data forms consistent throughout the study.
After collecting material, it was analyzed through a qualitative content analysis using the elements of renewal coding frame listed in Table 1. The Facebook posts were also used to explore how social media was used to facilitate recovery and renewal actions.

Facebook does not have a search engine for searching within pages or a tool to access specific time periods on a discussion feed. Posts are generally sorted by date, but the Facebook news feed algorithm occasionally interrupts this and displays older posts of higher interest above more recent posts. To access the posts made in the period of interest, it was necessary to scroll back through each of the group’s discussion pages until they were displayed. The posts were then saved as PDF files to be uploaded into MAXQDA for coding.

Facebook provides tools for its users to like and comment on posts. On the Cajun Army and Cajun Navy group pages, users posted requests for help, offers to help, messages of gratitude, and information about group activities which garnered comments and interaction from other users. It is not feasible to analyze every interaction on the group’s page, but interactions of interest were expanded and added to the social media database. Expansion criteria was determined by the topic of the original post, the group member posting, the number of comments, and the topic of comments. For example, posts by the group leaders often received multiple comments from group members. These were included in the database to explore leadership dynamics within the community groups. Comments to posts that asked for action from group members, such as rescuing, volunteering or donating were included to examine responses to calls to action and coordination between group members for recovery and relief efforts.

**Coding Procedure**

(2007) to apply in a case study of the Red Lake, Minnesota School Shooting (Littlefield et al., 2009). The elements of renewal used by Littlefield et al. (2009) included corrective action, organizational transformation, restructuring and change, positive emphasis in discourse over cause, blame and culpability, focus on rebuilding and the future, strong company and leadership ethics and morals, commitment to and strong leadership with stakeholders, leader plays pivotal role in creating meaning. Those elements, along with elements described in narratives of renewal by Seeger and Sellnow (2016) including resilience and goodwill, were used as the initial coding frame for this case study. As part of qualitative content analysis, categories were revised and added as patterns emerge from the data sources.

The researcher first collected media and Facebook content from the aforementioned time period. The content was sorted into categories using key words and actions associated with renewal listed the codebook found in Appendix A before interpreting the data and presenting findings through figures, tables and discussion, as appropriate.

**Results**

This research used qualitative content analysis of community news coverage and community social media pages to analyze a case of crisis renewal in the digital media age. The content analysis of both data sources found examples of the following themes of renewal: corrective action, goodwill, ethics and morals, positive emphasis, resilience, cultural history and heritage, rebuilding and the future, transformation and leadership. The findings from the community news coverage are presented first. Overall, the news coverage presents a positive, forward looking approach to the flooding recovery. Goodwill via volunteering and donations provided resources for flood recovery. The news coverage portrayed Louisiana citizens as a resilient group of people and portrayed Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards as a strong leader.
capable of shaping interpretations of the flooding and encouraging people to rebuild. However, the news articles included notable exceptions to a positive outlook after the flooding. The implications of negative focused coverage for the success of a renewal outcome are briefly discussed. Analysis comparing results to previous research and discussing the implications of this study’s results follow the findings from each theme.

The findings from the content analysis of the social media data sources are presented after the community news coverage results. The Facebook pages of the Cajun Army and Cajun Navy support a renewal outcome for the communities affected by the flooding. The groups were formed to take corrective action after the flood by responding to immediate needs assisting in cleanup. Their actions created opportunities for flood victims to rebuild. The Facebook groups also helped frame the flooding as a chance to serve neighbors, grow closer to communities, and work toward a better, stronger community. Again, after each findings section, discussion of results and implications of the research are provided.

After the results from the content analyses are presented and discussed, the final research question, which asks how social media was used to facilitate crisis recovery and renewal in Louisiana, is answered. A discussion section explains the insights from the use of social media in community crisis communication before the conclusion section summarizes new knowledge gained from the research, acknowledges study limitations, and makes suggestions for future research.

Community News Coverage and Renewal

To answer RQ1, “What elements of renewal can be found in community news coverage of the Louisiana event?,” news articles from NOLA.com, The Advocate, The Creole, WAFB and WBRZTV collected as described in the methods chapter were analyzed. A codebook, which was
adapted from Littlefield et al. (2009), Seeger and Sellnow (2016) and Reierson and Littlefield (2012) and synthesized elements of renewal found by previous researchers, was used for the content analysis. The findings of the content analysis are organized by renewal theme: corrective action, goodwill, ethics and morals, positive emphasis, resilience, cultural history and heritage, rebuilding and the future, transformation, and leadership. A brief definition and summary of each theme and corresponding findings is provided before giving examples from the data and discussing the findings. Specific criteria for coding each theme can be found in Appendix A.

Corrective Action

To paraphrase Littlefield et al. (2009), corrective actions are steps taken to stop or mitigate the harm a crisis situation is causing. Corrective action can begin during the crisis event and continue during crisis recovery. This element of renewal is presented first as it was the first chronologically to appear in the data. Almost immediately after the flooding event, community news outlets began reporting corrective actions occurring across flood-damaged areas. Corrective actions identified in community news coverage included flood cleanup, which corrected the physical damages of the flood, and emotional support, which alleviated the emotional trauma of experiencing severe loss and destruction.

**Flood cleanup.** To address the physical damages from the flooding, citizens and volunteer groups worked to remove debris and gut houses. On August 17, four days after the flooding began, The Advocate reported people were beginning to shift to “recovery mode” and removing flood-damaged items from their homes (Roberts, 2016). NOLA.com painted a vivid image of the corrective action Louisianans were taking: “The smell of muddy water hung heavy in the air as people donned surgical masks and began the back-breaking job of ripping out soggy carpet, drywall and insulation. They cleaned out spiders and cockroaches that had bubbled up
through the sewer grates” (Kunzelman, Deslatte & Santana, 2016). Multiple reports of piles of ruined belongings, furniture, appliances and drywall crowding the sides of roads is further evidence of flood-clean up processes and corrective action (Boyd, 2016; Jones, 2016). Information about town or state facilitated debris pickup are further evidence of correcting the flooding damage (Pasqua, 2016b).

**Emotional support.** Corrective action does not only apply to physical damages; it also includes actions taken to mitigate emotional damages. An agent from the Louisiana Office of Behavioral Health stressed importance of addressing mental health symptoms associated with flood damage to WAFB as destruction and stress from the flood could cause depression and anxiety. The report included information about state resources for flood victims suffering from mental health symptoms (Koh, 2016).

The Federal Emergency Management Agency provided Louisiana with $6.8 million to fund crisis counseling for flood victims (Associated Press, 2016a). Individual parishes in flood-affected areas offered their own behavioral health support for flood victims (Chatelain, 2016a). According to the state’s schools chief, schools served as a checkpoint for the mental health of students affected by the flood. “We are being very intentional and conscious of the challenges children may have," he told the Washington Post in an article republished on NOLA.com. "It is critical that to every extent possible, schools should have counselors on hand to deal with the social and emotional needs of their students” (Cusick, 2016).

Churches were an additional source of emotional corrective action after the flood. “Across the state, many turned to their faith and their churches for comfort. And in turn, many flooded churches turned to their people. Together, many found strength” (Jackson, 2016). The Church International, south of Baton Rouge, served as a relief point for flood victims and
provided corrective action through a “Post Flood Guidance” workshop detailing how to work with FEMA and insurance to lessen the flood’s financial impact. According to flood victims, prayer was an important vehicle for emotional support and corrective action. “My preacher cousin came by and prayed with us. Every little bit helps,” a flood victim told a reporter from The Advocate. “And when you get depressed, right at that point where you say, “Man, it’s too much,” somebody will come by. That perks you up, makes you want to keep going” (Wirt, 2016). The Church of the Latter-day Saints provided both physical and emotional corrective action to flood victims in south Louisiana. Volunteer groups from the LDS church travelled to flood-damaged areas to help victims clean out their homes in the hopes they could alleviate some of their suffering. The volunteers also offered to pray with homeowners at the end of the day’s labor (Hardy, 2016).

Corrective action found in the community news coverage provided examples of citizens, volunteers, government agencies and churches working to address the flood’s physical damages and adverse mental health affects caused by the flood. These actions are conclusive with other case studies of community renewal in which corrective actions were important to effective community renewal. After the 2005 Red Lake public school shootings, school officials took corrective action to remove the physical evidence of the shooting, add security to the school, and secure counseling experts to mitigate mental trauma (Littlefield et al., 2009). To paraphrase Reierson et al. (2009), organizations must address current weaknesses and spend time and resources correcting problems before they can accomplish long-term change and renewal. Previous research and the evidence from this case support a similar concept: communities also have to attend to immediate issues before long-term change can be enacted. Physically cleaning up the damages from the flood created physical space for rebuilding, while attending to
emotional trauma provided support for flood victims to cope with their losses before moving on. To successfully renew after a crisis, communities must allocate resources to correct immediate problems to form a basis for long-term change.

In the Louisiana case, these resources came from individuals, churches, and government agencies. Community crisis responses should acknowledge the need for corrective action and allocate resources accordingly. Many elements of renewal are examples of positive speech and discourse, such as a positive emphasis and forward looking narrative grounded in ethics and morals. The findings from this research and other studies support that renewal depends on meaningful action in addition to positive discourse. Communities recovering from crises must take action to address damages and harm and cannot rely on rhetoric to enact a renewal response.

Next, the findings from the goodwill theme will be presented.

**Goodwill**

Goodwill built through community networks or positive relationships before a crisis situation can facilitate renewal after a crisis. Goodwill may also form out of sympathy for victims after a crisis and frequently manifests in volunteerism (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). Scholars have not included donations as part of the goodwill element of renewal, however, the coding framework for this study was expanded to include donations as examples were found throughout the database. Volunteerism is included in the goodwill theme as a physical manifestation of goodwill. Because volunteerism is a form of donation as one donates time as a volunteer, other forms of donations included monetary donations and supply donations were included in the goodwill theme.

**Donations.** Community news coverage of the flood reported goodwill in the form of monetary and supply donations. The NOLA Media Group, which owns NOLA.com and the
Times-Picayune, started the One Louisiana Fund to provide rapid grants supporting small business recovery. Tim Williamson, the president of NOLA Media Group referenced the monetary support and goodwill Baton Rouge provided to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in explaining his motivation for starting the fund.

We stand with the people of Baton Rouge. We know that they can't yet see over the piles of muck and debris and sadness, to the opportunity that stands before them to transform their community into something they couldn't imagine before the water came. But we in New Orleans know a thing or two about the character of our neighbors to the west. We are One Louisiana. And we will do our small part to help them rise again. (Williamson, 2016)

Goodwill was displayed in large donations from celebrity figures, such as a one-million-dollar gift from pop singer Taylor Swift, and in smaller size donations, such as those through the crowd-funding platform GoFundMe. More than $7.6 million to support Louisiana flood recovery was raised through GoFundMe, a record for disaster fundraising in the company’s history (Chatelain, 2016b). Supply drives to support flood-damaged schools were reported to be successful. For example, St. Tammany Parish held a district-wide fundraiser that brought 55 schools, 38,000 students, over 5,000 employees and community businesses together in the most successful fundraiser in the school system’s history. The superintendent said the fundraiser was about giving flood victims hope and support as well as physical resources (Rhoden, 2016b).

Volunteerism. Goodwill manifest in volunteerism was also found across the news coverage. All five of the data sources used reported some kind of volunteer activity in their coverage of the flooding. NOLA.com republished The Washington Post’s coverage highlighting
volunteerism: “There have been astonishing displays of generosity and selflessness, and a swelling pride in the way communities have rallied to take care of each other.” (Brown, 2016).

The Advocate described the actions of the volunteer rescue group “The Cajun Navy” and shared 150 reader submitted stories and experiences with the Cajun Navy (2016). The stories include descriptions of humanity, selfless behavior, goodness and bravery on the part of the Cajun Navy volunteers. One reader sent, “Age, race, gender didn't matter, they helped anyone they could reach including nursing home residents, this was humans helping humans” (Schaefer, 2016). WBRZ-TV reported tourists from France turning their vacation time into volunteer time assisting a homeowner gut her home. One volunteer turned tourist said of her motivation for volunteering, “It’s a state of mind. I think it’s normal to help people in distress.” Other volunteers from New Jersey referenced their experience during Hurricane Sandy when explaining why they travelled to the state to help: “We know what happens with people after their lives are turned upside down.” WBRZ-TV also provided opportunities to volunteer in a report with a detailed list of organizations, activities and contact information (Verdina, 2016).

In addition to individuals, universities and sports teams displayed goodwill after the flooding event. The University of South Carolina set up donation collections to benefit flood victims. The USC president referenced the goodwill Louisiana State University had shown to USC after South Carolina was affected by historic flash flooding in 2015 before encouraging Gamecock fans to donate material goods (Dupuy, 2016). The owner of the New Orleans Saints and Pelicans expressed sympathy for the flood victims and called for volunteer support and donations. The teams used training facilities as collection points for donations and organized opportunities for fans to participate in recovery efforts (Thomas, 2016).
Examples of goodwill via donations and volunteering illustrated sympathy for flood victims and helped facilitate recovery from the event by providing funding, supplies and volunteer labor. Research on cases of organizational renewal found that ethical behavior and strong relationships prior to experiencing crisis resulted in an outpouring of goodwill and support. For example, the CEO of Malden Mills developed strong relationships prior to experiencing an industrial fire, and was supported with donations and letters of support from stakeholders after the incident (Ulmer et al., 2009). This case illustrates that relationships within and outside of communities can create similar reservoirs of goodwill. The University of South Carolina and Louisiana State University had a strong relationship built on past ethical behaviors and USC demonstrated goodwill to LSU after the flooding. Communities that want to build resilience should work to develop relationships with communities around them, as this research and other scholars suggest that communities that are well integrated and connected may be more resilient (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016).

Next, the findings from ethics and morals from the community news coverage are presented.

**Ethics and Morals**

Strong ethics and morals are often part of renewal discourse. In their analysis of renewal narratives, Seeger and Sellnow (2016) found that values such as community and family are frequently part of renewal narratives. The news articles provided examples of importance working together as a family or community and supporting the community expressed by leaders and by flood victims. A Baton Rouge councilwoman referenced values during a disaster information meeting a few weeks after the flood and said working together as a family would help restore the community (Couvillion, 2016).
Shortly after the storm, a flood victim in Ascension Parish took WBRZ-TV News on a tour of his flooded neighborhood. Floodwaters in Ascension Parish took longer to recede than in other parts of the state, and flood victims in the area had to continue fighting the flood while other Louisianans were already cleaning and gutting their homes. “We’re going to stick together as a community, help each other out like we’ve been doing this whole time,” the man told WBRZ-TV (Aguilar, 2016).

The Ascension Parish sheriff told The Advocate he felt law enforcement should support its community by making it feel safe and by being integrated into the community. The sheriff worked with the St. Amant fire department chief and St. Amant Middle School principal to organize a Halloween event providing flood victims with a safe, family friendly environment for trick-or-treating (Pasqua, 2016a).

Valuing community and family led to supporting flood victims and restoring damaged communities. Previous renewal research found that successful renewal was supported by leadership grounded in strong ethics and morals. For example, government leaders used American values of patriotism and independence in post-9/11 communication to urge Americans to move past the terrorist attacks (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002). In the Louisiana flooding case, values of community and family were incorporated into post-crisis narratives by community members as well as leaders. This provides evidence that individuals also have the ability to build support for a renewal narrative grounded in ethics and morals, giving further evidence for an application of crisis renewal to communities.

A positive emphasis and optimistic outlook are also part of renewal narratives. The findings from the positive emphasis theme will now be presented.

Positive Emphasis
The positive emphasis theme includes statements about limited harm or damage, statements regarding lessons learned from the crisis and statements suggesting the community will be better after the crisis. Promoting positive messages after a crisis instead negative messages and blame rhetoric can foster a renewal narrative instead of a blame narrative. Examples of positive emphasis include focusing on what was left after the flood as opposed to what was lost, reflecting on lessons learned from the experience, and viewing the flooding event as a healing opportunity for divided communities.

**Limited damage.** Individuals reflected on limited harm through statements about how they were lucky damages were not worse or how they weren’t left with nothing after the flood. For example, one flood victim said, “I'm not going to lie, I cried uncontrollably. But you have to push forward and make it through. Like everybody says, you still have your family” (AP, 2016b). Another flood victim retained a positive attitude about the situation despite her losses. “Happiness and faith in god is all we got,” she told The Advocate (Roberts, Lau, Stole & Gallo, 2016).

One flood victim admitted she was struggling with facing the truth that she was going to lose everything, but was grateful for her granddaughter’s “shining ray of light” and smiled as she told NOLA.com, “It’s going to be pretty fun shopping for Christmas” (Lane, 2016). Another woman teared up as she surveyed her gutted home which had previously held everything her parents left to her, now destroyed by floodwaters. “It is hard to know we lost everything,” she said. “But it’s OK. I just have to start over” (Jackson, 2016).

**Lessons from crises.** Citizens and officials both expressed the lessons they learned from the crisis and the lessons they hoped would come out of the recovery. "Some people say it's God teaching us a lesson to forgive and forget, said a woman who lost her home to flooding (Brown,
"If you've gone through it, you've hopefully learned something from it. Just watching somebody else go through it doesn't teach you anything," another flood victim told NOLA.com (Granger, 2016). The governor of Louisiana, John Bel Edwards, said the devastating floods illustrated the need to build smart, resilient communities. Federal officials indicated to Edwards they would provide more funding if the state incorporated lessons from the flooding into rebuilding smartly (Boone, 2016).

Officials also reflected on lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina in their response to the 2016 flooding. A congressman from New Orleans vowed rebuilding programs would not repeat mistakes past recovery programs made. He stressed recovery programs to support homeowners after the flood would not resemble the state-run “Road to Home” program that ultimately failed to provide housing aid to Katrina victims (Rainey, 2016a). A spokesman from FEMA told WAFB the agency was working as hard as it could to provide service. "This is something we're going to spend a lot of time on and really redouble our efforts on it because it was an important lesson learned," he said (Hunter, 2016b).

**Unity and healing.** Many viewed the flood as an opportunity to bring communities together and reflected on the unity effect tragedy had on groups of people. A social worker in Baton Rouge acknowledged the challenges of coping with flood loss, but saw positive effects of the flooding as well. Existing relationships become closer and new relationships form, she told The Advocate. "Neighbors who have not been close are now meeting one another," she said (Peveto, 2016).

Healing through crisis was another aspect of positive emphasis found in the news articles. After a “summer of pain,” collaboration and community in the aftermath of the flood brought hope and unity to Louisiana. Racial tensions and distrust of the police plagued the greater Baton
Rouge area after the killing of a black man at the hands of the police and the retaliatory deadly shootings of three policemen by a black gunman (Kunzelman, McGill & Santana, 2016). "The city needs to heal up," said a flood victim. "I hope that this is an eye-opener for everyone. It's not just black people, it's not just white people. Everyone has lost (Brown, 2016). WBRZ-TV reported anti-police rhetoric had quieted down and police officers formerly viewed with suspicion and fear had risked their lives to rescue civilians from floodwaters (Kunzelman, McGill & Santana, 2016). "I'd like to think there's almost a silver lining," the chief medical officer at Our Lady of the Lake said. "That somehow this event, this flood, is what it took for us to come together" (Brown, 2016). A flood victim rescued by the Cajun Navy echoed the unity effect of the flood. "I noticed that there were no black, no white, no races, no genders, no hate and no greed all while everyone helped or were being rescued,” she said. “It made me smile seeing this, but then it made me cry at the same time knowing that this is what it took” (Hooper, 2016). A Baton Rouge policeman saw collaboration between the community and police as an indication of positive recovery (Stole, 2016).

The community news coverage presented examples of positive emphasis after the flooding such as statements expressing limited harm, statements of lessons learned, and statements about the healing and unity effect of the flood. While this positive emphasis served to highlight opportunities and lessons from the crisis and keep community members focused on the future, the news articles were not all positive. In contrast to the social media data analyzed, the news articles provided a wider range of information, including updates on government actions and plans, but included more negativity. Articles detailed the scale of the flood’s damages and the cost of event. This type of material is newsworthy but highlighting damages is counteractive to a renewal narrative. National media covering the scale of damage could have obtained
attention and sparked volunteerism, but the news articles selected for study were from local news outlets and directed at a local audience. Therefore, the negativity included in them likely served to counteract positive interpretations of the crisis event.

This complication has been evident in previous research. Media coverage of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina was largely negative and focused on social issues of racism, poverty, violence and drug addiction among the Lower Ninth Ward residents affected by the storm. This negative emphasis complicated renewal for that community as many pessimistic members lost hope for the future of their communities and moved away. Years later, New Orleans had not yet recovered from population loss in the Lower Ninth Ward (Reierson & Littlefield, 2012). Local media outlets covering crises have the ability to frame the events as opportunities or as devastating disasters, which could have long-term effects on crisis outcomes and community renewal. The media should give attention to newsworthy details, but including a balance of positive coverage may serve to counteract negativity and give support to a renewal outcome. This study was not designed to analyze media framing and crisis outcomes, but these findings suggest that such an analysis could be useful to explore the connections between mass media and renewal outcomes.

Renewal can also be supported by resilience. The findings from the resilience theme are now presented.

Resilience

Resilience is defined as the ability to adapt to changing conditions and “bounce back” from a crisis event. Resilience is often described as an attribute that helps communities recover from a crisis and a desired outcome of a crisis event (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). Flood victims,
public figures and officials referenced the resilience of Louisiana communities after the flood and resilience was incorporated into state rebuilding plans.

Resiliency was referenced immediately after the flooding as an existing resource for recovery. Don Lemon, anchor of CNN Tonight and Louisiana native told NOLA.com he was horrified to watch floodwaters rise in his hometown of Baton Rouge, but felt the people of Louisiana would recover from the storm just as they had storms before it. "I know the people are going to be resilient," he said. "We're going to be resilient. We bounce back from everything. Floods, the awful things that are happening with the police shootings - we bounce back” (Scott, 2016a). A U.S. congressman also spoke of the resilient nature of Louisiana after touring flood-damaged areas a few days after the flooding. “People are determined to get back on their feet. They're determined and morale is good under difficult circumstances," he told NOLA.com. “This is Louisiana, and we'll bounce back” (Rainey, 2016a). A displaced flood victim used humor to express resiliency when telling his flood story to NOLA.com. “We’re like cockroaches down here,” he said. “You can’t kill us” (Becherer & Pettus, 2016).

People also spoke of seeing resiliency throughout the recovery process. The mayor of Denham Springs told the Advocate:

This whole thing has changed me forever. I’ve always felt that Denham Springs is a special place, but now? You know, every time you see natural disasters anywhere in the world, you always hear them say how it brings people together and they talk about resilience. I see that now, more than ever. (Kinchen, 2016)

Additionally, resilience was built into Governor Edwards’ plans for rebuilding the state. In a letter to President Obama, Edwards requested an additional $800 million in funding to support “resilient infrastructure projects implemented both locally and on a watershed-wide basis
in the flood impacted areas” (WAFB, 2016). At the Louisiana Smart Growth Summit after the flood, Edwards said the state was committed to “resilient rebuilding, not status quo ante” (Boone, 2016). Incorporating resiliency into rebuilding plans utilizes lessons learned from the flood to better prepare communities for future adverse events.

Citizens of Louisiana were presented in the news coverage as resilient and able to bounce back from adverse events. Community resilience is defined as the ability to leverage resources and adapt to adverse events. Scholars have suggested a link between resilience and renewal (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016; Ulmer, 2012), but have not specifically explored resilience in case study applications. The manner in which the news coverage described the resilient nature of Louisianans was more of an inspirational sentiment than it was a description of their adaptive capacities. The social media data are more descriptive of how community members were able to use existing resources to successfully adapt and respond to the flooding event. By identifying those resources and examining the ways in which communities self-organized after the crisis, resiliency could be built into future disaster plans.

References to the cultural history and heritage of Louisianans were also found across the news coverage. Cultural history and heritage can influence community crisis renewal and the findings from the history and heritage theme are as follows.

**Cultural History and Heritage**

Reierson and Littlefield (2012) found cultural history and heritage helped make sense of community crisis events and built cohesiveness among group members throughout the rebuilding process. The news articles analyzed included multiple references to the giving, helpful nature of Louisianans. For example, the St. Tammany Parish president used the nature of Louisianans to
explain why the parish was pooling resources to assist other, more devastated parishes after the flood. She told NOLA.com:

    We, as Louisianans, do not sit idly by as our neighbors struggle. When we are faced with this level of destruction and loss, our people seek to lighten the burden when we can. We step in if we are able, and those of us who were spared, help the broken become whole again. (Chatelain, 2016a)

A volunteer who rescued a woman and her dog from a car sinking into floodwaters attributed his actions to his Louisiana heritage. “It's just who we are in Louisiana,” he said. “We help people in times of need” (Kunzelman, 2016b). Despite feeling overlooked by the national media and federal government, another flood victim told NOLA.com he had his community to depend on during the crisis. “We’re country people,” he said. “Neighbors help neighbors” (Rhoden, 2016a).

A food culture and dining reporter from The Advocate wrote an article encouraging the use of Louisiana’s food culture to support flood relief efforts. He described food as a powerful ally during the rebuilding process and said:

    It’s about harnessing food, Louisiana’s reputation for it and the traditions we already have around it as vehicles to help others...It’s about using part of our Louisiana lifestyle to help others build back their own lives, and it draws on a culture that is so strong in Louisiana to help people when they need strength most. (McNulty, 2016)

Cultural heritage and local connections were also important to retaining citizens after the flood. A Louisiana State University professor who researches migration patterns told The Advocate that Louisiana has among the largest percentages of people who don't leave the state. “Local connections are powerful magnets that keep people rooted in place," he said. "More people who
grew up in Louisiana live in Louisiana than any other state. That's a tremendous amount of rootedness. Connections like family, friends and churches are powerful” (Allen, 2016).

Community news coverage presented the nature of Louisianans and connections such as food, family and churches as cohesive forces which held communities together and supported flood recovery. Reierson and Littlefield (2012) found that cultural heritage motivated crisis victims to rebuild their communities. After Hurricane Katrina, some Lower Ninth Ward residents said they were driven to rebuild because losing their community would mean losing their heritage and identity (Reierson & Littlefield, 2012). Culture and heritage as an element of renewal contrasts the top-down model of organizational renewal. Messages of Louisiana identity came from and were supported by community members as opposed to people in formal leadership roles. This provides further evidence that renewal can be initiated on a community level, and confirms Reierson and Littlefield’s (2012) suggestion that culture is an important consideration for crisis communication and community renewal.

News coverage also provided examples of forwarding looking narratives and a future after the flooding. Findings from the rebuilding and the future and transformation themes follow.

**Rebuilding, the Future and Transformation**

Renewal discourse and renewal narratives are forward looking and emphasize a future after the crisis event over the crisis itself (Littlefield et al., 2009; Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). They may feature vague descriptions of the future that become more specific as recovery progresses (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). Descriptions of the future from flood victims were vague but identified opportunities ahead. Transformation, which is indicated by long-term system changes and new ways of thinking, was present in the news coverage but came from government officials rather than individual flood victims.
Descriptions of the future. Flood victims described a nonspecific, but positive future ahead of their communities after the flooding. “It will feel like a new start if we can get this stuff taken away,” one victim told said. (Kunzelman, 2016a). A reader submitted story to the Advocate emphasized future opportunities over the scale of disaster. She wrote:

Clinton can be better if such responders will continue to be involved, courageous, and united. If there is a good side to this terrible event, it might be found in the old cliché of the Chinese characters to write crisis. One is “danger,” the other stands for “opportunity.” The opportunity is ours for the taking, if we will. (Worrell, 2016)

A blues musician who participated in a benefit concert for flood relief also referenced a vague, but positive future for the state. "We've given the world so much and I think the world needs Louisiana. So, we have to try to rebuild this and not just rebuild this but make it better in the future," he told WAFB (Vowell, 2016).

Transformation. Transformation in renewal is indicated by long-term system changes and new ways of thinking in the future. Ideas for future partnerships, collaboration and cooperation between civilians and police indicated a shift in thinking after the flooding event. The FEMA administrator summarized a culture change within the government agency that now recognizes local residents, businesses and law enforcement officers are important resources after disasters. “So I'm of the mind to look at the public as a resource, not a liability,” he told NOLA.com. “Yeah, there are some crazy people out there doing stupid stuff, but we shouldn't use that to then frame the whole thing as 'We shouldn't have engaged the public because there's risk.' There's always going to be risk” (Rainey, 2016b).

The plans for rebuilding and transformation found in the community news coverage were not detailed, specific or very concrete. This is consistent with other cases of renewal in which
specific plans for the future emerge further into the recovery process. Visions for future can frame a crisis as positive event and provide stability and hope for victims. For example, after tornados destroyed Greensburg Kansas, town leaders presented ideas for capitalizing on destruction. Residents living in temporary housing were eager to get recovery process started, which built support for a plan of a better future future (Ulmer et al., 2009). The town had been experiencing declining population as young people left for college and did not come back.

Successful renewal narratives could function to prevent population loss and “brain drain” after a crisis, which occurs when highly skilled and educated people move away from areas. Presenting a vision of a better Louisiana in the future could be a motivating force for people to stay in the area. After Hurricane Katrina, leaders failed to present a plan for rebuilding New Orleans (Ulmer et al., 2009). Renewal was complicated by a division between community members with no hope for the future leaving New Orleans and members believing in the community and staying to rebuild (Reierson & Littlefield, 2012). While the Louisiana case did not provide evidence of a concrete plan for the future, the promises to rebuild and forward-looking perspectives presenting in the news coverage data are progress toward a renewal outcome.

Often, the plans for the future are presented by or encouraged by people in leadership roles. The findings from the leadership theme will now be presented.

**Leadership**

In renewal discourse, leaders may play an important role in shaping other’s interpretations of the crisis event (Littlefield et al., 2009). Leaders can frame the crisis event as an opportunity and motivate others to rebuild (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). Evidence of this can be found in the community news coverage regarding Louisiana’s governor, John Bel Edwards.
Edwards fulfilled a leadership role by encouraging recovery and remaining positive instead of engaging in negative blame rhetoric. Edwards also demonstrated commitment to stakeholders and supported rebuilding efforts.

Edwards acknowledged the challenges of the disaster, but remained positive about how residents would respond and recover from the flooding. “It continues obviously to be historic and unprecedented, but every day, the damage is just greater and greater, but the people are resilient and are doing a great job,” he said. (Roberts, 2016)

Edwards also remained positive and noncritical on topics others engaged in critical or blaming rhetoric over. Many criticized President Obama when he chose not to end his vacation to visit the flood-damaged parts of Louisiana. Edwards did not engage in negative rhetoric and publicly supported the president’s decision during a press conference shortly after the flooding. “I am not complaining about our federal partnership in any way” Edwards said, before noting that the president had already been very helpful through issuing federal declarations of disaster and open communication with the governor Edwards encouraged members of his flood recovery task force to remain bipartisan and approach recovery with a united effort (O’Donoghue, 2016).

Some Louisiana residents complained that the national media had neglected the Louisiana flooding, resulting in a lack of national awareness and recovery support. The New York Times did not post a story about the flooding until two days after the storm began and the floodwaters began to rise. Letters to the New York Times from Louisiana residents expressed outrage at the lack of coverage. One woman wrote that it was disappointing the front page focused on the presidential race and the Olympics while so many in Louisiana were suffering. Another woman wrote, "People are stranded, have lost everything and are dying, and the nation's newspaper of record has done no original reporting on this? Make this a priority!" (Scott, 2016b).
Instead of engaging in negative criticism of the national media, Edwards emphasized that his administration was trying to make up for the support media coverage would have garnered from the American public (O’Donoghue, 2016).

**Commitment to Stakeholders.** Commitment to stakeholders by leaders, organizations and communities is indicated by words and actions showing importance of stakeholders, sharing timely information is shared and asking for stakeholder input (Littlefield et al., 2009).

Almost immediately after the flooding, Gov. Edwards demonstrated a commitment to flood victims by indicating a tailored response to flood recovery. "We have to take into consideration this particular group of storm victims and what their needs are going to be," he said. A month into the recovery process, Edwards demonstrated continued support for flood victims and commitment to recovery by announcing the formation of the Restore Louisiana Task Force. The task force’s purpose was to provide resources to people in need and make long-term investments to support the state’s recovery (Pasqua, 2016c).

Other leaders demonstrated their commitments to their communities by fighting for funding and supporting rebuilding. U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy celebrated the success of a $500 billion spending bill for flood relief:

We’ve made a half a billion dollar down payment that will ensure these families have the resources they need to start recovering, rebuilding and prospering again. However, our work is not done, this is a down payment. The entire delegation will continue to press to make sure that every Louisianan has what they need to get their lives back. This is a good start. (AP, 2016c)

The mayor of Central held a meeting less than a week after the flood to relax many of the city's ordinances and permit fees, making it easier for residents to rebuild and replace what they lost in
the flood. "During times like this you have to adjust the rules," he told The Advocate. "We're trying to be compassionate to folks. These are just the type of things you have to do in times like this (Jones, 2016).

The community news coverage provided evidence of Gov. Edwards behaving as a strong leader, remaining positive, and focusing on the future as opposed to engaging in political debates or blame accusations. Edwards, along with other government officials, also demonstrated commitment to stakeholders through verbal plans to consider stakeholder needs and support rebuilding and through concrete actions, such as policy changes to make it easier for flood victims to recover.

Previous case study applications of renewal have emphasized the importance of a strong leader to a successful renewal outcome. In cases of organizational crisis, such as the cases of industrial fire at Malden Mills and Cole Lumber, effective leadership was central to renewal (Ulmer et al., 2011). In the case of the Red Lake school shooting, tribal leaders played a pivotal role in creating meaning as the community healed and recovered from its crisis (Littlefield et al., 2009). This case sought a different perspective on crisis renewal and was not focused on a top-down study of the function of leadership after crisis. However, including an overview of leadership provided by the news articles illustrated the different roles leaders in the Louisiana flooding case filled. Government leaders have the ability to allocate funds and change policies, similar to the abilities of an organizational leader. Successful community renewal is unlikely to occur without the support of formal leaders who can resolve financial issues and make long-term infrastructural changes to improve community systems. However, regardless of the strength of the leader, community renewal requires the support of the community (Reierson & Littlefield, 2012). This suggests community members and government leaders should collaborate for
successful crisis recovery. Community leaders on the social media pages had slightly different roles, which will be demonstrated in the results and analysis of RQ2a.

**Community-based Renewal**

To answer RQ2a, “What elements of renewal can be identified in the community response to the Louisiana flooding?,” data from the Facebook pages of the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army were analyzed using the same codebook used for RQ1. The findings are organized by theme in the same order as the findings for RQ1: corrective action, goodwill, ethics and morals, positive emphasis, resilience, cultural history and heritage, rebuilding and the future, transformation and leadership. Many examples from the Facebook pages are similar to examples of the same themes from the community news coverage, but provide a different perspective.

**Corrective Action**

Corrective actions are steps taken to mitigate or stop the harm a crisis situation is causing. Corrective actions described on the pages included gutting homes and flood clean up to address physical damages and prayer groups and offerings of emotional support to mitigate emotional damages from the flooding. The corrective action theme was expanded to include the Cajun Navy’s rescue missions because the act of rescuing stranded civilians addresses the danger and harm of the crisis.

**Rescue missions.** How social media was used to coordinate rescue missions will be addressed in the results for RQ2b, but examples of rescue mission posts are included in the corrective action results as well. The Cajun Navy Facebook page was originally created to coordinate flood rescues and was briefly named “Baton Rouge Rescue Locations” before the creator of the page changed the name. Users posted locations of people in need to the Cajun Navy Facebook group and volunteer rescuers acted upon the information provided to rescue
stranded civilians. These messages were often brief and only included the name and location of people in need. Some were labeled urgent and conveyed desperation: “***URGENT*** Chris and Patty Broussard and 2 other adults are still at their tire shop on Vincent!!! If you have a boat and can get to them, the address is 24384 Hwy 16/Vincent Road. Please please please help them!!!” (A. Broussard Eldridge, personal communication, August 14, 2016). Users were urged to update their requests once their needs had been met so volunteers did not waste time on stale requests. For example, a user added “****Found safe, UPDATE” to her original post, “22854 Atchafalaya Rd. Denham Springs 70726. Young mother with 103 fever who has small child, less than 2 months. They are supposedly on land but surrounded by water. If you are close please help them” (J. Gordon, personal communication, August 14, 2016). Rescue requests were often posts on behalf of others; users asked for help for their families, friends, neighbors and notified the Cajun Navy page of general areas that needed assistance. The Cajun Navy used the information provided to organize and coordinate boat launches and rescue missions to attend to immediate needs during the flooding.

**Gutting homes.** Flood cleanup and gutting homes began as soon as the floodwaters receded. The Cajun Army Facebook group was formed in part to support physical corrective actions after the Louisiana flooding. A post on the Cajun Navy page urged the group members who had volunteered on boating rescues to support continuing corrective actions through volunteering to gut houses (C. King, personal communication, August 19, 2016). Another group member demonstrated the importance of immediate corrective action for long-term success: “It’s very important that we get the house-gutting to scale right away. If flooded homes go another week without being gutted, the mold growth will add to the hundreds of millions in losses to
homeowners, making the long-term recovery that much more difficult” (K. Savicki, personal communication, August 20, 2016).

Posts about offers to help others with flood cleanup and gutting were coded as “goodwill” as they demonstrate a willingness to volunteer. Posts about the outcomes of gutting projects were coded as “corrective action” as they represent physical actions taken to correct damages. One group member called the Cajun Army’s work as “destruction for a good cause” (Hoffman, 2016b). Updates about the Cajun Army’s activities were regularly posted to the group’s Facebook page. A member of the Cajun Army shared pictures of volunteers at work and wrote, “There’s a lot of work to be done, but the crew of five plans to stick around until the gut job is done. Thanks for seeing the mission through to completion!” (Adams, 2016a). Posts also expressed gratitude for the Cajun Army’s work. For example, one post to the group said, “Many thanks to the Cajun Army!! Contacted them last night around 10:00 pm on their website about going to help my sister-in-law gut her home in French Settlement, La and they were there at 9 o’clock this morning with a crew” (Frederick, 2016).

Emotional support. The experience of the flood and the loss of homes and possessions threatened the emotional stability of Louisiana flood victims. To address emotional damages and give spiritual support, the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army held regular evening group prayers via the walkie-talkie application Zello. Regular posts to the discussion pages of each group reminded members about when the prayer would take place and how to use Zello to connect to the group. The member who started the Cajun Navy’s evening prayer wrote about the value of prayer to flood victims: “Not only have we helped touch families and loved ones, but a small prayer gives families hope and encouragement” (B. Edwards, personal communication, August 25, 2016). The Cajun Army also started a 24/7 prayer group to “address every concern around the clock.”
Prayer volunteers from the Cajun Army group were connected to people in need through a spreadsheet to coordinate emotional support whenever needed (Elkins, 2016).

The Facebook pages served as an online community and resource for flood victims seeking emotional support. A woman wrote to the Cajun Army’s page about feeling as though she was reaching her breaking point and losing hope she would ever get her home back, and group members responded with emotional support in comments to her original post. One comment read “Prayers of strength and endurance for those affected by this flood. Please remember that Katrina survivors have felt this way too at many times. It always helps and encourages me to know others pull through difficult times” (J. McKinney, personal communication, September 20, 2016).

Group members shared information about external emotional support resources with other group members. One shared the Louisiana Department of Health’s website along with a post that read, “If you’re having trouble processing your stress or grief from the massive damage around you, if you don’t know how to talk to your kids and students about it or if you just need someone to listen, there are plenty of resources out there for you. Take care of yourselves, Louisiana” (E. Schroeder, personal communication, August 18, 2016). Another shared the contact information for the Disaster Distress Helpline, which is dedicated to providing year-round immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster (EC, 2016). Organizations used the Facebook groups to share information about their emotional support resources. The “Front Desk” account of Family Focus, a multidisciplinary mental health clinic in Baton Rouge, offered free Equine Facilitated Learning Sessions to address emotional affects of the flood. Along with information about the time and location of sessions, the organization urged the members of the Facebook groups to
engage in emotional corrective actions. “We know that early processing of emotional traumas allows for better healing and fewer lasting effects,” it wrote. “Taking a break from work and stress to address the emotional impact is hugely important but often overlooked” (Front Desk, personal communication, September 10, 2016).

Cajun Army members frequently posted about providing emotional support along with physical corrective actions. One member shared a story about supporting an older woman who lost many of her belongings due to mold:

People that aren’t here, don’t see what we see and can’t feel the hurt and despair might have a difficult time understanding what we’re talking about. Sometimes we have to be as gentle as we can with the truth and be a shoulder to cry on. The Cajun Army teams work so hard to help everyone we meet gutting homes, supplying food, praying and ministering to so many. (McCaskill, 2016a)

Through rescue missions, flood cleanup and emotional support via prayer and crisis counseling, the Facebook groups enacted corrective actions after the Louisiana flood. Facilitating corrective action was the original goal and basis for formation of both the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army Facebook groups.

The members of the Cajun Navy used their personal boats and equipment to attend to immediate needs during the flooding. There was not a preexisting plan or system in place to facilitate their actions, but the group was able to self-organize to attend to the community’s needs. The corrective actions the group engaged in were a necessary first step to crisis renewal. As illustrated in previous analysis for RQ1, communities must attend to immediate needs before long-term change can occur. The actions of the Cajun Navy also demonstrated evidence of community resilience as their actions represent utilizing existing resources and citizens as
support structures to meet the needs of their communities. Throughout the response and recovery to the flood, the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army served as resources of support for their communities, assisted in managing the crisis, and contributed to the resilience of their communities. These groups formed spontaneously in response to the flooding, but their actions can serve as examples for communities building resilience into disaster planning. In this case, social media provided a platform for connecting community resources with members in need. Other communities wishing to form disaster response groups could follow the example of the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army pages and utilize social media platforms similarly.

The responses to rescue requests, calls for help gutting homes and other requests for assistance are examples of another renewal theme: goodwill. The findings from the goodwill theme follow.

**Goodwill**

Goodwill arises after a crisis event due to sympathy for the victims or identification with the victims and often manifests in volunteerism (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). Examples of goodwill manifest in volunteerism displayed on the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army Facebook pages included rescuing people stranded in the flood and assisting in flood cleanup. Expressions of sympathy and goodwill through donations were also prevalent on the pages.

**Volunteer rescuers.** From August 14 to August 16, volunteer rescuers with boats posted their locations on the Cajun Navy Facebook page and offered to help anyone stranded in the floodwaters. These posts generally had similar formats. For example, one said “We are headed to juban crossing with 3 boats. Please list addresses of those still needing to get out” (J. L. Knight, personal communication, August 15, 2016). Volunteer rescuers also used Facebook to coordinate larger rescue efforts by sharing central meeting locations and launch sites. One shared “For those
of you with boats wanting to help, many people are meeting at Cabella’s right now to to be given assignments on what areas/addresses to go to” (L. M. Tingle, personal communication, August 16, 2016).

**Sympathy.** Most examples of goodwill found in the data were examples of volunteerism or donations, but examples of sympathy were also found. Facebook users from outside the Louisiana area expressed their sympathy for flood victims with phrases such as, “My heart is breaking for y’all as I’m living in NY now and watching this all unfold from afar” (Z. Loscuito, personal communication, August 17, 2016). A user from Mississippi wrote, “I would like to give my condolences to everyone in Louisiana that was affected by the flood. We are praying hard for all of you!!” (Harper, 2016). A flood victim in Louisiana expressed sympathy for those around her: “I haven’t had time to cry about what I personally lost because I’m seeing what so many others lost” (Jenkins, 2016b).

**Material donations.** Material donations were coded as goodwill as they represent kindness and support manifest through giving. The Cajun Navy and Cajun Army Facebook groups were used to ask for donations and coordinate donation collections and delivery. While rescue efforts were still going on, users urged others to get involved through donations: “Anything anyone can donate, please do... Not all people are able bodied to be able to help with rescue or volunteer work... this is your way to pitch in for your neighbors” (Acosta, 2016). As soon as the Cajun Navy’s water rescues ended, the page’s focus shifted to goodwill through donations: “Now that the waters have receded, the clean up beginnings. Most lost EVERYTHING. If you have anything laying around that you don’t want or can’t use, then DONATE!!” (J. T. Leonard, personal communication, August 19, 2016).
Users who wanted to donate supplies turned to Facebook to ask what was needed and where to take items. For example, a post to the Cajun Navy’s page said, “We have a van full of supplies and we would like to go to a shelter if anyone could please tell us of a shelter in need!” (A. Singh, personal communication, August 23, 2016). Other group members used the comments section to list shelter locations and coordinate donation drop off.

The Cajun Army used an Amazon Wishlist to ask for materials the group needed. While gutting homes, the team asked for specific materials: “Our demo crews are in need of respirators as well as filters. If you’d like to help us, please place an order from our Amazon Wishlist. Items will be delivered right to our warehouse where demo crews can pick them up before working in moldy homes” (Adams, 2016c). A few days later, there was a report that the request had been fulfilled: “The Cajun Army spoke our need for respirators and filters earlier this week. Today, our warehouse was inundated with deliveries of both! Thank you to everyone who made a purchase from our Amazon Wishlists. Our mission is truly blessed to have so much support!” (Adams, 2016j).

A notable example of goodwill came from the Cajun Army’s “Operation Supachickn” event. The group planned and organized a community lunch in Baton Rouge, aiming to feed 20,000 people. The Facebook group was used to coordinate the event by asking for food donations and volunteers. One Cajun Army team member asked volunteers to come to the event ready to help (Adams, 2016d). Other group members replied to her request via the comments section with their availability and willingness to help. After the event, the Cajun Army Facebook group was updated on the outcome: “Yesterday’s Supachickn event was a huge success by any measure. There are differing opinions of the number of meals that were served. Some think we served about 4,000; others think it was closer to 7,000. Either way, we touched a lot of souls and
built many bridges in the community” (Adams, 2016e). The leader of the Cajun Army expressed that he felt the event had been meaningful. “To me the number served is not what matters, it’s that all who came were served well...The community outreach and the trust rebuilt makes it a complete success” (B. King, personal communication, October 3, 2016).

Volunteerism. In addition to volunteer rescuers’ immediate response to the flooding, volunteerism was evident in the weeks and months following the flood. Many individuals used the Facebook group pages to express their willingness to help with cleanup. For example, an individual wrote, “If anybody needs help, PM ME. I’ll be out there next week. Demo or clean up work” (Gagliano, 2016). Another offer to help said, “Anyone who has sustained damage from the floods and needs help please let me know. My baseball team with about 40 guys with come over and help clean out your house free of charge!! I’m serious don’t hesitate to ask. We will knock it out ASAP!” (Dean, 2016). A Cajun Army group member summarized the volunteerism responses with a post that said, “I have to say, I am totally blown away. Every time someone posts a need there are countless replies with the same 2 questions: what do you need and where are you located? The next response is ‘we are on our way’” (Guillory, 2016a).

The Cajun Army used an external website to organize requests for help and volunteers, but used Facebook to direct people to the website. Frequently, when people wrote they were willing to volunteer, a Cajun Army team member would direct them to the website. The Cajun Army also used Facebook to report volunteer stories. For example, a story of volunteerism said:

It is truly amazing how volunteers get to us. These volunteers were bicycling down the Mississippi River Trail earlier this month when they heard about the flood. “About a week into our journey, the storm hit and we were going to be passing through Baton Rouge. We decided it would be a big regret not to help out on our way through town. We
wanted to do anything we could to help people who were in dire need,” the volunteer said. And help they have. They enlisted with the Cajun Army and are spending several days working with a demo crew. (Adams, 2016h)

Of all of the themes of renewal coded for during analysis of the Facebook pages, goodwill was coded for the most frequently. Seeger and Sellnow (2016) found that goodwill can allocate resources after a crisis event. Examples of goodwill through sympathy, material donations and volunteering were found immediately after the Facebook groups were formed and continued throughout the months that followed the flooding. Goodwill supported community members, whether they were stranded by floodwaters, left without necessary items such as clothing and school supplies, or unable to cleanout their damaged homes without outside assistance.

Previous research has found that existing relationships can be a source of goodwill but goodwill can arise as a result of a crisis as a result of sympathy. Often, media coverage calls broad public attention to event and creates an emotional response among public to volunteer (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). In the Louisiana case, the national media did not cover the case extensively and the public’s attention was never drawn to the event. Instead, the Facebook groups served as a large source of goodwill for the flooded communities.

Prior case study applications of renewal to community crisis communication have not specifically examined the function of goodwill in community renewal. In contrast, this case suggests that goodwill may be critical to fulfilling community needs and supporting a renewal narrative after a community crisis. Goodwill may be influenced by sympathy, connection with crisis victims, or by strong values such as community (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). Continued
research of goodwill after community crises could illuminate ways to encourage goodwill and utilize it to support a recovering community.

While related to goodwill, the value of community was coded under the ethics and morals theme as it fit more explicitly into other scholar’s criteria for ethics and morals. Findings from ethics and morals will now be presented.

**Ethics and Morals**

Strong ethics and morals are often part of renewal narratives. Values such as community and family frequently arise after a crisis event (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). Nonspecific posts about serving the community or supporting the community were coded as “ethics and morals,” while posts outlining specific outreach plans and volunteer activities were coded as “goodwill.” The ethics and morals theme also includes avoiding unethical practices and protecting community members from unnecessary scrutiny. Facebook group members protected each other by warning group members about potential unethical behaviors. The groups also demonstrated ethics by outlawing fundraising on the pages.

**Value of community.** The value of community was evident throughout the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army’s discussion pages. Group members asking for volunteers and reflecting on volunteering experiences frequently referred to their actions as “serving the community” or “serving your neighbors.” This type of service was supported by other users who wrote encouraging statements: “Helping people is respectable, gratifying and just plain the right thing to do” (K. Sicard, personal communication, August 17, 2016). Valuing community can support rebuilding and renewal. As one user wrote, “It truly takes a community to rebuild a community” (Adams, 2016g).
Illegitimate practices. Several members shared information to protect other members from unethical behaviors. These posts warned other group members about fraudulent mold certificates and advised them to watch out for illegitimate mold specialists. (Leonard, 2016a; L. Smith, 2016). One post urged others to “be careful when selecting and purchasing items for your home to assists with flood repairs” and included infographics about what to know before hiring a contractor, price gouging, renter scams and water treatment device information (C. Sand, personal communication, August 25, 2016).

Money and politics. Both the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army banned any posts soliciting money or selling items for fundraising. People were encouraged to support the relief efforts through volunteering or buying items from the Cajun Army’s Amazon Wishlist (R. Gaudet, personal communication, August 21, 2016; Adams, 2016b). According to group leaders, it was too difficult to validate the legitimacy of GoFundMe accounts or t-shirt sale fundraisers (C. King, 2016a). Outlawing such posts lowered the risk of fundraising scams on the group’s pages. Political posts were also banned from both groups. A Cajun Navy member wrote that political posts made it more difficult to sort through requests for assistance (M. Oehmichen, personal communication, August 16, 2016). A Cajun Army member said that political posts were banned as they distracted others from the group’s goals and message (Loupe, 2016a).

The Cajun Army and Cajun Navy Facebook groups demonstrated strong ethics and morals through valuing community, protecting each other from unethical situations, and banning solicitation of money and political posts. Possessing strong ethics and morals kept the groups focused on recovery and rebuilding. Using a positive emphasis and optimistic outlook also kept the groups focused on positive recovery and minimized negative statements.
Blame narratives arose in the news articles as government officials and political parties criticized others’ flood responses. The social media groups banned posts about political opinions, which effectively kept the groups focused on recovery efforts and eliminated negative blame rhetoric and political debates. Successful crisis renewal in previous research cases occurred only when organizations were able to avoid blame accusations and could use crisis communication to support renewal and transformation instead of repairing damaged images. These findings suggest that community renewal can be successful if communities avoid engaging in political debates and blame narratives. The effectiveness of the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army groups to support a renewal outcome was dependent upon their ethics and rules for posting. Future disaster response groups on social media will be more effective if they follow a similar standard.

The social media pages were also more effective at retaining a positive focus, which is an important element of successful crisis renewal. The findings from the positive emphasis theme will now be presented.

**Positive Emphasis**

The positive emphasis theme includes references to how communities will be better because of a crisis and the lessons learned from a crisis situation. Positive emphasis includes limiting statements about blame, failed crisis responses and criticism of government parties. During data analysis, the positive emphasis theme was expanded to include statements about how fortunate citizens felt to be able to volunteer, help their communities and be involved in the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army. These statements emphasized the positivity and hope people felt through flood relief efforts, thus highlighting benefits of the crisis event.

The efforts of the Cajun Army were described as beacons of hope and humanity. A user posted to the group’s page, “Society in general needs a shining beacon of hope that humanity and
kindred souls still exist. All society needs to do to find that beacon is to come to Louisiana’s local affected areas. When they do, they will find so many beacons of hope to restore that faith in humanity” (Drager, 2016). Another said, “Thanks to everyone for caring so much! You all restored my faith in people, which was much needed” (Estalote, 2016). The flood and the cleanup efforts that followed were described as a unifying force. “In a time in America where a lot of things are divided, politically and otherwise, it gives me great joy to see all of you come together to help your fellow man” a user posted (D. Zugschwerdt, personal communication, August 16, 2016). Another wrote, “In recent times we’ve had much strife in our community, but through this flood, each of us have joined in unity” (A. Metrejean, August 21, 2016). One post acknowledged the damages of the flood, but remained positive about the crisis: “I know some lives were lost... but even from afar I have great pride and joy seeing what life is really about. That is pulling together and working through it. Coming together and not worrying about all the hate that we’ve been experiencing” (Neddeau, 2016).

Volunteers frequently wrote that the opportunity to help others through flood cleanup had been a positive experience or blessing to them. For example, a group member wrote:

Well Louisiana, what do you have to say for yourself? You brought me into your nightmare to shed some light. You showed me your least, last, lost and lonely. You introduced me to friends I never knew I had. You’ve worn me down but picked me back up daily. You taught me to be a better person inside and out. (Cox, 2016c)

Another member wrote, “We were able to bless these beautiful homeowners by totally gutting their home. The volunteers, I believe, got the greatest blessing though” (McCaskill, 2016b).

Volunteers put positive emphasis on working together and meeting new people. Posts rarely mentioned the difficulty of cleanup work. One volunteer thanked the group for the
opportunity to help: “I want to thank all of y’all for allowing me to come help and become part of the Cajun Army family! It was a pleasure meeting and working with some of you. I made friends and memories that will last a lifetime!” (Long, 2016). Another volunteer wrote about finding hope through the cleanup process:

This makes it my second time going out to help with flood cleanup in Baton Rouge. Each time has been a very humbling experience and an emotional rollercoaster. Knowing that each time I’ve gone out there along with the help of others has given me hope for this community and this world knowing that people do truly care. We’ve met some beautiful souls in the process. (O’Brien, 2016)

By remaining positive and emphasizing hope throughout the recovery process, the Cajun Army and Cajun Navy Facebook groups supported a renewal narrative after the flood. In organizational renewal, leaders are central to framing a crisis event as an opportunity and building support for renewal (Ulmer et al., 2011). Littlefield et al. (2009) found that community members of Red Lake enacted a renewal response through maintaining a positive emphasis after experiencing a school shooting crisis. This case provides further evidence that renewal does not have to originate from leadership or management and can be enacted by community members.

A positive emphasis can take the place of negative blame rhetoric and a pessimist outlook for the future, which discourages recovery. The flood and cleanup efforts were described as a unifying force. People posted to the groups that they found hope and faith in humanity again through the groups’ actions and the flood seemed to have a healing effect on previously divided communities. During the summer before the flood, shootings in Baton Rouge led to racial tensions and police distrust. Other case studies of community renewal in marginalized communities found that healing may need to occur before a community could begin to hope for
the future and rebuilding (Reierson & Littlefield, 2012). In the Louisiana case, healing did not appear to be a separate process from finding hope for the future and framing the flooding positively. Instead of reflecting on existing social problems, the Facebook groups overwhelmingly looked forward with a positive emphasis and encouraged members to keep working towards flood recovery.

Resilience, the ability to rebound from adverse events, is also related to crisis recovery and renewal. The findings from the resilience theme follow.

**Resilience**

Resilience is defined as the ability to “bounce back” from a crisis event (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016). References to the strength of the community were found as examples of resilience on the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army Facebook pages. The hashtag “#LouisianaStrong” was coded as an example of resilience and was used in different types of posts to signify support for Louisiana as well as the strength of Louisiana.

One frequent Cajun Army volunteer used #LouisianaStrong at the end of all her posts about volunteering experiences. The hashtag was used in posts about overcoming challenging cleanup projects: “That floor wasn’t going to beat us!! #LouisianaStrong” (Lea, 2016). Another post used the hashtag to signify the resilience of Louisiana and wrote, “You can shake us to the core, but you will never break us! We are #louisianastrong” (K. B. Gilchrist, personal communication, August 16, 2016).

Flood survivors and volunteers referenced seeing resilience in the people around them. One flood survivor and volunteer wrote, “What’s even more emotional is the sense of survival I’ve seen in every single one of my friends. That strong resilience!” (Jenkins, 2016b). Another volunteer said, “All these people I’ve seen, are sad, they are tired- but they are resilient- they are...
smiling” (L. Delaroderie, personal communication, August 19, 2016). Despite the difficulty of the crisis situation, cleanup efforts continued in a display of resilience. One volunteer wrote, “Yet through all the debris, and all of the stench... in spite of sore bodies and tired souls... regardless of how bad the next house is or the one after that... We go on” (Dupree, 2016).

Resilience in the people of Louisiana and in the communities damaged by the flooding served as a resource for recovery. Determination to rebuild, recover and overcome the devastation of the flood supported a renewal narrative on the Facebook group pages. In their presentation of community resilience, Norris et al. (2008) explained that resilience can serve as an inspirational concept, as well as function as an adaptive capacity. The resilience conveyed in the phrase “Louisiana Strong” represents inspirational speech, which contributed to the positive emphasis and optimism of the Facebook groups. The groups also demonstrated community resilience by utilizing their existing resources to adapt to the flooding, which was analyzed with the “corrective action” theme. Resilience can support a renewal narrative as promises to “bounce back” and “beat the crisis” foster inspiration in community members.

Cultural history and heritage and a sense of “Louisiana pride” supported renewal as well. Examples of the cultural history and heritage theme found on the Cajun Army and Cajun Navy Facebook groups will now be presented.

**Cultural History and Heritage**

Reierson and Littlefield (2012) suggested that cultural history and heritage may be used to build group cohesiveness. The Cajun Navy and Cajun Army Facebook pages provide evidence that cultural history can be successful in creating a group identity and community. References to the Cajun culture and shared characteristics of Louisiana residents supported a sense of Louisiana pride.
Cajuns were described as “empathetic” (A. Hebert, personal communication, August 31, 2016) and “the kind of people that spread love, support and a hot meal to our neighbors and community” (L. Delaroderie, personal communication, August 19, 2016). Group members wrote about the historical background of Cajuns:

The Cajuns were abandoned and sent here, almost 300 years ago and forced to leave everything they knew. They had to learn to survive and carve their life in a harsh wasteland that no one wanted to live in. The only way they could do that [was] with each other. You guys and girls are a tribute to the Cajun way of life. (C. Wooley, personal communication, August 20, 2016)

Pride and strength went beyond the Cajun culture to include other cultures and races. One group member described Louisiana as “a melting pot of beautiful cultures.” “We are Cajuns and Creoles and rednecks and hippies,” she wrote. “We are all colors and we are all family. We are Louisiana and you will not divide us” (K. T. Whitehead, personal communication, August 19, 2016). Another wrote that all Louisianans shared strength, resilience and a willingness to help others, regardless of race or origin (T. Bozeman, personal communication, August 21, 2016).

Through posts referencing history, common cultures and Louisiana pride, the Facebook groups established a group identity and community. This cohesiveness gave group members a sense of belonging and made the group more effective when organizing activities and shaping the outcome of recovery efforts. Building new relationships and online communities was made easier through existing shared values and culture. It is possible that communities without shared heritage would not be able to connect and self-organize in the same way the Cajun Army and Cajun Navy did. Previous case studies of community renewal have focused on communities with
similar strong cultures, such as the Red Lake Indian Reservation and the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans (Littlefield et al., 2009; Reierson & Littlefield, 2012).

Group cohesiveness can also build support for rebuilding. The findings from the rebuilding and the future theme will now be presented.

**Rebuilding and the Future**

Renewal narratives focus on rebuilding and what will come after the crisis event, instead of on the event itself or the damages it caused. Posts with descriptions of the future were vague and presented a promise to rebuild rather than a specific plan for rebuilding. For example, shortly after the flooding, a user wrote to the Cajun Navy’s page “we will rise and rebuild, and we will be even stronger together” (A. Iris, personal communication, August 18, 2016). Overall, Facebook posts and group actions were more geared toward immediate corrective action as opposed to future plans of rebuilding.

**First steps.** The corrective actions of rescuing stranded civilians and cleaning out flooded homes were presented as a first step toward rebuilding. A few days after the flood, a user wrote on the Cajun Navy discussion page “If you have given, in any way, you have blessed these cities and gotten us one step further away from this crisis and to a new life!” (D. Plauche, personal communication, August 17, 2016). Corrective actions continued months after the flooding as people were still grappling with flood damages. A Cajun Army member shared a video of damages a month and a half after the flood and wrote “People are still living in tents, sleeping in moldy homes, and not even close to the rebuilding process” (Hoffman, 2016a).

Despite the damages and remaining cleanup work, group members saw corrective action as a step toward the future. One comment to the Cajun Army’s page read “The road to long term recovery starts with the first tiny step. Food, diapers, hope. Mucked out house, hope. Delivery of
goods, hope. Drywall and tape and mud, hope. Everything you do helps with long term recovery” (P. Trowbridge, personal communication, October 12, 2016). A post urging others to volunteer and donate to flood relief had a similar message of creating hope for the future through donations and concluded with “All this short-term help produces long term reality” (Cox, 2016b).

While the data from the Facebook groups did not provide evidence of specific rebuilding plans, posts were generally not retrospective. Flood cleanup was seen as a necessary first step to rebuilding and recovery and the forward looking perspective of the Facebook groups encouraged members to think about the future rather than the crisis. A notable difference between the two data sources was found in the rebuilding theme. News articles featured more concrete plans for the future and rebuilding. Focusing on the future is an important characteristic of crisis renewal, but the social media accounts focused on immediate corrective actions as steps toward rebuilding. This is conclusive with what other researchers have found through examining community renewal (Littlefield et al., 2009; Reierson & Littlefield, 2012).

Large-scale infrastructural changes were presented by government leaders in the news articles. Community-based renewal may not have the ability to create such changes as community members do not have authority to make policy changes. Renewal is indicated by taking advantages of opportunities inherent in crisis through rebuilding more efficient and resilient systems (Ulmer et al., 2009). Therefore, the potential inability of community-based renewal to affect long-term changes in rebuilding is a limitation to the application of renewal to communities. It is also possible that the study did not extend long enough past the crisis event to capture community rebuilding plans and actions. The transformation theme of renewal is also concerned with what comes after crisis. The findings from the transformation theme follow.
Transformation

The transformation theme includes long-term system changes and new ways of thinking. The data from the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army Facebook pages provided examples of changing the relationship between the police and community and forming new relationships and groups as a result of the crisis.

The Cajun Navy worked together with the police during rescue efforts, signifying a new relationship with law enforcement. Evidence of law enforcement relying on citizens can be found on the Cajun Navy’s page: “Springfield police chief says they need boats ASAP! They have a plan ready” (R. Guedry, personal communication, August 15, 2016). The Cajun Army asked group members to persuade law enforcement officers to help at Operation Supachickn to show support of the event (C. King, 2016f) and later reported that members of the Baton Rouge Police Department had served some of the lunches (Adams, 2016i).

New relationships were formed as a result of the flood as victims grew closer to their neighbors and met strangers through the recovery process (M. Broussard, personal communication, August 29, 2016). There was a sense of collaboration between the different volunteer groups as leaders from the Cajun Army and Cajun Navy met to “combine forces, resources, volunteers and other necessary means” (A. Hebert, personal communication September 23, 2016).

Other “transformation” posts described the “lasting impact on lives in Louisiana” of the Cajun Army’s actions. Group members also felt a sense a new sense of ownership from the civilian flood response: “We’ve started a movement to take our state back. Proud to be a part of something this big” (N. S. Falke, personal communication, August 19, 2016).
Renewal is often marked by transformation and improvement post-crisis. Large-scale, long-term changes, such as new infrastructural systems, were not present on the Facebook pages. Transformation in cases of organizational renewal are examples of sweeping changes, such as Odwalla’s introduction of a new pasteurization technique for fresh juice in response to an *E. coli* outbreak (Reierson et al., 2009). In contrast, the transformation the community groups presented were smaller-scale changes, such as new relationships and ways of working together. The transformation found in the Red Lake case study of community renewal after a school shooting were similar to the findings from the Louisiana case. Littlefield et al. (2009) found that new relationships between external community members and Red Lake residents and between emergency workers from outside the Indian reservation and those on the reservation were indicative of transformation and renewal in the case. While they are not large-scale, sweeping changes that revolutionize an industry, these new relationships are evidence of new ways of thinking as a result of the crisis, indicating that transformation was present on the Facebook pages. Communities recovering from crisis can support transformation and a renewal outcome through facilitating new relationships and working together. Social media was used as a tool for building these new relationships in the Louisiana case. This evidence, as well as social media’s ability to facilitate interactive communication, suggests that social media can be used as a transformative tool for communities recovering from crises. In organizational crisis renewal, ideas for transformation are often guided by strong leadership. In this case of community renewal, leaders were informal, but had similar influence as organizational leaders. The findings from the leadership theme will now be presented.

**Leadership**
In cases of organizational crisis renewal, a strong leader acts as an influential force who shapes others’ interpretations of the crisis event, frames the crisis as an opportunity and motivates others to rebuild. The Facebook group pages had informal leaders who acted in similar ways. Page administrators kept the group organized, spoke on behalf of the group, encouraged members to act, and helped frame the crisis as a positive event.

**Roles of informal leaders.** Many of the messages group leaders shared asked members to consider volunteering, but did not dictate specifically how they felt people should get involved. Both the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army were encouraged to self-organize and fill needs as members saw fit. Rob Gaudet, a leader from the Cajun Navy, wrote to the group,

> “Remember this group didn’t exist a couple of days ago. Plenty of room for upward advancement in this organization!! In other words, if something needs to be done and you can do it, then do it! None of the organizers have even met before. We’re just like you, we’re just doing what needs to be done. Step up and do.” (R. Gaudet, personal communication, August 16, 2016)

Requests for minor help were sent to the Cajun Army Facebook page instead of the group’s external website. Chris King, the leader of the Cajun Army group, wrote “We are encouraging [people] to post here and trusting the real ARMY (you people) will take it and run with it” (2016b).

The leaders of the Facebook groups were seen as valuable to the success of flood rescues and recovery efforts. One group member wrote “without some type of sincere and honest leadership, any group of like-minded people will lose their way and become ineffective” (R. H. Edwards, personal communication, August 22, 2016). Another attributed the volunteer response on the Cajun Army’s page to King’s “pure heart and willing to serve and help” (Cox, 2016a).
King used Facebook Live to regularly update the Cajun Army. He also spoke on behalf of the group to the local media at the Operation Supachickn community lunch, publicizing the positive mission of the event. “We’re here today to shower love on this community,” King said. “To serve them, to come together despite racial lines, just to make a bold statement about how we should be living in the community with each other” (B. King, 2016).

**Positivity.** Gaudet framed the flood as a positive event about a week after the group’s water rescues concluded:

We were empowered. The Great Flood forced us to do what we should have been doing all along. Focusing on what’s really important in all of our lives. Helping our communities, saving our neighbors and finding ourselves again. In the midst of it we figured out how to celebrate the good in humanity and by doing so we regained control of our lives. And we became better people. (R. Gaudet, personal communication, August 22, 2016)

Two months after the flood, King urged Cajun Army members to contact the state legislature and ask why people were still living in tents and dangerous environments (C. King, 2016e). His message did not directly criticize the state government and encouraged the group to engage in peaceful communication opposed to protests.

The leaders of the Facebook groups lacked the formal titles and the power and authority of traditional leaders. Nevertheless, these informal leaders were organizational and motivating forces for the Facebook groups. Leadership was still seen as an important organizing force for the crisis. Similar to leaders in organizational renewal, the leaders of the Facebook groups framed the flooding as an opportunity and demonstrated ethics and morals by setting up page guidelines outlawing fundraising and political speech. They also demonstrated the ability to
leverage group support by motivating members to take action to volunteer or contact government leaders. Organizational leaders enacting renewal leveraged stakeholder goodwill to maintain and build support for a positive outcome (Ulmer et al., 2011). These parallels demonstrate that leadership is central to effective renewal, whether in a community or organizational setting.

This case is the only research thus far to explore leadership that did not exist prior to the case’s crisis event. The Red Lake shooting case study confirmed that leadership was pivotal to creating meaning for the community after experiencing crisis and that effective leaders displayed strong ethics and morals while guiding the community through recovery and renewal. However, the leaders in that case were established members of the community with preexisting authority and experience (Littlefield et al., 2011). The leaders in the Louisiana case emerged out of the crisis and were able to enact renewal responses among Facebook group members. Because leadership, preexisting or emergent, is pivotal in crisis renewal, communities planning for crises or responding to crises will benefit from incorporating leadership.

Social Media and Renewal

To answer RQ2b, “How did community crisis communication via social media contribute to recovery and renewal in Louisiana?” data gathered from the Facebook pages of the “Cajun Navy” and “Cajun Army” were analyzed to gain an understanding of how social media was used after the flooding event. This section seeks to give an overview of the function of social media in the flood response.

Immediate Response. The community crisis communication via the Facebook page of the Cajun Navy coordinated immediate crisis responses. Stranded civilians used Facebook to ask for help or rescue. The Cajun Navy used a Google Doc request form to compile a list of people in need of rescue and shared the form via Facebook (A. Herbert, personal communication,
August 15, 2016). Facebook users posted requests for assistance including the location and number of people in need. For example, one post read, “I’m in search of someone with a boat. I have several stranded family members at their houses and strangers houses with no electricity, or food and young children and infants. Please message me if you can help” (A. Biondo, personal communication, August 15, 2016). Some people who requested help reported that other authorities had failed to respond to requests. “We still need help, water in the house rising all animals at risk of drowning, we’re still here we can’t get out... we need help, please, I was told by 4 different agencies they would send help yesterday” (L. C. Seffens-Preece, personal communication, August 15, 2016).

One of the leaders of the Cajun Navy page, Rob Gaudet, provided specific instructions for users to post addresses and phone numbers of people in need and asked others who were not in danger to monitor the page for people in need and add them to the rescue request Google Doc form.

Group updates via social media provided information on where to meet to launch rescue efforts and who to coordinate with to connect with the group on Zello, a walkie-talkie app, and Glympse, a GPS app (M. Oehmichen, personal communication, August 16, 2016). One example of a group update read:

Anticipated needs for the next day’s rescues including location of staging, objective to find coordinated launch areas and assist local officials, members verifying launch sites before day’s rescues began. Reminder, only flat bottom boats allowed, bring as few crew members as possible, download Zello and Glympse, bring water and food items. (M. Oehmichen, personal communication, August 15, 2016)
Social media was used to coordinate immediate responses after the flooding. Facebook provided a platform for people in need to ask for help and for volunteers to answer their calls. It also coordinated group efforts to ensure an efficient and effective crisis response. Social media’s interactive functions made it useful tool for immediate crisis communication. Additionally, Facebook was a useful tool for sharing information related to navigating the flood recovery process.

**Sharing Useful Information for Relief and Recovery**

The information shared on the Cajun Navy and Cajun Army Facebook pages helped group members navigate the flood and recovery process. Immediately after the flooding, group members shared information about the movement of floodwaters and road openings (P. Cook, personal communication, August 16, 2016; P. Cook, personal communication, August 21, 2016; T. M. Miller, personal communication, August 17, 2016). Once the floodwaters receded, members shared guidelines for how to pick up debris (L. Naquin, personal communication, September 23, 2016), lists of supplies necessary to properly gut houses (C. King, 2016c) and guidelines for gutting houses (Jenkins, 2016a) which contributed to people’s knowledge and ability to recover from the flooding. An updated list of organizations providing gut and demo volunteer work was posted, providing group members with additional resources for flood recovery (Adams, 2016f). Advice for working with FEMA updated members on government activity and told them what to expect when FEMA officials went door-to-door in flood damaged areas (Leonard, 2016b). Sharing this kind of information was particularly valuable as a traditional medium of communication, the national media, was largely quiet on the flooding.

**Absence of National Media Coverage**
The national media was criticized for being slow to report news of the Louisiana flooding. The Cajun Navy and Cajun Army Facebook pages used social media to increase visibility and recruit volunteers. Rob Gaudet of the Cajun Navy group urged members to report their experiences in a post reading “We need your immediate help. Please become a citizen reporter. Share your story. Share your neighbor’s story. Short 1-2 minute videos are best. But also share photos” (R. Gaudet, personal communication, August 17, 2016). Using social media for visibility continued long after the flooding rescues were over. A month after the flooding, a user on the Cajun Navy page reiterated the request for sharing videos and photos of the situation:

Please post pictures of what is going on right now in Louisiana. The rest of the nation has this “out of sight, out of mind” mentality because there is so much information to process on a daily basis from the news media. The nation does not know what is going on in Louisiana right now because the news media is not reporting it as it is old news. Even if it is just videos of the inside of homes, the piles of trash, something to get attention focused on the needs of the people. (C. B. Richard, personal communication, September 21, 2016)

Social media was also used in efforts to recruit volunteers outside of Facebook. One user asked the Cajun Army page, “I know we desperately need volunteers, but since the media isn’t giving us coverage, we need to go a different route. Only people on Facebook know about our needs. Could someone possibly create a flyer everyone can put up in their area?” (Guillory, 2016b). Another member responded with PDF files to print and pass out for volunteer recruitment.

When the national media offered coverage to the Louisiana flooding, social media was used to take advantage of the opportunity. The Cajun Navy/Army was included in a short ESPN College Gameday segment showing “the strength of Baton Rouge, even through natural
disasters” (J. Lewis, personal communication, August 30, 2016). An individual working with ESPN turned to Facebook to ask people to show the ruins of their neighborhoods, clean up efforts and aid centers. He asked for “real time, current video to show that it is not over and people still need help.” By demonstrating the damage and need of Louisiana communities, the Cajun Navy/Army hoped to get the attention and support of people unaware of the situation. Outside of the little mainstream media attention the groups received, the Facebook pages represented the formation of online communities to support flood recovery.

**Forming an Online Community**

The formation of the Cajun Navy Facebook page created an online community to respond to rescue needs. A. Hebert, one of the administrators on the Cajun Navy page, said the group gave people a place to communicate their needs and brought strangers together to assist people stranded by flooding (personal communication, August 22, 2016).

The Cajun Army page was created for longer term recovery efforts. Chris King, the creator of the Cajun Army group, wrote on the page soon after he formed the group “Please help build this group if you are all interested in coordinating efforts after the Cajun Navy is done with the water rescue. Share with your friends and invite people to join. There will be houses to gut, supplies to get where they are needed and meals to cook....plus I’m sure a whole lot more” (2016c).

Group members expressed the value of Facebook for rescue and recovery. One wrote: “Anyone have Twitter who can get this out there? Tag Mark Zuckerberg and #google #googledocs #googlemaps and flood him with thank yous from South Louisiana for inventing such awesome, workable technology that’s been used to save thousands of lives down here!” (T. Scarbrough, personal communication, August 15, 2016). A Hurricane Katrina survivor wrote a
post about how useful Facebook would have been in the aftermath of Katrina to logistically coordinate relief efforts from afar, and that the social media service was useful enough to be worth paying for because of the difference it was making in getting things accomplished (J. Johnson, personal communication, August 22, 2016).

Conclusion

One of the objectives of this study was to explore how crisis communication via social media channels was used to facilitate recovery and renewal after the Louisiana flood. According to Fraustino, Liu and Jin (2012), social media is used for communication during crises for access to convenient, timely information, to check in with friends and family, to maintain a sense of community and support, and to self-mobilize. The Louisiana flood case is consistent with those uses. Along with sharing useful information, publics used Facebook to coordinate rescue missions and volunteer assistance. This demonstrates the ability of a community to self-organize successfully if given the tools to do so. To paraphrase Seeger and Sellnow (2016), communicative acts are building blocks of self-organization as they allow stakeholders to impose order on an uncertain situation. Mass communication systems can promote self-organization further by broadly disseminating information and instructions (Sellnow & Seeger, 2016). In this case, social media promoted self-organization by disseminating information and instructions regarding rescues and volunteering.

This research sought a new application and new perspective of an existing form of crisis communication, crisis renewal, by applying it to a case of community crisis in the digital media environment. Ulmer (2012) argued that effective crisis communication practices should be made accessible to organizations, communities and individuals to better prepare them for managing crises. He suggested that crisis communication researchers do more to engage communities in
managing crises effectively and leverage existing resources of communities to better prepare them for crisis. To paraphrase Reierson and Littlefield (2012), if a crisis can serve as a renewing force for an organization, and the communication strategies and actions used by the organization can be identified and applied to a community experiencing crisis, the results could be profound (p. 30). Renewal had previously been applied to community recovery by a few researchers, but this study was the first to examine the intersection of crisis renewal and social media. In the Louisiana flooding case, communication strategies and actions associated with organizational renewal were identified in the community’s response to the crisis via social media.

Analyzing crisis communication on social media platforms for elements of renewal confirmed that support for a renewal narrative and outcome can be built on social media. Certain elements of renewal, such as goodwill, were more prevalent in the social media data used in this case. Leveraging goodwill to support positive crisis outcomes is central to effective crisis renewal, and utilizing social media platforms for this purpose could be a valuable resource for future communities experiencing crisis. Leadership has been established by other scholars as another important element to successful crisis renewal. The social media groups in this case did not have formal leaders or leaders with strong authority, but leadership still emerged and influenced a renewal outcome to the flood. Public relation strategies are typically used to help organizations build relationships and communicate with their publics, but this case, along with other case studies, illustrates that communicates can build and benefit from renewal narratives after crises. Ulmer (2012), Reierson and Littlefield (2012) and this research support applying and adapting public relations theories and communication models to entities other than organizations. Crises and disasters affect communities, families and individuals, but through effective crisis
communication, communities can capitalize on opportunities inherent in crisis, leading to a more favorable outcome for the communities and the organizations that depend on them.

The results of this study were limited by factors related to the study design. The study’s reliance on secondary data made completing this research in the allotted timeframe feasible, but primary data collected through in-depth interviews would have added depth and new insights to the research. The sample used for this study turned out to be a limitation for the study as well. Conducting a universal sample is challenging. Facebook’s algorithm for rearranging Facebook posts and the variations between news sites used for data collection presented additional challenges. It is unlikely that an exhaustive sample of all Facebook posts to the Cajun Army and Cajun Navy pages and all news articles from the selected news outlets was obtained. Because of the overall sample size, missing a limited number of Facebook posts and news articles did not affect the analysis of the case. However, it would have been more beneficial to collect a smaller sample of Facebook posts and news articles over a longer period of time. This would have been more efficient and served the study better by including more of the recovery process.

Because this research was only designed to explore crisis renewal, the codebook used only included themes of renewal. New patterns were added as they emerged from the data, but only if they represented themes related to renewal. There was no frame of reference for contradictory themes and other crisis communication theories. Including these in analysis could have provided additional insights into community crisis communication. Additionally, previous case studies applying renewal through a content analysis used two researchers, instead of one, to analyze data. Using an additional coder was not practical for this research due to the qualitative nature of the analysis and time limitation of the study, but future studies may benefit from using an additional coder to divide data and limit bias.
Future research should be designed to combat the limitations of this study and continue to expand renewal research to different settings. Additional case studies of communities experiencing different types of crises would provide more support and evidence for a community crisis renewal model. Extending research over a longer period could be used to explore what elements of renewal occur at different points during crisis recovery. For example, the Cajun Army Facebook group was focused on corrective action and did not provide resources for rebuilding homes during the time period selected for study. Following the case after corrective actions work was complete would have added more insights regarding rebuilding and transformation to the study. Ultimately, applying the insights from community crisis renewal research to actual cases of community crisis through communication recommendations would expand the worth and use of this type of research.
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edwards-requests-more-money-for-flood-recovery-ahead-of-second-dc-trip


Appendix A

Codebook

A. Corrective action
   I. Steps taken to stop or mitigate harm caused by crisis situation
      i. Physical changes, such as flood clean-up or gutting homes
      ii. Emotional support through prayer groups or other forms of community support
      iii. Calls to action: requests for help and assistance in gutting homes
      iv. Rescue request: specific call to action to rescue stranded citizens providing name/location of people needing rescue assistance

B. Organizational/Community Transformation
   I. Long-term system changes and new ways of thinking
      i. New relationships forming as result of crisis
      ii. Statements suggesting community changes or new practices
      iii. Statements about ending racial barriers

C. Positive emphasis
   I. Statements expressing lessons learned or suggesting how the community will be better because of the crisis are promoted over statements of blame
      i. Statements about limited human harm (“We were lucky we did not lose more”)
      ii. Limiting statements about blame, failed crisis responses, criticism of government entities
      iii. Statements about how fortunate citizens are to be able to help, blessed to be a part of the Cajun Navy/Army are coded as positive emphasis
      iv. References to hope, positivity, rewarding experiences are coded as positive emphasis

D. Rebuilding and the future
   I. Focus is not on the crisis event, but on what will come after the event.
      i. Statements about how community will be more successful after crisis event
      ii. Specific references to rebuilding damaged property
      iii. Plans for better or improved life

E. Strong ethics and morals
   I. Avoiding unethical practices; leaders may protect community members from scrutiny. Values such as community, family and support of those affected are often part of renewal
      i. Referencing community and family as values
      ii. Nonspecific posts about serving the community or supporting the community are coded as “ethics/morals”
      iii. Posts that outline specific plans coded as “goodwill”
      iv. Avoiding unethical practices such as charging money for volunteer assistance, profiting from crisis event.
      v. Warning group members about potential unethical behaviors such as illegal contractors

F. Resilience
I. Ability to adapt to changing conditions and “bounce back” from crisis event. Resilience is often described as an attribute that helps communities recover from a crisis and a desired outcome of a crisis event
   i. References to resilience, strength or toughness of community and members
   ii. #LouisianaStrong, #CajunNavyStrong, #CajunArmyStrong

G. Commitment to stakeholders
   i. Through words and actions communities show importance of stakeholders; timely information is shared, stakeholders may be asked for input
      i. Sharing Useful Information
      ii. Posts that contain official information about access to help or large-scale events are coded as “useful information”
         1. Informal posts regarding food availability or donations available on smaller, personal scale coded as “goodwill”
      iii. Posts about weather, government updates, FEMA, traffic situations
   iv. Posts about gutting process, health hazards
   v. Requesting ideas from group members

H. Leadership
   i. How leaders behave shapes others’ interpretations of event; leadership may frame crisis as opportunity. Leaders energize and motivate others to rebuild
      i. Group administrators functioning as group leaders, speaking on behalf of group to outsiders such as the media
      ii. Leaders calling on group members to see crisis as positive event and act to rebuild

I. Goodwill
   i. Goodwill built through community networks or positive relationships before a crisis can facilitate and bolster renewal. Goodwill may also form out of a crisis as a result of sympathy and manifest in volunteerism.
      i. Individuals and groups not part of established emergency response management respond to crisis;
         1. Citizens conducting rescue missions
         2. Citizens offering to help with gutting/rebuilding projects
      ii. Posts about success of gutting/rebuilding events or news of such events are coded as “corrective action”
      iii. Posts that mention an individual’s availability of time and resources to gut/rebuild homes are coded as “goodwill: time donations”
   iv. Donations of material goods
   v. Offers to cook food for community members are coded as “goodwill: material donations”
   vi. Requests for donations of material goods such as food, equipment, etc., are coded as “call to action”

J. Community vision
   i. Shared vision or idea of where community wants to go or how it wants to move forward, profound enough to instill hope in a majority of community members
      i. Vision of future and hope offered by someone other than group administrator/established leader

K. Cultural history and heritage
I. Shared history and heritage may be used to build cohesiveness among community groups and build support for a common community vision
   i. *References to “Cajun” culture beyond group name that describe shared characteristics and culture of Louisiana residents that build common group identity.*
   ii. *References of pride to be from Louisiana*