

**Oum Elbouaghi University**  
**Faculty of Social and Human Sciences**

Humanities Department/ English Exam

**Master 2 : Public Relations / Mass Communication New Media model**  
**answer/ marking rubric**

In today's public relations environment, visibility is constant because every consumer can record events and disseminate them instantly on social media. The 2017 United Airlines (UA) Flight 3411 incident demonstrates how a single viral video can overpower years of corporate reputation building. When Dr. David Dao refused to give up his seat during an overbooking situation, aviation officers forcibly removed him. Passengers captured the scene, and the footage quickly circulated online. Social media accelerated the crisis: the video not the company's communication became the dominant narrative frame, portraying UA as a powerful corporation mistreating a vulnerable passenger. Hashtags like #BoycottUnited spread rapidly, generating global outrage. Sentiment analysis would have revealed a dramatic shift toward negative public opinion. United's initial crisis communication worsened the situation.

The company issued a delayed, defensive statement using euphemistic language ("re accommodate"), which appeared insincere. A leaked internal email blaming the passenger strengthened perceptions of a lack of empathy and accountability. A genuine apology arrived too late to prevent major reputational harm. The long term consequences included a temporary loss of market capitalization, regulatory scrutiny concerning overbooking practices, and the need for policy reforms aimed at restoring trust. The case underscores a key PR lesson: during a viral crisis, transparent action and authentic empathy must come before legalistic explanations if an organization wants to protect its reputation.

**A. Comprehension Questions (05 points)**

**1. Why is the United Airlines incident considered an example of the modern "crisis of visibility"?**

- It is considered a crisis of visibility because passengers were able to record and instantly share the incident on social media, making the event globally visible and uncontrollable for the company.

**2. How did social media affect the narrative frame of the UA crisis?**

- Social media allowed the viral video to dominate the narrative frame, portraying United Airlines as a powerful corporation abusing a vulnerable passenger rather than allowing the company's official communication to shape public opinion.

**3. What aspects of United's initial communication made the situation worse?**

- The situation worsened due to delayed and defensive communication, the use of euphemistic and insincere language, and a leaked internal email that blamed the passenger and showed a lack of empathy and accountability.

**4. What long-term consequences did the crisis have for the company?**

- The crisis resulted in reputational damage, a temporary loss of market capitalization, regulatory scrutiny of overbooking practices, and the need for policy reforms to restore public trust.

### **5. According to the text, why must transparency and empathy come before defensive statements in crisis communication?**

- Because during a viral crisis, audiences expect immediate accountability and human empathy, and defensive or legalistic explanations can intensify public outrage and further damage reputation.

### **B. Activity 02: Complete the sentences (05 points)**

1. In today's PR environment, every customer acts as a potential **journalist** with the ability to broadcast events instantly.
2. The viral video of Dr. Dao became the dominant **narrative frame** defining the crisis.
3. The rapid spread of #BoycottUnited demonstrated the global **velocity** of the backlash.
4. Sentiment analysis showed a collapse in positive **sentiment** toward the airline.
5. United's first statement used the euphemism **re-accommodate** to describe the forced removal.
6. The leaked internal email contributed to the perception that the company lacked **integrity** and accountability.
7. The CEO's sincere apology was viewed as **insincere** because it came too late.
8. The crisis caused a significant drop in United's market **capitalization**.
9. Public pressure led to new regulatory discussions on airline **overbooking** practices.
10. The company had to introduce proactive policies to begin the process of **reputation** repair.

### **C. Activity 03: Build five sentences (05 points)**

1. In the digital age, organizational **visibility** makes companies vulnerable to public scrutiny.
2. **A viral** video can damage a corporate reputation within hours.
3. **Social media** platforms accelerate the spread of crises and public reactions.
4. **Sentiment analysis** helps organizations measure shifts in public opinion during crises.
5. **Transparency** is essential for rebuilding trust after reputational damage.