

# CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT: LESSONS FROM GLOBAL EVENTS

Onyinyechi Assumpta Ezemba, \*

\*Department Of Mass Communication, Faculty Of Social Sciences, Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu University

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## Abstract

Crisis communication is managing communication during a crisis or emergency and it is an important aspect of risk management for any organization, designed to protect the company's reputation and minimize negative impacts. This study explores the use of effective communication tools in crisis situations. It aims at understanding the roles of different communication channels, stakeholders, organizations, countries and personnel before, during and after crisis as crisis is inevitable and can come in different shapes, sizes, times and situations. The study utilizes the library research method to underscore the role and significance of effective communication in responding to crisis situations and emergencies. The study advocates that preparedness, prompt response and effective communication should be embraced during crises and that organization and stakeholders should respond accordingly so as to avoid some certainties involved in inadequate crises management and to uphold positive image to the publics. This study strongly advocates that organizations should have crisis communication committee who sees to the management of communication and communication channels during crises.

**Keywords:** Crisis, Communication, Management, Global events.

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## INTRODUCTION

Crisis manifest in various forms; pandemics, economic recession, geo-political conflicts or climate change (example; the international debt crisis of 1982, the Asian crisis of 1997 - 2001, the economic recession of 2007 - 2009, the Gulf war, the Tsunami of 2004, the 9/11 attack, the COVID-19 Pandemic, Ebola virus, Russian-Ukrain war, etc). These events emerge as a "black swan" according to Das et al (2023) for which the market and its actors are not or perhaps will never be fully prepared. Crises of global proportions are not unique in world history, still the suddenness with which such crisis seems to emerge as the site of passage and porosity, Das (2023) quoting Butler (2016) and the resultant sufferings of the mind cross the individual limits of the bodily boundary. The suffering emerges as over-aching, temporal and overwhelming experiences. Given these realities, we suggest that the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of a world-turned-upside-down by crisis, call for a radical reimagining of what constitutes markets, consumers and consumption and what it means to communicate in such a redefined settings.

Crisis according to Coombs (1998) is "an event that is unpredictable, a major threat that can have a negative effect on the organization, industry or stakeholders if handled improperly". Since crisis can cause financial and reputational damage to the company or organization, a considerable attention has

been given to the research on crisis, crisis management and crisis communication (Coombs and Holiday, 2002) cited by Upadhyays et al. (2023) and also on appropriate crisis response strategies so as to enable the organization to manage crisis and reduce harm. Crisis communication management (CCM) involves the strategic planning, implementation and evaluation of communication efforts during a crisis to protect an organization's reputation, minimize harm, and ensure business continuity, Coombs (2012). Effective crisis communication management requires a thorough understanding of the crisis, stakeholder's expectations and communication channels.

Sometimes, crisis communication is known as conflict communication. It is the commitment to building peace and stability in crisis regions. This can be achieved through various means and instrument, including measures for both crisis prevention and resolution (Hinas, 2023). A crisis sometimes emerges when diplomacy fails during peacetimes. Once the crisis emerges, crisis communication is needed to prevent further escalation into war. Recently global events have highlighted critical lessons in crisis management, offering insights into how organizations, governments and societies can better prepare for and respond to crisis. These events, ranging from COVID-19 pandemic to geo-political conflicts and natural disasters, have underscored the importance of effective communication, preparedness and

adaptability in crisis management. One of the key lessons is the vital role of clear, transparent and timely communication. During the COVID-19 pandemic, public health agencies and governments faced the challenge of conveying complex information to diverse audiences. The effectiveness of their communication strategies significantly impacted public response and adherence to safety protocols. This underscores the need for crisis communication plans that include clear messaging and consider the varied information needs of different stakeholders.

The increased reliance on technology during recent crisis has also emphasized the need for robust digital infrastructure and cyber security measures. Remote working environment and digital communication platforms became essential during lockdowns, stressing the importance of digital readiness in crisis situations. Therefore, crisis communication could be referred to as the process of exchanging information between an organization and its stakeholder during a crisis situation. The goal of crisis communication is to protect the organization's reputation, minimize harm and ensure business continuity. In crisis communication, different communication channels are used; social media (most recently), traditional media, the press releases, employee communication, customer communication, investor communication, community engagement, and the mass media (most widely and effectively used). Effective crisis communication can protect reputation, minimize financial loss, ensure business continuity foster stakeholder trust, prevent or mitigate harm and ensure cordial relationship between stakeholders, organizations, countries and their publics.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper is geared towards:

1. Raising awareness - this is educating the participants on the importance of effective crisis communication. Participants here are the organizations in crisis situation and their publics.
2. Building capacity - building capacity is one of the purposes of this study because it will enhance skills and knowledge for managing crisis communication.
3. To prepare and equip organizations to respond promptly and effectively during crises.
4. To help organizations/countries into networking. This will facilitate connections among professionals handling crisis communication strategies.
5. To ensure best practices are shared. Presenting and analyzing the successful crisis communication strategies and case studies will help stakeholders towards managing crisis situations.
6. Improving reputation management amongst organizations and their publics and even within the organizational settings.
7. To foster organizational resilience through proactive crisis communication planning

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Understanding crisis

A crisis is an emotional and physical reaction to a life event. The life event that can cause a crisis are diverse, and may include receiving a new medical diagnosis, loss of a loved one, experiencing violence, witnessing a natural disaster or being exposed to triggers that bring back past trauma. A crisis event may interfere with your ability to cope and do daily activities. Everyone experiences a crisis in a unique way. Often a crisis event is time limited and one may experience one or more of the following feelings and thoughts:

- Loss of control
- Loss of hope
- Unsafe
- Unable to solve problems
- Overwhelming
- Numb
- Intense anger
- Self-hatred
- Like life is no longer worth living

The English Dictionary describes crisis as a time of intense difficulty or danger, a time when a difficult or important decision must be made. It states further that a crisis is the turning point of a disease when an important change takes place, indicating either recovery or death.

A broad definition of crisis is a predictable or unpredictable life event which is perceived by an individual as stressful to the extent that normal coping mechanisms are insufficient. This definition denotes that a crisis can be predicted, for instance, the recent hurricane at Florida, was seen coming and people were reached through different communication channels; the mass media, internet, discussions, personal contacts, social media, etc. It can also be unpredictable like the outbreak of some diseases like Ebola, Corona virus, etc. Gerner Caplan, one of the early pioneers in the crisis intervention field, was the first to articulate what he referred as crisis theory. In order to understand his crisis theory, it is helpful to look at how he defined crisis. For Caplan (1964), a crisis is a temporary state of upset and disorganization, characterized chiefly by an individual's inability to cope with a particular situation using customary method of problem solving and by the potential for a radically positive or negative outcome.

A crisis, according to the *Indeed* editorial team of *Indeed Career Guide* (2024) is an unforeseen event that causes restlessness among the people of an organization. Different types of crises can happen to an organization, all of which require a dept management to keep the company working towards its goals. Therefore, one can say that a crisis is a sudden and unplanned event that results in the instability of an organization and can be caused by internal or external factors. The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) defined crisis as a state of feeling, an internal experience of confusion and anxiety to the degree that formerly successful coping mechanism fail us and ineffective decisions and behaviour take their place. As

a result, the person in crisis may feel confused, vulnerable, anxious, afraid, angry, guilty, hopeless and helpless. Perceptions often are altered, and memory may be distorted.

Crisis is both a time of opportunity and danger. Crisis is useful when it causes one to go beyond familiar coping skills (both internal and external) and to develop skills, therefore becoming more competent and autonomous. A crisis is dangerous when the person becomes overwhelmed with anxiety and pain and adapt in negative ways.

Let us examine other definitions of crisis. A crisis as defined in Wikipedia.org is any event or period that will lead to an unstable and dangerous situation affecting an individual, group or all of society. Crises are negative changes in the human or environment affairs, especially when they occur abruptly with little or no warning. More loosely, a crisis is a testing time for an emergency. A crisis is a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, as its publics, products, services or good name. An organizational crisis can constitute any number of situations (John Keith, 2010). In this definition therefore, a crisis is a major event with a potential negative consequences for an organization and its reputation. Proper planning and reputation are essential to minimize damage from a crisis. Crisis also according to Bernard (2000) is an incident, which can have a serious adverse effect impact on the business activities and reputation of a company or organization. It is more often than not unexpected, requiring things to be done in a hurry and initially with very little knowledge of what is going on. A state that exists when a person is thrown completely off balance emotionally by an unexpected and potentially harmful event or difficult development transition is how Kanji (2016) describes crisis. He went further to say that crises are not usually predictable or expected. This unexpectedness can intensify the reaction to crisis. It is the intense emotional experience of these states that creates the crisis.

Kanji further said that when we talk about crisis, we are referring to people's emotional reactions to a situation, not the situation itself. Therefore, crises intervention helpers work with a person's perceptions and judgment of the crisis, not with the event itself. These crises can ensue from a lack of information, such as not knowing which job to take, what type of medical referral to seek for, a particular symptoms, what one's options are about living arrangements, whom to ask for what, etc. In all the above definitions of crisis, there are two concepts that are glaring, crisis as a phenomenon and crisis as a state of being. Crisis as a phenomenon which indicates the happenings around us that disrupts the comfort of our activities both internal and external, natural and artificial. These phenomena may include natural disasters, repeated loss of jobs because of an inability to get along with supervisors, loss of goods in accidents, death of loved ones or colleague, etc. these and more are happenings that can destabilize our routine activities. Another concept in crisis is that crisis is a state of being. By this, it is a psychological state one adapts to crisis situations. This is what

Mejirushi (2016) calls *Psychopathological* crisis. These are emotional crises precipitated by pre-existing psychopathology. One is rendered incompetent or unable to maintain responsibility for oneself - one is dangerous to oneself, to others or to both. At the initial phase, one experiences the beginning of tension and attempts to use habitual kinds of problem solving to restore one's emotional equilibrium. A crisis is any situation that threatens a company's integrity or reputation usually due to negative media attention. Crisis also is a major, unpredictable event that threatens to harm an operation, staff, customers, reputation or the legal and financial status of an organization. Crisis can strike at any time and during this situation, there tends to be confusion, uncertainty, fear, etc.

Any situations that is threatening or could threaten to harm people or property, seriously interrupts business, significantly damage reputation and/or negatively impact the bottom line, major unpredictable event that has potentially negative results, the event and its aftermath may significantly damage an organization and its employees, products, services, financial condition and reputation is termed to be crisis.

#### KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF A CRISIS

Some of the features of a crisis as stated by Sonali, (2020) are as follows:

- a. Crisis occurs in all the individuals at one time or another and it is not necessarily equated with psychopathology
- b. Crises are precipitated by specific identifiable events
- c. Crises are personal by nature. What may be considered a crisis situation by one individual may not be so for another.
- d. Crises are acute, not chronic and will be resolved in one way or another within a brief period.
- e. A crisis contains the potential for psychological growth or deterioration.
- f. Disorganized biological, cognitive, emotional and behavioural experiences.
- g. Crisis is universal and idiosyncratic: something is going to happen to everyone and it can be a matter of pure luck.
- h. Crises are time-limited and involve a precipitated event. They can be situational as well as developmental.
- i. Crisis brings about vulnerability and reduced defensiveness as well as a heightened state of suggestibility.
- j. Crisis is not mental illness and it should not be confused as such.

#### TYPES OF CRISIS

]Types of crisis according to Kristen (2023) are as follows;

**Natural Disasters** – Natural disasters are basically “act of God” that occur naturally. Environment causes are generally responsible for them. These include

earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, storms, drought, volcano, wildfire, etc. they affect human life as well as property. These kinds of disasters are almost always unpredictable and hence more difficult to prevent.

**Technological crises** – A far more challenging crisis to manage because it could be even more unpredictable and unexpected than natural disasters are technological crises. It could become a full-blown crisis caused by employees' criminal behaviour, neglect, malfunctioning in the system and breakdown of cyber wall defense, among others. An example of a technological crisis involving the internet is the unexpected crashes of websites and systems. Such happened when Google shut down in 2020 following an outage and when Facebook was inaccessible for several hours in the last quarter of 2021. Technological disasters may also involve industries such as nuclear meltdowns like those at Chernobyl or oil spills. A technological crisis could also occur with a natural or artificial disaster. That happened to Fukushima in Japan in 2011 and to the Persian Gulf during the Gulf war.

**Organizational crisis** – Organizational crisis occur when companies intentionally wrong or mislead their customers. This can play out in three distinct ways;

- Deception: a company knowingly lies about and/or tampers with public-facing information such as details about one of their products or services.
- Misconduct: a company intentionally engages in illegal activities, usually with the end goal of bettering its financial position.
- Skewed values: a company prioritizes short-term economic success over social progress, investors, customer experience and employees.

**Workplace Violence crisis** – Workplace violence crisis happen when current or former employees act violently in the workplace. One of the worst examples of this kind of crises happened in 2017. A San Francisco based UPS driver brought a gun to work and opened fire on his colleagues. Tragically, he killed three people and injured five others before shooting himself. A definitive motive was never established, though it's believed the attacker felt disrespected.

**Crisis of Malevolence** – This happens when one company tries to sabotage another in illegal ways. These acts go beyond traditional competition and become criminal. For example, hacking into another company's data records, stealing their secrets, spreading nasty untrue rumours about them and in extreme cases, kidnapping key company personnel all fall under the crisis of malevolence umbrella.

**Public Health Emergencies** – In the last few years, all countries, companies, institutions and organizations have become intimately familiar with the next type of crisis; the public health emergencies. These are disruptions stemming from disease or disorder, significant outbreak of infectious diseases or even

bioterrorist attack that must be planned for. In the case of COVID-19, for instance, public health emergencies pose direct safety risk to workers, which impacted the ability of companies to stay viable. Public health emergencies can also have a political angle, as governments can restrict the ability of organizations to work as they did before.

**Financial crisis** – In a financial crisis, asset prices see a steep decline in value, business and consumers are unable to pay their debts., and financial institutions experience liquidity shortages. A financial crisis is often associated with a panic or a bank run during which investors sell off assets or withdraw money from savings accounts because they fear that the value of those assets will drop if they remain in a financial institution.

## **THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT**

Communication plays a crucial role in preventing, controlling and managing crises. It helps in identifying potential risk, disseminating timely information, coordinating response efforts and maintaining public trust and confidence.

## **THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATION**

Communication is a crucial aspect of effective organizational management. On-going patterns of interaction among people within organizations are characterized as planned, sequential and systematic. While communication is the connection among individuals at the same time, it helps individuals in creating awareness (Neher, 1997) quoted by Ezekiel L.Z. (2020). Cloke and Goldsmith (2020) stated that those employees' reactions to the conflict may take different styles, such as litigation, strike, poor morale or reduced productivity due to miscommunication. They believe that any kind of conflict can be "avoidable" if the organization opens communication channels through dialogue. Ezekiel (2020) quoting Rama (1985) defines communication as the transmission and reception of ideas, feelings and attitudes, verbally or non-verbally to produce a favourable response. Draft (2020) defines communication as the process by which information is exchanged and understood by two or more people usually to motivate or influence behaviour. Communication refers to the exchange of information between a sender (source) and a receiver (destination) so that it is received, understood and leads to action cited in (Obamiro, 2008). Obilade (1989) defines communication as a process that involves the transmission of messages from the sender to the receiver. Folarin (2003) defines communication as any means by which a thought is transferred from one person to another. Communication is the process by which any person or group shares and impacts information with/to another person (group) so that both people (and groups) clearly understood one another cited in (Soola, 2000).

According to Ince and Gull (2001), communication is the exchange of ideas, emotions and opinions, letters and symbols among two or more

people. He stated that this may be defined as a technical fact. Yet it is uncertain whether symbols are transferred truly or not, to what extent symbols meet the transmitted message and how effectively transmitted fact on the receiver (Kalla, 2005) quoting (Baltas and Baltas, 2002). Without communication through readings, listening (the receptive skills) people would find it difficult to unravel some of the mysteries of life. Those things that we are ignorant of or have knowledge of, or that we have doubts about can be explained to us better through communication. Altinoz (2008) defines communication as a means through which the task and the resources needed to carry out an assignment, the roles and duties and the expected results are made known to the subordinates. This means that communication is the transfer of information (a message) from one person to another. Thus, effective communication is therefore the transfer of message, followed by feedback from the receiver to the sender, indicating an understanding of the message.

In all the above definitions of communication, channels were not mentioned. Every communication comes through a channel. That is to say that in every information received there is a medium (channel) through which such message was passed to the receiver and feedback follows the same process. That is why Nwammuo, et al. (eds) (2022) quoting Nwabueze, et al. (2019) stated the features of communication to be thus;

- Communication is a process
- It involves a sender and a receiver
- The process could be verbal or non-verbal
- A medium is used to convey the message
- There is a feedback
- The process is made meaningful with a common frame of reference.

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT

**Gather accurate information:** when a crisis occurs, there may be limited information available, but it is important to gather as much accurate information as possible before communicating with stakeholders. Information needs to be verified, clearly, explained and updated as new facts arise. Most importantly it's ok to admit it if you don't have all the information. It is better to admit that than to share false or misleading information with your staff and colleagues.

**Proactive Communication:** Organizations should proactively communicate with stakeholders before, during and after a crisis to provide updates, address concerns and maintain transparency.

**Transparency and openness:** Organizations should be transparent and open in their communication, acknowledging mistakes or shortcomings and providing honest and clear information.

**Establish a clear chain of command:** it is important to have a clear chain of command in place so there is clarity about who is responsible for communicating with the stakeholders. This is when having a crisis communication team really pays off, as the team

already knows exactly what they need to do in during crises.

**Consistency in messaging:** Consistent messaging across all communication channels helps reinforce key messages, avoid confusion and maintain credibility.

**Use of multiple communication channels:** Organizations should use variety of communication channels, including traditional media, social media and direct communication, to reach different stakeholder groups effectively.

**Engagement and dialogue:** two-way communication, such as, town hall meetings, forums, or feedback mechanisms, press conferencing, allows organizations to engage with stakeholders, address concern and gather feedback.

**Empathy and communication:** communicating with empathy and compassion helps organizations connect with stakeholders on a human level, showing that they understand and care about their concerns. Alveena, (2024).

**Monitor and adjust:** continuously monitor the situation and adjust your communication strategies as needed. A professional crisis communication team understands how critical it is to include additional information in their communications when and if it becomes available. There is no "set and forget it" in crisis communication management.

## IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION CRISIS MANAGEMENT

**Providing timely and accurate information:** during a crisis, stakeholders rely on organizations to provide timely and accurate information to make informed decisions. Effective communication helps mitigate confusion, rumours and misinformation.

**Building and maintaining trust:** trust is crucial in crisis management, as stakeholders are more likely to trust organizations that communicate openly, honestly and transparently. Effective communication builds trust and credibility.

**Coordinating response efforts:** communication facilities coordination among internal and external stakeholders involved in crisis response ensures that actions are aligned, resources are deployed efficiently and information is shared effectively.

**Demonstrating leadership:** effective communication from organization leaders during a crisis reassures stakeholders, provide direction and skills confidence in the organization's ability to manage the crisis. (Alveena, 2024).

## CHALLENGES IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Today we look at the challenges of crisis communications, ways to optimize your crisis

management efforts and what you need to know to be ready for any potential crisis that may come your way. Crisis communication, which occurs both during and after a crisis, can be a daunting challenge for any organization. It is critical to get communication right when responding in a crisis, especially in a life-or-death situation. Crisis communication experts say that some of the most common challenges that organizations face include the following;

**Limited available information:** In the early stages of a crisis, when everyone needs clarification as to what could/is going on, there may be limited information available about what has happened, what is happening, or what can be done about it. This can make it difficult to communicate accurately and effectively.

**Quality of information:** Miscommunication can occur when there is confusion about what is happening or when different people or departments communicate different messages. Inaccurate or misleading information can confuse and hamper the ability to respond effectively to the crisis.

**Disruptions to communication channels:** Crisis situations can often disrupt oral communication channels, such as phone lines, text messaging or the internet, making it difficult to communicate with employees, stakeholders or the public. The COVID-19 pandemic especially has exposed gaps in many emergency preparedness plans regarding communication.

**Overlooking staff mental health:** A crisis is typically a stressful moment for your workforce, with stress levels increasing based on factors that affect them personally and professionally for the duration. A crisis can often be a highly emotional situation and it can be difficult to communicate effectively when emotions are running high.

**Reputation management:** A crisis can damage a company's reputation and it is important to manage crisis communication in a way that protects it and minimizes any negative impact. A crisis communication team should have the tools to protect the organization.

**Legal implications:** crisis communication must be carefully planned to avoid legal issues, such as defamation or disclosing confidential information.

### **BEST PRACTICES IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION**

The best crisis communication practices one can remember are:

- Make messaging consistent
- Back up statements with action
- Balance timeliness with precision
- Practice empathy

**Make messaging consistent:** Your internal communications during a crisis should convey the

same stance and expectations to every member of your team, regardless of level. That is more effective if you already have an easy, direct line of communication with each member of your organization. While different roles may need to respond differently, it is crucial to ensure a better response across your organization.

**Back up statements with actions:** Organizations should note that it is very important to understand how to talk about a situation. It is even more important to understand what is being done and the role of their team members in the process. As soon as you have a response plan, communicate it to your team. That way, what is being done to resolve an issue is at the forefront of the conversation.

**Balance timeliness and precision:** It can be possible to plan out the details of your crisis response and to create response documents that lay the ground process of establishing more detailed response with your team.

**Practice empathy:** The crisis will undoubtedly affect your employees day to day, some certainly more than others. It is crucial to empathize with your employees' struggles throughout the crisis and recognize where their duties become more difficult. A 2020 catalyst survey on the effects of empathy in the workplace during COVID-19 found that empathetic leaders and managers increase productivity, innovation and engagement. According to the study, empathetic leaders entail;

- Respecting life circumstances
- Supporting both life and work needs
- Fostering inclusion.

### **THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION**

The crisis management team can use social media to monitor online conversations and media coverage of the situation. This can aid in identifying important aspects that need to be addressed and help provide a sense of public and stakeholder sentiment, engaging with stakeholders and the public.

However, the potential benefits of new technology are significant. By using new technology to collect and analyze data, improve communication and coordination, and support decision-making. Crisis managers can better understand, respond to and recover from crisis. Using social media to communicate during a crisis or emergency is known as social media crisis communication. Information may be quickly and effectively shared in real-time on social media platforms with both existing followers and the general public.

When emergency crisis take place, social media is a key communication channel. In today's crisis management strategies, social media is an increasingly important element in successful crisis management. Some of the advantages or roles of social media in crisis communication include;

**Rapid dissemination of information to the audience:**

Since social media platforms allow real-time communication, authorities may immediately distribute updates, warnings and guidelines to a sizeable audience. It is an efficient approach for reaching a wide range of people as information may be broadcast to hundreds of or even millions of people at the same time.

**Tailored communication:** Social media often permit precise targeting of audiences based on factors such as location, demographics, interest and behaviours. This feature enables the customization of emergency messages for specific groups or regions, ensuring that pertinent information reach the appropriate recipients.

**User engagement:** Social media encourages users to actively participate. Posts can be liked, shared and commented on by others, which can help the network effect increase at the reach of emergency notifications. Users can also give feedback and ask questions, enabling a two-way communication process that assists in the clarification of instructions and addresses issues.

**Visual and multimedia communication:** The versatility of social media accommodates various formats like images, videos, and infographics. These formats enhance the visual appeal of emergency information and enhance its comprehensibility. Visual content effectively conveys vital instructions, evaluation routes and safety measures.

**Real-time updates:** In times of crisis, situations evolve rapidly. Social media empowers authorities to furnish real-time updates as new information surfaces. This capability aids in keeping the public abreast of the latest development and necessary steps to undertake.

**Harnessing user-generated content:** Social media users frequently share their experiences and observations during emergencies. The user-generated content offers valuable insights into the on-ground situation, assisting authorities in comprehending the magnitude and implications of the crisis.

**Dissemination of accurate information:** by utilizing verified and official social media accounts, authorities can counter misinformation and unfounded rumours that tend to propagate during crises. The act of sharing accurate and current information from credible sources migrates confusion and panic.

**Proactive education:** Social media can be proactively utilized to educate the public about emergency preparedness, safety protocols and appropriate response in various crisis scenarios. This proactive approach contributes to bolstering community resilience and preparedness levels.

## GLOBAL CRISIS SITUATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

### Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the novel

coronavirus, SARS-COV-2, emerged in late 2019 and quickly spread globally, leading to widespread illness, death and economic disruption. The pandemic posed unprecedented challenges for government, healthcare system, businesses and communities worldwide.

### Crisis communication response

Governments, health authorities and organizations around the world implemented various communication strategies to manage the pandemic. Key aspects of crisis communication during the COVID-19 pandemic include:

1. **Transparency and information sharing:** Governments and health authorities provided regular updates on the spread of the virus, preventive measures and public health guidelines. This helped to educate the public and reduce misinformation.
2. **Health messaging and guidance:** Communication efforts focused on promoting behaviours such as hand washing, wearing masks, and social distancing to prevent the spread of the virus. Health authorities also provided guidance on testing, contact tracing and vaccination.
3. **Risk communication:** Authorities communicated the risks associated with COVID-19, including the severity of the illness, groups at higher risk and the importance of following public health guidelines.
4. **Community engagement:** Efforts were made to engage with communities to understand their concerns, address misinformation and encourage compliance with public health measures.
5. **Crisis leadership:** Political leaders, health officials and other stakeholders played a crucial role in communicating with empathy, authority and clarity to reassure the public and mobilize resources.

### Impact and resolution

The COVID-19 pandemic had far-reaching impacts on health, economies and societies globally. Effective crisis communication played a critical in managing the pandemic including;

1. **Public compliance:** Clear and consistent communication helped promote compliance with public health measures, such as lockdowns, masks wearing and vaccination, reducing the spread of the virus.
2. **Healthcare system preparedness:** communication efforts helped healthcare systems prepare for and respond to the surge in COVID-19 cases, ensuring that resources were allocated efficiently.

company faced backlash for downplaying the severity of the spill and for its handling of the cleanup efforts.

3. Vaccination development and distribution: Communication about vaccinations, including their safety and efficacy was crucial in encouraging vaccination and facilitating the global vaccination efforts.
4. Mental health and wellbeing: Communication strategies also addressed the mental health impacts of the pandemic, providing support and resources for those affected by isolation, grief and anxiety.

### Lessons learned

The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the importance of effective crisis communication in managing public health emergencies. Key lessons learned from the pandemic according to Alveena (2024), include:

1. Timeliness and transparency: Timely and transparent communication builds trust and credibility with the public, enhancing compliance with public health measures.
2. Adaptability and flexibility: Communication strategies must be adaptable to evolving situations and able to address emerging challenges and concerns.
3. Community engagement: Engaging with communities is essential for understanding their needs and concerns, tailoring communication efforts and building trust.
4. Multichannel communication: Using multiple communication channels, including traditional media, social media and community outreach, ensures that information reaches adverse audience. By applying these lessons, organizations and governments can improve their crisis communication strategies and better prepare for future public health emergencies.

### BP DEEPWATER HORIZON OIL SPILL

#### Background

In 2010, BP faced a major crisis when the deepwater horizon oil rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico, causing a massive oil spill that lasted for about five months, from April 19 - September 20, 2010. The spill had 11 workers killed and 17 injured. It had a devastating environmental and economic impacts on the region.

#### Impact and resolution

The Deepwater Horizon Oil spill had a profound impact on BP's reputation and finances, leading to billions of dollars in fines and cleanup costs. The crisis highlighted the importance of effective crisis communication and the need for companies to prioritize safety and environmental stewardship.

#### Crisis communication response

BP's initial response to the oil spill was criticized for being slow, insensitive and lacking in transparency. The

### THE 9/11 ATTACK

#### Background

September 11 attacks, series of airline hijackings and suicide attacks committed in 2001 by 19 militants associated with the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda against targets in the United States, the deadliest terrorist attacks in American soil in US history. The attacks against the New York city and Washington DC caused extensive death and destruction and triggered an enormous US effort to combat terrorism. Some 2,750 people were killed in New York, 184 at the Pentagon and 40 in Pennsylvania, (where one of the hijacked planes crashed into the ground after the passengers attempted to retake the plane), all 19 terrorists died, police and fire departments in New York were especially hard-hit; hundreds rushed to the scene of the attacks and more than 400 police officers and firefighters were killed.

#### Crisis communication response

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United States government responded by commencing immediate rescue operations at the World Trade Center site, grounding civilians aircraft and beginning a long-term response that included official investigations, legislative changes, military action and restoration projects.

During the disaster, first responders struggled to communicate due to lack of interoperability among the radio systems and over-crowded communication channels. As a result, the 9/11 commission made communications research for public safety a priority and tasked NIST with finding solutions.

More than 400 firefighters and 60 police officers lost their lives at Ground Zero, but not before rescuing thousands of civilians; firehouses such as FDNY ladder 10, located just blocks from the World Trade Center, were among the first on the scene. US government deployed all elements of national power to combat terrorism, which had previously been considered primarily a "law enforcement" issue. The president indeed took the fight to the enemy to defeat the terrorists and protect America.

#### Impact on Public trust

Among the most notable changes in US Public Opinion that occurred after September 11, 2001 there was a significant increase in trust in the national government. In the days after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon (US), US public trust in the government in Washington DC rose to a level not seen since the mid 1960. In the national poll assessing trust in government before 9/11, conducted in March 2001 by the *Los Angeles Times*, 29% of the public indicated that they trusted government in Washington to do what is right either just about always or most of the time. After the attack, the first comparable poll

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Government, organizations and stakeholders should always be prompt and prepared in responding to crises situations and also employ effective communication team for the management if information during crises.

The study equally recommends a synergy among media workers and relevant stakeholders to communicate effectively to their publics. This will go a long way to guard against reporting conflicting information on the coverage of future crises situations.

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conducted from 25th to 27th September by the *Washington Post*, the percentage of the public saying they trusted the government to do what is right doubled, increasing to 64%. This post-9/11 increase in trust followed a long period of relatively high level of public cynicism about government. It provides an opportunity to review scholarship on public evaluations of government.

Again, after the attacks, amid the horror and the grief, many Americans felt a deeper sense of duty to their communities and to their country, all around the country with hearts breaking for the slain and the suffering. Americans looked within themselves and felt called to give back.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study utilizes the library technique to gather data for the work. Most of the information sources were drawn from previous literature. Thus, secondary sources were used to gather data. The data were gathered from journals, periodicals, textbooks and online materials.

**MAJOR FINDINGS**

Based on the library study, the following are major findings;

1. That preparedness and prompt response towards crises situations help in ameliorating some certain effects if measures are not taken towards the situation at hand.
2. That organization, stakeholders should be properly informed as to learn from previous events and how effective communication strategies played some roles in managing crises situations.

**CONCLUSION**

Effective crisis communication is crucial for managing a crisis effectively and minimizing any negative impacts. It requires careful planning, clear communication and adjusting and responding as the situation evolves. When the next crisis or unknown event happens, you and your crisis management team will be better prepared to implement your crisis communication plan. Successful crisis management requires appropriate actions and communications to happen at the right time and because communication components are complex and difficult at multiple levels, this can be difficult to do. It can be a delicate balance between assurance, optimism, honesty and courage. Advanced planning and having the right tools in place are integral to the effectiveness of internal communications. This study noted the impacts of effective communication in a crisis situation and the effects of inappropriate communication during crisis moments. In view of these effects and impacts, the study concludes that prompt, accurate and effective response in communication during crises situations can save a whole lot of things and repair some organizational damages.

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