

BledCom

Disaster, Health, and Organizational Crisis Communication

BledCom 2026

Book of Abstracts

of the 33rd International Public Relations Research Symposium

June 26 - June 27, 2026

Editors: Dejan Verčič, Ana Tkalac Verčič and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh

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Disaster, Health, and Organizational Crisis Communication

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Public Relations Research Symposium
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Editors:

Dejan Verčič
Ana Tkalac Verčič
Krishnamurthy Sriramesh

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Dear Friends and Colleagues,



It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to the 33rd International Public Relations Research Symposium (BledCom 2026)! When the symposium began in 1994, we had not anticipated that we would be going strong into the fourth decade! Hundreds of participants, such as yourselves, have contributed to sustaining BledCom over the decades. We offer our heartfelt thanks to you for that!

This year, we received an overwhelming number of abstract submissions far surpassing the record forcing us to request several of you with more than one submission to restrict yourselves to one submission per presenter. Thank you for honoring our request!

We attribute this overwhelming response to the relevance of the theme to the contentious world we live in – although one would have hoped that weren't the case. Year after year, we seem to be going deeper and deeper into crises. While the war in Ukraine continues into the sixth year, the war in Iran has disrupted life at various levels in just a few months. Its effects will linger long after any resolution is reached, if one is reached at all. In the CFP we had remarked that crisis communication is at the heart of societal resilience. It is clear that the resolve of every society is being tested ever more now because of the disruptions resulting from this war.

How organizations communicate before, during, and after, crises often determines whether trust in organizations and leaders is preserved or lost. Any resolution to the Iran war, and thus a reprieve for the region and the rest of the world, will hinge on the level of trust between the negotiators, which is in short supply it seems. The lack of trust is based as much in history as on the desire among the warring sides to communicate in good faith – affirming the critical role that communication plays in any negotiation.

The currency of the theme for BledCom 2026 is thus again confirmed even though we would much prefer a serene world with fewer crises and disruptions. What role does our discipline have in driving the world toward that goal?

Thank you! Lep pozdrav! Namaste!

Dejan Verčič, Ana Tkalac Verčič and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh



Dejan Verčič *University of Ljubljana and Herman & partnerji (Slovenia)*

• Dejan Verčič is Professor, Head of Centre for Marketing and Public Relations at the University of Ljubljana, and Partner in strategic consulting and communication company Herman & partners Ltd. Slovenia. He received his PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK. A Fulbright scholar, recipient of the Pathfinder Award, the highest academic honour bestowed by the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) in New York, and named a Distinguished Public Relations Scholar by the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA). In 1991 he was the founding director of Slovenian national news agency (STA). Organizing the annual International Public Relations Research Symposium – BledCom since 1994.



Ana Tkalac Verčič *University of Zagreb (Croatia)*

• Ana Tkalac Verčič is a Professor in the Department of Marketing at the Faculty of Economics & Business, University of Zagreb. Her research focuses on internal communication, organizational communication, employee engagement, and the relationship between communication and well-being. She has led and participated in numerous national and international research projects, including projects funded through European and national research frameworks. Her work has been published in leading international journals in the fields of public relations, strategic communication, and organizational communication. She is recognized as a highly cited researcher and is included in Stanford University's list of the world's top 2% most-cited scientists.



Krishnamurthy Sriramesh *University of Colorado (USA)*

• Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, is Professor of Public Relations at the University of Colorado. He recently received honorary appointment as Extraordinary Professor at North-West University, South Africa. He has taught a range of courses in 10 universities in the North America, Asia, Australasia, and Europe while also delivering seminars/talks in over 40 countries. His program of research has resulted in 14 edited or co-edited books, over 120 articles and book chapters, and over 150 conference papers and other presentations around the world. Two of his books won the PRIDE award from the National Communication Association, USA. A recent bibliometric analysis published in *Public Relations Review* placed him among the top five cited global public relations scholars. He has won several awards including the Pathfinder Award from the Institute of Public Relations (USA) in 2004.



Akanbi, Francis, *University of Florida (USA)* • Francis Akanbi, Ph.D., is a scholar of Public Relations and Strategic Communication who earned his doctorate from the University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications. His research examines corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate purpose, and public relations ethics, with a particular focus on how organizational communication shapes stakeholder trust and engagement. He also studies internal communication and the role of artificial intelligence in organizational communication, particularly how information flow, leadership messaging, and AI-mediated communication shape employee engagement, organizational trust, workplace relationships, employee perceptions, and public trust.



Akçay, Ebru, *Başkent University (Turkey)* • Assoc. Prof. Ebru Akçay holds a B.A. in American Culture and Literature from Hacettepe University (2013) and an M.A. (2015) and Ph.D. (2020) in Public Relations and Publicity from Ankara University. She began her academic career in 2014 as a research assistant in the Department of Public Relations and Publicity at the Faculty of Communication, Ondokuz Mayıs University, Samsun. She joined Başkent University in 2021 as an assistant professor and has been serving as an associate professor since December 2024. Her research currently explores key issues such as emotions, strategic silence, corporate social advocacy and public relations education.



Alkemade, Elise, *Erasmus University Rotterdam (Netherlands)* • Elise Alkemade is a PhD candidate in the Media and Communication department at Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her doctoral research is focused on public trust and strategic health communication. She mainly employs qualitative methods, and has studied health campaigns and crisis communication.



Anton, Anca, *University of Bucharest (Romania)* • Anca Anton is Associate Professor and Vice dean of Research at the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies, University of Bucharest, Romania, as well as Editor-in-Chief of the Romanian Journal of Journalism and Communication. She teaches public relations, marketing and corporate communication, and sustainability communication. Her research focuses on professional well-being, AI-mediated communication, PR education, freelancing, and media CSR. She organises the FuturePR International Student Competition, co-leads the EUPRERA Education Network and serves as the EUPRERA Director of Public Relations and Administration.

Arti, Alina, *University of Jyväskylä (Finland)*



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Austin, Lucinda, *University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (USA)* • Dr. Lucinda Austin is an Associate Professor at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. Her research focuses on social media's influence on strategic communication initiatives, namely health and crisis communication, and explores publics' perspectives in corporate social responsibility and organization-public relationship building.



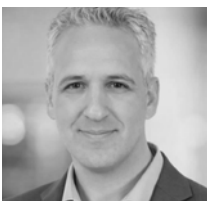
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Balliu, Laurence, *Ghent University (Belgium)* • Laurence Balliu is a PhD candidate at the Department of Translation, Interpreting and Communication at Ghent University (Faculty of Arts and Philosophy). She holds a master's degree in Multilingual Communication (Dutch, English and French). Her research examines crisis communication, with a specific interest in legal liability, message formulation, and community relations. Her work has been published in journals including *Journal of Applied Communication Research* and *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*.



Barlik, Jacek, *University of Warsaw (Poland)* • He is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies, the University of Warsaw, Poland (full-time since 2014, previously straddled business career and part-time teaching). He is also a seasoned public relations practitioner, with vast experience as an advisor to major Polish and international corporations, public institutions and NGOs. He has authored articles, chapters and a book on public relations, communication strategies, awareness campaigns, crisis communication, social media, PR theory, sales and persuasion (in Polish and English), and was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Maryland, College Park (USA).



Barnoy, Aviv, *Erasmus University Rotterdam (Netherlands)* • Aviv Barnoy is an Assistant Professor of Media and Communication at Erasmus University Rotterdam, specializing in trust in strategic communication. His research combines social epistemology and empirical methods to examine how trust is built, challenged, and strategically used in digital and institutional contexts. He is the developer of the Trustless Strategic Communication theory, which explores how communicators can foster reliance under conditions of skepticism and uncertainty. His work spans AI, misinformation, and crisis communication, and has been published in leading journals.



Barreto, Ana Margarida, *NOVA University of Lisbon – NOVA FCSH (Portugal)* • Ana Margarida Barreto is Assistant Professor (with Habilitation) in Strategic Communication at NOVA University Lisbon and researcher at ICNOVA, where she coordinates the Strategic Communication research group. Her work examines the effectiveness of communication in shaping attitudes and behaviours, with a focus on health communication, social influence, and behaviour change. She is Principal Investigator of the FCT-funded project COM-M4HEALTH, which explores why information alone often fails to change health behaviours, highlighting the role of social influence. Her research adopts mixed-methods approaches, combining experimental and participatory designs to develop evidence-based communication interventions.

Bauwens, Morgane, *Ghent University (Belgium)*



Becktel, Kalyca Lynn, *North Carolina State University (USA)* • Dr. Kalyca Lynn Becktel, APR, is an Assistant Professor of Public Relations at NC State University. Her research focuses on organization–public relationships, public sector communication, and the role of digital environments in shaping trust and behavior. She is the founder of Pack Lab Public Relations, an agency-style, community-engaged learning initiative that bridges classroom learning with real-world practice. Dr. Becktel is the recipient of NC State University’s Outstanding Engagement Award and the CHASS Community Involvement Award. She is also a designated Advanced Public Information Officer through FEMA, integrating her scholarship with local and federal risk and crisis communication efforts.



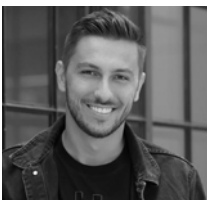
Bellamy, Bridget, *Ada and Alan (UK)* • Bridget is a Senior Account Manager of Pembroke and Rye, a London-based PR consultancy, and a Senior Researcher with their research division, Ada and Alan. Blending practical experience with academic research, Bridget helps clients prepare for crises through simulation training, tailored guidelines and strategic frameworks. Her research interests include complex crises, reputational management, and AI.



Belić, Ivana, *REGEA (Croatia)* • In the world of strategic communications, Ivana represents a combination of experience, expertise, and innovative thinking. As the Head of Strategic Communications at REGEA since 2017, she is dedicated to creating and implementing communication strategies that ensure the visibility and recognition of REGEA’s activities in the public. She began her professional career working on the CARDS 2002 project at the Ministry of Finance, focusing on improving the public debt system. However, her passion for media and communication soon led her to HRT (Croatian Radiotelevision), where she worked as a journalist and later as the host of the show “Through EU Funds” from 2008 to 2012. She gained experience in the private sector as the head of marketing and public relations at Ghetaldus Optics from 2014 to 2017. She continued her academic development at the Faculty of Political Sciences, specializing in public relations, and later enrolled in a doctoral program in Strategic Communication Management at Alma Mater Europaea in Maribor.



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Bonometto, Caterina, *ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione (Italy)* • A psychologist, specialized in Work and Organizational Psychology, she has worked for over fifteen years in the field of human resources, in recruitment and organisational development projects in Italy and France. Since 2016, she has been working with ICDLAB Sostenibilità e Comunicazione, extending her expertise to the field of sustainability and communication. She currently supports the analysis and definition of sustainability strategies, with particular reference to the social sphere, the drafting of sustainability reports and the design of training interventions.



Brečić, Ružica, *University of Zagreb (Croatia)* • Ružica Brečić is a Professor in the Marketing Department at the Faculty of Economics & Business, University of Zagreb. Her research focuses on food marketing, consumer decision-making, and children as consumers. She teaches Principles of Marketing, SME Marketing and Marketing Communications. She has taken part in several national and international EU research projects and has published in world-leading journals in the field of marketing and behavioural research. Her academic development also includes international training and visiting research stays at Newcastle University, UK; Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Spain; and the University of Washington, USA.



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Burgers, Evelien, *Ghent University (Belgium)* • Evelien Burgers is a PhD researcher at the Department of Translation, Interpreting and Communication at Ghent University (Faculty of Arts and Philosophy). In September 2025, she started on a project in collaboration with the Belgian National Crisis Center, which is titled “What to do during an emergency? A multi-year research project to increase self-reliance in Belgium.” Her research interests include governmental risk and crisis communication. She holds a master’s degree in Multilingual Communication (Dutch, German and Russian).



Cartwright, Rod, *Rod Cartwright Consulting (UK)* • Rod is the principal of Rod Cartwright Consulting, a strategic communication consultancy which works with clients to enhance their human preparedness, organisational resilience and business performance. Over a 25-year global PR agency career, Rod worked for international market leaders including Ketchum (as Global Corporate Practice Director), Text100/Archetype (EMEA Regional Director), Hill & Knowlton (Director) and GCI (Director). His frontline crisis experience includes advising Malaysia Airlines' Chair, CEO, Board and legal counsel following the disappearance of Flight MH370 in 2014, and on the airline's subsequent restructuring.



Cen, April Yue, *Boston University (USA)* • April Yue is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Mass Communication, Advertising, and Public Relations at Boston University. Her research focuses on internal communication, leadership communication, and organizational change. Her work has been published in leading journals in public relations, organizational communication, and management. She serves as Chief Research Editor for the Organizational Communication Research Center and the Center for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the Institute for Public Relations. Her recent book, *Strategic CEO Communication* (with Yeunjae Lee), examines how chief executives use communication to build trust, shape organizational culture, and navigate complex social and technological environments.



Chen, Zifei Fay, *University of Georgia (USA)* • Dr. Zifei Fay Chen (presenter) is an Associate Professor of Public Relations at the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication. Her research agenda focuses on corporate communications, including corporate social responsibility and advocacy, startup and entrepreneurial PR, the evolving role of digital technologies such as AI in PR, and prosocial communication.



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Conti, Sara, *Università IULM (Italy)* • Sara Conti (Ph.D.) is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Employee Relations and Communication within the Department of Business, Law, Economics, and Consumer Behaviour “Carlo A. Ricciardi” at Università IULM, Italy. She also serves as a Teaching Assistant in the Corporate Communication course at Università IULM. Her main research interests are corporate communication, employee voice, silence and dissent, psychological safety, whistleblowing and newcomers onboarding in hybrid

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Coombs, W. Timothy, *Centre for Crisis and Risk Communications (USA)* • W. Timothy Coombs (PhD Purdue University) (USA) is an advisor for the Centre for Crisis and Risk Communications. His primary area of research and consulting is crisis communication. His works include the award-winning book *Ongoing Crisis Communication*, coediting the *Handbook of Crisis Communication*, and co-writing *Strategic Sport Communication: Traditional and Transmedia Strategies for a Global Sport Market*. His crisis communication

research has won multiple awards from professional organizations including the Jackson, Jackson & Wagner Behavioral Science Prize. He is a Fellow in the International Communication Association.

Correia, Janine, *National Health Service (SNS) (Portugal)*

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De Waele, Aurélie, *Ghent University (Belgium)* • Aurélie De Waele (PhD, KU Leuven) is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Translation, Interpreting and Communication at Ghent University, Belgium. Her research focuses on crisis communication, with particular interests in nonverbal communication, misinformation, and health communication. Her work has been published in journals such as *Communication Research*, *Public Relations Review*, *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, and *Vaccine*.

behavior, and Vaccine.



Domac, Julije, *REGEA (Croatia)* • He studied and earned his doctorate in 2004 at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, University of Zagreb. He is the author of special editions and a reviewer of works for international professional journals such as *Energy Policy*, *Forestry Economics*, and *Biomass & Bioenergy*. He has published over 60 scientific and professional papers that have been published in scientific journals or presented at international scientific conferences. In 2025 he published the book *European Energy Independence through Investing in Renewables - Empowering Freedom*. In 2023, he was appointed as an adjunct professor and teaches at the Croatian Catholic University. He worked at the Hrvoje Požar Energy Institute, as a national project director for the FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, project manager for the IEA – International Energy Agency, national project coordinator for UNIDO – United Nations Industrial Development Organization, and consultant on projects for the World Bank. Since 2008, he has been the director of the Regional Energy Agency of Northwestern Croatia, and since 2013, he has been the president of the European Federation of Agencies and Regions for Energy and Environment (FEDARENE) based in Brussels for five consecutive terms. He advises the European Commission as an invited expert in multiple working bodies, and since 2017, he has been a member of the EU Covenant of Mayors Political Board. Since February 2020, he has served as the first Special Advisor to the President of the Republic of Croatia for energy and climate.

and climate.



Dong, Enzhu, *The University of Alabama (USA)* • Enzhu Dong (Ph.D., University of Miami) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at the University of Alabama. Her research focuses on corporate social responsibility, internal communication, and prosocial communication. By integrating public relations and stakeholder relationship management within evolving social dynamics, her work provides an interdisciplinary perspective on how strategic communication shapes stakeholder perceptions and behaviors, ultimately contributing to positive outcomes for both organizations and society. She has published in leading refereed journals, including *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Public Relations Review*, *Management Communication Quarterly*, and *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*.



Duratović Konjević, Amela, *Institute of Oncology Ljubljana (Slovenia)* • She is a senior expert and researcher in health and science communication. She works at the Institute of Oncology Ljubljana, Slovenia, where she previously established and led the Communication Department for 17 years. She is now part of the Epidemiology and Cancer Registry sector, focusing on communication of cancer data, oncology and public health. Her expertise includes crisis communication in complex healthcare environments, communication of screening programmes, and strategic corporate, environmental and health risk communication. She is a recipient of the IABC Gold Quill Award. She has contributed to various publications, participates in research projects, and is an active lecturer.



Durocher, H el ene, *Universit e du Qu ebec   Rimouski (UQAR) (Canada)* • H el ene Durocher (Ph.D., Universit e de Montr al, Canada) is a nurse and professor in the Department of Health Sciences at UQAR's Gasp sie- les-de-la-Madeleine campus. Her research focuses on health promotion, community health, healthcare ethic, and vulnerable populations in both urban and rural settings. She is particularly interested in the role of social determinants of health, including environmental factors and health risks, as well as structural violence, and natural disasters. Grounded in a constructivist approach, her work emphasizes qualitative research in sensitive contexts. She has over 30 years of experience in child protection, in both clinical and managerial roles, along with extensive teaching experience in nursing at the Universit e de Montr al.



Downes, Edward J., *Boston University (USA)* • Edward J. Downes, Ph.D., M.P.A., is an associate professor of public relations at Boston University's College of Communication. Prior to joining academic full-time he worked, for 10 years, throughout metropolitan Washington, D.C., as a communications professional. He was employed by public, private, and non-profit organizations, among them the U.S. Congress. His research has been published in six academic journals and he has presented at numerous academic conferences.



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Ertem-Eray, Tugce, *North Carolina State University (USA)* • Tugce Ertem-Eray (Ph.D., University of Oregon and Istanbul University) is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication, NC State University. Her fields of interest are international public relations, public diplomacy, diversity, equity, and inclusion in strategic communication. She was a Visiting Scholar at the University of Alabama, Advertising & Public Relations Department in 2016. Her research has been featured in *Public Relations Review*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Journal of Public Relations Education*, among others. In addition, she is a part of a multi-university research team that focuses on bibliometric studies in public relations.



Fan, Xiaofang, *The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong, S.A.R. China)* • Xiaofang Fan is a master's student in Corporate Communication at the School of Journalism and Communication, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, with industry expertise in new media and content marketing. Her research interests include sustainability communication, digital stakeholder engagement, and corporate storytelling, particularly focusing on data governance and trust-building in financial service ecosystems.



Fediuk, Tomasz A., *Family Business Strong, LLC (USA)* • Tomasz A. Fediuk, Ph.D., is the Managing Director of Family Business Strong LLC, an advisory firm dedicated to building strong, enduring family enterprises. His work focuses on helping business-owning families navigate the complexities of generational transition and continuity planning. Dr. Fediuk's academic work focuses on strategic communication, crisis management, and family enterprise readiness for continuity.



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Gimenez Gil, Paloma, *University of Zurich (Switzerland)* • Paloma Gimenez Gil is a journalist and corporate communications specialist with professional experience across media organizations, corporations, and the financial sector. She holds an MA in Public Media from Fordham University (New York) and has a strong background in international communication. As recipient of the Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship, she is currently conducting her research project “Framing ‘Too Big to Fail’: A Case Study of the Acquisition of Credit Suisse by UBS in Key Global Financial Hub Media” at the Department of Communication and Media Research at the University of Zurich. The project analyzes how this landmark banking acquisition was communicated and framed in international financial media, offering insights into corporate communication strategies in high-stakes, globally visible contexts.



Gonçalves, Gisela, *University of Beira Interior, LabCom (Portugal)* • Gisela Gonçalves holds a PhD in Communication Sciences. She is Associate Professor at the University of Beira Interior (Portugal) and coordinator of the Media and Communication research group of LabCom - Communication research centre. Founder and vice-chair of the IAMCR Organizational Communication Working Group and former chair of the ECREA Strategic and Organizational Communication Section. She is vice-president of Sopcom, the Portuguese Association of Communication Sciences. Her research interests concern: communication ethics, public relations, political communication, strategic communication and crises communication.



Gregory, Anne, *University of Huddersfield (UK)* • Prof. Anne Gregory is Professor Emeritus of Corporate Communication at the University of Huddersfield. Anne joined the University of Huddersfield in September 2014. Previously she worked at Leeds Beckett University where she was Director of the Centre for Public Relations Studies, an internationally recognised research centre and think tank on public relations and communication. While at Leeds Beckett, she also completed a three year term as Pro Vice Chancellor. Anne has led numerous specialist research and consultancy programmes for public and private sector clients, particularly for the UK Government where her work has led to Government policy documents and capability-building initiatives. She remains an advisor to UK Government having completed three attachments and is currently working on the Senior Talent Programme for Government which seeks to build capability in the most senior communicators. She is a formal Reviewer of Government Departmental communication and has advised both the South African and New South Wales Governments on capability development.

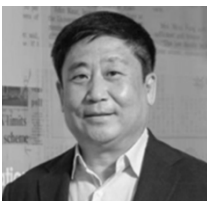
Grossi, Ines, *University of Osijek (Croatia)*



Guan, Qinghao, *University of Zurich (Switzerland)* • Qinghao Guan is a PhD student at the Department of Communication and Media Research, University of Zurich. He is now the YECREA representative for the Digital Culture and Communication Section, European Communication Research and Education Association. His research interests involve textual and visual content analysis on social media and information communication in Large Language Models. More broadly, he is interested in the societal implications of GenAI and the methodological challenges of integrating AI systems into communication research.



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Hejlová, Denisa, *Charles University (Czech Republic)* • Assoc. Prof. Denisa Hejlova, Ph.D. is a leading Czech scholar and communication consultant. She focuses on research, teaching and practice in strategic communication, public relations, public affairs or political communication. From 2011-23, Denisa Hejlova headed the Department of Marketing Communication and PR at Charles University in Prague, one of the most sought-after study programmes in the Czech Republic. Prior to that, she worked as a vice-dean for PR and PR manager at the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Denisa was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Columbia University in New York in 2014 and studied intercultural communication at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in 2005-06. Denisa has published comprehensive books on public relations (Grada, 2015) and strategic communication (Karolinum, 2024) for the Czech audience. She regularly publishes in academic journals and has been a guest lecturer at universities in Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Japan, etc. In 2020 she started the first Czech MA programme in Strategic Communication at Charles University in Prague. Since 2023 she's the director of the Research Centre for Strategic Communication and the Charles University in Prague.



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processes.

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Hung-Baesecke, Chun-Ju Flora, *University of Technology Sydney (Australia)* • Flora Hung-Baesecke (Ph.D., University of Maryland) is Senior Lecturer (equivalent to Associate Professor) at University of Technology Sydney. She publishes at peer-reviewed journals and has won several faculty top papers at international conferences. Hung-Baesecke is on the advisory board of International Public Relations Research Conference and on editorial boards of public relations and strategic communication journals. She is also a member of



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Jeleč Bulić, Ivana, *Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (Croatia)* • Ivana Jeleč Bulić is an experienced communication manager with corporate, institutional and agency expertise, university lecturer and a PhD student of Information and Communication Sciences at the University of Zagreb. She focuses on corporate and strategic communication and marketing, which, along with reputation management, are also topics that she studies from a scientific perspective. She participates in scientific and professional conferences, researches and writes scientific papers, and was also part of the editorial board of the Croatian translation of the biography of Edward Bernays, the founder of PR profession. Ivana speaks English, Spanish and Italian.



Jin, Yan, *University of Georgia (USA)* • Prof. Yan Jin, Ph.D., is the C. Richard Yarbrough Professor in Crisis Communication Leadership and a professor of public relations at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Georgia (UGA). She is Co-Founder and Director of the UGA Crisis Communication Think Tank (CCTT) and Director of the Crisis, Risk, and Disaster Communication graduate certificate program. She is a Fellow of the International Communication Association (ICA) and recipient of the Kitty O. Locker Outstanding Researcher Award of the Association for Business Communication (ABC). She serves on the board of directors of the International Public Relations Research Conference (IPRRC).



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Johansson, Bengt, *University of Gothenburg (Sweden)* • Bengt Johansson is Professor at the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication (JMG), University of Gothenburg. His research centres on political communication, journalism, and crisis and risk communication. His work in political communication focuses on media coverage of election campaigns, political scandals, and political advertising. He has also published widely on media effects, public opinion, and the role of communication in shaping societal responses to crises. Johansson has been involved in several international research projects on crisis communication and the COVID-19 pandemic and is a member of the management team of the COST network AlertHub. He is currently President of the International Crisis and Risk Communication Association (ICRCA).



Kaclová, Markéta, *Charles University (Czech Republic)* • After nearly 20 years in the public relations agency world, she is now transitioning into academia. Currently pursuing a PhD at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, her research focuses on strategic communication, the public relations profession, and the technologies—particularly artificial intelligence—that are reshaping the field.



Kang, Minjeong, *Indiana University (USA)* • Minjeong Kang (Ph. D in Mass Communication, Syracuse University) is an associate professor and teaches undergraduate and graduate strategic communication and research courses at the Media School, Indiana University. Her recent research interests have focused on understanding engagement in various stakeholder contexts such as member, employee, and volunteer relations and its positive impacts in eliciting supportive communication and behavioral outcomes. Additionally, Dr. Kang is working on understanding organizational listening by examining factors that contribute to employee silence motives. Dr. Kang serves as reviewer to various journals including *Journal of Public Relations Research*, which she is on the editorial board.

Karagiorgou, Ioanna, *University of the Arts London (UK)*



Kim, Solyee, *Howard University (USA)* • Solyee Kim (Ph.D., University of Georgia) is an assistant professor at the School of Communications in Howard University. Her research focuses on (1) intergroup and cross-cultural communication; (2) exploring power dynamics through discourse analysis; and (3) ethical application of technology in strategic communication and journalism. Her research has explored DEI topics in public relations; discourse analysis of the South Korean U.S. embassy's public diplomacy efforts on social media; and immigrants' experiences of dis- and misinformation in the U.S. Her research has appeared in *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Journalism Practice*, and *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, among others.



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Communication

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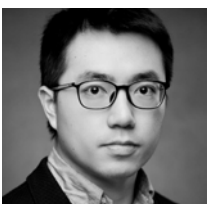
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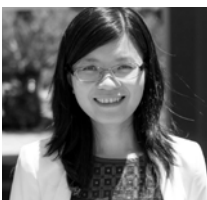
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Disaster Communication as the Null Curriculum: An Examination of PR Education in Türkiye

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Introduction and purpose of the study

In Türkiye, a country that lives with the constant reality of disasters, PR practitioners play a critical role in disaster communication. This study examines whether 4-year undergraduate PR programs in Türkiye offer courses on disaster communication. In this context, the research questions of the study are as follows: 1) To what extent are disaster communication courses incorporated into the curricula of undergraduate PR programs in Türkiye? 2) Do risk/crisis communication courses include disaster communication as a thematic component? 3) Are psychological and sociological dimensions embedded in disaster communication courses?

Literature review

Disaster communication, including pre-disaster preparedness, response during the disaster, and post-disaster recovery, is a strategic PR practice. In this vein, PR programs should offer courses on disaster communication in addition to risk/crisis communication, as PR practitioners' roles before, during and after disasters are highly critical. The literature broadly demonstrates that disaster communication education is a critical competency area that strengthens the professional roles of students across various disciplines. Studies highlight that experiential learning-based curricula and scenario-based instructional approaches allow students to practice communication skills within an authentic disaster context, helping them understand the

strategic importance of proactive and reactive communication. Collectively, the literature underscores that effective disaster management requires not only technical expertise but also consistent and timely stakeholder communication, making disaster communication a vital component of modern educational programs. This need becomes even more pronounced in PR as practitioners serve as the bridge between organizations and affected publics.

Methodology

In order to map the presence and scope of disaster communication within undergraduate PR education in Türkiye, this study examines PR program curricula. In the first stage of the research, all undergraduate programs in Türkiye offering education in public relations were identified via the Council of Higher Education Atlas. After identifying 81 undergraduate PR programs, only four of which included disaster communication courses, the analysis shifted to risk/crisis communication courses to examine whether and how disaster-related topics were integrated into the curriculum. Among the 81 undergraduate PR programs, it was found that 69 included at least one course on risk or crisis communication. For the programs that offered disaster communication courses, the extent to which disaster-related topics were addressed, and whether the content incorporated sociological or psychological perspectives were evaluated. Finally, the study assessed whether the programs offered university-wide elective courses related

to disasters and whether these electives included communication or PR-oriented content. In the second stage of the research, a content analysis was conducted on the syllabi of disaster, risk and crisis communication courses with respect to the course title, course type, the academic year in which the course was offered, weekly course content and recommended readings.

Results and conclusions

The findings reveal a paradox: although Türkiye is a disaster-prone country, disaster communication courses do not achieve curricular recognition in PR education, whereas risk/crisis communication courses are prevalent. The minimal presence of disaster communication courses in PR curricula, together with the limited attention to disaster-related topics within risk and crisis communication courses, underscores a deeper issue: disaster communication is not perceived as a critical professional competence for PR practitioners in Türkiye. Another key finding concerns the systematic exclusion of sociological and psychological dimensions from disaster communication teaching. Furthermore, sociological and psychological processes that shape public responses to disasters are largely absent from course content, and emotion management remains unaddressed in PR curricula, reinforcing a narrow managerial approach in Türkiye.

Taken together, these findings suggest that disaster communication functions as part of the “null curriculum” in Türkiye’s PR education,

that is, it remains consistently unaddressed. The mismatch between Türkiye’s disaster-prone environment and the lack of institutionalization of disaster communication courses raises critical questions about the profession’s understanding of its public responsibility and highlights the need to reconsider curricular priorities within PR expertise. As this study is limited to PR programs in Türkiye, further research is needed to examine how disaster communication is incorporated into PR curricula in other countries, enabling cross-national comparative analyses.

Practical and social implications

The study highlights the urgent need to strengthen disaster communication competence within PR education in Türkiye, particularly given the country’s high exposure to disasters. Enhancing PR curricula with disaster-focused, psychologically informed and sociologically grounded content would help equip future PR practitioners not only to support organizational communication but also to contribute to community resilience and emotionally responsive messaging. Recognizing disaster communication as “the null curriculum” is essential for educating future PR practitioners who understand their communicative roles and broader societal impact before, during and after disasters.

Keywords

disaster communication, risk/crisis communication, PR education, PR curriculum, Türkiye

Trust in practice: the application of trustworthiness in Dutch health crisis campaigns

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Introduction

In disaster, health, and organizational crisis communication, trust is often positioned as a core condition for resilience, compliance, and legitimacy, yet it remains unclear how “trust” is translated into concrete campaign decisions under real-world constraints. Trust is widely regarded as a key mechanism for increasing the uptake of health advice in PR and crisis communication (Liu & Duarte, 2023; Valentini, 2020). A dominant operationalization of trust is the ability, benevolence, and integrity framework (ABI, Mayer et al., 1995), yet it is unclear to what extent such theoretical models are actually used in the design of real-world campaigns. This study examines how public health communication professionals understand and operationalize “trustworthiness” in the production of Dutch mass media health campaigns. We ask: How is trustworthiness operationalized in practice, and what conceptual and practical tensions emerge when campaign makers anticipate controversy, urgency, and polarized responses?

Methods

We conducted reconstruction interviews with a diverse sample of Dutch communication professionals (n=20) working in for-profit, non-profit and governmental organizations. Between April and July 2025, participants systematically reviewed specific campaigns they had recently produced, covering a range of behaviors and

risk levels (e.g., smoking cessation, childhood vaccination, sexual health). The reconstruction method anchors reflections in concrete outputs and decisions rather than abstract ideals (Reich & Barnoy, 2020). Interviews were analyzed using inductive thematic coding in Atlas.ti.

Findings

Our findings show that the “ability” dimension of trust is applied by communicating facts and invoking authority. Campaigns in our sample highlight evidence of effectiveness (e.g., reduction in hospitalization risk), draw on medical authority (e.g., images of GPs, references to experts), and are often disseminated via trusted intermediaries such as doctor’s offices. Participants describe these competence cues as especially salient when health advice is expected to be contested or met with skepticism.

Benevolence and integrity are frequently translated into a broader notion of authenticity. Professionals emphasize “real people with real stories,” familiar and realistic scenarios, and identifiable characters as ways to enhance perceived sincerity and moral alignment. Several participants frame this as a response to heightened sensitivity to perceived manipulation and politicization in the wake of recent public health crises.

At the same time, trust does not consistently guide all stages of campaign development. When working with creative agencies, participants de-

scribe a tension between portraying trustworthiness and producing “thumb-stopping” content for crowded platforms, in which attention-grabbing aesthetics sometimes override trust-related considerations. This points to the growing influence of platform logics on crisis-relevant public communication, where visibility pressures may compete with credibility aims.

A third recurring theme that falls outside of the ABI framework is the importance attributed to audience autonomy. Many professionals express reluctance to give direct behavioral advice, instead framing campaigns as facilitating “informed choice” through transparency and high-quality information. In this framing, individuals are invited to decide for themselves, which sits uneasily alongside explicit goals such as increasing vaccination uptake. Stressing autonomy can be seen as a distinct mechanism for behavior change that diminishes the reliance on trust in health campaigns.

Overall, the strategies described reflect predominantly one-way communication and reveal a persistent tension between informative and persuasive aims. This tension is especially relevant for crisis communication, where urgency can amplify the temptation to prioritize attention and compliance over deliberation and perceived autonomy.

Conclusion

By opening up the production processes of contemporary Dutch health campaigns, this study illustrates how trust models, particularly the ABI framework, are selectively translated, stretched (e.g., via authenticity), and sometimes sidelined in practice. The findings highlight both conceptual gaps (e.g., the role of autonomy) and practical constraints (e.g., platform logics, creative agency priorities) that limit the systematic application of trust theory. For crisis communication research and practice, the results suggest that “trustworthiness” is operationalized as a bundle of partially competing logics (authority/competence cues, authenticity, and autonomy) whose

balance may shift when urgency and anticipated backlash increase. Future research should further align trust models with practitioners’ realities and explore more dialogic, two-way campaign approaches that can foster trust without obscuring strategic objectives.

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Keywords

trust, crisis communication, public health, authenticity, autonomy

Strategic Public relations in India: An Analysis using the Generic Principles

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Purpose

This paper explores the public relations practice in India by applying the generic principles of global public relations vis-a-vis strategic communication. To the best of our knowledge, these generic principles have not been applied for studying public relations in India and thus our study helps enrich the body of knowledge. Our sample consists of all the three major types of organizations: government agencies, non-profits and corporations.

Literature review

As an outcome of globalization and increased multinational activities of Indian organizations, public relations practice in India is shifting from primarily publicity function to a more sophisticated strategic one. This change in the 21st century was chronicled in early research (Singh, 2000; Bardhan and Sriramesh, 2006) and further discussed by PRCAI's (2019–2023) yearly reports. Eight out of 10 corporate communication specialists in India report directly to the CEO according to the 2023 research, and corporations reportedly place a higher value on the strategic advice provided by PR professionals. This pattern shows how public relations is increasingly involved in the “dominant coalition,” where C-suite executives work closely with PR teams on strategy and planning.

Research on strategic public relations in India does not seem to have caught up with practice. Sriramesh (1988 & 1999), who conducted the first empirical study, highlighted the paucity of

empirical studies on PR practices of Indian organisations. Patwardhan and Bardhan (2014) positioned their survey as one of the few studies comparing Indian PR practice with global trends. A more recent review of 82 published papers by Sahoo and Nayak (2022) concluded that data on PR in India had been largely unavailable for a decade. In their research, Bhargava and Arakkal (2022) reported the growth of the regional public relations industry in the country. Khare et al.'s (2023) study revealed how PR activities, including events, sponsorship, and philanthropy, can be significant determinants of small business expansion. Dhanesh (2012) investigated whether the argument for PR leadership of corporate social responsibility (CSR) holds true in the non-Western context, particularly in Indian corporations known for strong CSR practices, and found that senior business executives—not PR practitioners—usually lead it. Dialogic attitude favors organization-media ties, according to research by Ting Lee and Desai (2014) on NGO media relations. The impact of culture on practice was highlighted by Antyaku-la and Murthy's (2019) cross-cultural assessment of gender and business communication in India and Japan.

Based on this literature review, we feel there is a need for many more empirical studies from India grounded in theoretical underpinnings. There have been minimal published papers in India for the last 10 years, as indicated in the work of Sahoo & Nayak (2022). In addition, neither the current study nor any earlier studies identified conceptualising strategic PR in India as something significant. So, we conceptualized this

study seeking to use theorizing on the generic principles of strategic public relations management based on the Excellence study (J. Grunig, 1992, Dozier, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1995, and L. Grunig, J. Grunig, and Dozier, 2003).

Design/methodology/approach

We gathered data using self-administered surveys and in-depth personal interviews. 160 invitations to participate in the survey were distributed via email, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn, yielding 41 usable responses (25% response rate), which is reasonable for an online survey. In addition, 20 qualitative interviews were conducted with senior pr/corporate communication practitioners, some of whom also completed the survey.

Findings

The results indicate that the practice of the profession in India appears to have a dual/hybrid approach, although operational/technical activities still dominate. The study revealed that the public relations/corporate communication function is slowly evolving and moving towards a strategic role, and that its operations is within a hybrid role system, where practitioners shift between technician and strategic functions de-

pending on the type of organisation, leadership orientation, and situational needs.

Practical and social implications

The study aims to understand the state of the current public relations/corporate communication practices in India focusing especially on strategic public relations. The study reveals an actionable understanding of how the importance of strategic roles can benefit public relations/corporate communication professionals in helping organisations enhance their overall reputation. Ethical and societal dimensions of communication with the public are also highly emphasised by practitioners, highlighting the importance of ethical communication in shaping stakeholders' opinions and promoting transparency between the organisation and society at large.

Keywords

Corporate Communication, Public Relations, India, Excellence theory

Navigating crisis communication decisionmaking: Uncovering competing logics within crisis management teams

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To handle complex crisis situations and develop suitable crisis communication, organizations often rely on multi-disciplinary crisis management teams (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017; Uitdewilligen & Waller, 2018). Crisis management team members have to combine their domain-specific knowledge to collectively make sense of the situation (Uitdewilligen & Waller, 2018; Weick, 1988). Their discipline-specific backgrounds, however, may lead them to process similar information differently, requiring the team to reconcile multiple conflicting interpretations of a crisis situation (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010).

When it comes to conflicting interpretations within crisis teams, crisis communication scholars have often assumed that public relations and legal practitioners pursue different objectives (e.g., Fitzpatrick & Rubin, 1995; Reber et al., 2001). Still, only limited research has investigated their collaboration, mostly through in-depth interviews (e.g., Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2016; Kim et al., 2019; Toledano et al., 2017). Overall, these studies confirm that differences between both professions exist, while also pointing to a shared understanding and openness to collaboration. To avoid biases associated with interview methods (e.g., social desirability, recall), observation research can help to better understand the collaboration dynamics within crisis teams (e.g., Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2021).

To this end, the first author conducted participatory observations in two Belgian commu-

nication agencies specialized in crisis communication. Over two three-month periods (i.e., March-May, September-November 2025), the first author worked as an overt participant observer (cf. Frenette, 2013) to investigate decision-making within crisis management teams. In particular, the focus was on interactions between crisis communication consultants and the legal advisors from their clients. The observations were complemented by eighteen in-depth interviews with sixteen external communication consultants and two legal experts. The interviews helped to contextualize distinct observations, as well as capture interviewees' broader experiences with the topic of study. In the following months, the field notes and interview transcripts will be subjected to inductive data analysis through MaxQDA.

Preliminary findings indicate that crisis teams indeed weigh diverse stakes, including media coverage, financial and legal consequences. Across the observed cases, however, legal considerations appeared to dominate crisis communication practice in two ways. First, national laws and regulations determine the degree to which certain crisis communication strategies are either possible or obligatory, with specific legal frameworks activated depending on the crisis type. Decision-making becomes even more complex when organizations are international or publicly traded, as additional regulations apply. Second, we found that different crisis team

members tend to follow their own professional logic. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Fitzpatrick & Rubin, 1995), internal and external communication advisors generally advocate for open, transparent and emphatic communication, while legal advisors tend to promote a more cautious approach aimed at minimizing legal liability. Noteworthy, however, is that the legal rationale has permeated organizations and crisis management teams to such an extent that communication practitioners proactively adjust their crisis responses.

Theoretically, our findings offer deeper insight into the collaboration dynamics within crisis management teams and the ways in which competing logics shape crisis communication decisions. This study adds value through its extensive ethnographic approach, which has allowed us to capture the actual collaboration dynamics in crisis management teams. Practically, our research highlights opportunities for crisis teams to improve cross-functional collaboration.

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Keywords

crisis communication, decision-making, public relations, legal liability, ethnography

Flooded and Confused. An Insider's View of a Disastrous Flood in Poland in Sep 2024

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

In September 2024, catastrophic flooding struck southern Poland, severely affecting the Kłodzko Valley and the spa town of Łądek-Zdrój. Triggered by extreme rainfall and the collapse of a dam, the flood caused widespread destruction of housing, infrastructure, bridges, public buildings, and local economies. The disaster also revealed profound challenges in crisis communication among public authorities, institutions, firms, media, and local communities.

This study examines, also via the author's first-hand experience, how crisis communication operated during the emergency response and the recovery phase. Its aim is to assess the effectiveness and shortcomings of communication practices at local and national levels, and to explore how residents themselves participated in producing, sharing, and interpreting information. By focusing on Łądek-Zdrój—a small spa town heavily impacted by the disaster—the paper highlights how communication influences trust in public institutions, NGOs, community resilience, and perceptions of state legitimacy in post-disaster contexts.

Literature Review

Crisis communication literature stresses the importance of timeliness, transparency, and empathy for victims in reducing uncertainty and maintaining public trust (Lukaszewski, 2013). Scholars have examined the role of social media and informal communication networks, recog-

nizing local communities as crucial spaces for real-time information exchange and emotional support. There are also numerous, also recent, studies addressing challenges created by floodings for governments, businesses, and local communities (Intrieri et al., 2020, Selakovic, 2025, Soares et al., 2026).

However, the recovery phase remains under-explored compared to immediate emergency messaging. Recovery involves complex administrative procedures, long-term uncertainty, and sustained psychological stress, requiring continuous dialogue and debate with affected communities rather than one-way and top-down information delivery. Existing research highlights participatory communication, community engagement, and narrative reconstruction as key to rebuilding physical infrastructure and social cohesion. The Polish flood case aims at examining communication not only as strategic messaging but also as lived experience shaped by bureaucratic encounters, aid distribution systems, and everyday survival practices.

Methodology

The study uses a qualitative case study approach combining desk research and participatory observation. Desk research includes analysis of national and local media coverage, official government communications, public statements by political leaders, and legal-administrative documents related to recovery programs. In addition, posts and discussions from local Facebook

groups were analyzed to capture grassroots information exchange, mutual aid coordination, and emotional expression.

A distinctive methodological element is participatory observation. As a resident of Łądek-Zdrój, the author experienced the flood and took part in clean-up and rebuilding of the town. Field notes from interactions with neighbors, public services, aid workers and volunteers documented communication practices, relations between residents and institutions, and perceptions of official messaging. This dual perspective—systemic and experiential—shows how crisis communication is received, interpreted, and contested at the community level.

Results and Conclusions

The findings reveal a clear contrast between communication during the emergency response and during long-term recovery. In the immediate aftermath, uniformed services—especially the fire brigades and Territorial Defense Forces—were perceived as effective communicators. Their constant presence, practical guidance, and empathetic interpersonal contacts, built trust effectively. Communication was action-oriented, direct, and embedded in visible assistance.

In the recovery phase, communication was overwhelmed by bureaucratic procedures, complex aid applications, and fragmented institutional responsibilities. Residents frequently saw interactions with welfare offices, inspectors, and insurers as opaque, inconsistent, and distrustful. Information about financial assistance, reconstruction rules, and legal requirements was difficult to access and interpret. National-level political communication emphasized large financial allocations, while local experience was marked by delays, administrative barriers, and persistent uncertainty. This discrepancy fostered frustration, emotional exhaustion, and a sense of exclusion. Local social media groups partially compensated for institutional communication gaps. They functioned as informal communication ecosystems where residents exchanged

practical advice, verified information, organized support, and expressed collective emotions.

Overall, the study shows that communication failures in the recovery phase can prolong psychological distress and erode trust more than the initial disaster. Crisis communication must therefore be understood as a process, not merely a tool for emergency alerts and media statements.

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Keywords

crisis communication, floods, resilience, trust

Why Information Fails in Health Crises: Evidence on Social Influence

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Public health challenges such as obesity, diabetes, and diet-related chronic diseases are commonly addressed through long-term informational campaigns grounded in rational-choice assumptions and individual responsibility (Lake et al., 2022), placing pressure on health systems and public institutions (Seidell & Halberstadt, 2015). This persistence raises a critical problem for communication and public relations scholarship: why do information-based strategies fail to prevent health crises?

Drawing on public relations theory and crisis communication scholarship, this study challenges transmission-oriented approaches that dominate institutional health communication. Existing research shows that health-related behaviors are shaped not only by information, but by social norms, relational dynamics, emotional support, and collective practices (Asch, 1951; Christakis & Fowler, 2007; Meng, 2016). Behavioral science models emphasize the role of social opportunity and motivation. Nevertheless, institutional health communication remains anchored in one-way information diffusion.

This paper addresses this gap through empirical data generated within a research project awarded funding through a competitive national peer-review process in communication. The analysis is guided by the following research question: Are healthy behaviors more effectively stimulated through the diffusion of information or through

social influence (SI)? The study focuses on two age groups—children and older adults—representing critical life stages in which health behaviors are strongly shaped by social environments. Rather than comparing message content, the study contrasts two communication logics underpinning institutional health campaigns.

Methodologically, the study adopts an experimental design comparing communication interventions grounded in SI and information diffusion over a six-month period, followed by a post-intervention assessment. Four population groups were involved: (1) children aged 10–13 participating in face-to-face group workshops (SI condition); (2) children exposed to online informational video content (information condition); (3) older adults aged 65 and over participating in in-person group workshops (SI condition); and (4) older adults receiving informational SMS messages (information condition). SI interventions relied on participatory and gamified dynamics shown to enhance motivation and engagement (Berger & Schrader, 2016; Werbach et al., 2012).

Across all groups, outcomes were assessed in terms of attitudinal orientation toward healthy eating, self-reported dietary behaviors, and persistence of effects. Process indicators (attendance, continuity of participation, and engagement across sessions) were also recorded.

Findings across the four experimental groups reveal a consistent pattern aligned with communication logic rather than age alone. In both age segments, participants exposed to SI-based interventions demonstrated higher engagement and continuity of participation than those in information-based conditions. Among children, group workshops fostered active involvement, whereas informational video exposure generated more limited engagement. Among older adults, workshop-based interventions produced stronger adherence and sustained participation, while SMS-based informational messaging was associated with faster disengagement. Overall, communication grounded in social interaction fostered higher commitment than one-way informational messaging.

From a public relations and crisis communication perspective, these findings point to a systemic organizational vulnerability. Health institutions continue to privilege information diffusion models despite evidence of their limited effectiveness in socially embedded behavioral contexts. When such misalignment persists, chronic public health challenges can be understood as ongoing communication crises.

The paper contributes to communication research by extending crisis communication theory to slow-moving public health crises and by providing experimental evidence supporting a shift from information-centric to socially embedded strategies. Ultimately, it demonstrates that information alone does not prevent health crises; communication grounded in social influence offers a more robust pathway for sustainable crisis prevention and relational governance.

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Keywords

health crisis communication; social influence; public relations theory

Public Information Officers as Public Relations Practitioners: Role Enactment and Media Relationships in Public Sector Crisis Communication

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When a wildfire shifts direction overnight, a boil-water advisory is issued without warning, or a public health order must be communicated before misinformation spreads, Public Information Officers (PIOs) are often the first point of contact between institutions and the public. Embedded within government agencies, emergency management systems, public health institutions, and public safety organizations, PIOs are formally designated communication professionals responsible for translating complex, evolving situations into actionable public guidance (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2020). In these moments, communication outcomes are evaluated not only by organizational reputation, but by whether publics understand, comply with, and act upon information under conditions of uncertainty and risk.

Although PIOs are most visible during crises, research and professional training frameworks emphasize that most of their work occurs outside active emergencies through routine public awareness, preparedness, and risk communication intended to mitigate future harm (Littlefield & Quenette, 2007). These everyday communication practices establish the relational, institutional, and informational conditions that shape whether crisis messages are trusted, understood, and acted upon when emergencies occur (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013).

Unlike many corporate or agency-based public relations practitioners, PIOs often enter communication roles through nontraditional professional pathways. In public sector and emergency contexts, PIO positions are frequently filled by individuals transitioning from operational roles such as emergency management, law enforcement, fire service, public health, or other public service functions rather than through linear progression from formal education in public relations (Littlefield & Quenette, 2007; Lee, 2012). As a result, professional socialization into communication work often occurs on the job, shaped by institutional norms, crisis demands, and legal accountability structures rather than by early identification with public relations as a discipline.

This transition has important implications for how communication roles are enacted and understood. Individuals moving from operational or response-oriented positions may initially emphasize coordination, information control, and logistical support over strategic communication planning or relationship management, particularly in high-pressure environments where speed and accuracy are paramount. At the same time, as PIOs assume responsibility for public-facing messaging, media relations, and leadership advising, they are required to navigate communication decisions with consequences that extend beyond internal operations

to public understanding, compliance, and safety. This dual orientation helps explain why PIO work often involves fluid movement between technical execution and managerial judgment, and why role boundaries may be less stable than those traditionally described in public relations scholarship.

Drawing on journalism scholarship, public relations role theory, and Organization–Public Relationship (OPR) theory, this study conceptualizes crisis communication as an institutional and relational process that develops over time rather than as a discrete response to singular events. Survey data were collected from a national sample of 206 PIOs working across local, county, state, and federal public-sector contexts. Respondents completed measures assessing professional role enactment using Broom’s public relations role scales (Broom & Smith, 1979) and perceptions of their relationship with the news media using adapted OPR dimensions (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Exploratory factor analysis revealed a five-factor role structure encompassing communication facilitation and problem diagnosis, expert prescriber and strategic counsel, communication technician production, management participation and program accountability, and a distinct media relations specialist role. Descriptive analyses indicated moderate to high enactment across all role dimensions, with media relations and technical production reported most frequently. Comparison of higher-order role indices showed that technical role enactment exceeded managerial role enactment overall, although managerial engagement remained well above the scale midpoint, reflecting a hybrid professional configuration.

Analysis of media relationship perceptions indicated that PIOs viewed their interactions with journalists as stable and institutionalized, characterized by relatively high perceived control mutuality and commitment, moderate trust and satisfaction, and lower communal relationship orientation.

Exchange-based perceptions were negatively associated with trust, control mutuality, and communal orientation, suggesting tension between transactional sourcing norms and relational expectations. Importantly, these perceptions were largely consistent across levels of professional experience, supporting the view that media–source dynamics are shaped by institutional routines rather than individual career progression.

Taken together, these findings highlight crisis communication as an ongoing institutional practice grounded in routine relationship cultivation rather than solely in reactive event-based messaging. By integrating role enactment and media relationship perceptions within a single analytic framework, this study demonstrates how crisis communication capacity is built through everyday professional routines that precede and shape crisis response. In doing so, it extends public relations role theory into public-sector contexts where communication carries direct public consequences and underscores the importance of examining crisis communication beyond moments of disruption alone.

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Keywords

crisis communication; Public Information Officers; media–source relationships; public sector communication; organizational–public relationships

Reframing Climate Change as a Permanent Crisis: Developing a Model for Strategic Crisis Communication

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Climate change communication has long struggled to spur urgent public action, despite scientific consensus on the threat's severity. This paper addresses the *communication* failure underlying this *climate emergency* by reframing climate change as a **permanent crisis** and proposing a strategic crisis communication model to engage stakeholders more effectively. The research problem is grounded in the observed gap between high public awareness of climate change and the lack of commensurate behavioral change or policy support, suggesting that prevailing communication approaches have not made climate change *feel* like an immediate crisis. We treat the failure of current climate communication approaches as a research problem: while scientists and advocates increasingly refer to a *climate crisis*, many audiences still view climate change as a distant and abstract risk. The purpose of this study is to analyze why climate change has not been widely recognized as an urgent crisis and to develop a new model of climate crisis communication that sustains urgency and engagement. Bridging crisis communication theory (Coombs) with climate communication, the paper conceptualizes climate change as a *chronic crisis*—a crisis without a clear end point that challenges traditional crisis paradigms.

Literature Review

Traditional crisis communication theory frames crises as acute events with distinct phases (e.g. pre-crisis, crisis, post-crisis), whereas risk communication addresses long-term hazards before they manifest. Climate change straddles this divide: it is a slow-moving, pervasive threat that is already causing disasters yet lacks the sudden shock quality of conventional crises. Prior studies suggest climate messaging often fails by remaining abstract and statistics-driven, neglecting emotional and cultural factors that drive public engagement. An *awareness–action* gap has been widely observed, where concern about climate change does not translate into action. Repeated *doom-and-gloom narratives* may even induce *crisis fatigue*, leading audiences to tune out. These insights highlight the need for new communication strategies that make climate risks feel immediate while avoiding audience apathy.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study is a conceptual analysis that synthesizes crisis communication theory with climate communication practice. We adopt Coombs' theoretical lens of crisis (emphasizing perception and stakeholder expectations) and extend it to a protracted context. The concept of a *permanent crisis* or *permacrisis* is introduced to describe climate change. Drawing on strategic communication principles, we posit that cli-

mate change communication should be treated as an ongoing crisis narrative requiring continuous management. Our methodology involves an interdisciplinary literature review and the development of a new framework. We analyze real-world examples from the European Union and Croatia to ground the model in practice, examining how climate-related events and policies are communicated and perceived. This is a qualitative, theory-building approach.

Results – Proposed Model

We propose a Climate Crisis Communication Model that reconceptualizes climate change communication as a sustained crisis communication effort. Key elements of the model include: (1) Continuous Framing of Urgency: positioning climate change as an immediate threat in communications by linking global warming to local extreme weather events and current health or economic impacts, thereby overcoming psychological distance; (2) Emphasis on Personal Relevance and Values: crafting narratives that connect climate solutions to stakeholders' core values, moving beyond scientific facts to resonate emotionally; (3) Balancing Fear with Efficacy: using crisis framing to convey urgency and serious consequences, but coupling it with clear solutions and progress stories to avoid paralysis or despair; (4) Sustained Engagement and Two-Way Communication: treating the public not as passive recipients of dire warnings, but as partners in dialogue; and (5) Institutionalizing *Permanent Crisis Management*: integrating climate crisis communication into regular operations (rather than one-off campaigns), ensuring consistency and rapid responsiveness to emerging climate-related events. The model distinguishes *acute climate crisis events* (e.g. a catastrophic flood) from the *chronic climate crisis* (the underlying warming trend), and outlines strategies for both scenarios.

Conclusions and Implications

Reframing climate change as a permanent crisis offers a pathway to more effective public engagement. Our model contributes conceptually by bridging the gap between risk and crisis communication. It suggests that communication professionals should adopt a *marathon* mindset—maintaining a sustainable rhythm of urgent messaging without burning out the audience. The scientific contribution lies in defining a new approach to strategic communication under conditions of ongoing crisis, expanding crisis communication theory to non-traditional crises. In practice, the implications are significant for public relations and policy communication: governments, agencies, and NGOs could increase public support for climate action by framing climate change as a crisis and demonstrating achievable solutions. The paper concludes with recommendations for implementing the model in EU and Croatian contexts, and calls for future research (e.g., testing the model's effectiveness on audience engagement). In sum, treating climate change as a permanent crisis—communicated through a carefully calibrated crisis strategy—may help resolve the current communication failure and foster a more informed public response.

Keywords

climate change communication; crisis communication; strategic communication; risk perception; crisis fatigue

The Incubating Iceberg – A Crisis Communication Model

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Crisis communication is generally discussed on a normative level. One outstanding theory comprises Timothy Coombs's "Situational Crisis Communication Theory" (2023). Coombs analyzes organizational crises from the perspective of management's best strategy to reduce damage to a company. Coombs explicates how reputation and liability influence expectations and the extent of damage incurred by a company during a crisis. Coombs does not analyze the situation from a societal, organizational or an individual perspective.

This study examines the organizational crisis starting from the one-on-one interaction, e.g., the company spokesperson's communication with the mother who lost her son in a plane crash. This one-on-one interaction represents the basis of the company's communication with stakeholders who have been directly affected. This core communication moment has been caused by a crisis trigger (e.g. a plane crash). From this moment forward, the crisis evolves through its dissemination in the public sphere. Stakeholders initiate communicative systems that operate within their own constitution.

This study investigates the development of the crisis through a communication science approach as well as a systems theory lens to understand crises as dynamic processes that base on communicative actions. The crisis takes on an "identity" that is shaped by systems and interactions within the framework of morality, truth and authenticity. They occur in the context of societal, media, legal and economic trends. The

study analyzes the entire process of an organizational crisis based on established theories. The central research question is: What factors influence the process of an organizational crisis?

Literature Review

The core communication of the crisis can be investigated by employing interpersonal communication theories such as those by Lasswell (1948), Watzlawick (1969) or Schulz von Thun (2019). Simple communication models name several factors that influence one-on-one communication situations. In an organizational crisis, it is, nevertheless, not sufficient to look solely at individual communications. Sociological theories offer analyses of group behavior.

Luhmann's systems theory (1997) explains how groups function and why it is so challenging to interact between independent systems. Habermas and his theory of communicative action (1981), in turn, explains how people interact under the premises of being truthful, authentic, and moral – all of which are essential in a crisis. Emotions are the central drivers of crisis behaviors and can be explained through psychological models. The organizational aspects of a crisis can be understood using PR models such as Grunig's and Hunts's four models (1984), or even with Bernays's approach to manipulating people into a sense of emotional comfort (2011). Constructivism can be utilized to discuss the presentation of the truth from a company's perspective (Merten 2014). Thus, the theories to explain organizational crises thoroughly are varied and numerous. No one simple answer is available for the question of how best to react. Instead, the

complexity of crises needs to be represented as in the model that this study develops.

Methodology

This study is based on a thorough examination of the literature of communicative crises and on theories and models stemming from sociology, communication studies, psychology, and economics. The combination of this input was applied to case studies involving twenty crises that occurred during the past ten years to determine the similarities between them and to develop a framework model. This structured analysis has uncovered central factors common to all crisis situations.

Interviews with crisis experts have validated the model’s usefulness. Extending the model to the examination of other crisis cases and discussing these with further experts will improve the validity and reliability of this qualitative approach.

Results and Conclusions

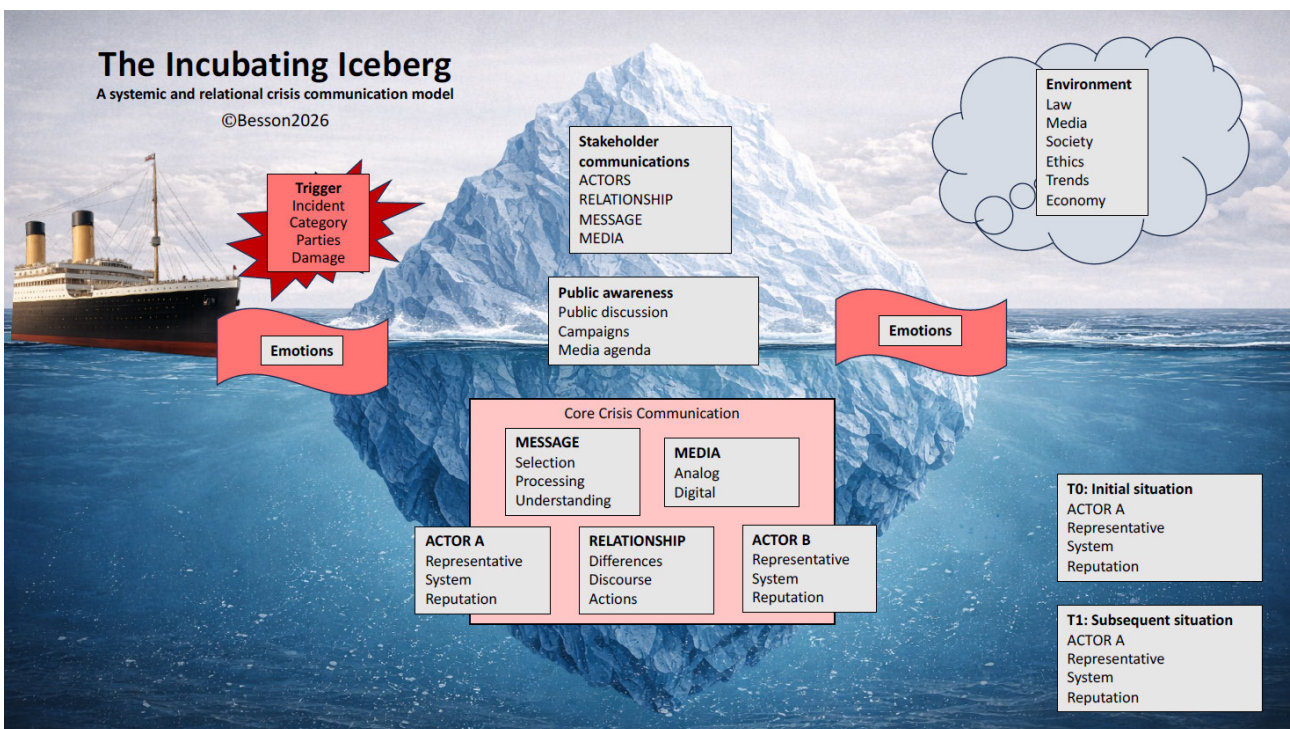
The study presents “The Incubating Iceberg” as a systemic and relational crisis communication model. The model provides the basis for a

thorough analysis of the dynamic emotive, intersocial processes that occur during an organizational crisis. The Incubating Iceberg model includes environmental factors and takes changing conditions into account.

The model demonstrates the not public/underwater versus public/above water communication. The crisis trigger escalates the core communication and makes the crisis public and seen. The iceberg becomes visible.

Practical and Social Implications

The model enables to understand an organizational crisis to the detail and find strengths and weaknesses to prepare better for the next crisis. The model is based on a theory groundwork that can easily be extended with more theories to e.g. dive into the role of narratives in crises.



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Keywords

*Crisis communication, theory, model, Incubating
Iceberg, relational, dynamic, emotional*

Transparency and stakeholder management in cybersecurity breaches: Applying stakeholder theory to the University Hospital Centre Zagreb crisis communication case study

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, particularly within the public healthcare system, represent high-intensity crises where technical disruptions intersect with profound ethical threats to data privacy. The central challenge of such crises is not merely technological recovery but the management of trust through transparent communication and strategic stakeholder alignment across multiple organizational levels.

Building on the tenets of stakeholder theory, this study aims to evaluate the types and levels of transparency employed in the crisis communication of the University Hospital Centre (KBC) Zagreb during the significant cyberattack in 2024. The research aims to investigate how the institution navigated the competing information needs of various stakeholder groups – ranging from patients and medical staff to regulatory bodies and the general public – amidst the chaos of compromised data security. By scrutinizing the messaging, this study intends to determine the extent to which transparency was used as a strategic asset to stabilize the institutional reputation and fulfill the ethical obligations toward the hospital's most salient stakeholders.

Literature review

The theoretical framework of this paper is grounded in stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), moving beyond its instrumental application toward a normative perspective that prioritizes ethical accountability in public institutions. Central to this analysis is the stakeholder salience model (Mitchell et. al., 1997), which provides a dynamic lens for evaluating how power, legitimacy, and urgency shift during a cybersecurity breach. This study argues that in digital crises, the salience of *dependent stakeholders* – such as patients – often escalates due to the high urgency of data privacy, yet they frequently face a “transparency deficit” in institutional responses.

Furthermore, the paper integrates situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007) to examine how the technical error versus victim crisis clusters influences an organization's reputational repair strategies. In the context of cybersecurity, the study bridges SCCT with the concepts of ethical and operational transparency, distinguishing between mere information disclosure and meaningful transparency that fosters stakeholder trust.

Finally, the literature review draws on the emerging concept of cyber-resilience as a communicative construct. It explores how institutional legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) is no longer solely maintained through operational continuity, but through the proactive management of digital risks and the fulfillment of the social contract in the era of algorithmic vulnerability. By synthesizing these perspectives, the research situates cybersecurity not as a peripheral technical issue, but as a core component of strategic corporate communication.

Methodology

The research is based on a qualitative content analysis within a single study that combines a cyberattack on critical infrastructure, position towards transparency and perspectives from multiple stakeholder groups.

The sample consists of official documents and media announcements from KBC Zagreb and its representatives, government and regulatory statements (Minister of Health, Minister of Interior, PM and other relevant stakeholders) and media coverage that combines articles within three most-read national dailies and 10 most relevant news portals between 27 June and 27 July 2024. Content analysis implies coding across five levels of transparency (timeliness, accuracy, completeness, accessibility and accountability) and their orientation toward specific stakeholder groups (patients, employees, institutions and media).

Results and conclusions

This paper will determine how KBC Zagreb managed the expectations of different stakeholder groups through the dimensions of transparency during and after the cyberattack. It should determine (1) the difference between the communicated message and the actual situation across all crisis phases, (2) different expectations of stakeholder groups regarding inadequate transparency and its consequences and (3) the extent of the

application of the SCCT model to cybercrises in the context of critical infrastructure.

Expected findings include (1) communication failure demonstrating a significant gap between the message communicated in KBC Zagreb's first press release and media investigations, and this gap widens across the phases of the crisis; (2) inequality of stakeholders perspective reflecting in the lowest priority of the most vulnerable stakeholders (patients) in the communication approach; and (3) inadequate communication is not only a problem of KBC Zagreb, but also of the institutional framework which failed to protect all stakeholders.

Practical and social implications

Practically, this research should provide a pragmatic guide for healthcare organizations, consisting of three key recommendations regarding positioning most vulnerable stakeholders in the center of communication, the importance of early messaging and claims during the initial crisis phase and cooperation with regulators from the very first day, not only when the media begin to ask uncomfortable questions.

The social significance of the paper lies in advocating for the stakeholders' right to timely and honest information, which is crucial for maintaining the stability of public health systems in the face of increasingly frequent cyber threats. By advocating for higher standards of transparency during cybersecurity breaches, the organization contributes to the preservation of public trust in the national healthcare system as a vital pillar of social stability.

Keywords

stakeholder theory, stakeholder management, situational crisis communication theory, health sector, cybersecurity

Beyond “Soft Skills:” The Roles of Emotional Intelligence and Mindfulness in Listening, Engagement, and Employee Advocacy

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

In the post-COVID workplace, organizations are facing sustained challenges posed by employee disengagement and discontent, an issue that is intensified by the sense of isolation from remote work, heightened sociopolitical polarization, and information overload. For leaders and public relations professionals responsible for organizational culture and internal communication, a critical question emerges: what factors enable employees to remain connected, engage constructively, and advocate for their organizations in today’s complex environments?

To address these challenges, this study draws in interdisciplinary insights on emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and listening research to examine how emotional intelligence and mindfulness are cultivated in organizational settings (RQ1) and how they influence employee engagement and advocacy (RQ2). This study further examines active-empathic listening as a key interpersonal mechanism through which emotional intelligence and mindfulness influence employee outcomes (RQ3). Data were collected through a survey with 1,159 full-time employees in the United States.

Literature Review

Emotional intelligence and mindfulness are two connected yet distinct concepts.

Emotional intelligence refers to one’s ability to recognize, understand, and monitor their own and others’ feelings and emotions, and to use this knowledge to adapt to surrounding social situations (Mayer & Salovey, 1995). It includes the dimensions of self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, and motivation. **Mindfulness**, originated from the Buddhist philosophy, has now been widely adopted in modern day psychology studies and clinical, educational, and organizational practices. From the social scientific perspective, mindfulness is defined as “the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present” (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and includes the dimensions of observing, acting with awareness, describing, nonjudging, and nonreacting (Baer et al., 2006).

Previous studies have provided related empirical evidence indicating the positive effects emotional intelligence and mindfulness have on active-empathic listening—a cognitive process that involves sensing, processing, and responding (Bodie, 2011), as well as their positive influence on employee outcomes. However, extant empirical research offer limited insights regarding how emotional intelligence and mindfulness are cultivated in organizational settings and which

organizational factors are most effectiveness in supporting their development.

Methodology

An online survey was carried out with 1,159 full-time employees in the U.S. Five-point Likert scaled items were adopted and modified from reputable earlier studies to measure emotional intelligence, mindfulness, active-empathic listening, employee engagement, and employee advocacy. Based on prior literature and the authors' earlier exploratory qualitative work, we created items to measure organizational factors in cultivating emotional intelligence and mindfulness under three broad categories: organizational programs and training, employees' self-practice, and leaders' modeling practices.

Results and Conclusions

For **RQ1**, results indicate mixed effects from organizational wellness and training programs on the cultivation of emotional intelligence and mindfulness. While they show a positive impact on emotional intelligence, they do not significantly predict mindfulness.

Employees' self-practice and leaders' modeling practices, in contrast, are positively associated with *both* emotional intelligence and mindfulness.

Findings for **RQ2** show that both emotional intelligence and mindfulness positively influence employee engagement and advocacy. Dimension-level analyses reveal that awareness of others' emotions alone does not significantly influence employee outcomes, whereas self-awareness, self-management, and managing others' emotions do. For mindfulness, most dimensions, except for "non-judging," are positively associated with employee outcomes.

Regarding **RQ3**, active-empathic listening serves as a partial mediator between emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and employee engagement and advocacy. However, the effect size is relatively small, suggesting that while active-empathic

listening is a significant interpersonal mechanism, it does not account for the whole process.

Practical and Social Implications

Our findings offer important implications for leaders and internal communication professionals seeking to strengthen employee engagement and advocacy. Rather than relying on "cookie-cutter" wellness programs, organizations should prioritize leadership behaviors that model emotional intelligence and mindfulness. Given the critical roles that emotional intelligence and mindfulness play in driving active-empathic listening and employee outcomes, these capabilities should not be treated merely as "soft skills." Instead, they should be intentionally embedded in leaders' and employees' everyday practices and cultivated through ongoing programs that are deeply integrated into organizational culture.

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Keywords

emotional intelligence, mindfulness, active-empathic listening, employee engagement, employee advocacy

In AI We Trust: Opportunities and Threats of Using Generative Artificial Intelligence in Public Relations Content Creation

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Introduction

Despite the overwhelming adoption of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in the daily tasks of public relations (PR) practitioners, the consequences of relying on AI-generated content for publics' trust towards organisations remain insufficiently explored (Yue et al., 2024). The present study addresses this research gap by investigating the components of trust toward organisations, with a specific focus on information-seeking behaviours and their epistemic consequences.

Literature Review

Galloway and Swiatek (2018) argue that public relations (PR) focuses primarily on human-to-human relationships. However, they also suggest that individuals can satisfy their need for meaningful connection through non-human entities, such as ideological movements, organisations, and brands. Consequently, members of the public exhibit information-seeking behaviours that require content to be credible, reliable, and transparent. While artificial intelligence (AI) can advance the PR industry by accelerating the analysis of large datasets, significant concerns remain regarding content quality (e.g., AI hallucinations), data management, and the evolving relationships between organisations and their publics (Cheng & Verčič, 2025). Recent industry challenges illustrate these risks, such as Am-

azon's historical gender bias in its recruitment algorithms and the January 2026 deepfake controversy involving Grok, where the AI was used to generate explicit imagery via nudity prompts.

To address these challenges, Younger (2024) advocates for a conceptual shift, viewing generative AI (GenAI) as a stakeholder rather than merely a technology, and recommends that organisations develop specific AI engagement strategies. Beyond managing the technical limitations of GenAI, PR practitioners must understand the public's expectations of the technology and scrutinize the components of trust formed during the information-seeking process.

Method

The present study addressed the need to understand the antecedents of epistemic trust toward organisations that communicate using GenAI versus human-created content. Through an online experimental design, content authorship and organisational familiarity were manipulated. A press release from an international consumer goods organisation and an AI-generated version of the same release were used to examine how members of the public evaluated dimensions related to epistemic trust.

Results and Discussion

Results revealed significantly higher trust toward organisations that communicate using GenAI content, $p = .041$. A five-component model of trust for Gen Z consumer stakeholders ($R^2_{adj} = .74$) was proposed, consisting of perceptions of authenticity, transparency, predictability, reliability, and knowledgeability. Moreover, there was a significant difference in how the perception of authorship influenced the expected components of trust. While human-generated trust was influenced by the reliability and transparency of the organisation, GenAI trust was explained by authenticity and reliability. Although publics expect reliability from both human and AI-generated content, GenAI is paradoxically perceived as more authentic than human-created content. This study is limited to exploring the cognitive components of trust; its affective component requires additional investigation.

Practical Implications

The risks and benefits for organisations building trust with their publics through AI versus human-created communication are discussed. The results suggest that GenAI can support practitioners when communicating novel information, such as major innovations or the introduction of new products. However, AI scepticism may arise when GenAI is used to manage relationships between publics and familiar organisations with established reputations. To mitigate this negative effect, practitioners should produce and communicate human-centric content in a transparent manner while explicitly emphasising human authorship.

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Keywords

generative artificial intelligence, public relations, epistemic trust, Gen Z, AI authorship

Belgian youth and crisis preparedness: Perceptions, strategies, and information practices

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The current global situation is perceived as carrying a growing risk of natural and human-made disasters (World Economic Forum, 2026). The European Commission (2021, p. 62) cautions that “in the future, we can expect more extreme events, sudden and slow-onset, and potentially causing increasing damage”. Because governments must know how to communicate effectively (Lin et al., 2016), the Belgian National Crisis Center (NCCN) commissioned our research team to carry out a four-year research project aimed at increasing the self-reliance of Belgian citizens in general, and groups at risk in particular.

One such group that the NCCN wants to focus on, is youth. Prior research indicates that indeed, age is related to how citizens respond to crises. More so than other age groups, for instance, youth value friends and family as important sources of crisis-related information (Avery, 2010). In addition, they prefer social media channels for seeking and sharing information about crises (Jin et al., 2016; Velasquez-Espinoza & Alcantara-Ayala, 2025).

Even though social media provide support to young people throughout a crisis event (Dahal et al., 2020), however, they come with an important risk. Younger age groups are more exposed and susceptible to misinformation (Dahal et al., 2020; Pickles et al., 2021). Overall, prior research indicates that their level of crisis preparedness

and their compliance with recommended protective actions is more limited as compared to older citizens (Jin et al., 2016; Velasquez-Espinoza & Alcantara-Ayala, 2025). Through qualitative interviews with Belgian youth, we want to focus on their perceptions in depth.

A semi-structured topic list enables us to examine three research questions. First, we explore which types of crises they perceive as the most significant risks to Belgium (RQ1). We ask which scenarios seem most likely to occur, as well as which worry them most.

Second, we examine whether Belgian youth feel prepared for potential crises (RQ2). We ask what they believe the government, as well as they themselves, do or should do to increase crisis preparedness. In addition, we ask which preparedness measures recommended by the NCCN they engage in and why (e.g., emergency plan, emergency kit, registration for warning system BE-Alert). Third, we examine which information sources they are likely to turn to in the event of a disaster (RQ3). Relatedly, we explore what they consider reliable and unreliable information sources and for what reasons.

Between February and April, 2026, we will conduct in-depth interviews with 30 Belgians aged between 18 and 25. To recruit a sample distributed across Belgium’s three Regions (i.e., the Flemish, Brussels-Capital, and Walloon Regions),

research agency Bilendi will invite participants from its research pool. They will receive an invitation letter approved by our faculty's ethics committee, and each interviewee will receive an incentive of 30 euros.

We will conduct the interviews in Dutch or French via Microsoft Teams, transcribe them verbatim, and analyze them using MAXQDA (i.e., qualitative data analysis software) in May-June 2026. The findings to be presented at Bled-Com will enrich crisis communication research by foregrounding the perspectives of youth, and will assist governmental agencies in adapting risk and crisis communication strategies targeted at younger citizens.

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Keywords

crisis communication, disaster communication, risk communication, youth, crisis preparedness

Managing internal dissent and adversarial employee activism: A new corporate governance function

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Employee activism is an increasingly significant phenomenon of contemporary organizations, with employees mobilizing around social, political, and environmental issues both within and beyond their workplaces (Briscoe & Gupta, 2021; Krishna, 2021). Recent research has started to examine the strategic communication management of employee activism (Ravazzani et al., 2025; Ravazzani & Hung-Baesecke, 2025) and identify organizational and individual factors influencing employee activism intentions (Conti et al., 2025). However, limited attention has been given to how dissenting voices, considered here the precursor to activism, emerge and evolve depending on how organizations pay attention to and respond to employee concerns, and how effective internal management can prevent its escalation into adversarial and externally directed forms.

This conceptual study proposes an integrated framework that adopts a risk management perspective, focusing on the internal dynamics through which dissent emerges and can be constructively addressed before it escalates externally. The framework links employee activism to two distinct sources of organizational dissent: *workplace-driven dissent*, which arise from internal problems mainly related to wellbeing issues or toxic micro- and macro-organizational causes, such as poor leadership, incivility, bullying or other antisocial behaviors that negatively

affect employees personally and professionally (e.g. Cannon, 2022; Krishna et al., 2024; Singh & Srivastava, 2023); and *values-driven dissent*, which stems from misalignment between employees and their organization on sociopolitical issues, including corporate and CEO positions on such issues (e.g. Hambrick & Wowak, 2021; Villagra et al., 2022).

Central to the framework is a two-level prevention mechanism that includes *governance* and *organizational responsiveness*. *Governance* consists of the structural infrastructure organizations establish to manage employee relations including: formal and informal voice channels, employee resource groups (ERGs) or establishment of internal communities; codes of conduct, internal policies or accountability mechanisms; wellbeing and mental health support policies, and work-life balance and workload management practices (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Morrison, 2014; Morrison et al., 2011; Rasool et al., 2021); alignment between stated organizational values and actual practices (Vredenburg et al., 2020); employee engagement in decision-making processes (e.g. Morrison, 2023); and organizational positioning on sociopolitical issues (Villagra et al., 2022). *Organizational responsiveness* refers to how these structures are activated in practice through managerial behavior: the climate of voice that leadership at all levels enables (Frazier & Bowler, 2012; Morrison

et al., 2011), the degree of psychological safety their actions foster in employees (Edmondson, 1999), transparent leadership communication (Men & Stacks, 2014; Rawlins, 2009), organizational listening (Macnamara, 2016), and concrete managerial action or inaction in response to employee concerns. The framework proposes that governance creates the structural conditions for responsiveness, but structures alone are insufficient, as effectiveness depends on whether and how leadership implements and activates them.

This level of managerial action or inaction is reflected in the *bridging and buffering strategies* identified by Ravazzani and Hung-Baesecke (2025). When the governance-responsiveness system functions effectively, organizations can use *bridging strategies*, characterized by dialogue, active engagement with employees, and integration of concerns into decision-making, channeling dissent constructively toward resolution or internally directed advocacy forms of activism aligned with organizational purpose (Hung-Baesecke & Delmo, 2025; Krishna, 2021; Ninova-Solovykh, 2023). When management adopts a *buffering approach*, minimizing employee concerns and controlling or manipulating messages, dissent accumulates internally, manifesting as strategic silence (Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison & Milliken, 2000), displaced expression, or exit intentions, and risks evolving toward adversarial and externally directed activism (Brown et al., 2020; Krishna, 2021).

This conceptual article extends existing models of employee activism (Ravazzani & Hung-Baesecke, 2025) and offers several contributions. From a theoretical perspective, it integrates previously separate literature on toxic work environments, employee voice and silence, and employee activism, proposing dissent management as the conceptual link between organizational dysfunctions and employee activist behaviors. From a practical perspective, the framework provides organizations with a proactive approach to address employee concerns internally, through effective governance structures and responsive leadership, thereby preventing escalation into

adversarial and externally directed activism that requires crisis management. It also showcases organization's commitment on addressing sociopolitical issues employees care about. The social implications include the different aspects of broader organizational responsibility. For example, organizations can create psychologically safe workplaces where employees can voice concerns constructively, contributing to healthier organizational cultures and more accountable institutions. Furthermore, positive social change is more likely to occur when organizations foster management-employee collective action toward shared social goals.

Future research could test the proposed relationships and examine how contextual factors such as industry, organizational size, different sociopolitical issues, and national culture influence governance-responsiveness dynamics.

Keywords

employee activism, dissent, social change, governance and responsiveness, risk management

Organizational reputation and crisis communication strategies: the case of the Elevador da Glória funicular accident

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Crises represent a threat to organizations and their stakeholders, as they may affect their image and reputation (Coombs, 2023; Fearn-Banks & Kawamoto, 2024). The adoption of appropriate crisis communication strategies, which should be aligned with the potential reputational risk, influences public perception, contributing to reducing the impact of the event, protecting and, in some cases, repairing the organization's reputation, and restoring trust among its publics and stakeholders (Benoit, 1997). As crises are perceptual events (Coombs, 2023), what organizations say and do during a crisis can influence how they are perceived by their stakeholders and, consequently, their organizational reputation.

On September 3, 2025, a serious accident involving the historic funicular Elevador da Glória, in Lisbon, resulted in the death of 16 people, with 12 seriously injured and nine sustaining minor injuries. As one of the city's most emblematic means of transport, considered the postcard of the city, the accident received extensive media coverage both nationally and internationally, placing Carris, the public company responsible for operating the system, under intense public scrutiny regarding its actions and responsibility in the accident.

The study focuses on a qualitative content analysis of the crisis communication strategy developed by Carris. The analysis is based on insti-

tutional and media content published between September 3 and September 6, 2025. It includes four press releases issued by Carris, a press conference, and a public intervention by the organization's leader, as well as news published by the newspapers Público, Expresso, and Correio da Manhã, by Lusa, the national news agency, and by the public television channel RTP during this period.

The study also evaluates the adequacy of Carris' crisis communication response to the accident. It examines how the communication timeline, the messages conveyed, and the tone of communication align with the assumptions of the most relevant theoretical approaches (Coombs, 2023; Coombs & Holladay, 2023; Benoit, 1997). It also analyzes the impact of the actions of the organization's president, as leader and spokesperson during the crisis, on the construction of public perceptions of the crisis and on the organization's reputation.

The results show that the communication strategy adopted by Carris in response to the crisis was not appropriate to the severity of the accident or to the impact it had on the organization's reputation. The initial response was slow, preventing Carris from taking control of the public narrative and undermining image repair efforts. Furthermore, the image repair strategies adopted, particularly evasion of responsibility, were not aligned with the attribution of responsibility for

the accident to Carris, as advocated in the literature. The performance of the president of Carris, in his role as organizational leader and spokesperson, also revealed a lack of preparation for a crisis of this nature, reinforcing the importance of spokesperson training for crisis scenarios of this magnitude.

This accident involving the Elevador da Glória has multiple social implications. Beyond the emotional impact on the families and friends of the victims, as well as the general sense of mourning and public distress in the country, the tragedy called into question perceptions of safety and user trust in this emblematic transport system in Lisbon, leading to the precautionary suspension of all the city's funiculars (Bica, Lavra, and initially Graça) in order to carry out rigorous technical inspections. Moreover, the way Carris managed the crisis, through a slow response and the adoption of an evasion of responsibility strategy, combined with the lack of preparation of the leader as spokesperson, undermined the credibility of public transport institutions and contributed to public perceptions of insecurity and mismanagement of an essential public service.

This study presents several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. It focuses only on the initial response to the crisis, within a limited time frame between September 3 and September 6, 2025, making it impossible to assess the long-term effects of the crisis response. In addition, the analysis is limited to press releases, social media content, and media coverage, which are secondary sources, and does not include an analysis of the direct perceptions of Carris' stakeholders. Finally, as this is a single case study, the generalization of the findings is limited.

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Keywords

reputation; crisis communication; crisis response strategies;

What if misinformation never reaches the audience? Comparing proactive versus reactive strategies for combatting misinformation in times of crisis.

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When organizations are confronted with a crisis, they often encounter the additional challenge of concurrent misinformation about the crisis. Such misinformation can have serious consequences, including risks to stakeholder safety and wellbeing, as well as damage to organizational operations and reputation. Therefore, it is important to examine how organizations can effectively counter misinformation in times of crisis.

Broadly, there are two approaches for countering misinformation: debunking strategies, which are reactive measures to correct misinformation after it has reached the public, and prebunking strategies, which are proactive efforts to preemptively refute misinformation before the public has been exposed to it. Prior research suggests that prebunking is more effective than debunking in protecting organizational reputation when misinformation circulates in times of crisis (e.g., Lu & Jin, 2024). However, existing studies have consistently exposed participants to misinformation following the prebunking message, implicitly assuming that misinformation inevitably reaches the audience.

In reality, not every individual will necessarily encounter misinformation after an organization has engaged in prebunking efforts. This raises an important question: does prebunking remain ef-

fective when misinformation never reaches the audience?

Relevant insights can be drawn from research on pre-crisis inoculation, which has examined the effects of inoculating the public (i.e., warning them beforehand about a possible attack against the organization) depending on whether a crisis subsequently occurs or not.

While some studies recommend pre-crisis inoculation as a means of preparing stakeholders for potential crises, others suggest that inoculation may have unintended negative consequences when no crisis occurs afterwards (Wan & Pfau, 2004; Wigley & Pfau, 2010). Building on this mixed evidence, our research wants to examine the effectiveness of prebunking misinformation during a crisis, contingent on whether individuals are subsequently exposed to misinformation.

We are conducting two between-subjects experiments. For both studies, participants receive a link to an online survey. After giving their informed consent, they first read a fictitious crisis scenario. Afterwards, participants are exposed to either (a) misinformation about the crisis which is afterwards debunked by the organization in crisis, (b) an organizational prebunking message after which they are exposed to the misinformation, or (c) an organizational prebunking message without subsequent exposure to the mis-

information. In the first experiment, a second factor will manipulate whether the misinformation is repeated in the debunking or prebunking message, or not. In the second experiment, the second manipulated factor is the organizational pre-crisis reputation (good vs. bad). After exposure to these stimuli, participants will receive a questionnaire measuring their attitude towards the organization, organizational reputation, crisis responsibility, organizational motives, credibility of the organizational message, and crisis severity.

The results of these studies will provide insights into whether prebunking is more effective in countering misinformation in times of crisis than debunking, and whether it may have unintended consequences for publics who are not subsequently exposed to misinformation. By directly comparing debunking and prebunking strategies across misinformation exposure and non-exposure conditions, this research clarifies the boundary conditions under which prebunking is beneficial during crises. Theoretically, the findings contribute to the literature on misinformation in times of crisis by extending existing work beyond the assumption that misinformation inevitably reaches stakeholders. Practically, the results will offer guidance for organizations on how to counter misinformation during crises, informing strategic decisions about proactive versus reactive communication in situations where misinformation exposure is uncertain.

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Keywords

crisis communication, misinformation, prebunking, debunking

Managing Health Crises in the Age of Misinformation: A Case Study of Tylenol's Response to the 2025 Autism Allegations

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In 2025, Tylenol became the center of a public controversy following allegations linking prenatal acetaminophen use to autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Fueled by political influence and the rapid spread of misinformation across social media platforms, the controversy raised significant public health concerns despite the absence of conclusive scientific evidence (Kekatos, 2025). Although crises involving scientific ambiguity and politicized misinformation are increasingly common, limited research has examined how organizations communicate effectively under such conditions. Therefore, this case presents a timely opportunity to examine organizational crisis communication in environments characterized by uncertainty, misinformation, and heightened political tension.

Guided by Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and the concept of message integrity, this study investigates Tylenol's crisis communication strategies during the 2025 pregnancy-use-and-autism controversy. SCCT provides a framework for understanding how perceived responsibility influences appropriate crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2007), while message integrity emphasizes the consistency, coherence, and credibility of messages as they circulate across corporate and media channels (Carroll et al., 2014). While SCCT offers guid-

ance on *what* response strategies organizations should adopt, message integrity provides insight into *how* those strategies are communicated and sustained within complex information environments. Together, these perspectives allow for a theoretically grounded examination of how crisis response strategies are constructed, communicated, and delivered in today's environments.

From an SCCT perspective, the 2025 controversy most closely resembles a challenge or rumor crisis, in which stakeholders question an organization's credibility rather than its direct culpability (Nekmat & Kong, 2019). This crisis contrasts with Tylenol's widely cited 1982 cyanide poisoning case, a victim crisis that prompted accommodative response strategies and established the company as a "gold standard" in crisis management (Jaques, 2009).

Unlike the 1982 case, the 2025 controversy unfolded in a polarized and digitally saturated media environment in which misinformation circulated rapidly and political ideology shaped interpretations of health-related claims. These dynamics complicate the application of traditional crisis response strategies and raise important questions about message alignment, credibility, and audience reception. Understanding how Tylenol responded under these challenges contributes to broader discussions about the

adaptability of crisis communication theories today and offers valuable insight into how crisis communication strategies evolve amid shifting conditions. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How does Tylenol's crisis response strategy during the 2025 pregnancy-use-and-autism controversy align with SCCT principles?

RQ2: To what extent does message integrity exist between Tylenol's corporate communications and media coverage during this crisis?

RQ3: How do Tylenol's corporate responses and media coverage regarding the pregnancy-use-and-autism controversy inform crisis communication strategies in a contemporary media environment amid the spread of misinformation?

To address these questions, this study employs qualitative content analysis of Tylenol's corporate communications and U.S. news coverage related to the 2025 controversy. This analysis examines the types of crisis response strategies articulated in Tylenol's corporate website content, official press release, and public statements, alongside news coverage drawn from U.S. Newsstream Collection. By assessing the degree of alignment between corporate messaging and media coverage, this study explores how organization intent, message framing, and external interpretation interact in a media environment shaped by rapid information circulation.

Overall, this study is expected to contribute to crisis communication scholarship by extending SCCT to politically charged, health-related crises in a digitally driven media context and by considering message integrity as a critical but underexamined dimension of crisis effectiveness. Practically, the findings aim to inform organizational strategies for maintaining credible and coherent communication amid misinformation and uncertainty. Socially, the study highlights the broader implications of corporate crisis communication for public trust, risk perception, and informed decision-making.

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Keywords

Public health crisis, Health communication, Message integrity, SCCT

What's Going on With that Device Attached to Your Hip—Now in Your Hand? (Part 3) Continuing the Discussion of the Downfalls Among PR Professionals' (Et. al) of Mobile Device Dependency

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

This discussion shares new findings, built on those presented at the last two Bled conferences, from a research stream asking: “What have mobile devices ‘wrought’ globally on the principles, practices, and procedures of communication management among public relations professionals?”

Literature and Methodology

The study draws conclusions from three sources:

(1) Recent scholarly presentations at international academic conferences analyzing the influences of mobile devices on communication management generally and on public relations specifically. Among them are Downes' titled: (a) *The Immediate Experiment: Mobile Devices' Diffusions and Adoptions and the Lives of Public Relations Professionals* (2025); (b) *Profound Changes: Mobile Devices. Potential Consequences. And the Lives of Today's Public Relations Professionals* (2024); (c) *An Up-to-Date Analysis of The Historical Evolution--Presented Step-by-Step--of Social Media's Influence on Capitol Hill's Communication Management Choices* (2024)

(2) Insights shared by the Downes' invitation to present at the May 2025 Hong Kong Conference, “Media for All: Breaking Barriers: Media Localization in the Age of Global Platforms,” titled *Three Decades Riding a Revolution's Rollercoaster: Ten Insights Providing a Kaleidoscopic Overview of the Platform Society's Influence on the World's Political, Economic, Cultural--and Ethical--Systems*.

(3) Discussions/Findings from roughly 175 analyses—about half chosen from the social sciences, the others from the national sciences, arts and humanities--proving a kaleidoscopic collection of statements that speak to mobile devices' influences on communication management generally and, by extension, public relations principles and practices specifically.

They discussed a rich collection of themes ranging from those highlighting the detrimental mental and physical health concerns correlated with extensive use of mobile devices, to those indicating mobile phone's mere presence deletes the users ability to pay attention oral/written presentations.

Results and Conclusions

Informed primarily by the aforementioned analyses' findings, as well as autoethnographic methodology, the presentation discusses, particularly from the perspectives of PR professionals, to consider their smartphones not only as devices on which they depend--but also as:

1. essential tools for an unprecedented, rapid, and uncontrolled global experiment—the long-term results of which remain unknown;
2. catalysts for unprecedented social, political, economic, and cultural change, the results of which are beyond “massive,” and stronger than “profound;”
3. forces reshaping long-established, life-affirming rituals--social, familial, romantic, religious.
4. hindering our ability to “just be”—absent our device to satiate us;
5. agents redefining “the present,” demanding we live less in the moment, more “through anticipation;”
6. “uninvited guests” calling us throughout our days and (nights);
7. drivers of increasing information overload, decreasing attention spans, and increasing anxiety--hindering our ability to be mindful; and
8. tenaciously addictive devices.

Thus, while a body of literature on which this paper focuses describes empirically supported downfalls of mobile device dependency, these downfalls may be exasperated, and new ones will emerge, as studies begin to integrate crisis PR principles and practices integrated into mobile device capabilities.

Practical and Social Implications

As primarily a conceptual piece of PR research, the author shares his longstanding perspective: “Yes, own a cell phone, but don't let your cell phone own you.” Further, he freely admits that he doesn't have all of the answers. Rather, he is proposing a question: “Are we thinking about the potential effects of smart phones beyond our need to use them?”

And concludes: Cell phones continue to produce precipitous ontological change—redefining time, space, and availability; redefining “the present”; and redefining us.... The most important question then is not “How are mobile devices affecting us?” but rather, “*What are mobile devices?*”

Keywords

Mobile Devices/Mobile Phones, Physical/Psychological/Social Effects, Crisis PR

Nurses' Crisis Communication During Natural Disasters: A Study Protocol on Health Promotion and Community Engagement

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Effective crisis communication management (CCM) is a core component of disaster response, requiring coordinated information flows, credibility and the ability to make rapid decisions in uncertain situations (Quinn, 2018). During natural disasters, frontline health professionals occupy a strategic position within crisis communication ecosystems when it comes to addressing health threats (A ık & Sevim, 2025). As a significant proportion of health professionals, nurses operate at the intersection of organizational communication and community interaction (Pires et al., 2025). They play a crucial role in the response to crises by ensuring the reliable transfer of information, supporting health promotion and strengthening community engagement (Pourvakhshoori et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the role of nurses in managing crisis communication during natural disasters remains underexplored in nursing research. This study protocol aims to theorise how nurses manage crisis communication during natural disasters.

Literature review

Recent studies have examined nurses' preparedness for natural disasters, as well as their role in crisis communication. Coordinating information and building trust across multiple stakeholder networks poses a significant challenge, which is further complicated by disrupted in-

frastructure and the proliferation of information sources and actors (Ak a S umengen et al., 2025). Nurses occupy a central position in crisis communication, receiving, interpreting, adapting and redistributing information simultaneously across organizational, interprofessional and community levels. In doing so, they help stabilize meaning, maintain trust and coordinate collective action (Uysal et al., 2025). Despite their critical role, little is known about frontline nurses' crisis communication competencies during disasters. A gap exists between the vital role nurses play and the limited training they receive in this area. The International Council of Nurses (ICN, 2019) emphasizes that disaster preparedness and response should be core knowledge and skills for all nurses. This study will address this knowledge gap by conceptualizing nurses as frontline crisis communication managers whose communicative practices are closely intertwined with clinical reasoning, ethical responsibility and sustained relational proximity to affected populations.

Methodology

This study builds on the work of Charmaz (2014) and is grounded in a constructivist paradigm. It adopts an interpretive, exploratory qualitative approach using constructivist grounded theory (ConGT), in which nurses are understood to actively interpret crises through ongoing interactions with patients, communities, colleagues,

and organizational structures. The study is further informed by sensemaking theory (Weick, 1988), which examines how nurses navigate uncertainty and construct shared meanings, as well as by the principles of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, 1986), which provide a framework for linking crisis communication practices to health promotion outcomes such as trust-building and community engagement. Following ethical approval, 30 nurses who have participated in responses to natural disasters in urban and rural areas of the province of Québec (Canada) – including floods, wildfires, tornadoes, extreme heatwaves, winter storms, and landslides – will be recruited from a range of healthcare settings to capture variations in organizational structures and crisis contexts. In-depth interviews will be conducted to explore their crisis-related practices. Consistent with ConGT principles, data collection and analysis will proceed iteratively, with emerging categories guiding subsequent sampling and refining the analytical focus. The researcher's position as a nursing scholar will be considered an analytical resource, enhancing theoretical sensitivity rather than constituting bias. Data analysis will involve coding, constant comparison, and memo writing to co-construct a conceptualization of the phenomenon under study, as outlined by Charmaz (2014). Guided by sensemaking theory and the Ottawa Charter, the analysis will examine how nurses' actions shape the environments that may constrain or exacerbate crises. It will also explore how their commitments, capacities, and expectations influence sensemaking processes, including the management of information reliability, coordination, misinformation, and uncertainty. Finally, the study will investigate how these practices support health promotion and community engagement during and after crises.

Expected results and conclusions

The findings will provide a more nuanced, practice-informed understanding of crisis communication, highlighting nurses as frontline health professionals as key actors in managing information, trust, and community engagement

during crises. They will help to clarify how nurses interpret crisis communication in the context of natural disasters, as well as their roles and the competencies required to support effective communication in disaster response. The study will contribute in three ways: (1) Theoretically, by extending crisis communication theory through integrating the perspectives of frontline nurses into CCM models and linking sensemaking processes to health promotion; (2) Empirically, by offering insights into nurses' experiences of managing crisis communication during natural disasters; and (3) Disciplinarily, by highlighting communication as a core dimension of disaster nursing, encompassing strategic, relational, and community-oriented roles beyond clinical care. Limitations: Social desirability bias may influence interview data, as participants may provide responses that align with perceived social norms rather than fully reflecting their experiences.

Practical and social implications

The findings of this study will inform organizational and societal solutions to improve crisis management, public health, and community engagement. In addition, they will contribute to advancing crisis communication theory while strengthening trust, promoting health, and guiding frontline nurses' actions during increasingly complex natural disasters.

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Keywords

crisis communication management; natural disasters; nurses; health promotion; constructivist grounded theory.

Is American Higher Education in Crisis? An Examination of International Doctoral Students in Public Relations

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Higher education in America is struggling, most often due to financial issues (Perna, 2025). However, it also faces a multifaceted crisis, including declining enrollment, the erosion of tenure, rising administrative costs, and a decline in public trust in academia (Corvo, 2025). Recent U.S. regulations on international students, including visa suspensions for certain countries, new visa interview requirements, and potential H-1B fee increases, aimed at tighter control and security, have also brought about another significant crisis in American higher education. This qualitative study explores this crisis by analyzing the lived experiences of international doctoral students, focusing on the public relations field.

In public relations, scholars addressed the importance of recognizing identities as a social construct that resulted from power dynamics, multiplicity, and intertwining effects of those identities in the profession and practice (Logan & Ciszek, 2021; Pompper, 2007; Tindall, 2009; Vardeman-Winter & Tindall, 2010; Vardeman et al., 2022). In higher education, Nichols and Stahl (2019) argued that intersectionality continues to provide a critical understanding of educational experiences and outcomes. Their systematic literature review revealed that gender, race/ethnicity, social class, religious affiliation, family status, and sexual orientation are the most frequently considered social identities. Further-

more, they identified a gap in understanding the role of language, immigration status, and disability in intersectionality research in higher education. Thus, by employing intersectionality as a theoretical framework, this study seeks to address the experiences of international doctoral students in the U.S. public relations field. Specifically, the research investigates the unique challenges these students encounter regarding their cultural and ethnic identities, while simultaneously examining the specific coping strategies they utilize to navigate these academic environments. Ultimately, the study aims to identify actionable ways in which doctoral programs can substantively improve their diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives to better support and retain international students. This study employs a qualitative, in-depth interview approach to capture the nuance of the participant experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Tracy, 2013). Participants include international doctoral students who have completed at least one year of study in U.S. mass communication or public relations programs.

Findings indicate that doctoral international students' challenges in the public relations field go far beyond academic rigor and extend to navigating the system, including complex tax laws, visa issues, and language. The combination of heavy teaching loads, demanding coursework,

and the pressure to create original research leaves little room for social life, leading to burn-out. This is exacerbated by funding insecurity and the current political climate that impacts the job market. They develop coping strategies centered on community and mentorship. They actively look for similar social identities to validate their experiences. In the absence of institutional support, they look for safe spaces that allow them to share their experiences. Participants also indicated the need for diversifying faculty hiring, educating faculty and administrators on the specific needs of diverse backgrounds, and diversifying the class content by including non-Western perspectives in the syllabus.

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Keywords

higher education, international doctoral students, intersectionality.

When Privacy Feels at Risk: How Concerns Shape Consumer Participation in Brand Value Co- Creation

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Digital connectivity has become a major way of life around the world. In 2025, the global number of Internet users exceeded 6 billion (Statista, 2025), and China had

1.123 billion netizens with an Internet penetration rate of nearly 80% (CNNIC, 2025). China has also become the largest mobile app market in the world (Statista, 2025). Consumers use social media and brand apps very frequently and with high stickiness, and co-create value with brands through likes, comments and user-generated content. However, privacy concerns have become an important psychological factor influencing consumers' participation in value co-creation. When consumers realize that brands or platforms may collect and analyze their personal information, they may reduce their willingness to express themselves publicly and to interact. This study aims to examine how privacy concern, as an inhibiting factor, influences consumers' intention to participate in co-creation activities. It introduces brand trust as a moderating variable and brand familiarity as a control variable, to help digital marketing practitioners better understand consumers' concerns and improve engagement and quality.

Literature Review

Privacy concerns refer to users' worries about how their personal information is collected and used on the Internet (Gutierrez et al., 2023), including risks such as data leakage, identity theft and third-party use (Chen & Kim, 2013). Malhotra et al. (2004) divide it into three dimensions: collection, control and awareness of privacy practices. Value co-creation is the process in which firms and stakeholders interact and integrate resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Participation in online brand communities can enhance brand experience and loyalty, and turn consumers from passive receivers into active participants (Li, 2014). This study proposes that all three dimensions of privacy concern have a suppressing effect on value co-creation intention.

Brand trust refers to the willingness to rely on a brand even when there is perceived risk (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). This study argues that brand trust negatively moderates the relationship between privacy concern and value co-creation intention. Brand familiarity can increase trust and purchase intention (Laroche & Zhou, 1996), and can partly offset privacy concerns (Nepomuceno et al., 2014), so it is treated as a control variable. Based on this, the study pro-

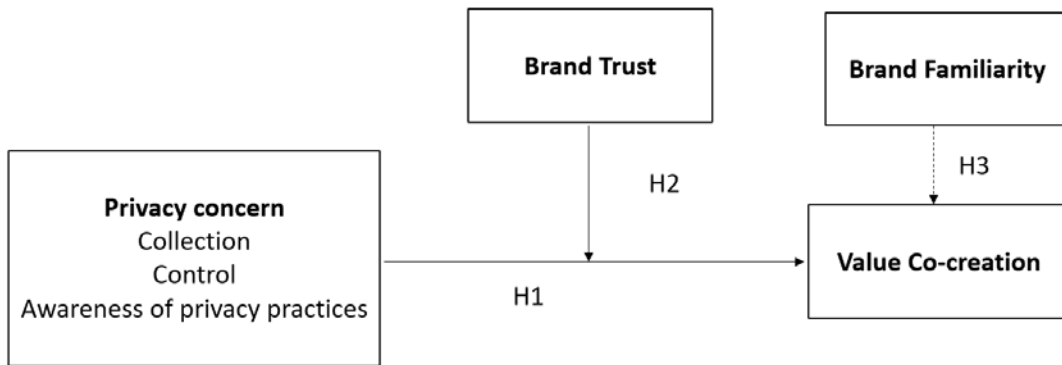


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

poses three hypotheses (Figure 1):

H1a: The higher consumers' privacy concerns about a brand's data collection, the lower their intention to participate in value co-creation

H1b: The higher consumers' privacy concerns about a brand's data control, the lower their intention to participate in value co-creation

H1c: The higher consumers' privacy concerns about a brand's privacy awareness, the lower their intention to participate in value co-creation

H2: Brand trust has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between overall privacy concern and value co-creation intention

H3: Brand familiarity positively influences consumers' willingness to participate in value co-creation

Methodology

This study targets social media users in mainland China and Hong Kong. It uses snowball sampling to conduct an online survey on WeChat and Instagram from November 12 to 18, 2025, and uses SPSS for data analysis. The questionnaire has three parts. In the first part, respondents read a scenario about the Chinese technology brand DJI, which serves as the experimental brand, launching an online co-creation activity. After reading, they answer items in the second part measuring privacy concern, value co-creation intention, brand trust and brand familiarity, based on their understanding of DJI and the

scenario. The third part collects demographic information.

Results and Conclusions

All scales show good reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80. Regression analysis shows that among the three dimensions of privacy concern, only "data collection concern" has a significant negative effect on value co-creation intention, supporting H1a, while "control concern" and "awareness concern" are not significant, so H1b and H1c are not supported. Brand familiarity has a significant positive effect on value co-creation intention, supporting H3. Moderation analysis shows that brand trust can effectively weaken the negative effect of privacy concern on value co-creation intention, supporting H2.

Consumers' concern about data collection is the main barrier to participation in brand value co-creation, especially at the initial data solicitation stage. Brand trust alleviates this negative effect, as trusted brands sustain willingness to engage despite privacy concerns. In addition, brand familiarity directly enhances participation, lowering psychological barriers to engagement. These findings suggest that firms should strengthen trust-building mechanisms and privacy protection measures to foster value co-creation in digital environments.

Table 1. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Value Co-Creation Intention(N=201)

Independent Variables	Model1_ B	Model1_ SE	Model1_ _t	Model1_ _p	Model2_ _B	Model2_ SE	Model2_ _t	Model2_ _p	Model3_ _B	Model3_ SE	Model3_ _t	Model3_ _p
Constant	2.716	0.748	3.631	<.001	2.849	0.935	3.048	<.01	3.617	0.899	4.473	<.001
Gender (Male=1)	-0.155	0.068	-2.262	0.025	-0.161	0.164	-0.876	0.383	-0.277	0.166	-1.579	0.112
Age	0.029	0.025	1.159	0.248	0.115	0.137	0.047	0.842	0.032	0.119	0.064	0.268
Education Level	0.008	0.012	0.669	0.504	0.008	0.137	0.047	0.958	0.008	0.103	0.075	0.938
Brand Familiarity	0.398	0.111	2.95	0.004	0.356	0.119	2.995	0.003	0.421	0.11	3.832	<.001
Data Collection												
Concern					-0.423	0.133	-3.174	0.002	-0.423	0.163	-2.598	0.011
Data Control												
Concern					0.421	0.218	0.193	0.847	0.421	0.218	1.931	0.066
Privacy Awareness					-0.043	0.11	-0.392	0.696	-0.043	0.103	-0.417	0.677
Collection ×												
Brand Trust									0.266	0.089	2.991	0.003
Control × Brand												
Trust									0.511	0.102	5.011	<.001
Awareness × Brand												
Trust									0.476	0.084	4.762	<.001

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this research adds an “inhibiting factors” perspective to value co-creation theory and deepens the understanding of brand trust as a “buffer mechanism” in digital interactions, while confirming the foundational role of brand familiarity. For enterprises, the practical implications are as follows: transparency should be prioritized during data collection; trust should be built through consistent behavior; owned platforms are therefore positioned as relatively trusted environments for fostering sustained and structured value co-creation and long-term communication should be utilized to enhance brand familiarity, thereby encouraging participation.

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Keywords

privacy concern, value co-creation intention, brand trust, brand familiarity

Public Diplomacy as Crisis Management: Building and Sustaining Reputational Security

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Introduction and purpose of study

Using the U.S. experience in public diplomacy – the nation’s global engagement and communication with foreign publics – as a backdrop, this paper examines the role and value of public diplomacy in preventing, mitigating and managing conflicts with foreign publics that could become crises. The focus is on increased understanding of public diplomacy as a crisis management resource that helps to build and sustain reputational security and goodwill with people abroad. The researchers approached this work through the public relations lens of crisis management, which has seldom been used in assessing the worth and value of public diplomacy in global affairs.

Literature review

By any measure, the Cold War was a sustained global crisis defined by nuclear anxiety and ideological debate. In crisis management terms, the Cold War involved unpredictable events and stakeholder conflicts that threatened U.S. reputational security and other interests. Yet, crisis management concepts have not been used in assessing U.S. public diplomacy’s importance and effectiveness in containing threats to national security either during or after the Cold War. This gap in the literature is especially curious given that the largest U.S. agency abroad during the Cold War was the United States Information Agency (USIA), whose mission was to explain

and advance U.S. foreign policy, values and ideals and build supportive relationships with people abroad.

Following the country’s next major ideological crisis – 9/11 – the perceived importance of public diplomacy in international relations was tied primarily to the concept of “soft power,” or the idea that gaining the support of foreign publics for a nation’s values, policies and culture strengthens that nation’s ability to advance its foreign policy. Only recently have scholars begun to consider “reputational security” as a conceptual and practical substitute for soft power that provides a stronger foundation for describing public diplomacy’s value to nations. In examining public diplomacy as a crisis management resource, this work deepens understanding of public diplomacy’s importance in building and sustaining national reputation as a security asset.

Research questions

RQ1: How important was U.S. public diplomacy in preventing a global crisis during the Cold War, according to public diplomats?

RQ2: How did public diplomacy contribute to building and sustaining reputational security during the Cold War?

Methodology and rationale

The research questions were answered through analysis of unreported survey data collected as part of the 2007 USIA Alumni Association Survey involving U.S. Foreign Service Officers who served on the front lines of public diplomacy during the Cold War. Completed questionnaires were received from 213 participants who worked in the USIA for an average of 25 years. The overall response rate was 48 percent. In answering an open-ended question about the importance of U.S. public diplomacy during the Cold War, participants offered lengthy responses collectively totaling more than 8,000 words. A thematic analysis method was used to analyze participant responses for patterns and themes related to each research question. The analysis focused on understanding participants' views regarding the importance of public diplomacy to Cold War outcomes and how public diplomacy contributed to building and sustaining reputational security during this prolonged crisis event.

Results and conclusions

The findings revealed a strong belief on the part of U.S. Foreign Service Officers that public diplomacy played a vital role in averting a global crisis during the Cold War. Responses centered on the importance of public diplomacy in managing the conflict of ideologies between communism and democracy and building long-term relationships with foreign publics through listening and dialogue. Countering propaganda and disinformation and building mutual understanding and trust were viewed as key components of public diplomacy's success. The diplomats reported that public diplomacy efforts – including cultural and educational activities, local presence and community dialogue, i.e., “boots on the ground,” and international broadcasting – helped build a reservoir of good will that helped to insulate the United States against ideological and other threats.

Practical and social implications

At a time when U.S. diplomacy and foreign aid are being dismantled and America is disengaging from the world, this study provides insights into the importance of public diplomacy in building and sustaining supportive cross-border relationships and protecting a country's reputation. The research shows how public diplomacy helps to build legitimacy and credibility with stakeholders and foreign publics that help to mitigate threats that can lead to crises. In linking crisis management and reputational management to public diplomacy, the study expands opportunities for cross-disciplinary research in public relations and public diplomacy.

Keywords

crisis management, public diplomacy, reputational security

Framing “Too Big to Fail”: A Case Study of the Acquisition of Credit Suisse by UBS in Key Global Financial Hub Media

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On March 19, 2023, Swiss authorities engineered the emergency takeover of Credit Suisse by UBS for 3 billion Swiss francs, marking one of the most significant government interventions in banking since the 2008-2009 Global Financial Crisis. The taxpayer-backed rescue operated within Switzerland’s Too-Big-To-Fail (TBTF) framework, which addresses institutions whose failure could destabilize the financial system and require government intervention (FINMA, 2023). This research examines how international news media framed the merger, with particular attention to whether and how coverage reinforced or challenged the narrative. Additionally, the study compares how the frames promoted by institutional, political, and market actors is reflected across different media systems (democratic corporatist and liberal), to identify cross-system differences in crisis reporting.

The TBTF concept has generated considerable academic debate about how such interventions are communicated and legitimized to the public (e.g. Berry, 2012; Knowles et al., 2015; Cox 2022). Existing research reveals divergent findings about how media cover bank bailouts, some studies suggest interventions are presented as justified and unquestioned (Muller, 2021; Cox 2022), while others identify critical discourse (Palmer and Tanner, 2012; Thompson, 2017). This divergence, combined with substantial changes in economic conditions and media

business models since the Global Financial Crisis, a period in which TBTF narratives were extensively examined, highlights the need for renewed analysis of contemporary TBTF framing patterns.

The UBS & CS merger occurred amid an acute crisis of confidence in the acquired institution, threatening Switzerland’s reputation for banking stability, with media coverage emphasizing risks to Swiss financial credibility and systemic stability (Meredith, 2023; Jones, 2023). Because the public and market actors rely heavily on media reporting in times of uncertainty (Brunken, 2006), how the crisis and institutional responses were framed is highly relevant. Prior research shows that news media can have a soothing effect on public panic and speculation, contributing to crisis stabilization rather than escalation (Meer & Verhoeven, 2013).

Additionally, financial hub media occupies a central institutional role by shaping public understanding of economic issues, influencing policy decisions and corporate behaviour, and serving as a vital mechanism for democratic accountability and transparency (Tambini, 2010; Goddard et al., 1998; Dyck & Zingales, 2002). However, financial journalism frequently fails to fulfill this watchdog function, as journalists tend to uncritically reproduce corporate narratives and focus narrowly on market actions rather than interrogating systemic failures or broader

societal implications (Tambini, 2010; Chakravarty & Schiller, 2011; Usher, 2017).

This study addresses three key questions: How did international news media frame the UBS-Credit Suisse merger? How did coverage reinforce or challenge the TBTF narrative? What differences emerged across media systems and within national contexts?

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to explore not only what frames emerge in media coverage but also frame co-occurrence, to examine which particular narratives dominate. Frame identification follows qualitative content analysis as outlined by Schreier (2012), using a primarily deductive coding frame based on Entman's (1993) four framing elements, with inductive refinement to capture any additional patterns or frames that emerge from the data. Quantitative analysis complements the analysis by calculating frequencies for each frame category, allowing a systematic identification of frame co-occurrence patterns. Frame combinations may reveal narrative structures that can reinforce dominant interpretations while marginalizing alternative perspectives.

The analysis distinguishes the sources, with particular attention to official communications from the involved banks and the Swiss government, which often provide foundational narratives which media relies upon. This approach helps assess whether the rationale presented by key institutions through crisis communication strategies is reflected on media coverage or whether the media actively reframes them. Preliminary analysis indicates divergence between institutional crisis communication and journalistic framing: official statements, press releases, and press conferences issued by the involved actors, as reported in news coverage, avoid the term "bailout." By contrast, journalists frequently employ explicit bailout-related language and more critical framing in their reporting. This preliminary evidence suggests that news media do not simply reproduce institutional narratives but actively reinterpret and reframe crisis events.

The corpus comprises 340 articles from nine outlets across the United States, England, and Switzerland. Articles without substantive analysis, including newsletters, daily overviews, and podcast transcriptions, were excluded. Data was collected through Factiva using the search terms 'UBS' OR 'Credit Suisse' from March 12-26, 2023, capturing one week before the merger announcement (March 19) and one week after, to examine how coverage evolved across critical moments.

Understanding how media frame bank bailouts carry significant practical and social implications. First, the presence or absence of critical reporting reveals the extent to which journalism fulfills its watchdog role in clarifying, rigorously examining, and scrutinizing these interventions. Second, examining frame prevalence reveals how competing narratives advanced by involved actors seek to promote their perspectives, and which frames achieve dominance in media discourse. Third, identifying whether framing patterns are globally consistent or nationally distinct, highlighting how national contexts and media systems shape media coverage. Finally, this research contributes to broader debates about media's role in either legitimizing or questioning the TBTF doctrine, enriching scholarly literature on financial crisis communication.

Keywords

media framing, financial crisis communication, bank bailouts

From Visibility to Influence: Rethinking Impact Measurement in Digital Health Communication

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Background

Health communication is currently shaped by the convergence of **internal transformations in strategic communication**—including shifts in planning logics, stakeholder orientation, and trust management—and **external structural changes driven by digitalisation**. Digital platforms have reconfigured persuasion from clearly identifiable advertising towards embedded, peer-to-peer and influencer-mediated communication, where credibility is generated through social proximity, moral framing, and perceived authenticity rather than message repetition (Boerman & van Reijmersdal, 2020; Hwang & Jeong, 2016). At the same time, periods characterised by multiple and overlapping transformations call for a return to the core principles of campaign planning: the clear articulation of organisational objectives and systematic stakeholder mapping as the basis for communication design. When persuasive influence is diffused across networks and everyday interactions, impact can no longer be meaningfully assessed through visibility alone. Yet health communication research and regulation expressed in the NetCode monitoring breastmilk substitute marketing (World Health Organization & UNICEF, 2017) continue to rely predominantly on exposure-based indicators such as opportunities to see (OTS), reach, and self-reported media behaviour—metrics developed for mass-media environments. This misalignment has direct implications for public health policy and regu-

latory effectiveness, particularly in areas where communication practices intersect with ethical concerns and behavioural outcomes. Moreover, behavioural and health-related lifestyle choices are deeply shaped by cultural meanings, social norms, and everyday practices, making it essential to consider sociocultural factors in analysing health communication. (Sriramesh, 2025).

Objective

This conference paper examines how the digital shift in health-related marketing challenges prevailing approaches to measuring behavioural impact and argues for a systematic re-evaluation of impact measurement tools beyond visibility- and exposure-based indicators.

Methods

The study employs a mixed-methods research design focusing on digital marketing practices for breast-milk substitutes in the Czech Republic. Quantitative monitoring based on the WHO NetCode framework was combined with qualitative content analysis of influencer marketing, nano-influencer campaigns, and organised word-of-mouth activities across social media platforms, e-commerce environments, and online product-testing communities. This approach enables analysis of both the formal characteristics of digital marketing and the culturally embedded mechanisms through which influence is exercised (Hejlová et al., 2026).

Results

The findings indicate that digital persuasion operates primarily through socially embedded mechanisms—peer credibility, trust transfer, social proof, and the normalisation of consumption practices (Cialdini, 2009, 2016, De Veirman et al., 2017)—rather than through repeated exposure or explicit promotional claims. Influencer and nano-influencer content functions as a form of “cold” participatory media (McLuhan, 1964), relying on relational engagement and community norms rather than message salience. Behaviourally relevant influence is produced within culturally specific parenting communities, where commercial intent is often obscured and traditional exposure metrics fail to capture pathways of persuasion affecting decision-making related to infant feeding (Baker et al., 2023; Rollins et al., 2016; World Health Organization, 1981).

Discussion

The results reveal a growing mismatch between contemporary digital persuasion strategies and the tools used to evaluate their effects. Measuring impact primarily through media exposure or declared media consumption overlooks the cultural, anthropological, and relational processes through which behavioural change occurs in digital environments (Sriramesh, 2025). In contexts where trust in peers rivals or exceeds trust in experts (Edelman, 2025), influence is generated through stakeholder relationships rather than through channel dominance. This disconnect undermines both scholarly assessment and regulatory oversight, enabling ethically ambiguous practices to remain systematically underestimated.

Conclusions

Effective evaluation of impact in digital health communication requires a shift from media-centric measurement towards context-sensitive approaches grounded in stakeholder analysis, cultural interpretation, and behavioural

insight. Integrating methods such as netnography and qualitative analysis into impact assessment would better reflect how influence operates in digitally embedded communication. Without revising existing measurement frameworks, public health research and regulation risk misjudging the real behavioural consequences of contemporary health communication and weakening policy responses intended to protect public health.

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Keywords

health communication, public health, persuasion, digital marketing, stakeholder behaviour, policy evaluation

Risk READINESS for Psychological Safety at Workplace: A New Decision-Making Thermometer

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Organizations increasingly recognize psychological safety (PS) as a critical foundation for effective teamwork and open communication (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). It denotes a belief that individuals can speak up, ask questions, or acknowledge mistakes without fear of negative repercussions (Mitterer & Mitterer, 2023). It is also crucial to ethical conduct, innovation, employee well-being, and creating a healthy workplace (Center for creative leadership, 2024).

Research shows that PS consideration leads to healthier climates and stronger performance at both individual and team levels, as employees will feel comfortable voicing opinions, report errors, and pursuing improvement (Garrick et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2013). Edmondson (2003) defines PS as inherently interpersonal and situational, shaped by local relationships and immediate settings, and other organizational scholarship also emphasizes the role of policies, practices, and procedures that protect psychological health and safety (Dollard et al., 2012). However, in practice, PS is still treated as binary or static, which ignores how it fluctuates across teams, time, and issues; it is precisely when internal communication is most consequential. This conceptual paper proposes reframing of PS as a dynamic spectrum, the level of which is determined by a matrix of situational and dispositional factors through individual, team, organizational, and societal lenses. By positioning

PS as a spectrum and time-varying rather than static, we anticipate a better explanatory power for variations in employees' behaviors across diverse organizational contexts while also accounting for the role of strategic/internal communication in building PR in the workplace at different levels.

This PS spectrum is anchored in the READINESS framework, which conceptualizes response capacity as the alignment of multilevel efficacy, mindset (emotional leadership, mental adaptability), and dynamic, process-driven agility, which is a keystone that extends beyond traditional preparedness and resilience (Jin et al., 2024, 2025). It also underscores that outcomes of READINESS are created through effective response in the situation, and that both efficacy and readiness are multi-level (e.g., self- and collective efficacy; readiness at the individual, team, and organizational levels) (Jin et al., 2024). Critically, READINESS entails the right mindset, with crisis leadership marked by high emotional leadership and willingness to adapt; thus, leaders' emotional skills and communication during decision-making conflicts and crises are integral to readiness (Jin et al., 2024).

Grounded in the READINESS model, we will develop a three-pillar decision tool, grounded in multilevel efficacy for PS, mindset for promoting and protecting PS among employees, and leadership communication management

regarding PS focused risk and crisis management in a dynamic process. To operationalize the process pillar, we will incorporate Mazzei et al.'s (2022) internal communication strategies into our model development—creating a sense of security (cognitive), sustaining a sense of belonging (affective), and activating employees as allies (behavioral), and when discussing different PS levels, such that higher-hazard conditions prioritize security-building communication first, whereas safer conditions can place greater emphasis on activation and allyship (Mazzei et al., 2022). This new risk READINESS roadmap identifies conditions along a PS spectrum from (operationalized from “completely safe” to “total hazard/completely unsafe”) and links each level to practical guidance for cross-functional strategic communication (e.g., human resources/employee relations, risk management, and internal communication).

We expect our PS model to contribute both practically and theoretically to the crisis communication field by providing a roadmap to help organizational leadership improve decision making and articulation via effective and integral strategic communication when PS is at stake. Practically, it will clarify and predict the conditions under which employees feel psychologically safe, and where safety has been breached and requires repair, so managers can support an environment with expectations for idea sharing without fear of judgment or subtle slights through this (Mitterer & Mitterer, 2023). Theoretically, it integrates multilevel efficacy, mindset, and dynamic processes with a spectrum view of PS to explain how organizations convert voice into learning under pressure. We believe this study will provide organizations with better solutions for dealing with employees' psychological safety issues and create healthier workplaces.

Keywords

Readiness, Psychological safety, Strategic/internal communication, Crisis management, Employee relations

Forced Versatility and Stretched Profession: Resocialization of PR Practitioners in the Generative AI Era

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Although there is a growing body of research on the impact of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) on the PR profession, three gaps remain. First, the focus is primarily on senior professionals' and leadership views (e.g., Yue et al., 2024), creating a top-down perspective that largely overlooks how everyday PR work integrates GenAI. Additionally, most research has focused on what GenAI can and cannot do, and on its implications for the professionalism and ethics of PR practice (e.g., Dong & Berg, 2025). This leaves a gap in understanding the process of integrating these tools. Finally, most studies are conducted in the US and European contexts, where the PR profession and professionalism are well established. However, in the Chinese context, the professional boundaries among public relations, marketing, and advertising are notably blurred, resulting in a high degree of integration in PR professionals' work (Chen et al., 2020). We know little about how PR professionals in highly role-blurring contexts adapt to the adoption of GenAI.

To address these gaps, this study explores how PR professionals in China navigate the adoption of GenAI in their work. Specifically, we examine the **resocialization** of PR practitioners. Makarius et al.'s (2020) AI socialization framework suggests that employees need to comprehend AI in terms of their impact on role clarity, task mastery, and social interactions at work. Following their framework, we aim to explore a central question: How do PR practitioners in China

experience the organizational resocialization during the GenAI adoption?

We conducted semi-structured interviews with PR practitioners at various levels in mainland China and Hong Kong, working either in-house or at agencies. The interviews are ongoing, and we aim to conduct approximately 30. The interview protocol was developed based on research questions that addressed everyday work, the adoption of GenAI and changes in practice, and perceptions of professionalism and the role of GenAI. Following the grounded theory approach, we conducted open, axial, and selective coding of the data.

As in previous research, participants currently see GenAI as mainly aiding with daily tasks. The use of professional judgment and strategic management remains fully human-led. However, the integration methods of GenAI varied, resulting in different experiences of professional boundary extension.

Our interviews reveal a critical paradox linked to job-task hybridity. In PR roles with high hybridity (e.g., blending marketing and content creation), efficiency gains from GenAI do not reduce workloads. Instead, GenAI intensifies job demands and redefines professional roles. As basic tasks are automated, practitioners face higher performance expectations and a "forced versatility." The time saved is reallocated to new cross-departmental responsibilities, increasing overall workloads and ambiguity. This pressure

disproportionately affects junior staff, while managers perceive a much lower negative impact on their own positions.

This environment also fosters ethical challenges. In cultures prioritizing high efficiency, ethical considerations are often secondary. GenAI's integration appears to accelerate an "ethical down-grading," where practitioners, driven to meet service demands and maintain client trust, may choose not to disclose their use of AI. Conversely, those with lower job hybridity reported more manageable workload expansions and demonstrated a stronger commitment to professional ethics, explicitly emphasizing the importance of transparency regarding GenAI involvement.

This study offers significant contributions. First, we provide one of the first examinations of how PR professionals in the Chinese context resocialize and reskill in varying conditions of role hybridity. Second, we advance theory by developing a novel framework that identifies two distinct scenarios of professional change within the PR industry. This typology not only illuminates the pathways through which practitioners are adapting to AI but also presents a generalizable model for analyzing the impact of GenAI on other professions. Finally, the research yields practical implications for organizations. We argue that a more effective starting point for successful AI-driven organizational change is to first understand the current state of the profession and, more specifically, to address employees' evolving professional self-perceptions, as these underpin the development of new capabilities.

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The boundary-spanning capacity of social technology platforms: Examining the impact of communication visibility on work engagement

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Introduction

Social technology platforms (STPs) support communication, coordination, and collaboration among employees. A fundamental and distinctive affordance of STPs is communication visibility, which refers to the outcomes of activities in which communicators make their communication more or less available and access others' communication in certain socio-technical contexts. Communication visibility theory (Leonardi, 2014) suggests that social technologies could enable *message transparency* (increasing awareness of who knows what) and *network translucence* (increasing awareness of who knows whom). The theory has been applied to understanding the effects of communication visibility on performance-related outcomes, but its impact on work engagement remains unclear.

Literature Review

Work engagement is defined as a positive work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model posits that certain job characteristics either provide job resources (e.g., social support and autonomy) or impose demands (e.g., heavy

workload) on employees. Job resources create motivational processes that enhance work engagement, whereas high job demands lead to employee burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). We hypothesize that enhanced communication visibility would promote employees' *role boundary spanning* behaviors (a job resource, such as organizational citizenship behaviors, OCBs) and demand *work/family boundary spanning* behaviors (a job demand, such as family boundary flexibility, FBF), thereby contributing to work engagement.

Communication visibility could foster OCBs (**Hypothesis 1, H1**), which are discretionary, extra-role behaviors, such as going out of one's way to help new employees and organizational development. First, message transparency allows employees to see organizational challenges and identify coworkers who need help, enabling them to volunteer assistance. Second, network translucence makes social connections visible, building a sense of closeness that encourages reciprocal helping. In addition, We believe that "doing good," manifested in OCBs, can make employees "feel good." OCBs may elicit motivational processes that enhance work engagement (**H2**). Combining H1 and H2, communication visibility is positively related to work engage-

ment through increased OCBs (H3).

Communication visibility may create demands for FBF (H4). Constant awareness of work activities may dissolve traditional boundaries, forcing employees into constant availability. Network translucence exposes an employee's social connections, creating unexpected obligations for introductions or impression management that extend into personal life. Treating FBF as a job demand, we propose that FBF is negatively associated with work engagement (H5). Combining H4 and H5, we propose that communication visibility is negatively related to work engagement through enhanced FBF (H6).

Methods and Results

A three-wave panel survey contracted with Dynata was conducted among full-time office workers in Hong Kong from September to December 2025. The three waves received 1521, 722, and 319 valid responses, respectively. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using communication visibility measured in the first wave (T1) as an independent variable, OCBs and FBF (T2) as mediators, and work engagement (T3) as the dependent variable. Control variables included age, work experience, and income. The results suggested an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(643) = 1305.71$, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.06 (CI: 0.05, 0.06).

H1, H2, and H3 received partial support: communication visibility was significantly and positively related only to OCBs toward the organization, and it was also significantly related to work engagement. H4 was supported. However, H5 and H6 were not supported and showed a contradictory finding: communication visibility increased, not decreased as predicted, work engagement through increased FBF.

Implications

This study extends work engagement research by investigating how communication visibility generates boundary-spanning resources and demands for employees. The contradictory findings regarding FBF suggested that employees might not view it as a demand but rather as a resource that alleviates the burden of perpetual digital connectedness. This is perhaps because this study was conducted in Hong Kong, where after-hours work is considered the norm. Qualitative explorations of how the meanings of communication visibility intersect with social and organizational norms could enrich our understanding of its impact. In practice, organizations should be mindful of the boundary-spanning effects of STPs and design an online space that motivates employees' helping behaviors. Leaders can also encourage employees to leverage FBF to balance their responsibilities by modeling healthy boundary-setting, thereby providing employees with psychological safety to manage the work/life interface.

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Keywords

social technology platform, communication visibility, organizational citizenship behavior, family boundary flexibility, work engagement

Training Validation-Based Insights into Cyber Crisis Communication

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Cyber incidents such as ransomware attacks and data breaches pose major threats to organizations and can sometimes escalate into full-blown crises marked by uncertainty, time pressure, and heightened stakeholder vulnerability. Data breaches are particularly challenging because they expose sensitive personal information and generate persistent perceptions of harm and loss of trust. In these contexts, crisis communication becomes a strategic lifeline, helping organizations to navigate uncertainty, mitigate stakeholder anxiety, and maintain credibility and legitimacy when trust is most fragile.

Building on earlier work that developed general cyber crisis communication guidelines and training content, this paper examines the validation of cyber crisis communication training designed for professionals working in critical infrastructure organizations. It explores how participants evaluate the relevance and usefulness of the training content and what scenario-based discussions reveal about practical cyber crisis communication needs and challenges.

Literature review

Cyber crises differ from more traditional organizational crises due to their technical complexity, evolving impact trajectories, ambiguous responsibility, and heightened stakeholder vulnerability. They place organizations in a communicative dilemma, as uncertainty and contested responsibility require balancing legal constraints with stakeholder expectations for transparency and

trust across both internal and external stakeholder groups (Knight & Nurse, 2020). Cyber incidents are therefore not merely technical problems managed behind the scenes; they can threaten organizational continuity, stakeholder trust, and even societal stability (ENISA, 2025; IBM, 2025), while triggering strong emotional reactions and responsibility attributions among publics (Coombs et al., 2020). As a result, cyber crises demand timely, transparent, and emotionally attentive communication under conditions of intense scrutiny and incomplete information (Coombs et al., 2020; Knight & Nurse, 2020).

Methodology

The study is based on qualitative data collected through online cyber crisis communication training validation workshops conducted via Microsoft Teams. The workshops lasted approximately two hours and involved 22 participants with professional roles related to cybersecurity, continuity management, and crisis communication in critical infrastructure organizations. The primary rationale for the workshops was to evaluate the training content and to capture participants' reflections, discussions, and feedback before and after engaging with the materials.

A pre-training cyber incident scenario was used as a facilitation tool to establish a shared point of reference and to stimulate discussion about communication challenges, stakeholder expectations, and organizational responses during cyber crises. The scenario was not intended as a full simulation, but as a structured prompt for collective reflection. All sessions were record-

ed and transcribed with participants' informed consent. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns across participants' evaluations and scenario-based discussions.

Results and conclusions

The findings indicate that training validation workshops offer valuable insights into how practitioners perceive cyber crisis communication challenges in practice. Participants emphasized difficulties related to communicating under conditions of uncertainty, clarifying roles and responsibilities, coordinating communication across organizational units, and balancing transparency with limited or evolving technical information. The discussions also highlighted tensions between formal communication procedures and the realities of dynamic cyber crisis situations, as well as the emotional and ethical dimensions of communicating about incidents that may affect stakeholders.

Although the small sample size limits generalizability, the study demonstrates that scenario-based training validation can serve as an effective empirical setting for examining practitioners' interpretations of cyber crisis communication demands. The findings suggest that cyber crisis communication competence is shaped not only by documented plans and guidelines, but also by opportunities for collective reflection and discussion around realistic crisis situations.

Practical and social implications

From a practical perspective, the results underscore the importance of incorporating scenario-based discussion and systematic end-user feedback into the development and refinement of cyber crisis communication training. Such approaches can help organizations better align communication guidance with practitioners' needs and lived challenges. Socially, strengthening cyber crisis communication practices contributes to protecting stakeholder trust, reducing long-term harm to affected individuals, and supporting the stability of critical infrastructure systems that are essential to societal functioning.

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Keywords

cyber incident, cyber crisis communication, training

Revisiting internal crisis communication research: where are we today?

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Fifteen years ago organizational internal crisis communication formed a new and upcoming field within public relations. Until then, most studies within crisis communication had concentrated on external communication and crisis response strategies of private and public organisations, often related to image repair (Benoit, 2004) or reputation and SCCT (Coombs, 2007). Some of the very first articles on internal crisis communication during included a conceptual paper establishing a theoretical integrative framework for the study of internal crisis communication (ICC) (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011); and two empirical studies: the article entitled “Entering new territory: A study of internal crisis management and crisis communication” in Danish private and public organizations (Johansen et al., 2012), and the study on manager-employee communication in Italian companies during the financial crisis in 2008-2009 (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2011).

Since then, research within ICC has gained traction, also following changes in the crisis landscape. Crises have become the new normal within today’s societies, including wars and geopolitical conflicts, health crises such as Covid-19, cyber attacks, climate changes leading to storms and floodings, DEI issues, scandals. ICC is extremely important for the handling of such crisis situations and for strengthening the resilience of organizations, managers and employees. It is often the employees who have the expert knowledge on how to deal with a specific situation in

practice, e.g., communication systems during a cyber attack.

Although we have witnessed an important increase in studies on internal dimensions during crises since 2010 (e.g., Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015, 2020, 2022; Heide & Simonsson, 2015, 2019, 2021; Strandberg & Vigso, 2016, to name a few), the global Covid-19 pandemic lead to renewed interest for knowing how to deal with topics such as internal communication and remote work (e.g., Ecklebe & Löffler, 2021, Yeomans & Bowman, 2021, Ravazanni et al., 2024), challenging our ability to keep track of the development within internal crisis communication research.

Hence, the overall goal of this paper is to conduct a literature review on internal crisis communication research, and to find out how far we have come since the first pioneering publications identifying the evolution of the field from 2010 to 2025, including the impact of Covid-19, as well as to discuss where to go next.

The theoretical background is formed by the heuristic integrative framework developed by Frandsen & Johansen in 2011 that includes various types of communication forms before, during and after a crisis, with managers and CMT’s and employees as senders or receivers as well as organizational factors and voices outside an organizations that may have an impact.

As for methodology, the study has been done through a systematic literature review (2010-

2025), following PRISMA guidelines (Snyder, 2019), using the search terms “internal crisis/risk communication” across *Business Source Complete* and *Scopus*. Based on a thorough screening process, it led to 95 records (handbooks, book chapters, and peer-reviewed articles in communication). All 95 records were subject to a detailed coding process using both predefined categories and inductive elements, which helped identify key contributors, methodological and theoretical patterns, and key topics and contributions.

Findings show a substantial increase in research in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, with 38 records focusing specifically on this crisis. Until then, key contributors were Scandinavian, Italian American, and Malaysian scholars; however, in light of the pandemic, several new countries are now also represented. Various methods have been applied; surveys and retrospective interview studies are dominant, along with theories of SCCT, the integrative ICC framework, organizational resilience, and theories on sensemaking. Broader categories of key topics include communication processes and technology/channels; organizational actors and roles; managerial capabilities; participation and involvement mechanisms; cultural dynamics; employee-organization relationships; external representation (outside-in), and employee boundary spanning and advocacy (inside-out). The pandemic brought new topics to the forefront, including remote work and a renewed focus on physical and psychological safety and employee well-being. The paper also presents potential for future research.

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Keywords

Internal crisis communication, integrative ICC framework, Covid-19, literature review, sensemaking, organizational resilience

Leader Silence in Organizational Crisis: Implications for Employee Trust, Engagement, and Crisis Recovery Efforts

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Introduction

Organizational crises bring disruption, uncertainty, and emotional turbulence, which often prompt employees to seek direction and reassurance from their leaders. Crisis communication research emphasizes the importance of transparent, timely, and empathetic leadership in maintaining trust and supporting recovery (Boin et al., 2020; Coombs, 2019). However, leadership communication during crises is not only about what is communicated but also about what is withheld. Leader silence, whether intentional or unintentional, can be a powerful, ambiguous signal that invites interpretation and speculation among employees. While much of the literature focuses on what leaders should say, the potential harm of what is left unsaid is often overlooked. When leaders delay addressing a crisis or fail to explain their silence, employees may perceive this as strategic move, avoidance/incompetence, or even a cover-up (Le et al., 2019; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Given the urgency for information during crises, leader silence can have significant consequences for both employees and organizational recovery.

Purpose and Literature Review

This study explores leader silence during organizational crises, defined as the withholding, delaying, or minimizing of communication by

a leader. It examines how leader silence affects employees, particularly in shaping their trust, engagement, and commitment to recovery. The study proposes that prolonged leader silence is not neutral; it often elicits emotional and cognitive responses that influence organizational outcomes.

The study integrates Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1985) and Sensemaking Theory (Weick, 1995) into a relational-attributional framework, incorporating Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Bauer & Erdogan, 2013) and Employee-Organization Relationship (EOR) (Kang & Sung, 2017). This framework explores how relational quality influences how employees interpret leader silence, whether they perceive it as a strategic tactic or as a sign of dysfunction, and how these interpretations affect trust and engagement. The study seeks to address calls for more integrated research on leadership, crisis communication, and organizational behavior (Heide & Simonsson, 2021; Men & Stacks, 2014).

Research Questions

RQ1: How do employees interpret and make sense of leader silence during organizational crises, and what underlying emotions and meanings do they associate with this silence?

RQ2: How do employees' perceptions of leader silence shape their trust in leadership and the organization, and how do these perceptions evolve during and after the crisis?

RQ3: How do employees describe their engagement with the crisis recovery process in response to leader silence, and how do these descriptions vary based on their interpretations of silence?

RQ4: How do relational factors, such as LMX and EOR, affect employees' interpretations of leader silence, and how do these dynamics shape their crisis response and commitment to recovery?

Method

This study will use a mixed-methods approach, beginning with 10-15 in-depth interviews with purposively selected employees from various organizations. These interviews will explore how employees interpret leader silence during crises, focusing on their emotions, attributions, and sensemaking. Following the interviews, an online survey will be distributed to a larger sample of full-time employees across the United States to validate and expand on the qualitative findings. This mixed approach will allow us to examine how leader silence influences trust, engagement, and recovery efforts while considering relational dynamics.

Findings and Implications

This research provides valuable insights into how leader silence during crises impacts employee trust, engagement, and commitment to recovery. By examining employees' emotional and cognitive responses, the study could reveal that silence is not just an absence of communication, but it also shapes employees' perceptions of leadership and organizational trust. Employees who interpret leader silence negatively may experience decreased trust and reduced engagement with recovery efforts, while those who view it as a strategic move may maintain higher levels of trust and commitment.

The study also highlights the role of relational dynamics, such as Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and Employee-Organization Relationship (EOR), in shaping how silence is interpreted. Strong, positive relationships between leaders and employees can lead to more favorable interpretations of silence, while weaker relationships may lead to negative attributions and hinder recovery efforts.

These findings emphasize the importance of fostering transparent communication and strong relationships between leaders and employees. Leaders must be aware of the influence of silence and its potential to erode trust and engagement during crises.

It also offers practical guidance for organizations seeking to enhance crisis communication strategies, rebuild trust, and boost employee engagement during recovery. Understanding how leader silence is interpreted can help organizations improve their crisis management and long-term recovery.

From Catwalks to Black Cards: Crises of Exclusivity in Luxury Fashion and Luxury Finance

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Luxury fashion and luxury finance are two industries in which public relations and strategic communication are central to value creation and to the ongoing management of exclusivity and legitimacy. In both sectors, value is derived less from functional utility than from symbolic prestige, trust, and controlled access. Luxury fashion relies on cultural distinction and aesthetic authority, while luxury finance relies on credibility, discretion, and confidence in expertise. In recent years, however, both sectors have faced a shared communicative challenge: the destabilisation of exclusivity under conditions of digital visibility, platform circulation, and consumer commentary. This paper examines how luxury fashion and luxury finance experience and manage this challenge as a form of organisational crisis.

The purpose of the study is twofold. First, it conceptualises the erosion of exclusivity as a legitimacy-based crisis rather than a reputational scandal or institutional failure. Second, it brings luxury fashion and luxury finance into dialogue within crisis communication and public relations scholarship, arguing that these sectors face structurally similar communicative risks because they address overlapping luxury consumers across different markets. The central research question guiding the study is: how do luxury fashion and luxury finance brands communicate and attempt to repair exclusivity when social media platforms expose, narrate, and reinterpret

prestige for mass audiences?

Literature Review

The paper is situated at the intersection of crisis communication, luxury consumption, and financial public relations. Crisis communication research has traditionally focused on discrete, high-impact events such as scandals or organisational breakdowns. While this framework remains essential, it offers limited tools for analysing slower, culturally driven legitimacy disturbances that unfold through ongoing communication rather than singular triggering events.

Recent research on luxury consumption identifies the rise of quiet luxury, in which status is communicated through minimalism, restraint, and subtle design cues rather than overt branding. This form of luxury depends on shared cultural understanding and limited visibility, making it particularly vulnerable when circulated widely through digital platforms. Fashion scholarship on stealth luxury further emphasises the role of fashion capital and insider competence in regulating who can legitimately recognise and claim such forms of distinction, reinforcing the idea that exclusivity is socially produced rather than inherent.

A parallel challenge emerges in luxury finance. Strategic communication research highlights legitimacy and trust as core assets in contemporary brand management, particularly in digital

environments where meaning is co-produced by organisations and audiences. Recent studies show that luxury financial services — including invitation-only credit cards and premium financial tiers — increasingly operate symbolically as prestige brands, functioning as markers of identity and status rather than purely financial instruments. Despite these developments, financial public relations scholarship has rarely examined luxury finance through the combined lens of luxury consumption and crisis communication.

Methodology

Empirically, the study adopts a qualitative case approach focusing on platform-mediated public and consumer discourse. The analysis examines how legitimacy, distinction, and exclusivity are discursively negotiated in social media environments where visibility is amplified and meanings are contested.

The first case analyses public and media reactions to The Row's 2025 sample sale, with particular attention to TikTok discourse during the late-October surge in visibility. The Row is a New York-based luxury fashion house founded in 2006, known for minimalist design, high price points, and a quiet luxury positioning that emphasises discretion and limited visibility. TikTok content documenting queues, pricing, and “haul” experiences reframed the brand through narratives of access and affordability, generating debate over whether exclusivity had been compromised. This episode is examined as a legitimacy crisis rather than a traditional reputational scandal.

The second case examines luxury finance as a consumer-facing PR domain, focusing on Black Card culture and mass-premium products such as Revolut Metal, which operate symbolically as luxury markers within digital finance cultures. Social media commentary surrounding these products reveals consumer negotiations around authenticity, value, and distinction. As in luxury fashion, reputational vulnerability arises not

from institutional failure but from the perceived dilution of symbolic value.

Results and Conclusions

The analysis suggests that both luxury fashion and luxury finance are increasingly exposed to legitimacy-based crises driven by digital visibility rather than discrete events. In both sectors, communicative strategies aim to repair exclusivity by reasserting symbolic boundaries, recalibrating narratives of distinction, and managing platform-specific meanings co-produced with audiences. These cases demonstrate that exclusivity erosion functions as a form of chronic legitimacy crisis, challenging conventional crisis typologies centred on sudden reputational threats.

The paper contributes to crisis communication scholarship by extending the concept of crisis beyond event-based scandals to include culturally mediated legitimacy disturbances shaped by digital circulation. It positions luxury finance as an underexplored site of consumer-facing financial public relations and demonstrates the analytical value of examining luxury fashion and luxury finance together, reflecting how contemporary luxury consumers move across sectors carrying shared expectations of exclusivity and legitimacy.

Practical and Social Implications

The findings offer practical insights for public relations professionals working in luxury markets, highlighting the need for strategic communication approaches that address the symbolic and socially negotiated nature of exclusivity in digital environments. More broadly, the study contributes to social debates on how platform visibility reshapes prestige, trust, and value across cultural and financial domains.

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Keywords

crisis communication; luxury fashion; luxury finance; quiet luxury; financial public relations

Conspiracy Spillover: A Study of Australian Supermarket Giants, their Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use, and the Issue of AI-Driven Price Gouging”

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Introduction and purpose of the study

While businesses’ use of artificial intelligence (AI) has become increasingly prevalent across various business functions, a trust gap has emerged as consumers are concerned about various risks, such as data security and job losses. Although consumers generally have high awareness of AI, they are often unaware of how businesses employ AI in their daily operations. Consequently, there have been calls for more empirical research to explore consumers’ perceptions about businesses’ AI use. Defining conspiratorial thinking (CT) as individuals’ tendency to attribute problematic events to the self-interests of powerful organizations, this study examines a framework that unpacks how conspiratorial thinking about a business can spill over into conspiratorial thinking about the role of business in an AI-driven issue.

Literature review

Tam and Kim (2023) defined conspiratorial thinking (CT) as individuals’ propensity to consider malicious events and circumstances as secret plots initiated by a powerful organization for its self-serving purpose. While their study explains how and why individuals consider or subscribe to certain conspiracy theories in a public relations context, there is little research explicating how and why their conspiratorial

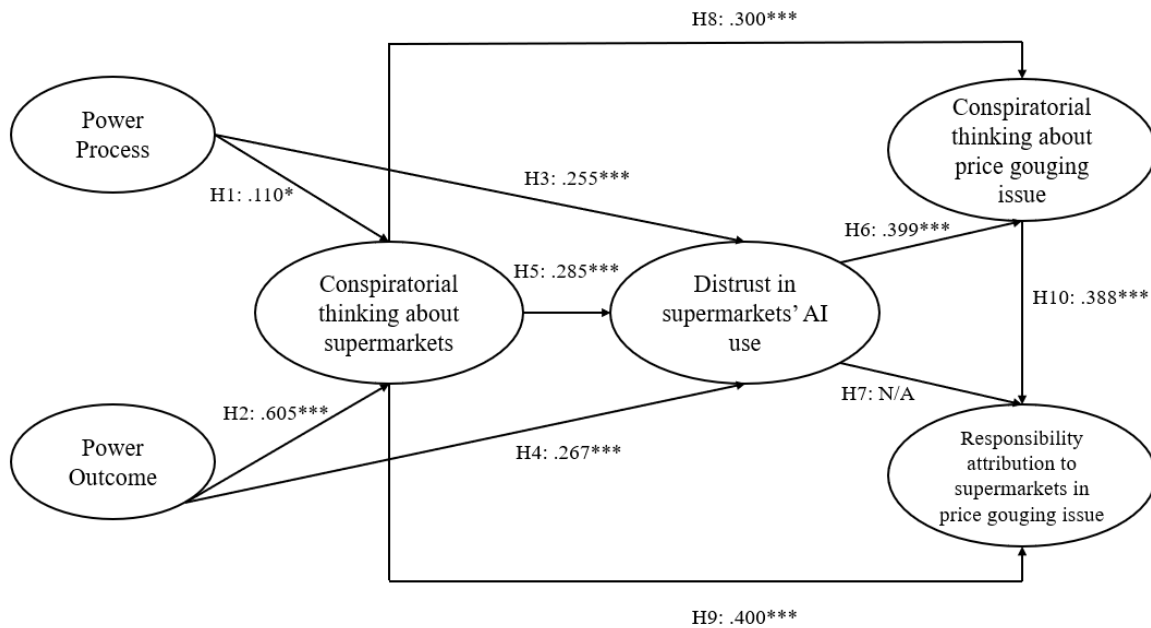
thinking generates another conspiratorial thinking. Douglas et al (2017) called for more research on the consequences of conspiracy beliefs.

Methodology

An online survey was conducted in September, 2024 using a nationally representative sample of 456 Australians in Australia (N=420). A quota sampling method was used by age and gender, and the sample was recruited by Qualtrics. Total 420 responses were retained for data analysis after incomplete and straight-lining responses were deleted. The survey respondents received remuneration for their participation per their agreement with Qualtrics.

Results and conclusion

The following results are found: (1) Individuals’ perceptions of supermarket giants’ efforts to share power with consumers (i.e., power process and outcome) are related to their conspiratorial thinking about the supermarkets (i.e., CT-business), (2) CT-business is positively associated with individuals’ distrust in supermarkets’ AI use as well as with conspiratorial thinking about the role of supermarkets in an AI-driven price gouging issue (i.e., CT-issue) and (3) CT-issue is positively associated with responsibility attribution. The framework demonstrates a process of



conspiracy spillover that reflects cognitive disclosure at times of AI uncertainty.

Practical and social implications

Conspiracy spillovers are a serious problem due to their potential impact on the spread and vicious cycle of misinformation and distrust, which in turn shape public opinions toward the entities which become the targets of such series of conspiratorial thinkings (CT). Moreover, when individuals engage in conspiratorial thinking (CT) about a particular organization, they are likely to engage in damaging behaviors such as negative megaphoning (Tam & Kim, 2023) and attributing blames as this study found. This potentially creates crises for entities who are blamed for causing an issue (Kim, Tam, & Taylor, 2023). Organizations' conscious and genuine efforts toward their stakeholders are required to mitigate ungrounded conspiratorial thinking (CT) and distrust. Those efforts include matching their actions with words, reducing uncertainty by providing reliable information, etc.

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Keywords

conspiratorial thinking, power outcome, power process, responsibility attribution

Brand Identity Fusion as a Relational Shield during Crises: A Multistakeholder Approach

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Introduction

Crisis situations, by definition, present reputational, financial, and/or operational threats to businesses. In the current, increasingly polarized environment, where research shows that 61% of the global population reports holding grievances against the government, business, and the rich, believing that businesses make their lives harder and serve self-interests (Edelman, 2026), businesses are under enhanced stakeholder scrutiny. In times of crises, these grievances may result in more forceful backlash against brands. Therefore, it is important to understand the factors that may help mitigate backlash during crises from the perspective of multiple stakeholders. In this conceptual essay, we draw upon social psychology, consumer psychology, and communication scholarship to propose the idea of brand identity fusion as a relational shield for brands during crises.

Literature Review

Crisis communication research has long emphasized the importance of understanding the pre-existing conditions that may mitigate reputational damage when a crisis occurs. Within the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007), these conditions are conceptualized as crisis buffers, factors that exist prior to a crisis and shape stakeholder responses independent of the organization's immediate crisis strategy (Koerber & Zabara, 2017). Two

common crisis buffers are an organization's crisis history and its favorable reputation with stakeholders, both of which can attenuate attributions of responsibility and negative evaluations during crises (Koerber & Zabara, 2017). Further research has advanced the buffering logic to stakeholders being buffers themselves. For instance, brand fans—consumers who strongly identify with a brand—have been shown to function as active buffers by defending the brand, accepting crisis responses more readily, and engaging in positive word-of-mouth during crises (Lim & Brown-Devlin, 2023). Similarly, studies on corporate reputation suggest that buffering effects arise from stakeholders' motivation to maintain cognitive consistency, leading them to discount or reinterpret negative information to preserve existing favorable beliefs (Sohn & Lariscy, 2015).

Recent developments in social psychology have articulated a much more powerful form of organizational-public relationships, i.e., organization-public identity fusion. Lin and Sung (2014) built on social psychology scholarship (e.g., Swann et al., 2009) to propose that brand identity fusion is “the ultimate destination for consumer-brand relationships” (p. 55). Brand identity fusion is defined as, “the merging of individual (customer) and identity of the brand in the mind of the customer such that the individual may see threats to the brand as a threat to one's self” (Krishna & Kim, 2022, p. 569). Building on this, Krishna (2023) tested the idea of employee-organization identity fusion and

found that when confronted with their employers' moral transgression, employees' identity fusion reduced negative megaphoning and increased positive megaphoning intentions. Taken together, we propose organization-public identity fusion as a powerful relational shield that may protect organizations from stakeholder backlash when facing crises. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of this work.

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Knowledge, Skills and Motivation for Efficient Communication in Health Crises in Slovenia

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Health crises, regardless of how big or small they are, always demand rapid, accurate, and ethically grounded communication that fosters trust and compliance with advised health behaviours. In Slovenian healthcare institutions, i.e. hospitals and health centres of different sizes and positions, crises emerge or begin to develop quite frequently, although most often at lower levels, attracting mainly local media and specific publics' attention. In contrast to higher-level crises (regional or even national), which are skilfully managed by multidisciplinary teams of experts, low-level crises demand that directly involved doctors and nurses react immediately with official statements, thus shifting public communication responsibilities to non-specialist roles. If the situation evolves, most crises further involve institutions' public relations officers (if an institution has one) and institutions' directors. Therefore, this study examines doctors', nurses', directors' and PR officers' public communication competency framework (drawing on Macnamara, 2018 and Botan & Hazleton, 2010), connecting interviewees' perceptions of crucial knowledge, skills, and motivations underpinning the ability to communicate efficiently in sensitive health contexts in Slovenia.

Literature review

Communicators' competencies are measured using a Healthcare Communication Compe-

tence Questionnaire (HCCQ), developed for the purpose of this study. The content follows the Knowledge–Skills–Attitudes (KSA) competency model, widely applied as a generic model in professional competence research, and is theoretically grounded in Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT; Coombs, 2007) and the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) model (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005), which enable interpretation of communication competencies in relation to trust-building, strategic alignment and timely response in health crises.

Methodology

The constructed questionnaire explores the public communication competency framework through 28 indicators, nine covering knowledge, ten skills and nine motivations. In the survey, each indicator is used twice: firstly, to measure the level of importance of the indicated knowledge, skill, or motivation for efficient crisis communication, and secondly, to obtain an estimation of the quality of performance. Using a five-point Likert scale to acquire the level of agreement with each statement, 56 variables are obtained, 28 quantifying the competency framework elements' importance and 28 the competency framework elements' quality in performance. In the questionnaire, knowledge covers topics such as ethical aspects of sharing health information, media legislation, understanding of stakeholders, media roles and effects in soci-

ety, communication strategy and planning, media monitoring, and rules and ethical guidelines for the use of artificial intelligence. Skills include responding quickly, explaining professional concepts in simple terms, speaking live, participating in online discussions, writing for social and traditional media, and understanding social media publics. Motivations include enjoyment of following media topics, popularising health topics, educating the public, building one's own media visibility, and exploring the potential of AI.

The data were collected using a structured online survey questionnaire prepared on the platform of a professional agency (www.ninamedia.si). The entire population of doctors, nurses, directors of health institutions and communicators employed in health institutions in Slovenia was invited to participate in the study. The invitation to complete the questionnaire was sent in October 2024 to the email addresses of doctors (N = 6,266), directors of health institutions (N = 93) and health communicators (N = 48). For nurses, the invitation was published in e-newsletters in October and November (N = 14,313). The questionnaire was available online until the end of November, and a total of 542 fully completed questionnaires were collected. Due to the voluntary nature of the survey, the response rate is relatively low, but at the same time one third higher than seven years earlier in a similar survey conducted among the same population. The obtained sample roughly matches the population's characteristics. The main deviations are the overrepresentation of women (only one fifth of the sample are men) and doctors (slightly more than half of the sample). In addition, three quarters of invited communicators and almost half of invited directors provided their responses.

Results and conclusions

The statistical analyses produced interesting and useful results for the immediate improvement of communication in health crises as well as for the adaptation of educational programmes for the target population. The most notable findings

include: (a) the prevailing importance of skills over knowledge, and even more so over motivation; (b) substantial gaps between perceived importance and performance regarding skills; and (c) linearity of performance evaluations, indicating structural challenges in competency development.

Practical and social implications

The results provide an empirical basis for improving public communication practices in health crises, suggesting that such improvements require role-specific training approaches tailored to different professional groups within healthcare organizations.

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Keywords

health crises, crisis communication, PR competencies

Bolstering Crisis Response Strategies in Government Disaster Communication: A Content Analysis of Croatian Government Earthquake Messaging (2020–2021)

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In recent years, the noticeable increase in natural disasters globally, both in number and impact, has made disaster management and effective crisis communication more important than ever. Many scholars have emphasised that governments traditionally play a primary or central role in disaster management, including preparedness, response, and recovery (Boin & McConnell, 2008, p. 8; Tierney, 2012, p. 345-346; Fisher & Dugan, 2021, p. 1231), as well as in providing public information through timely, accurate, and trustworthy communication (Zabi, 2025, p. 13). The Sendai Framework clearly states, “each State has the primary responsibility to prevent and reduce disaster risk, including through effective governance” (UNDRR, 2015, p. 13). At the same time, according to Liu & Mehta (2021, p. 862), citizens’ trust in public authorities during disasters is closely linked to how governments communicate uncertainty, responsibility, and recovery.

The theory of Situational Crisis Communication (SCCT) has been widely adopted to study how organisations can handle reputation threats and retain stakeholder trust during a crisis. Coombs (2007, p. 164) states that crisis communication aims to protect and restore an organisation’s reputation, which is directly associated with the level of public trust during a crisis. Although

much SCCT research has focused on core response strategies, there is a need to examine at so-called other response strategies, especially bolstering strategies, which have so far received relatively limited scholarly attention. Coombs (2013, p. 273-274) explicitly recommends further research on these understudied strategies, as understanding of their functions and effects remains limited. This necessity is also supported by Tian and Yang (2022, p. 7), who reveal that the effectiveness of bolstering strategies is context-dependent and varies depending on the person implementing them.

In this context, to address these gaps in existing SCCT literature, this study examines how the Croatian government integrated core crisis response strategies alongside bolstering strategies in a disaster environment characterised by low blame but high uncertainty and public anxiety. Focusing on the 2020 earthquakes in Croatia and the subsequent recovery process, the paper specifically analyses ingratiation, reminder, and victimage strategies as conceptualised by Coombs (2007, p. 170).

The study employs quantitative content analysis of news items published on the Croatian government’s official news portal and posts on the government’s official Facebook page. The unit

of analysis is the sentence, enabling identification of distinct communicative functions within multi-topic texts. Crisis response strategies are coded using SCCT-aligned categories. A priority rule assigns one primary strategy per sentence (for example, instructing, adjusting, corrective action or rebuilding, denial or diminishment), while also allowing coders to note the presence of secondary bolstering strategies.

Preliminary patterns indicate that government communication about the earthquakes primarily focuses on informing the public and outlining recovery and reconstruction measures, emphasising procedures, institutional actions, and funding. Bolstering strategies are used selectively and almost always as secondary elements, typically to highlight institutional capacity, cooperation with partners, and previous achievements. This suggests that bolstering functions less as a standalone trust-repair or maintenance mechanism and more as a discursive layer supporting institutional legitimacy. Emotional reassurance is rare and usually brief, indicating a limited emotional dimension in official disaster communication, leaving open questions about how affective communication can be used to maintain public trust when facing uncertainty in the long term.

Since SCCT is widely used in crisis communication research, this study contributes by examining the implications of government crisis response strategies for trust-related communication dynamics in multi-disaster contexts, with particular attention to underexplored bolstering strategies. Coombs (2020, p. 133-134) stated that SCCT is “an open world crisis communication theory” that requires further research on underexplored variables. The results indicate that trust and emotional responsiveness should be more clearly incorporated into governmental disaster communication. Although the study focuses on Croatia, the case provides insights into government communication in multi-hazard disaster contexts common in many European and global settings, where blame is diffuse but uncertainty and public anxiety are high. The findings offer

practical insights for governments communicating in low-blame, high-uncertainty disaster contexts and highlight the need for more emotionally responsive crisis communication to support public resilience and institutional legitimacy.

As this study involves content analysis, it does not directly assess the level of trust or how the audience perceives government information as trustworthy. Although trust is not measured as an outcome, the study examines trust-related communication by adopting a message-centred approach to crisis response strategies, providing a foundation for future research. The conceptualised strategies of SCCT serve as tools for reputation and legitimacy management, which are inherently trust-related. Therefore, future research combining message analysis with survey or experimental designs is recommended to examine how these strategies influence public trust and stakeholder responses.

Keywords

crisis communication; situational crisis communication theory; disaster communication; government communication; content analysis

Exploring How Strategic Communication Professionals Employ Ethics of Care to Navigate Disinformation

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Introduction

Disinformation, the intentional dissemination of false information for persuasion, has emerged as a major global threat. In 2025, an advisory report to the U.N. produced by the Center for Conflict & Cooperation argued that disinformation poses “a systemic risk” to human rights. In light of this risk, research on how strategic communications professionals navigate disinformation is needed, including the development of an ethical framework.

Literature Review

Disinformation

Disinformation is weaponized through tactics such as propaganda, astroturfing, and fake news. Strategic communication professionals must act as calculated combatants against these deceptions, yet research has largely ignored the complex lived experiences of those tasked with navigating a volatile information environment. The field requires rigorous ethical guardrails and formal guidelines that empower professionals to ensure transparency, effectively shielding client reputations while sustaining public trust.

Ethics of Care (EoC)

To address this gap, the EoC framework prioritizes the cultivation of mutually beneficial relationships through the proactive process of empathy and active listening. The framework generates a strategic feedback loop that fortifies trust against external attacks. Crucially, this framework provides a structural safety net, allowing organizations to support professionals as they navigate the moral labor of high-stakes crisis management. By adopting EoC, firms move beyond performative compliance to protect organizational integrity through context-heavy, relational responsibility.

Research Question

How do strategic communication professionals apply the EoC phases when navigating disinformation?

Method

This study used a mixed-method approach including focus groups and short answer survey data. Data collection began with three focus groups that included 20 strategic communication professions, 15 women and five men. Participants answered questions regarding how they would practically apply each EoC phase when it comes to navigating disinformation. Each ses-

sion lasted one hour on Zoom and resulted in 59 pages of data. The second phase of data collection included short answer survey data of a larger sample size to confirm the focus group insights.

Using Prolific, 148 strategic communication professionals in the U.S. completed the survey, including 58 (39.2%) men, 89 (60.1%) women, and 1 other/prefer not to say (.7%). Years of experience was 8.68 (SD = 6.95). Participants were asked the same questions as the focus groups. Both data sources were thematically analyzed and compared to each other to arrive at the practices professionals use for each phase.

Findings

The five phases begin with caring about, which is initiated through noticing an individual's or group's caring needs. The tactic that was discussed most by participants was the importance of active listening. The goal of the listening was to empathize and understand the various stakeholders impacted by the disinformation. One focus group participant shared, "My path to understanding my audience is going to begin with finding out more about why they believe or have behaved in the way that they did."

The second phase is caring for, which is about creating a safe and communicative space that must acknowledge power dynamics. The focus is on debunking information and educating audiences as a way to build trust. The empathetic approach continues here by creating a safe place for people to share and discuss. A survey respondent said, "This involves establishing an open, secure communication environment where people may freely voice their worries."

This leads to the third phase of care giving, which is the act of providing tangible care. Most people talked about caring through action for all stakeholders. This includes educating, offering media literacy tools, and communicating often. A survey respondent shared, "Implementing the care delivery phase means moving from a commitment to action to effective and concrete de-

livery of care."

The fourth phase observes the care given within the third phase to translate and make judgments on the actions. Participants discussed the value of seeking feedback from audiences in addition to various types of assessments. A survey respondent said, "By incorporating audience feedback and assessing the real-world impact of care actions, communicators strengthen public trust, and foster a more informed and resilient society."

The final phase of caring with takes the previous stages covered within the framework and incorporates them to allow for a feedback loop. This phase is about continuing collaborative efforts, which is often done through constant communication. A focus group participant said, "Our organization needs to constantly be communicating what we do and why we do it."

Practical and Social Implications

While findings highlight technical skills (e.g., debunking), participants primarily cited soft skills. This organic focus on relationship-building addresses a critical void in the industry and offers an explicit ethical framework for navigating disinformation. By applying EoC, this study demonstrates how professionals can leverage these intuitive, empathetic responses into a proactive, ethically grounded process for navigating disinformation.

Keywords

ethics of Care (EoC), disinformation, strategic communication professionals

What can practitioners learn from research? A practitioner's view of the implementation of research within crisis communication into police operations

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The Swedish Police have one of the most specialized management systems in Europe for communication. With approximately 900,000 unique articles annually, the police are the biggest sender in Swedish news media. At the same time, the police have very high results when measuring the public's trust in Swedish authorities.

Management system for crisis communication

Communication is a fully integrated part of the police organization during special operations. With nine different staff functions, communication (no. 7) is one of the most frequently used functions within the Swedish police.

The management system at the national level (N7) is mirrored in the seven police regions. There are locally based organizations (R7) to handle crisis communication during operations, and at the same time national coordination is ensured in case of major events.

Continuous development

The staff function for police crisis communication (N7/R7) is based on constant development of new methods and procedures. It rests on three foundations:

- Follow-up of communication after events
- International exchange with law enforcement
- New and relevant research in crisis communication

The findings are transferred into manuals, guidelines and training of the communication staff.

Examples of relevant research

Relevant research and independent studies of crisis events are always important as a complement to the organization's own practical experiences. These are examples of theories that the Swedish police have adopted:

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs)

Although the theory is often used to relate to reputational crises in private business, it is also useful in a police operational context. In addition to maintaining public trust (which is strategically important for law enforcement), it is also applicable on how to handle operational incidents.

Finding the right response in communication, depending on the situation, is important when you reassure the public. By neither exaggerating nor minimizing an incident, you increase the chance that the public will follow your advice and help the police.

IDEA Model (Sellnow)

The *IDEA Model* is an evidence-based method on how to compose effective warning messages. It is easy to use during an ongoing crisis and based on four different components (Internalization, Distribution, Explanation, Action).

The model is also applicable in extreme situations requiring very fast communication. It enables a quick quality control for the sender in stressful situations.

Crisis Communication Readiness (Jin)

The research on *Readiness* creates an understanding of the dynamics of crisis communication, the team's composition and motivation. It focuses on leadership and the need for mental preparation and adaptability during crises. It helps us to understand the needs of crisis communication outside the traditional structural preparations.

Cynefin framework (Snowden)

Swedish police have integrated the Cynefin framework as a support for decision-making under time pressure. A recently published study shows that it is also highly applicable in crisis communication (Jong).

Research from a practitioner's perspective

While there is a lot to be gained from scientific studies in crisis communication, there are things that make it difficult for practitioners to absorb the results. These are some examples that create barriers between theory and practice:

1. Researchers often place great emphasis on detailed discussions of method and sampling. This is of course extremely important for scientific results to be valid and reliable. But practitioners want the results to be in focus in order to draw useful conclusions. (We trust that the research is of high quality).
2. Several research studies repeat already known and basic facts that most crisis communication practitioners know well through experience. (The Earth is round - we know that).
3. Some research studies do not take into account practical limitations (e.g. resources, competence) and make conclusions on a theoretical ideal type of crisis communication that is never reasonable for an organization to achieve. (No, in a small agency, there will never be twenty experienced crisis communicators 24/7).
4. Some research and evaluations at the overall system level, do not take into account legal mandates or complex dependencies and responsibilities between different agencies and stakeholders. (Yes, you have shown us the ultimate goal - but how do we get there, and who is responsible?).

Future research that could be useful to practitioners

New scientific theories and studies in crisis communication are important for practitioners. These are some suggestions how research could contribute:

1. Studies of events that thoroughly examine internal management and control of crisis communication. Not just focus on the outcomes of communication. Preferably in complex crises where external cooperation between different stakeholders is necessary.
2. Research on how communication personnel are psychologically affected by crises. Stress and exposure to traumatic events affects the well-being and performance both in the short and long term. Communicators are put in the spotlight during a crisis, but are often forgotten during debriefing.
3. Increased exchange between researchers and practitioners in crisis communication. The theoretical and practical dimension of crisis communication needs arenas for joint discussion.
4. Maintain the independence and quality of research. In a world where communication has increasingly become a tool for state control, it is important that research into crisis communication is conducted independently, with high quality and integrity.

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Keywords

Crisis Management, Police Communication

The insular side of disasters: listening to citizens' voices for improving risk and crisis communication

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Over the past decades, scholarly interest to the concepts of risk and crisis has grown considerably, involving different sectors and disciplines including communication research (Coombs 2013; Frandsen et al. 2025; Covello et al. 1986). This development reflects the broadening range of phenomena classified as risks, involving different types of stakeholders, including citizens and media. Most of these risks are today deeply mediatized, due to the role of digital platforms in contemporary communication ecologies. Institutions play a crucial role in risk prevention, as well as in disaster and crisis communication management (Coman et al., 2025; Coombs, 2020) to inform citizens in a cacophony of messages often polluted by disinformation (Lovari & Bowen 2020).

In this context the abstract presents the findings of a research project funded by the Italian Ministry of Research and University, aimed at supporting more participatory and inclusive risk communication policies through a survey on citizens' risk perception and communication practices. The study focuses on Italy's major islands, Sicily and Sardinia, where insularity represents a key factor shaping communicative resilience.

Literature review

Alongside the several dimensions that characterize the concept of risk, communication is being considered as one of the most crucial ones (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2024). The increas-

ing frequency of natural disasters, amplified by climate change, have made risk and crisis communication crucial dimensions of contemporary society for understanding emerging global challenges (Coombs 2013; Schwarz et al. 2025). The impacts of climate change are increasingly visible and are significantly (re)shaping how institutions communicate with citizens and media (Eurobarometer 2025). Public sector communication (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019) is the leverage to transparently inform and engage multiple stakeholders also during critical events that can harm different publics. In an era characterized by mega-crises (Sellnow-Richmond & Lukakovic 2025) and the pervasiveness of social media and AI-driven systems, risk communication plays a strategic role also in shaping perceptions, enhancing trust, and fostering communities' capacity to respond to disasters. In this context, it becomes strategically important to listen to citizens' voices (Lovari & Parisi, 2015), detecting their previous experiences with natural disasters, the level of trust in institutions, as well as media and communication tools they rely on to get information when facing natural events such as floods, heatwaves, and similar hazards. Different stakeholders' perception, specific territorial vulnerabilities, and citizens' information seeking practices need specific approaches and integrated communication strategies (Sriramesh, 2026).

Methodology

The study adopted a probabilistic, multi-stage stratified sampling design structured around

three main variables: territorial distribution, degree of urbanization, and age and gender. Data were collected in July 2025 using a mixed-mode approach combining CAWI and CATI. Overall, 3,022 interviews were completed: 1,356 in Sicily, 443 in Sardinia, and 1,223 in a national comparison sample. The territorial stratification covered the nine provinces of Sicily and the five provinces of Sardinia, further differentiated into metropolitan, urban, and rural areas. Within each stratum, quotas were defined according to four age groups and gender, reflecting the actual distribution of the resident population. The same sampling logic was applied to a national comparison sample.

Results and conclusions

Findings show that direct experience of natural disasters is strongly shaped by territorial context. At national level, respondents mostly report experience with events like thunderstorms and lightning (80.8%), heat and cold waves (74.4%). In insular contexts, direct experience highlights more specific risk patterns. Sardinians report high experience with drought (66.8%) and wildfires (57.8%). Sicilians highlight direct experience with earthquakes (55.6%) and volcanic eruptions (43.6%).

In terms of trust, family and friends emerge as the primary source for coping with disasters, especially in Sardinia (86.5%). This reliance on informal networks is consistent with a stronger sense of cohesion in insular contexts: respondents in Sardinia (27.1%) and Sicily (28.8%) believe that citizens must largely cope on their own, compared to 14.6% at the national level. Institutional trust is highest for emergency actors (Civil Protection), while trust in regional, national, and European institutions is comparatively lower.

Regarding information sources, public communication and emergency services are considered the most reliable channels across all phases of emergencies (58%), in particular the institutional websites, followed by television, radio, and

newspapers. Trust in social media conversations remains limited (10-13%). The survey reveals an ambivalent attitude toward AI in risk management. While citizens acknowledge their potential for prevention, concerns persist regarding decision-making transparency and data protection.

Practical implications

Findings identify specific paths to integrate citizens' voices in the management of public risk communication strategies by improving its timeliness, and territorial reach, particularly in insular settings marginally investigated in risk communication.

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Keywords

public communication; natural disasters, risk communication, insularity

What do we know about political crisis communication? A review of a decade of research

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From the perspective of crisis communication research, the political sphere is understood as one of the areas of public crises, along with disasters and health emergencies (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020; Coombs & Holladay, 2023). However, some studies have identified a significant gap in the theorization of a political crisis (Udris, 2019; Lozano-Recalde, 2024), pointing to a lack of conceptual clarity regarding its definition and main characteristics. Existing research suggests these crises occur when a political actor faces a threat to their power or legitimacy, typically provoked by another political actor (Auer, 2016; Frandsen & Johansen, 2020). Consequently, such crises are deeply shaped by rhetorical and contextual factors, where the process of meaning-making plays a central role (Boin et al., 2009; Frandsen & Johansen, 2020). Other scholars argue that the defining feature of a political crisis is its management from an institutional rather than a situational perspective (Pont-Sorribes, 2014; Salomonsen & t'Hart, 2020). Despite these theoretical contributions, most of the existing literature calls for further academic efforts to advance the development of political crisis communication theory.

Building on this background, the present study aims to advance understanding of political crisis communication by assessing the current state of academic research and synthesizing its main theoretical approaches. A scoping review of academic articles and conference papers was conducted, following the PRISMA and SALSA frameworks. The inclusion criteria comprised

publications in English and Spanish from 2016 to 2025 indexed in Scopus or Web of Science. From an initial sample of 218 records, a final corpus of 72 studies was selected for analysis.

The findings reveal a lack of systematic conceptualization of political crises. Although most of the reviewed publications addressed political crises as a central theme and 64.4% focused explicitly on crisis communication, only 17.8% included any theoretical reference to political crisis as a concept. In 82.2% of the studies, the term “political crisis” was used without definition, indicating its frequent treatment as a generic and undefined category. Also, studies about this topic use primarily content analysis as a research method (38.9%). Regarding research objectives, 38.4% of the studies analyzed crisis communication processes, while 20.5% examined citizens’ perceptions of crisis management. When reviewing case studies, the countries with the most research in the field are the United States, China, the UK and Germany. The analysis found that political crises are described as more challenging than other types of crises, but that they also offer potential opportunities for political actors to strengthen their positions. Communication during political crises was closely linked to narrative construction aimed at legitimization, with public leadership playing a key role. Additionally, the strong influence of traditional media in shaping public perceptions was emphasized, underscoring the need for strategic media relations alongside social media planning.

The scoping review confirms Udris's (2019) previous findings by showing that most studies addressing political crises are, in fact, not specifically about them. The fragmentation of the field results in approaches that are predominantly politically driven rather than communication-oriented, limiting the development and practical applicability of communication theories. Advancing political crisis communication as a distinct research domain, defined by its specific characteristics, challenges, opportunities, and best practice, is essential for building a more coherent and systematic theoretical framework. This study is limited by its reliance on indexed literature and the absence of qualitative methods such as expert interviews. Future research should integrate both academic and practitioner perspectives to further refine the concept of political crisis and enhance communicative tools for crisis management.

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Keywords

political crises, political communication, crisis communication, scoping review

Communicating Through Emergency Alerts: Examining Canadian Police Approach

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Emergency alerts are a critical communication tool, delivered directly from an official source and received by the general public. Alerts can save lives. The purpose of this study was to examine how Canadian police use public alerting, especially mandatory emergency alerts.

Police-initiated public alerts have come under intense scrutiny in Canada in recent years, especially following two mass casualties in the provinces of Nova Scotia (2020) and Saskatchewan (2022), AMBER Alert child abductions and dangerous person investigations. Mandatory emergency alerts distributed via Canada's National Public Alerting System (NPAS) notify of imminent safety situations and are used by police to support public safety. This research investigated 1) how Canadian police navigate challenges, tools and public expectations when using emergency alerts to communicate and 2) the public's awareness, trust and expectations regarding police communication methods during urgent threat situations. Emergency preparedness is critical to public safety and security, with communication playing a key role.

While there are natural occurrences or weather-related emergency alerting studies, a critical gap exists in international scholarship on police use of emergency alerting. Minimal inquiry exists to inform police personnel in imminent safety threat public alerting communication. Existing research highlights critical components of alerting platform usability, public response and campus-based law enforcement use of emergency alert communication tools (e.g.: Bean &

Grevstad, 2022; Madden, 2015; Sheldon, 2018). Despite several Canadian tragedies, gaps exist in knowledge about how or whether police use, or are prepared to use, emergency alerting to warn about imminent safety threats. Furthermore, it is unknown whether the public has any knowledge of, or any expectations exist, for police use of emergency alerts. In the absence of this vital data to unify police response nationally in Canada, a patchwork, weak communications response (Davis, McNeil & Gamble, 2022) could emerge, resulting in increased confusion and elevated safety threats to the general public in crisis situations. This mixed-methods study incorporates both qualitative interview findings and quantitative public survey data, balancing legitimate police insight and decision making considerations with public opinion and commentary. Eight interviews with Canadian police service representatives were conducted, and public survey data collected from all Canadian provinces ($n = 486$). Interview results indicated that police preparedness and experience affect alerting approach; alert strategy and risk impacts police decision making; alerting is influenced by external factors; and alerting approach differs across police services. Survey results linked public trust in the police to communicate when an urgent threat impacts their safety and whether local police do a good job educating the public about alerting. Targeted, police-driven alerting education campaigns are recommended to expand public understanding and build trust and preparedness. While grounded in a Canadian context, this study offers insights applicable

to international crisis communication research and provides a foundation for examining public trust, expectations, perceptions, and police-initiated public alert cases. The findings confirm the critical role and expectation of police communication with the public during imminent safety threat situations. Broader societal impacts can yield heightened public, police and public safety organization awareness and understanding specific to emergency alerting. This research can inform policing practices, including the need for knowledgeable staff and processes in place to use public alerting to its full potential during an urgent threat situation to help mitigate casualties and harm. Practically, the findings from this research can help inform police response to imminent safety threats, highlight knowledge gaps and evaluate the effectiveness of current alerting practices for police, public and academic audiences internationally. As a civilian communications practitioner in policing, this study was initiated to help address my own knowledge gaps and integrate the findings into my professional practice. In short, it is not a matter of *if* the next imminent safety threat occurs requiring police response – it is *when*. This study should encourage police self-awareness while identifying avenues for further academic exploration.

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Keywords

public alert, emergency, crisis, policing

Activist public relations and frameworks: The case of the Climáximo collective in Portugal

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The climate crisis is one of the most pressing global challenges of contemporary societies. In response, climate activism has expanded worldwide, calling for a transition away from economic growth-centred models towards approaches that prioritise life, environmental sustainability, and collective well-being. In Portugal, climate movements have gained increasing visibility in political and media arenas (Almeida, 2022). Among these, Climáximo stands out as a horizontally organised climate justice collective aligned with anti-capitalist principles and integrated into a broader international movement.

This study examines how the climate crisis is framed by Portuguese online newspapers and how activist groups use strategic communication and public relations to influence public debate. Drawing on framing theory and activist public relations literature, it explores how Climáximo's actions shape media representations of the climate crisis. The central research question asks how these theoretical approaches help explain the influence of Climáximo's actions on media framing in Portugal. To address this question, the study compares the collective's press releases with news content published in major Portuguese newspapers, assessing the effectiveness and limits of activist public relations strategies.

Literature review

The relationship between activism and public relations has historically been marked by tension (Müller, 2024). Although activist groups strategically use communication to influence public opinion and media agendas, such practices were long excluded from mainstream public relations theory. More recent perspectives, however, situate activist public relations within a postmodern paradigm that challenges functionalist and normative approaches (Benecke & Oksiutycz, 2015).

Framing theory provides a useful analytical lens for examining these dynamics. Goffman (1974) conceptualises frames as interpretative schemata that organise experience, while Tuchman (1978) argues that framing is intrinsic to news production. Entman (1993) further defines framing as the selection and salience of certain aspects of reality to promote specific interpretations. Framing analysis thus enables a nuanced understanding of how meanings are constructed in media discourse beyond binary evaluations.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The sample comprises press releases published on Climáximo's official website and $n = 17$ news articles published between August and November 2025 in four leading Portuguese

newspapers: *Expresso*, *Público*, *Diário de Notícias*, and *Jornal de Notícias*.

The analysis begins with a qualitative examination of the press releases to identify dominant frames and discursive strategies used to present the collective's actions and the climate crisis. Only press releases related to actions later reported in the media were included. Subsequently, news articles were analysed to identify media frames and assess their focus on activist actions, the climate crisis, or other contextual elements. Articles were required to explicitly refer to Climáximo, describe or contextualise one of its actions, and relate to the climate crisis.

A comparative analysis was conducted between each press release and its corresponding news article to identify convergences and divergences. Quantitative analysis complemented this approach by measuring the frequency of frames across newspapers. The literature review informed the analytical categories and guided the interpretation of the results.

Results and conclusions

Of the $n = 17$ press releases issued by Climáximo during the period analysed, only $n = 5$ generated media coverage. *Diário de Notícias* was the outlet that most frequently drew on the collective's communication, using information from all five press releases. *Público* follows, having incorporated four press releases, often within articles that provided greater political contextualisation and a stronger structural framing of the climate crisis. *Jornal de Notícias* relied on three press releases, adopting a coverage style centred mainly on the disruptive nature of the actions. *Expresso* shows the lowest level of incorporation, using only two press releases, suggesting a more restrictive editorial stance towards the collective's initiatives.

Overall, when press releases were reported, newspapers reproduced a substantial portion of the information provided by the collective, albeit with omissions or reformulations of central elements such as calls to action, slogans, or

broader political framings. The analysis of the five press releases and their media repercussion confirms, on the one hand, Climáximo's capacity to influence news content when it gains access to the media agenda and, on the other, the structural limits of that influence, as reflected in the reduced volume of coverage and the editorial filtering of activist frames.

Focusing on the news coverage published on 26 October 2025 across the four newspapers, concerning Climáximo's action during the Lisbon Half Marathon, several frames can be identified. The protest frame predominates, emphasising the disruption of the sporting event as a form of demonstration against the energy company EDP, often shifting attention away from the broader climate crisis. A responsibility attribution frame is also present, particularly in *Público*, which reproduces in greater detail the collective's accusations against EDP, including references to greenwashing, fossil gas use, and environmental impacts. *Público* further incorporates a climate emergency frame, highlighting the systemic nature of the crisis, whereas *Diário de Notícias* gives this frame less prominence.

In contrast, *Jornal de Notícias* uses information from the press releases mainly to describe the protest and its factual contours, without developing the underlying accusations or structural causes of the climate crisis. *Expresso* makes the most restrained use of the collective's discourse, introducing additional contextual and factual information that distances the coverage from the activist framing. In both cases, the action is framed primarily as an isolated event rather than as an expression of a broader, systemic climate emergency.

The comparison between press releases and news articles reveals a high degree of textual similarity, indicating the effectiveness of Climáximo's public relations strategy in this specific case, as all four newspapers relied heavily on information provided by the collective. At the same time, the absence of coverage of the remaining $n = 12$ press releases is analytically significant, as media silence also constitutes a relevant finding. This

study has limitations, including its focus on four newspapers and its exclusive reliance on textual analysis. Future research should extend the time frame, include other media formats, and incorporate interviews with journalists and activists.

Practical and social implications

This study contributes to strategic reflection on activist public relations practices and enhances understanding of media framing patterns in climate activism coverage, fostering critical awareness of dominant narratives and their implications for public debate on the climate crisis.

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Keywords

Climáximo; Framing; Activist Public Relations; Climate Crisis.

In Case Of Emergency...Ask The Expert! The Role of Science Communication in time of uncertainty

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Crisis management literature reports various roles taken on by experts in crisis management and in emergent contexts: they can support decision-making processes, reduce uncertainty, provide legitimacy, inform governments, media and the lay publics (Grönval, 2001; Baekkeskov, 2016; Broekema et al. 2018).

But who are the experts who are referring to? Where do they “live”? Which are their roots of legitimacy? And moreover, do they could provide ‘pieces of information’ (Herek et al. 1987) during a crisis or do they have a pivotal role in it?

In this paper we are referring to those experts, external to the crisis management, characterised by a scientific knowledge and involved in the science communication processes (Donovan, 2021; Coombs&Holladay, 2010; Coombs, 2007).

The present contribution aims at reflecting on the key-role played by experts and by science communication in the nowadays media ecosystem and in the public space, in times of uncertainty and skepticism. As the most recent empirical studies on the connections between science and communication seem to reveal (Jin et al. 2025), there is an urgent need of a synergic and integrated approach with a broader collaboration among all the social actors involved to explore such a complex and dynamic landscape.

The growing interest towards the communication of science and the mediation of expert knowledge does not only concern scientific institutions, research and researchers, but society more generally, politics, institutions and citizens themselves, as demonstrated by numerous empirical evidence (Wagenknecht et al. 2021): the constant growth over the years of exposure and use of scientific contents by citizens, in particular on social media; the levels of trust placed in science in general, in research institutions and in scientists and experts themselves (Pew Research Center, 2024). A trust that is connected to citizens’ need to find reassuring responses to emergency and dramatic events, highlighting and broadening expectations towards those in society who are engaged in research to address and mitigate the harmful effects of these phenomena. But, at the same time, if the trust of citizens in scientists shows a recovery trend after the Covid years, on the other hand mainly concerns some specific characteristics of experts: intelligence, their ability to work in team, honesty and predisposition to problem solving. Much less trust, however, can be found in their communication skills, considered ineffective, cold, asymmetrical. (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2024).

The reflections here proposed are based on different sides of the empirical research. Thanks to a partnership with the main Italian press agency, ANSA and a national financed programme,

the study has investigated the role of science communication and of experts in the news representations. In particular, we have explored 3 different main issues published on ANSA portal between 2019 and 2024: health, environment, science&technology. A sample of 1218 press-releases was created, and it has been investigated with a content analysis, exploring different key-dimensions. Data interpretation is still ongoing, but we are focusing the attention on the experts' professional profiles, not only as crisis interlocutors, but also as trust mediators.

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Keywords

experts; science communication; crisis; trust; scientific journalism.

The ‘Transgenerational Legacy’ and ‘Reputational Shadows’ of a Corporate Crisis: An Exploratory Case Study of Inherited Perceptions of BP’s Deepwater Horizon Crisis Among Generation Z

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Introduction and Purpose

In today’s digital media landscape, crisis narratives remain accessible, searchable, and persistent long after the events themselves. This raises critical questions about how the reputational legacies of corporate crises endure. Using BP’s 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill as a case study, this research explores how Generation Z—who lack lived experience of the crisis—form ‘inherited perceptions’ of reputational harm. The study also examines how digitally mediated narratives prolong or reignite negative attitudes, emphasizing the need for organizations to address enduring effects of their ‘reputational shadows’. These findings challenge traditional assumptions of temporal boundaries for post-crisis recovery and highlight the importance of transgenerational perspectives in crisis communication.

Literature Review

Crisis communication strategies often rely on frameworks like Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2020), which emphasizes deploying appropriate responses to mitigate reputational harm. Factors like moral outrage (Niu

et al., 2025) and perceived corporate hypocrisy (Wagner et al., 2009) amplify stakeholder reactions, particularly when organizational actions contradict sustainability commitments. Reputational damage can become self-reinforcing, influence interpretations of new information and extending harm over time (Rhee & Haunschild, 2006). Digital media amplifies this by archiving and recirculating crisis narratives (Hoskins, 2011). While existing research acknowledges lingering reputational damage, it primarily focuses on direct stakeholders. This study addresses a critical gap by investigating how mediated memory shapes the perceptions of Generation Z; a demographic encountering historical crises through digital narratives rather than experience.

Methodology

This mixed-method study, completed in 2025, examines how reputational meanings associated with BP’s Deepwater Horizon crisis are produced, circulated, and inherited by Generation Z.

Phase 1: Reddit discourse was analysed using crisis-related search terms. Over 100 posts were coded for sentiment, tone, and thematic content, with further analysis of audience interactions assessing how narratives were mediated.

Phase 2: Comments from a comparative dataset were examined for sentiment, thematic patterns, and rhetorical style, providing deeper insights into reputational judgments.

Phase 3: An exploratory survey of 120 Generation Z participants measured crisis awareness, evaluative attitudes, and how the event influenced their perceptions. This enabled comparison between circulating digital narratives and the perceptions of a generation shaped by mediated memory.

Results and Conclusion

Findings reveal BP's Deepwater Horizon crisis continues to exert a durable reputational influence on Generation Z, despite their lack of direct experience.

Reddit Analysis: 56% of posts were coded as negative, with damage and restoration themes accounting for 45% of thematic references. Ethical responsibility and safety failures were consistently framed as moral and systemic failures.

Comment-level analysis: showed 75% of comments carried negative sentiment, with harsher evaluations directed at BP.

Survey Results: Generation Z respondents reported overwhelmingly negative trust in BP. Environmental and human impacts were the most significant drivers, while PR and crisis communication ranked lowest. A majority indicated that the spill still shapes their perception of BP, confirming the persistence of inherited reputational associations.

Overall, the study demonstrates the enduring nature of reputational shadows, with environmental harm emerging as the most salient factor. These reputational meanings are reinforced by

moral judgment and are sustained through digitally mediated discourse. The findings extend models of reputational inertia and stigma by evidencing the transgenerational transmission of reputational damage, challenging assumptions that post-crisis recovery is temporally bounded in contemporary media environments.

Practical and Social Implications

This research offers practical insights for organizations managing long-term reputational impacts in digitally mediated environments. By highlighting how crisis narratives persist and shape perceptions among emerging stakeholder groups, the study underscores the need for reputation and crisis communication strategies that extend beyond immediate recovery. Organizations must address the enduring 'reputational shadows' that threaten trust and legitimacy over time. More broadly, the findings contribute to understanding how collective memory of corporate crises is framed and sustained within digital media, raising critical questions about accountability, environmental responsibility, and the role of digital platforms in maintaining public trust.

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Keywords

Reputational Shadows, Crisis Repair, Transgenerational Perspectives, Digital Narratives

When Sustainability Becomes a Crisis: Evidence from Organizational Practice and Implications for Crisis Communication

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Introduction and purpose of the study

In recent years, sustainability has assumed an increasingly central role in organizational strategies and communication processes, progressively shifting from a reputational lever to a potential source of vulnerability. Developments in the regulatory framework on ESG disclosure and assurance, rising stakeholder expectations, and growing public and media attention have contributed to turning environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues into potential triggers of organizational crises.

This contribution examines sustainability-related crises as an emerging and structurally distinct category of organizational crises, characterized by dynamics that challenge traditional crisis communication models. Unlike sudden crises, ESG-related crises tend to develop gradually, involve a plurality of stakeholders, and generate persistent reputational effects.

The aim of the study is to provide an interpretative reading of ESG-related crises grounded in evidence from organizational practice, and to identify relevant implications for communication and governance.

Methodology

The paper adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach, based on the authors' direct profes-

sional experience developed through sustainability projects, ESG reporting, non-financial disclosure, and governance analysis.

The evidence analyzed emerges in particular from situations of exposure, tension, or crisis related to sustainability issues observed during professional activities, and includes:

- the analysis of sustainability documentation;
- the observation of organizational dynamics related to sustainability management and communication;
- interactions and solicitations from external stakeholders observed during phases of criticality or contestation.

The contribution adopts a cross-cutting perspective aimed at identifying recurring patterns relevant to sustainability-related crisis communication.

Results and conclusions

Analysis of the professional experiences considered shows that one of the main triggers of sustainability-related crises is the misalignment between sustainability narratives, internal governance arrangements, and operational preparedness. Sustainability is at times communicated as an identity-defining element without adequate control of internal processes, generating latent fragilities that may evolve into cri-

ses when transparency demands or stakeholder challenges arise.

Further analysis highlights the ambivalent role of sustainability reporting, disclosure processes, and assurance practices, which may act both as mechanisms for crisis prevention and as factors that amplify reputational risk in the presence of structural or narrative inconsistencies. Overall, the findings suggest that established crisis communication models, including Situational Crisis Communication Theory, provide a useful but not always sufficient interpretative framework for understanding the specific features of ESG-related crises, which require a more systemic, process-oriented, and relationship-focused perspective.

Practical and social implications

The contribution highlights that crisis communication should not be understood solely as a reactive ex post response, but it should be integrated into sustainability management processes as a strategic lever for risk prevention and the protection of organizational continuity.

From a practical perspective, the findings point to the need to strengthen coordination between communication, governance, and operational processes, by developing practices oriented toward stakeholder relationships. From a social perspective, a more informed management of sustainability-related crises may contribute to strengthening trust and credibility.

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Keywords

Crisis communication; Sustainability; Risk; Stakeholders

Defining the “Critical Juncture”: A Thematic Analysis of Crisis Narratives in Chinese Presidential New Year Speeches (2012-2026)

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Introduction and literature view

The annual New Year speech delivered by the President of the People’s Republic of China is a pivotal moment in the nation’s political communication calendar. It serves not only to review past achievements and set the tone for the year ahead but also to construct a national narrative, unify public sentiment, and frame collective challenges. This paper presents a longitudinal analysis of these highly symbolic speeches from 2012 to 2026, a period encompassing the leadership transition from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping and a series of profound domestic and global shifts. While existing scholarship (e.g. An, 2025; Wu et al., 2021; Zhang, 2022) has often examined these addresses for economic and policy signals, a systematic study of how they articulate and define “crisis” has remained a critical gap.

This research addresses the central question: How has the Chinese state, through its highest official voice, narrated certain events and issues as crises? Furthermore, what specific categories of challenges, be they economic, social, environmental, or geopolitical, are elevated to the status of a national crisis? How do these annual speeches manage the “public relations” between the state and its citizens? By answering these questions, this paper provides a temporal analysis of China’s evolving official definition of

crisis, revealing shifts in national priorities and perceived vulnerabilities over the past decade, especially speaking to its massive domestic audiences.

Methodology

Employing a mixed-method approach of quantitative content analysis (see Benoit, 2010) and qualitative thematic analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2021), this study meticulously examines the full corpus of presidential New Year speeches delivered since 2012. The analysis identifies and codes explicit and implicit mentions of crises, challenges, difficulties, and risks. The findings reveal a distinct narrative evolution.

Results and implications

Our analysis demonstrates a shift towards framing crises with various events. These include the “profound changes unseen in a century”, risks to national security and sovereignty, technological chokepoints, and global public health emergencies, exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. The rhetoric increasingly casts these crises not merely as obstacles to be overcome but as “tests” of the legitimacy and resilience of the political system and the Chinese people’s spirit.

This paper argues that the construction of crisis in these speeches is a strategic tool for state/nation-building and ideological consolidation. By mapping the changing face of “crisis” in China’s most prominent annual address, this research provides an essential foundation for future comparative studies. It is a crucial first step toward understanding how different political systems officially communicate and conceptualise crises for their citizens, offering vital insights into national threat perception, governance philosophy, and the discursive strategies of power in the 21st century.

Keywords

Crisis Narrative, Political Communication, Chinese Politics, Public Diplomacy, Presidential Speeches

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Moral Meaning-Making in Crisis: Examining Networks, Emotions, and Identity in an International Religious Crisis

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Crisis communication scholars position crises as reputation-threatening events that prompt stakeholders to evaluate organizational responsibility and trustworthiness (Coombs, 2007). This perspective assumes that strategic organizational messaging can impact crisis outcomes and ultimately protect an organization's reputation when effectively deployed (Benoit, 1995). However, a new genre of crisis has recently gained attention from scholars that accounts for moral transgression, value conflict, and identity threat (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024). These crises still threaten organizational reputation and trustworthiness; however, they include an additional layer of complexity via stakeholders' moral evaluations and fundamental questions of belonging and identity.

Moral and identity-threatening crises extend beyond reputational harm by implicating stakeholders' sense of belonging and moral alignment with institutions (Morehouse & Lemon, 2023). This dynamic is particularly visible in religious organizations, where actions may be interpreted as violations of religious values rather than managerial failures. This study examines the United Methodist Church (UMC) schism with the Global Methodist Church (GMC) over the inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals as a moral and identity-threatening crisis.

Literature Review

This study integrates crisis communication theory with moral foundations theory (Haidt, 2012), social network theories (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010), and identity scholarship (Werbner, 2010) to study a global religious crisis. Traditional crisis communication frameworks assume stakeholders evaluate an organization's actions, competence, and trustworthiness (Coombs, 2007), but scholars overlook the impact of stakeholders' networks in negotiating and understanding crises. Therefore, this study bridges these literatures to examine the extent to which networks shape moral meaning-making during religious crises. Four research questions guide this study:

RQ1: To what extent do stakeholders' networks (structure and composition) associate with their moral interpretations of the crisis?

RQ2: In what ways do emotions mediate the relationship between stakeholders' network characteristics and their distancing from or embracing of religious institutions following the crisis?

RQ3: In what ways do stakeholders' networks and moral orientations relate to identity-level outcomes, including distancing from or embracing (a) UMC, (b) GMC, (c) Christianity.

RQ4: To what extent does attachment to God moderate the relationship between moral emotions and stakeholders' identity-level distancing or embracing following the crisis?

Method

This study conducted a survey and egocentric network analysis of individuals identifying as Methodist ($N = 1,739$). Responses were removed for failure to follow directions and potential bot infiltration, leaving 154 completed human responses. The survey combined validated scales from public relations, moral psychology, religious identity, and social network analysis.

Analyses included bivariate correlations, Baron and Kenny mediation tests, and hierarchical regression with interaction terms.

Results

Results indicate that moral orientations were most strongly associated with identity outcomes. Contact frequency was modestly related to moral interpretations of the crisis ($r = .36, p < .001$) and moral foundations ($r = .30, p < .01$), whereas network size and diversity were unrelated (RQ1). Emotions were not a mediating mechanism between networks and identity outcomes, although moral emotions were strongly associated with religious distancing or embracing ($r = .68, p < .001$) and network characteristics did not predict emotional responses (RQ2).

Moral interpretations were more strongly associated with UMC ($r = .42, p < .001$) and GMC identity ($r = .51, p < .001$) than network characteristics ($r = .22-.25, p < .05$), suggesting that moral meaning-making outweighed structural network effects in shaping religious identity responses (RQ3). Attachment to God moderated the relationship between moral emotions and identity outcomes for both UMC ($\beta = .19, p = .040$) and GMC identity ($\beta = .26, p = .006$), indicating that religiosity conditions how emotions translate into identity-level distancing or embracing following the crisis (RQ4). Causal

inference and generalizability are limited by cross-sectional design and small sample size.

Practical and Social Implications

Limited research has been conducted on the impact of an individual's network during an organizational crisis. Results from this study suggest practitioners should move beyond reputation management frameworks when addressing moral and identity-threatening crises. In such crises, stakeholders are evaluating organizational performance *and* negotiating moral alignment and belonging. Therefore, crisis responses that focus solely on message strategy or reputation repair may fail to address identity-level harm and risk exacerbating disengagement and stakeholder damage.

These findings caution against overestimating the influence of social networks while underestimating the moral frameworks through which stakeholders interpret crises. This study demonstrates how organizational crises can accelerate identity fragmentation and religious exit by prompting moral boundary-drawing around institutions and belief systems. Broadly, our findings highlight the need for crisis communication scholarship to treat moral meaning-making as a central process shaping belonging, polarization, and institutional legitimacy, particularly in organizations that claim moral or religious authority.

Keywords

Crisis communication; social networks; religion; identity

Lost in Translation? Generative AI and the Preservation of Crisis Communication Style Across Cultures

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The increasing use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has changed how organizations produce and translate texts (Liang et al., 2025). In crisis communication (CC), where speed is crucial, rapid multilingual translation is particularly appealing. However, using GenAI for translation raises questions about whether culturally appropriate communication styles are preserved. We examine how well GenAI systems maintain linguistic features reflecting cultural norms in corporate crisis statements across English, German, and Chinese.

Situated within a rhetorical and text-oriented tradition of CC research (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017), the study examines crisis responses through four linguistically embedded indicators: emotion, voice, language abstraction, and certainty. Using authentic corporate crisis statements and their GenAI-generated translations, we assess cross-linguistic preservation through a quantitative index measuring deviations between original and translated texts.

The study addresses two research questions: What linguistic differences in emotion, voice, language abstraction, and certainty characterize Chinese, English (US), and German (Germany) CC (RQ1)? and to what extent do GenAI models reproduce or account for these cross-linguistic style differences when translating crisis messages (RQ2)?

Literature Review

From a rhetorical and text-oriented perspective, crisis responses are understood as discursive practices in which strategic intent is enacted through specific linguistic choices, including emotional tone, agency attribution, abstraction, and certainty (Benoit, 1997; Frandsen & Johansen, 2017; Fannes et al., 2024). Research on trust repair and apologies demonstrates systematic cross-cultural variation: in individualist cultures such as the United States and Germany, crisis responses emphasize explicit responsibility attribution and credibility rebuilding, whereas in collectivist cultures such as China, they foreground emotional moderation and social harmony (Maddux et al., 2011). Despite extensive research on the rhetorical and emotional design of crisis messages (e.g., Fannes et al., 2024; Schoofs & Claeys, 2021), no study has examined whether GenAI systems reproduce or preserve these strategies in CC. Understanding how GenAI translates linguistic content and cultural meaning is crucial for responsible professional communication as practitioners increasingly rely on AI-supported systems (Gregory & Virmani, 2020; Singh et al., 2024). This issue is exacerbated by evidence that LLMs exhibit cultural and ideological biases favoring Western norms (Lowe & Tsang, 2017). When GenAI translations are used in non-Western settings, these biases may lead to misinterpretations or shifts in tone, undermining trust and effectiveness of CC

(Zeng et al., 2025). Given their capacity for rapid multilingual text production, GenAI systems are likely to be adopted in multinational CC contexts where timely messaging across markets is required (Gregory & Virmani, 2020; Liang et al., 2025).

Methodology

We analyze corporate CC statements from the US, Germany, and China. Texts are collected from professional press release databases (e.g., Factiva) and from verified corporate social media accounts to ensure authenticity and organizational authorship. We construct the corpus using a structured keyword-based search strategy combining genre-specific terms (e.g., statement, press release) with crisis-related keywords (e.g., apology, incident, investigation). This filtering ensures the corpus consists of original corporate CC rather than media coverage.

Drawing on prior linguistic CC research, we assess four key dimensions: emotion, voice, language abstraction, and certainty, which are central to effective crisis responses (Borden & Zhang, 2019; Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2021; De Waele et al., 2020; Fannes et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2016). The unit of analysis is the crisis statement, because limiting the number of companies would reduce the linguistic variability required for robust computational analysis. Companies may appear multiple times if they experience distinct crises, whereas others appear only once. Crisis statements are classified by crisis type and responsibility attribution, following Coombs' (2007) established CC typology, and are used as control variables. The collected texts are translated into the other languages using GenAI models such as ChatGPT, Gemini, DeepSeek, and Grok, with prompts designed to maintain tone, style, and rhetorical stance, while considering the target language and cultural context. Automated tools and human annotations are used to analyze emotion, voice, concreteness, and certainty in the texts. Metrics such as valence, passive-voice ratio, concreteness indices, and certainty markers are computed to assess style preservation.

The study also examines the impact of translation direction, prompts, and model differences on linguistic and cultural preservation.

Practical and Social Implications

This study empirically assesses whether GenAI systems preserve culturally grounded linguistic strategies in CC. Beyond its theoretical contribution, it offers practical guidance for communication professionals by highlighting situations in which automated translations may unintentionally alter tone, perceived responsibility, or emotional resonance across cultures, potentially undermining crisis response effectiveness. Ultimately, it aims to answer whether GenAI is a boon or a curse for CC translation practice.

Keywords

GenAI, Crisis Communication, Intercultural Corporate Communication, AI-Translation

Crisis as a Trigger for Strategic Communication: Normalizing Cabinet-Level International Government Communication in Japan

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

This study examines how crisis communication functioned as a catalyst for the strategic transformation of Japan's international government communication. Following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and the subsequent Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, Japan faced unprecedented international scrutiny and information demands, exposing the limitations of its decentralized ministry-level approach to external communication. In response, Cabinet-level international communication, coordinated by the Prime Minister's Office, was introduced as an emergency measure to address international perceptions. Rather than remaining exceptional to crisis response, this Cabinet-level function became layered over existing structures and gradually normalized as a routine mode of government communication.

Building on crisis communication and strategic communication scholarship, this study asks how and why crisis-driven communication arrangements became institutionalized beyond the emergency phase. By conceptualizing crisis as a critical juncture that reshapes communication governance, the study aims to clarify the mechanisms through which strategic centralized international communication was embedded into Japan's governmental system. In doing so, this research sheds light on how crisis communication reshapes who speaks for the state and how governmental messages are coordinated.

Literature Review

Crisis communication research has shown that stakeholders' perceptions of a crisis are shaped by the organizational environment and the specific crisis management approaches adopted (Coombs, 2007). This suggests that crises are socially constructed, with their significance shifting according to an organization's communicative responses. Research on public institutions further demonstrates the multifunctional nature of crisis communication by categorizing it into a four-quadrant typology based on two dimensions: orientation (resilience-oriented vs. reputation-oriented) and purpose (operational vs. strategic; Olsson, 2014).

In a globalized context, natural disasters and public health crises can affect a nation's external image and reputation, thereby expanding the scope of public diplomacy research—a field that has traditionally focused on interstate conflict and its related phenomena (Olsson, 2014). While the state remains the primary actor in national security, attention has increasingly been directed toward the security of individual citizens and their communities, which requires trust and cooperation (Zaharna, 2015, p. 321). Despite this growing body of research, less attention has been paid to how crises reshape the institutional organization of government communication itself. This study addresses this gap through the Japanese case.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine the institutional transformation of Japan's international government communication following the 2011 crisis. The analysis draws on official government documents, organizational records, budgetary materials related to international communication, and publicly available statements issued before and after the crisis.

Results and Conclusions

The analysis identifies the Great East Japan Earthquake as a critical juncture that restructured Japan's international government communication. Cabinet-level international communication was introduced to centralize voice and coordination without replacing existing ministerial practices, resulting in a layered, multilevel communication structure. Over time, this configuration became routinized, indicating that crisis logic was embedded into Japan's routine government communication.

These findings suggest that crisis communication can function not only as a temporary response but also as a mechanism for longer-term institutional transformation. By focusing on communication governance rather than message effects, this study highlights how crises reconfigure authority and coordination within democratic governments.

This study has several limitations. It focuses on a single national case and does not directly assess international audience perceptions. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating comparative cases or audience-oriented analyses.

Practical and Social Implications

The Japanese case demonstrates how crisis-driven international communication can become institutionalized at the Cabinet level, producing a layered and enduring structure of strategic government communication.

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Keywords

crisis communication; government communication; strategic communication; international public relations; Japan

Preparing future communication professionals for disasters and emergencies: Integrating WHO RCCEIM framework into PR education

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Preparing future communication professionals for disasters and emergencies is a pressing challenge for Public Relations education. Unlike Crisis Communication which focuses on organisational response and reputational threat, Risk Communication within Public Relations emphasises prevention, preparedness and behaviour change. In disaster contexts, communication is not centred on organisational image but on reducing harm, sustaining public trust and protecting lives (L'Etang, 2013; Diers-Lawson & Qureshi, 2021).

Recent emergencies, including pandemics, climate-related hazards and complex humanitarian crises, show that risk communication failures significantly exacerbate vulnerability and undermine response effectiveness. Evidence from global health emergencies shows that communication constitutes an intervention in its own right, with direct consequences on mitigating harm and saving lives (Diers-Lawson & Qureshi, 2021).

The World Health Organization's (WHO) Risk Communication, Community Engagement and Infodemic Management (RCCE-IM) framework is a core pillar of preparedness and response. It is one of the eight core capacities under the International Health Regulations (2024) which all States commit to develop and implement (WHO, 2005a).

RCCE-IM serves as a vital communication tool, mediating between experts, authorities, media and communities while driving social and behaviour change. Trust emerges as the central organising principle, reinforcing the idea that “the overriding goal for outbreak communications is to communicate with the public in ways that build, maintain or restore trust” (WHO, 2005b).

Despite its importance, RCCE-IM is largely absent from PR and Communication curricula, leaving future professionals unprepared for their roles in multidisciplinary emergencies. This paper addresses this gap through a pilot elective course on RCCE-IM in a Bachelor's Degree in Public Relations and Corporate Communication at a Higher Education Institution in Portugal. Launching in the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, the course integrates WHO RCCE-IM principles and tools into PR education oriented toward disasters and health emergencies. This is the first such course in a communications faculty with plans to additionally develop an aligned curriculum for public health and medical students in Ukraine.

To assess the impact of integrating RCCE-IM into PR education, this study adopts the WHO Capability Mapping tool (CapMap) as its primary evaluation framework. CapMap is a capability-based self-assessment instrument developed by the WHO Regional Office for Europe

to support professionals working in RCCE-IM to identify strengths and areas for development across six interdependent subject areas: evidence generation, risk communication, community engagement, infodemic management, capacity-building and operational management (Gregory & Salvi, 2025). In this pilot course, students complete the CapMap assessment at the beginning and at the end of the semester. Comparative analysis of pre- and post-course self-assessments enables an examination of perceived capability development across RCCE-IM domains, offering an initial indication of the course's contribution to strengthen these competences.

The implementation of this pilot project will allow teams to assess the advantages and areas for improvement in applying this framework in the context of higher education institutions. Based on the conclusions presented, the aim is to extend this methodology to other higher education institutions, increasing the number of communication professionals trained and prepared to act in coordination with the WHO in disaster and emergency situations.

In conclusion, integrating RCCE-IM into Public Relations education intends to contribute to a necessary reconfiguration of professional training, positioning this framework as both an essential public health intervention and a core communication competence for the future of disaster and emergency communication.

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Keywords

Risk communication; Community Engagement; Infodemic Management; Public Relations; Education

Beyond Persuasion: Post-Persuasive Crisis Communication and the Limits of Strategic PR in Political Emergencies

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Crisis communication scholarship in public relations and strategic communication has been largely premised on an implicit normative assumption: that communication retains persuasive capacity even under conditions of extreme disruption. Dominant crisis response frameworks, including Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Repair Theory, presuppose that legitimacy can be repaired, responsibility reframed, and stakeholder perceptions influenced through strategic message selection. This paper challenges that assumption by theorising crisis contexts in which persuasion itself collapses as a viable, ethical or safe communicative objective. The purpose of this study is to interrogate the limits of persuasion-centred crisis communication in political emergencies and to conceptualise an alternative mode of strategic communication that emerges under such conditions. The research question is: What happens to strategic communication when crisis conditions render persuasion structurally unavailable?

Literature review

Mainstream crisis communication research has focused on message strategies, response typologies and reputation repair mechanisms (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2007). These approaches assume communicative agency, audience accessibility and the recoverability of legitimacy, even in

high-stakes crises. Political crisis management and public administration scholarship has complicated these assumptions by examining crises characterised by prolonged emergency governance, legitimacy strain, and institutional rupture (Boin et al., 2017; Christensen & Lægreid, 2020; 't Hart & Tindall, 2009). In parallel, critical public relations and political communication research has foregrounded power asymmetries, professional vulnerability and the ethical limits of transparency under coercive conditions (Morton & Weaver, 2005; Edwards, 2018). However, across these literatures, persuasion remains the implicit horizon against which communicative success or failure is evaluated. This paper advances the field by arguing that certain political crises should be understood not as failures of persuasion, but as contexts in which persuasion ceases to function as an organising logic of strategic communication.

Methodology

The study adopts a conceptual and theory-building methodology grounded in qualitative synthesis and analytical reinterpretation of existing scholarship. Following Merton's (1968) logic of middle-range theory development and interpretive approaches to conceptual innovation (Weick, 1995; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009), prior empirical and theoretical studies are treated as analytical material rather than findings to be aggregated. The analysis draws on three in-

tersecting bodies of work: (1) persuasion-oriented crisis communication and image repair frameworks in public relations (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2007), (2) political crisis management and emergency governance scholarship (Boin et al., 2017; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2020; 't Hart & Tindall, 2009), and (3) critical public relations and political communication research examining communication under conditions of constraint, risk, and asymmetrical power (Motion & Weaver, 2005; Edwards, 2018).

The study employs theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), selecting empirically grounded studies of political crises -particularly those addressing prolonged emergencies, democratic rupture, and communicative restriction- on the basis of conceptual relevance rather than representativeness. Through theoretical abstraction across these literatures, the paper develops a novel conceptual category. This study constitutes Phase 1 of a broader research programme, providing the conceptual groundwork for subsequent empirical investigation through qualitative interviews (Phase 2) and comparative case analysis across political contexts (Phase 3).

Results and conclusions

The paper's central theoretical contribution is the conceptualisation of post-persuasive crisis communication as a boundary condition of persuasion-based crisis communication theory. While SCCT and Image Repair remain analytically robust where communicative agency and legitimacy are preserved, the analysis demonstrates that in political emergencies marked by coercion, extreme polarisation, legal precarity, or prolonged institutional rupture, persuasion becomes structurally unavailable. Under such conditions, the function of strategic communication is reoriented away from influence and toward exposure management, risk mitigation, and professional survival. Communicative practices such as strategic silence, ambiguity, proceduralisation, temporal deferral, and depersonalisation are theorised not as normative deficiencies or ethical withdrawal, but as adaptive responses

to crisis environments in which communication itself produces heightened risk. By identifying the boundary conditions under which persuasion-centred models cease to apply, this paper strengthens rather than displaces existing crisis communication theory. Lastly, this paper does not claim empirical generalisability, but rather delineates conceptual boundary conditions that require subsequent empirical testing.

Practical and social implications

Practically, the concept of post-persuasive crisis communication legitimises restraint, delay, and non-communication as ethically defensible strategies when persuasive engagement amplifies harm or risk. Socially, the study cautions against over-reliance on communication as a solution to political crises that exceed communicative repair, foregrounding the limits of transparency and persuasion under conditions of collapsed legitimacy.

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Keywords

crisis communication; political crisis; strategic communication; persuasion; public relations theory

‘The forest and the trees’ paradigm for Risk Assessment: Are company boards getting a fuller picture to be crisis prepared?

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Introduction and purpose of the study

In a recent issue of flight disruptions for India’s leading airlines, the board intervened. There is larger scrutiny for boards on corporate governance, and even on operational issues. The challenge is greater for companies listed on stock exchanges. Risk Assessment is an integral part of Integrated (Annual) Reports for listed companies.

As per the Listing Agreement and Corporate Governance rules, listed companies have to submit an Annual Report to their shareholders and the exchanges. For large organisations globally, the nomenclature of Annual Reports has changed to ‘Integrated Reports’, incorporating the ESG (Environment Sustainability Governance) parameters. Risk matrix and Stakeholder engagement – two public relations domain – are a critical component of the Integrated Reports.

The Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), the oldest and prominent exchange, has over 5600 companies listed. The current study analysed the ‘risks’ mentioned in the Integrated Reports of the 30 companies that constitute the Sensex - India’s benchmark stock market index - as of 31st December 2025. These risks were matched with 10240 media stories, identified by this researcher, with ‘media framing’ of risks and crises, between January and December 2025.

This study set out to understand the alignment between the companies’ identification and articulation of risks, and what were the actual risk and crises that happened in the market and its framing in the media.

Literature Review

Grunig (2006) proposed systematic content analysis of media, as part of environment monitoring, be integrated into a company’s strategic management function, to identify emerging issues and signal for new developments (Wimmer & Dominick, 2018). Media plays a role in shaping perceptions and making us aware of developments at companies, whose inner workings we are oblivious to. Accordingly, companies with a reputation orientation put media monitoring systems as a safeguard, and to know what is being discussed (Fombrun, 1996).

Risk assessment (identification of threats); having a plan (envisaging scenarios, and developing communication strategies to deal with it; crisis response (communication during the crisis); crisis recovery (recording the lessons, and getting back to normal) are the four steps in crisis communications planning (Guth & Marsh, 2003). Risk assessment and planning are peacetime endeavours, part of crisis preparedness. Business organisation’s face three types of risks: 1) directly related to the company’s business 2) related to company actions that go against company core

values, and 3) related to company actions that go against the values of the times (Anthonissen, 2009). Organisations that prepare in pre-crisis, peaceful time, are better equipped to come out of a crisis quickly (Mitroff, 2001).

Methodology

This study took an interpretive paradigm, combining content analysis and discourse analysis of Indian media reporting on risks and crises, and the articulation of risks in the Integrated Reports of 30 listed companies forming the Sensex. A mixed-method approach was suitable for the study to find meaning and context from the data.

Six English newspapers with the highest readership – 3 mainlines and 3 business – were part of the study. The timeline for the media monitoring was January to December 2026 (12 months).

The Integrated Reports (annual reports) of the 30 companies forming the Sensex as of 31st December 2025 were analysed to identify the ‘Risks’ articulated by the respective companies.

Results and conclusions

This study identified 10240 media stories with a risk or crisis orientation. The stories were classified under industries to identify sectors facing higher or lower risks and crises. Basis the risk matrix mentioned in the Annual Integrated Reports of Sensex (30 companies that constitute Indian stock market’s benchmark index), the media stories were categorised as below:

Publication	Headline	Industry
Parameter	Page No.	City
Source		

Key highlights of the findings:

- Points raised in media coverage on systems, processes, complicity of management
- Industries facing the highest risk/crises related coverage, and the topics of concern
- The triggers for the reportage
- Words that ascribe a risk/ crisis (this will help Machine Learning and Online searches

for crisis preparedness). The researcher identified over 400 words

Practical and social implications

Two crises from India – Bhopal gas tragedy (Union Carbide) and Maggi noodles recall (Nestle) – have been analysed by public relations researchers: The Bhopal Carbide disaster - A lesson in crisis communication (Patwardhan & Bardhan, 2006); Culture and Crisis Communication: Nestle India’s Maggi Noodles (Dhanesh & Sriramesh, 2018). Post liberalisation in 1991, India witnessed two major stock market related scams, and the winding up of two prominent business organisations – Satyam (IT) and Ranbaxy (Pharmaceuticals).

Company boards are increasingly getting entangled in crisis situations, and regulatory bodies are holding boards responsible for lapses, if any. Boards need a broader oversight on the Crisis Communications plans, beyond the risk assessment articulated in the Integrated Annual reports.

Keywords

business, risks, company board, organisational crisis, mediaframing

Measuring Science Communication in Climate Crisis Reporting: Media Coverage of Cyclone Barbara in Romania

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Journalism and media play a dual role in crisis contexts: they not only shape the decoding of reality but serve as a critical public warning system (Bean, Hasinoff, & Fields, 2024). Consequently, the way information related to climate crises is portrayed in news reporting directly influences public understanding, risk perception, and behavioral responses. Rapid technological and media transformations have intensified the visibility and circulation of extreme weather events associated with climate change, turning meteorological phenomena into highly mediatized crises.

In crisis situations, while “organizations should tell their own stories” (Eray, 2018), the communicative ownership of climate-related disasters remains ambiguous. Who tells the story of a cyclone: scientists, authorities, journalists, or platform-driven media dynamics? When extreme weather events unfold, competing voices and communicative logics attempt to shape public interpretation, often oscillating between scientific explanation, public safety messaging, and sensationalist framing.

This study investigates how journalism integrates—or fails to integrate—principles of sci-

ence communication when reporting on extreme weather events. Using the case of Cyclone Barbara affecting Romania in October 2025, the research asks: To what extent did Romanian media coverage translate scientific information into public communication according to science communication principles during a climate-related crisis? The study also explores whether crisis coverage leaned toward informative science translation or toward alarmist and attention-driven reporting.

Existing scholarship suggests that effective crisis communication requires a centralized model for building trust in government risk messaging (Liu & Mehta, 2020). However, the information form and source on social media significantly influence behavioral intentions during disasters (Fraustino, Liu, & Jin, 2019), often complicating the flow of accurate guidance. Furthermore, contemporary media environments are susceptible to anti-science communication and populism, which can fuel distrust in scientific expertise and distort public perception (Hameleers & Van der Meer, 2021). These dynamics are particularly acute in the European context, where integrating theory and practice in unstable times

remains a challenge for risk communicators (Diers-Lawson et al., 2024). While the IDEA model highlights the necessity of accurate instructional communication for self-protection (Sellnow et al., 2017), less attention has been paid to how journalistic practices manually translate scientific expertise during unfolding climate events. This study contributes to bridging science communication and crisis communication by proposing measurable indicators to assess science communication quality in crisis news environments.

Methodologically, the study employs a manual content analysis to ensure high-fidelity interpretation of nuances often missed by automated tools. Data were collected on 16 October 2025, covering media outputs published between 1–16 October 2025, using keyword searches related to Cyclone Barbara. The corpus includes 979 entries: 476 Facebook posts, 465 web articles, and 38 YouTube news videos. The analysis relies on three composite indicators: (1) a Science Communication Index (SCI, 0–10) measuring technical accuracy, meteorological explanations, expert citation, communication of uncertainty, and absence of sensationalism; (2) Communication Translation Fidelity (CTF, 0–10) assessing how faithfully expert information is transmitted to audiences, including preservation of terminology, uncertainty, and contextual meaning; and (3) an Alarmism Score (0–3) capturing the presence of alarmist language, with higher weighting assigned to headlines. The manual coding process allows for a rigorous qualitative validation of construct usage, ensuring that subtle distinctions in tone and scientific framing are accurately categorized.

Practically, the study offers tools for evaluating science communication quality in climate-related crisis reporting and highlights the need for stronger collaboration between journalists, meteorological institutions, authorities, and crisis communication practitioners. Socially, improving science-based reporting during climate crises can enhance public preparedness, reduce misinformation risks, and support informed

decision-making. As climate-related extreme weather events become more frequent, refining media practices in crisis contexts becomes increasingly essential for democratic resilience and public safety.

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Keywords

climate crisis, science communication, crisis communication, public warning

Navigating Crisis Communication: Cultural Dynamics of Political Public Relations Practice in South India

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Crisis communication scholarship has largely examined organisational responses to discrete incidents, offering limited insight into how practitioners operate within contested crisis environments where multiple crisis meanings coexist and must be navigated as part of everyday work (Liu & Mehta, 2024). This tendency is reinforced within dominant public relations (PR) approaches, which treat crises as organisation-bound threats to reputation, foregrounding managerial strategies of image repair and response (Coombs, 2025). Such a framing sidelines the socio-cultural tensions and unequal governance arrangements through which conditions of crisis are produced and experienced, particularly in Global South contexts where crises are rarely episodic or contained. Responding to this limitation, this study examines crisis communication as a cultural practice situated within conditions of crisis produced by local cultural dynamics and asymmetries of governance surrounding the cancellation of the Hampi Utsav, an annual state-organised cultural festival at a UNESCO World Heritage site in South India.

The Hampi Utsav is a case in which crisis was produced through competing claims advanced by different actors over heritage preservation, environmental protection, and regional, religious, and political identity. In 2019, the government's cancellation of the festival generated divergent crisis interpretations among organisations invested in these domains, creating an unstable communicative environment rather than a sin-

gular organisational-centred reputational threat. Against this backdrop, the study asks: How do political public relations practitioners navigate and perform crisis communication within crisis conditions produced by socio-cultural relations and unequal governance arrangements in state-organised heritage contexts in South India?

Literature Review

Systematic reviews of crisis communication research demonstrate the field's continued reliance on organisation-centred and managerial perspectives that prioritise reputation management, attribution, and strategic messaging, most notably through Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Liu & Mehta, 2024). Critical public relations scholarship has challenged this orientation by foregrounding power and structural conditions shaping PR practice, while discursive approaches show how PR reproduces power through language and representation (Valentini, 2021). Despite these advances, crisis communication scholarship continues to treat culture primarily as contextual background rather than as an operative mechanism shaping professional action (Dhanesh & Sriramesh, 2018). This study extends structural critiques in critical PR by theorising professional cultural logics as the means through which culture mediates crisis communication practice in contested governance contexts.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist approach to professional PPR practice. Data were collected through video ethnography, comprising 66 hours of recorded observation over eight days across two communication departments of a political party, alongside 22 semi-structured interviews with practitioners from political, religious, heritage, environmental, and industrial organisations. The video ethnographic data capture verbal and non-verbal multimodal interaction in live coordination and content production settings and are analysed as data strips documenting situated crisis work.

The Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) was used analytically to identify moments within routine practice where crisis meanings became salient, enabling examination of how practitioners oriented to crisis within everyday organisational activity and supporting moderation generalisations (Rasquinha, 2024). Analytical tools drawn from critical discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and gestural analysis were applied to the video data, with interview material used to contextualise and corroborate ethnographic observations.

Findings, Results and Conclusion

The findings show that crisis communication in this context is a culturally charged practice rather than a neutral or purely strategic function. PR practitioners' actions are structured by professional cultural logics that guide how they recognise and perform crisis communication and how organisational priorities are maintained amid competing cultural and political demands. In the Hampi case, these logics informed practitioners' responses to the government's policy reversal, requiring them to balance institutional loyalty, cultural nationalism and personal moral reasoning.

Social and Practical Implications

By conceptualising crisis as an ongoing condition produced through socio-cultural and unequal governance arrangements, this study reframes crisis communication as continuous legitimacy work rather than episodic crisis response. Practically, this positions PR practitioners as relational intermediaries whose everyday communicative practices mediate competing cultural, political, and moral claims over time. Recognising such work highlights PR's potential as a reformative practice, not through resolving crisis, but through sustained engagement, coalition-building, and the negotiation of legitimacy within persistent conditions of conflict. Socially, this draws attention to how practitioners' routine actions shape which claims are normalised, marginalised, or rendered visible within contested governance contexts.

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Keywords

Critical Public Relations, Professional-Cultural Logics, Hampi Utsav, India, Ethnography

The price of reputation: The ethical tension between political legitimacy and public safety in the Valencia DANA

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Introduction and Purpose

On October 29, 2024, Valencia, Spain, faced an extreme DANA causing catastrophic flooding (Rombeek et al., 2025). Despite early warnings, the civil protection alert, governed by regional regulations, suffered a 12-hour latency. Technically, the meteorological agency managed data, but activating the ES-Alert system for citizens required political validation (Factico, 2024). This study investigates: How did the tension between political legitimacy and public safety, exacerbated by bureaucratic protocols, block the transition from Alert to Rescue phase?

Literature Review

This research applies the Loop Model (Persici Toniolo & Gonçalves, 2025), identifying ethical tensions in public crisis communication between the informational perspective, focused on saving lives, and the political perspective, focused on reputation. Public management relies on rigid protocols, often creating communicational blockades. We also use the IDEA Model (Sellnow et al., 2017), examining Internalization, Distribution, Explanation, and Action, to evaluate instructional efficacy. Recent DANA studies (Moreno-Castro, 2025) demonstrate institutions failed to use social media preventively, resorting to reactive communication limited by bureaucracy (Rodríguez Hernández & Ortega Fernández, 2025). Furthermore, in hybrid ecosystems,

official narratives compete disadvantageously against algorithmic dynamics for attention (Míguez-González & Dafonte-Gómez, 2026).

Methodology

A qualitative case study utilized temporal data triangulation. The sample spans the continuous alert and rescue phases of the Loop Model from October 24 to October 31, 2024. The physical event time chronology, based on hydrometeorological records, was cross-referenced with the message emission time on the X network and ES-Alerts. An integrated matrix coded messages by Loop phase, IDEA components, and regulatory context, such as emergency coordination meeting.

Results and Conclusions

During the Alert phase, from October 24 to 29, early warnings functioned as purely informational frames without actionable instructions. Communication remained reactive and constrained by official protocols. The transition to the Rescue phase experienced a critical phase rupture. Although sensors confirmed river overflows, political leadership, operating within the coordination framework, projected normalization at 13:00. This evidence demonstrates the political perspective actively blocked the informational one, ignoring objective physical data. The regulatory validation requirement caused a

fatal latency. Legally mandated action instructions via ES-Alert only arrived at 20:11, when infrastructure had already collapsed.

Practical and Social Implications

Rigid regulations requiring political validation to issue emergency alerts cost lives. The Rescue phase must be rigorously depoliticized. We propose communicational automation in disaster protocols. Critical physical thresholds, such as river flows, must trigger immediate, automated action alerts, circumventing political and regulatory interference.

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Keywords

Crisis Communication, Loop Model, Emergency Management, Climate Resilience, DANA Valencia.

Communication failures: optimising effective strategic crisis communication management in largescale wildfires

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The frequency of natural disasters with a destructive impact, such as large-scale wildfires (LSW), is increasing due to the current climate instability, which is affecting the planet (e.g., high temperatures, droughts caused by a lack of rain) (Boulanger et al., 2025). These fires sometimes generate harmful air pollution that spreads beyond the affected region. When they approach cities, this can lead to population evacuation (Boulanger et al., 2025). In the absence of effective strategic crisis communication management (SCCM), the proactivity and adaptability of communication strategies between relevant stakeholders, such as local populations and competent authorities, are called into question. This raises the following research question: of the crisis communication strategies (CCS) deployed in the literature, which are the most appropriate for ensuring effective crisis communication management in LSW situations?

This study aims to explore the communication strategies used by public relations experts specializing in SCCM when communication failures occur in the context of LSW. Two specific objectives are pursued: 1) understanding this phenomenon to adapt CCS based on effectiveness criteria during crises likely to persist, 2) contributing to knowledge development in the areas of communication and crisis management relating to LSW.

Literature Review

A literature review on CCS revealed several important findings. Specifically, natural disasters were found to be detrimental to the effectiveness of certain communication networks (Jiao et al., 2024). Some authors have noted the adverse consequences for the population, such as isolation and limited access to reliable information (e.g., rumours or disinformation), due to the persistence of technical failures during disasters (Buchanan et Sparagowski, 2022; Rudolph-Cleff et al., 2022). Therefore, optimizing crisis communication management and ensuring community safety are essential (Gacitua et al., 2025).

Methodology

This research adopts a socio-environmental perspective. It emphasizes the emergency of strategic communication in crisis situations to ensure the effective transmission of essential information to affected stakeholders. The research design is exploratory and sequential, drawing on the systemic approach of the Palo Alto school (Watzlawick, 1972), the crisis lifecycle process (Roux-Dufort, 2003), the model of technical failures and social destabilization (Lagadec, 1988) and crisis communication management (Libaert et al., 2018; Proto, 2024). The research will proceed with an iterative process between analysis and data collection. It will use semi-structured individual interviews.

A qualitative interview guide will be prepared to conduct interviews with public relations experts specializing in SCCM. These interviews will generate qualitative data for analysis. The non-probability sample will be selected through purposive network sampling to interview experts who participated to LSW in Quebec and Canada, considered the worst in the country (Centre interservices des feux de forêt du Canada Inc., 2025).

Results and Conclusion

The results of this study will enhance the effectiveness of SCCM in various crisis scenarios. Identifying effective CCS practices will improve the transmission of essential information among the different stakeholders involved. The results regarding communication failures will promote collaboration among these stakeholders and clarify each party's role in sharing information, whether through field teams or operational centers (e.g., crisis management teams). Lessons learned about the ineffectiveness of certain CCS will be useful in various crisis scenarios. Limitations: The interviews will only be conducted with public relations experts who specialize in SCCM. An external perspective or one from another discipline would, however, be valuable in identifying CCS specific to their sector. Another limitation is the exclusive focus on Canadian LSW cases.

Practical and Social Implications

This research anticipates an outcome involving the development of a framework encompassing effective CCS and best practices, which should be implemented prior to crisis management. This framework would enable communication experts to analyze and compare different crisis cases and scenarios.

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Keywords

Crisis communication; communication failures; strategic management.

Regional Resilience Centers Co-create Crisis Communication for All-of-Society

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Changes in climate have increased natural hazards, dangerous weather events, and multi-risk environments where disasters may have cascading effects. According to the Sendai Framework, more than 1.5 billion people have been affected by disasters in various ways. Especially women, children and people in vulnerable situations become disproportionately most affected. **Research question:** Can Regional Resilience Centers co-create crisis communication for all-of-society?

Literature review

Niinistö (2024) calls for overcoming silos, ensuring the necessary capabilities to foster public-private partnerships, and maintaining preparedness across sectors; supporting awareness and resilience among EU citizens and societies are all central to European security. The European Union (EU) A strong and secure Europe from Strategic agenda 2024-2029 calls for active search of coordinated actions, improved understanding of impacts of disasters and crises, long-term planning, and early warnings.

Improved risk communication by regional/local authorities and emergency services can greatly benefit from active engagement of citizen volunteers to improve current resilience of emergency systems for disaster prevention, preparedness, and communication. Efficient crisis communication is important in improving disaster risk management and governance.

Methodology

Pre- and post-crisis this concept uses a living labs approaches where the RRC serves as a co-creation platform that brings regional/local authorities, emergency services, and other stakeholders together with citizen volunteers to co-creatively increase understanding of impacts of disasters and crises and improve early warning messages.

The Municipality of Nurmijärvi operates a Regional Resilience Center (RRC) which focuses on crisis response Awareness and Activity Coordination (AWAC). Nurmijärvi's RRC is hosted by a local school, and it serves as a coordination location for volunteer services and hosts a situation room. This can be manned 24/7 during crisis response by a volunteer crew of five per shift.

Results and conclusions

RRC ASEP co-creates co-ordinated ways to engage NGOs, volunteer groups and individuals, especially in focusing on long-lasting crises and their cascading effects. Active engagement of volunteer services makes the bottom-up RRC stand out from e.g. existing municipality or authority control centres that currently tend to focus only on top-down communication. Coordinated and effective AWAC functions further help rescue services and other regional and local authorities communicate during crises and to maintain active situational awareness.

The RRC ASEP methods empower adaptive decision making and effective capabilities between authorities and citizens and across local and regional entities. The RRC ASEP concept living labs methods, with a cyclical plan, do, check, act (PDCA) approach, help the field of security and resilience identify and promote best practices in crisis communication messages.

Practical and social implications

All-of-Society Engagement and Participation approach (ASEP) can bring together citizen volunteers, emergency services, and regional/local authorities together to improve risk messaging foresight and co-creation to improve warning messages; impacts of disasters and crises must be commonly understood.

This study demonstrates how an All-of-Society Engagement and Participation (ASEP) approach can bring citizen volunteers, emergency services, and regional/local authorities together to co-create better understanding of impacts of disasters and crises, long-term planning, and early warnings.

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Keywords

Regional Resilience Center, Crisis communication, All-of-society

It's all about expertise, isn't it? The role of subject matter experts in communication management

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Today's societies are characterized by an enormous increase in knowledge, both in terms of quantity and quality. The proliferation of AI applications among communication professionals (Cheng & Verčič, 2026) has reinforced this development and led to an overwhelming flood of information that can comprise the effectiveness of decision-making processes (Stieglitz et al., 2024). Although consulting AI assistants might seem like the easiest way to sort through information, a recent study found that 81 percent of AI responses are problematic in some way and cannot be fully trusted (European Broadcasting Union, 2025).

Human expertise should therefore not be overlooked in the digitalized world. It has long been common practice to involve experts with trustworthy knowledge in various ways in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of communication activities. However, there is a lack of conceptual research on the use of such experts. This is relevant because understanding the need for expertise from humans or algorithms is key to excellent communication management. The study aims to fill this gap by providing an overview of the potential use of subject matter experts in communication management. The research question is therefore:

RQ: How can the use of subject matter experts in communication management be conceptualized?

Methodology

A qualitative design was chosen for this study. An interdisciplinary literature review provided an initial understanding of the topic and helped to identify dimensions for a framework that conceptualizes use cases and drivers. This was complemented by expert interviews with n=13 seasoned communication managers from German companies, who provided further insights. They helped to verify and expand the framework.

Literature review

Authors in our field mention experts in various contexts. They are discussed in terms of incorporating expert knowledge for campaign analysis and planning, as well as in the context of media relations, lobbying, financial communication, and social media communication. Experts are also mentioned when it comes to increasing credibility, trust, reputation, and thought leadership. However, these discussions are usually quite general, and deeper insights are rarely presented.

An interdisciplinary literature review revealed that there is no uniform definition of "experts" and "subject matter experts." Different academic disciplines emphasize different aspects. Psychology mainly examines how expertise works and how it is acquired, while sociology often examines expertise as a social system. IT researchers traditionally focus on software-based expert systems. There is also extensive academic discus-

sion in disciplines such as organizational development, journalism, politics, and methodology research, as well as in non-academic contexts.

Combining these insights leads to the following definition: Subject matter experts are individuals who are distinguished by specific knowledge, characteristics, and abilities in a particular area of common interest that others do not possess (derived from, e.g., Dall’Alba, 2018; Ericsson, 2018). In communication management, both communication experts and subject matter experts are important – this study focuses on the latter.

Results and conclusions

Similar to the literature on strategic communication, respondents interpret the term “subject matter expert” very broadly. They emphasized that subject matter experts should be visible to the outside world, have specific knowledge, and be able to communicate it effectively. Internal subject matter experts seem to be used more frequently than those who are not part of the organization.

The framework to be presented at the conference covers various dimensions: the application context, sub-areas of corporate communications, types of use, reasons for selection and deployment, motivators that encourage subject matter experts to participate, as well as challenges and success factors.

The qualitative interviews show that subject matter experts are increasingly being used for the implementation of communication activities, but also in the analysis and planning phase. Regardless of the specific areas of corporate communications, these experts can contribute to strategic and opportunity-related issues as well as provide legal or regulatory support. The reasons for their involvement are diverse but closely interrelated – legitimacy, reputation, and credibility are particularly noteworthy. In addition to intrinsic motivators, intangible benefits such as further training also appear to be important for internal experts. However, not all subject matter

experts need to be actively motivated, and some cannot be motivated to participate in communication activities at all.

Practical and social implications

The study shows that subject matter experts are crucial for communication management in the business world. A more strategic and structured approach is however needed, especially as AI systems promise to deliver and apply knowledge faster and cheaper. Further research is needed to identify the areas where the integration of human experts in digitalized environments brings advantages.

Keywords

Subject Matter Expert – Expertise – Corporate communications – Knowledge – Communication management

Disruption, Transgression, and Subversion in the Context of Permanent Liminality: Lessons for Crisis Communication

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Introduction

There is a growing concern that in the context of “liquid modernity” (Baumann, 2007), many emergent challenges and threats have become simply inconceivable in terms of existing positivist epistemologies. Uncertain times and technological developments have enabled various subversive actors to manipulate official narratives, promote their agendas, and undermine national security worldwide. In the context of digital activism, cancel culture, and manipulated media, subversive actors seek to achieve goals ranging from settling personal scores to changing societal power dynamics. The purpose of this study is to explore three prominent strategies used by agents of chaos in liminal situations and offer insights that could potentially direct future academic research in the fields of crisis communication.

Literature Review

Szokolczai (2022) describes modernity in terms of *permanent liminality* or a situation where temporary crisis situations have become lasting. Events such as political or social revolutions and crises can thus be considered liminal, as they result in the complete collapse of order and can lead to significant social change (Thomassen, 2006). This state of affairs is extremely beneficial to multiple agents of chaos who produce new liminal situations. These strategic actors engage

in various activities to get media attention by using disruptive, transgressive, and subversive tactics.

Disruptive strategies refer to activities that aim to interrupt an event, conversation, or relationship. Activist groups, paid trolls, and pranksters are among the typical agents of disruption who seek to interrupt ongoing conversations and promote their own opinions and agendas. Political activists have used disruption to protest the tyranny of oil, recast the health reform debate, and deconstruct the rituals of organized religions (Boyd, 2012; Meikle, 2018). Howard and Kollanyi (2016) analyzed the role of bots in the run-up to the UK’s vote to exit the EU and found that they were deployed in an effort “to attack opponents, choke off hashtags, and promote political platforms for amplifying messages” (p. 5).

Transgressive strategies test the limits of social norms and question conventional authority (Jenks, 2003). A transgressor not only diverts attention by disrupting ongoing conversations but also breaches moral norms in socially unacceptable ways, thus provoking public contempt and public outrage. Scandal is a conduit of transgression. Scandals not only affirm prevailing norms by sanctioning moral transgressions but also function as a social ritual that drives moral outrage and prompts discourse about values, norms, and breaches of them (Jacobsson & Löfmarck, 2008). Depending on context, transgressive acts can be punished by the system to reaffirm the

rule (e.g., in the case of serious crimes), integrated into a new system with slightly altered parameters (e.g., the legalization of marijuana), or allowed temporarily in specific moments (e.g., Mardi Gras, erotic transgressions, etc.).

Subversive strategies focus on the reframing and reinterpretation of traditional narratives and cultural codes. Due to their capacity for creative resistance, social movements aim to dismantle prevailing political and corporate narratives, conventions, and symbols, ultimately aiming to supplant them with a new set of rules and interpretations (Williams, 2011). For example, feminist activists shame and boycott the advertising industry for its misogyny and promote alternative slogans and messages that emphasize the role of women in sustaining life (Nos Aldás & Farné, 2020). Conspiracy theorists, for example, can hijack original government or corporate narratives and then creatively reframe the issue while leveraging media presence to draw attention to their side of the story (de Zeeuw & Gekker, 2023).

Methodology

This study employs a case study approach. This qualitative research method is employed to produce a comprehensive, nuanced grasp of intricate situations within their real-world setting. It is especially advantageous for investigating, delineating, or elucidating phenomena in which the researcher possesses less control on occurrences. The presentation focuses on the QAnon movement that developed into an influential force of conspiracy fictioning in which conspiracy theories are used to disrupt and subvert official narratives by formulating their own understanding of realities.

Results and conclusions

The current media ecosystem is conducive to trickster strategies of disturbance and control that subversive strategic actors from across the political spectrum use to capture media attention, hijack political and public discourses, and

replace mainstream narratives with alternative media frames. Media companies have a stake in growing their user base and usually have little interest in regulating disruptive and transgressive content and behavior.

Disruptive, transgressive, and subversive strategies and tactics are strategic in nature; they are derived from the opinions and attitudes of members representing various communities on a range of different social issues and hold the capacity for inciting moral outrage. They also appeal to invested stakeholders (e.g., journalists, activist groups, and competitors) who profit from the tarnishing of reputations.

The recent scholarship on paracrisis and scansis has profound implications for developing new approaches to pre-crisis management. One way for crisis management to foresee subversive efforts is to become synergetic with the communities of interest.

Practical and social implications.

To maintain relevancy, crisis communication theory must shift its focus to examining the effects of subversive practices on institutional trust and public reputation in the context of collapsing economic optimism, mounting public disapproval of governments, and low trust in traditional and social media (Edelman, 2025). Crisis communication scholars must reevaluate previous theories and models while adopting novel concepts to comprehend current subversive strategies and be cognizant of modern pre-crisis scenarios. Staying attuned enables them to direct their attention toward the sociology of scandal, which elucidates norm-transgression events with multiple causes, including those of a global nature that result from heightened entropy in social systems.

Keywords

crisis communication, disruption, liminality, subversion, transgression

Crisis Trigger Model: A New Framework for Crisis Communication

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Introduction

Crises are breakdowns that occur when an organization is struck by acute triggers such as accidents, cyberattacks, ethical breaches, or rumors, taking the system out from equilibrium. Accumulated stresses - structural, cultural, technological, or relational can interact with the trigger to amplify an impact of the trigger on organizational operations, behavior, or reputation. In a hyper-connected world characterized by immediacy, sensationalism, and propulsive technological development, crises propagate rapidly, impacting organizations on multiple levels.

Crisis communication scholarship has generated robust guidance for post-onset response. In the non-linear world, the crisis genesis needs to be explored further. It is important to understand whether latent organizational vulnerabilities can accumulate and, under certain conditions, appear as crisis triggers, and how these vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities of an organization can impact the flow of the crisis. Thus, the paper intends to address the following research questions:

RQ1: How can crisis communication theory reinterpret the transition from latent vulnerability to crisis in the contemporary environments?

RQ2: Is there visible interdependence between organizational stress, crisis trigger and organizational adaptive capacity?

Literature review

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) links responsibility attributions to effective strategy choice - deny, diminish, or rebuild (Coombs, 2007). Contingency Theory conceptualizes stance along an advocacy–accommodation continuum moderated by contextual factors (Cancel et al., 1997). Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) relates stakeholder emotions such as anger, fear, or sadness to information needs and compliance (Jin et al., 2012). Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication and IDEA models emphasize phase alignment and clarity of instructional content (Sellnow et al., 2023). In parallel, body of crisis communications research includes multiple crisis lifecycle and stage frameworks that describe phases such as pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis, or signal detection throughout the crisis. Organizations are not only strategic communicators: like live organisms, they are adaptive systems that can become affected by acute or chronic illnesses. Moreover, analogously to live organisms, organizations can not only be affected by illness: they can also become exposed

to continuous stress. Medical treatment includes stages of diagnostics, triage, treatment, monitoring, and rehabilitation, along with necessary prevention and immunization. The concept of CTM tries to align this medical metaphor with complex organizational systems perspectives in crisis and risk research.

Methodology

This study uses a theory-building, integrative design aimed to explore the parallel between medical treatment of live organisms and organizational responses to different stages of the crisis. Three core components have been included in this research:

1. Focused integrative review of crisis communication, organizational and medical scholarship to identify stressors, trigger types, and adaptive capacity mechanisms, and build parallels between organizations in crisis and organisms affected by acute and chronic diseases, or exposed to various stress factors.
2. Model specification and operationalization: development of CTM's core formulation and measurement logic, including indicators for Stress (S), Trigger (T), and Adaptive Capacity (A), and a modular architecture linking protocols, trigger-specific modules, and phase-based approaches.
3. Theory-to-protocol mapping: possible crisis triggers, possible sources of organizational stress, and mechanisms for building adaptive capacity have been identified, listed and classified to translate theoretical insights into the baseline of possible applied protocols.

Results and conclusions

CTM specifies crisis risk as a function of $S \times T$, moderated by A, where:

- Stress (S) reflects accumulated vulnerability observable through intra-organizational indicators,
- Trigger (T) reflects an acute crisis event or activation,
- Adaptive Capacity (A) reflects preparedness and resilience resources that can be applied in the acute stage of the crisis.

The principal differentiator from lifecycle models described in the available literature is that CTM provides a pathway from pre-crisis conditions to onset by identifying stress accumulation factors, specifying trigger and stress interaction, and formalizing adaptive capacity as a moderator. Moreover, in CTM communication functions as both sensor (early warning) and effector (intervention), with different optimal cadences dependent upon type: cobra crises vs. python crises (Mitroff & Anagnos, 2001). A baseline for future research and verification of possible protocols has been established.

Limitations

A primary limitation is that proposed formula and approach offer operational suggestions rather than validated measures. Empirical testing, such as longitudinal multi-case designs, time series analysis of indicators and crisis dynamics, or simulations, is required to fine-tune thresholds, stress factors, triggers, protocols, and interaction effects and to validate generalizability across industries and cultures.

Practical and social implications

For practitioners, CTM yields a base for creation of an organization-centric diagnostic protocol that follows flow and dynamics of the crisis, supporting preventive actions in python crises and effective engagement in acute stages of the crises. CTM creates ground for developing dashboards that integrate organizational health indicators (stress), real-time incident signals (triggers), and resilience resources (adaptive capacity). In social context, earlier detection and more accurate modeling can reduce harm to the communities, improve transparency, and strengthen institutional accountability.

Keywords

Crisis Trigger Model; crisis communication; complex adaptive systems; organizational stress; organizational resilience

Corporate Blacklisting: Strategic communication during wartime

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Introduction and purpose of the study

At the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine, the Chief Executive Leadership Institute at Yale University compiled a list of non-sanctioned international companies and their engagement in Russia (Sonnenfeld, 2022). This *blacklist* rates companies according to the state of their business ties to Russia, whether they have ceased operations completely, reduced their dealings, or still do business as usual. As a result of this *public shaming* and a general public pressure on companies to reassess their business, over 1.000 companies have since then curtailed their operations in Russia; however, several hundred more companies continue to operate on the Russian market.

Being blacklisted and publicly shamed represents a serious challenge to a company's reputation and can harm its performance substantially. After all, the expectations of the public regarding the activities of business organizations during the war are also high and sensitive. Any actions of companies that are not approved by the public can become triggers for the development of various negative public reactions to violations of their expectations. And blacklisting has proven to be the main instrument of pressure on companies both directly and through other stakeholders.

Well-organized corporate communications in such situations are essential and can help maintain the company's favorable reputation. Hence, the research project aims to answer the following question:

RQ: How does a corporate communication cope with the challenge of blacklisting?

It is important to understand how companies confront this situation in the public sphere and vis-à-vis key stakeholder groups, namely, by identifying the strategies communication specialists use in such crises.

Literature review

Building upon general crisis communication theory at the intersection with CSR (Coombs & Holladay, 2015), it is important to understand this special category of reputational crisis. Zhou and Zhang (2023), among others, analyzed the reactions of blacklisted companies continuing to operate in Russia. However, the authors focused on experimentally testing the effectiveness of only a few paracrisis communication strategies. Empirical studies of crisis communication specifically in geopolitical conflicts were conducted by Knudsen et al. (2011), for example, while Kehane (2024) studied rhetorical strategies as an effective reputational repair maneuver in cancel culture.

Methodology

Qualitative content analysis was used to inquire into the research question. The analyzed content was published between the beginning of the invasion in 2022 and the end of 2025. The material included formal statements, press releases, first-person and press service comments in mass media and social media, published first-person interviews with company officials, CSR com-

munications, etc. The sample consisted of eleven blacklisted companies. These are companies from Europe (Central and Eastern) and the US, including B2B and B2C, from the following industry sectors: finance, technology/household appliances, construction materials, food/drink, retail, clothing/shoe production, hygiene/cosmetic products. The analysis was performed using a code book based on crisis response strategies in the academic literature; hence, categories were defined in advance based on the conceptual structure of the study and the review of literature on crisis communication. New codes were added inductively when necessary. Data labeling and categorization were done using the coding software MAXQDA.

Tentative results and conclusions

The results show that companies use primarily paracrisis strategies in varying combinations. Revision, reference to organizational values, and recognition/reception were the most popular. Two cases of applying a repression strategy and one case of a refusal strategy were also found. Separately, it should be noted that in seven cases the strategy of refutation (in combination with others) was used.

Furthermore, five cases showed signs of an ethical base response strategy, with intentions to more broadly and deeply utilize empathic responses to rethink stakeholder and organizational values. Three cases demonstrated intentions to develop response communication within the framework of a transcendence strategy, a value defense discourse, or a cancel discourse, which is appropriate during moral outrage. Given the complexity of the crisis frame and the unique communication requirements, further research is needed to determine which strategies would be most appropriate for the crisis case under study.

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Keywords

corporate blacklisting, reputational risk, crisis communication, cancel culture, character assassination

Short-Termism in Corporate Communication: A Theoretical Framework Amid an Accelerated Issue Environment

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In an era marked by continuous, intersecting crises, corporations find themselves navigating what has been termed a “permacrisis” (Turnbull, 2022). Indeed, today’s corporate digital information environment is defined by the rapid emergence and transformation of pressing issues (Vos et al., 2014)—from geopolitical tensions to global challenges such as the climate crisis (Lock, 2025) or polarization (van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021). Fueled by a 24/7 news cycle, viral social media dynamics (Castells, 2000; Mills, 2012), and broader patterns of social acceleration (Rosa, 2013), these issues can escalate into full-blown crises, exposing corporations to unprecedented reputational risks (Badham & Luoma-aho, 2023).

A common organizational response to such environmental uncertainty (Huber & Daft, 1987) is short-termism, defined as “decisions and outcomes that pursue a course of action that is best for the short term but suboptimal over the long run” (Lavery, 1996, p. 826). Just as individuals tend toward immediate gratification and exhibit temporal discounting—valuing outcomes less the further they lie in the future (Loewenstein & Thaler, 1989)—organizations increasingly prioritize short-term visibility, quarterly results, and public and political approval at the expense of long-term sustainability and societal goals (e.g., Graham et al., 2005; Bansal & DesJardine, 2014). This bias is intensified under conditions of urgency, uncertainty (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014),

and public scrutiny, making the accelerated digital issue environment a catalyst for communicative and strategic decisions that may undermine long-term goals.

Recent developments underscore the stakes: The World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report 2026 indicates that experts worldwide express heightened concerns about short-term risks (e.g., geoeconomic confrontation)—while environmental issues are predominantly perceived as long-term risks. In line with that, sustainability has lost political and public prominence amid shifting political dynamics and corporate retrenchment. While some rollback reflects feasibility and regulatory concerns, many firms are withdrawing net-zero targets or engaging in “greenhushing” to avoid reputational risk and align with the political momentum (Bryan & Pooler, 2024; Miller, 2025; Cinceoglu et al., 2025). These patterns of communicative short-termism may be a key—yet overlooked—driver behind inertia slowing progress on the SDGs and climate action.

Short-termism has been extensively studied in finance (e.g., shareholder value maximization: Mason, 2015), management (Lavery, 1996), and political science (Boston, 2021; Ogami, 2024). Scholars have identified drivers such as stock market pressures, incentive structures, and political cycles, showing how short-term priorities often undermine strategic future investments, long-term competitiveness (Lavery, 1996), and

sustainability objectives (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014). While some short-term actions may serve long-term goals (Marginson & McAulay, 2008)—such as enhancing geopolitical resilience—a disproportional focus on short-term goals can be detrimental to individual and organizational (Marginson & McAulay, 2008) as well as environmental and societal goals (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014).

While early studies highlighted social influences on managerial decision-making (Lavery, 1996) and a “strong social dimension” in short-term orientation (Marginson & McAulay, 2008, p. 287), these insights remain fragmented and disconnected from today’s digitally accelerated realities (Schultz et al., 2025). With the rise of social media and online platforms (Castells, 2004), issues now emerge, spread, and are contested at unprecedented speed, shaping what becomes salient and how organizations respond (Vos et al., 2014). Yet, little is known how this environment is impacting the temporal orientation of corporate communication. Furthermore, the communicative dimension of short-termism remains largely overlooked. Existing studies often treat corporate communication as secondary to managerial decision-making, even though it both reflects and reinforces corporate strategy (Cornelissen, 2023; Moss et al., 2000) through its

boundary-spanning function of monitoring the environment and feeding insights back to decision-makers (Hoffmann & Strauß, 2025).

Addressing this gap, this conference contribution conceptualizes communication as a constitutive force (Schoeneborn et al., 2019): communicative practices not only mirror but actively shape short-term orientations within corporations and society. The central research question of this theoretical work is therefore: *How does the accelerated digital crisis environment shape short-termism in corporate communication, and what factors explain its emergence and inform strategic approaches to mitigate it?*

By synthesizing insights from organizational and corporate communication, media theories, and short-termism research in other disciplines, this theoretical contribution positions time not merely as a contextual factor, but as a central variable in communication processes and managerial decision-making by developing the Temporal Orientation in Corporate Communication (TOCC) model (see Figure 1), which also examines how acceleration processes unfold across these dimensions. It examines how short-termism in communication emerges across micro-level drivers (e.g., managerial attention), meso-level dynamics (e.g., governance, organizational cul-

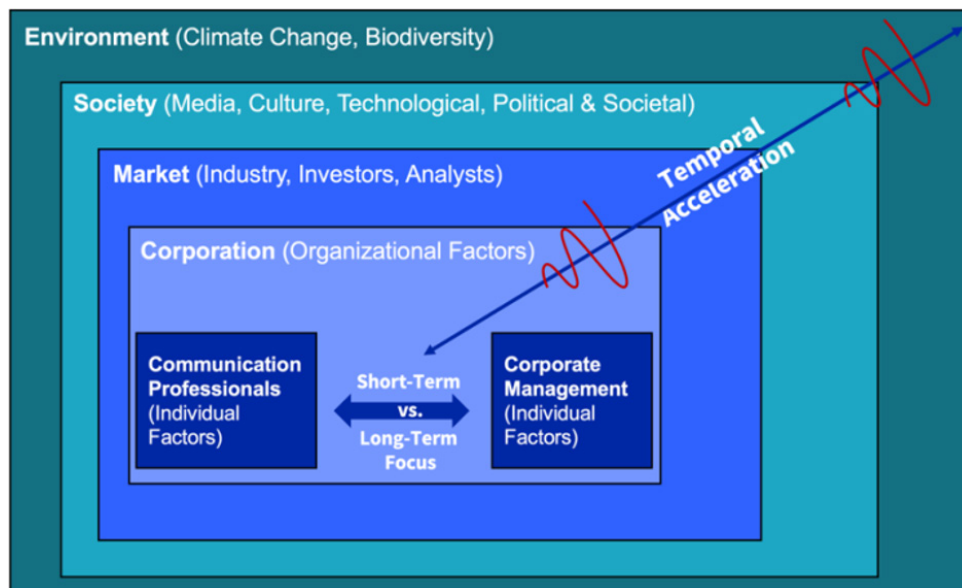


Figure 1. Temporal Orientation in Corporate Communication (TOCC)

ture), and macro-level factors (e.g., media logics, institutional pressures), connecting established determinants of managerial short-termism (Wiersema et al., 2025) with communication-specific factors such as stakeholder dynamics, issue salience, and mediatization pressures (Grunig et al., 2002; Vos et al., 2014).

Keywords

short-termism, corporate communication, issue environments, media logics, sustainability

Understanding the effects of moral outrage: Improving the predictability of SCCT for preventable crises

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Introduction and purpose of the study

The notion of moral outrage-inducing crises has prompted the need to explore how organizations can communicate more effectively with their stakeholders (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024). The purpose of this research project is to (1) replicate the findings of previous studies examining moral outrage-inducing crises and (2) to expand on our understanding and application of SCCT for severe preventable crises.

Literature review

Moral outrage-inducing crises are characterized by perceptions of exploitation, meaning the public perceives the organization has acted out of greed and has been unfair (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024). With the discovery of moral outrage-inducing crises, the preventable crisis cluster in Situational Crisis Communication theory (SCCT) has been problematized (Coombs & Tachkova, 2023). The preventable cluster is of most interest to both scholars and practitioners as these are the most severe types of crises. After using injustice and greed to re-examine and regroup the crises comprising the cluster, Coombs and Tachkova (2023) suggested the new reformation of the cluster should be: human-error, management misconduct and scams. However, these findings have not been replicated since. Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold.

First, we want to corroborate the findings of Coombs and Tachkova (2023) by testing wheth-

er a management misconduct crisis, indeed generates stronger perceptions of exploitation than a human-error crisis. We know that management misconduct and scams have already been conceptually linked (Coombs & Tachkova, 2024). Second, there has been a call to explore how account acceptance affects the relationship between a crisis response and key crisis outcome variables (Fediuk et al., 2010) which the study addresses. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: A management misconduct crisis will generate stronger perceptions of exploitation compared to a human-error crisis.

H2a: Perceptions of exploitation will be negatively related to willingness to buy.

H2b: Perceptions of exploitation will be positively related to anger.

H2c: Perceptions of exploitation will be negatively related to negative word-of-mouth

H2d: Perceptions of exploitation will be positively related to desire to retaliate.

H3: Account acceptance will mediate the relationship between an explicit statement of moral recognition and willingness to buy, negative word-of-mouth and retaliation.

Methodology

The study employed a 2 (crisis type: human error vs. management misconduct) × 2 (moral recognition: absent vs. present) between-subjects factorial design. The sample was drawn from an online audience panel provided by Dynata. A total of 335 responses were included in the study.

Results and conclusions

H1, H2a, b, c and d were supported. Therefore, this is the first study to replicate the findings of Coombs and Tachkova (2023) and corroborate the differences between human-error and management misconduct crises.

H3 was tested through a series of multiple regressions. The results indicate that honoring the account does have a significant effect on key crisis outcome variables such as willingness to buy, negative word-of-mouth and retaliation. Furthermore, account acceptance reduced perceptions of anger and exploitation. Lastly, there is no clear evidence that moral recognition affects account acceptance.

Practical and social implications

First, the study corroborates the findings of previous research examining the preventable crisis cluster thus shedding more light into how moral outrage affects perceptions of organizations in terms of key crisis outcome variables. Second, the study is the first to empirically test the effects of account acceptance which has important theoretical and practical implications. Specifically, the results indicate that honoring the account is a strong predictor of willingness to buy and has a moderate effect on negative word-of-mouth and retaliation. Moreover, moral recognition only partly mediates the relationship between honoring the account and willingness to buy. This indicates that although organizations might explicitly acknowledge their moral violations, it does not seem to affect the way people perceive the response. Therefore, the third contribution of the study is that simply recognizing the moral

violation is not enough to make people accept the response, though it adds a small, direct boost to willingness to buy once acceptance and other factors are considered.

The findings of the study pertaining to honoring the account and the moral outrage-inducing crisis prescribed response open up new avenues for research.

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Keywords

crisis communication, preventable crises, account acceptance, moral outrage

Ethics in Media Reporting on Alternative Medicine: Audience Perceptions in Croatia

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Media reporting on alternative medicine represents a relevant segment of contemporary health communication, particularly in contexts where such practices operate outside fully regulated medical frameworks. For a substantial portion of the public, media content constitutes the primary source of information about alternative medical practices, their perceived benefits, and their role within broader health systems. This places ethical responsibility on media actors to ensure that reporting supports informed decision-making rather than selectively emphasizing particular aspects of these practices. The purpose of this study is to examine audience perceptions of ethical characteristics in media reporting on alternative medicine. The focus is placed on three interrelated dimensions: the balance between positive representations and information on limitations and risks, the prevalence of promotional versus public-interest-oriented informational discourse, and the types of sources most commonly perceived as dominant in media narratives. By addressing these dimensions, the study aims to contribute to discussions on ethical standards in health-related media communication.

Literature review

Existing research in health communication highlights the ethical importance of accu-

cy and transparency in media reporting on health-related topics (Singhal et al., 2024; Fitzpatrick, 2023). Studies indicate that media representations of non-conventional medical practices often rely on simplified narratives, personal testimonies, and success stories, which may marginalize uncertainty, risk, and scientific debate (Zhang et al., 2024; Sarman, Uzuntarla, 2022). This tendency raises ethical concerns related to selective framing and the potential blurring of boundaries between journalism and promotion. Research on promotional discourse in health communication further suggests that commercial interests, native advertising, and sponsored content increasingly influence the presentation of health-related information, particularly in digital media environments (Fitzpatrick, 2023). Such practices complicate the distinction between public-interest communication and implicit endorsement. In addition, literature addressing source credibility emphasizes that reliance on non-institutional or experiential sources, while enhancing emotional engagement, may undermine the visibility of scientific evidence and expert evaluation (Sarman, Uzuntarla, 2022). Despite growing scholarly attention to media ethics and health communication, empirical research focusing on audience perceptions of ethical issues in reporting on alternative medicine remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining how media audiences interpret and evaluate ethical dimensions of such reporting.

Methodology

The study employs a quantitative research design based on an online survey questionnaire administered to a convenience sample of adult respondents in Croatia. The survey instrument is designed to capture respondents' general exposure to media content related to alternative medicine and their perceptions of dominant reporting patterns across various media platforms, including digital news portals, social media, and traditional mass media. The study tests three hypotheses: (H1) that positive aspects of alternative medicine are perceived as more prominent than information on limitations and risks; (H2) that promotional discourse is perceived as more prevalent than public-interest-oriented informational discourse; and (H3) that media reporting is perceived to rely more on personal experiences and non-institutional sources than on scientific and expert sources. Data analysis will include descriptive statistical procedures and the construction of composite indicators corresponding to each hypothesis.

Results and conclusions

The study is expected to provide insight into audience perceptions of ethical aspects of media reporting on alternative medicine. Based on existing literature, respondents may perceive an emphasis on positive representations over information on limitations and risks, the presence of promotional elements within media content, and a reliance on personal experiences and non-institutional sources rather than scientific and expert perspectives. The conclusions will be drawn from the analysis of survey data and will assess the extent to which these perceptions align with ethical principles in health-related media communication.

Practical and social implications

The results of this study may be relevant for journalists, media organizations, and communication professionals involved in health-related reporting and may inform discussions on bal-

anced and responsible communication practices. At the societal level, the study may contribute to debates on media responsibility, public trust, and informed health-related decision-making.

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Keywords

alternative medicine, complementary medicine, health communication, media ethics, medical practice

Legitimizing social listening in health emergencies: ethics in EU institutional discourse

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Social listening is becoming an integral part of infodemic management in health related emergencies. European and national authorities are utilizing digital monitoring, AI-assisted analytics and behavioral insights to detect mis/disinformation, assess public sentiment and adjust addressing the public in times of emergencies in real time. The success of social listening tools relies on trust that authorities utilizing these tools enjoy among the public. At the same time, social listening tools raise substantial ethical considerations. This study examines how European Union public health institutions discursively construct and legitimize social listening in crisis communication in health related emergencies and whether their official documents meaningfully address ethical dilemmas identified in the scholarly literature.

Literature review

Recent literature frames social listening as situated at the intersection of public health, governance and democratic legitimacy. Germani et al. (2024), in a systematic scoping review, identify core ethical domains in infodemic management: proportionality, transparency, accountability, privacy protection and community engagement. Taguchi et al. (2023) situate social listening within the Pandemic Accords, while Mahl et al. (2025) emphasize responsible AI, Highlighting explainability, oversight and ethical safeguards

in data-driven risk communication. White et al. (2023) demonstrate how AI-supported social listening introduces additional governance challenges. Trust and legitimacy are central in studies by Unlu et al. (2023) and Wang et al. (2022), which show that public acceptance of digital interventions depends on perceived fairness and institutional credibility.

Methodology

This study applies Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDS) to publicly accessible institutional documents, produced by the European Commission and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) that reference social listening, infodemic management or digital monitoring in health emergencies. Ethical dimensions identified in peer-reviewed literature guide the analysis. The study examines legitimation strategies and how institutional texts address potential ethical risks.

Results and conclusions

The analysis shows that social listening is consistently frames as a necessary and technical instrument for strengthening preparedness, resilience and mis/disinformation response. Institutional documents emphasize urgency, collective protection and innovation, situating digital monitoring as a rational extension of public health governance. Ethical considerations are primarily addressed when referencing legal compliance,

especially with data protection laws. Concerns regarding proportionality, algorithmic bias and democratic oversight received less attention. Discussion of digital exclusion and different visibility of social groups is largely absent. The public is constructed as a population to be monitored and guided rather than an active partner in communication. These findings suggest a discursive gap between scholarly ethical standards and institutional framing, with potential implications for legitimacy and trust in crisis communication.

Practical and social implications

The effectiveness of social listening in health emergencies depends on public trust. Because these tools rely on monitoring digital discourse and applying AI-assisted analytics, their legitimacy is closely tied to perceptions of transparency and accountability. If institutional documents frame social listening as a technical necessity without addressing ethical concerns, they risk reinforcing public mistrust toward health authorities. To sustain trust, institutions must clearly communicate what data are monitored, how analyses inform crisis messaging and what prevents misuse. Addressing algorithmic bias, digital exclusion and representation gaps is also important.

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Keywords

social listening, ethics, institutional discourse, trust, mis/disinformation

Theoretical Foundations of Internal Communication: A Systematic Review

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Internal communication has become a central concern in public relations and communication management research, particularly in the context of organizational complexity, digitalization, and changing employee–organization relationships. Although research on internal communication has expanded substantially, the field remains theoretically fragmented. Studies draw on multiple theories originating in organizational communication, management, psychology, and public relations, often without cumulative theoretical development. Previous work has noted both the rapid growth of the field and the absence of a clearly articulated theoretical core (Grünig, 1992; Lee & Yue, 2020). The purpose of this study is to systematically review the theories used to explain internal communication in academic literature. The study aims to identify dominant theories, examine patterns of theory use, and assess gaps and limitations in existing theorizing, thereby clarifying the theoretical foundations of internal communication research.

Literature review

Internal communication has been conceptualized and studied under a variety of labels, including organizational communication, employee communication, and internal public relations, reflecting its multidisciplinary roots (Goldhaber, 1993; Jablin & Putnam, 2001). Scholars have proposed integrative perspectives, yet definitions and theoretical explanations remain

inconsistent (Kalla, 2005). In public relations research, internal communication has increasingly been framed as a strategic management function focused on relationships with internal stakeholders (Welch & Jackson, 2007; Ruck & Welch, 2012). At the same time, reviews of the literature suggest that internal communication research relies on a wide array of theories that are applied selectively to specific phenomena, such as satisfaction, engagement, or trust, rather than to internal communication as a holistic organizational process (Lee & Yue, 2020). Conceptual work has called for clearer theoretical positioning and stronger integration between organizational communication and public relations perspectives (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2012; Wehmeier & Winkler, 2013).

Methodology

The study employs a systematic literature review following PRISMA guidelines. Web of Science serves as the primary database, with Scopus used as a robustness check. The search includes the terms “internal communication,” “employee communication,” and “organizational communication” in titles, abstracts, and keywords. Theory-related terms are deliberately excluded from the search string to avoid privileging specific theoretical traditions. Articles are included only if they explicitly employ a named theory, theory-based framework, or theoretical model to explain internal communication. A-theoretical and purely descriptive studies are excluded. The unit of analysis is the theory or theory-based

framework used to explain internal communication. The analysis focuses on the types of theories used, their disciplinary origins, what aspects of internal communication they aim to explain, and where their explanatory limits lie.

Results and conclusions

The review is currently in progress. Based on existing conceptual work and prior mappings of the field, the study is expected to reveal a high degree of theoretical pluralism, with no dominant unifying theory structuring internal communication research. Internal communication studies are expected to draw primarily on theories from organizational communication and organizational behavior, with public relations theory used more selectively and inconsistently. Theories are anticipated to be applied instrumentally to explain specific outcomes rather than to theorize internal communication as an integrated organizational function. As a result, the field is expected to exhibit parallel streams of theory use rather than cumulative theoretical development. The final analysis will identify key gaps in theorizing the dynamic, relational, and adaptive dimensions of internal communication and outline directions for future theory development.

Practical and social implications

By clarifying the theoretical foundations of internal communication research, this study is expected to provide scholars with a stronger basis for theory selection and development. For practitioners, improved theoretical coherence can support more reflective and strategically informed internal communication practices. At a societal level, clearer theorizing of internal communication may contribute to a better understanding of how organizational communication shapes employee well-being, engagement, and organizational effectiveness.

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Keywords

communication management; internal communication; systematic literature review; theory

How data accessibility amplifies knowledge gap in civil protection: mapping warning communication documentation across 27 countries

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Introduction / purpose of the study

In cross-national research a persistent challenge emerges: the uneven accessibility and availability of official documentation. While research consortiums might use unified research protocols across countries, the outputs stumble upon the strict barriers of research validity and reliability: in some cases, relevant documents are easily accessible and publicly available, in others they are restricted, fragmented, or scattered across institutions, and in some contexts they may not exist at all. This creates both practical barriers for researchers and deeper questions about social science research replication and transparency (see Damian et al., 2019). This discrepancy doesn't just complicate comparative research; it exposes a deeper knowledge accessibility problem in civil protection, where documentation also indicates how institutions mitigate people's vulnerabilities – scarce documentation refers to a stronger reliance on individual experience and memory but more flexibility for *ad hoc* solutions, whereas extensive regulating reflects a stronger dependence on institutional memory and collective experience, often at the cost of reduced flexibility in countering unforeseen threats in risk and crisis communication (see Torpan et al., 2023).

Methodology

To probe and highlight the problematic uneven access to warning communication documentation, we built an agent-based search algorithm, essentially an agentic workflow to map documents related to warning communication in 27 countries – Albania, Belgium, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, United States of America. To that end we created a research protocol in English and translated the questions into local languages, altogether more than 30 languages. The protocol questionnaire had 17 questions in three thematic blocks: the general governance structure of disaster communication; warning systems used in the country; explicit disaster communication purposes in the documentation. We ran the agent in January 2026 on OpenAI's ChatGPT 5.2 and Google's Gemini Flash 2.5 large language models (LLM), while using local VPN servers to mirror possible local accessibility issues and geoblock restrictions in each country separately. Between the thematic blocks we unloaded the results to a separate file to overcome token limit issues. To verify and further validate the findings, we then compared our agent-based search results with results from an international consortium of researchers

(AlertHub) who carried out the same search manually and independently in each country.

Results / implications

By accompanying manual research with the agentic LLM we mirror the current reality of most search engines having adapted to using LLM-based search (see Breuer et al., 2025). By examining 32 countries, our study highlights how the governance structure of national disaster communication reflects broader gaps in institutional transparency across countries; and importantly, how uneven access to warning communication documents affects knowledge transfer and thus preparedness. Although the analysis is still in progress, we argue that these disparities are not just methodological obstacles but valuable signals pointing to where civil protection systems need to develop, harmonise, or strengthen documentation practices.

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Keywords

warning communication, data accessibility, knowledge gap, capability gap, cross-national research, methodological paper

Artificial Intelligence & Artificial Intelligence Influencers on Crises Management: From Traditional to Digital Public Relations by PR Practitioners

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Crisis communication is positioned as one of the most important implementation areas of public relations practices, and as a communication process that needs to be reorganized and strategically managed. Particularly with changes and developments in communication tools and environment, public relations practices are increasingly taking place in the digital realm. During the digital transformation process, public relations professionals and academics are focusing on new communication technologies and their usage practices (Verčič, D. et al. 2015: 143).

Digital public relations, is defined as public relations practices carried out through digital platforms via new information and communication technologies. It also arises when PR practices are managed on digital platforms. Within this scope, crisis communication management, a practice within public relations, is also implemented in a digital environment. In the context of digital transformation, artificial intelligence (AI) emerges as an implementation area. In its simplest form, AI can be defined as systems created by computer technologies that can mimic human intelligence and behave and make decisions like it. In the context of public relations, AI can be defined as technologies that exhibit human-like cognitive abilities and perform human-like functions in public relations applica-

tions (Galloway & Swiatek, 2018). In the context of public relations, AI's various tasks include assisting in crisis management (Panda G. et al., 2019).

In recent times, it can be said that AI-generated influencers, along with AI applications in the communication processes of organizations, are increasingly gaining prominence and are being effectively implemented as a strategic tool. AI influencers, which are fictional digital personalities/characters created and managed using artificial intelligence, can offer organizations more creative control in processes such as public relations, advertising, and marketing, and can generate more engagement than human influencers (Looia J. & Kahlor L. A. 2024). The implications of this situation are seen in the management of potential and actual crisis situations. The role of corporate image and reputation created by AI influencers and its reflections in crisis management, and the use of influencers in crisis processes, are becoming increasingly evident.

This study, which evaluates the general impact of the digital transformation process on public relations practices, focuses on how artificial intelligence and AI applications are integrated into public relations practices. In line with the study's aim and scope, the main research ques-

tion is to assess the role of using AI influencers and its reflections in crisis management. Within this framework, the research questions are as follows:

RQ1: Are there reflections of the implications of organizations using artificial intelligence/AI influencers for public relations practices, and how?

RQ2: What is the role of organizations using artificial intelligence/AI influencers on perceived corporate image and reputation?

RQ3: How are the implications and practical uses of AI/AI influencers by organizations in crisis communication management?

This study aims to reveal the implications of using AI influencers in the crisis communication management process, as perceived by public relations practitioners. The perceived impact on corporate image and reputation (before and after crisis management) is also evaluated. The research method is qualitative, and the interview technique was chosen as the data collection tool. Interviews were conducted with managers of public relations agencies operating in Istanbul. The findings show that the use of artificial intelligence in public relations processes can make communication strategies more efficient, effective, and personalized, and plays an effective role in the pre-crisis preparation phase and in corporate reputation management.

Participants indicated that AI influencers play a significant role as a strategic communication tool in stakeholder communication, image management, reputation management, and crisis communication. AI influencers offer significant advantages over traditional methods, such as rapid feedback, consistency, engagement, and customizability. The study concluded that AI has great potential to accelerate, improve, and optimize crisis management processes with a faster and more strategic approach compared to traditional methods, by influencing proactive and reactive approaches and supporting the decisions of crisis response teams through accurate data collection.

The findings of this study will contribute to the literature on public relations practices regarding the use of artificial intelligence and influencers in crisis management, and may also allow for more in-depth research on the subject. From a practical/managerial perspective, presenting the use of artificial intelligence and influencers, particularly in and after crisis communication management, through the perspectives of practitioners provides a professional assessment. It can offer a starting point, a roadmap, and a perspective for future and more comprehensive studies.

The importance of this study can be summarized as follows: the evaluation conducted in line with the study's main objective, the relevance of AI influencer usage practices, and their reflections during and after crisis periods, are revealed through the experiences and predictions of public relations practitioners.

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Keywords

crises management, artificial intelligence, artificial intelligence influencers, image, reputation management.

Spectres of Digital Authoritarianism: Statecrafted Collective Forgetting on Social Media Platforms in China

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This ongoing study investigates how controversial cultural memory is constructed, curated, and governed on Chinese social media platforms through the intertwined actions of the party-state, major technology companies, and platform users. Rather than treating memory as a passive repository of the past, the project conceptualizes cultural memory as an institutionalized and infrastructural process through which societies determine what becomes collectively knowable, sayable, and transmissible across time. On digital platforms, memory is not simply preserved or lost; it is actively produced through practices of amplification, deletion, indexing, and algorithmic ranking. Cultural memory therefore constitutes a critical site of governance, where struggles over visibility, legitimacy, and temporality shape how political realities are understood and lived.

Building on scholarship that defines cultural memory as an objectified form of collective remembrance, this study advances a processual approach that emphasizes continuous selection, narration, and erasure. Through these processes, subjectivities are constituted and political order stabilized. What counts as “the past” is neither neutral nor complete but is mediated by institutions that authorize certain narratives while marginalizing others. In China’s platformized media environment—where state regulation, corporate

infrastructures, and everyday participation converge—cultural memory provides a productive lens for examining how power operates through communication technologies. Social media platforms do not merely host discussions of the past; they structure the conditions under which remembering and forgetting become possible.

To theorize these dynamics, the project places Foucault’s notion of governmentality in dialogue with Derrida’s hauntology. Foucault’s account of governmentality and biopolitics highlights how modern power extends beyond formal lawmaking and overt repression into the mundane organization(s) of everyday life. Power operates through dispersed techniques that manage populations, guide conduct, and regulate visibility. Digital platforms function as such disciplinary sites: algorithms rank content, interfaces guide attention, moderation systems filter speech, and metrics of engagement determine circulation. These mechanisms shape what becomes visible, durable, and collectively significant. From this perspective, statecraft is not a fixed structure but an ongoing and iterative performance that governs populations by continuously redefining the boundaries of legitimacy and deviance. Cultural memory is therefore governed not only through explicit censorship but through the routine infrastructures that sort, prioritize, and distribute attention.

At the same time, an exclusively governmental framework risks portraying power as seamless and totalizing. Derrida's hauntology offers an essential corrective by foregrounding the constitutive role of absence. For Derrida, memory is never fully present or self-identical; it is structured through deferral, exclusion, and erasure. What has been suppressed does not simply disappear but persists as a spectral trace that unsettles the present. In the case of controversial memories, denial, silencing, and prohibition are not failures of remembrance but conditions through which remembrance operates. The unspeakable and the unrepresentable continue to shape meaning precisely through their absence. By bringing hauntology into dialogue with governmentality, this study conceptualizes cultural memory as simultaneously regulated and haunted: produced through infrastructures of control yet persistently marked by the return of erased pasts. Forgetting, in this sense, is not the negation of memory but one of its central modalities.

This theoretical framing addresses a limitation in existing research on contentious events and collective memory in the Chinese internet context. Much of the literature relies on a binary model of state repression versus popular resistance, interpreting memory politics as either top-down control or bottom-up counter-memory. While useful, this dichotomy obscures the more complex and negotiated processes through which cultural memory is co-produced. In practice, remembrance and forgetting are shaped not only by the party-state but also by platform corporations driven by traffic and data extraction, as well as by users whose everyday practices generate and circulate content. Platforms must balance political risk with commercial imperatives, enabling limited participation while managing visibility. The result is not simple suppression but modulation: narratives are amplified, fragmented, or dispersed through subtle manipulations of ranking, aggregation, and connectivity. These temporal and infrastructural controls determine which events accumulate collective attention and which fade before achieving historical inscription.

Methodologically, such forms of absence were historically difficult to observe. Practices of erasure often leave little evidence, rendering the governance of forgetting empirically elusive. The digital era, however, provides new opportunities. Algorithmic footprints, cached pages, archived links, and deleted posts leave residual traces that make disappearance partially visible. Rather than treating missing content as a lack of data, this study treats disappearance itself as data. By analyzing how posts are removed, downgraded, or rendered inaccessible, we examine forgetting as an active and systematic practice. Making absence analytically visible allows cultural memory to be studied not only through what remains but through what has been deliberately prevented from remaining.

Empirically, the study focuses on the contested memory of COVID-19, one of the most socially consequential and politically sensitive issues in recent Chinese public life. The pandemic generated widespread suffering and debate, yet discussions concerning responsibility, governance failures, and collective trauma were frequently subject to platform intervention. To investigate how these debates were curated, we compiled a dataset of Weibo trending topics related to COVID-19 over the past four years using GitHub-based archives that track historical hot-search rankings. Trending lists are key infrastructures of attention: they aggregate dispersed posts into shared focal points and thus play a central role in transforming individual experiences into collective memory.

We systematically revisited archived links and assessed their accessibility. Beyond outright removal, many links remained technically accessible but were stripped of their trending status. These topics could still be located through direct URLs but were disconnected from the aggregation mechanisms that enable large-scale public discussion. Such practices disperse collective attention and weaken the formation of shared narratives without fully erasing traces. These findings demonstrate how platforms reorganize cultural memory not only through censorship

but through granular manipulations of visibility and connectivity that subtly determine what becomes memorable.

Ongoing discourse analysis of these unavailable or restricted topics further examines how official language frames absence and legitimizes deletion. Together, these empirical observations reveal how state regulation, corporate incentives, and technical design converge to curate the boundaries of collective remembrance. Cultural memory, in this environment, is assembled through layered negotiations rather than imposed through unilateral control.

By placing Foucault's genealogy of power in sustained conversation with Derrida's hauntology, this study advances a framework for understanding cultural memory in authoritarian digital contexts as a governed yet persistently unstable field. Memory and forgetting thus operate as intertwined techniques through which political authority, technological mediation, and social experience are co-produced. In foregrounding both regulation and haunting, this project demonstrates that cultural memory is neither fully controllable nor spontaneously free, but continuously negotiated across infrastructures of power and absence. Through this lens, the study contributes a new approach to analyzing information governance in contemporary China and offers broader insight into how digital platforms reshape the politics of memory worldwide.

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Authentic Vulnerability as a Leadership Resource in Times of Crisis

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In times of crisis, organizational leaders operate under heightened public scrutiny, where communication becomes a central leadership resource for managing uncertainty and accountability. In these contexts, leaders are evaluated not only on decisions and actions but also on how they express emotion, acknowledge vulnerability, and accept responsibility. Research in risk and crisis communication shows that leaders' emotional expressions can shape stakeholder reactions, particularly perceptions of empathy, sincerity, and trust (e.g., Claeys et al., 2013, 2022; Stephens et al., 2019). At the same time, findings remain inconsistent: similar emotional displays may enhance credibility in some crises while appearing exaggerated, self-centred, or manipulative in others. Existing frameworks, including responsibility-based approaches such as Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007), offer limited explanation for these divergent outcomes when emotion and leadership identity are foregrounded.

This paper advances the concept of authentic vulnerability to address this gap. Authentic vulnerability refers to leadership communication that combines emotional openness with consistency in identity and a visible acceptance of responsibility. To conceptualise how vulnerability and authenticity intersect, the paper introduces an authenticity–vulnerability matrix structured along two dimensions: the degree of emotional exposure and the degree of perceived authentic-

ity. The framework distinguishes four leadership communication styles in crises: controlled messaging, performative vulnerability, grounded transparency, and authentic vulnerability. Rather than treating emotion as inherently beneficial or harmful, the matrix conceptualises vulnerability as communicative exposure to accountability and risk, and authenticity as a relational judgment inferred by publics rather than an intrinsic leadership trait.

The framework is illustrated through ten leader-centred crisis cases spanning different organisational scales and cultural contexts, including multinational corporations, scale-ups, and owner-led organisations. The cases focus on situations in which senior leaders were directly implicated in both the crisis and the response, such as industrial accidents, technological failures, cultural backlash, workplace controversies, and aviation disasters. Comparative analysis shows that emotional expression alone does not constitute vulnerability, nor does it guarantee credibility. Leaders were perceived as vulnerable when they publicly accepted responsibility, acknowledged limits to control, or incurred consequences extending beyond symbolic apology. Credibility emerged when such exposure aligned with prior leadership identity and was sustained over time, although evaluations often diverged across competing publics.

By distinguishing emotional expression from vulnerability and treating credibility as an au-

dience-based judgment, the authenticity–vulnerability matrix extends emotion-centred crisis communication research and complements responsibility-focused models. The paper contributes a diagnostic lens for analysing leadership communication in fragmented and polarised public environments, where crisis effectiveness cannot be assessed solely through reputational repair but must account for uneven trust and contested evaluations.

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Exploring the Impact of Employees' Work-Related AI Use on Employee Empowerment and Innovative Job Behavior: Evidence from the U.S. and China

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a transformative force in workplace practice, shaping how employees interact with technologies. As the U.S. and China are the two largest countries in the AI industry, it is meaningful to compare how American and Chinese employees use AI and examine its motivation and impact.

Drawing from social cognitive theory, this study conducted a comparative survey of 824 employees working in large organizations in the U.S. and China in 2025. The purpose of the study was to empirically test a conceptual model that links perceived competence of using AI, work-related AI use, employee empowerment, and innovative behaviors in the workplace. We also compared the findings of the study in the U.S. and China. Furthermore, we examined how employee empowerment mediates the effect of work-related AI use on innovative behaviors.

Literature Review

Social cognitive theory provides a robust framework for understanding employees' motivation of using AI. This theory suggests that individu-

als' perceived competence influences their behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Thus, our study applied this theory to the AI context and examined how employees' perceived competence of using AI affects their work-related AI usage.

The rapid development of AI has spurred a wave of scholarly inquiry into AI. However, few studies have examined the effects of employees' work-related AI usage (i.e., purposive use of AI systems to accomplish work tasks, generate ideas, and make informed decisions) on empowerment and innovative behaviors, especially cross-cultural studies. Employee empowerment is a psychological state in which employees feel both capable and in control of their work (Men & Stacks, 2013), which leads to innovative behavior (Nuwagaba et al., 2025). Employee innovative behavior refers to the intentional generation, promotion, and implementation of novel and useful ideas, processes, or solutions within an organization (Lukes & Stephan, 2017). Although innovative job behaviors have been extensively investigated in the management field, public relations scholars have seldom studied employee innovative behavior.

Methodology

The sample for this study consisted of employees who were currently working at large organizations in the U.S. and China and were Internet users. Data collection was implemented with the assistance of Dynata and Sojump. They randomly selected qualified participants from their panels in the U.S. and China, respectively.

After conducting a pilot study in the U.S. and China to ensure the validity of the measurements, the researchers conducted a national Web-based survey in both countries from February to March 2025. A total of 409 American employees and 415 Chinese employees participated in the survey. The measurement items for all variables were adapted from established scales in the public relations and management scholarship.

Results and Conclusions

The results of confirmatory factor analysis suggested that the measurement model fits well with the U.S. and Chinese data. We then conducted a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis with R to test the proposed model. The results suggested that both the U.S. and Chinese data adequately fit the proposed model.

Results showed that American and Chinese employees perceived competence in using AI shapes their work-related AI use. Such AI usage empowers employees at work, which eventually translates to their innovative behaviors at work. However, cross-cultural comparison revealed that in the U.S. sample, work-related AI use promotes innovative behavior through both direct and indirect pathways, which is mediated by employee empowerment. By comparison, in the Chinese sample, AI use predicts innovative behavior solely through the mediation of empowerment. The divergence in the two samples implied that cultural context plays a critical role in shaping how AI adoption translates into workplace innovation.

Practical and Social Implications

The findings of this study provide strategic guidance for large organizations in the U.S. and China. They can design experiential learning opportunities (e.g., on-the-job AI experimentation) for employees to build both skills and confidence. Training should emphasize the creative and problem-solving potential of AI, helping employees reframe the technology as a means of empowerment. Organizations' internal communication about AI should frame AI as a collaborative partner that extends human potential.

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Keywords

AI competence, work-related AI use, employee empowerment, innovative job behavior

One Bad Algorithm, All Bad Algorithms? Examining Public Responses to AI-Managed CSR Practices Following AI-Driven Crises

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

In recent years, organizations have increasingly deployed AI to manage and support CSR activities, from automating grantmaking to forecasting CSR outcomes through agentic AI (ACCP, 2025). At the same time, the growing reliance on AI have introduced new organizational risks. AI failures, ranging from biased algorithmic outputs to safety-related system breakdowns can undermine public trust and cause reputational harms. To this end, a critical question emerges: *How do publics respond to an organization's AI-managed CSR practices when the organization encounters an AI-driven crisis?*

Situated at the intersection between the increasing adoption of AI in CSR practices and the heightened risks associated with AI failures, this study examines how publics respond to AI-managed CSR practices when AI plays a critical role in *both* an organization's CSR practices and the cause of an organization's crisis. Importantly, we also examine how people's comfort level with intelligent technologies act as a boundary condition.

Literature Review

In this study, AI-managed CSR practices refer to organizational adoption of AI in enabling and managing CSR initiatives. While industry evi-

dence suggests that AI is increasingly integrated into CSR activities, the growing reliance on AI also raises concerns about how AI-related challenges may impact evaluation of AI-managed CSR practices. Particularly, AI-driven crises—organizational crises triggered by algorithmic or AI system failures—present an emerging crisis type that complicates this landscape.

Drawing on prior research on *algorithmic transference* (Longoni et al., 2023), this study examines whether publics generalize perceptions from a failing AI system involved in a crisis to another AI-enabled practice within the organization. Because AI systems are often perceived as relatively homogeneous and distinct from human actors, failure in one AI system may negatively influence perception of another, even when the systems are functionally unrelated.

Importantly, we propose that such effects are contingent on individuals' comfort level with AI. Previous research suggests that for individuals *less* comfortable with intelligent technologies, AI-managed CSR may evoke perception of warmth, thereby offsetting negative AI stereotype of being “cold” (Wu et al., 2024). Therefore, we hypothesize that *algorithmic transference* will only occur among individuals with *higher* comfort with AI, leading to more negative company evaluation when informed of AI-managed CSR practices following an AI-driven (vs. hu-

man-driven) crisis, whereas such difference will not emerge among those with lower AI comfort.

Methodology

A 2 (crisis cause: AI-driven vs. human-driven) x 2 (CSR type: AI-managed vs. human-managed) online experimental design was conducted with 245 participants in the US. Crisis cause was manipulated using two news briefs, reporting a crisis involving a fictitious financial services company. The AI-driven crisis condition depicted the crisis as the company offering high-risk investment products to retirement age clients due to AI system errors; the human-driven crisis attributed the failure to human errors. CSR type was manipulated using two articles mimicking real news stories. Both stories described the same company's CSR practices. The AI-managed CSR condition highlighted the company's use of AI in configuring and improving CSR programs; in the human-managed CSR condition, the same tasks were performed by a human team. People's comfort level with AI, operationalized as their uneasiness with robots, was measured.

Results and Conclusions

Findings showed conditional support for *algorithmic transference*, which was observed *only* among AI-comfortable individuals. Specifically, when these individuals were informed of AI-managed CSR practices following an AI-driven (vs. human-driven) crisis, they reported more negative company evaluation. For individuals who are not comfortable with AI, their company evaluation after seeing AI-managed CSR practices stay consistent regardless of whether it followed an AI-driven or human-driven crisis.

Practical and Social Implications

Our findings offer guidance for public relations practitioners on navigating the integration of AI in CSR practices. Practitioners should be careful in implementing and communicating about a company's AI-managed CSR initiatives following AI-related failures. Greater comfort

level with AI does not necessarily translate into greater "tolerance" in AI-driven crises; instead, AI-comfortable publics may become more skeptical of AI-enabled practice in other areas, inadvertently triggering *algorithmic transference*. As such, practitioners should consider providing clarifications on the different functionalities of AI systems within an organization when AI-managed CSR practices are introduced after an AI-driven crisis.

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Keywords

AI-managed CSR practices, AI-driven crisis, uneasiness with robots

It takes more than motivation in life to be receptive to palliative care: The mediating role of death discussion and perception of accessibility

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The world is aging rapidly and the increasing burden of diseases requiring immense need for greater end of life (EoL) care can no longer be ignored. Despite the advantages of receiving palliative care for patients and their families facing the challenges of life-threatening illness, significant barriers hindering the acceptance of palliative care continue to persist (Yan et al., 2020).

Singapore shares similar concerns regarding receptiveness to palliative care as other developed countries (e.g., Trivedi, 2019). A recent nation-wide survey conducted in the city-state suggested that only half of the participants were aware of palliative care while even fewer (48%) were receptive to receiving the care for themselves (Yeo et al., 2023). Considering that Singapore is projected to reach a “super aged” status in 2026 (Lau, 2024), promoting palliative care receptiveness has become an urgent task for the Singapore’s health authorities.

However, despite the policymakers’ efforts to improve the offering of palliative care services in Singapore, many individuals are still averse to receiving it for themselves and their loved ones (Yeo et al., 2023). The unwillingness to talk about death was found to be a barrier as death discussion has been shown to positively facilitate enhanced knowledge and favorable attitudes towards EoL issues (Sutherland, 2019). Individuals’ willingness to talk about death is a necessary condition for engagement that leads to health

literacy, ultimately increasing receptiveness to palliative care (Ladin et al., 2018).

In addition to 1) willingness to engage in death conversations and 2) health literacy, two other key determinants – 3) perceived accessibility to palliative care (Dang et al., 2022), and 4) motivational outlook on life - have been demonstrated to positively influence receptiveness. Our study aims to close knowledge gaps by investigating the associations of the four variables and their influence on receptiveness of palliative care by testing our proposed conceptual model on the Singapore population. To this end, we asked the following two research questions and further developed four hypotheses:

RQ1: What roles do each of the four factors play in impacting the receptiveness of palliative care and what are their relationships to each other?

RQ2: Given that health literacy and motivation in life have been shown to be strong predictors of palliative care receptiveness, are their roles mediated by the comfort level of death discussion and perceived importance of accessibility?

We conducted a cross-sectional online survey with 926 respondents in Singapore and tested our model by performing the advanced mediation package of jamovi. Our findings showed that health literacy, death discussion and perceived importance of accessibility were positive-

ly associated with palliative care receptiveness. Motivational outlook on life and receptiveness on the other hand were fully mediated by comfort level of death discussion and perceived importance of accessibility. Implications on public health communication and policy suggest that only by facilitating death discussion on the personal and national levels and perceived significance of palliative care accessibility can public health authorities hope to better provide a more seamless care journey for patients at the end of life.

Keywords

palliative care receptiveness; health literacy; comfort in death discussion; accessibility; motivation in life

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Employee Responses to AI-Driven Organizational Change: Leadership, Communication, and Readiness

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

As organizations increasingly adopt artificial intelligence (AI) to automate tasks and augment professional work, many struggle to realize meaningful returns on these investments (McKinsey & Company, 2025; MIT, 2025). Prior research suggests that the success of AI adoption depends less on technological capability and more on how employees interpret, accept, and enact AI-related change in their daily work (Markarius et al., 2020; Raisch & Krakowski, 2021). Yet existing organizational change research often treats leadership and internal communication as uniformly effective across change contexts, without considering whether AI represents a qualitatively distinct form of transformation.

This study examines how dialogic internal communication and transformational leadership shape employee responses to AI-driven organizational change. Focusing on public relations professionals as an early-adopting, communication-intensive occupational group (Boston Consulting Group, 2025; Uysal & Deng, 2025), the study investigates how these two mechanisms influence employees' commitment to AI-related change, attitudes toward AI adoption, and actual AI usage. It further theorizes change commitment as a mediating mechanism (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002) and organizational AI readiness as a contextual boundary condition (Hossain et al., 2016; Yin et al., 2024).

Literature Review

Organizational change scholarship consistently emphasizes employees as active agents whose reactions determine whether change initiatives succeed or fail (Oreg et al., 2011). In AI-driven change, uncertainty surrounding job relevance, skills, ethics, and professional identity heightens the importance of leadership and internal communication (Roth, 2025). Transformational leadership has been shown to foster motivation, meaning, and commitment during complex change (Herold et al., 2008; Oreg & Berson, 2019), while dialogic communication emphasizes openness, participation, and mutual understanding (Yang et al., 2015).

However, limited research has examined whether these mechanisms operate similarly when change involves advanced technologies such as AI. AI adoption challenges not only workflows but also expertise and authority, potentially altering how employees respond to leadership and communication efforts (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021). This study builds on change, leadership, and technology adoption literature by proposing that transformational leadership and dialogic communication influence AI-related outcomes through commitment to change, and that organizational AI readiness conditions the effectiveness of these mechanisms.

Methodology

The study employed a cross-sectional online survey of 612 public relations professionals recruited through an academic–industry partnership between February and June 2025. Participants represented diverse organizational settings, career stages, and generations.

Validated multi-item scales were used to measure dialogic communication (Yang et al., 2015), transformational leadership (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004), commitment to AI-related change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002), organizational AI readiness (Yin et al., 2024), attitudes toward AI adoption (Myers & Goodwin, 2011), and AI usage (Man Tang et al., 2022).

Data were analyzed using path analysis with robust maximum likelihood estimation in *lavaan*. Indirect effects were tested using Monte Carlo simulations with 10,000 replications (Pesigan & Cheung, 2024). The model demonstrated acceptable fit.

Results and Conclusions

Results revealed clear differentiation between leadership and communication effects. Transformational leadership was positively associated with employees' commitment to AI-related change and directly predicted AI usage. Its effects on AI adoption attitudes and usage were significantly mediated by change commitment, underscoring commitment as a central psychological mechanism during AI-driven change.

In contrast, dialogic communication did not exert significant direct effects on commitment, attitudes, or usage. However, its indirect effects became significant under conditions of high organizational AI readiness, suggesting that dialogic processes require structural and technological support to translate into behavioral outcomes.

Notably, organizational AI readiness did not condition the effects of transformational leadership, indicating that leadership functions as a relatively robust sensegiving mechanism even

in lower-readiness environments. Overall, the findings suggest that AI-driven change amplifies the importance of leadership-driven meaning-making, while dialogic communication becomes effective only when supported by credible organizational capacity.

Practical and Social Implications

The findings suggest that organizations should not rely on participatory communication alone to secure employee support for AI adoption. In contexts characterized by technological uncertainty, transformational leadership that provides vision, confidence, and direction is critical for building commitment (Hill et al., 2012; Yue et al., 2019).

At the same time, dialogic communication becomes consequential when organizations demonstrate tangible readiness through resources, infrastructure, and expertise. Encouraging employee voice without such support risks symbolic participation rather than meaningful engagement. From a broader societal perspective, these findings highlight that responsible AI adoption depends not only on technological innovation but also on leadership, communication, and organizational preparedness that enable employees to adapt without undue uncertainty or disengagement.

Keywords

artificial intelligence; organizational change; transformational leadership; dialogic communication; AI readiness; public relations

Synthetification of Public Communication: Introducing the Concept and Its Relevance for Public Relations Research and Practice

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Introduction and purpose of the study

Digital public communication is currently undergoing a profound structural transformation (Jungheer & Schroeder, 2023). Automated and algorithmic systems—such as generative artificial intelligence, recommendation algorithms, automated moderation tools, and social bots—are no longer merely infrastructures or neutral channels of communication. Instead, they are active participants that shape visibility, meaning-making, and interaction in public arenas (Epstein et al., 2023; Hepp et al., 2023).

Against this background, the presentation introduces the concept of the *synthetification of public communication*, i.e., the fact that a growing part of communication today is created, distributed, and shaped by automated systems that are active participants in communication and increasingly outperform established actors. This creates a new context for organizational communication regarding the conditions for the production, circulation, and use of information and meaning.

While related debates have so far focused primarily on democracy, journalism, and political communication, their implications our discipline remain under-theorized. The purpose of this presentation is therefore to position synthetification as a key analytical lens for research and practice. The guiding question is: How does

the *synthetification of public communication reshape the conditions, roles, and responsibilities of communication management in digital arenas, and what conceptual and practical challenges emerge from this transformation?*

Literature review

The study builds on scholarship addressing the transformation of the public sphere in the digital age (Bruns, 2023; Eisenegger & Schäfer, 2023; Habermas, 2023). Research on platformization (Smyrnaiois & Baisnée, 2023), algorithmic governance, and digitally mediated public arenas (Badham et al., 2024) has demonstrated that contemporary public communication is increasingly fragmented, competitive, and shaped by platform logics rather than deliberative ideals. Recent work further highlights the growing influence of non-human actors: recommendation systems structure attention and visibility (Gorwa et al., 2020), automated moderation systems exercise normative power, and generative AI systems participate in the production of discourse (Esposito, 2025). Parallel to this, the notion of “synthetic” media has been used to describe artificially generated or manipulated content, such as deepfakes (Godulla & Hoffmann, 2025), while the term “synthetification” has recently been proposed to capture broader processes through which public opinion formation itself becomes

increasingly artificial (Saura Garcia, 2025).

However, existing literature has largely overlooked how these developments affect organizational communication and public relations. Disciplinary research on automated communication focuses mainly on tools, ethics, or efficiency (Weller & Lock, 2025). The profound structural transformation of the communicative context (Kelm, 2025) and the relevance of “simulated communication” (Wloka & Zerfass, 2026) and similar effects have only recently been addressed. Therefore, a unifying concept to analyze these changes from an organizational perspective is needed.

Methodology

The presentation is based on a conceptual analysis grounded in an integrative review of interdisciplinary literature from communication science, media studies, philosophy, political communication, sociology, and strategic communication. Rather than presenting empirical findings, the study synthesizes existing theoretical approaches and empirical insights to develop a coherent conceptual framework. This approach helps to identify analytical dimensions of synthetification and formulate research questions that can guide future empirical studies.

Results

The main result of the study is the systematic elaboration of the concept of synthetification of public communication and its relevance for public relations research and practice. The presentation outlines the emerging new context for communication management that affects three central dimensions:

First, synthetification *challenges established practices of monitoring public discourses and analyzing stakeholders*, as communicators increasingly have to deal with synthetic signals, manipulated content, and uncertain attribution. Second, it *reconfigures content production* because generative systems promise efficiency and scalability

but also raise epistemic, ethical, and reputational risks, such as hallucinations or the erosion of authenticity. Third, synthetification *reshapes dissemination and visibility*, as organizations must adapt to algorithmically curated public arenas in which content reach depends on opaque and constantly changing logics.

Beyond these functional aspects, the presentation raises broader questions about the future role of public relations, highlighting a paradoxical situation in which organizations are simultaneously affected by synthetification and actively contribute to it through their own use of automated systems.

Practical and social implications

For communication professionals, the synthetification of public communication entails both challenges and opportunities. The presentation outlines three broad strategic responses: *Adaptation strategies* include optimizing content for algorithmic and generative systems (e.g., GEO = Generative Engine Optimization) or developing in-depth and authentic content that should prevail in the new environment. *Avoidance strategies* focus on consciously negating platforms and debates that are distorted by automated communication. *Circumvention strategies* involve investing in alternative communicative arenas and relational formats, such as human-led and face-to-face communication, or in owned digital platforms where algorithms can be controlled.

By introducing synthetification as a core concept, the study offers both scholars and practitioners a framework to better understand and navigate the ongoing transformation.

Keywords

Automation – Communication Management – Digitalization – Public communication – Public sphere

Using Influencers to Divert Attention from Corporate Crises: Computational Evidence for Third-Party Bolstering in TikTok Sponsorships

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Introduction and Purpose

The growing prominence of influencers in business communication has reshaped how companies manage reputation and respond to public reactions during and after crises. Rather than relying on explicit endorsements, companies sometimes engage influencers to highlight positive organizational attributes unrelated to the crisis itself, such as products, initiatives, or brand affiliations, with the strategic aim of redirecting stakeholder attention and reshaping public discourse. This study conceptualizes this practice as *influencer diversion* and examines its implications for contemporary corporate crisis communication. We argue that influencer diversion constitutes a third-party-initiated form of crisis management, distinct from traditional organization-centered approaches, and extends scholarship on bolstering by theorizing it as a third-party practice.

Guided by these aims, the study addresses two research questions: (RQ1) Do companies strategically increase influencer partnerships for diversionary purposes during the post-crisis stage? and (RQ2) How effective are these third-party bolstering efforts in reshaping public sentiment and restoring stakeholder trust?

Literature Review

Existing research on influencer endorsements during corporate crises is limited and suggests that such practices often signal persuasive intent (Singh et al., 2020) and pose reputational risks to influencers (Casais & Gomes, 2022). *Influencer diversion* differs in that it allows influencers to maintain greater reputational independence and aligns with diversion strategies identified in prior crisis communication research (Huang et al., 2005). Meanwhile, the content of such diverting messages aligns with the bolstering strategy, a supplementary approach through which organizations remind stakeholders of past good works (Coombs, 2007). Because self-initiated bolstering efforts are often met with skepticism, influencer-initiated bolstering may represent a more credible alternative, thereby providing a theoretical basis for empirically examining this practice. Building on this literature, we identify a gap in empirical evidence regarding influencer diversion and argue for its relevance as a crisis communication strategy.

Methodology

We adopted a computational approach to analyze a real-world crisis case involving influencers. We focused on TikTok due to its prominence as a social media platform, rich audiovisual data,

and centrality in contemporary influencer communication. We selected the January 2024 Boeing 737 MAX incident (the Alaska Airlines mid-air door-plug detachment) as an industry-wide crisis. We collected a complete archive of sponsored TikTok videos associated with 11 major U.S. airlines from January 6, 2023, to January 6, 2025, yielding over 1.5 million videos. Using regression discontinuity design and interrupted time-series analyses, we assessed post-crisis shifts in sponsorship volume and sentiment and further explored the thematic content of the videos and associated user comments.

Results and Conclusions

Findings revealed that Alaska Airlines, the company most directly implicated, experienced a statistically significant surge in sponsored influencer content during the first three months following the incident, a pattern not observed among less-affected competitors (e.g., Hawaiian or American Airlines) or in historical seasonal baselines. The observed time lag may reflect the time required to negotiate influencer partnerships during a reputational crisis. Meanwhile, sponsored content largely avoided crisis-related topics and instead focused on unrelated themes, while user comments suggested that public attention was redirected away from the crisis.

Practical and Social Implications

This study identifies influencer diversion as a practically distinct, empirically observable, yet rarely examined crisis management strategy that companies deploy in response to crises. The findings demonstrate how third-party communicators can be leveraged to shape public attention and discourse, informing contemporary crisis communication practice. They also underscore the growing importance of managing influencer partnerships not only as marketing assets but as crisis communication tools, particularly in attention-driven social media ecosystems. At the same time, the findings suggest that such practices may blur the boundary between routine promotion and crisis management. Although

third-party bolstering may appear more authentic than organization-initiated messaging, it can also complicate public accountability and diffuse corporate responsibility during crises. These dynamics raise important implications for platform governance, disclosure norms, and public expectations regarding transparency, contributing to ongoing conversations about ethical crisis communication and the societal consequences of algorithmically amplified communication.

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Crisis Communication, Influencer, Diversion, Computational Methods.



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