

**Organizational resilience in the digital era:  
leveraging social media platforms for Crisis Communication**

*Ana Mafalda Matias*

PhD in Communication Sciences  
Polytechnic University of Viseu, School of Education,  
Department of Communication and Art (Portugal)  
[anamafalda@esev.ipv.pt](mailto:anamafalda@esev.ipv.pt)

*Ezel Türk*

PhD in Public Relations and Social Media  
Istanbul University, Faculty of Communication,  
Department of Public Relations and Publicity (Turkey)

*Ana Lopes*

*MA in Applied Communication*  
Polytechnic University of Viseu, School of Education,  
Department of Communication and Art (Portugal)

*Abstract:*

This paper explores the critical role of crisis communication in contemporary organizations, emphasizing the growing importance of digital media in shaping communication strategies. As technological advancements and societal shifts redefine how institutions interact with stakeholders, entities face increasing pressure to safeguard their reputations and maintain public trust, particularly in times of crisis. Drawing on recent data predicting a rise in unforeseen crises, this study examines how crisis communication serves as a strategic framework for risk identification, prevention, and responsive action. Special attention is given to the integration of traditional and digital communication tools, as well as the principles of transparency, timeliness and consistency in managing reputational risks. The paper proposes a coding categorization model to support future empirical research, offering a structured approach for analyzing organizational responses in crisis scenarios. Ultimately, the findings highlight the necessity of adaptative, proactive, and multi-platform communication strategies that enable institutions to respond effectively in an increasing complex and fast-paced media environment.

*Keywords:*

Crisis communication strategies  
Reputation management  
Digital media in crisis management  
Crisis response frameworks  
Comprehensive crisis communication

## *Introduction*

In the contemporary era, technological advancements and profound transformations in societal communication practices demand a heightened focus on organizational communication strategies. Entities must not only protect and enhance their reputations but also cultivate a positive public image through effective messaging to diverse stakeholders. The evolution of new media has emerged as a pivotal element in this communication paradigm, marking its prominence in the second decade of the 21st century, and organizations are increasingly recognizing the potential of these platforms as conduits for disseminating critical information, particularly in mitigating the adverse effects of negative events that could severely impact their reputations.

Historically, crises have pervaded various sectors of human activity, arising from an array of risks inherent in the human condition. Data from the Institute for Crisis Management (2020) indicates a projected exponential increase in unpredictable crises over the coming years, underscoring the necessity for governments, institutions, and enterprises to be adeptly prepared to respond. Effective crisis communication emerges as an essential theoretical framework for identifying risks, preventing crises, and responding decisively when crises occur. Developing comprehensive crisis communication strategies that address the unique contexts of different organizations is imperative. Such strategies should involve pre-established protocols that identify relevant stakeholders and outline effective engagement with the media (Payton, 2021; Contreras-Pacheco, Álvarez-Arciniegas & Garnica-Rugeles, 2024).

Moreover, a thorough examination of crisis communication encompasses the principles of effective messaging, emphasizing the critical stages of information exchange before, during, and after a crisis. Key elements such as transparency, consistency, and timeliness are essential in mitigating reputational damage and restoring public trust. The rapid proliferation of social media and digital platforms has transformed the landscape of crisis communication, presenting both opportunities for real-time engagement and challenges associated with the swift dissemination of information, including the risk of misinformation (Civelek, Çemberci & Eralp, 2016).

This paper aims to investigate best practices in crisis communication, exploring relevant concepts and providing an analytical framework for understanding the adaptation of crisis management strategies in unfavorable conditions within the digital environment. The research paper proposes coding categorization as a framework for future empirical studies, thereby offering a theoretical + practical contribution.

Ultimately, the findings will reinforce the necessity of an integrated and agile communication approach that leverages both traditional and digital channels to ensure comprehensive crisis management in an increasingly volatile global landscape.

### *1. Crisis Communication in organizations – conceptualizations, importance, objectives*

Crisis communication has become an essential aspect of organizational management, particularly in today's volatile and interconnected global environment. As organizations face increasing risks, including natural disasters, technological failures, and reputational threats, effective crisis communication strategies are crucial for safeguarding institutional integrity and maintaining stakeholder trust. In light of these challenges, organizations are compelled to develop robust frameworks for crisis communication that not only address immediate concerns but also contribute to long-term resilience (Lauran et al., 2019; Snoeijers & Poels, 2018). This paper discusses key conceptualizations of crisis

communication, its importance in organizational resilience, and the primary objectives that guide communication strategies during crises.

Crisis communication is defined as the process of conveying information to stakeholders during a crisis situation, aimed at mitigating damage and facilitating recovery. It encompasses a range of activities, including information dissemination, stakeholder engagement, and message management. According to Coombs (2007), crisis communication can be conceptualized through the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which posits that the response strategy employed by an organization should be aligned with the crisis type and the organization's responsibility for the crisis. This theory emphasizes the importance of situational analysis in selecting appropriate communication responses. By categorizing crises based on factors such as the organization's culpability and the nature of the crisis, SCCT provides a nuanced understanding of how organizations can tailor their communication strategies to effectively address the needs of various stakeholders. This strategic alignment not only enhances the credibility of the organization but also contributes to more effective management of the crisis.

Further expanding on the concept, Ulmer et al. (2017) argue that crisis communication involves both reactive and proactive elements. Reactive communication addresses immediate concerns during a crisis, while proactive communication entails pre-crisis planning and preparation to prevent or minimize potential crises. This dual approach is essential for organizations to effectively navigate the complexities of crisis situations. Proactive measures may include conducting risk assessments, developing crisis communication plans, and training employees to respond effectively during a crisis. By investing in these proactive strategies, organizations can mitigate the impacts of potential crises before they escalate, thereby ensuring a more streamlined and efficient response when crises do occur.

The significance of crisis communication cannot be overstated. A well-crafted crisis communication strategy can significantly influence the outcome of a crisis, helping organizations to manage public perception and maintain credibility. According to the Institute for Crisis Management (2020), effective crisis communication contributes to organizational resilience by enabling entities to adapt to unexpected challenges and recover more swiftly. In today's landscape, where information spreads rapidly through social media and other digital platforms, the ability to communicate effectively during a crisis can differentiate between organizational survival and failure. Organizations that excel in crisis communication not only protect their reputations but also create a foundation for sustained stakeholder trust and loyalty (Sun, 2023) and are more likely to restore public confidence and mitigate reputational damage (Fearn-Banks, 2016; Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). The importance of timely and accurate information dissemination is underscored by the increasing prevalence of social media, where misinformation can spread rapidly, exacerbating the crisis situation. In this context, organizations must be proactive in monitoring social media channels and responding to misinformation in real-time. By addressing false narratives swiftly, organizations can not only correct the record but also reinforce their commitment to transparency and accountability, further strengthening stakeholder relationships.

Additionally, crisis communication plays a vital role in organizational learning. As organizations analyze their responses to past crises, they can identify strengths and weaknesses in their communication strategies, facilitating continuous improvement. This

reflective practice is essential for developing robust crisis communication frameworks that enhance preparedness for future crises. Organizations that engage in post-crisis evaluations can derive valuable lessons about what worked and what did not, informing their future crisis management strategies. This continuous cycle of learning and adaptation is particularly important in an era of rapid change, where the types of crises organizations face are constantly evolving.

The primary objectives of crisis communication can be categorized into several key areas. One of the foremost objectives is to provide accurate and timely information to stakeholders. Organizations must ensure that relevant parties, including employees, customers, and the media, receive clear messages about the nature of the crisis and the organization's response efforts (Coombs, 2018). This objective underscores the importance of having a well-defined communication strategy that outlines who communicates what information, to whom, and through which channels. Bailey (2023) refers that clarity and consistency in messaging are paramount during a crisis, as confusion can lead to increased anxiety among stakeholders and can further exacerbate the situation.

Another critical objective is to protect and manage the organization's reputation. Effective crisis communication aims to prevent long-term damage to the organization's image by addressing the concerns of stakeholders and demonstrating accountability. Organizations that engage in proactive reputation management during crises can foster greater trust among their stakeholders (Coombs, 2018; Meyers & Holusha, 1987; Spradley, 2017). This involves not only responding to crises as they occur but also engaging in activities that reinforce the organization's commitment to ethical practices and social responsibility over the long term. Such proactive reputation management may include community engagement initiatives and regular transparency reports that showcase the organization's values and ethical commitments.

Engaging stakeholders is essential during a crisis. Organizations must actively communicate with affected parties, allowing for dialogue and feedback. This engagement fosters a sense of inclusion and helps to alleviate stakeholder concerns, contributing to a more favorable crisis outcome. Moreover, involving stakeholders in the communication process can create a sense of shared responsibility and collaboration, which can be invaluable during difficult times. This proactive engagement can also serve as a means to identify potential issues before they escalate into crises, thus enhancing the organization's overall crisis preparedness. By cultivating relationships with stakeholders prior to a crisis, organizations can facilitate more effective communication during emergencies.

Finally, crisis communication plays a critical role in the recovery phase following a crisis. Organizations must communicate their recovery plans and progress to stakeholders, reinforcing their commitment to transparency and accountability. This ongoing communication is vital for rebuilding trust and facilitating the organization's return to normal operations. The recovery phase also presents an opportunity for organizations to reflect on their crisis management practices and consider how they might improve their systems and processes moving forward (Ulmer et al., 2017; Forni, 2019). Effective communication during recovery can help to reassure stakeholders that the organization is committed to learning from the crisis and making necessary changes to prevent future occurrences.

## *2. Strategic principles of Crisis Communication - before, during, and after*

Effective crisis communication is a multifaceted process that requires meticulous planning, quick decision-making, and consistent, transparent communication before, during, and after a crisis. The principles governing crisis communication are not only aimed at mitigating immediate damage but also at restoring long-term organizational health and public trust. This holistic approach can be broken down into three phases: before the crisis, during the crisis, and after the crisis. Each phase demands distinct, but interrelated strategies to ensure that the organization is not only prepared to address a crisis but also equipped to recover from it (Coetzee & Niekerk, 2012).

### a) Before the crisis: laying the groundwork for effective crisis communication

Crisis communication begins long before an actual crisis occurs. Preparation is key, and it starts with setting clear, well-defined communication goals. These goals should center around three primary objectives: maintaining public trust, protecting the organization's reputation, and ensuring business continuity. Effective crisis communication can only be achieved when the organization has outlined specific, measurable objectives that address both short-term mitigation and long-term recovery. For instance, communication strategies should aim to minimize the reputational damage caused by the crisis while assuring stakeholders of the organization's commitment to resolving the situation promptly and effectively (Eugeni et al., 2023).

A critical component of pre-crisis planning is identifying and analyzing target audiences. Organizations must have a deep understanding of the stakeholders who will be most affected by the crisis, such as employees, customers, investors, regulatory bodies, and the media. Each group has unique concerns and expectations, and tailoring messages to address these concerns is vital for reducing confusion and preventing misinformation. Clear, targeted messaging ensures that stakeholders are not left in the dark, which can often exacerbate a crisis. Understanding the needs of each group before the crisis enables an organization to communicate swiftly and accurately when the situation arises.

In addition to identifying key stakeholders, organizations must assess potential risks. This means evaluating both internal and external threats that could escalate into a crisis. The risk assessment should involve identifying possible crisis scenarios—ranging from reputational damage to operational disruptions to legal issues. By understanding the types of crises that could arise, organizations can devise mitigation strategies and contingency plans. This proactive approach helps ensure that there are predefined responses to specific types of crises, reducing the time it takes to act and preventing further escalation (Schwarz, 2019). Identifying vulnerabilities in communication channels is also essential in this stage. A crisis often exposes weaknesses in communication strategies, and addressing these vulnerabilities before a crisis occurs is crucial to ensuring a more efficient response.

Choosing the right communication channels is another essential aspect of crisis preparedness. Different media platforms have varying reach and effectiveness. Social media is often the fastest and most direct way to communicate with the public, while official websites and traditional press releases offer a more controlled, formal communication outlet. Understanding how each platform serves the organization and its stakeholders ensures that messages are disseminated quickly and through the most effective channels (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014; Elvegård, Andreassen, & Badu, 2024).

Choosing the right media platforms enables the organization to reach its target audience swiftly and ensures the message remains consistent across all channels.

Equally important in the preparation phase is the development of a comprehensive crisis manual (Mikušová & Horváthová, 2019). This document serves as a practical guide for managing crises, outlining communication procedures, emergency contacts, and protocols for responding to various crisis scenarios. A crisis manual ensures that the organization is ready to act quickly when the need arises, providing a structured approach to crisis communication that minimizes chaos and confusion. The manual should also include templates for press releases and guidelines for spokespersons, ensuring that responses are consistent and professional. Additionally, this manual should be updated regularly to account for new risks, technologies, and communication trends.

Finally, a well-established crisis communication team is indispensable. This team, typically composed of senior management, communications experts, legal advisors, and operational leaders, must be trained and prepared to handle a crisis. Clear roles and responsibilities should be assigned, and regular training exercises and simulations are essential for ensuring that team members are equipped to handle the pressure of a real crisis. By preparing a crisis communication team and establishing procedures and protocols in advance, organizations ensure that their response is coordinated and effective when a crisis occurs (Mir, Hassan, Ali & Kosar, 2016).

#### b) During the crisis: managing communication in real time

When a crisis occurs, prompt action is crucial. The first step in managing communication during the crisis is to activate the pre-established crisis communication team. With roles already defined, the team can immediately begin assessing the situation, formulating an appropriate response, and coordinating their actions. Quick decision-making is crucial, and the team must be prepared to handle both internal and external communications simultaneously.

The next immediate action is to issue an initial public statement. This statement should be issued as quickly as possible, acknowledging the crisis and providing an assurance that the organization is actively working to address the situation. Transparency is essential at this stage. If the organization is aware of the crisis but lacks full details, this should be communicated clearly to avoid speculation (Beeler, 2022). Transparency not only helps maintain trust but also prevents misinformation from spreading. A prompt, clear response indicates that the organization is in control, which can prevent the situation from escalating further.

Once the initial statement is issued, it is important to maintain communication through the designated channels. These may include the organization's website, press releases, social media platforms, and direct emails to key stakeholders. It is essential to maintain a consistent message across all these platforms, as inconsistencies in communication can lead to confusion and undermine the organization's credibility (Jamal & Bakar, 2017). Social media, in particular, should be monitored continuously, as it is often the first place where misinformation spreads. Social media platforms should be used to provide updates, respond to inquiries, and address any concerns in real time. Maintaining regular communication ensures that stakeholders feel informed and reassured during the crisis (Seeger & Schwarz, 2024).

Frequent updates are critical throughout the crisis. These updates should be clear, concise, and fact-based. They should focus on what the organization is doing to resolve the crisis, what progress has been made, and what actions are still being taken. Providing

timely updates not only helps keep stakeholders informed but also demonstrates that the organization is actively managing the situation. The updates should also convey any new information that may emerge, as failing to do so can lead to the perception that the organization is hiding details or is disorganized (Dutta & Pullig, 2011).

An essential action during the crisis is designating trained spokespersons to handle media inquiries. These individuals should be prepared to answer questions from the media and other stakeholders while ensuring that the organization's message remains consistent. Media training is critical to ensure that spokespeople are able to handle high-pressure situations effectively. They must remain calm, composed, and factual, providing information that is both clear and consistent.

In addition to managing external communications, it is important for organizations to coordinate internal communications during the crisis. Clear communication with internal stakeholders is essential to ensuring that everyone within the organization is on the same page (Farmer, 2024; Snoeijers & Poels, 2018). This could involve holding internal meetings, sending out email updates, or setting up an intranet portal with real-time information. Employees should be provided with clear guidance on how to respond to external inquiries, ensuring that the organization speaks with one voice.

Monitoring public sentiment and media coverage is crucial throughout the crisis. By tracking how the crisis is being covered in the media and what is being discussed on social media platforms, the crisis communication team can assess the effectiveness of their messaging and adjust their approach if necessary. This monitoring also helps identify emerging issues and allows the team to address them before they escalate. Social listening tools and media monitoring platforms can provide valuable insights into how the organization is being perceived and what actions should be taken to correct any misinformation.

Finally, demonstrating accountability and empathy during the crisis is essential to rebuilding trust. Acknowledging mistakes, offering sincere apologies, and outlining the corrective actions that are being taken not only help to rebuild stakeholder confidence but also show that the organization is taking responsibility for its actions. Empathy for those affected by the crisis can go a long way in mitigating negative feelings and ensuring that stakeholders feel valued and heard. A crisis is an opportunity for the organization to showcase its commitment to resolving the issue and preventing future incidents (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017; Hersel, Helmuth, Zorn, Shropshire & Ridge, 2019).

#### c) After the crisis: restoring trust and preparing for the future

Once the immediate crisis has passed, communication efforts should shift toward recovery and long-term reputation management. The first step in post-crisis communication is to conduct a thorough debriefing with the crisis communication team. This evaluation should focus on the effectiveness of the communication strategy, the lessons learned, and areas for improvement. A post-crisis evaluation helps ensure that the organization can refine its crisis communication plan and improve its readiness for future crises.

Next, it is crucial to communicate the organization's actions and the lessons learned from the crisis to both internal and external stakeholders. A comprehensive post-crisis report should be shared, detailing the steps taken to resolve the crisis, the outcomes, and the measures implemented to prevent similar crises in the future (Soares, 2022; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015). This transparent communication not only demonstrates accountability but also reassures stakeholders that the organization is committed to continuous

improvement. By providing this information, the organization helps restore public confidence and shows that it has taken concrete steps to prevent future incidents.

Rebuilding the organization's reputation after a crisis is a key post-crisis communication task. It requires focusing on positive engagement with the public and highlighting the organization's efforts to improve its operations, policies, or services. This can involve showcasing corporate social responsibility initiatives, highlighting improvements made in response to the crisis, and engaging with stakeholders to rebuild relationships. Positive, consistent messaging across media channels, including social media, press releases, and public appearances, can help reshape the narrative and restore the organization's image over time (Kara, 2019; Pfarrer, Decelles, Smith & Taylor, 2008).

Moreover, it is important to continue communication with stakeholders even after the crisis has ended. Follow-up updates, direct emails, or meetings with key partners and clients should be used to inform them of any ongoing actions or changes made as a result of the crisis. This continued engagement fosters transparency and helps maintain trust. It is also an opportunity to reinforce the organization's commitment to its stakeholders and to demonstrate that it values their continued support.

Finally, after the crisis, it is essential to update and refine the crisis communication plan. This includes revising the crisis manual, improving training for spokespeople, and conducting new risk assessments. The crisis communication plan should evolve to address the lessons learned and ensure the organization is even better prepared for any future crises.

### *3. Essential Tools for Crisis Communication*

For effective crisis communication, there is a need to combine both offline and online tools, which can help ensure a well-coordinated response and maintain trust during a crisis. Crisis Management Plan, as a crucial tool for crisis communication, outlines procedures and responsibilities during a crisis. The purpose of crisis management planning is to evaluate the entire scenario and create flexible plans so that those involved in their implementation can understand and practice them accordingly. Thus, a crisis management plan outlines overall strategy for responding to a crisis, including decision-making, resource allocation, and operational coordination (Khodarahmi, 2009; Lando, 2014; Parsons, 1996; Sapriel, 2003).

The crisis management plan provides the strategic framework for handling the crisis and it requires the combination of many factors, including the formation of a crisis management team, the designation of a crisis spokesperson, the establishment of a crisis pressroom, the development of a crisis communication plan, and ensuring the flow of information (Parsons, 1996). In order to ensure the flow of information, a crisis communication plan - a specific subset of the crisis management plan- should be implemented.

Organizations need to evaluate the most effective tools for managing crises across different scenarios and contexts, including a crisis communication plan and the necessary communication equipment (Sapriel, 2003). Crisis communication plan focuses on how to communicate with key stakeholders, the media, and the public during a crisis. Thus, it involves activating networks, especially media networks to ensure the real-time information and to stay in constant contact with key-decision-makers. To achieve this, a member of the crisis team should act as the spokesperson, responsible for organizing regular meetings and press conferences (Saliou, 1994). Identifying and preparing

spokespersons as part of the crisis response team is crucial for effective communication and decision-making during a crisis. That is why; roles and responsibilities should be clearly assigned to team members and spokespersons.

Creating messaging templates, press releases, and media kits are crucial tools for effective crisis communication, as they provide timely updates and help maintain transparency and credibility. To manage media relations and coordinate both internal and external communication, having a well-prepared communication plan is essential (Coleman, 2020). Email communication with both internal and external audiences is a reliable tool to reach both employees and stakeholders. Using an organization's official website to share relevant information, news and updates about ongoing crisis is a fundamental tool of effective crisis communication (Gainey, 2010). Additionally, Chatbots, which are software applications that interact with users, can be used for direct communication with affected individuals, providing support and information (Daimiel, & Estrella, 2021). Utilizing apps can also enhance crisis communication by helping to reduce the uncertainty experienced by those affected, although the objectives of communication can vary based on the specific context of a crisis (Karl, Rother, Nestler, 2005).

The strategic use of priority channels to provide consistent updates to media contacts and stakeholders are also important for crisis communication. Effective use of digital platforms, especially social media plays a key role in quickly and timely disseminating information. However, instead of sharing information across all digital platforms, it is necessary to identify the channels where the main target audiences are present and prioritize these platforms in the plan (Karl, Rother, Nestler, 2005; Coleman, 2020).

Social media provides various tools for media monitoring and evaluation, which are critical to the success of a crisis communication plan (Sapriel, 2003). Media monitoring tools help organizations track news and social media mentions, allowing them to evaluate the impact of their crisis response and adjust their strategy. Social media tools and analytics, such as Google Analytics, Facebook Insights, and Twitter Analytics, as well as social listening tools like Brandwatch, Hootsuite, and Mention, can be used for this purpose. These social media tools allow organizations to monitor a crisis by tracking the spread of information, public sentiment, and the effectiveness of their communication strategies. Social media trends and social media listening can provide crisis managers with insights into the conversations surrounding the crisis (Mackey, 2015; Ruggiero, & Vos, 2014). While these tools can detect early signs of an emerging crisis and related issues, they can also be utilized to adjust crisis communication strategies based on real-time feedback. The effective use of both traditional and digital tools together will provide a structured and reliable approach to crisis management and crisis communication.

#### *4. Crisis Communication on Social Media and Digital Environments*

Social media plays a crucial role in crisis communication as it provides various platforms for interactive and extensive communication. Social media here refers to the internet-based applications such blogs, forums, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, etc., that are generally accessible for free and enable users to create and share information, allowing dialogue and two-way communication with various publics (Breakenridge, 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann, et. al., 2011; Lariscy, et.al., 2009). Thus, social media provides real-time updates and engagements with the public, which allows addressing misinformation immediately.

Crisis communication on social media and digital environments involves the strategic use of social media and other digital media platforms by institutions, organizations, companies and public figures to communicate effectively during a crisis situation. Social media, social networking, and digital environments can be employed during various phases of both natural and human-made crises (Chewning, 2014; Kaufhold et al., 2019; Wetzstein et al., 2014). Since the primary objective of crisis communication is to rebuild the organization's reputation and restore the confidence among customers or stakeholders (Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013), social media use in crisis management can help mitigate the situation's severity and assist the organization in regaining control.

The digital environment, especially social media platforms, has the potential to rapidly disseminate information during crisis situations, enhancing the speed and reach of crisis communication. When a negative incident occurs, social media often serves as the first point of communication. In such situations, it is crucial for organizations to provide immediate information on social media in order to address rumors, correct misinformation, and deliver regular updates, reaching a wide audience in real time (Valentini, Romenti, & Kruckeberg, 2017). Thus, the effective and timely use of social media in crisis communication will prevent the spread of misinformation and enable the public to access accurate information. Effective crisis communication strategies should include debunking false claims and rumors while directing the public to verified sources of information.

With the evolution of social media, crisis communication has shifted from a one-way to a two-way communication model, enabling organizations to engage directly with the public in digital environments. Social media enables interactive communication, allowing organizations to respond directly to questions, comments, concerns, and feedback from the public. This interaction can help diffuse negative sentiment, reassure stakeholders and clarify misunderstandings during crises (Mele, Filieri, & De Carlo, 2023). However, while social media allows organizations to quickly inform stakeholders it also results in a potential loss of message control, as social media users can create and disseminate their own interpretations of a crisis. That's why, during crisis situations, it is essential for organizations to maintain transparent communication and act promptly to manage public perception.

Organizations can use social media to strengthen the sense of community and offer emotional support during crises. Social media also allows organizations to show empathy and acknowledge public concerns (Liu, Austin, & Jin, 2011). Social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube allow individuals not only to connect, but also to share experiences, and come together during a crisis, helping to foster community resilience.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), a framework for managing crisis communication, systematically categorizes crisis response strategies which organization takes after a crisis occurs. According to SCCT organizations should adapt their communication strategies based on specific characteristics of each crisis (Coombs, 1995). Strategies for apologies, transparency, image repair, or corrective action can be adapted to social media. Regarding the response strategies in literature (Benoit, 2015; Coombs, 2007, 2017; Liu et. al., 2011; Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2012), a coding categorization for a crisis communication on social media can be offered based on a message type, the tone,

contents of the message (posts), target audience, frequency and timing, and engagement metrics.

Table 1 - Coding categories for a crisis communication on social media

Message Type	
Informational	Gives new information, facts or updates about the crises
Denial	Express that no crisis exist
Apology	Expresses regret or apologizes for the incident
Empathetic	Expresses concern for affected individuals
Defensive	Justifies or explains the organization's actions
Corrective Action	Defines steps being taken to resolve the crisis or prevent future crises
Reassurance	Tries to calm fears or concerns about the crisis
Engagement/Interaction	Responds to user comments or questions directly
Call to Action	Encourages the audience to take specific actions like safety advice, contact support
Tone	
Neutral	Factual and unemotional language
Empathetic	Expresses care, concern or sympathy
Reassuring	Provides comfort and assurance
Apologetic	Expresses regret or admits fault
Defensive	Justifies or shifts blame
Urgent	Uses urgent language to express the seriousness of the situation
Optimistic	Focuses on positive outcomes or improvements
Contents of the message (posts)	
Text-Only Message	Uses only text to deliver the message
Image Inclusion	Accompanied by a static image, visuals (like infographic, photo).
Video Inclusion	Uses video content to convey the message
Links/ Hyperlinks to Additional Information	Provides links to external resources (e.g., press releases, blog posts, web sites).

Hashtags Use	Uses hashtags to categorize or emphasize the message
Mentions/Tags	Tags specific users, organizations, or stakeholders
Target Audience	
General Public	Message intended for the broad public
Affected Individuals/Groups	Directed at those directly impacted by the crisis
Media	Addresses journalists or media outlets
Investors/Shareholders	Targets stakeholders concerned with financial aspects
Frequency and Timing	
Immediate Response	Issued within a few hours of the crisis
Follow-Up Post	Subsequent updates after the initial response
Engagement Metrics	
Number of Likes/ Reactions	Measures audience interest
Number of Shares/ Retweets	Indicates how widely the message is being disseminated
Number of Comments/ Replies	Indicates the level of engagement and audience interaction
Sentiment of Comments	General tone of the responses (positive, negative, neutral)

*Source.* Adapted by Matias, Türk, and Lopes based on Benoit (2015), Coombs (2007, 2017), Liu et al. (2011), and Jin, Pang, and Cameron (2012).

This coding scheme can be applied to systematically analyze social media content during crises, helping to assess the effectiveness of communication strategies used by organizations.

### *Conclusion*

Crisis communication is a vital element of organizational resilience, requiring a strategic, phased approach to effectively address the challenges posed by crises. This process begins with preparation, emphasizing proactive measures such as conducting risk assessments, crafting crisis communication plans, and training dedicated response teams. Establishing clear protocols and channels of communication is essential to ensure readiness for unexpected events, as the pre-crisis phase sets the foundation for effective management, by mitigating risks and fostering a culture of preparedness. At a later stage, the crisis response phase demands transparency, timeliness, and consistency; organizations must act swiftly to

issue initial statements, provide regular updates, and engage with stakeholders to prevent misinformation and confusion. Trained spokespersons play a crucial role in conveying credibility, while internal alignment ensures unified messaging, and monitoring public sentiment during this phase helps organizations address concerns and adapt strategies as the situation evolves. In the post-crisis phase, evaluations and reflective practices are essential to restoring trust and learning from experience. In fact, by sharing lessons learned and implementing preventive measures, organizations demonstrate accountability and a commitment to continuous improvement. This cycle of refinement not only enhances resilience but also informs how organizations leverage evolving tools to address future challenges more effectively.

Among these tools, social media and digital platforms have emerged as transformative elements in modern crisis communication. Offering unparalleled opportunities for real-time interaction and extensive reach, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube empower organizations to disseminate information swiftly, engage directly with stakeholders, and combat misinformation. Social media fosters two-way communication, allowing organizations to respond to questions and concerns in a timely manner, thereby reinforcing trust and demonstrating a proactive approach. Furthermore, digital tools such as Google Analytics, Brandwatch, and Hootsuite empower organizations to monitor public sentiment and evaluate the impact of their communication strategies. These platforms facilitate real-time adjustments to messaging, ensuring it remains relevant and impactful, and features like hashtags, mentions, and targeted messaging enable precise audience engagement, whether directed at the general public, affected groups, or stakeholders. Despite their benefits, social media platforms also pose challenges, such as the rapid spread of misinformation and diminished message control. To navigate these complexities, organizations must adopt structured strategies, leveraging frameworks like the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) to tailor responses to the crisis context. Maintaining transparency and acting promptly are crucial to managing public perception and preventing reputational damage.

The research also led to the development of a coding scheme designed to contribute to future academic and scientific studies on crisis communication via social media. By categorizing key message types, tones, content formats, target audiences, timing, and engagement metrics, it provides a structured framework for evaluating and enhancing communication strategies in crisis contexts.

Ultimately, the integration of traditional methods with digital tools ensures a comprehensive approach to crisis communication. By combining offline strategies - such as structured team coordination and spokesperson training -, with the immediacy and reach of social media, organizations can enhance their ability to respond effectively. This balanced approach fosters trust, supports recovery, and builds resilience in an increasingly complex and connected global environment.

## Acknowledgments

*This work is funded by National Funds through the FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P., within the scope of the project Ref<sup>o</sup> UIDB/05507/2020 and DOI identifier <https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/05507/2020>. Furthermore, we would like to thank the Centre for Studies in Education and Innovation (Ci&DEI) and the Polytechnic of Viseu for their support.*

## REFERENCES:

- Austin, L., & Jin, Y. (Eds.). (2017). *Social media and crisis communication*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Bailey, A. (2023). Taking the lead on communication before, during and after a crisis. *Security Management, ASIS International*. <https://www.asisonline.org/security-management-magazine/articles/2023/01/taking-the-lead-on-communication-before-during-and-after-a-crisis/>
- Beeler, R. F. (2022). Disaster case chapter: Silence is not golden. In *Social media and crisis communication* (pp. 343–347). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003043409-41>
- Benoit, W. L. (2015). *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of image restoration* (2nd ed.). State University of New York Press.
- Breakenridge, D. K. (2008). *PR 2.0: New media, new tools, new audiences*. Pearson Education.
- Chewning, L. V. (2015). Multiple voices and multiple media: Co-constructing BP's crisis response. *Public Relations Review*, 41(1), 72-79.
- Civelek, M., Çemberci, M., & Eralp, E. (2016). The role of social media in crisis communication and crisis management. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 5(3), 111-120. <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v5i3.279>
- Claeys, A., & Cauberghe, V. (2014). What makes crisis response strategies work? The impact of crisis involvement and message framing. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(2), 182-189. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.10.005>
- Coleman, A. (2020). *Crisis communication strategies: How to prepare in advance, respond effectively and recover in full*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Coetzee, C., & Niekerk, D. (2012). Tracking the evolution of the disaster management cycle: A general system theory approach. *Jàmá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/jamba.v4i1.54>
- Contreras-Pacheco, O. E., Álvarez-Arciniegas, J. C., & Garnica-Rugeles, M. F. (2024). Crisis communication strategies: A qualitative study about a natural medicine controversy in Colombia. *Tec Empre*, 18(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.18845/te.v18i2.7136>
- Coombs, W. T. (1995). Choosing the right words: The development of guidelines for the selection of the "appropriate" crisis response strategies. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 8(4), 447-476. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318995008004004>

Coombs, W. T. (2007). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(3), 163-178. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550049>

Coombs, W. T. (2017). Revising situational crisis communication theory: The influences of social media on crisis communication theory and practice. In *Social media and crisis communication* (pp. 21-37). Routledge.

Coombs, W. T. (2018). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Daimiel, G. B., & Estrella, E. C. M. (2021). Using virtual assistants and chatbots for crisis communication. *aDResearch: Revista Internacional de Investigación en Comunicación*, 25, 70-91.

Dutta, S., & Pullig, C. (2011). Effectiveness of corporate responses to brand crises: The role of crisis type and response strategies. *Journal of Business Research*, 64, 1281-1287. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.01.013>

Elvegård, R., Andreassen, N., & Badu, J. (2024). Building collaboration and trust in emergency preparedness: A model for planning collaboration exercises. *Saf. Extreme Environ.*, 6, 319–331. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42797-024-00107-w>

Eugeni, F., Sacco, S., Ludovico, D., & Marco, A. (2023). A simulation tool for crisis management and pre-disaster planning. *2023 International Conference on Information and Communication Technologies for Disaster Management (ICT-DM)*. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ict-dm58371.2023.10286926>

Farmer, M. (2024). 5 steps for navigating the first hour of a crisis. *Public Relations Society of America*. <https://www.prsa.org/article/5-steps-for-navigating-the-first-hour-of-a-crisis>

Fearn-Banks, K. (2016). *Crisis communications: A casebook approach* (5th ed.). Routledge.

Forni, J. (2019). *Gestão de crises e comunicação* (3rd ed.). Atlas.

Frandsen, F., & Johansen, W. (2017). *Organizational crisis communication*. SAGE. [https://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-assets/80649\\_book\\_item\\_80649.pdf](https://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-assets/80649_book_item_80649.pdf)

Gainey, B. S. (2010). Educational crisis management practices tentatively embrace the new media. In *The handbook of crisis communication* (pp. 301-318).

Hersel, M. C., Helmuth, C. A., Zorn, M. L., Shropshire, C., & Ridge, J. W. (2019). The corrective actions organizations pursue following misconduct: A review and research agenda. *Academy of Management Annals*. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2017.0090>

Institute for Crisis Management. (2020, May 25). *Crisis Consultant - Annual Crisis Report for 2019*. Retrieved from <https://crisisconsultant.com/icm-annual-crisis-report/>

Jamal, J., & Bakar, H. A. (2017). Revisiting organizational credibility and organizational reputation – A situational crisis communication approach. Paper presented at i-COME'16, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. <https://doi.org/10.1051/73300083>

Jin, Y., Pang, A., & Cameron, G. T. (2012). Toward a publics-driven, emotion-based conceptualization in crisis communication: Unearthing dominant emotions in multi-staged testing of the Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) Model. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 24(3), 266-298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2012.676747>

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2012). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68.

Kara, A. (2019). *Crisis communication in the digital age: Manage or rampage*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Karl, I., Rother, K., & Nestler, S. (2015). Crisis-related apps: Assistance for critical and emergency situations. *International Journal of Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management*, 7(2), 19–35.

Khodarahmi, E. (2009). Crisis management. *Disaster Prevention and Management*, 18(5), 523–528. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09653560911003714>

Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 241–251.

Lauran, N., Kunneman, F., & Van de Wijngaert, L. (2019). Connecting social media data and crisis communication theory: A case study on the chicken and the egg. *Journal of Risk Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2019.1628097>

Lando, A. L. (2014). The critical role of crisis communication plan in corporations' crises preparedness and management. *Global Media Journal – Canadian Edition*, 7(1), 5–19.

Lariscy, R. W., Avery, E. J., Sweetser, K. D., & Howes, P. (2009). An examination of the role of online social media in journalists' source mix. *Public Relations Review*, 35(3), 314–316.

Liu, B. F., Austin, L., & Jin, Y. (2011). How publics respond to crisis communication strategies: The interplay of information form and source. *Public Relations Review*, 37(4), 345–353.

Mackey, S. (2015). Theorising and practising public relations crises management. In *Crisis Communication in a Digital World* (pp. 12–27). Cambridge University Press.

Meyers, G., & Holusha, J. (1986). *When it hits the fan: Managing the nine crises of business*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Mele, E., Filieri, R., & De Carlo, M. (2023). Pictures of a crisis: Destination marketing organizations' Instagram communication before and during a global health crisis. *Journal of Business Research*, 163, 113931.

Mikušová, M., & Horváthová, P. (2019). Prepared for a crisis? Basic elements of crisis management in an organisation. *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 32(1), 1844–1868. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677X.2019.1640625>

Mir, U. R., Hassan, S. S., Ali, A., & Kosar, R. (2016). New knowledge creation and crisis management team's performance. *Science International*, 28(3), 2831–2836. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309585562\\_NEW\\_KNOWLEDGE\\_CREATION\\_AND\\_CRISIS\\_MANAGEMENT\\_TEAM'S\\_PERFORMANCE](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309585562_NEW_KNOWLEDGE_CREATION_AND_CRISIS_MANAGEMENT_TEAM'S_PERFORMANCE)

Parsons, W. (1996). Crisis management. *Career Development International*, 1(5), 26–28.

Payton, P. (2021). Crisis management strategies for sustaining organizations during a crisis [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection. <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=12288&context=dissertations>

Pfarrer, M., Decelles, K. A., Smith, K. G., & Taylor, S. M. (2008). After the fall: Reintegrating the corrupt organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(3), 730–748. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2008.32465757>

Ruggiero, A., & Vos, M. (2014). Social media monitoring for crisis communication: Process, methods and trends in the scientific literature. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 4(1), 105–130. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ojcm/2457>

Saliou, P. (1994). Crisis communication in the event of a flu pandemic. *European Journal of Epidemiology*, 10, 515–517.

Sapriel, C. (2003). Effective crisis management: Tools and best practice for the new millennium. *Journal of Communication Management*, 7(4), 348–355.

Schwarz, A. (2019). The state of strategic organizational crisis communication research in the context of global and digital communication. *Revista de la Asociación Española de Investigación de la Comunicación*, 6(11), 279–310. <https://doi.org/10.24137/raeic.6.11.15>

Seeger, M., & Schwarz, A. (2024). Best practices in crisis and disaster communication. In *Routledge Handbook of Risk, Crisis, and Disaster Communication* (pp. 65–82). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003363330-7>

Snoeijers, E., & Poels, K. (2018). Factors that influence organisational crisis perception from an internal stakeholder's point of view. *Public Relations Review*, 44(1), 65–74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.12.003>

Soares, R. (2022). Post-crisis organizational learning thresholds, pitfalls and the risk of repeated crises: Clarifying the discourse of renewal theory [Doctoral dissertation,

University of Central Florida]. University of Central Florida Electronic Theses and Dissertations.

<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2408&context=etd2020>

Sun, W. (2023). Corporate crisis management from a strategic operations perspective: The importance and impact of information management. *Journal of Information Systems Engineering and Management*, 8(2), 22353. <https://doi.org/10.55267/iadt.07.13882>

Tsarenko, Y., & Tojib, D. (2015). Consumers' forgiveness after brand transgression: The effect of the firm's corporate social responsibility and response. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(17–18), 1851–1877. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2015.1069373>

Ulmer, R., Sellnow, T., & Seeger, M. (2017). *Effective crisis communication: Moving from crisis to opportunity* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Utz, S., Schultz, F., & Glocka, S. (2013). Crisis communication online: How medium, crisis type and emotions affected public reactions in the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. *Public Relations Review*, 39(1), 40–46.

Valentini, C., Romenti, S., & Kruckeberg, D. (2017). Handling crises in social media: From stakeholder crisis awareness and sense making to organizational crisis preparedness. In *Social Media and Crisis Communication* (pp. 57–67). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Wetzstein, I., Régent, V., Götsch, K., & Rainer, K. (2014). Crises and social media: A metastudy on pertinent research and practice. *Human Technology*, 10(2), 95–124. <https://doi.org/10.17011/ht/urn.201411203312>