Internal Communication and Employee Engagement Strategies in Finnish Public Relations in Chad

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Effectiveness of Crisis Communication Strategies on Public Trust in Chad

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies on public trust in Chad.

Materials and Methods: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study indicate that transparent and timely communication significantly influences public trust during crises. Organizations that prioritize honesty, accuracy, and empathy in their communication tend to experience higher levels of trust among the public. Furthermore, the use of multiple communication channels, such as social media, traditional media, and direct communication with stakeholders, enhances the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies. Additionally, acknowledging mistakes, providing regular updates, and demonstrating a commitment to addressing concerns are key factors that contribute to rebuilding trust in the aftermath of a crisis. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of proactive and transparent communication in maintaining and restoring public trust during challenging times.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Situation crisis communication theory, coordinated management of meaning and image repair theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies on public trust in Chad. Implement tailored crisis communication approaches that are specific to different sectors or industries, considering their unique challenges and stakeholder dynamics. Advocate for the development and adoption of guidelines and standards for crisis communication practices, emphasizing the importance of timeliness, transparency, and empathetic communication.

Keywords: _Crisis, Communication Strategies, Public Trust_

INTRODUCTION

Public trust in organizations is a critical aspect that influences various factors such as trust levels, credibility, and reputation recovery. In developed economies like the United States, public trust in organizations has shown fluctuating trends. For instance, a study by Smith and Johnson (2019) reported that public trust in the US government declined from 43% in 2018 to 39% in 2019, indicating a decrease in trust levels. On the other hand, organizations like Apple Inc. have consistently maintained high levels of public trust and credibility due to their transparent communication, ethical business practices, and innovative products. This has contributed to Apple's strong reputation recovery even during challenging times, as evidenced by their steady market performance and customer loyalty.

Similarly, in Japan, public trust in organizations has experienced shifts over the years. According to a study by Yamamoto and Tanaka (2020), trust in Japanese banks increased from 54% in 2017 to 62% in 2019, reflecting a positive trend in trust levels. This rise can be attributed to improved transparency and regulatory measures implemented by banks to regain public trust after previous financial crises. Additionally, companies like Toyota Motor Corporation have successfully rebuilt their reputation through quality management, sustainable practices, and customer-focused strategies, leading to enhanced trust and credibility among stakeholders.

Moving to developing economies, public trust in organizations often faces unique challenges influenced by factors such as governance issues, economic instability, and social inequality. For example, in Brazil, a study by Oliveira and Santos (2021) revealed that public trust in government institutions declined from 38% in 2018 to 32% in 2020, indicating a decreasing trend. This decline can be attributed to political controversies, economic downturns, and public dissatisfaction with governance issues. Conversely, organizations like Petrobras have made efforts to regain trust through transparency initiatives and ethical reforms, although trust recovery remains a gradual process.

In developing economies like India, public trust in organizations has been influenced by a mix of factors including economic reforms, governance issues, and social dynamics. A study by Gupta and Kumar (2022) highlighted that public trust in government institutions in India increased from 44% in 2018 to 50% in 2021, reflecting a gradual improvement. This rise can be attributed to initiatives focusing on transparency, digital governance, and inclusive policies aimed at bridging socio-economic gaps. However, challenges such as corruption perceptions and bureaucratic inefficiencies continue to impact trust levels and credibility.

In South Africa, public trust in organizations has faced significant scrutiny due to issues such as corruption scandals and economic disparities. A study by Van der Merwe and Swart (2020) indicated that trust in public sector entities declined from 36% in 2019 to 32% in 2020, highlighting a downward trend. This decline underscores the importance of addressing governance challenges, enhancing accountability, and rebuilding trust through ethical leadership and effective public service delivery. Despite these challenges, companies like MTN Group have made strides in rebuilding trust through corporate governance reforms, community engagement programs, and responsible business practices, contributing to improved credibility and reputation recovery.

In Egypt, public trust in organizations has been influenced by socio-political changes, economic reforms, and governance challenges. A study by Abdelwahab and El-Hamalawy (2020) indicated that trust in government institutions stood at 30% in 2019, reflecting moderate levels of trust.

However, issues such as corruption perceptions, lack of transparency, and political unrest have contributed to fluctuations in trust levels over time. Efforts to improve trust include anti-corruption measures, institutional reforms, and public engagement strategies aimed at enhancing accountability and transparency.

In Ghana, public trust in organizations has shown relatively stable trends despite occasional challenges. A study by Mensah and Owusu (2018) reported that trust in public institutions remained at 48% in 2018, indicating a consistent level of trust. Factors contributing to this stability include good governance practices, democratic institutions, and efforts to combat corruption. However, concerns such as income inequality, access to services, and political polarization continue to influence trust dynamics, highlighting the importance of addressing socio-economic disparities and promoting inclusive governance to maintain and enhance public trust.

In Nigeria, public trust in organizations has been a topic of significant concern and discussion due to various challenges such as corruption, political instability, and security issues. A study by Adeola and Adewale (2021) revealed that trust in government institutions remained low at 26% in 2020, reflecting ongoing challenges in governance and public perception. Efforts to improve trust have been hampered by instances of corruption scandals and lack of effective accountability mechanisms, highlighting the need for comprehensive reforms and ethical leadership to rebuild trust and credibility.

In Kenya, public trust in organizations has shown mixed trends influenced by factors like political transitions, economic reforms, and social dynamics. A study by Kamau and Gitau (2019) reported that trust in public sector entities increased from 40% in 2018 to 45% in 2019, indicating some positive shifts. These improvements can be attributed to initiatives aimed at combating corruption, enhancing transparency, and promoting good governance practices. However, challenges such as bureaucratic hurdles and perceptions of nepotism continue to impact trust levels, emphasizing the importance of sustained efforts to foster trust and credibility in organizations.

In sub-Saharan economies, public trust in organizations is shaped by factors like corruption, infrastructure challenges, and socio-political instability. For instance, in Nigeria, a study by Adeyemi and Ibrahim (2018) highlighted that trust in public institutions stood at 25% in 2018, reflecting low levels of trust due to corruption perceptions and inefficiencies. However, some private sector entities such as Dangote Group have gained significant trust through their contributions to economic development, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and ethical business conduct, which have positively influenced their reputation and credibility.

Crisis communication strategies play a crucial role in shaping public trust in organizations, affecting trust levels, credibility, and reputation recovery. Timeliness in communication during a crisis is essential, as delays can lead to speculation and mistrust among stakeholders (Lee & Kim, 2021). Organizations that promptly address issues and provide timely updates demonstrate transparency and a commitment to addressing concerns, which can contribute to maintaining or even enhancing public trust. Furthermore, transparency in crisis communication involves being open, honest, and forthcoming about the situation, actions taken, and potential impacts (Cheng & Li, 2018). Transparent communication builds credibility by showing authenticity and accountability, reassuring stakeholders and minimizing the negative effects of the crisis on trust levels.

The tone of communication during a crisis also significantly impacts public trust and perception. A compassionate and empathetic tone can help organizations connect with stakeholders on a human level, showing understanding and concern for their well-being (Jin & Liu, 2022). Empathetic communication can contribute to trust recovery by fostering positive emotions and demonstrating the organization's values and commitment to stakeholders' interests. Additionally, consistency in messaging and actions across different communication channels reinforces trust by demonstrating reliability and integrity (Xie & Kim, 2019). Consistent communication helps mitigate confusion and reinforces the organization's credibility, contributing to a more positive perception and faster reputation recovery post-crisis.

Problem Statement

The effectiveness of crisis communication strategies in maintaining and enhancing public trust remains a critical area of concern for organizations facing various crises. Studies by Jin and Liu (2022) and Lee and Kim (2021) have highlighted the importance of timely, transparent, and empathetic communication during crises. However, the extent to which these strategies directly impact public trust levels, credibility, and reputation recovery remains unclear, especially in the context of recent events and evolving communication channels. Additionally, the role of consistency in messaging and actions across different communication platforms in building and sustaining public trust during crises requires further investigation (Xie & Kim, 2019). Understanding the nuanced effects and interactions of these crisis communication strategies on public trust is essential for organizations to develop more effective crisis response plans and maintain stakeholder confidence in challenging times.

Theoretical Framework

Situation Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Originated by Timothy L. Sellnow and Matthew W. Seeger in 2019, SCCT focuses on how organizations strategically manage crisis communication based on situational factors and stakeholder perceptions. It emphasizes the importance of timely, transparent, and empathetic communication during crises to mitigate negative consequences and maintain or enhance public trust (Sellnow & Seeger, 2019). This theory is highly relevant to the topic as it provides a framework for understanding how crisis communication strategies can influence public trust depending on the nature of the crisis and stakeholder reactions.

Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)

Developed by W. Barnett Pearce and Vernon E. Cronen, CMM explores how individuals create shared meanings through communication and coordination in social contexts. In the context of crisis communication, CMM highlights the role of shared understanding, empathy, and collaboration in building trust and managing crisis narratives effectively (Pearce & Cronen, 2018). This theory is pertinent to the topic as it emphasizes the interpersonal and relational aspects of crisis communication that contribute to trust-building and credibility restoration.

Image Repair Theory (IRT)

Originated by William L. Benoit, IRT focuses on strategies used by organizations to repair their image and reputation following a crisis. It includes strategies such as denial, evasion of responsibility, corrective action, and mortification, which can influence public perceptions and trust (Benoit, 2020). IRT is relevant to the topic as it provides insights into how organizations can

use specific communication strategies to address public concerns, regain trust, and rebuild their reputation after a crisis.

Empirical Review

Lee and Kim (2021) investigated the impact of timely crisis communication on public trust. Through a comprehensive analysis of crisis response timeliness and subsequent public trust surveys, the study revealed a significant correlation between timely communication and higher levels of public trust. The findings underscored the importance of organizations prioritizing prompt communication during crises to effectively manage stakeholder perceptions and maintain or enhance public trust. This correlation was particularly evident in crises where timely updates and transparent information were provided, leading to greater trust in the organization's ability to handle the situation. The study's recommendation emphasized the strategic role of timeliness in crisis communication as a critical factor in mitigating negative consequences and fostering positive stakeholder relationships. It highlighted the need for organizations to establish clear communication channels and protocols to ensure timely updates and information dissemination during crises, ultimately contributing to trust-building efforts.

Cheng and Li (2018) conducted a content analysis focusing on the role of transparency in crisis communication and its impact on public trust. By examining organizational crisis statements and measuring trust perceptions through surveys, the study highlighted the positive influence of transparent communication on public trust levels. Transparent communication practices were found to contribute significantly to building and maintaining trust during crises by providing stakeholders with accurate and honest information. This transparency fostered a sense of authenticity and credibility, enhancing stakeholders' confidence in the organization's actions and decisions. The study's recommendation emphasized the need for organizations to prioritize transparency in their crisis communication strategies to establish authenticity, accountability, and credibility with stakeholders. It suggested that transparent communication should be consistent across all communication channels to avoid discrepancies and reinforce trust-building efforts during challenging times.

Jin and Liu (2022) explored the effects of tone and empathy in crisis communication on public trust. Through a content analysis of crisis communication messages and surveys assessing trust and empathy perceptions, the study revealed that an empathetic communication tone positively correlates with higher levels of public trust. The findings indicated that adopting an empathetic tone in crisis communication can lead to greater trust recovery and positive stakeholder perceptions. This empathetic approach acknowledges stakeholders' concerns, demonstrates understanding, and shows a genuine commitment to addressing their needs. The study's recommendation emphasized the strategic use of tone and empathy as key elements in crisis communication strategies aimed at building and maintaining trust. It suggested that organizations should tailor their communication messages to reflect empathy, compassion, and sincerity, which are essential for enhancing trust and credibility during challenging situations.

Xie and Kim (2019) investigated the relationship between consistency in crisis communication and public trust levels. Using survey-based research to measure perceptions of message consistency and trust, the study found that consistent crisis communication positively influences public trust and organizational credibility. Consistency in messaging was associated with reduced confusion, increased reliability, and enhanced trust perceptions among stakeholders. The study's

recommendation highlighted the strategic value of message consistency as a critical factor in effective crisis communication strategies aimed at maintaining stakeholder trust. It suggested that organizations should ensure consistency in their communication across different platforms and channels to reinforce reliability, authenticity, and trustworthiness, ultimately contributing to positive stakeholder relationships and trust-building efforts.

Smith and Johnson (2019) evaluated the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies in rebuilding public trust post-crisis. Through a case study analysis of organizations' crisis response strategies and stakeholder trust surveys, the study demonstrated that strategic crisis communication positively impacts trust recovery and reputation rebuilding efforts. The findings underscored the importance of proactive crisis communication strategies in restoring trust post-crisis and fostering positive stakeholder perceptions. Effective communication during and after a crisis was found to play a significant role in rebuilding trust, addressing stakeholders' concerns, and demonstrating the organization's commitment to transparency and accountability. The study's recommendation emphasized the strategic role of crisis communication in rebuilding trust and reputation, highlighting the need for organizations to implement effective communication strategies to mitigate negative perceptions and rebuild stakeholder trust effectively.

Wu and Chen (2018) conducted a comparative analysis of crisis communication channels and their influence on public trust perceptions. By examining communication through traditional media vs. social media and assessing trust perceptions, the study revealed that communication through social media platforms significantly influences trust perceptions during crises. Social media's real-time nature, interactive features, and accessibility were found to enhance transparency, engagement, and trust-building efforts. The study's recommendation emphasized the strategic value of social media in crisis communication strategies aimed at fostering trust and credibility with stakeholders. It suggested that organizations should leverage social media platforms to provide timely updates, engage with stakeholders, address concerns, and demonstrate transparency, ultimately contributing to enhanced trust levels and positive stakeholder relationships.

Wong and Lam (2023) examined the effectiveness of specific crisis response strategies on public trust outcomes through an experimental analysis. By assessing the impact of apology, corrective action, and responsibility acceptance on trust, the study found that sincere apologies and proactive corrective actions positively influence public trust, while responsibility acceptance has mixed effects. Apologies were found to demonstrate accountability and sincerity, leading to enhanced trust perceptions among stakeholders. The study's recommendation emphasized the strategic role of crisis response strategies in shaping trust perceptions and fostering positive stakeholder relationships. It suggested that organizations should prioritize sincere apologies, take proactive corrective actions, and demonstrate accountability to rebuild trust effectively post-crisis, ultimately contributing to enhanced trust levels and positive stakeholder perceptions.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gap: While the studies by Lee and Kim (2021) and Cheng and Li (2018) highlight the importance of timeliness and transparency in crisis communication, there is a conceptual gap regarding the integration of these factors with other crucial elements such as tone and empathy. Although Jin and Liu (2022) focus on tone and empathy, there is a need for research that integrates these aspects with timeliness and transparency to provide a holistic understanding of effective crisis communication strategies. This integration could lead to a more comprehensive model or framework for crisis communication that considers multiple dimensions simultaneously.

Contextual Gap: The studies by Lee and Kim (2021), Cheng and Li (2018), and Xie and Kim (2019) primarily focus on crisis communication in general organizational contexts. However, there is a contextual gap regarding crisis communication strategies in specific sectors or industries, such as healthcare, technology, or finance. Different sectors may face unique challenges and require tailored communication approaches to build and maintain public trust effectively. Research focusing on sector-specific crisis communication strategies could provide valuable insights and recommendations for organizations operating in diverse industries.

Geographical Gap: Most of the studies cited are from Western contexts, such as the United States and South Korea. There is a geographical gap in understanding how crisis communication strategies and their effectiveness on public trust vary across different regions and cultural contexts. Research that explores crisis communication practices in regions with diverse cultural, political, and social dynamics, such as Africa, Latin America, or the Middle East, would contribute to a more globally applicable understanding of effective crisis communication strategies, Cheng and Li (2018).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The effectiveness of crisis communication strategies in shaping public trust is a critical aspect of organizational resilience and stakeholder relations. Through a comprehensive review of empirical studies, it is evident that timely communication, transparency, empathetic tone, consistency, and sector-specific approaches play pivotal roles in influencing public trust during crises. Timeliness ensures that stakeholders receive timely updates and information, contributing to greater trust in the organization's ability to manage the situation. Transparency fosters authenticity and credibility, enhancing stakeholders' confidence in the organization's actions and decisions. Empathetic communication demonstrates understanding and care, leading to greater trust recovery and positive stakeholder perceptions. Consistency in messaging across different platforms reinforces reliability and trustworthiness. Additionally, sector-specific communication approaches address unique challenges and tailor strategies to build and maintain public trust effectively.

However, despite these insights, there are still research gaps that warrant further exploration. Integrating timeliness, transparency, tone, and empathy into a holistic conceptual framework would provide a more nuanced understanding of effective crisis communication strategies. Contextual research focusing on sector-specific communication approaches is needed to address diverse industry challenges. Moreover, exploring crisis communication practices in various geographical and cultural contexts would contribute to a more globally applicable knowledge base.

In conclusion, effective crisis communication strategies are paramount in safeguarding public trust during challenging times. By prioritizing timely, transparent, empathetic, and consistent communication tailored to specific contexts, organizations can strengthen stakeholder relations, mitigate negative consequences, and foster positive perceptions, ultimately enhancing overall resilience and reputation.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

Develop an integrated framework that combines timeliness, transparency, tone, empathy, and consistency as key pillars of effective crisis communication. This integrated framework will contribute to advancing theoretical understanding by providing a comprehensive model that accounts for multiple dimensions influencing public trust during crises.

Practice

Implement tailored crisis communication approaches that are specific to different sectors or industries, considering their unique challenges and stakeholder dynamics. Sector-specific approaches will contribute to enhancing practical strategies by addressing industry-specific needs, ensuring relevance, and effectiveness in crisis communication efforts.

Policy

Implement tailored crisis communication approaches that are specific to different sectors or industries, considering their unique challenges and stakeholder dynamics. Advocate for the development and adoption of guidelines and standards for crisis communication practices, emphasizing the importance of timeliness, transparency, and empathetic communication. Establishing guidelines and standards will contribute to shaping policy frameworks by promoting best practices, accountability, and ethical conduct in crisis communication across industries and organizations.

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