

Crisis Communication: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

In recent years, crisis communication has become increasingly crucial for Indonesian institutions and companies, involving diverse stakeholders, communication forms, and contexts before, during, and after perceived crisis events. This study aimed to map, analyze and compare published studies in both global and national contexts. By adhering to the PRISMA 2020 standards for systematic literature reviews, the study consisted of five phases: (1) research questions, (2) eligibility criteria and sources of information, (3) search selection, (4) process of study selection, and (5) data coding and synthesis from Zotero bibliographic management. The study revealed that academic publications on crisis communications were primarily focused on the Asia and European continents and utilized either qualitative or quantitative research methods. It is shown that the outcome of crisis communication management is mostly around reputation repair, control, and also risk management changes and improvements, which highlight the importance of a corporate reputation in shaping organizational resilience. Future studies should concentrate on proactive crisis communication management strategies since it is essential for mitigating the side effects of the crisis communication itself while emphasizing the role of reputation repair, control, and also risk management changes in fostering stakeholders' trust.

Keywords: Crisis Communication Management, Mitigation, Corporate Reputation, Relationship, Reputation

1. Introduction

Crisis communication involves a multifaceted and fluid array of communication processes that occur prior to, during, and after an occurrence, circumstances, or sequence of events perceived as a crisis by an organization and/or its stakeholders (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). It involves various individuals, contexts, and forms of communication that are interconnected and play a crucial role in addressing and managing crises effectively. In the last half-decade, Indonesian institutions and companies have experienced a discernible rise in the occurrence of crisis communication incidents. These incidents range from the COVID-19 pandemic, transportation accidents, cyber/data security issues and electric blackouts to natural disasters, highlighting the diverse nature of crises that organizations must navigate.

Figure 1. Cyber/data security issues



Figure 2. Transportation Accidents



Figure 3. COVID-19



Figure 4. Electric Blackouts



The previous figures are some examples of the crisis communications cases in Indonesia for the past few years which have been quite notable and viral. From the latest cyber-attack issues at the largest Islamic

bank in Indonesia, plane crashes/accidents, and COVID-19 handling to electric blackouts issues, institutions/companies had to navigate crises and manage their communication effectively.

Companies must handle crisis communication seriously in a timely manner for several reasons: to protect the organization's reputation and image, address stakeholders' concerns and maintain trust during challenging times; to help minimize the negative impact on the organization's operations, financial stability, and relationships with key stakeholders; and demonstrate the company's commitment to accountability and responsibility, which can help in rebuilding trust and credibility (Coombs & Holladay 2010). The growing complexity of crises, the impact on reputation and stakeholders, media scrutiny, legal considerations, learning from past experiences, and the strategic advantages of effective crisis management have all contributed to its growing significance and interest as a subject of study.

In the dynamic landscape of modern business environments, the effective management of crisis communication plays a pivotal role in safeguarding organizational reputation and maintaining stakeholder trust. This research aims to investigate the strategies, challenges, and outcomes associated with crisis communication management within companies facing diverse crisis scenarios. By exploring the intersection of theory and practice in crisis communication, this research aims to offer valuable insights into ways organizations can improve their readiness, response, and recovery strategies to effectively navigate challenging periods.

1.1 Literature Review

Crisis Communication Management

The historical evolution of crisis communication can be traced back to the work of Steven Fink in 1986 in his book: *Crisis Management: Planning of the Inevitable*. Fink proposed a model to explain the development of the stages of a crisis. The evolving domain of crisis management is delineated into four distinct stages: (1) prodromal stage, which shows indicators of an impending crisis emerge; (2) acute stage, in which a crisis unfolds; (3) chronic stage, which is a recovery period marked by residual concerns stemming from the crisis; and (4) crisis resolution stage, which is the restoration of normal operations within the organization. The crisis management model was also developed by Smith (1990) with the three-step model and Mitroff (2000) with the five-stage model. Broadly, crisis models encompass the emergency phases of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery (FEMA, 2006). The process of crisis management can be condensed into three phases: (1) pre-crisis; (2) crisis; and (3) post-crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). This three-phase model serves as a framework for organizing discussions on crisis communication, emphasizing the importance of understanding critical points where communication plays a crucial role in managing crises.

Based on the results of the exploration of several books and journals, crisis communication management can be explained as the strategic and coordinated communication efforts undertaken by organizations, companies, or individuals to build and protect organizational reputation by addressing and navigating crises effectively.

Mitigation

Mitigation refers to a range of actions taken prior to an event in order to prevent harm, such as illness, injury, and death as well as minimize property damage/loss (Gougelet, 2016). Mitigation is the process of reducing the risk or severity of an unfavorable event or situation. This can be achieved by implementing preventive measures to decrease the likelihood of the event happening or by taking steps to reduce the impact if it does occur. Mitigation strategies can be applied across various fields, including

environmental or natural protection, financial risk management, information technology security, law, occupational health and safety, and politics.

Company Reputation

Ronald J. Burke in his book, *Corporate Reputation: Managing Opportunities and Threats*, explained that corporate/company reputation can be considered as a reflection of the opinions, perceptions, attitudes, and sentiments of individual stakeholders within a specific group (Burke et al., 2016). Company reputation is the perception held by stakeholders, such as customers, employees, investors, regulators, and the public, about a business or organization. A strong reputation can positively influence a company's financial performance by fostering customer loyalty, improving employee morale, and enhancing financial results.

Relationship

In communication theory, relationships are often defined as the connections, associations, or bonds established between individuals or groups via communication processes (Beebe et al., 1996). These relationships may manifest in interpersonal, organizational, or societal contexts and are influenced by an array of elements such as communication styles, shared encounters, and mutual understandings.

2 Method

This study uses a method of systematic literature review by using the PRISMA 2020 standard to identify criteria, sources of information, search strategy, process of data selection, process of data collection, and data set (Page et al., 2021). PRISMA 2020 provides 27 elements and guidance (in the form of a checklist) on the technique to find, analyze, and synthesize a study by using five different phases (Tawfik et al., 2019), as stated below:

Phase 1: The research questions (“RQ”) are organized around four main areas such as (1) Quartile levels journals (“RQ1”), characteristics of the documentary, and specific places, or geographical locations (RQ2), and also the methodology of research that are used (RQ3); (2) the three phases of crisis communication management (RQ4); (3) The outcome and impacts of a crisis communication management in the previous studies (RQ5) (Coombs & Holladay, 2010).

Phase 2: Eligibility requirements and information sources. In this study, any English and/or Indonesian scholarly journal articles between 2021 and 2023 that may include related terms such as “crisis communication management”, “corporate reputation”, “company”, “reputation”, “relationship”, “communication” inside their title, abstract, and keywords are included (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). All related studies that use quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods are included (Page et al., 2021). Previous literature that does not have clear methods such as books and also proceedings of a conference/symposium are excluded.

Phase 3: Search strategies. Scopus is used only for the scholarly articles selection. The global index is derived from a highly esteemed index like Scopus. Published timeframes for these journal articles are limited to three years from 2021 up until 2023. The limitation of time is solely based on the data recency of the relevant literature.

Phase 4: Study selection process. The first inquiry of Scopus produced 533 articles. The articles identified through the inclusion and exclusion criteria, primarily based on their titles and abstracts were assessed. Our findings were combined and found 79 relevant articles. In the second selection round, only 72 journals will be examined in full text and we decided to exclude the remaining 461 articles. The 72 articles were included in the final sample for this systematic literature review.

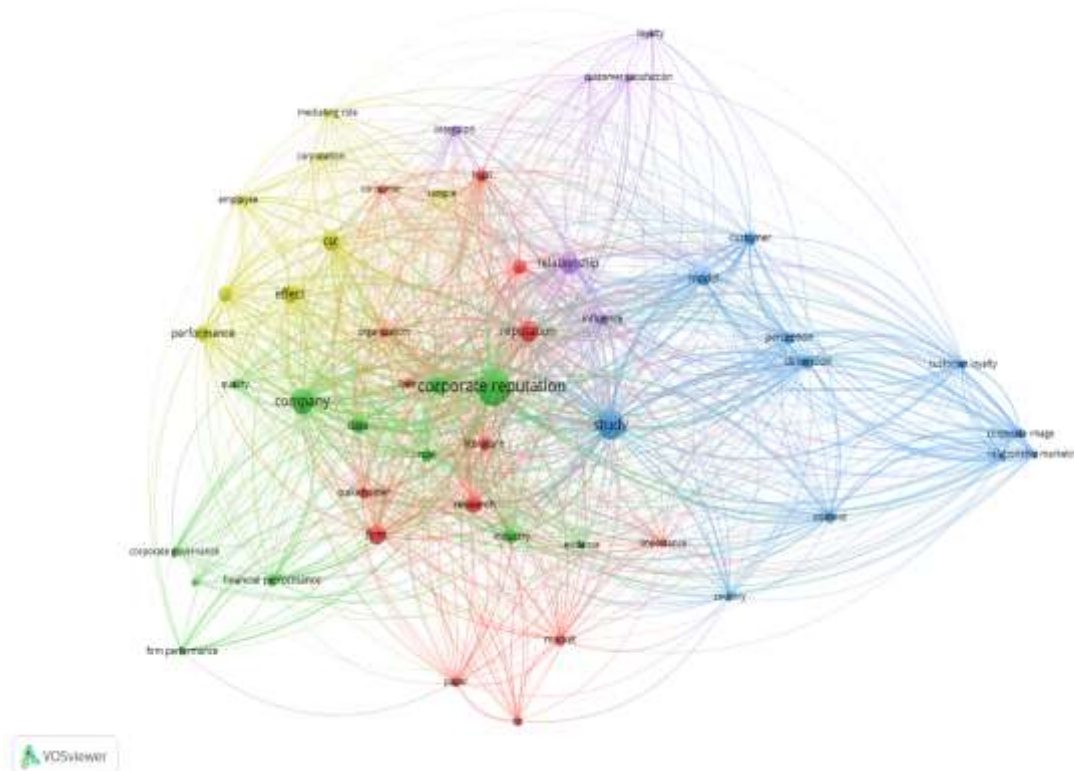
Phase 5: Data coding and also synthesis. In this phase, Zotero bibliography management is used for data collecting to make it easier for both researchers to make this article in real-time collaboration. For data synthesis, a simple coding sheet were used. Then VOS Viewer was used to analyze the conceptual network (van Eck & Waltman, n.d.). In this review, the researchers independently and in consensus applied the selection criteria in different phases, first for the preliminary inclusion and then for the final inclusion (Valverde-Berrocoso et al., 2022).

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Clusters of Keywords in Crisis Communication Management

The analysis results identified several clusters that are caused by the co-occurrence of keywords used in the selected journals/articles. In cluster 1, which is defined by the color green, the term “corporate reputation” is connected to “impact”, “company” and “data”. The term “study” in the second cluster that is defined by the color blue is connected to “customer”, “model” and “perception”. The term “reputation” is connected to “analysis”, “research” and “firm” in the third cluster that is defined by the color red. In the fourth cluster, which is defined by the color purple, the term “relationship” is connected to “influence”, “intention” and “customer satisfaction”. We also have the fifth cluster that is defined with the color yellow, the term “effect” in this cluster is connected to “performance”, “CSR” and “corporate social responsibility”.

Figure 5. VOS Viewer Clusters



3.2 Documentary characteristic

In this study, we also discovered a greater number of previous studies focusing on crisis communication management that were indexed in Scopus. The articles were mostly found in Asia (65%), Europe (53%), The United States of America (21%), and also The United Kingdom (10%). As for the research method, these journals are using either a quantitative approach or a qualitative approach.

3.3 Three Phases of Crisis Communication Management

According to the book by Coombs: *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*, crisis communication management consists of three distinct phases: pre-crisis, during-crisis, and post-crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). Each phase has its own dimensions that need to be considered for any organization to prepare them for what may happen and how to endure it. On pre-crisis, each company/organization needs to consider any legal and ethical considerations as these are the vital aspects that require meticulous attention. Any organization must navigate legal frameworks while upholding ethical standards to mitigate any potential liabilities and reputation damage if the crisis happens (Yi, 2023). If the crisis does happen, there are various key components that comes into play such as crisis management (strategic planning and execution to mitigate the impact of crisis), crisis leadership (guiding the organization through turbulences), crisis communication (disseminating accurate information to stakeholders), and also stakeholders engagement (maintain trust and transparency towards stakeholders) (Pérez-Cornejo & de Quevedo-Puente, 2023). The last one is the post-crisis phase, which includes organizational learning where the organization analyzes and reflects on the crisis that happened, and also media relations where organizations ensure that media are reporting accurately and disseminate any crisis-related information (Opgenhaffen, 2023). The one key component that plays the most important part in successful crisis communication management is effective communication itself, which should ensure proper information management towards external parties and direct communication towards stakeholders, and will give favorable outcomes (M.A. et al., 2021).

3.4 Outcomes and Impacts of a Crisis Communication Management

In this study, researchers identified that the most frequently reported outcomes in the scholarly articles were reputation repair (78%), control (71%), and also risk management changes and improvement (63%). As for the impacts, researchers found that the highest impact is towards the company/corporate reputation (85,2%) as most researchers pointed out in their scholarly articles. Company/corporate reputation itself refers to the overall perception of an organization that is held by stakeholders, such as customers, employees, investors, regulators, and the public (Ghuslan et al., 2021). When a crisis communication occurs, it has the possibility of tarnishing the reputation of a company/corporate which will result in a decline or loss of trust, credibility, and goodwill among the stakeholders (Araújo et al., 2021) if not managed properly.

3.5 Discussion

As previously mentioned, there are a few clusters mentioned in crafting effective crisis communication strategies that address various dimensions of organizational resilience and stakeholder engagement. These clusters, if studied right, will be the underlying key concepts when researching crisis communication. Asia and Europe are the two continents where crisis communication is studied, this reflects the related trends that have been happening there, regardless of the methods used. The three phases of crisis communication (pre-crisis, during crisis, and post-crisis) will provide valuable insights into effective crisis communication preparedness and response strategies.. The outcomes and impacts of crisis communication management highlight the significance of reputation repair, control, and risk management changes; these will underscore the centrality of a corporate reputation in shaping stakeholder perception and also organizational resilience. This emphasizes the need for proactive company/corporate management strategies in mitigating the side effects of crisis communication.

4 Conclusion

The study explores different aspects of crisis communication management, drawing insights from scholarly articles indexed in Scopus, primarily from Asia and Europe. The three crisis communication management model, comprising pre-crisis, during-crisis, and post-crisis phases, is foundational for every organization. An effective communication strategy is pivotal for successful crisis communication management, aiding in information management and stakeholder engagement. Relevant scholarly articles highlight reputation repair, control, and risk management changes as primary outcomes, with the most significant impact on company reputation. A damaged reputation can harm stakeholder trust if not managed well. Thus, a comprehensive crisis communication strategy must be able to address organizational resilience and stakeholder engagement. The three-phase approach offers insights into crisis preparedness and response. Outcome and impact assessments highlight the importance of corporate reputation in shaping stakeholder perceptions and organizational resilience. Proactive management strategies are essential for mitigating the negative effects of crisis communication, emphasizing the critical role of reputation repair, control, and risk management changes in fostering organizational resilience and stakeholder trust.

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