



UniMAC
UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION

**CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT IN MEDIA
ORGANIZATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF GHANAIAN NEWSROOMS
DURING ELECTION PERIODS.**

BY

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MAMM24018

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND
COMMUNICATION-INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM IN FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTER'S DEGREE IN MEDIA
MANAGEMENT.**

DECEMBER, 2025

CANDIDATES DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that, no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

This Dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of Dissertation/Thesis laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication UniMAC-IJ.

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DEDICATION

I first and foremost dedicate this thesis to the Almighty God, from whom our blessings flow and the source of wisdom to complete the study. I dedicate this thesis to my parents Dr. Seth Twum-Baah and Mrs. Comfort Twum-Baah for everything they ever wished for me. To my lovely wife and daughter Georgina Baffour and Winifred Afia Nyametse Adams I say God bless you abundantly.

Again, to my siblings, Millicent Adams, Frank Adams, Rev. Asare Adams, I say God bless you for the support you gave me even when I thought all hope was lost you came through for me.

To my uncle and friends, Rev. Frank Twum-Baah, Clement Marfo, Vera Achiaa Esther Asare, your unwavering support laid the foundation for every achievement in my life. Your resilience and encouragement were much appreciated throughout my journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply grateful to God for the strength, wisdom, and perseverance that made the completion of this study possible. I extend my sincere appreciation to my Supervisor Dr. Caroline Aboagye Da-Costa, whose scholarly guidance, critical insights, and unwavering commitment to academic excellence greatly shaped the direction and quality of this research. Her mentorship challenged me to think rigorously and to uphold high standards throughout the research process.

I am also profoundly thankful to Dr. James Kwaku Asante for the consistent encouragement, intellectual support, and practical assistance offered at various stages of this journey.

Again, my heartfelt thanks further go to Andrews Adunkwah and Christian Asamoah Mpere, for their support, patience, and thoughtful contributions. Their encouragement and readiness to assist both academically and personally helped sustain momentum and focus from inception to completion.

Finally, I appreciate all participants who generously shared their time and experiences, as well as everyone who contributed in diverse ways to the success of this study. This work is a product of collective effort, support, and shared commitment to knowledge.

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ABSTRACT

Crisis communication management is a critical function of media organizations during election periods, where heightened political tension, misinformation, and external pressures threaten journalistic credibility and democratic stability. This study examined how Ghanaian media organizations manage crisis communication during elections by exploring the nature of communication crises encountered, the challenges faced, levels of newsroom preparedness, and the strategies employed in responding to electoral communication crises. Guided by an interpretivist research philosophy, the study adopted a qualitative research approach and inductive reasoning to capture the lived experiences and subjective interpretations of newsroom professionals. The study focused on selected state-owned and private media organizations thus Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), Adom FM, Graphic Communications Group Limited (GCGL), and Citi FM/Citi TV to reflect the pluralistic nature of Ghana's media landscape. Using purposive and maximum variation sampling techniques, six participants comprising editors, producers, newsroom managers, and a senior journalist were selected. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews structured around key thematic areas, including communication challenges and crises, newsroom preparedness, crisis communication strategies, and post-crisis learning. The interview guide was reviewed by experts and pilot tested to ensure clarity and relevance. Data were analysed thematically, and methodological rigour was ensured using Guba and Lincoln's trustworthiness framework. Findings revealed that Ghanaian newsrooms experience recurring communication crises during elections, largely driven by misinformation, technological constraints, verification delays, and limited access to rural communication networks. Political interference, media ownership influence, and regulatory pressures were found to undermine editorial independence and ethical standards, contributing to reputational and preventable crises. While individual journalists often relied on personal ethics and professionalism to navigate crises, institutional preparedness across newsrooms was uneven, with many organizations lacking formal crisis communication frameworks. Leadership quality, organizational culture, and internal communication emerged as critical determinants of effective crisis management, while post-crisis evaluation and learning remained underdeveloped. The study concludes that strengthening institutional preparedness, ethical training, leadership capacity, and post-crisis learning mechanisms is essential for enhancing newsroom resilience. The findings contribute context-specific insights to crisis communication theory and offer practical recommendations for improving media performance and democratic communication during elections in Ghana.

Keywords: Crisis communication, elections, Ghanaian media, misinformation, newsroom preparedness, political pressure, qualitative study, democratic stability.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of Study

Crisis communication management is fundamental for media organizations, particularly during politically sensitive periods like national elections. Elections are integrally marked with tension, uncertainty, and the heightened possibility of misinformation, which demands rigorous and strategic communication practices from media entities (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). In Ghana, a country renowned for its vibrant and competitive democratic processes, media organizations hold an influential position, significantly shaping public perceptions and attitudes during electoral cycles (Gadzekpo, 2018).

Ghanaian newsrooms face unique challenges during elections, partly due to the country's history of competitive politics marked by tight electoral contests. Since Ghana's return to multiparty democracy in 1992, elections have consistently generated crises, ranging from accusations of electoral fraud to heightened ethnic and political tensions, requiring media houses to communicate swiftly and responsibly (Gyimah-Boadi & Prempeh, 2012). These crises present an ongoing test of newsroom resilience, journalistic ethics, and crisis communication strategies.

The complexity of crisis communication management in media organizations during election periods is underscored by the dual responsibility of providing accurate information while mitigating potential conflicts (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2018). Media outlets often become central actors in crisis resolution efforts or, conversely, contribute to the escalation of tensions through sensational or biased reporting. This delicate balance necessitates sophisticated strategies and preparedness in Ghanaian newsrooms to effectively manage information dissemination during electoral crises (Boateng, 2019).

In Ghana, the liberalization and pluralism of the media landscape since the mid-1990s have significantly increased the number of media outlets, intensified competition and consequently influencing crisis communication dynamics (Hasty, 2005). The proliferation of radio, television, newspapers, and recently digital platforms, has broadened the public's access to information, but simultaneously amplified the risks associated with misinformation and biased reportage (Mensah, 2021). During election periods, misinformation often flourishes, prompting media organizations to act decisively to uphold their credibility and public trust (Ankomah & Boateng, 2020). Crisis communication management in this context demands a proactive approach thus anticipating potential crises, formulating clear communication guidelines, and responding effectively to evolving situations to minimize harm and confusion (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003).

Studies indicate that Ghanaian media's capacity to manage crises effectively during elections varies significantly, depending on organizational resources, the professional training of journalists, and internal communication protocols (Asante & Gadzekpo, 2020). Smaller and newer media organizations often lack structured crisis management plans, leaving them vulnerable during periods of high political volatility (Owusu, 2017). The role of social media has further complicated crisis communication management in Ghanaian media organizations. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp enable rapid dissemination of both accurate information and misinformation, amplifying the effects of electoral crises exponentially (Mensah & Yeboah, 2022). As a result, newsrooms increasingly recognize the need to incorporate social media monitoring and management strategies into their broader crisis communication plans.

Additionally, cultural contexts, political affiliations, and ownership structures greatly influence newsroom behaviours during electoral crises in Ghana (Kwansah-Aidoo, 2018). Media

ownership by political figures or aligned stakeholders often compromises journalistic independence and objectivity, affecting crisis communication decisions and public trust (Ansu-Kyeremeh & Gadzekpo, 2017). Effective crisis communication management also requires ongoing training and professional development for journalists and editors in Ghanaian newsrooms. Studies highlight the positive correlation between comprehensive crisis training programs and improved journalistic response during election crises (Mensah, 2021). Investing in training equips media personnel with the tools to responsibly manage complex information environments, ultimately supporting peaceful electoral outcomes.

Therefore, examining crisis communication management practices within Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods contributes significantly to understanding how media organizations can better navigate these complex dynamics. Such research not only informs theoretical models of crisis communication, but also offers practical recommendations for enhancing the resilience and ethical conduct of media practitioners during critical democratic events in Ghana (Boateng, 2019; Mensah & Yeboah, 2022).

1.1 Problem of Study

Effective crisis communication management in media organizations is essential, particularly during election periods when newsrooms are highly vulnerable to information disruptions and misinformation campaigns. Media organizations hold a significant role in informing and educating the public, influencing perceptions, and ensuring democratic processes function smoothly. However, during election periods, heightened political tensions and competing agendas often test these media institutions' crisis communication frameworks, potentially undermining their credibility and capacity to manage critical information effectively (Seeger & Sellnow, 2019).

In Ghana, the situation is particularly pressing, given the country's vibrant yet politically charged media landscape. Ghanaian newsrooms face unique challenges during elections, characterized by intensified partisan influence, misinformation, and information overload (Owusu-Amoh, 2018). Previous election cycles have highlighted the inadequacies of existing communication management frameworks, exposing gaps in newsrooms' preparedness to handle crises effectively. Consequently, this inadequacy has sometimes resulted in public distrust and questioned the credibility of media outlets during politically sensitive periods (Karikari, 2021).

Furthermore, limited research has specifically explored how Ghanaian media organizations manage crisis communication during election periods. Existing literature predominantly focuses on broader aspects of media performance or political communication without delving deeply into the nuances of crisis communication strategies employed by newsrooms in electoral contexts (Danso & Edu-Afful, 2018). Consequently, there remains a significant knowledge gap in understanding the usefulness of crisis management strategies within Ghanaian media environments during elections.

The importance of addressing this knowledge gap lies in the necessity for robust, strategic, and responsive crisis communication management approaches that can mitigate misinformation, maintain public trust, and ensure effective dissemination of accurate information during electoral crises (Coombs, 2019).

Moreover, understanding and addressing these challenges will equip Ghanaian newsrooms with evidence-based strategies tailored to navigate the complex and often raging political communications landscape typical of election periods.

In light of the above, this study aims to investigate crisis communication management practices within Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods, examining the preparedness of both newsroom structures and personnel, strategies employed, and effectiveness of these strategies. This study will contribute valuable insights and practical recommendations for enhancing media resilience, credibility, and accountability during critical democratic processes, ultimately fostering a more vigorous media system capable of managing crises effectively during Ghanaian elections.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To identify the nature of crisis communication challenges media organizations in Ghana encounter during elections.
2. To explore the major challenges faced by Ghanaian media organizations in crisis communication management during elections.
3. To examine the level of preparedness of Ghanaian newsrooms in managing communication crises during election periods.
4. To identify and analyse the crisis communication strategies employed by Ghanaian media organizations during electoral crises.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What types of crisis communication challenges do media organizations in Ghana encounter during election periods?
2. How prepared are Ghanaian newsrooms in managing communication crises during election periods?
3. What crisis communication strategies do Ghanaian media organizations employ during electoral crises?

4. What recommendations can be proposed to improve crisis communication frameworks within Ghanaian newsrooms during future election periods?

1.4 Scope of the study

This study focused specifically on crisis communication management within Ghanaian media organizations during election periods. The decision to concentrate on this area stemmed from the recognition that elections in Ghana often served as high-pressure moments that tested newsroom preparedness, communication ethics, and institutional resilience. As noted by Karikari (2021), election seasons in Ghana typically heighten the scrutiny on media institutions due to their central role in shaping public opinion and ensuring credible information flow. Similarly, Ansah (2020) emphasizes that the electoral environment in Ghana creates conditions where misinformation, political interference, and audience polarization become acute, thereby complicating newsroom operations. Hence, the study's scope targeted this context to uncover how media houses anticipated, navigated, and mitigated communication challenges when tensions were highest.

The study examined various Ghanaian newsrooms across print, broadcast, and online media to ensure a balanced and representative understanding of newsroom practices. The inclusion of these media types acknowledged the evolving communication landscape, where digital media platforms now influence political discourse as significantly as traditional outlets (Arthur, 2022; Gadzekpo, 2019). By including both legacy and digital newsrooms, the study captured a wide spectrum of crisis management practices, reflecting the hybridity of Ghana's current media ecosystem.

Geographically, the research was limited to media organizations operating within Ghana, particularly in major urban centres such as Accra and Kumasi. These cities hosted the most influential newsrooms and reflected national patterns of media behaviour and crisis response.

According to Owusu-Amoh (2018), these media hubs not only dominate the country's information flow but also set the tone for regional and national discourse. Focusing on these centres therefore allowed the study to analyse crisis communication management at the heart of Ghana's media influence, where political and editorial decisions are most visible and consequential.

Temporally, the study covered election cycles between 2016 and 2024, a period that was chosen to capture multiple general elections and to trace developments in newsroom preparedness and response strategies. As Danso and Edu-Afful (2018) argue, Ghana's recent elections have presented evolving communication challenges, including social media manipulation and political misinformation. Examining this timeframe enabled the study to identify consistent trends, improvements, and enduring gaps across successive electoral cycles, contributing to a longitudinal understanding of crisis management.

The study adopted a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews with newsroom managers, editors, journalists, and communication experts. This design aligned with Seeger and Sellnow's (2019) argument that qualitative inquiry is most appropriate for exploring organizational learning, communication decision-making, and crisis adaptation. Through this approach, the study gained insight into practitioners' lived experiences, internal protocols, and reflections on crisis response within politically charged reporting environments.

Ultimately, the scope was designed to produce contextually grounded findings that are both academically and practically relevant. By situating the research in Ghana's key media centres, focusing on contemporary election cycles, and integrating diverse media formats, the study contributed to a deeper understanding of newsroom resilience and credibility during democratic contests. This orientation aligns with Coombs (2019), who highlights the role of crisis

communication in sustaining institutional trust, and with Boateng (2021), who underscores its importance for the legitimacy of media practice in emerging democracies.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study in its potential is to fill existing knowledge gaps by examining specific crisis communication strategies used by Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods. This study is critical in understanding how media organizations can effectively manage crises and misinformation during elections, thereby reinforcing their credibility and trustworthiness in the public domain (Karikari, 2021).

Additionally, the study's findings will provide valuable insights for media practitioners, policymakers, and scholars interested in crisis communication and electoral processes. By highlighting effective practices and identifying shortcomings within current frameworks, the research can inform targeted interventions and training programs aimed at enhancing newsroom preparedness and response capabilities during electoral crises (Seeger & Sellnow, 2019).

Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader literature on media management and political communication, offering empirical evidence from the unique context of Ghanaian elections. This context-specific contribution enriches the global discourse on crisis communication by illustrating particular challenges and adaptive strategies that media organizations face in emerging democracies (Danso & Edu-Afful, 2018).

Moreover, the research outcomes are expected to promote democratic resilience by equipping Ghanaian media organizations with robust communication strategies that safeguard against misinformation and ensure accurate information dissemination.

Effective crisis communication management directly supports democratic stability and transparency, crucial for maintaining public trust and engagement during politically charged periods (Owusu-Amoh, 2018).

Finally, strengthened crisis communication frameworks will enable media organizations to perform more effectively as essential pillars of democracy, thereby positively impacting Ghana's democratic consolidation and societal well-being (Coombs, 2019).

1.6 Organization of the study

The study will be organized into five chapters. Chapter one gives an overview of the background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, scope, and organization of the study. Chapter two also examines the applicable theories from both a positive inquiry and analysis and gives some perspectives on some related empirical works. Chapter three entails the research design, population of the study, sampling techniques to be used, and data collection methods and data analysis. Chapter four will present the results and discuss the findings of the study with applicable theories. Finally, Chapter Five draws' conclusions and makes recommendations.

1.7 Chapter Summary

Chapter One introduced the study on crisis communication management in Ghanaian media organizations during election periods, highlighting the critical role of the media in maintaining public trust, managing misinformation, and promoting democratic stability. The background established the contextual relevance of crisis communication within Ghana's competitive political environment, emphasizing challenges such as misinformation, political influence, and newsroom preparedness. The problem statement identified gaps in research and practice concerning how Ghanaian newsrooms manage crises during elections, which guided the

formulation of clear research objectives and questions aimed at exploring preparedness, strategies, and effectiveness. The scope of the study detailed the geographical, temporal, and methodological boundaries, focusing on major media hubs such as Accra and Kumasi and covering election cycles from 2016 to 2024 using a qualitative approach. The significance of the study was outlined through its potential contributions to academic discourse, policy formulation, and professional media practice. Finally, the organization of the study was described, outlining the structure of the subsequent chapters and the logical progression of the research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

In Ghana, where the media is considered a vital pillar of democracy, the ability of newsrooms to manage communication crises effectively during election periods is critical. These crises may range from reputational damage due to accusations of bias, the spread of misinformation, threats against journalists, and operational disruptions. As such, crisis communication management in media settings is a strategic necessity, aimed at preserving credibility, maintaining accurate information flow, and promoting national stability during electoral transitions.

Scholarly interest in crisis communication has grown in recent decades, focusing on frameworks and strategies that organizations, including media outlets, can adopt to prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises. The literature provides several theoretical models, such as Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which offer insights into how responses should align with stakeholder perceptions and the nature of the crisis. Other studies emphasize the role of framing, agenda-setting, organizational preparedness, and digital media integration, particularly in emerging democracies where media systems are susceptible to political and structural pressures (Coombs, 2015; Entman, 1993).

This literature review creates existing studies on crisis communication management within media organizations, with a focus on Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods. It examines key themes such as newsroom preparedness, journalist safety, misinformation management, media framing, and stakeholder engagement.

By analyzing both global and local perspectives, the review aims to establish a scholarly foundation for understanding how Ghanaian media institutions respond to electoral crises and to identify gaps that this study seeks to address.

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Concept 1: Crisis Communication

Crisis communication refers to the strategic process of creating, delivering, and managing information during and after an unexpected event that threatens an organization's reputation, credibility, or operational stability (Coombs, 2019; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2018). It involves clear, timely, and transparent messaging aimed at minimizing confusion, countering misinformation, and maintaining public confidence. According to Reynolds and Seeger (2005), crisis communication is not limited to public relations, it encompasses risk anticipation, stakeholder engagement, and meaning-making during turbulent events.

In essence, crisis communication serves two main purposes: informational control and reputational protection. Informational control ensures that the public receives accurate and consistent messages, while reputational protection focuses on maintaining stakeholder trust and organizational legitimacy (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). In the context of elections, media organizations act as both communicators and crisis managers. They are responsible not only for relaying official information but also for managing narratives that could influence public stability.

In Ghana's electoral environment, crises often emerge from accusations of bias, misinformation, electoral disputes, and threats against journalists (Karikari, 2021). During these times, media organizations must deploy effective crisis communication strategies to avoid escalating tensions. As noted by Mensah (2021), effective crisis communication in the

Ghanaian media context demands clarity, neutrality, and factual verification to sustain the media's watchdog role and safeguard public confidence in democratic institutions.

2.1.2 Crisis Communication Management

Crisis communication management is the systematic coordination of communication activities before, during, and after a crisis to mitigate reputational damage, ensure information accuracy, and restore normalcy (Coombs, 2007; Seeger & Sellnow, 2019). It integrates strategic planning, decision-making, and message dissemination under pressure. As Ulmer et al. (2018) explain, crisis communication management involves three key stages:

1. **Pre-crisis preparation**-risk assessment, monitoring, and developing communication protocols.
2. **Crisis response**-implementing rapid communication strategies, issuing press briefings, and addressing stakeholder concerns.
3. **Post-crisis recovery**-learning from the incident and rebuilding trust.

In media organizations, effective crisis communication management means developing proactive systems that can handle disruptions, misinformation, or public backlash. According to Boateng (2019), newsroom crisis management involves assigning spokespersons, coordinating cross-departmental responses, monitoring media narratives, and maintaining ethical reporting standards. Failure to manage communication crises can erode credibility, fuel misinformation, and polarize audiences.

In Ghana, many media organizations lack formalized crisis management frameworks (Owusu, 2017). Crises are often handled reactively, rather than strategically, which exposes vulnerabilities during high-stakes periods like elections. As Asante and Gadzekpo (2020) highlight, effective crisis communication management requires training, planning, and internal

coordination within media institutions. It also demands alignment with national communication regulations, such as those set by the National Media Commission (NMC), to ensure professionalism and accountability.

Therefore, crisis communication management in the Ghanaian media sector is not just a technical function but a strategic necessity, a process that upholds institutional integrity, sustains democratic discourse, and mitigates the harmful impact of electoral misinformation.

2.1.3 Election Crisis Communication in Media Organizations

Election crisis communication in media organizations refers to the specialized set of strategies and responses media houses employ to manage crises that arise during electoral processes. These crises may include reputational damage due to perceived bias, the spread of misinformation, threats to journalists, or operational disruptions caused by political tension (Ansu-Kyeremeh & Gadzekpo, 2017; Mensah & Yeboah, 2022). During elections, the media's role as a primary source of information places it at the centre of crisis dynamics such as balancing speed, accuracy, and impartiality under intense public scrutiny.

Election-related crises often arise from the interplay between political competition, media partisanship, and public perception. As Gadzekpo (2018) observes, Ghana's highly liberalized and politically plural media environment increases the likelihood of both misinformation and politicized reporting. Crisis communication in this context, therefore, requires strategic framing, ethical reporting, and stakeholder collaboration. According to Coombs (2019), successful election crisis communication depends on the organization's ability to anticipate potential triggers and respond with empathy, factual integrity, and cultural sensitivity.

Media organizations must also address digital-era challenges, including viral misinformation and online propaganda. Mensah and Yeboah (2022) found that Ghanaian newsrooms have

begun to integrate social media monitoring and fact-checking into their crisis response plans to manage the rapid circulation of false news. This evolution underscores the shift from traditional press management to hybrid digital crisis communication, where newsroom credibility depends on both offline and online communication practices.

In Ghana, election crisis communication thus serves a dual purpose:

1. To protect the credibility of media institutions amid political contestation.
2. To preserve democratic stability by ensuring accurate, non-partisan information dissemination.

By effectively managing election crises, media organizations reinforce their watchdog function and contribute to peaceful electoral outcomes (Karikari, 2021; Boateng, 2019).

2.2 Empirical Review

Crisis communication management within media organizations has increasingly attracted scholarly attention, especially in contexts like Ghana, where election periods heighten political tension and information disorder. The literature collectively emphasizes three interrelated empirical issues: institutional preparedness, framing and editorial conduct, and organizational leadership and political influence. However, these studies vary significantly in scope, depth, and analytical rigor, reflecting both the evolving nature of the field and persisting research gaps.

2.2.1 Institutional Preparedness and Strategic Capacity

Several empirical studies highlight weak institutional preparedness in Ghanaian media houses. Nyarko (2015) found that most newsroom crisis responses during elections were *ad hoc* and largely dependent on the discretion of senior editors rather than institutionalized crisis plans. His findings are echoed by Mensah and Abeka (2017), who also observed that journalists relied

on personal intuition rather than established communication protocols during the 2012 elections. Together, these studies reveal a consistent trend of *reactive rather than proactive* crisis communication management in Ghana's media sector.

However, more recent research provides a contrasting development. Osei-Owusu and Boateng (2020) identified a growing awareness of the need for preparedness, especially among well-resourced outlets like Joy News, which had implemented pre-election simulations and crisis training. Their findings partially confirm earlier works by Nyarko (2015) but extend them by showing that isolated improvements exist, primarily in larger, urban-based organizations. Yet, the persistence of unpreparedness in smaller outlets, as both studies suggest, underscores an uneven distribution of crisis management capacity across Ghana's media ecosystem.

Empirical convergence therefore exists around the idea that preparedness is both organizational and resource-dependent. While earlier studies attribute weaknesses to lack of training or structure, newer works emphasize capacity gaps linked to institutional hierarchy and financial stability. This suggests that systemic challenges, rather than ignorance, account for weak crisis management culture in Ghanaian media houses.

2.2.2 Framing, Media Ethics, and Credibility under Crisis

Another important empirical strand concerns how media organizations frame crises and manage their credibility during elections. Agyekum and Asamoah (2021), through content analysis of coverage during the 2016 and 2020 elections, found that state-owned outlets like GBC generally adopted neutral, official framing, whereas private media, particularly Adom FM and UTV, often presented partisan narratives. This finding aligns with Entman's (1993) Framing Theory, suggesting that framing choices influence public perception of electoral crises.

In contrast, Gadzekpo (2009) offers an earlier but still relevant ethnographic account showing that self-censorship in state-owned media often emerges as a defensive response to political pressure. Thus, while Agyekum and Asamoah's findings suggest institutional neutrality in public media, Gadzekpo's evidence complicates that narrative by revealing the hidden conformity behind apparent neutrality. When considered together, these studies suggest that the appearance of balance in Ghana's state media may sometimes conceal editorial caution rather than professional impartiality.

Furthermore, Mensah (2021) reinforces these tensions by emphasizing how misinformation crises during elections especially on social media have made ethical framing more difficult. His findings reveal that, under digital pressure, even well-intentioned journalists risk amplifying falsehoods through hasty reporting. This contrasts with Agyekum and Asamoah (2021), who focused on traditional broadcast framing, illustrating how platform differences now shape the scope and speed of crisis escalation.

Overall, the literature converges on the idea that credibility during crises depends heavily on ethical framing and newsroom gatekeeping, but diverges on the extent to which media organizations achieve these ideals under political and digital pressure. This reinforces the importance of integrating both organizational structures *and* editorial practices into crisis management frameworks.

2.2.3 Leadership, Decision-Making, and Political Influence

Leadership emerges as a defining factor in how media organizations navigate electoral crises. Aidoo and Teye (2022), in a case study of Citi FM, found that decisive editorial leadership and timely public statements during a misinformation crisis helped protect institutional reputation. Their findings align with Osei-Owusu and Boateng (2020), who noted that structured communication and clear authority lines improved newsroom response efficiency. Both studies

underscore the role of leadership in bridging gaps where formal crisis management policies are absent.

However, Gadzekpo (2009) provides a counterpoint, showing that leadership decisions in state-owned outlets are often constrained by political interference. Her findings on self-censorship and fear of retaliation highlight how political control limits editorial autonomy, a challenge that persists in contemporary media practice. Similarly, Ansu-Kyeremeh and Gadzekpo (2017) argue that ownership structures significantly shape newsroom crisis decisions, particularly when outlets are affiliated with political elites.

The convergence among these studies is that leadership quality strongly determines the effectiveness of crisis communication but the context of ownership and political influence defines how far leaders can exercise autonomy. Hence, while Aidoo and Teye (2022) illustrate the potential of proactive crisis leadership, Gadzekpo (2009) and Ansu-Kyeremeh and Gadzekpo (2017) remind us of the structural constraints that hinder consistent application of such leadership across Ghana's media landscape.

2.2.4 Digital Transformation and Social Media Disruption

The rise of digital media introduces a new empirical dimension. Appiah-Adjei (2019) observed that misinformation during elections spreads rapidly via WhatsApp and Twitter, outpacing traditional verification mechanisms. His work resonates with Mensah and Yeboah (2022), who found that newsrooms struggle to counter online misinformation because digital platforms lack editorial oversight. Both studies confirm that the speed and virality of social media crises challenge conventional newsroom communication hierarchies.

However, Mensah and Yeboah (2022) go further by proposing a hybrid response model, integrating real-time digital monitoring with crisis communication protocols. This contrasts

with Appiah-Adjei (2019), whose descriptive analysis stops short of offering structural solutions. The synthesis of these findings highlights that while digital transformation has democratized information dissemination, it has also amplified organizational vulnerability, an insight that reinforces the need for digital-era crisis communication strategies in Ghanaian media.

2.2.5 Synthesis of Empirical Review

In synthesis, the empirical literature demonstrates that crisis communication management within Ghanaian media organizations remains largely reactive, uneven, and shaped by institutional, political, and technological factors. While early studies (e.g., Nyarko, 2015; Mensah & Abeka, 2017) reveal the absence of formal crisis structures and reliance on individual editorial discretion, more recent research (Osei-Owusu & Boateng, 2020; Aidoo & Teye, 2022) indicates gradual institutional improvement in preparedness and leadership coordination among better-resourced newsrooms. However, this progress is hindered by persistent challenges of ownership influence, limited training, and digital misinformation, as noted by Appiah-Adjei (2019) and Mensah & Yeboah (2022). Comparative studies (Agyekum & Asamoah, 2021; Gadzekpo, 2009) further reveal that crisis communication practices are mediated by political bias and self-censorship, which compromise public trust and media credibility. Collectively, these findings affirm that effective crisis communication in Ghanaian newsrooms is contingent upon organizational capacity, ethical framing, and leadership autonomy. Yet, the lack of integrated, system-wide crisis management frameworks underscores the need for holistic strategies that combine structural preparedness with responsible communication to sustain media credibility during elections.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) has been pivotal in understanding how institutions manage public perception and response during crises. Developed by W. Timothy Coombs (2007), SCCT proposes that the effectiveness of a crisis response depends on the attribution of responsibility by stakeholders. The theory categorizes crises into three types: victim, accidental, and preventable. Each type calls for a different set of strategic responses ranging from denial to rebuilding tactics. While the framework is widely respected for its clarity and practicality, its application in politically volatile environments such as Ghana presents challenges. In Ghanaian media contexts, the lines between preventable and accidental crises are often blurred due to institutional fragility and political pressures, which makes strict categorization difficult (Coombs & Holladay, 2015).

A critical limitation of SCCT is its assumption of rational and stable environments where organizational intent and stakeholder perception can be clearly mapped. In contrast, Ghana's media landscape during elections is often shaped by complex power dynamics, ethnic loyalties, and misinformation campaigns, which can distort public attribution of blame. For example, when a media house is accused of bias, the perception may not always be tied to factual reporting failures but rather to political affiliations or historical grievances. This challenges the SCCT assumption that stakeholders act on logically perceived responsibility (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015). Therefore, adaptation of the theory must consider not just the crisis type, but the socio-political ecosystem in which media institutions operate.

The SCCT framework encourages proactive crisis planning something many Ghanaian newsrooms lack. According to Nyarko (2015), few media institutions in Ghana possess crisis manuals or conduct regular simulations. This deficiency undermines the SCCT model's

emphasis on pre-crisis readiness and post-crisis learning. Without such systems in place, media outlets resort to ad hoc responses that may appear inconsistent or reactive, further eroding public trust. Hence, the theory's application in this context must integrate organizational capacity-building and institutional learning as foundational strategies, not just reactive tactics post-crisis.

Moreover, while SCCT focuses on restoring organizational image, it may underplay the role of trust in journalism as a public good. Ghanaian media houses do not only protect corporate interests but also serve democratic functions by informing citizens during elections. When credibility is compromised due to accusations of partisanship or misinformation, the harm extends beyond institutional image to societal trust in electoral processes. In this regard, SCCT must be integrated with public interest theories to fully capture the stakes of media-related crises in transitional democracies (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2017).

There is also the issue of media pluralism and competition, which SCCT does not directly address. In Ghana, competition among private broadcasters can influence how crises are managed. A media house may choose a more defensive or confrontational crisis strategy not because it aligns with stakeholder perceptions, but due to market pressures to retain audience loyalty. This introduces a commercial dimension to crisis management that SCCT in its traditional form does not factor in. Therefore, the model should be extended to include economic incentives that shape crisis response decisions (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010).

The digital environment introduces further complications. Social media accelerates the crisis lifecycle, meaning that the response time SCCT assumes is no longer realistic. Newsrooms must act within minutes, not hours, and often before full facts are known. This calls for real-time adaptation of SCCT, incorporating rapid-response mechanisms and digital monitoring tools. In Ghana, where WhatsApp and Facebook are major information channels, failure to

manage crises in these digital spaces can lead to escalation and reputational damage (Ankomah, 2022). Thus, SCCT should integrate digital media literacy and platform-specific protocols.

In applying SCCT to Ghanaian newsrooms, it is also essential to consider the credibility of the source delivering the crisis response. Studies have shown that who speaks matters as much as what is said (Liu, Austin & Jin, 2011). In politically charged environments like Ghana, a newsroom's spokesperson whether it's an editor-in-chief or a media owner can either reassure or further polarize audiences. Therefore, SCCT application must factor in spokesperson strategy and organizational voice, especially when dealing with public institutions such as the Electoral Commission or state broadcasters.

Cultural factors are another necessary modification. SCCT is rooted in Western notions of individualism and transparency. However, in Ghana, communal values and indirect communication styles often influence public expectations. Apologies and corrective action may not be perceived as genuine unless they align with local norms of accountability, such as invoking traditional authorities or religious figures (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2005).

This implies that SCCT must be culturally contextualized to avoid misalignment between response strategies and audience expectations.

Finally, to make SCCT more applicable in Ghana, the theory should be combined with empirical tools such as stakeholder mapping and sentiment analysis to better gauge attribution of blame. This allows media managers to move beyond assumptions and base their responses on real-time data, especially during high-stakes events like elections. Incorporating empirical feedback loops can enhance the model's relevance and effectiveness in volatile contexts (Jin, Liu & Austin, 2014).

In summary, while SCCT remains a powerful tool for understanding crisis communication, its use in Ghanaian media contexts requires adaptation. Political volatility, digital disruption, cultural nuances, and institutional limitations must be accounted for in the model's application. Only by situating SCCT within Ghana's unique media ecology can it effectively guide newsrooms in navigating electoral crises. This study will adapt SCCT by incorporating these local realities and will apply it to evaluate how Ghanaian newsrooms prepare for, respond to, and learn from crises during election periods.

Framing Theory

Framing Theory, as articulated by Entman (1993), remains one of the most influential theoretical frameworks in media and communication studies. It posits that the way news is presented through selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration shapes how audiences understand events. During crises, especially in politically sensitive contexts like Ghana's election periods, framing becomes not merely a method of storytelling but a powerful tool that can either de-escalate or intensify public tension. Frames help to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). This makes the theory especially useful in analyzing how media narratives influence public perception and crisis outcomes during election disputes.

In the Ghanaian media landscape, Framing Theory offers an interpretive lens to evaluate not only what information is disseminated but how it is structured and why it is framed in a particular way. For example, during the 2020 general elections, different news outlets framed delays in electoral results in contrasting ways some as technical verification procedures, others as deliberate political manipulation (Arthur, 2021). These competing frames shaped distinct public reactions, with some citizens expressing trust in electoral authorities, while others

mobilized in protest. Such framing dynamics show how media narratives can shape social behaviour and political trust, especially in fragile electoral contexts.

However, a key limitation of Framing Theory lies in its lack of emphasis on the structural and institutional constraints that shape frame selection. It primarily focuses on content and audience interpretation without sufficiently addressing the newsroom conditions, editorial hierarchies, or political influences that shape those frames. In Ghana, media content is often influenced by political affiliation, ownership structure, and advertiser pressure (Gadzekpo, 2009). Thus, to apply Framing Theory effectively in this study, it must be paired with political economy perspectives that explain why certain frames dominate, who benefits from them, and who is marginalized.

Framing Theory also offers limited strategic guidance for managing reputational crises from an institutional perspective. While it is powerful in dissecting how news content is constructed and interpreted, it does not offer frameworks for how media houses should respond to accusations of bias, misinformation, or ethical lapses. This makes it essential to combine Framing Theory with strategic models like SCCT, which address how institutions manage stakeholder relationships during crises (Coombs, 2015). Together, the two theories can provide a dual perspective Framing Theory explaining the narrative content, and SCCT explaining the organizational response strategies.

In politically charged environments like Ghana, framing also serves as a self-defensive mechanism for media institutions. When accused of partisanship or misinformation, news organizations often use framing to justify their editorial decisions and realign public interpretation. For instance, UTV Ghana, after facing criticism during the 2020 elections, framed its controversial coverage as a deliberate effort to represent marginalized political voices rather than favouring a party (Nyarko, 2021). This example illustrates how frames are

used not only to shape public events but also to manage institutional credibility a function that aligns with SCCT's emphasis on reputational repair, though approached through a narrative rather than strategic lens.

Framing Theory is also essential for understanding the emotional and cognitive responses of audiences during crises. In times of uncertainty such as delayed results or reports of election violence how information is framed influences whether the public responds with patience, fear, outrage, or resignation. Iyengar (1991) argued that media frames play a major role in determining whether audiences assign blame to individuals, institutions, or systemic issues. This emotional framing is especially relevant in Ghana, where ethnic, regional, and political divisions can be easily inflamed by media narratives, thus amplifying the stakes of responsible reporting.

Ethical considerations are a crucial aspect often overlooked in framing analyses. Frames are not value-neutral; they carry ideological weight and moral implications. In election periods, how media frame incidents of violence, irregularities, or political statements can either contribute to national cohesion or aggravate existing divisions (Votmer, 2013).

For instance, describing electoral clashes as “minor scuffles” may downplay violence and silence victims, whereas labelling them as “politically motivated attacks” can escalate tensions. Therefore, applying Framing Theory requires a critical awareness of its normative dimensions not just what is being framed, but whether it contributes to peace, justice, and democratic development.

Furthermore, Framing Theory facilitates comparative analysis between different types of media outlets public versus private, urban versus rural, or mainstream versus community radio. Such comparisons can reveal how institutional identity, resource capacity, and audience

orientation influence framing styles. In Ghana, public broadcasters like GBC tend to use more official, neutral frames, while private stations like Adom FM may adopt populist or partisan angles, especially during elections (Asante, 2020). Analyzing these variations provides insights into the broader media ecosystem and how different narratives compete for public attention and legitimacy.

Despite its strengths, Framing Theory alone does not fully capture the cyclical nature of crisis communication. It analyses how events are portrayed but does not offer mechanisms for feedback, learning, or narrative revision based on audience reception. This is where it complements SCCT, which encourages post-crisis evaluation and adaptation. By integrating both theories, this study can investigate not only how Ghanaian newsrooms frame electoral crises, but also how they learn from public reactions and adjust their crisis communication strategies accordingly (Coombs & Holladay, 2015).

In conclusion, Framing Theory offers a critical lens through which to explore the construction of media narratives during crises. In the Ghanaian electoral context, it is particularly useful in understanding how framing choices affect public trust, emotional responses, and political stability. However, its analytical power is enhanced when applied alongside SCCT, which addresses the strategic and organizational side of crisis response. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for this study, enabling an in-depth analysis of both how crises are communicated and how institutions respond to protect credibility and fulfil their democratic role.

2.3.1 Integrating SCCT and Framing Theory in the Study

The integration of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Framing Theory provides a comprehensive and multi-dimensional foundation for this study, enabling an understanding of both the strategic and communicative dimensions of crisis management within Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods. While SCCT focuses on the organizational and managerial logic behind crisis responses, Framing Theory emphasizes the discursive and interpretive processes through which these responses are constructed and understood in the public sphere. Together, they offer a complementary framework that bridges the gap between internal institutional decision-making and external public perception which are two critical components of crisis communication management in politically charged environments such as Ghana.

SCCT, developed by Coombs (2007), offers a structured model that categorizes crises based on responsibility attribution and recommends specific communication strategies such as denial, rebuilding, or bolstering depending on the perceived source and severity of the crisis. This theory is especially valuable for understanding how newsroom managers and editors decide on crisis strategies such as issuing apologies, clarifications, or rebuttals when faced with accusations of bias, misinformation, or ethical misconduct during election coverage. However, while SCCT provides clarity on strategic choices, it is limited by its organizational bias that is, it centres on the institution's response mechanisms without adequately accounting for how audiences, shaped by cultural, political, and emotional contexts, interpret those responses. It assumes a relatively rational and homogenous audience, which may not reflect Ghana's diverse and politically polarized media environment.

This theoretical gap is effectively filled by Framing Theory, proposed by Entman (1993), which shifts attention from strategy to communication practice. Framing Theory explains how media

messages construct social reality by emphasizing certain aspects of events and downplaying others. It accounts for how journalists, editors, and news outlets shape meaning through language, tone, visuals, and emphasis elements that significantly influence public interpretation. In the Ghanaian electoral context, where public trust in media institutions is often mediated by perceptions of political allegiance, framing determines whether a newsroom's crisis response is perceived as credible, biased, or manipulative. Thus, while SCCT focuses on the organizational intent behind crisis management, Framing Theory examines the communicative outcome, i.e. how messages are received, reinterpreted, and potentially reframed by both media audiences and political actors.

The two theories, therefore, complement each other by addressing the two sides of crisis communication: internal strategy and external communication. SCCT helps this study identify why a newsroom adopts a particular crisis strategy and assess whether that choice aligns with the type of crisis and stakeholder expectations. Framing Theory, on the other hand, enables the analysis of how those crisis responses are constructed and represented in the media space, and how the framing of events either mitigates or amplifies reputational damage. For example, if a newsroom issues a corrective statement after spreading misinformation, SCCT helps evaluate whether the chosen strategy that is apology or corrective action fits the attribution of responsibility. Framing Theory then assesses whether the language used in the statement reinforces public trust or inadvertently fuels suspicion. By integrating both perspectives, the study can assess not only whether crisis strategies are theoretically appropriate but also whether they are communicatively effective.

The integration also enhances contextual sensitivity by situating SCCT's structured, strategic lens within Ghana's socio-political and cultural environment. In Western contexts, SCCT assumes relatively stable media institutions and rational audience reactions. However, Ghana's

media landscape is characterized by political parallelism, ownership influence, and high audience polarization (Gadzekpo, 2009). These conditions complicate how crisis messages are received and interpreted. Framing Theory adapts SCCT to this context by revealing how cultural communication patterns such as appeals to national unity, moral responsibility, or communal values affect audience reactions to newsroom crisis responses (Asamoah & Nyadzi, 2024). Hence, the theoretical synthesis not only integrates two distinct analytical perspectives but also localizes them within Ghana's unique democratic and media realities.

Furthermore, the integration provides analytical depth by combining SCCT's prescriptive orientation with Framing Theory's interpretive flexibility. SCCT offers diagnostic precision, helping the study evaluate the strategic logic of newsroom responses whether they were preventive, corrective, or defensive. Framing Theory adds a narrative dimension, allowing examination of how these responses are linguistically and symbolically framed in public discourse. The synthesis thus moves beyond institutional assessment to capture the full communication cycle from internal crisis planning and message formulation to public framing and audience interpretation. This duality is essential for understanding how crisis communication in Ghanaian newsrooms either upholds or undermines media credibility during elections.

Ultimately, the integration of SCCT and Framing Theory strengthens the theoretical foundation of this study by enabling a multi-level analysis of crisis communication management. SCCT provides insight into organizational behaviour and strategy, while Framing Theory exposes the communicative and perceptual consequences of those strategies. Their combined use ensures that the study does not only describe how crises are managed internally but also interrogates how these responses function in public discourse to shape media credibility, audience trust, and democratic stability.

In a context where media institutions play pivotal roles in election communication, this integrated theoretical approach offers a holistic lens for evaluating both the effectiveness and ethics of newsroom crisis communication in Ghana.

2.4 Chapter Summary

Chapter Two reviewed existing literature and theoretical foundations relevant to crisis communication management within media organizations, with a particular focus on Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods. The chapter began by outlining the conceptual understanding of crisis communication, crisis communication management, and election crisis communication, highlighting how these concepts interrelate in shaping newsroom preparedness and response. It then examined empirical studies that revealed significant variations in institutional readiness, leadership effectiveness, and ethical framing practices, underscoring persistent gaps in strategic coordination and digital crisis management within Ghana's media landscape. The review also demonstrated that political ownership, limited resources, and the rapid spread of misinformation continue to undermine media credibility during elections. The theoretical framework integrated Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Framing Theory to provide a dual perspective with SCCT explaining the strategic logic behind institutional crisis responses, and Framing Theory elucidating how these responses are constructed, communicated, and interpreted by the public. The synthesis of these theories offered a comprehensive analytical lens that captures both internal organizational decision-making and external narrative framing, ensuring that the study addresses the complex relationship between newsroom strategy, media ethics, and public perception. Collectively, this chapter established the intellectual foundation for the study's analysis of how Ghanaian media organizations manage, communicate, and learn from crises during election periods.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology employed to investigate crisis communication management in Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods. It outlines the research design, population, sampling procedures, data collection instruments, and analytical techniques adopted for the study. The methodology provides a systematic framework that guides how data were gathered, interpreted, and validated to ensure the study's credibility and reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Given the complex and sensitive nature of crisis communication during elections, this chapter justifies the research approach and explains how it aligns with the study's objectives. It further highlights the methodological rigor applied to generate in-depth insights capable of strengthening newsroom crisis preparedness, strategic response, and resilience in Ghana's electoral communication landscape.

3.1 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy was rooted in interpretivism, which emphasized understanding social phenomena from the perspectives of those directly involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interpretivism recognizes that reality is socially constructed and that knowledge is derived from the meanings individuals ascribed to their experiences (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Since the study focused on how newsroom professionals perceived and managed crises during election periods, the interpretivist paradigm provided an appropriate framework for exploring their lived experiences, interpretations, and decision-making processes. This philosophical orientation allowed for an in-depth understanding of how journalists and media managers navigate complex communication challenges in politically charged environments such as Ghana's elections.

Unlike positivist approaches, which seek objective measurement and generalization, interpretivism acknowledges that human behaviour is influenced by social context, values, and interactions (Bryman, 2016). In the context of Ghanaian newsrooms, crisis communication practices were shaped by multiple contextual factors such as political pressure, media ethics, institutional culture, and public expectations. These factors could not be fully captured through quantitative inquiry alone. An interpretivist stance therefore enabled the researcher to engage directly with participants through interviews and observations to uncover nuanced insights into their crisis management strategies. This approach aligns with the study's aim of understanding the subjective realities and communication dynamics within media organisations during elections.

The ontological assumption underpinning the study was that reality is multiple and socially constructed. Media crisis communication and management during elections were not uniform occurrences but were experienced differently by various actors, including editors, reporters, and communication officers. Each participant's perception of a crisis situation such as what constituted a "crisis," how it was managed, and its implications for credibility varied depending on organisational culture and individual experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This multiplicity of perspectives reflected the interpretivist belief that no single objective reality exists; rather, reality is co-created through social interactions and shared meanings (Scotland, 2012). The study therefore sought to explore these diverse realities to gain a holistic understanding of crisis communication management in Ghanaian newsrooms.

Epistemologically, the study assumed that knowledge is subjective and constructed through dialogue between the researcher and participants. The researcher did not remain detached but instead engaged interactively to interpret the meanings participants assigned to their experiences (Creswell, 2014). This reflective engagement facilitated the generation of rich,

contextualized data on how newsroom professionals understood and responded to crises during elections. It also allowed the researcher to acknowledge positionality and reflexivity, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in participants' realities rather than imposed theoretical assumptions (Gray, 2018). Through this approach, the study aimed to contribute authentic, context-specific insights into crisis communication practices within the Ghanaian media landscape.

From an axiological perspective, the research acknowledged the influence of values in the research process. The interpretivist paradigm recognizes that both researcher and participants bring their beliefs, experiences, and values into the study (Saunders et al., 2019). The researcher's commitment to ethical inquiry ensuring confidentiality, respect, and accuracy was central to maintaining integrity throughout the research process. Furthermore, the study valued participants' voices as legitimate sources of knowledge about crisis communication in their professional contexts. By adopting this philosophy, the study not only sought to describe but also to understand and interpret the lived realities of Ghanaian journalists and media managers, ultimately contributing to theory and practice in media crisis communication management.

3.2 Research Approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore crisis communication management in Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods. The qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and meanings that journalists and media managers attach to their communication practices during crises (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research emphasizes understanding social phenomena within their natural contexts, focusing on the "why" and "how" of human behaviour, rather than numerical measurement (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In this context, the study seeks to uncover how newsroom actors interpret, manage, and communicate during crises

that arise in politically sensitive periods such as elections, where issues of accuracy, ethics, and credibility are paramount.

The qualitative approach aligns with the interpretivist philosophical orientation underpinning this research. Interpretivism assumes that reality is socially constructed, and understanding human experiences requires capturing participants' subjective meanings (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). In the case of Ghanaian newsrooms, crisis communication management involves human interactions, ethical judgments, and organizational decision-making processes that cannot be quantified or generalized. By adopting a qualitative approach, the researcher can capture the complexity of these social processes through interviews, document analysis, and observations. This ensures that the study reflects the authentic realities of newsroom practices during elections rather than imposing predetermined theoretical assumptions (Creswell, 2014).

This study further employs an inductive reasoning approach, which moves from specific observations to broader generalizations and theoretical insights. Inductive reasoning is particularly suitable for studies seeking to generate new understanding from data rather than to test existing hypotheses (Gray, 2018). Given that limited scholarly attention has been paid to crisis communication management within Ghanaian media organizations, this approach allows the researcher to build theoretical understanding from empirical evidence gathered in the field. Through the collection and analysis of qualitative data, patterns and themes will be identified, leading to the formulation of insights that contribute to both theory and practice in media management and communication studies.

Finally, the findings from this approach are expected to contribute to a deeper comprehension of media crisis communication in Ghana and offer practical implications for strengthening newsroom preparedness and resilience in future elections. This approach not only complements the interpretivist paradigm, but also ensures that the study produces meaningful, context-

specific knowledge grounded in the lived realities of media practitioners (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019).

3.3 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore crisis communication management practices in Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods. The qualitative design is appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and actions of media professionals within their real-life contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the study aims to investigate how journalists and media managers handle crises in politically sensitive environments, the qualitative design allows for rich, descriptive data that captures the complexities of newsroom decision-making. Quantitative approaches, by contrast, would not adequately capture the nuanced meanings, motivations, and strategies underlying crisis communication behaviour (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Thus, the qualitative case study design is best suited to achieve the study's objectives by exploring how communication crises are perceived and managed in specific media settings.

Also, this approach allowed the researcher to collect data from multiple sources such as interviews, and observations to build a comprehensive understanding of crisis management processes. According to Stake (1995), case studies are instrumental when the goal is to gain insight into a phenomenon, rather than merely to describe it. In this context, the case study design enabled a detailed examination of newsroom practices and provided a foundation for generating practical and theoretical insights applicable to crisis communication management in Ghana's media landscape.

3.3.1 Case Study Design

The study adopted a multiple-case study design to examine crisis communication management across four major Ghanaian newsrooms. This approach was suitable because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of crisis communication within real-life media environments, particularly during election periods when newsrooms face heightened pressures. The qualitative nature of the case study facilitated a rich understanding of how media professionals interpret, respond to, and manage crises in complex political and organizational settings.

The selected cases, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), Adom FM, Graphic Communications Group Limited (GCGL), and Citi FM/Citi TV were purposefully chosen to reflect diversity in ownership, structure, and editorial cultures. GBC represents the state-owned broadcaster that often contends with political expectations; Adom FM exemplifies a leading private multimedia outlet with extensive election coverage; GCGL provides insights from a legacy print institution navigating digital transformation; and Citi FM/Citi TV represents modern hybrid digital-broadcast journalism. Each case offered unique perspectives on crisis decision-making and newsroom operations.

These media houses were selected because of their national influence, central roles in election coverage, and susceptibility to crises such as misinformation, political pressure, and public scrutiny. By analyzing varied newsroom environments, the multiple-case approach strengthens the study's ability to compare patterns and identify both shared and distinct crisis communication practices. This method enhanced the reliability and applicability of the findings, producing comprehensive insights that can help improve crisis preparedness and response strategies across Ghana's media landscape.

3.4 Population and Sample Size

The population for this study comprised media professionals working in Ghanaian news organizations, specifically editors, producers, news managers, and senior journalists actively involved in newsroom decision-making and communication during election periods. This population was appropriate because these individuals play a direct role in formulating and implementing crisis communication strategies within their organizations. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), defining a clear and relevant population enhances the credibility and focus of qualitative research by ensuring that data are collected from individuals who possess first-hand knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. The study focused on Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), Adom FM, Graphic Communications Group Limited (GCGL), and Citi FM/Citi TV. The inclusion of both state-owned and private media outlets ensured diversity in perspectives and organizational contexts, reflecting the pluralistic nature of Ghana's media environment (Gadzekpo, 2020).

Given the qualitative nature of this study, the sample size consisted of participants selected based on their direct involvement and experience in crisis communication within Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods. Rather than relying on predetermined numerical targets, the study adopted the principle of information saturation, which is widely recognized as a rigorous criterion for determining adequate sample size in qualitative research (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020). Information saturation occurs when additional interviews no longer yield new insights, themes, or perspectives relevant to the research questions.

This approach justifies relatively small, information-rich samples because qualitative inquiry prioritizes depth over breadth (Palinkas et al., 2015). The aim was to extract detailed, context-specific narratives from individuals who possess substantial knowledge of newsroom crisis management. Purposive sampling was therefore used to recruit editors, senior journalists,

newsroom managers, and communication leads who have first-hand experience handling electoral communication crises. This strategy enhanced the credibility and relevance of the data by ensuring that participants are selected based on expertise rather than representativeness (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

The final sample size for the study consisted of six (6) participants, determined upon the achievement of data saturation during the data collection process. Saturation was reached when additional interviews no longer produced new themes or insights relevant to crisis communication management in Ghanaian newsrooms. The six participants, drawn from different newsroom roles and media organizations, provided sufficient depth and diversity of perspectives to fully explore the phenomenon under study. This sample size ensured methodological rigour by allowing for in-depth analysis while avoiding redundancy, and it was deemed adequate for achieving the study's qualitative objectives.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

This study employed purposive sampling to select media professionals with direct experience in crisis communication during election periods. One Editor, two producers, two newsroom managers, and one senior journalist were deliberately chosen because of their involvement in newsroom decision-making and crisis response. To ensure diversity of perspectives, maximum variation sampling was incorporated by selecting participants from both state-owned and private media organizations across print, broadcast, and digital platforms, including Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), Adom FM, Graphic Communications Group Limited, and Citi FM/TV. This approach ensured that the data reflected the pluralistic and competitive nature of Ghana's media landscape and captured variations in newsroom crisis communication practices.

To enhance rigour and trustworthiness, the study applied Guba and Lincoln's (1985) framework of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was ensured through triangulation of multiple data sources, prolonged engagement with participants, and member checking, which allowed participants to validate interview summaries and interpretations. Transferability was supported through rich, detailed descriptions of cases and contexts, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar media settings. Dependability was maintained through a systematic audit trail documenting research decisions and procedures, while confirmability was ensured through reflexive journaling, detailed field notes, and the consistent linking of interpretations to empirical data.

The study adopted a qualitative methodological approach involving multiple case studies and in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews with newsroom managers, editors, senior journalists, and communication experts provided firsthand insights into crisis communication practices. By integrating these qualitative methods, the study generated rich, context-specific data that enhanced understanding of how Ghanaian newsrooms manage communication crises during election periods and contributed to strengthening media resilience and democratic governance.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method for this study. Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative interviewing technique that combines predetermined guiding questions with the flexibility to explore emerging issues and participant-specific experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This structure allows for depth and openness while ensuring that key thematic areas are consistently addressed across all

interviews. Their flexible, conversational nature makes them particularly effective for investigating complex processes such as crisis communication management within newsrooms.

The interviews were conducted with editors, producers, newsroom managers, and senior journalists from the selected Ghanaian media organizations. This group was intentionally targeted because they possess first-hand experience and practical knowledge of newsroom operations during election-related crises. Before data collection commenced, formal permission was obtained from each participating media house. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and the voluntary nature of their participation, in line with established ethical research standards (Silverman, 2020). Depending on availability, interviews were conducted either face-to-face or virtually, and all sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accuracy and completeness during transcription.

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, a qualitative analytic technique that involves identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning across the dataset (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2018). Thematic analysis was appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to capture recurring ideas and the deeper communication dynamics underlying newsroom crisis responses. Following transcription, the data were coded systematically, with codes grouped into broader categories that aligned with the study's thematic areas. Reflexive notes taken during and after interviews were incorporated into the analysis to provide contextual depth and enhance the credibility of the findings. This rigorous and iterative process ensured that the final themes accurately reflected how Ghanaian newsrooms prepared for, responded to, and learned from communication crises during election periods.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

The main data collection instrument for this study was semi-structured interview guide, designed to obtain in-depth and context-specific information from participants about crisis communication management practices within Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods. Semi-structured interviews are suitable for qualitative case studies because they combine structure with flexibility, allowing the researcher to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies in detail while maintaining consistency across interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The interview guide was structured around four broad thematic areas derived from the research objectives, crisis communication literature, and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT):

1. Nature and Types of Communication Challenges and Crises- examining the specific crises newsrooms encounter during elections, including misinformation, political interference, technological disruptions, and ethical dilemmas.
2. Newsroom Preparedness for Crisis Management-exploring whether newsrooms have crisis policies, training, risk assessment processes, and adequate resources to anticipate and respond to crises.
3. Crisis Communication Strategies and Response Mechanisms – investigating real-time newsroom actions, communication flows, decision-making processes, verification mechanisms, and stakeholder engagement during crises.
4. Post-Crisis Evaluation, Improvements, and Future Capacity Needs- identifying how newsrooms conduct post-crisis assessments, review performance, implement improvements, and identify long-term capacity gaps.

These themes informed the development of open-ended questions capable of eliciting rich, reflective responses from participants. To enhance the validity and cultural relevance of the instrument, the interview guide was reviewed by academic experts and pilot tested with two experienced media professionals, a senior journalist and a newsroom editor who were not part of the final sample. During the pilot test, mock interviews were conducted to assess clarity, flow, and content appropriateness. Feedback resulted in refining ambiguous questions, eliminating redundancies, and adding probing items to capture more nuanced insights. This iterative refinement ensured that the final interview guide was robust, contextually appropriate, and capable of generating meaningful qualitative data.

3.8 Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study followed a thematic analysis approach, which is widely used in qualitative research to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns of meaning within textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This method was appropriate for exploring the complex processes of crisis communication management in Ghanaian newsrooms, as it allowed for the systematic organization and interpretation of participants' narratives. The analysis began with the transcription of recorded interviews, followed by careful reading and re-reading to achieve familiarity with the data. Codes were then generated to capture significant features of the data related to crisis preparedness, communication response, and recovery strategies. These codes were organized into broader themes that reflect recurring ideas and patterns across the interviews (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The researcher applied both inductive and deductive coding inductive to allow new themes to emerge from the data and deductive to align findings with existing theoretical frameworks such as the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007).

Emerging themes were critically analysed and supported with direct quotations from participants to preserve authenticity and contextual meaning. The interpretation connected findings to existing literature and theories on crisis communication, highlighting similarities and divergences within the Ghanaian media context. This rigorous thematic analysis process ensured that the study produces nuanced, credible, and practically relevant insights into how Ghanaian newsrooms manage communication crises during election periods.

3.9 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are central to ensuring the credibility, integrity, and protection of participants throughout this study. All participants were required to complete a formal informed consent form before participating. The form outlined the purpose of the study, data collection procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation. Consent was documented in writing to ensure transparency and compliance with ethical standards (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants were reminded that they can withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty, ensuring respect for autonomy and voluntary participation.

To protect the data collected, the study implemented strict confidentiality and security protocols. All audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes were stored in password-protected and encrypted digital folders accessible only to the researcher. Backup copies were also encrypted to prevent unauthorized access or data loss. Any printed materials will be securely stored in a locked cabinet. In reporting findings, pseudonyms will be used, and all identifiable information will be removed to ensure anonymity and protect participants from reputational risk or workplace implications (Silverman, 2020). These measures uphold privacy and guarantee that participants' information remains secure throughout the research process.

Ethical clearance was required for this study, and approval was obtained from the Graduate school before any data collection began.

Finally, the researcher employed the APA referencing style for all citations of academic sources that were used in the course of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study on crisis communication management in Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods. It explores how journalists and media managers identify, respond to, and manage crises that arise from political tensions, misinformation, ethical dilemmas, and institutional pressures during elections. Drawing on data from semi-structured interviews with media professionals, the chapter organizes the findings thematically around key issues such as communication-related crises, political and external pressures, ethical and professional integrity, crisis preparedness, misinformation management, leadership and newsroom culture, and lessons learned for future practice. The analysis is guided by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Framing Theory, which together provide a framework for understanding both the internal management of crises and the external narratives constructed by media organizations. Each theme is supported by direct quotations from participants to capture their lived experiences and professional perspectives. The chapter concludes with a discussion that connects the findings to existing literature and theoretical insights, highlighting the implications for media management, ethics, and crisis communication in Ghana's evolving democratic context.

4.1 Presentation of Findings

4.1.1 Communication-Related Crises During Election Periods

Crisis communication challenges are a recurring feature of election periods in Ghanaian newsrooms, as journalists experience multiple forms of disruption ranging from misinformation and delayed communication to physical threats. According to respondents, these challenges reflect both structural and contextual constraints within the Ghanaian media environment.

There are some rural areas here in Ghana that are not too accessible in terms of telecommunication. If your reporter is in a rural settlement where you can hardly get connected by internet or by phone call, it means information flow from such areas will be delayed. -Newsroom managers

This statement reveals a key communication bottleneck which is technological inaccessibility that directly impacts newsroom efficiency and credibility. The inability to verify or transmit timely information not only delays accurate reporting but also allows misinformation to fill the information vacuum.

We are in an industry where the first to bring the news is always the norm now. If someone else brings that information that is not true, before long the bad information goes out first, and bad news travels fast. -Newsroom managers

This interplay between speed and accuracy defines the communication crisis most newsrooms grapple with during elections.

Beyond technical constraints, journalists highlighted interpersonal and institutional crises.

Sometimes the politicians can come straight to the newsroom and attack you physically, or sometimes the delegates. Some things that you say on the radio, if you don't take care, you'll meet them outside and they'll be attacking you. -Editor

This reveals the precarious nature of journalism in Ghanaian elections, where communication crises take physical and emotional forms. Such incidents not only threaten safety but also undermine professional independence, forcing journalists to self-censor or alter their framing of stories to avoid backlash.

Another recurring communication challenge involves ownership and partisanship pressures that interfere with editorial neutrality.

Many radio stations being owned by politicians lead to biased reporting and lack of independence. Because the owner of the radio station maybe supports one political party, the owner expects you to say things that will favour them or say things that will make delegates support them. -Editor

This aligns with broader literature on the political economy of Ghanaian media, where ownership structures shape crisis vulnerability.

We get well prepared for fast-track checks. You analyse your sources very well because the moment there is a lot of misinformation or disinformation, it disintegrates the kind of respect or integrity that your media house has. -Producers

This reflects how newsroom credibility hinges on verification under pressure, especially when false information trends quickly on social media before official confirmation.

For others, the crisis manifests as a shift in public attention that destabilizes media relevance.

Because we are mostly focused on football during election periods, the attention shifts from football to the main election. Therefore, whatever information you put out does not really matter. Producers

His insight broadens the definition of crisis beyond misinformation to include audience disengagement and organizational marginalization.

During the election period our organization often faces communication-related challenges, and one of the main issues is the rapid speed of misinformation and rumours, especially on social media platforms. -Senior Journalist

The combination of technical, social, and political communication disruptions thus underscores the complex environment in which Ghanaian journalists operate during election periods.

4.1.2 Theme Two: Political and External Pressures on Newsrooms

Political and external pressures emerged as a dominant theme shaping both the occurrence and management of crises in Ghanaian newsrooms. Journalists reported consistent interference from political actors, regulators, and partisan audiences. These pressures often compromise newsroom autonomy, distort editorial decision-making, and transform crisis communication from a professional activity into a politically negotiated process. The findings reveal that during elections, journalists experience tension between institutional loyalty and professional responsibility, forcing them to constantly navigate external expectations and internal restrictions.

Almost one out of twenty-five politicians own a media institution or have the owners of a media institution aligned to a particular political party. The organization is forced to churn out information that always makes the political party they are in league with look good, even if it's not true. Newsroom managers

This quote exemplifies how political ownership interferes with newsroom independence.

Journalists often find themselves under pressure to produce content that favours specific political interests, thereby undermining their credibility and accountability to the public.

Sensitive parts of election issues, you'll be cautioned not to tackle because the owner will seem it to be against his or her political party. - Producers

This demonstrates how internal gatekeeping becomes a self-imposed censorship mechanism to avoid political backlash.

Regulatory bodies and public expectations also intensify these crises. For example:

Political actors exert pressure on radio stations to self-censor or avoid reporting on sensitive topics. This leads to loss of editorial independence, fear of retaliation, and self-censorship by journalists. - Editor

Legal regularities also play a major role in it. You can be cautioned not to tackle certain issues even when it's in the public interest. - Producers

You may have or incur a lot of pressure from social media and other angles. Whenever what you are dealing with doesn't go on well with them, they will mount pressure on you for you to retract a comment or issue an apology. - Producers

We reaffirm our commitment to neutrality and by upholding our professional ethics and respect for diverse political views, and internally remind our staff of our guidelines. – Newsroom managers

Altogether, these extracts demonstrate that Ghanaian newsrooms operate in an ecosystem of political influence, regulatory constraints, and public polarization. These forces complicate crisis management and require careful balancing of truth-telling and institutional survival.

4.1.3 Theme Three: Ethical and Professional Integrity in Crisis Management

Ethical integrity emerged as the moral foundation of newsroom crisis communication management. Journalists consistently emphasized that while political and social pressures are inevitable during election periods, professional integrity and honesty determine the credibility of both the journalist and the institution. Maintaining ethical standards was described not only as a personal conviction but also as an organizational necessity for sustaining public trust and minimizing crises.

This is where the integrity comes in. Yes, a lot of pressure is out there, but you have to stand firm. If it's true, go ahead and say it; if it's false, keep your mouth shut. It's better to keep your mouth shut than to say something that is not true. – Newsroom managers

This statement highlights the ethical responsibility to prioritize truth over speed and the importance of restraint in crisis situations.

Because the owner of the radio station maybe supports one political party, the owner expects you to say things that will favour them. But as a journalist, you have to report truthfully and avoid bias even if it's uncomfortable. - Editor

We normally have ethical journalism training on how to deal with challenges so that anyone who may threaten you with legal action may fail. - Producers

Sensitive communication during sensitive periods like elections is not just about responding to crises but about building trust and capability over time. -Senior journalist

Sometimes we self-censor or avoid sensitive issues to stay safe. It's not what we want to do, but the situation forces you. - Editor

These insights indicate that ethics are central to maintaining credibility, but adherence to them often depends on institutional backing and safety guarantees. Without systemic support, journalists are left to rely on individual moral courage.

4.1.4 Theme Four: Crisis Preparedness and Capacity Building in Newsrooms

Crisis preparedness was identified as a crucial but unevenly practiced aspect of newsroom management. Most journalists indicated that while their organizations undertake some form of

election-related training, these efforts are irregular and largely depend on leadership commitment rather than standardized policy. Preparedness includes training for accuracy, safety, and legal awareness, which equip journalists to handle crises proactively rather than reactively.

When it gets to a month or a week before an election, you hear of election camps set up just to cover the news, and every individual who belongs to the company is also taken through a particular training. – Newsroom managers

This shows that many news organizations recognize the need for specialized election coverage structures. However, this preparation is often ad hoc rather than institutionalized.

We train our staff to be aware of the kind of information they bring out. Sometimes we practice the news before it goes out so that the words, we use will not cause crisis or chaos. -Editors

We have communication crisis training and legal education on how to deal with threats so that anyone who threatens you with legal action may fail. - Producers

We teach our staff how to respond quickly under pressure and issue clear, neutral public statements. We also have social media crisis management training where we monitor misinformation and crisis escalation. -Newsroom managers

We organize training for people working there, especially in the newsroom. We show them what to do, how to promote the news, and how to stop misinformation, but not all staff get such training. - Senior journalist

No two election periods are the same. We have to learn from past mistakes and make sure we do it very well next time. - Senior journalist

These accounts highlight that preparedness in Ghanaian newsrooms remains an evolving process. To be effective, it must become continuous, inclusive, and guided by clear institutional policy.

4.1.5 Theme Five: Managing Misinformation and Disinformation

Managing misinformation and disinformation was identified as one of the most pressing challenges during elections. Journalists explained that the proliferation of social media has created an environment where false information spreads rapidly, forcing media houses to react

in real time. The findings indicate that timely verification, transparency, and corrective communication are key strategies for managing this crisis.

We make sure we publish what is right and what we have heard. We don't go ahead and post before hearing. If the result is out and you go ahead to publish it and later find out it's not accurate, you have to go back and make sure that the public gets the right information. - Senior journalist

We manage it by coming out quickly to respond. If you fail to respond to misinformation, it becomes information and is consumed. But when you respond immediately, people get to know that it is false. - Producer

We have social media crisis management training, but it's difficult because everyone is on social media. Sometimes people share private information or rumours and they never come out to correct it. - Newsroom managers

We engage in public education, helping our audience recognize credible sources and understand the facts. - Senior journalist

Sometimes the Electoral Commission itself will not pick calls when you're verifying a story. - Producers

Bad news travels fast. If someone brings out wrong information before you verify, it spreads faster than the truth. - Newsroom managers

These testimonies affirm that misinformation represents both a technical and ethical crisis. Ghanaian journalists are aware of the importance of fast yet accurate response, but institutional collaboration and digital tools are required to make this effort sustainable.

4.1.6 Theme Six: Leadership, Organizational Culture, and Internal Communication

Leadership and organizational culture were found to be decisive in shaping how newsrooms respond to crises. Journalists emphasized that effective communication within the newsroom, respect among staff, and supportive management are key to minimizing chaos during election coverage. Leadership that demonstrates empathy, structure, and transparency creates stability even under pressure.

In summary, there should be respect in the newsroom from junior staff to the top and from the top to the bottom. Respect is the only way everyone can coordinate because the newsroom is a delicate area. - Newsroom managers

In our newsroom, we do a lot of education to ourselves and get prepared. The supervisors have to act like leaders; if the newsroom gives a one-hour or two-hour break for everyone to rest, they'll do it. - Producers

Sometimes the owner expects you to say things that will favour them or make delegates support them, but not everyone in the institution supports that particular party. Because you're being paid, you are forced to toe that line. - Editor

We reaffirm our commitment to neutrality and remind our staff of our guidelines to stay as neutral as possible and deliver accurate information. - Newsroom managers

Our organization establishes a clear plan that outlines steps to take in the event of a crisis, including who is responsible for what actions. - Editor

These findings highlight that leadership integrity, internal respect, and clearly defined crisis protocols help maintain order and professionalism in politically tense periods. Leadership, therefore, acts as both a moral compass and a management framework for newsroom stability.

4.1.7 Theme Seven: Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Strengthening Crisis Communication

The final theme focuses on learning and institutional reform as key outcomes of past crisis experiences. Journalists reflected on the importance of transparency, collaboration, and continuous training in improving future crisis management. The findings suggest a growing recognition that sustainable newsroom resilience depends on organizational learning and policy development rather than one-time reactions.

Sensitive communication during sensitive periods like elections is not just about responding to crises but about building trust and capability over time. Organizations that invest in engagement, transparency, and strong stakeholder relationships are in a better position to handle challenges when they arise. - Senior journalist

We have to learn from past mistakes and admit them. Maybe last election wasn't perfect, so next time we plan better. If we didn't have correspondents at certain places, we'll make sure we do next time. - Producers

In-service training, ethical journalism education, and legal literacy are all important, and there should also be digital crisis monitoring and quick-response strategies. - Journalists - Newsroom managers

Radio stations owned by politicians should not solely support one political party because it causes chaos and makes other media houses oppose each other during elections. - Editor

We have external commercials on TV and radio on peace because without peace, we cannot live in a democratic era. - Producers

If we are transparent and accountable, anything you put there, the public will believe you. - Senior journalist

Collectively, these insights show that Ghanaian newsrooms are developing a reflective and forward-looking approach to crisis management, one rooted in learning, independence, and ethical responsibility. The central lesson is clear: crisis communication must evolve into a proactive system of preparedness, institutional reflection, and democratic accountability.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that Ghanaian newsrooms face multifaceted and interrelated crises during election periods that challenge their ethical integrity, communication efficiency, and institutional resilience. These crises are shaped not only by internal newsroom dynamics but also by external political, regulatory, and technological forces. Guided by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007) and Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), this discussion connects empirical insights with existing scholarship to interpret how journalists navigate crises within a politically charged and competitive media environment.

The first research objective sought to identify the nature of crisis communication challenges Ghanaian media organizations encounter during elections. The findings reveal that misinformation, delayed verification, technological breakdowns, and limited access to communication networks are the most prevalent forms of crisis. These findings confirm Nyarko's (2015) and Ahiabenu, Oforu-Peasah, and Sam's (2018) studies, which observed that journalists in Ghana often operate in technologically constrained environments, particularly in

rural areas where network coverage is limited. This study expands on those insights by showing how these constraints create communication vacuums that allow misinformation to spread rapidly. According to Framing Theory, when journalists fail to fill such informational gaps promptly, alternative actors such as politicians, influencers, or unverified social media users frame the narrative to suit partisan interests, thereby distorting public understanding.

Such conditions illustrate what Coombs (2007) describes under SCCT as operational crises, where institutional and infrastructural weaknesses undermine organizational credibility. Ghanaian journalists find themselves caught between two competing imperatives, speed and accuracy, where the pressure to break news first often leads to factual errors. As one respondent noted, “bad news travels fast,” capturing the phenomenon where false reports circulate widely before verification occurs. Within the theoretical context, this reflects the failure of pre-crisis preparation and verification mechanisms, resulting in what Coombs (2015) terms preventable reputation threats.

The second research objective explored the major challenges faced by Ghanaian media organizations in crisis communication management. The study found that political and external pressures are the most dominant drivers of newsroom crises. Participants reported coercion from media owners aligned with political parties, regulatory interference, and intimidation from partisan groups, all of which compromise editorial independence. This finding corroborates Gadzekpo’s (2009) argument that political ownership and patronage distort media accountability in Ghana. Within SCCT, such influences constitute preventable crises, since organizations indirectly contribute to reputational risk by internalizing political control.

Through the lens of Framing Theory, political ownership shapes the framing of news, leading to selective storytelling that favours specific ideological positions. The findings show that journalists often engage in self-censorship, omitting sensitive political content to protect

themselves and their employers. This dynamic reinforces Entman's (1993) notion that framing is a process of power which is those who control media narratives control public interpretation. Thus, newsroom crises in Ghana are not only communicative but structural, rooted in the political economy of media ownership and the culture of self-censorship that undermines truth-telling.

Ethical and professional integrity emerged as another defining issue shaping newsroom crises. Journalists frequently described "integrity" as their most vital defence against misinformation and political manipulation. This echoes Mensah and Abeka's (2017) observation that Ghanaian journalists often rely on personal ethics in the absence of institutional safeguards. However, the findings also reveal how fear of reprisal, job insecurity, and political polarization lead to what Frandsen and Johansen (2010) call moral paralysis, a condition in which journalists are aware of ethical duties but feel constrained by external power dynamics. SCCT emphasizes that maintaining transparency and moral consistency reduces reputational harm during crises. Yet, this study shows that in Ghana's politicized environment, ethics often depend more on individual courage than on structural protection.

The third research objective sought to examine the level of newsroom preparedness in managing crises during elections. The findings indicate that preparedness is recognized as essential but practiced inconsistently. While some media houses conduct pre-election training and safety briefings, others rely on spontaneous or informal procedures. This finding aligns with Osei-Owusu and Boateng (2020), who reported that Ghanaian newsrooms tend to adopt reactive rather than proactive crisis communication strategies. Within SCCT's framework, preparedness represents the pre-crisis phase, emphasizing training, simulation, and preventive risk communication. The inconsistent implementation observed suggests that although awareness exists, institutionalization remains weak.

Framing Theory complements this insight by showing that preparedness influences the tone of media narratives during crises. Journalists who undergo training are more likely to adopt cautious, balanced, and ethically grounded frames, while untrained reporters may inadvertently amplify tension or sensationalism. The findings also reveal structural inequalities between large urban newsrooms such as Adom FM or Citi FM and smaller community outlets, which lack resources for sustained training. This disparity reflects Ghana's broader media ecosystem, where capacity-building remains concentrated in metropolitan centres.

The fourth research objective focused on identifying and analyzing crisis communication strategies employed by Ghanaian media organizations during elections. The study revealed that journalists rely on several key strategies: rapid verification, transparent correction, ethical restraint, and proactive public engagement. These strategies align with Coombs and Holladay's (2015) rebuild strategy within SCCT, which prioritizes transparency, accountability, and dialogue to restore stakeholder trust. Respondents emphasized that "quick response" and "factual correction" are essential in countering misinformation before it solidifies in public discourse.

However, as Entman (1993) observes, framing persistence often makes it difficult to reverse misinformation once audiences accept an initial false narrative. The study confirms this challenge, showing that Ghanaian journalists struggle to correct misinformation that spreads faster than official verification. The need for digital literacy and media monitoring tools thus becomes critical for improving real-time response. Within this context, crisis communication strategies are not only reactive but also proactive efforts to maintain institutional credibility through transparency and ethical framing.

Leadership and organizational culture emerged as central determinants of crisis management success. The findings reveal that strong leadership characterized by empathy, respect, and

coordination enhances newsroom stability and crisis response. This observation aligns with Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger's (2017) view that effective internal communication and team cohesion are foundational to organizational resilience. Participants emphasized that open communication between editors and reporters minimizes chaos, while poor leadership breeds confusion, delays, and ethical compromise. In SCCT terms, leadership integrity and consistent internal messaging determine the effectiveness of external crisis responses.

The findings also suggest that ethical training and professional development function as preventive strategies against crises. Periodic workshops on verification, media law, and ethics help journalists internalize professional standards, transforming ethics into institutional behaviour rather than individual choice (Seeger & Sellnow, 2019). This supports Coombs' (2015) argument that preparedness and stakeholder engagement before crises enhance post-crisis recovery. Yet, the uneven availability of such programs across Ghana's media landscape underscores the need for national-level coordination led by regulatory bodies such as the National Media Commission and Ghana Journalists Association.

Another critical insight from the findings concerns the culture of learning and reflection. Journalists acknowledged that "no two election periods are the same," emphasizing the importance of post-crisis evaluation to improve future preparedness. This aligns with Coombs' (2015) post-crisis phase, where reflection and feedback serve as mechanisms for institutional growth. However, many newsrooms rely on informal recollection rather than structured debriefings, limiting organizational learning. Formalizing post-crisis evaluation processes would not only strengthen preparedness but also enhance ethical consistency and accountability across the sector.

The study also found that media ownership and partisanship represent persistent structural threats to effective crisis communication management. Journalists observed that politically

owned outlets often use their platforms to advance partisan agendas, intensifying polarization and misinformation. This finding supports Tella's (2023) argument that Western-based crisis communication models like SCCT require contextual adaptation to Africa's politically embedded media systems. In Ghana, crisis management is often entangled with political loyalty, transforming communication crises into ideological contests rather than institutional learning opportunities. Framing Theory provides insight into this by showing that ownership dictates dominant frames, meaning that crises are sometimes constructed to defend partisan legitimacy rather than factual accuracy.

Public trust emerged as the central currency of effective crisis communication. Across all interviews, participants highlighted that credibility and transparency determine whether audiences believe election-related news. This aligns with Coombs' (2015) view that stakeholder trust is the foundation of organizational recovery and Entman's (1993) assertion that consistent ethical framing sustains legitimacy. In Ghana's politically volatile context, public trust becomes both a strategic asset and a moral responsibility. Journalists who communicate transparently and correct misinformation promptly are more likely to maintain public confidence even during contentious election cycles.

In sum, the findings show that crisis communication management in Ghanaian newsrooms is a multidimensional process shaped by interlocking political, ethical, organizational, and technological factors. The integration of SCCT and Framing Theory provides a holistic lens: while SCCT explains the internal strategic processes that guide institutional responses, Framing Theory reveals how those responses influence public understanding and trust. Together, they demonstrate that effective crisis management depends on proactive preparedness, ethical consistency, and leadership integrity. Yet, the persistence of political ownership, resource inequality, and weak institutional frameworks continues to limit Ghanaian

media resilience. Strengthening independence, professional capacity, and collaborative crisis communication mechanisms will therefore be essential for safeguarding media credibility and democratic stability during future elections.

4.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the presentation and discussion of findings on crisis communication management in Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods. The findings revealed that journalists encounter diverse crises including misinformation, political pressure, ethical conflicts, and operational constraints that challenge their professional integrity and institutional credibility. Through the lenses of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Framing Theory, the discussion established that newsroom crises are both strategic and interpretive in nature, shaped by internal preparedness and external socio-political dynamics. While many journalists demonstrate ethical commitment and proactive communication practices, the lack of consistent training, leadership support, and political independence undermines effective crisis management. Ultimately, the chapter concluded that strengthening organizational structures, ethical culture, and professional capacity remains essential to enhancing media resilience and public trust during Ghana's electoral periods.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the study's key findings, draws conclusions, and offers recommendations for improving crisis communication management in Ghanaian newsrooms,

particularly during election periods. The chapter also outlines the limitations of the study, discusses its contributions to knowledge and practice, and suggests areas for future research. The chapter draws its insights from the thematic analysis and discussion of findings in Chapter Four, which were interpreted using the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Framing Theory. Together, these frameworks provided a comprehensive understanding of how Ghanaian media organizations prepare for, manage, and respond to crises that emerge in highly politicized and technologically dynamic election contexts.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The study revealed that communication-related crises are a recurring challenge for Ghanaian media organizations during elections. Journalists encounter difficulties such as misinformation, technological breakdowns, delayed verification, and limited access to rural communication networks. These challenges often hinder timely and accurate reporting, allowing false information to spread rapidly. The findings emphasized that the pressure to be the first to report often conflicts with the responsibility to verify facts, leading to reputational risks. These outcomes align with Framing Theory, which explains how delays in credible information dissemination allow misinformation to shape public discourse before correctional frames are established.

A second key finding showed that political and external pressures including interference from political actors, media owners, and regulators undermine newsroom autonomy and ethical standards. Journalists reported being coerced to align their reporting with the interests of politically affiliated media owners. This situation mirrors Coombs' (2007) notion of a "preventable crisis," where institutional decisions heighten reputational risk. Such pressures contribute to self-censorship and loss of editorial independence, revealing that Ghana's media crises are as much structural as they are communicative. The pervasive influence of ownership

and partisanship distorts objective framing and weakens the watchdog role of the press in democratic processes.

The study further found that ethical integrity and professionalism are critical determinants of newsroom resilience during crises. Despite political interference and high-pressure environments, many journalists rely on individual integrity, accuracy, and truth-telling as guiding principles in their work. Ethical training and newsroom codes of conduct were found to reduce misinformation and improve crisis management, although their application varied across media organizations. These findings validate Frandsen and Johansen's (2010) argument that ethical consistency forms the foundation of stakeholder trust during crises. However, without institutional enforcement, ethics remain vulnerable to political manipulation and leadership weaknesses.

Another major finding centred on crisis preparedness and capacity building. The study revealed that while some media organizations engage in pre-election scenario training and establish crisis response teams, many others lack structured preparedness plans. This uneven capacity results in inconsistent and reactive responses to crises. Training initiatives were largely short-term and resource-constrained, particularly in smaller or regional newsrooms. This finding resonates with Osei-Owusu and Boateng (2020), who observed that Ghanaian newsrooms often rely on informal crisis management approaches. Strengthening institutional preparedness and integrating crisis communication into organizational policy were identified as crucial steps toward enhancing response effectiveness.

Lastly, the study found that leadership, organizational culture, and internal communication play a decisive role in managing crises. Effective newsroom leadership fosters respect, coordination, and shared responsibility, while weak leadership contributes to confusion and ethical compromise. Journalists highlighted the importance of trust, open dialogue, and clear

communication hierarchies during election coverage. Furthermore, the findings showed that post-crisis reflection and learning remain underdeveloped in most newsrooms. Institutions that evaluated past mistakes demonstrated greater adaptability and ethical consistency, reinforcing Coombs' (2015) argument that post-crisis learning is vital for organizational resilience and credibility restoration.

5.2 Conclusions

The study concludes that crisis communication management in Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods is both a professional and structural challenge influenced by political, ethical, and organizational factors. Although journalists demonstrate strong individual ethics and a commitment to accuracy, the absence of institutionalized crisis communication frameworks, compounded by political interference and resource constraints, weakens newsroom resilience. Integrating Situational Crisis Communication Theory and Framing Theory reveals that effective crisis management depends not only on strategic planning and timely response but also on how narratives are framed to maintain public trust. Strengthening ethical standards, preparedness, and leadership accountability is thus essential to building sustainable and credible media institutions in Ghana's democratic landscape.

5.3 Recommendations

First, Ghanaian media organizations should institutionalize crisis communication frameworks as part of their operational policies. This includes establishing crisis management teams, developing clear communication protocols, and adopting rapid verification systems during elections. Such measures will enhance coordination and reduce misinformation-driven crises. Integrating SCCT's "pre-crisis" and "response" stages into newsroom practice will also ensure that crises are anticipated and managed proactively rather than reactively.

Second, continuous professional and ethical training should be prioritized for journalists, editors, and media managers. Training modules should cover ethical reporting, digital verification, and emotional resilience under pressure. Collaboration with bodies such as the National Media Commission (NMC), Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), and academic institutions can help standardize ethical crisis communication practices across media organizations. These initiatives will reinforce public trust and professional credibility during election coverage.

Third, media ownership and regulatory reforms are essential to reduce political interference in news production. The government and media regulators should enforce transparency in media ownership and promote editorial independence, particularly for outlets affiliated with political figures. This would help ensure balanced reporting and minimize partisanship-driven crises. Strengthening institutional checks and supporting independent media watchdogs can further promote accountability and ethical consistency within the media ecosystem.

Finally, post-crisis evaluation and institutional learning should become a standard practice in newsrooms. After each election, media organizations should conduct debriefings to assess what went wrong, identify areas for improvement, and update their crisis management protocols accordingly. Incorporating these reviews into training curricula will foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptability, aligning with Coombs' (2015) post-crisis evaluation model.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study is its qualitative case study design, which focused on selected Ghanaian newsrooms and may not fully represent all media organizations in the country. The study's findings, while rich in depth, may therefore have limited generalizability to other

regions or media contexts. A broader mixed-methods approach involving more diverse media institutions could provide a more comprehensive understanding of crisis communication practices.

Second, the study relied primarily on self-reported data from interviews, which may have been influenced by social desirability bias or professional caution. Journalists may have moderated their responses when discussing sensitive issues such as political interference, ownership influence, or ethical breaches. Although efforts were made to ensure confidentiality and trust, the subjective nature of qualitative data remains a constraint.

Lastly, the study's temporal scope, focusing on elections between 2016 and 2024, may have limited its ability to capture emerging dynamics in crisis communication, particularly related to new digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and deepfake misinformation. Future studies could therefore explore how evolving digital ecosystems are reshaping newsroom crisis management strategies.

5.5 How the study has contributed to knowledge

This study contributes to academic, policy, and professional knowledge in several ways. First, it extends the application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Framing Theory into the African media context, specifically within the political communication dynamics of Ghana. By integrating these frameworks, the study provides a dual understanding of how media organizations both manage and construct crises through institutional responses and narrative framing. This contributes theoretically to the growing body of literature on crisis communication in emerging democracies.

Second, the study offers empirical insights for media policy and management practice by identifying structural weaknesses in Ghanaian newsrooms' crisis preparedness and response systems. The findings underscore the urgent need for institutionalized crisis management

policies, which can inform national media regulations and newsroom operational standards. Policymakers can use these insights to design training programs and accreditation systems that embed crisis communication ethics into professional certification.

Third, the study contributes to organizational management practices by highlighting the role of leadership, newsroom culture, and internal communication in shaping crisis resilience. By documenting the experiences of journalists and media managers, the research provides actionable strategies for improving team coordination, leadership ethics, and post-crisis evaluation in media institutions. These lessons are applicable not only in Ghana but also across other developing democracies with similar political and media structures.

Fourth, the research offers practical value for journalism education and training. The findings emphasize the importance of integrating crisis communication, ethics, and digital verification modules into journalism curricula. Universities and training centres can incorporate the study's insights to equip future journalists with the skills needed to navigate election-related crises responsibly. This contributes to the professionalization of journalism and the promotion of peace-oriented media practices.

Finally, at a broader societal level, the study provides a foundation for strengthening public trust and democratic governance. By highlighting how effective crisis communication can mitigate misinformation, reduce electoral tension, and preserve media credibility, the research informs policymakers, civil society, and international development partners seeking to promote media freedom and transparency in electoral contexts. The study thus bridges the gap between theory, policy, and practice in the evolving field of media crisis management.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Studies

Future research should adopt a comparative cross-country design to examine how crisis communication management practices differ across African democracies. Comparing Ghana

with countries like Kenya, Nigeria, or South Africa would provide broader insights into how political culture and media ownership models influence newsroom crisis response mechanisms during elections.

Secondly, further studies could employ mixed-method approaches combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys or content analysis. This would enhance the reliability and generalizability of findings by correlating journalists' perceptions with measurable outcomes such as audience trust levels, misinformation frequency, or social media response patterns.

Third, future research should explore digital crisis communication and artificial intelligence (AI) in newsroom operations. As misinformation increasingly spreads through online platforms and deepfake technologies, understanding how AI-driven tools can detect, verify, or counter disinformation will be crucial to strengthening newsroom crisis management in the digital age.

Lastly, scholars should investigate gender and psychological dimensions of crisis communication in media organizations. Examining how male and female journalists experience and cope with election-related pressures, including intimidation and burnout, will provide a more holistic understanding of newsroom well-being and ethical decision-making during crises.

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive synthesis of the study's findings, conclusions, and implications regarding crisis communication management in Ghanaian newsrooms during election periods. It highlighted how journalists contend with misinformation, political interference, ethical challenges, and weak institutional preparedness, all of which threaten media credibility and democratic stability. Drawing on Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Framing Theory, the chapter concluded that effective crisis management

requires both strategic planning and ethical framing to maintain public trust. Recommendations were proposed to strengthen media policies, promote newsroom training, and enhance leadership accountability. The chapter also acknowledged the study's limitations, including its qualitative scope, and outlined how the research contributes to theory, policy, and journalistic practice. Finally, it called for future studies to explore comparative, digital, and psychological dimensions of crisis communication to deepen understanding and improve media resilience across diverse democratic contexts.

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APPENDIX

Introduction

Hello, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Kingsley Adams and I am conducting research on crisis communication management in Ghanaian media organizations with a particular focus on how newsrooms manage communication crises during election periods.

Your participation is voluntary and your responses will be kept strictly confidential. With your permission, I would like to record this interview to ensure accuracy in capturing your responses. You may choose not to answer any question and can stop the interview at any time.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Gender: _____
2. Role/Position: _____
3. Media Organization: _____
4. Type of Media (e.g., Radio, TV, Newspaper, Online): _____

SECTION B: THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES AND CRISES

1. In your experience, what types of communication-related crises do media organizations typically encounter during election periods in Ghana?
2. Can you describe an example of a crisis your newsroom faced during a past election and how it unfolded?
3. What factors contribute most to communication crises in your newsroom during elections?
4. How do external pressures (such as political actors, regulators, and public expectations) create crises?

SECTION C: NEWSROOM PREPAREDNESS FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT

1. How prepared would you say your organization is for managing communication crises during elections? Why?
2. Does your newsroom have crisis communication policies or protocols specifically for elections?
3. What training or capacity-building initiatives exist to prepare journalists for crisis management during elections?
4. What resources (human, technical, or financial) support crisis communication preparedness in your organization?
5. In your opinion, where are the gaps in preparedness?

SECTION D: CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES USED

1. What strategies does your organization employ to manage communication crises during elections?
2. How does the newsroom coordinate internally during a crisis situation?
3. How do you manage misinformation or disinformation during elections?
4. What role does social media monitoring play in your crisis communication strategy?
5. What strategies have proven most effective, and why?

SECTION E: IMPROVEMENTS & FUTURE NEEDS

1. What improvements would you recommend to strengthen crisis communication management in Ghanaian newsrooms?
2. What support do media houses need from regulators or stakeholders to manage election-related crises more effectively?
3. Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not covered?

Closing

Thank you very much for your time, insights, and willingness to share your experiences. Your contribution is valuable to this research.