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**CRISIS COMMUNICATION DURING ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS: ANALYZING  
GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STRATEGIES DURING GHANA'S 2022–2024  
ECONOMIC CRISIS**

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**DECEMBER 2025**

**DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original work 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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**SUPERVISION CERTIFICATION**

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

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DECEMBER 18, 2025

**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my family for their unwavering support, encouragement, and prayers.

Also, to my colleagues, and all Ghanaians who continue to strive for accountability, transparency, good communication and better governance, this work is for you.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines how the Government of Ghana, under the New Patriotic Party administration, communicated during the 2022–2024 economic crisis and how these communication practices shaped public understanding, crisis framing and perceptions of trust and legitimacy. Guided by Situational Crisis Communication Theory, Image Repair Theory and framing theory, the research analysed three core areas: the crisis communication strategies employed by government actors, the rhetorical and framing devices embedded in official messaging, and the responses of citizens, civil society organisations, the media and international institutions. The study adopted a qualitative content analysis of presidential addresses, ministerial statements, press briefings, policy documents, media commentary and public reactions. The findings indicate that government communication followed a hybrid pattern characterised by external attribution, reassurance, selective empathy, justification and technocratic explanations. Framing choices consistently emphasised global shocks, national resilience and achievement narratives, while contentious issues, particularly the Domestic Debt Exchange generated significant inconsistencies that undermined credibility. Stakeholder responses highlighted growing scepticism, with civil society protests, critical media narratives and assessments from international actors revealing a widening gap between official communications and lived economic realities. The study concludes that effective crisis communication in prolonged economic downturns requires coherence, transparency and empathetic engagement with affected publics. Improved inter-agency coordination, clearer messaging and greater alignment between communication and policy outcomes are essential for sustaining public trust and strengthening the legitimacy of government responses during economic crises.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides the foundational framework for the entire study, outlining its scope and objectives. It begins by setting the stage for a detailed examination of government crisis communication during economic downturns within the Ghanaian political sphere, with a specific focus on the rhetoric and strategies of the current administration (2022–2024). This study addresses a critical research gap by providing context-specific insights into how a government navigates the complexities of fiscal crises, contributing to both academic knowledge on political rhetoric and practical applications for government communication practitioners in Ghana and across the African continent.

### **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

In recent decades, the global economy has been repeatedly destabilized by shocks such as the 2008 global financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and geopolitical conflicts like the Russia–Ukraine conflict, and the recent conflict in the Middle East between Israel and its neighbors such as Iran. These events not only disrupted markets and livelihoods but also placed communication strategies at the forefront of crisis management. Governments were compelled to explain complex economic realities to citizens in ways that balanced transparency, empathy, and authority (Chua & Pang, 2012; Stanley, 2012). These international crises serve as a critical backdrop to understanding Ghana's experience, as the country's recent fiscal crisis is regarded as one of the most severe in its Fourth Republic.

In Africa, the effects of global economic shocks are often magnified by structural vulnerabilities such as debt dependence, fragile currencies, and limited fiscal space. The African Development Bank (2023) reported that more than 25 African states were in debt distress or at high risk by 2023.

Countries across the continent faced currency depreciation, inflationary pressures, and widespread unrest, often catalyzed by unpopular policy changes. These episodes highlight a recurring pattern: when governments fail to convincingly communicate the rationale behind difficult policies, citizens often perceive leadership as evasive or unaccountable. Scholars argue that in Africa, where partisan politics and low institutional trust prevail, effective crisis communication requires not only factual clarity but also culturally resonant and trust-centered messaging.

Ghana's economic downturn, beginning in 2022 and continuing into 2024, has been one of the most severe in the country's Fourth Republic. The country faced a combination of debt overhang, high inflation, currency depreciation, and a significant loss of investor confidence. Inflation surged, peaking at over 50% by 2023, while the Ghana cedi experienced rapid depreciation against the US dollar (Ghana Statistical Service, 2023). Ghana was eventually compelled to secure a \$3 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout in 2023 to restore fiscal and macroeconomic stability (IMF, 2023). This financial downturn led to strikes, protests, and heightened public demand for transparency, accountability, and effective communication from the government.

While economic interventions were rolled out to stabilize the economy, the government's communication became a subject of intense contention. The New Patriotic Party (NPP) administration frequently framed the economic crisis as the outcome of external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia–Ukraine war. This approach reflects what Coombs (2007) describes in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) as the “deny posture,” where responsibility is shifted away from the organization or government. However, this framing did not universally resonate with Ghanaians. Citizens perceived it as blame-shifting, particularly when earlier assurances, such as the government's promise of “no haircuts” on bonds, were later contradicted by policy actions. These inconsistencies weakened public confidence in official

communication. The resulting public frustration signaled a widening gap between government messaging and citizens' lived experiences. Communication scholars emphasize that in high-stakes crises, prioritizing acknowledgment, accountability, and the proactive rebuilding of trust, rather than relying on denial or justification, is critical for achieving lasting political legitimacy (Benoit, 1997; Hearit, 2006).

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Despite growing recognition that crisis communication is central to governance, there is limited scholarly analysis of how African governments communicate during nationwide economic crises, particularly through the lens of established communication theories. Most existing studies focus on Western contexts (e.g., U.S., Europe), while research on sub-Saharan Africa has been sector-specific (such as banking reforms) rather than comprehensive national fiscal crises. In Ghana, although the 2022–2024 economic downturns, particularly the period of peak fiscal distress leading to the IMF program, generated intense public debate and protests, little is known about the government's communication strategies. Specifically, there is limited analysis of how these strategies align with established frameworks like SCCT, Image Repair Theory, and how the government rhetorically framed the crisis narrative. This gap leaves unanswered questions about the utility of these Western-developed theories in contexts shaped by high power distance, pervasive partisan politics, and communal cultural norms. Addressing this knowledge gap is critical for both advancing crisis communication theory in non-Western settings and improving practice in democratic governance by providing an evidence-based understanding of the communication tactics employed by the NPP administration.

### **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The study seeks to:

1. Examine the crisis communication strategies employed by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government during Ghana's 2022–2024 economic crisis.
2. Analyze how the NPP government framed the economic crisis and the rhetorical strategies it used in public communication.
3. Assess public and stakeholder responses to the government's crisis communication and evaluate how these responses influenced public trust and perceptions of governmental credibility.

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What were the crisis communication strategies employed by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government during Ghana's 2022–2024 economic crisis?
2. How did the NPP government frame the economic crisis and what rhetorical strategies were used in its public communication?
3. How did the public and stakeholders respond to the government's crisis communication, and how did these responses influence public trust and perceptions of governmental credibility?

### **1.5 SCOPE AND DELIMITATION**

The study analysis focuses exclusively on the official public communication and discourse of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government regarding the 2022–2024 economic crises in Ghana. The analysis covers the period from the initial public acknowledgement of fiscal distress in late 2022

up to the official approval of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Extended Credit Facility in May 2023, representing the period of peak crisis communication intensity.

The study is delimited to the public statements, speeches, press releases, and key policy documents originating directly from the Presidency, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Information.

## **1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the analysis relies on qualitative interpretation of official speeches, press statements, and public communications, which introduces the possibility of researcher bias in the coding and classification of strategies and frames, despite the use of established theoretical frameworks to guide analysis. Interpretive judgments about tone, intent, and rhetorical emphasis may reflect analytical perspectives rather than definitive authorial intentions. Second, the findings are context specific and grounded in Ghana's 2022–2024 economic crisis, which was shaped by unique political, institutional, and socio-cultural conditions, limiting the generalisability of conclusions to other countries or crisis contexts.

While the study offers theoretical insights relevant to democratic settings in the Global South, caution is required when extending its implications beyond similar economic and political environments. Third, the study faced constraints related to access and resources, as it depended primarily on publicly available government communications and secondary reactions from media and civil society, rather than direct interviews with policymakers or citizens. This limited the ability to capture behind the scenes decision making processes or deeper audience interpretations. In addition, uneven documentation of certain stakeholder responses and the evolving nature of the crisis posed challenges in achieving complete representational balance, which may have affected the depth of insight into some perspectives.

## **1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

**Crisis Communication:** The specialized field of communication that focuses on how governments or organizations interact with stakeholders during periods of disruption, threat, or uncertainty, to minimize damage and restore public confidence.

**Economic Crisis:** A prolonged period of national financial instability, specifically defined in this context by sharp declines in currency value, soaring inflation, unsustainable public debt, and the forced reliance on external fiscal measures, such as an IMF bailout, which presents a significant social and political challenge to leadership.

**Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT):** A model that helps select crisis response strategies based on the perceived crisis type and the degree of responsibility attributed to the organization (or government).

**Image Repair Theory (IRT):** A framework that outlines rhetorical strategies (e.g., denial, evasion of responsibility, corrective action, mortification) used by an individual or institution to restore its reputation after a damaging event.

**Apologia:** A rhetorical form of defense in which an individual or institution responds to accusations to protect or justify their character and actions, often involving a shift in focus from the act to the character of the actor.

## **1.8 CHAPTER ORGANIZATION**

This study is organized into five chapters that logically progress from the foundational context to the final analysis and recommendations. Chapter One establishes the study's background, problem statement, objectives, and significance, and sets out the scope and limitations. Chapter Two provides the theoretical and scholarly basis by reviewing existing literature and relevant communication frameworks and their applicability to the Ghanaian context. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, detailing the qualitative rhetorical analysis approach, data collection, and analysis procedures. Chapter Four presents and analyzes the study's findings, interpreting the government's communication strategies and framing within Ghana's unique socio-political environment. Finally, Chapter Five summarizes the conclusions, provides practical recommendations for improving future crisis communication strategies, and suggests areas for further research.

## **1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Chapter One introduced the critical link between economic crisis and effective governmental crisis communication, establishing that communication failure can erode public trust and political legitimacy. The background contextualized Ghana's 2022–2024 fiscal crises within broader global and African economic challenges, highlighting the specific pressures of debt, inflation, and currency depreciation that necessitated the IMF intervention. The statement of the problem identified a critical gap in applying established crisis communication theories (SCCT, IRT, Framing and Apologia) to the specific context of an African national economic crisis, especially concerning the government's use of rhetorical framing.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents a systematic review of the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to understanding government crisis communication, particularly within the context of economic downturns in democratic settings. The chapter first outlines the theoretical framework, Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), Image Repair Theory (IRT), and Framing. It then reviews core concepts of crisis communication, followed by global, African, and Ghanaian empirical studies. The chapter concludes with a synthesis highlighting the theoretical and empirical gaps this research addresses.

#### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

A robust theoretical framework is essential for guiding the analysis of government discourse. This study adopts a multidisciplinary theoretical foundation that integrates organizational crisis communication theories with rhetorical and framing approaches. Together, these theories provide a layered analytical lens for classifying communication strategies, interpreting rhetorical motives, and understanding how governments frame economic crises to shape public perception.

##### **2.1.1 Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)**

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), developed by W. Timothy Coombs (2007), is an evidence-based framework for selecting post-crisis responses that minimize reputational damage. SCCT posits that stakeholders attribute different levels of responsibility to an organization or government based on the perceived type of crisis. Accordingly, economic crisis response strategies must align with this level of attribution to maintain credibility.

SCCT classifies crises into three clusters: Victim Crises (low attribution), Accidental Crises (moderate attribution), and Preventable Crises (high attribution due to negligence or mismanagement). Based on these assessments, Coombs outlines three reputation-focused response postures: Deny (e.g., simple denial, scapegoating), Diminish (e.g., justification or excuses), and Rebuild (e.g., apologies, accepting responsibility).

The theory posits that the overall success of a crisis response rests on the government's ability to seamlessly integrate two distinct, yet equally vital, communication demands: addressing the reputational threat to the institution and fulfilling the informational needs of the public and stakeholders (Coombs, 2015).

The emphasis placed on this dual-pronged approach stems from the understanding that a crisis is not just an event, but a multifaceted phenomenon that simultaneously creates psychological distress for stakeholders and poses a severe threat to the organization's legitimacy. Therefore, SCCT fundamentally requires a crisis response to encompass both reputational strategies and the provision of instructing and adjusting information. Drawing heavily on Attribution Theory, SCCT posits that stakeholders attribute varying degrees of responsibility for the crisis to the organization, which dictates the choice of strategy. These strategies range from denial (claiming no crisis exists or no responsibility), to diminishment (excusing or justifying the event), to rebuilding (apology and compensation) (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). The central goal is to mitigate the harm to the government's credibility and long-term political legitimacy.

SCCT mandates that, despite the urgency of the reputational threat, the practical needs of the public must always be prioritized. This second demand is subdivided into instructing and adjusting information. Instructing Information refers to the immediate, practical safety advice given to protect stakeholders from physical harm (e.g., public health warnings). Adjusting Information

focuses on communicating the necessary policy, procedural, or societal changes that stakeholders must understand and integrate to cope with the new reality created by the crisis (Coombs, 2015). This involves explaining the prognosis, the reform process, and what the public can expect next.

In the context of a nationwide economic crisis, the concept of adjusting information is particularly critical and often outweighs the immediate effectiveness of reputational repair. When a government faces soaring inflation, debt distress, or currency depreciation, citizens require clear, transparent, and frequent communication explaining the complex economic realities and the specific austerity or reform measures being implemented (e.g., debt exchange, subsidy removal, IMF programs). If the government attempts to manage its reputation through a deny posture (e.g., by exclusively blaming external factors like global conflicts) without simultaneously providing honest, forward-looking adjusting information on the painful steps ahead, public trust will erode rapidly. SCCT highlights that citizens often value verifiable, practical information that impacts their livelihoods (adjusting information) more highly than political attempts at self-justification (reputational strategies). Consequently, the theory emphasizes that the ability of a government's communication strategy to successfully mitigate public panic, manage expectations, and foster social cohesion is intrinsically linked to its commitment to providing responsible, adjusting information that addresses citizens' lived economic realities (Coombs, 2007). The dual emphasis ensures a communication strategy remains both ethically and strategically sound.

SCCT has been applied beyond corporate contexts, including in public institutions such as South African universities (Van Rensburg et al., 2017). Despite critiques about its earlier reliance on student samples and its sometimes-rigid categorization of crisis types, SCCT remains a systematic tool for categorizing government communication strategies. In this study, it helps classify the New

Patriotic Party (NPP) government's crisis response during Ghana's economic downturn, widely perceived as a preventable crisis resulting from internal fiscal mismanagement.

### **2.1.2 Image Repair Theory (IRT)**

Image Repair Theory (IRT), developed by William L. Benoit (1995), provides a rhetorical lens for understanding how political actors respond to accusations that threaten their legitimacy. IRT outlines five major strategy types: Denial, Evasion of Responsibility, Reducing Offensiveness, Corrective Action, and Mortification.

Empirical work by Benoit and Drew (1997) suggests that Mortification and Corrective Action are generally perceived as more effective and appropriate in high-stakes contexts than Denial or Bolstering. Political applications of IRT such as the analysis of Polish government communication during the 2020 election crisis (Kurnal, 2021) show that politicians often rely on denial and reducing offensiveness to protect political capital.

IRT is thus valuable for this study because it provides a detailed inventory of rhetorical strategies the NPP government may have used to maintain credibility and defend its reputation during the economic downturn.

### **2.1.4 Framing Theory**

Framing Theory provides a critical lens for understanding how governments construct narratives to influence public interpretation of crises. A frame highlights certain aspects of a complex situation while downplaying others (Entman, 1993). In economic downturns, governments may frame crises as externally caused (e.g., global shocks), unavoidable, or as consequences of previous administrations. This act of selection and salience is critical because framing

fundamentally shapes how the public assigns blame, determines their level of public trust, and influences their perceptions of governmental legitimacy. A robust analysis of framing must be grounded in Entman's four core elements of framing, which provide the structural components of any narrative:

**Define the problem:** This element establishes what the core issue or crisis is. For governments, this might be framing the economic distress not as a structural failing, but as a short-term liquidity issue.

**Diagnose causes:** This element identifies the sources of the problem. Governments frequently employ external attribution, such as framing the cause as global shocks or external actors (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic or the Russia-Ukraine conflict), thereby shifting responsibility away from domestic policy choices.

**Make moral judgments:** This element evaluates the agents and their effects. In a crisis, this might involve praising the current government for its "prudent" handling of an "unprecedented" situation, or morally condemning previous administrations for creating the structural vulnerabilities.

**Suggest remedies (Treatment):** This element offers solutions and justifies the policy steps being taken. During economic crises, this involves emphasizing corrective action, long-term reforms, and the immediate necessity of unpopular measures like an IMF program or debt restructuring, often framed as essential for maintaining national stability.

During economic crises, dominant frames often emerge by selectively combining these elements. These common frames include emphasizing solidarity during hardship (moral judgment/treatment), highlighting global shocks or external actors (causal diagnosis), and stressing the need for corrective action and long-term reforms to maintain national stability (treatment). By

anchoring these communicative choices to Entman's model, the analysis moves beyond mere description to a deeper theoretical engagement with the mechanism of message construction.

Framing shapes blame attribution, public trust, and perceptions of legitimacy. During economic crises, dominant frames often include; global shocks or external actors, emphasizing solidarity during hardship, highlighting corrective action and long-term reforms and emphasizing the need to maintain national stability.

Framing complements SCCT, and IRT by explaining the broader narrative structures governments use to package crisis messages.

### **2.1.5 Synthesis of Theoretical Framework**

The three theories, SCCT, IRT, and Framing, work together as a multi-layered analytical framework. SCCT categorizes strategic responses based on crisis type; IRT deconstructs specific rhetorical tactics; Framing reveals how the government constructs overarching narratives that shape public interpretation. This integrated framework ensures that communication strategies, rhetorical choices, and narrative structures are systematically examined.

## **2.2 Crisis Communication**

Crisis communication, as a distinct field of strategic communication, is not defined by a single, monolithic concept but by a confluence of perspectives that reflect the varying goals of the organizations involved. One of the most frequently cited definitions, popularized by W. Timothy Coombs, frames a crisis as “a sudden and unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organization’s operations and poses both a financial and a reputational threat” (Coombs, 2007). This definition, deeply rooted in a corporate and public relations context, prioritizes the

organizational perspective, focusing on damage control to an entity's image and balance sheet. A similar, yet slightly broader, perspective is offered by Fearn-Banks (2016), who describes crisis communication as the strategic dialogue between an institution and its publics aimed at minimizing damage to its reputation and maintaining trust.

However, research also offers a conceptual distinction from this private-sector focus. Earlier research, such as that by Rosenthal et al. (2001), challenges the notion of a crisis as merely a discrete, reputation-threatening event, arguing instead that crises "should be understood as periods of upheaval and collective stress". This perspective is vital for public sector studies, as it shifts the focus from managing reputation to addressing the profound psychological and collective social effects felt by citizens.

### **2.3 Government Crisis Communication Strategies**

Government crisis communication differs fundamentally from its corporate counterpart because its primary objectives are rooted in public service, democratic accountability, and the maintenance of national security and social order, rather than financial profit. This distinction is critical, as governments are tasked not only with managing the political fallout but also with mitigating the psychological effects of crises on their citizenry (Shirk, 2022). The public sector faces unique structural challenges, including complex legal frameworks, political pressures, and the decentralized nature of federalism.

This environment places significant restrictions on crisis managers, making them "more restricted in the creativity of their message development" and increasing the complexity of deciding what information to share due to political and ethical constraints (Liu & Horsley, 2007). The requirement to coordinate communication efforts across multiple government entities further

complicates matters, often making strategic efforts sluggish, a definite weakness in a time-sensitive crisis situation.

When discussing the types of communication strategies used by governments, research indicates a clear tendency toward information-giving strategies. These strategies, often described within the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) as the base crisis response of instructing and adjusting information, take ethical priority over reputation management. The effectiveness of these strategies is, however, heavily influenced by cultural and contextual factors. In politically charged settings, politics are considered the "essence" of the public sector. Political ideology has been shown to be a crucial moderating factor on how an audience perceives government communication, with partisans often exhibiting selective exposure, making it a challenge for administrations to garner policy support from opposing ideologies. Furthermore, government communicators frequently suffer from a disconnect with stakeholders, focusing on "doing what they think the people need" rather than monitoring public opinion to learn what is actually needed, an issue that further erodes trust and necessitates greater stakeholder research in public sector planning (Kim & Liu, 2012).

## **2.4 Public Sector Crisis Communication in Africa**

African governments operate within complex socio-economic environments characterized by constrained fiscal space, volatile currencies, and historically low levels of institutional trust (African Development Bank, 2023). These structural pressures heighten the stakes of crisis communication, particularly during economic downturns where public patience is limited and expectations for government accountability are high. Recent national developments further highlight these challenges. For instance, Nigeria's 2023 fuel subsidy removal sparked widespread public frustration, largely attributed to perceptions that the government had not adequately

communicated the rationale, timing, or mitigation measures surrounding the policy (Adetola & Akinkugbe, 2023). Similarly, the public reaction to the 2024 Finance Bill in Kenya revealed that the government's initial 'dismissal and defiance' and its lack of sensitivity to socio-economic realities quickly escalated into widespread public unrest, as the official pragmatic stance failed to resonate with a populace already strained by economic hardship. (Okibe, 2024) In both cases, communication breakdown, not merely the policies themselves, intensified public dissatisfaction.

These examples reflect a broader regional pattern in which weak or unclear crisis communication amplifies public mistrust (Liu, Hoque, & Shahab, 2021) and fuels individual defiance of public policy (Burruss et al., 2021). This underscores the vital role of comprehensive communication in effective fiscal risk management during crises (Oliinyk et al., 2023). Despite the frequency of such crises across the continent, systematic scholarly analysis of how African governments communicate during nationwide economic distress remains limited. This gap underscores the need for deeper, context-specific studies, such as the present research, to illuminate the rhetorical and strategic dimensions of crisis communication in the African economy.

## **2.5 Public Trust and Government credibility**

Public trust during economic crises is influenced by multiple factors, including the perceived transparency and honesty of government communication, consistency of messaging, timeliness of information dissemination, and the government's demonstrated empathy toward citizens' economic hardships (Oliinyk et al., 2023). Economic uncertainty heightens public sensitivity to communication quality, making credibility a pivotal element in maintaining confidence. When governments acknowledge challenges openly and provide clear, actionable plans, they reinforce

trust; conversely, opaque or delayed communication can exacerbate skepticism and fear.(Liu et al., 2021)

The relationship between communication strategies and governmental credibility is deeply interconnected. Credibility is built through transparent, consistent, and empathetic messaging that aligns with observable actions and outcomes. Effective communication strategies during economic crises prioritize clarity in explaining complex economic conditions, use coordinated messaging across agencies to avoid contradictions, and engage diverse platforms to reach all stakeholders. Empathy in messaging helps humanize the crisis, fostering solidarity and social cohesion. (Stiglitz, 1999) These strategies enhance credibility by demonstrating accountability and responsiveness, which are essential for sustaining public trust amid economic turmoil.

In contrast, when communication during economic crises lacks transparency, consistency, or empathy, public trust deteriorates rapidly. Governments that withhold information, deliver conflicting messages, or fail to address citizens' concerns often face heightened skepticism and resistance. Such ineffective communication can amplify economic anxieties, fuel misinformation, and undermine social cohesion, making crisis management more challenging. (Burruss et al., 2021) This contrast underscores that communication strategies are not merely supportive but foundational to establishing and maintaining governmental credibility in times of economic uncertainty.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of governmental communication during economic crises hinges on its ability to balance honesty, clarity, and compassion. Transparent and timely dissemination of information, combined with consistent messaging and empathetic engagement, fosters public trust and strengthens the social fabric necessary for collective resilience. Conversely, poor

communication practices erode confidence and hinder recovery efforts, highlighting the critical role of strategic communication in navigating economic turmoil successfully.

## **2.6 Review of Empirical Studies**

Empirical studies across diverse contexts consistently show that governments often adopt denial and blame-shifting during crises (Tian & Yang, 2022). For instance, Pang et al. (2012), in their study of the U.S. government's crisis communication, observed a "defensive" posture where officials frequently employed strategies such as shifting blame and bolstering to deflect responsibility and maintain political image. Citizens, however, prefer practical, instructing, and adjusting information (Al Nashmi & Bashir, 2024). When governments fail to demonstrate accountability, public trust erodes (Jamal et al., 2021).

African studies further confirm tensions between political defensiveness and public expectations for transparency. Ghana-specific empirical work is limited, reinforcing the significance of the present study.

## **2.7 Synthesis and Research Gap Identification**

The review of the literature underscores the value of applying a multi-theoretical framework and reveals a distinct gap that this study seeks to address. While Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), and Image Repair Theory (IRT), provide robust analytical tools, their application remains limited in the context of democratic African governments navigating national economic crises.

Furthermore, existing research often treats policy actions and communicative strategies separately, overlooking the interplay between the economic interventions themselves and the rhetoric used to

explain them. This study addresses this gap by applying IRT's strategy of Corrective Action to analyze how the rhetoric surrounding the New Patriotic Party's (NPP) fiscal measures was constructed and communicated.

The most pronounced gap identified is the absence of a systematic, comprehensive analysis of government communication strategies and rhetorical framing during Ghana's 2022–2024 economic crises. By providing the first in-depth rhetorical analysis of high-level government discourse during this national downturn, this research directly responds to all three of the study's objectives and contributes to a context-specific understanding of crisis communication in Ghana.

## **2.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented a comprehensive review of the theoretical and empirical literature on government crisis communication during economic downturns, establishing foundational analytical frameworks such as Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), Image Repair Theory (IRT), and Framing to examine strategic choices and rhetorical purposes within the political sphere. The review strategically progressed from general principles of democratic crisis communication to a broader analysis of global crisis patterns before focusing on the specific challenges faced by African governments, particularly in the Ghanaian context. By synthesizing empirical studies and theoretical perspectives, the chapter identified critical literature gaps, notably the limited application of these frameworks to African economic crises and the absence of systematic analyses of government rhetoric during nationwide downturns. Overall, this review provides a solid theoretical foundation for the study, justifying the need for a context-specific qualitative rhetorical analysis and setting the stage for Chapter Three, which will outline the research methodology employed to collect, analyze, and interpret government discourse during Ghana's 2022–2024 economic crisis

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed to investigate the Government of Ghana's crisis communication strategies during the 2022–2024 economic crisis. It details the research philosophy, design, unit of analysis, sampling procedures, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. Furthermore, it addresses the measures of trustworthiness and ethical considerations observed throughout the study.

#### **3.1 Research Philosophy and Approach**

This research is grounded in an Interpretivist philosophical paradigm, which posits that social reality is constructed through human interaction, language, and meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Interpretivism emphasizes that knowledge is context-dependent and that human behavior cannot be fully understood through objective measurement alone. This perspective aligned with the study's objective to determine how government narratives and public perceptions evolved during the economic crisis.

As Creswell and Poth (2018) explain, qualitative approaches allow researchers to interpret the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to social phenomena. In this study, the focus was placed on the interpretive analysis of official and public communications to uncover the symbolic and rhetorical construction of legitimacy, accountability, and trust. The study also aligned with the constructivist view that meaning is co-created between the researcher and the data (Charmaz, 2014), emphasizing interpretation over quantification.

### **3.2 Research Design**

The research employed a qualitative case study design using documentary and content analysis methods. Yin (2018) describes a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

The case study approach was appropriate because the 2022–2024 economic crisis in Ghana represents a complex, context-bound event where communication played a central role in shaping public understanding. Documentary analysis complemented this design by providing a systematic framework for reviewing textual data to identify meaning and patterns (Bowen, 2009). This approach combined deductive coding, guided by established crisis communication theories, with inductive coding to enable emergent insights from the data.

### **3.3 Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis for this study was textual data derived from both official government communications and public responses related to Ghana’s 2022–2024 economic crisis. At the governmental level, this included press releases, budget statements, national addresses, policy announcements, and ministerial speeches. At the public level, the study examined media commentary, civil society statements, and citizen-led discourse on social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) under hashtags like #FixTheCountry and #FixTheEconomy.

The choice of textual rather than interview-based analysis aligned with the approach of Asiwome (2020), who emphasized the strength of analyzing documented communications for understanding crisis response strategies. This approach captured the discursive interplay between state actors and multiple audiences (Flick, 2018).

### **3.4 Sampling**

The sampling for this study consisted of all official communications issued by the Government of Ghana during the 2022–2024 economic crisis, along with the accompanying media and public discourse. Due to the extensive number of documents generated during this period, purposive and criterion-based sampling were adopted. Purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting documents that are information-rich and most relevant to the study’s objectives (Patton, 2015). Criterion sampling ensures that each selected text meets specific inclusion criteria. In this study, documents were selected based on their relevance to the economic crisis, origin from official government or credible public sources, and the extent of their visibility or public reaction. This approach aligns with Abunyewah et al. (2023), who emphasized the value of purposive sampling in capturing contextually rich data in Ghanaian crisis communication research. Time segmentation was applied to ensure that communication patterns were examined across the four major phases of the crisis: Phase 1 (Onset), Phase 2 (Height of Discontent), Phase 3 (IMF Bailout/Austerity), and Phase 4 (Reframing/Recovery) allowing for longitudinal insights.

### **3.5 Data Collection Methods**

Data were collected from primary digital sources, including official government portals such as the Presidency of Ghana, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Information. Additional data were sourced from parliamentary Hansards, reputable media outlets, and official social media accounts. Public reactions were drawn from online news commentaries and social media discussions.

This triangulated data collection ensured comprehensive coverage of the communication ecosystem. All collected materials were archived with metadata including source, date, and

speaker to ensure transparency and traceability. Following the framework provided by Bowen (2009), document analysis was employed to evaluate these materials systematically.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework: familiarization, coding, theme identification, review, definition, and reporting. Deductive and inductive approaches were combined to ensure theoretical grounding while allowing for emergent insights.

Deductive coding was guided by Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007), Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1997), and Framing Theory (Entman, 1993). Inductive coding captured emergent patterns such as tone, empathy, and defensiveness. Thematic clustering and interpretation were facilitated using Microsoft Excel for coding organization. This approach mirrored the qualitative content analysis methods used in contemporary Ghanaian communication studies (Gyamfi & Amankwah, 2021).

### **3.7 Theoretical Framework Mapping**

To ensure conceptual alignment between the study's aims and analytical process, each research question is explicitly linked to an underpinning theory, thereby clarifying the deductive coding logic applied during analysis:

Research Question (RQ)	Primary Guiding Theory	Purpose in Analysis
RQ1: What crisis communication strategies did the NPP government adopt during the 2022–2024 economic crisis?	Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)  Image Repair Theory	Used for deductive coding of initial strategies such as denial, diminishment, and bolstering. It helps categorize how the government managed responsibility and blame during the onset of the crisis.
RQ2: What were the dominant frames and rhetorical strategies used by the government to justify economic policies?	Rhetoric Strategies & Framing Theory	<b>Rhetorical Strategies</b> focus on the persuasive use of language such as <b>Logos</b> (economic data), <b>Ethos</b> (credibility of the IMF/experts), and <b>Pathos</b> (appeals to national resilience) to justify unpopular policies like the E-Levy or debt restructuring. Framing Theory identifies how the government defined the problem (e.g., global vs. local causes) and suggested remedies.
RQ3: How did the public and stakeholders respond to the government’s crisis communication, and how did these responses influence public trust and perceptions of governmental credibility?	Framing Theory & Public Counter-Frames	Facilitates an inductive analysis of how the public reacted to official narratives. It links communication failures and "frame clashes" to the erosion of trust and challenges to political legitimacy.

### 3.8 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure methodological rigor, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four criteria for trustworthiness will be applied. Credibility was achieved through triangulation of multiple data sources and peer review of coding procedures. Transferability was enhanced by providing thick descriptions of Ghana’s

socio-political and economic context. Dependability was established through clear documentation of the analytical process, while confirmability will be maintained through reflexivity and audit trails. Ethically, the study relied exclusively on publicly available data, avoiding any breach of confidentiality.

### **3.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the methodological framework guiding the study on Ghana's crisis communication during the 2022–2024 financial crisis. Anchored in an interpretivist philosophy and qualitative case study design, the research employed documentary and thematic analysis to examine official narratives and public responses. The use of purposive and criterion-based sampling ensured the inclusion of the most relevant communication events, while adherence to trustworthiness criteria guarantee methodological rigor. The next chapter presents the findings derived from this analytical framework, revealing how government communication evolved across the phases of the crisis and how these messages are interpreted within Ghana's socio-political discourse.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings from the analysis of government communication during Ghana's 2022–2024 economic crises. The purpose of this chapter is to show how crisis communication strategies, framing choices and public reactions interacted to influence perceptions of trust, credibility and legitimacy during the period. Consistent with recommendations by Coombs (2021) and Hearit (2006), the chapter organises the findings thematically to demonstrate how political and technocratic actors responded to reputational threats and shifting public expectations.

The presentation of results is structured around the three research objectives. Objective 1 examines the crisis communication strategies adopted by government actors, drawing on categories from Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Repair Theory. Objective 2 analyses the framing and rhetorical patterns embedded in official messaging, guided by Entman's (1993) framework. Objective 3 explores how citizens, civil society organisations, business groups, international institutions and the media responded to these communication strategies, and what these reactions suggest about public trust and political legitimacy.

A full set of coded excerpts, together with their classification under SCCT, Image Repair Theory and framing typologies, is provided in Appendix 1.

## **4.2 Presentation of Findings**

### **4.2.1 RO1: Crisis Communication Strategies Adopted by the NPP Government**

The analysis reveals that government communication during Ghana's 2022–2024 economic crisis relied on mix of crisis communication strategies, rather than a clearly sequenced response. Dominant strategies included external attribution, reassurance, empathy, apology, justification/defeasibility, attack-the-accuser, and technocratic defence. These strategies often appeared concurrently, reflecting the government's effort to manage political blame, stabilise markets, maintain public confidence, and preserve institutional credibility amid prolonged economic strain. This finding supports Coombs' (2021) argument that crisis communication in extended, complex crises is adaptive and overlapping, rather than stage-based.

#### **4.2.1.1 External Attribution and Blame**

Government actors consistently framed the economic crisis as the product of global disruptions rather than domestic policy decisions. President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo attributed the downturn to "COVID-19 and the Russia–Ukraine war," while the Vice President similarly stated that "external shocks knocked us off course," often coupled with references to earlier economic achievements. These statements reflect SCCT's diminish strategy, particularly the excuse variant, which seeks to lower perceived responsibility by emphasising limited control and unintended consequences (Coombs, 2007).

From the perspective of Image Repair Theory, this approach aligns with evasion of responsibility, positioning the government as a constrained actor rather than a principal agent of policy failure (Benoit, 1997). Empirical literature shows that governments facing economic crises frequently rely on global shock narratives to manage blame and protect legitimacy (Tian & Yang, 2022).

However, in Ghana's case, this framing clashed with assessments by international financial institutions. The IMF (2024) and World Bank (2024) both noted that external shocks compounded pre-existing fiscal weaknesses, rising debt, and weakened buffers, undermining the credibility of a purely external attribution narrative. This disconnect limited the effectiveness of the diminish strategy and contributed to public scepticism regarding government accountability.

#### **4.2.1.2 Reassurance and Policy Reversals**

Reassurance emerged as a central strategy aimed at calming markets and reducing uncertainty. The President Akuffo-Addo's repeated assurances that "*there will be no haircuts; investors will not lose money*" sought to stabilise expectations amid growing anxiety. Within SCCT, such messaging resembles a rebuild-oriented reassurance tactic, intended to maintain confidence and mitigate reputational damage (Coombs, 2007).

However, the subsequent introduction of the Domestic Debt Exchange Programme directly contradicted earlier guarantees. Civil society actors described this reversal as a "*breach of trust,*" highlighting the risks associated with over-reassurance in uncertain fiscal contexts. Consistent with Seeger et al. (2003), the findings show that credibility hinges on accuracy and consistency; when assurances later prove unreliable, they are interpreted as misleading. Jamal et al. (2021) similarly argue that visible narrative reversals amplify perceptions of incompetence and dishonesty, accelerating trust erosion during prolonged crises. In this case, reassurance initially stabilised sentiment but ultimately weakened trust due to policy inconsistency.

#### **4.2.1.3 Empathy and Apology**

Empathy featured prominently as a coping-oriented response, aimed at acknowledging hardship and preserving relational trust between government and citizens. The Finance Minister Ken Ofori-

Atta's expressions of regret "*I feel the pain... I am truly sorry*" reflect mortification within Image Repair Theory and align with apologia rhetoric (Benoit, 1997; Hearit, 2006). Similarly, the Minister for Information Kojo Opong Nkrumah's statement that "times are hard globally and locally... we feel the pain" attempted to humanise government communication and signal shared suffering.

SCCT conceptualises such affective messaging as adjusting information, designed to help stakeholders psychologically process disruption (Coombs, 2007). While these messages served an important relational function, the findings indicate that empathy alone was insufficient to sustain trust in the absence of consistent policy outcomes. This supports the literature's caution that emotional appeals without substantive corrective action have limited reputational value in preventable or mismanaged crises.

#### **4.2.1.4 Justification and Defeasibility**

Justification strategies were used to frame economic outcomes as constrained by institutional and structural factors. Officials cited parliamentary delays, credit rating downgrades, and market pressures as aggravating conditions. These narratives align with IRT's defeasibility strategy and SCCT's diminish posture, portraying decisions as technically necessary rather than politically induced. While such framing is common in government crisis communication, the findings suggest it further diffused responsibility in ways that weakened perceptions of leadership accountability.

#### **4.2.1.5 Attack-the-Accuser and Delegitimisation**

In politically contested downturns, governments sometimes treat criticism as a legitimacy threat and respond with delegitimising language that frames dissent as reckless or harmful, thereby tightening control over the crisis narrative and protecting governing authority (Svenbro & Wester,

2023). President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo warned, “*Sika mpɛ dede (money doesn’t like noise)... agencies will act against falsehoods*”, signaling an attempt to regulate dissent. Dr. Matthew Opoku Prempeh, then Minister for Energy and Member of Parliament for Manhyia South, dismissed criticism by stating that “*Even Jesus Christ was not spared by critics*”, while government spokespersons described the “*Arise Ghana*” demonstration as an “*attempt to create instability*”.

Scholars note that such responses are typical in highly politicised downturns where governments perceive dissent as a threat to legitimacy (Svenbro & Wester, 2023).

However, the findings indicate that this approach deepened political polarisation and undermined bipartisan support for recovery measures. Rather than neutralising criticism, delegitimation strategies reinforced perceptions of defensiveness and intolerance of dissent, thereby weakening communicative credibility.

#### **4.2.1.6 Technocratic Defence and Institutional Credibility**

Finally, technocratic defence was most visible in the communication of the Bank of Ghana. By offering technical explanations for losses linked to the DDEP and exchange rate effects, central bank officials positioned the institution as rule-bound and evidence-led. This aligns with Lehtimäki and Palmu’s (2022) argument that expert-driven communication enhances institutional credibility during crises. SCCT suggests such explanations are effective when institutions seek to distance themselves from direct responsibility (Coombs, 2021).

While this strategy helped preserve market confidence and align messaging with IMF-supervised reforms, the specialist language often failed to resonate with citizens experiencing hardship

through inflation, unemployment, and declining living standards. This gap underscores the tension between market-facing credibility and public-facing legitimacy in economic crisis communication.

#### **4.2.2 RO2: Crisis Frames and Rhetorical Strategies**

This section addresses RO2 by examining how government officials framed Ghana's 2022–2024 economic crisis to shape public understanding, manage responsibility, and maintain political and institutional legitimacy. The analysis identified six dominant framing patterns: causal interpretation, moral evaluation and emotional appeals, prognostic recovery and progress narratives, moral delegitimation and law-and-order framing, unity and collective responsibility appeals, and technocratic and data-driven framing.

Together, these frames reflect the strategic use of rhetoric to define the nature of the crisis, attribute responsibility, advance moral judgments, and promote preferred policy responses, consistent with Entman's (1993) framing functions. Rather than operating in isolation, the frames overlapped and sometimes competed, revealing both the strengths and limits of government meaning-making during a prolonged and politicised economic downturn.

##### **4.2.2.1 Causal Interpretation Frame**

Causal interpretation frames were central to government communication, repeatedly positioning the crisis as externally induced. References to COVID-19 and the Russia–Ukraine war were used to situate Ghana within a broader global economic disruption, framing the country as affected by forces beyond its control. The then Minister for Information, Kojo Opong Nkrumah, reinforced this logic through normalisation rhetoric, stating that the shocks were global and that “*Ghana is no exception.*”

According to Entman (1993), such framing directs audience attention away from domestic accountability and toward external causation, thereby shaping perceptions of responsibility. Empirical studies similarly show that governments facing economic crises often externalise blame to preserve legitimacy and reduce public anger (Tian & Yang, 2022). In this case, the causal frame also supported a treatment recommendation logic, making IMF engagement appear as a necessary stabilisation response to an imported crisis rather than a correction of long-standing domestic fiscal weaknesses. However, the persuasive power of this frame weakened when counter-frames from international institutions emphasised that global shocks interacted with pre-existing debt vulnerabilities, re-centering responsibility on domestic policy choices and diluting the effectiveness of external attribution.

#### **4.2.2.2 Moral Evaluation and Emotional Appeals**

Moral evaluation frames were expressed through repeated empathy cues and emotional language intended to humanise authority during hardship. The finance minister Ken Offori-Atta's statement, "*I feel the pain... I am truly sorry,*" alongside assurances that government understood citizens' suffering, framed the crisis as a shared moral experience rather than a leadership failure. Similar language from government spokespersons "times are hard globally and locally... we feel the pain" sought to establish emotional proximity between leaders and citizens.

Entman (1993) explains that moral evaluation frames guide audiences toward value judgments, and in this case, empathy language evaluated the crisis as collective suffering deserving patience rather than hostility. Aristotle's concept of *pathos* further explains how emotional appeals shape judgments of fairness and responsibility. While such rhetoric aligned with established findings that emotional appeals soften public evaluation during crises (Fearn-Banks, 2016), the findings indicate that empathy alone could not sustain legitimacy when economic strain persisted and policy

outcomes appeared inconsistent. This reveals the conditional effectiveness of moral framing in prolonged crises.

#### **4.2.2.3 Prognostic Recovery Framing and Progress Narratives**

Government communication also relied heavily on prognostic framing, presenting the crisis as temporary and recovery as already underway. Officials urged citizens to “recognize the gains we’ve made,” pointing to easing inflation and asserting that “recovery is on course.” This framing selectively highlighted specific indicators to define progress and imply policy effectiveness, consistent with Entman’s (1993) notion of selective emphasis.

By using directional metaphors such as “on course” and temporal comparisons between past hardship and future stability, officials constructed a narrative of controlled movement toward recovery. Prior research shows that such progress narratives are commonly deployed to sustain patience and justify austerity during extended crises (Seeger et al., 2003). However, the findings reveal that this frame lost traction when everyday experiences rising prices and declining purchasing power did not align with official claims, enabling counter-frames to question competence and sincerity (IMF, 2023). This mismatch weakened rhetorical credibility and exposed the fragility of optimism-based framing.

#### **4.2.2.4 Moral Delegitimisation and Law-and-Order Framing**

As public criticism intensified, government actors increasingly framed dissent as a threat to stability, rather than as legitimate policy grievance. Officials characterised the *Arise Ghana* protest as “an attempt to create instability” and dismissed allegations of mismanagement as opposition propaganda. This framing redirected attention from substantive economic concerns to the

supposed motives of critics, performing a moral evaluation that associated responsible citizenship with restraint and loyalty.

Wang (2022) notes that such delegitimisation frames are common in contested political environments where governments seek to defend authority. Statements by senior officials, including claims that critics were “politicizing everything,” narrowed the space for legitimate contestation. When paired with progress claims by the Vice President Dr. Bawumia, that “*inflation is down, growth up, exchange rate stabilised,*” this framing constructed a competence contrast that implied dissent was exaggerated or unnecessary. While effective in asserting control over the narrative in the short term, the findings suggest that this approach deepened polarisation and reinforced public suspicion that communication prioritised control over accountability.

#### **4.2.2.5 Unity and Collective Responsibility Appeals**

Unity frames featured prominently, with officials urging citizens to support recovery efforts through collective discipline and sacrifice. President Akufo-Addo’s call for Ghanaians to “turn this crisis into an opportunity and work together,” alongside culturally resonant warnings such as “*Sika mpe dede,*” framed unity as both a moral duty and an economic necessity.

Within Entman’s framework, these messages function as treatment recommendation frames, prescribing social cohesion as a remedy for instability. Such appeals aimed to stabilise sentiment in a context of fragile trust. However, their effectiveness depended on whether citizens perceived sacrifices as equitably shared, highlighting the interaction between rhetorical framing and perceived fairness.

#### **4.2.2.6 Technocratic and Data-Driven Framing**

Finally, technocratic institutions relied on data-driven and expert-oriented framing to assert credibility. The Governor of the Bank of Ghana explained that reported losses reflected the DDEP and exchange rate effects, rejecting claims of illegal money printing. Officials frequently cited inflation trends, fiscal consolidation, and structural factors to frame economic management as an evidence-based process rather than a political one.

This approach aligns with technocratic communication norms and supports Entman's treatment recommendation function by presenting policy continuity as rational and necessary. While such framing enhanced institutional credibility among markets and international partners, the findings show that its technical complexity reduced resonance for citizens experiencing the crisis through everyday hardship. This tension illustrates how technocratic framing can stabilise elite confidence while simultaneously widening the gap between official narratives and lived experience.

#### **4.2.3 RO3: Public and Stakeholder Responses and Implications for Trust**

The findings indicate that public and stakeholder trust during Ghana's 2022–2024 economic crisis was shaped primarily by perceived inconsistencies between official assurances and lived economic realities. Responses from international institutions, civil society groups, citizens, business associations, traditional and religious leaders, and the domestic media collectively reveal a widening credibility gap that constrained the government's ability to sustain legitimacy. Consistent with trust and crisis governance literature, these reactions demonstrate that trust erosion occurs when communication lacks transparency, coherence, and alignment with observable outcomes (Liu et al., 2021; Oliinyk et al., 2023).

## **International Validation and Contestation**

International financial institutions played a dual role in shaping public interpretation of the crisis. While IMF assessments acknowledged the role of global shocks, they simultaneously emphasised that “*pre-existing debt vulnerabilities intensified Ghana’s exposure,*” complicating the government’s dominant external attribution frame. The World Bank similarly highlighted governance and fiscal weaknesses as central contributors to the downturn.

According to Entman (1993), authoritative counter-frames from credible external actors can reshape meaning and weaken official narratives. In this case, international validation of global pressures initially lent support to government framing, but the emphasis on domestic vulnerabilities re-centred responsibility and reduced the persuasive power of a purely external shock explanation. These mixed signals constrained the government’s communicative control and reinforced public scepticism about policy stewardship.

### **4.2.3.2 Civil Society Resistance and Protest Politics**

Civil society responses were among the strongest indicators of trust breakdown. Groups such as *#FixTheCountry* criticised the reversal of “no haircut” assurances, arguing that government communication had “misled the public,” while pensioners described the Domestic Debt Exchange as “a betrayal of trust.” The *Arise Ghana* and *#OccupyJulorbiHouse* protests transformed communicative dissatisfaction into visible political resistance.

Empirical studies show that contradictory messaging in crises perceived as preventable significantly intensifies reputational damage and public anger (Jamal et al., 2021). In this case, protests functioned not only as expressions of economic grievance but also as counter-framing mechanisms, signalling that official rhetoric had lost credibility among key segments of the

population. This confirms findings from African crisis communication research that trust erodes rapidly when citizens perceive evasion and inconsistency rather than accountability.

#### **4.2.3.3 Public Sentiment and Lived Experience**

Public reactions further revealed a disconnect between technical explanations and everyday experience. Many citizens described government communication as *“too complex”* or *“all talk, no change,”* reflecting frustration with messaging that failed to translate macroeconomic narratives into relatable realities. Pensioners and bondholders protesting at the Ministry of Finance characterised their situation as *“painful and humiliating,”* highlighting the emotional consequences of policy reversals.

These responses confirm that trust is shaped not only by factual accuracy but by experiential alignment the degree to which official communication resonates with lived hardship. When rhetoric does not reflect daily struggles, confidence declines, supporting Liu et al.’s (2021) argument that trust is relational and grounded in perceived responsiveness rather than message intent alone.

#### **4.2.3.4 Private Sector Confidence and Economic Uncertainty**

Private sector actors, particularly traders and small and medium-sized enterprises, expressed scepticism toward official claims that *“the economy is recovering.”* Business associations such as the Ghana Union of Traders’ Associations (GUTA) argued that persistent exchange rate volatility, high import costs, and unpredictable taxes contradicted optimistic government narratives.

This reaction reflects research showing that economic actors evaluate communication credibility through market signals and transactional experience rather than political rhetoric (Burruss et al.,

2021). The divergence between macro-level indicators cited by officials and micro-level realities experienced by businesses weakened confidence in public assurances and encouraged reliance on personal observation rather than government messaging.

#### **4.2.3.5 Traditional and Religious Leadership as Moral Interpreters**

Traditional and religious leaders emerged as important moral interpreters during the crisis. Clergy statements urged political leaders to “*speak truthfully and show compassion,*” acknowledging the necessity of reforms while criticising the tone and perceived insensitivity of official communication.

Such interventions align with Liu and Horsley’s (2007) observation that non-state actors often step in to stabilise meaning and trust when government communication falters. While these leaders helped calm public anxiety and discourage unrest, their calls for humility and honesty also implicitly signalled dissatisfaction with the consistency and empathy of government messaging.

#### **4.2.3.6 Media Narratives and Elite Opinion**

Domestic media played a central role in interrogating and amplifying inconsistencies in government communication. Editorial commentary, particularly on platforms such as Joy FM, highlighted the reversal of the “*no haircut*” pledge and described official messaging as “inconsistent and evasive.” Analysts argued that shifting narratives confused the public and undermined credibility.

Given the agenda-setting power of urban media audiences, such critiques functioned as elite counter-frames that reinforced scepticism toward official narratives. Consistent with Entman’s

(1993) framing theory, these media interpretations reshaped public understanding and accelerated trust erosion by repeatedly juxtaposing assurances with policy outcomes.

### **4.3 Chapter Summary**

This chapter analysed government communication during Ghana's 2022–2024 economic crisis, focusing on strategies, framing choices, and stakeholder reactions. Findings under Objective One show that officials combined external attribution, reassurance, empathy, justification, delegitimisation, and technocratic defence to manage blame and protect legitimacy. Objective Two demonstrated that these messages were rhetorically framed through causal diagnosis, moral evaluation, prognostic recovery narratives, unity appeals, delegitimisation of critics, and technocratic rationality. The analysis revealed clear tensions between official frames and counter-frames from international institutions, civil society, media, and citizens. Objective Three showed that inconsistencies between assurances and lived experience significantly weakened trust and credibility. Overall, the chapter illustrates that crisis communication effectiveness depended not only on strategic intent but on alignment between rhetoric, evidence, and everyday economic realities.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the overall purpose of the study and presents the main findings derived from the analysis of government crisis communication during Ghana's 2022–2024 economic downturn. It summarises how crisis communication strategies, framing patterns and public reactions interacted throughout the crisis and draws conclusions linked directly to the three research objectives. The chapter also outlines recommendations for strengthening crisis communication practice and proposes areas for future research.

#### 5.2 Summary of Findings

The findings show that government actors relied on a hybrid and non-linear mix of crisis communication strategies throughout the 2022–2024 economic crisis. Rather than moving sequentially from denial to acceptance, officials simultaneously deployed external attribution, reassurance, empathy and apology, justification and defeasibility, attack the accuser, and technocratic defence. External attribution framed the crisis as largely driven by global shocks, reducing perceived government responsibility, while reassurance and empathy were used to stabilise expectations and acknowledge public hardship. However, policy reversals such as the Domestic Debt Exchange Programme weakened the credibility of earlier assurances and exposed the limits of reassurance in volatile fiscal contexts. Justification and defeasibility further distributed responsibility to structural and institutional constraints, while delegitimisation strategies sought to neutralise criticism. Technocratic defence, particularly by the Bank of Ghana, preserved institutional credibility but often failed to resonate with citizens' lived experiences.

Overall, the strategic mix reflected attempts to balance political survival, market confidence, and institutional legitimacy, though often with uneven outcomes.

The analysis demonstrates that government communication was structured around distinct framing functions that shaped how the crisis was understood rather than how responsibility was managed. Officials used causal interpretation frames to define the downturn as an externally induced shock, moral evaluation frames to present hardship as shared suffering deserving empathy, and prognostic frames to portray reforms as placing the economy on a recovery path. Unity and collective responsibility frames encouraged discipline and sacrifice, while moral delegitimation frames positioned critics as destabilising or politically motivated. Technocratic framing relied on data, indicators, and procedural language to present economic management as evidence led and rule bound. These frames worked through rhetorical devices such as emotional appeals, metaphors of recovery and trajectory, cultural proverbs, and competence contrasts. While some frames helped justify IMF engagement and stabilisation measures, their effectiveness was constrained when rhetorical optimism and moral appeals conflicted with everyday economic realities and credible counter frames from external institutions.

Stakeholder responses revealed that trust and legitimacy outcomes were shaped primarily by consistency between official narratives and lived experience. International institutions partially validated the role of global shocks but consistently highlighted domestic fiscal and debt vulnerabilities, weakening the persuasiveness of purely external attribution frames. Civil society groups, pensioners, and protest movements reacted strongly to perceived inconsistencies, especially around assurances that were later reversed, framing them as breaches of trust. Citizens expressed frustration with technocratic language that felt distant from household hardship, while private sector actors questioned recovery claims in light of persistent exchange rate volatility and

cost pressures. Religious and traditional leaders acted as moral interpreters, calling for honesty and compassion, and domestic media amplified contradictions through sustained scrutiny. Collectively, these responses demonstrate that prolonged inconsistencies and competing frames eroded credibility, showing that effective crisis communication in extended economic downturns depends on alignment between rhetoric, policy outcomes, and everyday economic conditions.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Government crisis communication during Ghana's 2022 to 2024 economic downturn operates as a contested governance tool, not merely a messaging function, because political legitimacy, market confidence, and public reassurance are negotiated simultaneously in real time. The evidence indicates that overlapping strategies can be rational in a prolonged crisis, yet the absence of disciplined prioritisation produces mixed signals that dilute credibility, particularly when external attribution and technocratic justification collide with public expectations of accountability. This positions crisis communication effectiveness as a product of coherence across actors and time, rather than the presence of many tactical moves.

Framing and rhetorical choices shape what the crisis "means" to audiences, which then conditions whether policy actions are interpreted as leadership, sacrifice, or evasion. The analysis suggests that causal and recovery narratives, empathy-driven moral appeals, and unity rhetoric can stabilise interpretation when they are consistent with observable experience, but they lose persuasive power when everyday hardship and authoritative counter narratives expose gaps in optimism and promises. In this setting, rhetorical sophistication becomes fragile because audiences can reinterpret moral appeals and progress language as deflection rather than responsibility-taking.

Trust and legitimacy in extended economic crises are cumulative outcomes that hinge on realism, consistency, and alignment between communication, policy delivery, and lived economic

conditions. The study's implications point to crisis communication as a core policy instrument that should be embedded into economic decision-making through communication protocols that prioritise transparent expectation setting and reduce contradictory narratives across institutions. Sustaining trust therefore requires disciplined expectation management, credible acknowledgment of domestic responsibility alongside external constraints, and audience-centred clarity that respects the economic realities citizens and stakeholders experience daily.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

Effective crisis communication during economic downturns requires clearer expectation management anchored in verifiable indicators. The study recommends that government communicators adopt a structured reassurance framework in which any public assurance is explicitly conditional and supported by short term benchmarks. For example, instead of absolute guarantees, officials should communicate scenario-based commitments tied to measurable fiscal indicators such as debt restructuring milestones, inflation bands, or IMF programme reviews, with progress updates issued at fixed quarterly intervals. This approach is achievable within existing government communication units and would reduce credibility loss caused by policy reversals, while ensuring that public expectations are aligned with evolving economic realities.

The study also recommends strengthening moral and emotional framing through institutionalised empathy protocols that go beyond rhetorical expressions. Ministries responsible for economic communication should integrate regular citizen focused briefings that explicitly acknowledge hardship and explain trade-offs using simplified language and everyday economic examples. These briefings should be delivered consistently during key adjustment phases such as budget announcements or debt restructuring reviews and evaluated through public sentiment tracking

using media analysis and social listening tools. Within a defined six-month cycle, such feedback mechanisms would allow communicators to adjust tone and content in response to public concerns, making empathy more credible and responsive rather than symbolic.

To address trust erosion linked to delegitimation and blame framing, the study recommends a clear separation between crisis explanation and political contestation. Government spokespersons should adopt a non-adversarial communication guideline during declared economic crisis periods, limiting the use of language that frames critics as destabilising or unpatriotic. Instead, dissent should be acknowledged as part of democratic accountability, with responses focused on evidence-based clarification rather than motive attribution. This guideline should be formally adopted by the Information Ministry and reviewed annually, ensuring relevance and consistency across administrations while reducing polarisation during sensitive recovery phases.

Finally, the study recommends improving the accessibility of technocratic communication through coordinated translation of economic data into citizen centred narratives. Institutions such as the Bank of Ghana and the Ministry of Finance should jointly produce simplified economic explainers following major policy decisions, using infographics, vernacular radio segments, and community level engagements within three months of each major announcement. These materials should be evaluated through reach and comprehension metrics such as audience engagement data and public surveys. This recommendation is achievable using existing public education platforms and would help bridge the gap between expert credibility and lived experience, thereby strengthening trust in economic governance during prolonged downturns.

## **5.5 Implications for Policy and Future Research**

The findings of the study carry important implications for public policy, particularly in the area of economic governance and government communication during prolonged crises. The study

indicates that crisis communication should be treated as a core policy instrument rather than a supplementary public relations function. Policymakers need to embed communication protocols into economic policy design, ensuring that major fiscal and monetary decisions are accompanied by clearly defined communication strategies that prioritise consistency, transparency, and realistic expectation setting. This includes aligning political messaging with technocratic assessments and institutional reports to avoid contradictory narratives that weaken credibility. The study also implies that policy frameworks should recognise public trust as a measurable governance outcome, with communication effectiveness evaluated alongside economic indicators such as inflation, debt sustainability, and growth performance. In this sense, communication becomes part of the policy feedback loop that shapes compliance, legitimacy, and social stability during adjustment periods.

In terms of future research, the study highlights several avenues for further scholarly inquiry. There is a need for comparative studies that examine government crisis communication across different African countries experiencing economic downturns, in order to test the applicability of crisis communication and framing theories in diverse political and cultural contexts. Future research could also incorporate audience centred methodologies, such as surveys, interviews, and experimental designs, to examine how different segments of the population interpret and respond to specific frames and strategies over time. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in assessing how trust evolves across different phases of an economic crisis and recovery. Additionally, research that integrates digital media analysis could provide deeper insight into how social media platforms shape counter narratives and influence the effectiveness of official communication in contemporary crisis environments.

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**APPENDIX:1**

**CODING SHEET: CRISIS COMMUNICATION DURING ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS: ANALYZING GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STRATEGIES DURING GHANA’S ECONOMIC CRISIS.**

**RQ1: Analyze the crisis communication strategies employed by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government during Ghana’s 2022–2024 economic crisis.**

Speaker	Text/Excerpt	SCCT Strategy	IRT Strategy	Implication/Notes
Akufo-Addo	“COVID and the Russia–Ukraine war caused this crisis.”	Diminis-Excuse (external attribution)	Evasion of responsibility	Shifts causal blame to global shocks; limits ownership.
Akufo-Addo	“Sika mpe dede... agencies will act against falsehoods.”	Deflect	Attack accuser / differentiation	Seeks narrative control; risks backlash among critics.
Akufo-Addo	“No haircuts; investors will not lose money.” (Dec 2022)	<b>diminish (reassurance) and rebuild (offering compensation/rectification)</b>	Rebuild-corrective action	Assurance intended to calm markets; later reversals hurt credibility.
Ken Ofori-Atta	“I feel the pain... I am truly sorry.” (Nov 2022)		Rebuild	Mortification / bolstering
Ken Ofori-Atta	“Downgrades and delays to revenue bills worsened the situation.”	Diminish	Defeasibility / justification	Shares responsibility with markets and Parliament.
Kojo Opong Nkrumah	“Times are hard globally and locally... we feel the pain.”	Diminish + bolster	Ingratiation	Combines global-shock frame with empathy.
Kojo Opong Nkrumah	“Calls for apology are misplaced... twin crisis (COVID, Ukraine) justifies IMF.”	Deny/diminish	Justification	Externalizes cause; normalizes IMF recourse.
Kojo Opong Nkrumah	“Arise Ghana demo shows attempt to create instability.”	Attack accuser	Delegitimization	Frames protest as security risk to undercut dissent.
Dr. Matthew Opoku Prempeh	“Even Jesus Christ was not spared by critics.”	Deny	Attack accuser / shift blame	Tries to neutralize criticism; tone perceived as insensitive.
Dr. Matthew Opoku Prempeh	“There is no ‘dumsor’... “Ask for a timetable? Then fix your own schedule (we’re doing the job).”	Denial : attack the accuser	Denial: simple denial	Rejects problem definition; can appear dismissive.

Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia	“We stabilized the economy... external shocks knocked us off course.”	Deny + bolster	Defeasibility / reminding	Past-achievement boasting with external blame to sustain confidence.
Ernest Addison (BoG Governor)	“Losses reflect DDEP and exchange-rate effects; BoG did not illegally print money.”	Diminish	Justification / defeasibility	Technocratic defense to protect institutional credibility.
Richard Ahiagbah (NPP Comms Dir.)	“Claims of NPP mismanaging the economy are propaganda.”	Deny	Attack accuser	Refutes opposition narrative; partisan hardening.
Majority Leader Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu	Opposition’s e-levy stance spooked markets.	Diminish	Justification	Shares blame with Minority; polarizes debate.
Ministry of Finance (DDEP comms)	Early “no haircut” assurances vs later debt-exchange terms.	Diminish → rebuild	Corrective action	U-turn dented trust; later explanations framed as necessity.
Richard Ahiagbah / NPP comms	Rebuttals calling criticism propaganda.	Aligned	Energized base but deepened polarization.	

**RQ2:How did the government frame the crisis and what rhetorical strategies were used?),**

Speaker	Text/Excerpt	Framing Type (Entman)	Rhetorical Device	Tone	Interpretation/Notes
Ken Ofori-Atta	“I feel the pain in my soul.”	Moral evaluation	Emotional appeal (pathos)	Regretful	Empathy to rebuild trust.
Akufo-Addo	“Global shocks are to blame.”	Causal interpretation (external)	Justification (logos/comparative)	Formal	Normalizes Ghana’s woes as global.
Kojo Opong Nkrumah	“Recognize the gains we’ve made.”	Bolstering	Achievement reframing	Optimistic	Shifts focus to past progress.
Dr. Matthew Opoku Prempeh	“Critics are politicizing everything.”	Blame-shifting / delegitimization	Accusation	Aggressive	Casts dissent as partisan.
Akufo-Addo	“Turn crisis into an opportunity; work together.”	Treatment recommendation (unity)	Collective appeal (pathos)	Inspirational	Solicits public cooperation for tough measures.
Akufo-Addo	“Sika mpe dede...”	Problem redefinition (mis/dis-info)	Proverb + authority	Stern	Portrays panic as harmful to the cedi.
Ofori-Atta	“Opposition worsened downgrades.”	Political attribution	Logical causation	Defensive	Shares blame with rivals.
Ernest Addison (BoG)	“Losses due to DDEP; no illegal money-printing.”	Technical/defensive	Logos	Technocratic	Shields BoG reputation; counters “printing” claims.
Akufo-Addo (SONA 2024)	“Progress on restructuring; recovery on course.”	Remedy/prognosis	Bolstering	Resolute	Reassures stakeholders with milestones.
Dr. Bawumia	The economy is recovering - data shows inflation down, growth up, deficit reduced, exchange rate stabilised	Technical/quantitative framing (data-driven)	Statistical appeal; comparative trend analysis	Measured/confident	Frames crisis recovery through empirical evidence, positioning government as competent technocrats managing a turnaround.
Ernest Addison (BoG)	Ghana's import dependence and profit repatriation create FX demand pressures weakening the cedi	Structural/technical problem framing	Logical causal chain; expert economic explanation	Analytical/professional	Frames the crisis as structural and external-sector-driven, shifting discourse from political blame to economic fundamentals.

**RQ3: What were the public reactions to the government’s crisis communication, and how did these responses impact public trust and perceptions of governmental credibility?**

Source/Stakeholder	Reaction Type	Alignment with Gov’t Messaging	Implication for Public Trust/ and reputation of government
IMF staff reports/media	Analytical assessment of causes (pre-existing fiscal weaknesses plus external shocks).	Partially aligned	Undermined pure external-blame narrative; demanded fiscal reforms for credibility.
World Bank updates	Analytical; emphasized domestic vulnerabilities alongside shocks.	Partially aligned	Reinforced need for governance and fiscal fixes; tempered official spin.
#FixTheCountry	Outrage at “no-haircut” U-turn; accountability demands.	Contradiction	Trust erosion; promises seen as unreliable.
#OccupyJulorbiHouse (2023)	Mass protests on cost of living and corruption.	Oppositional	Severe credibility loss among youth; arrests amplified mistrust.
Joy FM Editorial	Critique of shifting blame.	Not aligned	Questioned honesty and accountability.
IMANI Ghana	Data-based critique of fiscal policy and comms.	Not aligned	Public trusted experts over official messaging.
CDD-Ghana / Afrobarometer	Survey snapshots of low confidence.	Not aligned	Documented widespread distrust. Coding Sheet (1)
Pensioners & Bondholders	Protests over DDEP; pleas for exemptions.	Not aligned	Compassion deficit narrative; reputational damage.
TV3 / Citi Vox Pops	Confusion and frustration with assurances.	Partially aligned	“All talk, no action” sentiment lowered trust.
GUTA / Business voices	Complaints about forex and taxes.	Not aligned	Government viewed as out of touch with real-sector pain.
Religious/Traditional leaders	Calls for humility and empathy.	Mixed	Moral pressure for elite belt-tightening; limited trust gains.