

GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM



PROGRAMME: MA PUBLIC RELATIONS

**IMPACT OF EFFECTIVE CRISIS MANAGEMENT ON AN ORGANIZATION
AND IT'S STAKEHOLDERS: A CASE STUDY OF MTN GHANA**

ALEXANDER ESEM DUMAKOR

NOVEMBER 2021

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BY

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(MAPR 20060)

**A LONG ESSAY PRESENTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
AND RESEARCH, GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A
MASTER OF ARTS (MA) DEGREE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS.**

NOVEMBER 2021

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is as a result of my own research conducted at the Faculty of Public Relations, advertising and marketing, Ghana Institute of Journalism. All references to other people's work have been properly acknowledged. The work was supervised by Dr. George Asamoah.

Dr. George Asamoah

(Supervisor)

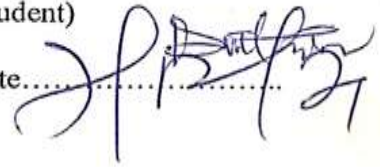
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God Almighty, to my family especially my mother Christiana Anaglate and to all lecturers and students of the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. George Asamoah, Lecturer at the Ghana Institute of Journalism, under whose supervision this long essay was carried out.

My gratitude also goes to the Public Relations Manager and staffs of MTN Ghana . I appreciate their support towards my data collection processes.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact and importance of having a crisis communication plan. It studied the internal communication channels used by MTN in communicating crisis-related information to them. An in-depth interview was conducted with the MTN Public Relations Manager. In addition, a survey was conducted on 100 employees from five MTN Regions and the results analyzed in frequencies and tables. This study was premised on the systems theory. The findings revealed that MTN's crisis communication strategy involved series of organizational meetings with employees at the head, regional and district offices. The strategy had been integrated into the organizational culture where existing communication channels and processes were adopted in communicating future crisis. It was also observed that durbar remained employees' most effective channel; though telephone calls, departmental meeting, social media and company website were also considered effective channels of communicating crisis-related information. In addition, social media was most preferred because communication through it is prompt, consistent, and easily accessible and it enhances effective communication. The study recommended that more efforts be geared towards making the crisis preparedness information readily available and accessible to all employees.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

Organizational researchers have posited that crisis is a significant event that has the potential to harm an organization, corporation, or industry, as well as its constituents, products, services, or good name (Fearn – Banks, 2011). A crisis disrupts routine business operations and can occasionally jeopardize the organization's existence. A crisis can occur as a result of a strike, terrorism, a fire, a boycott, product tampering, product failure, or a variety of other occurrences (Fearn -Banks, p. 354). Crises have become more inescapable and unpredictable, posing consequences not only for enterprises, but also for the many stakeholders who comprise an organization's environment. People (Mitroff, Pauchan, and Schrivastava, 1989) and the spread of the news media's ability to respond and report fast via the internet, social media, and mobile phones are mostly responsible for crisis (Mitroff, Pauchan, and Schrivastava, 1989). (Stevens, 1992). However, a corporation's or organization's response to a crisis may very well make all the difference (Goldberg and Harzog, 1996).

This study examines the effective crisis communication or crisis management tactics used by firms in Ghana's telecommunications network industry. Ndlela asserts that crisis communication is a vital aspect of the crisis management cycle (2019).

Communication is crucial then strategies to calm and solve challenges posed by a crisis situation usually enables an organization to come out of a crisis (Ulmer, 2001). Crises may be categorized into three phases:

1. Pre-crisis
2. Crisis response

3. Post-crisis

The case studies of these well-developed crisis management techniques will highlight the critical nature of stakeholder engagement and effective crisis communication throughout the pre- and post-crisis phases. Communication may significantly lessen tension by assuring parties of their common interests and the possibility of overcoming the crisis's issues. Inevitably, communication is at the center of every crisis, and the tact and strategic approach used by the Chief Executive Officer and his or her team of public relations officers can make all the difference.

The research elucidates the importance of communication during a crisis through in-depth interviews with stakeholders both inside and outside the business, focus group discussions, and evidence from the literature. Thus, firms must ensure that they are meeting the demands of all stakeholders through the use of strategic communication. Crises occur when a negative occurrence strikes with unanticipated ferocity, startling stakeholders and necessitating a rapid response (Coombs, 2007). Numerous organizations throughout the world have faced various types of crises, including the BP oil rig explosion in 2010 that resulted in millions of gallons of oil spilling into the Gulf of Mexico; the collapse of the Melcom building in Achimota, Ghana; product tampering at Johnson & Johnson and Tylenol; and, most recently, MTN's nationwide energy crisis in Ghana. According to Hargis and Watt (2010), crises can occur at any point of an organization's life cycle due to the diversity of risks and hazards (Sutton & Tierney, 2006:31). The organization's ability to foresee impending crises enables it to take proactive measures to address the concerns connected with crises, which include "public safety, financial loss, and reputational harm" (www.instituteforpr, 2014).

Boins and Sundelius (2005) described a crisis as a "particular, unexpected, and non-routine occurrence or series of events that generate significant uncertainty and threaten or are seen to endanger an organization's high priority goals". Crisis must be avoided since it is costly, mandating that businesses prepare (implement policies that best safeguard capital, stakeholders, and reputation) in order to respond effectively when crisis strikes. Without crisis planning, organizations face risks such as reputational damage, fire outbreaks, loss of human life, and technical failures (Coombs, 2007). A Crisis Management Plan (CMP) is a reference document that includes critical contact information, reminders of pending events, training and crisis exercises, communication preparation, and other strategic and tactical alternatives (Handbook of Crisis communication, 2010). A crisis management plan assists an organization in preparing for the possibility of a crisis (Johansen & Frandsen, 2012; Boz & Küçükaltan, 2013; Promsri, 2014; Coombs, 2012).

According to Coombs (2007), a crisis management strategy consists of three phases: (1) pre-crisis, (2) crisis response, and (3) post-crisis. The pre-crisis phase is concerned with crisis prevention and preparedness. The crisis reaction phase is when management must respond to the crisis directly, while the post-crisis phase examines how to strengthen crisis preparation for the future disaster. The pre-crisis stage is the most critical of the crisis management process because planning and preparation enable an organization to move swiftly and make more informed judgments (Selart, Johansen and Nesse; 2012). "Communication is crucial to crisis management" (Handbook of Crisis Management). The Crisis Communication Handbook (2010:17).

Pre-crisis management tactics include communicating the organization's crisis management plan and its expectations for employee behavior during a crisis (Coombs 2012; Lando 2014). Internal crisis communication is critical since crises are not resolved solely by management but also by employees. Additionally, it helps employees understand the possibility of crisis management and the methods necessary to accomplish so. Internal communication fosters trust between management and employees and also enhances the effectiveness of the business (Welch, 2012). Employees who are aware of the organization's crisis plans acquire confidence in the organization, share in its identity, do their responsibilities successfully, and accomplish their organizational objectives during a crisis.

A healthy connection of communication between management and employees before to a crisis is likely to result in effective employee communication during the crisis. Selart et al. (2012) found that "how leadership manages the pre-crisis phase frequently has an effect on its connection with employees." This implies that employees take on both receiver and sender roles during times of crisis and are more likely to act as advocates for their organization than to exaggerate management's responsibility by leaking confidential information about the organization or by withdrawing from the organization and refusing to act as its advocate (Ulmer, 2001). This supports Fearn-(2007:17) Banks's argument that "a strong people-centered company culture, as opposed to a profit-driven one, is also an effective crisis avoidance measure."

Information flows from the sender to the receiver through communication channels. The use of effective channels result in organizational efficiency because it prevents miscommunication and unsatisfied behavior among employees in the work place. In order to attain the organization's communication objectives, it is vital management

knows employees' views and preferences for its internal communication channels. In bridging that gap, the focus lies in developing a crisis communication strategy.

The presence of communication strategies will guide the organization to communicate effectively to its intended audiences by using effective communication channels and well-developed messages. The primary aim of any communication strategy is for the message to be delivered and be understood by its intended audience. Communication strategies will guide the organization to use effective communication channels and well-developed messages to communicate with its intended audiences successfully. During crisis, employees are probably the last to receive information from management because that is when management works excessively to protect the organization's reputation by engaging the external publics and the media. Internal communication strategy plays an important role in the crises preparedness process and must not be overlooked by crises managers so as to maintain consistent flow of information to all publics.

It is in this context that this study uses the MTN Ghana (MTN) as a case to examine the internal communication strategies and channels used in communicating crises in the pre-crisis phase. Also, to find out employees perceptions of those channels and whether they preferred others to the existing ones.

1.1 Problem Statement

MTN operations involve a lot of risk: fire outages, financial loss, reputational loss, technical failures, loss of human lives etc. and this increases the crisis vulnerability of the organization. At the time of this study, MTN had encountered cash flow challenges resulting from huge debt (about GH¢ 1.2billion) owed by some of its customers and

government agencies. MTN's situation was further aggravated by an energy crisis which eventually resulted in load shedding, lasting over three years.

This energy crisis posed the highest threat to the growth of Ghana's economy and affected individuals, industries and MTN as well. Energy tariffs went extremely high, the cedi depreciated and the nation recorded high inflation rates. Several businesses collapsed and many employees lost their jobs because of low productivity. Many Ghanaians were frustrated about the high cost of living resulting from this crises. Some physically attacked MTN offices and assaulted its employees whilst pressure groups, some celebrities and political parties also went on demonstration against MTN. All these threatened the sustainability and reputation of the organization. It became a huge and serious topical issue. The media reported that MTN was likely to undergo a concessionary sale or partial privatization which might lead to diminishing conditions of service and redundancies (Graphic Online, 19th May, 2015).

When employees experience risky situations they make use of information from trusted sources. Nonetheless if MTN has a crisis management plan but does not communicate it effectively to its employees, it would be difficult for the employees to know their roles and act confidently towards the achievement of the organizational goals during crises. In order to manage rumors and information from unofficial sources, MTN must prepare its employees towards crisis management and the changes which may affect them when the company undergoes a concessionary sale.

Several literature reviewed indicated that organizational crisis can be evaded if organizations anticipate the possible crises which threaten their business continuity and

have in place, crisis preparedness plans. Others confirmed that managers neglect management-employee communication during crisis and recommended it as a new research area (Lockwood, 2005; Promsri, 2014; Lando, 2014; Coombs, 2014; Heide & Simonsson, 2014; Johansen et al., 2012; Mazzei et al., 2012; Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). It is for this reason that this study focused on the internal crisis communication preparedness existing at MTN.

1.2 Research Objectives

It is however crucial as we will see in this research how pre-crisis strategies and communication have kept some companies going and others still struggling. Some of the objectives to be addressed in this research may include;

1. To examine the internal communication strategies used by MTN Ghana for its crisis communication.
2. To investigate the internal communication channels used by the MTN Ghana in preparing employees for crises.
3. To establish the MTN Ghana employees' satisfaction with the channels used in communicating crises to them.

1.3 Research Questions.

In order to achieve the above objectives, this study would be guided by the following research questions.

1. RQ 1. How do MTN's crisis communication strategies adequately prepare its employees for crises?
2. RQ2. What channels do MTN use in communicating its crisis preparedness to its employees?

3. RQ3. Which communication channels do MTN employees perceive as effective?
4. RQ4. Which of the internal communication channels used by MTN employees is the most preferred channel?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study will contribute to a deeper understanding and emphasis on the importance of internal crisis communication preparedness to organizations and open up further scholarly investigation on the subject within Africa (since most studies done have considered the western context). It will also contribute to scholarship on the crisis communication field.

In addition, the findings of this study will help MTN to build strong internal strategies for crisis communication management in order to better manage future crises from escalating into a nationwide crisis. Findings of this study will also encourage MTN to make crisis information easily accessible to all employees so that they can easily relate it to the organizational culture and perform productively towards their organizational goals. It will also highlight the importance of management-employee crisis communication preparedness before considering the external crisis communication. Organizations in the energy sector can also apply the recommendations that stem from this study to improve their crisis resiliency.

From the literature, not much has been done in relations to research on crisis strategies in Ghana. In light of this, it is helpful to conduct a research that will contribute to the crisis management scenarios in Ghana. It also seeks to provide a framework and

guideline for management to develop strategies ahead of potential crisis situations. This also seeks to explain the various strategies employed by multi-national companies highlighting the relevance of pre-crisis communication and engagement. To provide the opportunity for further studies into crisis strategies tailored for organizations in Ghana to adopt for business.

Finally, the findings of this research will help organizations in Ghana to develop strong and effective crisis strategies and communication in order to better manage future crises from escalating.

1.5 Limitation.

Conducting a research in the middle of a pandemic can pose a whole lot of challenges like an online interview instead of a face-to-face. Considering the limited time and resources available this will be a constraint due to the nature of the duration of the research study. Other challenges may be as a result of lack of access to information as some employees work from home and are not always in the office, hence it will take researcher a long time to administer the questionnaires to the respondents.

1.6 Organization of the Study.

The organizational structure of this study will be generally separated across five chapters. Chapter one gives an introduction and a background of the study, the research objectives, research questions to guide the study. The problem statement, significance of the study have been captured in the first chapter.

Chapter two focuses on the conceptual framework and literature reviews related to the study; on the impact of effective crisis management, crisis communication (before,

during and after crisis), crisis communication strategies and channels available. The theory adopted the Systems Theory to explain the phenomenon of the study for the study.

Methodology will occupy the third chapter of this study. The chapter gives details of the sampling procedure, the sampling size, the population and respondent background, data collection process, data collection instrument and data analysis.

The findings of the study are presented in chapter four while chapter five discusses the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to a literature review, in which it summarizes the numerous perspectives on the subject that have been expressed by various researchers. Thus, this chapter builds on the current literature to develop a theoretical framework that will be evaluated in this research. The term "literature review" refers to the process of compiling data from many sources such as journals, articles, newspapers, the internet, and books that include thoughts regarding the subject under research.

The researcher conducted a review of the literature on Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), organizational reputation, crisis, and crisis communication in this chapter. The chapter begins with the origins of SCCT as a theory and continues with a discussion of the theory's study and development to its current state. Following that, the broad concept of organizational reputation is evaluated in light of its critical role in an organization's success. The following section provides an overview of the literature on crises and their impact on organizations and stakeholders. The concluding portion discusses crisis communication and its function in crisis response.

2.1 Situational Crisis Communication Theory

2.1.1 The Challenge

The 1982 Tylenol product tampering case handled by Johnson & Johnson is credited with establishing the field of crisis management (Mitroff et al., 2016). Benson (1988, cited in Mitroff et al., 2016) discovered that the use of strategic communication

strategies both repaired and strengthened the organization's reputation; identifying where specific communication strategies aided Johnson & Johnson in coping with the crisis and successfully repositioning its Tylenol product in the market. The report suggests several suggestions, including organizational preparation for crisis response, proactive effort on organization-critical topics, limiting the number of spokespersons to ensure a consistent and frequent message, and relentless assertion (Benson, 1988). Benson tasked crisis communication researchers with developing a variety of crisis response techniques and determining which tactics are most appropriate for specific crisis kinds.

2.1.2 Development of SCCT

SCCT is a reply to the challenge issued by Benson (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). SCCT offers methodology for protecting and repairing a reputation using crisis response strategies that are matched to the organization's responsibility for the crisis. SCCT is a symbolic approach to crisis communication that offers explanation of the effectiveness of crisis response strategies in terms of reputational protection focusing on three core elements: the crisis situation, the crisis response strategies, and the method for matching the crisis situation to the crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2016b).

Grounded in the premise that a crisis was a threat to an organization's reputation and that the crisis situation itself should influence the choice of response strategy, Coombs (2015) introduced his initial guidelines for crisis communication strategies. Crisis response strategies were grouped into five categories: nonexistence, distance, ingratiation, mortification, and suffering. The five strategies were placed on a continuum where one end of the spectrum conveyed misinterpretation and that a crisis did not exist

while the other end conveyed the organization as a victim suffering from the effects of the crisis. The objective of the response strategies was to shape attributions of the crisis, change perceptions of the organization by affected stakeholders, and reduce the negative effect generated by the crisis. The guidelines suggested that the public's perception of the responsibility for the crisis could be modified through use of a crisis response strategy that was matched to the level of responsibility for the crisis.

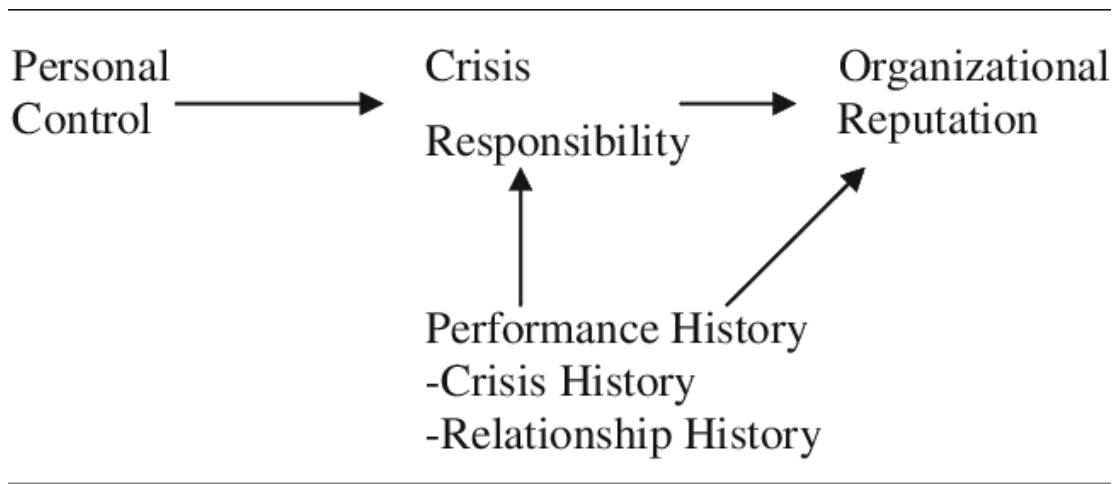
Coombs teamed up with Holladay and began research on crisis response strategies with an experimental study that related crisis response strategies to crisis types (Coombs & Holladay, 2016). They found that crisis response strategies matched to the crisis type lessened the damaging effects to organizational reputation by mitigating the feelings generated by attributions of blame toward the organization. Crisis types were categorized by personal control and intentionality using a 2 x 2 matrix. Control was internal if the organization had control over the cause, such as an accident or a transgression; and it was external if the organization had no control over the cause, such as a terrorist attack or hurricane. When the organization was perceived to have little or no control over the crisis, it experienced the least reputational damage. Whereas when the crisis was perceived as a transgression and the organization had more control, reputation was more negatively affected.

In 2014 Coombs revised the 2x2 crisis response strategies matrix into a continuum. The continuum ranged crisis response strategies from accommodative to defensive based on the organization's personal control over a crisis. The continuum illustrated that the more control an organization had over a crisis, the more accommodative the response strategy should be (Coombs, 2014). The most accommodative strategy was a full apology that

matched to an organizational transgression. The most defensive strategy, attack the accuser, was matched to a crisis such as a natural disaster over which the organization had little personal control.

Coombs and Holladay (2011) then introduced relational history into the symbolic crisis communication approach. Symbolic resources used in crisis communications refer to the use of words as symbols. They concluded the relationship between the stakeholders and their history with the organization shaped stakeholder's perception of crisis responsibility. A negative reputation impacted the perception of crisis responsibility negatively; however, a positive relational history, or halo effect, had the same effect as a neutral relational history. The negative history attracted additional reputational damage in the perception of the stakeholders. This negative history phenomenon was termed the *Velcro effect* because only a negative relationship history had an effect on reputation and perceived responsibility for the crisis.

When SCCT emerged as a theory in 2012, the term symbolic was changed to situational to relay the importance the crisis situation played in the response (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). The theory indicated an organization that is a victim of the crisis will have minimal responsibility for the crisis, whereas an organization that purposefully placed stakeholders at risk will have stronger attributions of crisis responsibility. Crisis responsibility was influenced by both the severity of the crisis and the organization's history with regards to crises and the relational history with the stakeholders. Figure 1 shows this relationship among the key variables.



Performance History (Crisis History and Relationship History)

Figure 1: Variables and Relationships in the Situational Crisis Communication

Theory

From “Helping Crisis Managers Protect Reputational Assets: Initial Tests of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory,” by W. T. Coombs and S. J. Holladay, 2012, *Management Communications Quarterly*, 16, p. 168. Copyright 2012 by Sage Publications. Reprinted with permission.

In the first test of SCCT, Coombs and Holladay (2012) explored the correlation between the level of responsibility attributed to the crisis and each of 13 crisis types and found a strong correlation between them. Additionally, the crisis types clustered into three groups based on crisis responsibility. Coombs and Holladay found that response strategies for the clusters of crisis types were effective for each crisis type within the cluster suggesting that crisis response strategy for each crisis type cluster would be just as effective as a separate crisis response strategy for each of the thirteen crisis types.

Coombs and Holladay (2012) identified the crisis type clusters as victim, accident, and preventable. The victim cluster, with minimal attribution of responsibility, included natural disasters, rumors, workplace violence, and product tampering. The accident cluster, indicating moderate attribution of crisis responsibility, included challenges, megadamage, technical breakdown–accidents, and technical breakdowns–recalls. The cluster with the strongest attribution of crisis responsibility was preventable (later called intentional) crises: human breakdown accidents, human breakdown product recalls, organizational misdeed- management misconduct, organizational misdeed with no injuries, and organizational misdeeds with injuries.

The clusters identified in Coombs and Holladay's 2012 research agreed with the findings of Pearson and Mitroff (2013) who found that grouping crisis types by clusters offered efficiencies to the organization in preparing for crisis response where skills are transferable among similar crisis types.

In this early model of SCCT, personal control was placed as a forerunner to crisis responsibility. As a result of this study Coombs and Holladay (2012) asserted the scales measuring personal control and crisis responsibility assessed the same factor. The two variables were collapsed in future models of SCCT.

In the next iteration of the theory crisis history was identified as a variable and Coombs (2014) revealed a history of similar type crises intensified the threat to reputation in a current crisis. Coombs suggested that repeated past crises heightened perceptions of crisis responsibility. He found that the reputational threat to an organization with a history of similar crises was increased even when the crisis was from an accident or victimization rather than an intentional act of the organization. Further supporting the

effect of crisis history on relational reputation, Lyon and Cameron (2014) cautioned that a current reputational threat cannot be viewed in a vacuum without regard to prior crisis history.

Coombs (2016a) again advanced SCCT with a study examining how stakeholders viewed the crisis response strategies. He concluded that similar crisis response strategies could also be grouped into three clusters that reflected increasing amounts of responsibility and reputational damage: denial, diminish, and deal (later revised to rebuild). The denial cluster included the crisis response strategies of: deny, attack accuser, and scapegoat response strategies; the diminish cluster included excuse and justification strategies; and compassion, concern, regret, ingratiation, and apology formed the deal cluster. Crisis response strategies that are unmatched to the level of responsibility damage the reputation and result in negative stakeholder behavioral intentions. Coombs and Holladay (2013) further tested the theory by examining the effect of emotions on stakeholders' supportive behaviors. They found emotions were a mediator between crisis responsibility and the behavioral intentions of stakeholders, indicating when stakeholders attribute blame for a crisis they experience negative emotions toward the organization (Coombs, 2013b). Emotions were added to the SCCT model suggesting crisis response strategies should attempt to diffuse strong negative emotions to better protect reputation. This revised model of SCCT is shown in Figure 2.

2.1.3 Factors that Shape SCCT

Crisis type, crisis history, and prior reputational relationship are the three factors used to evaluate the threat to reputation presented by a crisis (Coombs, 2012). SCCT

recommends these be applied in a two-step process to determine the reputational threat. The first step is to determine the crisis type. The second step is to modify the threat based on crisis history and prior reputational relationship.

Crisis type. Crises were categorized by Coombs and Holladay (2012) by responsibility for the crisis. Crisis types were placed on a continuum that listed crisis types by the level of responsibility for the crisis. The crisis type with the least amount of responsibility was rumor, where the organization had no responsibility and the other end of the continuum was organizational misdeeds where management knowingly place stakeholders at risk. At one end of the spectrum the organization was not responsible and the other end the organization was fully responsible. Coombs and Holladay found that each crisis type has predictable attributions that predict how stakeholders will view responsibility for the crisis.

The words and actions of an organization in a crisis affect how people perceive the organization and/or the crisis (Coombs, 2013b). “SCCT argues that as the reputational threat increases, the crisis manager should use response strategies that demonstrate acceptance of responsibility for the crisis and that address victim concerns” (Coombs, 2014, p. 266). Initial crisis responsibility is how much stakeholders believe organization actions or inactions have caused the crisis (Coombs, 2013b).

Coombs suggested the information regarding the institutional memory must be accurate and easily retrievable because how an institution responded to similar events in the past has an impact on how the stakeholders view the reputation of the institution.

Prior reputational relationship. “Relationship history does shape how people perceive the crisis and the organization in crisis” (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 336). Coombs and Holladay found a negative prior relationship with stakeholders will increase the reputational damage while a positive prior relationship creates a neutral condition as if a prior relationship or no crisis history is provided. A negative reputational relationship shifts the crisis responsibility up the responsibility continuum one level, further increasing the perception of responsibility for the crisis by stakeholders.

2.2 Other Crisis Communication Theories

SCCT is one theory of crisis communication. Other theories of crisis communication include theories of postcrisis communication, theories that tie crisis response strategies to crisis types, and a theory of relationships.

Theories of Postcrisis Communication. SCCT is a theory involving self-preservation crisis response strategies. Both Hearit’s (2016) apologia and Benoit’s (2017) image repair theory also map out postcrisis communications of self-preservation.

Hearit’s apologia is a theory of crisis communication that examines how people or organizations used communication to defend their character or reputation from public attacks. When reputation is under attack, especially when it is unfairly accused, the organization seeks to justify its behavior by presenting convincing counter accounts of its actions. The United States Supreme Court ruled that organizations have a

constitutional right to speak up when they are unfairly accused (Hearit, 2016; *The First National Bank v. Bellotti*, 2018). Apologia involves the examination of defensive communication used to manage reputations in troubled times. Communication associated with apologia is oriented with the sender while SCCT is oriented on the message receiver.

Apologies offered by the organization may be part of apologia (Ware & Linkugel, 1973 cited in Fitzpatrick & Rubon, 2015). Scholars acknowledge that universal application of apologies may be problematic (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Legal advisors often counsel against apology as it may be perceived as an admission of guilt that in turn may create liabilities associated with lawsuits (Fitzpatrick, 2015; Hearit, 2016). Attorneys may advocate for “no comment” in order to limit legal liabilities as compared to the traditional public relations approach of openness and information sharing (Fitzpatrick & Rubon, 2015). Coombs and Holladay (2012) suggest the situational approach to determine the appropriate response strategy, which may be an apology, be used to best protect the organization’s reputations.

Benoit’s (2017) image repair theory focuses on understanding what response strategy is most effective in a particular situation. It addresses the development of specific messages to targeted stakeholders. In selecting the relevant response, both the nature of the crisis and the affected stakeholders must be known in order to provide effective crisis communications that repair the organization’s image. Image repair theory, similar to SCCT, suggests that the communication response should be tailored to the offense. Unlike SCCT, image repair theory recognizes multiple stakeholder groups and advocates the prioritization of the various stakeholder groups, appeasing the most

important stakeholders first. Image repair theory suggests that different stakeholder groups not only receive the messages differently because of varied interests but that some stakeholder groups are more important than others. Benoit applied the theory first to people (Benoit, 2011) and later to organizations (Benoit, 2017).

Theories tying Crisis Response Strategies to Crisis Types. Coombs indicated SCCT is inspired by attribution theory and neoinstitutionalism (Coombs, 2015). He identified them as a basis for establishing the relationship between the crisis situation and the crisis response strategies.

Weiner's attribution theory holds that stakeholders search for the cause of negative, unexpected events and assign responsibility for negative, unexpected events based on dimensions of locus, stability, and controllability (Weiner, 1985). The Causal Dimension Scale developed by Weiner (1979) measures the three dimensions of cause, locus, stability, and controllability, and has been found a reliable instrument to measure the dimensional properties of causes (Russell, 2012). Locus is whether the cause of the crisis event is perceived as internal or external to the organization; stability refers to whether the crisis is recurring or a one-time event; and controllability is the power of the organization to influence the crisis. The attribution of blame affects the emotional response of stakeholders and their subsequent motivations (Weiner, 2015). Weiner, Graham, and Chandler (2012) found uncontrollable causes of stable negative events lead to stakeholder feelings of pity, regardless of the locus of the cause. In contrast, when negative events are viewed as controllable by the organization, stakeholders tend to feel the emotions of anger and guilt. Attributions of internal locus, stability, and controllability create the perception that the organization is responsible for the event.

The reputation of the organization is then altered in the minds of the stakeholders, usually in an unfavorable manner.

Weiner (2015) related the “structure of thought” (p. 569) to feelings and action, showing the interconnectivity between stakeholder perception and behavior. Individuals who perceive an organization to be good will have more positive behavioral intentions toward the organization. “Attribution theory is a useful framework for explaining the relation between a situation and the selection of communication strategies” (Coombs & Holladay, 2016, p. 281). Both attribution theory and SCCT recognize that crises have both unexpected and negative traits. The attributions of blame for the crisis affect the behaviors of stakeholders (Coombs, 2016a). Whereas attribution theory was originally applied to product harm cases, SCCT is applied to a wider array crisis types.

Attribution theory holds that stakeholders will attribute the cause of an event to an individual or individuals or to an outside force, determining that the cause is either personal or external (McAuley, Duncan, & Russell, 2012). Personal attribution for a crisis holds a higher potential for reputation damage than an external force over which the institution has little or no control (McAuley et al., 2012). SCCT builds upon the base identified in attribution theory by predicting the reputational threat and prescribing crisis response strategies that protect the reputation of the organization (Coombs, 2013b).

Researchers have shown that attributions of blame affect stakeholder perceptions and emotions. When stakeholders believe the cause of an event was controllable by the

organization, they attribute blame for event to the organization (McAuley et al., 2012; Weiner, 2015). When stakeholders perceive the causes of a crisis are negative and unexpected, stakeholders have an emotional response such as anger or sympathy (Coombs, Frandsen, Holladay, & Johansen, 2010). When stakeholders attribute responsibility for the crisis to the organization, they feel anger toward the organization, and when stakeholders perceive the crisis is not caused by the organization, they feel sympathy for the organization (Weiner et al., 2012).

Coombs and Holladay (2016) also identified neoinstitutionalism as a theoretical basis for SCCT, using it to explain the match between crisis response strategies and the crisis situation. Neoinstitutionalism examines the behavior of the organization in the context of normative expectations that is how the organization meets the expectations of society (Allen & Caillouet, 2011). An organization that is seen as conforming to societal rules for good has its legitimacy enhanced. When the organization operates within social norms, stakeholders perceive that the organization has the right to continue operating. “Neoinstitutional research consistently indicates corporate actors use mechanisms and procedures to convey conformity with their institutional environment in order to enhance legitimacy and survival chances” (Allen & Caillouet, 2011). A crisis can challenge the legitimacy base of the organization and legitimate endeavors of the organization may be difficult to maintain as societal norms may be conflicting, vague, and unstable (Boin, 2017).

Theory of Relationships. Freeman (2014) identified stakeholders as any group or individual that can affect or be affected by the behavior of an organization. Acknowledged stakeholders and an organization have a relationship prior to a crisis.

Stakeholders of an organization include employees, customers, investors, government, passengers (Taylor & Kent, 2016), and creditors, lenders, and special interest groups (Fitzpatrick, 2015). Coombs (2010a) recognized stakeholders to be both primary and secondary. Primary stakeholders can harm or be harmed by a crisis and they are necessary to the survival of the organization. Secondary stakeholders are those influenced by the actions of the organization. Typical secondary stakeholders include media, competitors, and activist groups. In any crisis there is more than one stakeholder group. Coombs, in his earlier work, recognized stakeholders may make different attributions and therefore have varied perceptions of a crisis response when he wrote, “Organizations, therefore, must consider how the various publics might view evidence, damage, and performance history differently” (Coombs, 2015, p. 458).

2.3 Research on Crisis Communication

Case studies. Academic literature on crisis communication is dominated by case studies (Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011). Case studies focus on postcrisis communication and how messages were used to repair or prevent reputational damage due to a crisis (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2012). Previous case study research reflects what worked and what did not. (Benson, 1988; Coombs, 2016a; Ferguson, Wallace, & Chandler, 2012) However, case studies generally lack systematic understanding of crisis communication’s impact on reputation. The lists and lessons gained from reviewing case studies offer a starting point for research that can test assumptions and strengthen the communications for public relations personnel and crisis managers.

Stakeholder perspectives. Much of the research involving SCCT has recognized stakeholders as having a single perspective (Claeys et al., 2010; Coombs, 2014; 2016b;

Coombs & Holladay, 2012, 2013; Ferguson et al., 2012; Elliot, 2013; Fussell Sisco, 2012; Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2010; Kim & Cameron, 2011; Lyon & Cameron, 2014; Pace et al., 2012; Wright, 2017). Even though an organization may have many stakeholders, the research lacks recognition the possible of unique perception of multiple stakeholder groups.

One retrospective review did use SCCT to study how an organization's crisis response strategy was perceived by different groups of stakeholders. Allen and Caillouet (2011) examined the externally focused messages of one corporation involved in a crisis regarding legitimacy to determine if messages were targeted to multiple stakeholder groups. Stakeholders identified included competitors, regulators, customers, suppliers, special interest groups, media, government, local community, and employees. They found that different message strategies delivered to different stakeholder groups were effective because the expectations of the stakeholder groups were different.

Research on SCCT application. Avery, Lariscy, Kim, and Hocke (2012) performed a quantitative review of the published articles from the domain of crisis communication in public relations that used SCCT as well as image repair theory. They advised that both SCCT and image repair theory could be enriched theoretically and practically if they were both more critically applied in research. In their examination of 66 articles, they found the use of both theories increased from 1991 to 2017 with regards to frequency, level of support, contextual application, and nature of the research stream. They concluded that these bodies of work could be more prescriptive if scholarly commentary and criticism for both models were richer.

Cooley and Cooley (2011) retrospectively examined the crisis communication strategies used in the real world crisis situation of General Motors' bankruptcy. The researchers reviewed the corporate messages and found that the SCCT model of suggested crisis response strategies was used by General Motors.

Claeys et al. (2010) did not find a significant effect between crisis type and the crisis response strategy as suggested by SCCT. They found the more severe the crisis, the more negative are the perceptions of the organization's reputation. They also found that preventable crises have the most negative effects on organizational reputation and that the rebuild crisis communication strategy has the most positive effect on restoring a positive organizational reputation.

2.4 Crisis

2.4.1 Definition

Literature is filled with examples that indicate crises have become a permanent and inevitable feature of organizational operations (Coombs, 2012). A crisis contains risk and uncertainty and has the potential for a high magnitude of change to the organization's reputation that can be either negative or positive (Fink, 1986; Sturges, 2011). Crises affect all industries.

Some crises such as the Challenger explosion, Chernobyl, President Clinton's impeachment, Columbine, "9/11", Hurricane Katrina, the Virginia Tech massacre, and the Penn State child abuse scandal have become so commonly known that it is not necessary to identify the details of the events. Although crisis management is the topic of many articles and books, there is no concise definition of a crisis. "Crisis most often

conveys a fundamental threat to the very stability of the system, a questioning of core assumptions and beliefs, and risk to priority goals, including organizational image, legitimacy, profitability, and ultimately survival” (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2012, p. 362). Coombs (2012) defined a crisis as “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes” (p. 2). Fink (2016) defined a crisis as “an unstable time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending” (p. 15). Rollo and Zdziarski (2013) identified the characteristics of a crisis as a negative perception where the event is often a surprise to the organization, response time has limitations, operations are interrupted, and safety and well-being are threatened.

Brody (2011) offered a divergence in definitions between crisis, disaster, and emergency. He suggested a crisis is a “decisive turning point in a condition or state of affairs”, a disaster is an “unfortunate sudden and unexpected event” that occurs “through carelessness, negligence, or bad judgment” or [is] produced through no fault of the organization, and an emergency is an “unforeseen occurrence” that presents a “sudden and urgent occasion for action. (p. 175)” He suggested that because each is different, a crisis, a disaster, and an emergency require different types of communication responses and risk management by the organization (Brody, 2011). For the purpose of this research, crisis is defined as “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name” (Fearn-Banks, 2011, p. 2).

2.4.2 Crisis Attributes

Although each crisis is unique, numerous scholars have placed crises into groups using common attributes. Coombs (2013a) grouped crises into three groups using attribution of crisis responsibility: victim, accident, and preventable. Mitroff and Anagnos (2010) categorized crises by causes: economic, informational, physical, human resource, reputational, psychopathic, and natural disasters. Grouping crises by responsibility or causes help to simplify how an organization can identify appropriate responses.

Both Fink (2016) and Sturges (2011) observed that crises have stages. These stages have been described as a life-cycle that includes the buildup or “prodromal” period, the crisis breakout or acute crisis, abatement, and lastly the termination. Other scholars have described the crisis stages as early warning signals, preparation and prevention, damage containment, and recovery (Pearson & Mitroff, 2013). Sturges (2011) suggested each stage of the crisis requires different responses and that customized communication at each stage of a crisis will maximize the effectiveness of the communication.

Crises impose severe tension on the organization, including its financial, physical, and emotional structures (Pearson & Mitroff, 2013). Crises may have catastrophic effects on an organization even to the point of destroying the organization. Crises affect the bottom line of the organization, its employees, and other stakeholders.

Effects of a crisis can be felt by organizations immediately following a crisis; however, some effects may not be realized until long after the crisis has ended. Lyon and Cameron (2014) examined the short-term and long-term effects of attitudes, behavioral intentions, and source credibility assessments of organizations experiencing crisis and

determined that reputation and the organization's response to the crisis were both powerful forces in stakeholders' subsequent judgments of an organization, underscoring the need for continual reputational management.

Public attention to an organization is particularly high and reputations are most vulnerable when an organization is in a crisis. Mitroff and Anagnos (2010) asserted that a major organizational crisis cannot be contained within the 'walls' of the organization. Boin (2017) suggested that crises "will be increasingly transboundary in nature" (p. 367), and that the size and scope of crises will affect multiple sectors, life-sustaining systems, and infrastructures.

Natural disasters such as hurricanes impact multiple states, regions, countries, and continents. The interconnectivity and internationalization of businesses is felt in global financial implosions of economies. Clear beginnings and ends cannot easily be identified in transboundary crises, making it even more difficult to identify stakeholders and to mitigate the impacts of future crises (Boin, 2017).

An organization and its stakeholders rarely experience a crisis in isolation (Pearson & Mitroff, 2013). A crisis in one organization may affect the entire industry. A residual impact of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, was heightened security throughout the airline industry (U. S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013b).

2.4.3 Crisis Management

Crisis communication is part of the larger field of crisis management (Fearn-Banks, 2011). Crisis management involves efforts to prevent and detect potential crisis and to

learn from the crisis experience. The very nature of crises makes planning for them difficult. Preparation for crises and management of crises has become a growing focus for organizations and governments amid a growing field of research. Crisis management has even become a distinct academic field of study in which degrees are offered.

Crisis and emergency management has many resources that prescribe through manuals and guidebooks how to set up command structures during a crisis, how to integrate with responders from other organizations, and what resources are necessary to prepare for various types of crises.

Mitroff (2014) identified a difference between crisis leadership and crisis management. He contended crisis management is reactive and addresses a crisis after it happens. He described crisis leadership as proactive, preparing an organization for possible crises before they happen and possibly even avoiding a crisis altogether.

Because organizations do not experience crises in isolation Pearson and Mitroff (2013) observed organizations that recognize a crisis may impact the broadest array of potential stakeholders are best prepared assure a positive response. Lee, Woeste, and Heath (2013) surveyed organizations regarding planning, training, and crisis communication practices and found that organizations can take a proactive stance to crisis communication by frequently training public relations professionals in the delivery of crisis communication strategies, making this part of their precrisis preparations.

Preparation for crises generally has been focused on securing the safety of stakeholders and delivering resources to respond to and limit damages beyond reputation. Guidebooks such as *Developing and maintaining emergency operations plans: Comprehensive planning guide (CPG) 101* (2010) produced by the Federal Emergency Management Agency contend that all hazards should be considered in planning. Communications are included in these guidelines; however, this communication has focused on how to physically communicate and with whom during the crisis. Response strategies to protect and restrict damage to the organizational reputation are not covered in the guidelines.

Crisis management has also been identified as having stages: precrisis, crisis, and postcrisis (Coombs, 2013a; Mitroff et al., 2016). The precrisis stage involves preparation for a crisis, studying the risks involved in possible crises and mitigating the possible damage; the crisis stage necessitates implementation of the plans; and the postcrisis stage includes assessments of what worked and what did not, looking for improvement and opportunities to better cope in the future.

2.5 Stakeholders

Organizations have many different stakeholders each with potentially diverse interests, concerns, goals and behavioral intentions toward the organization (Benoit, 2017; Fombrun et al., 2010). All stakeholders do not view the reputation of an organization similarly. Each stakeholder group has specific expectations of the organization and the organization in return expects different behaviors of the various stakeholder groups (Fombrun et al., 2010). Identifying the different stakeholder groups is challenging because of their diverse identities and expectations.

Stakeholders evaluate information they receive about the organization and compare it to what they know and expect (Coombs, 2013b). It is the stakeholder's evaluative perception of the organization that forms the reputation (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2017). Although the organization attempts to influence the stakeholder perceptions of the organization, the reputation is viewed from outside the organization and therefore 'owned' by the stakeholders (Lyon & Cameron, 2014).

Socially accepted standards established and changed over time define the legitimacy of environment in which organizations operate (Allen & Caillouet, 2011). Organizations function within environments where the stakeholders create norms, rules, and requirements. Organizations exist in a state of dependency upon their environments and survive when they continuously convince stakeholders of their value (Hearit, 2015). Stakeholders perceive the legitimacy of an organization to exist when the organization meets their expectations (Allen & Caillouet, 2011). When the expectations of stakeholders are not met, the organizational reputation suffers.

Social causes increasingly factor into organizational reputations. Researchers found that the organization's status and activities with respect to its societal obligations play a role in consumers' brand and product evaluations (Klein & Dawar, 2014). Social causes that are recognized as valuable by the consumer influence consumer behavior even when it is not rationally based on product attributes or economy. Research identified that these behaviors extend beyond consumer behavior to create a halo effect for the organizations influencing stakeholder perceptions of crisis responsibility. Klein and Dawar (2014) claimed that consumers are willing to give the benefit of the doubt to an organization they know little about when stakeholder valued social causes are

supported by the organization, and the opposite is true where lack of perceived social responsibility places the organization in a derogatory position.

Recognizing the importance of stakeholders to an organization, Freeman (1984) suggested stakeholder management be incorporated into the overall strategic management of the organization and that strategic objectives of the organization should include recognition of stakeholder groups that can affect those objectives. Stakeholders both affect and are affected by the organization's purpose and therefore may prevent the organization from accomplishing its mission. (Brody, 2011; Freeman, 2014). Management of stakeholders involves understanding the relationships between the organization and the various stakeholders (Freeman, 2014). Sturges (2011) recognized that a relationship between stakeholders and the organization exists prior to a crisis. Coombs (2010a) recognized that crises can be viewed as episodes within the ongoing relationship between an organization and its stakeholders. These approaches can provide insight into how stakeholders perceive a crisis situation within the context of the larger relationship.

Full recognition of the relationship includes an analysis of who the stakeholders are and the perceived stakes of the relationship, the processes that manage the relationships, and the transactions that transpire between the parties (Freeman, 2014). When the organization can put these pieces together, it has high stakeholder management capability. The more adept an organization is at identifying the requirements of the various stakeholder groups, the better the organization will be able to respond and solicit the behaviors it anticipates. Freeman (2014) further asserted stakeholder perspectives should be recognized from multiple levels in order to gain a full

understanding of the relationship, including technological, social, political, and managerial. Jin et al., (2010) also supported the importance of understanding the crisis from the perspective of the stakeholders, which allows for targeted messages to the various stakeholder groups.

Distinct stakeholder groups are not always easy to distinguish. Stakeholders may be a clearly distinct and defined group of individuals such as employees, community members, competitors, suppliers, students, stockholders, consumers, and media. Government agencies and regulators may create laws and standards and therefore are considered stakeholders for many organizations (Allen & Caillouet, 2011, p. 53). Stakeholders may be legitimate or illegitimate entities. Terrorists would not be recognized as a legal stakeholder group, but they can affect the operation of an organization and therefore may need to be considered as a stakeholder group for some organizations (Freeman, 2014).

When an organization maintains a strong positive reputation with its stakeholders over time, the ongoing favorable views are stored up as reputational capital, indicating the strength of the organization's relationship with its stakeholders. An organization with a large amount of reputational capital will have reserves in a time of crisis (Coombs, 2013), and built-up reputational capital acts as an insurance policy when a crisis occurs (Fombrun, 2010).

2.6 Crisis Communication and the Response

When organizations and leaders deal with crises they come under scrutiny and are judged by publics and their legitimacy is questioned (Hearit, 2016). Their response to

the crisis is significant factor in recovery from the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2013; Fearn-Banks, 2011). Crisis communication can be used to protect and repair an organization's reputation during a crisis (Benoit, 2017; Hearit, 2016). The vulnerability of an organization's reputation during a crisis makes it imperative that the organization protect and restore its stakeholders' positive view with communication (Fearn-Banks, 2011).

The crisis response strategy includes what the organization does and what it communicates in response to a crisis (Coombs, 2010b). In a crisis the primary responsibility of an organization is to secure the safety of its publics, not to protect its own reputation (Cavanaugh, 2016; Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Sturges, 2011). Although protection of the reputation is critical, during a crisis it would be negligent for the organization to think of its reputation before the safety of its publics (Kriyantono, 2012). Only after securing the safety of its publics should the focus turn towards managing its reputation. Crisis communication that is designed to protect management or the organization over the safety of the publics can further damage the reputation of the organization (Wolverton, 2011).

Part of the response includes providing assistance to the victims. Scholars suggest that assistance can be matched to what is warranted by the responsibility for the crisis and the reputational damage generated by the crisis situation (Coombs, 2016b; Coombs & Holladay, 2012). In an overly accommodative response the organization pays more but does not see an increase in reputational protection (Coombs & Holladay, 2016).

Crisis communication is used by crisis managers and public relations representatives to protect an organization's reputation in a crisis, and organizational responses are often

delivered through public relations personnel (Fombrun, 2010). Just as there is no ideal response and recovery for crises, there is no ideal communication strategy to respond to them (McGuire & Schneck, 2010).

McCroskey and Tevan (2013) viewed the message and the message provider as distinct. They found the credibility of the communication source plays a part in the believability of the messages received by stakeholders. They argued that ethos, or source credibility, can be measured through goodwill, and goodwill in turn can be a predictor of likeability and believability. Spokespersons who have little source credibility may do more harm than good. Source credibility can be determined by using a scale developed by McCroskey (2016) that measures authoritativeness and character.

Benoit and Pang (2012) argued that perceptions of crisis responsibility are more important than reality of the crisis situation. When stakeholders perceive an organization to be responsible for a crisis, even if the facts do not bear this out, the perception becomes the reality (Benoit, 2017; Coombs, 2012). Salient audiences or stakeholders may refuse to believe the facts. Behavioral intentions will shift based on the stakeholder perceptions even if facts don't support it (Benoit, 2017).

Attention to crisis communications prior to a crisis offers management the ability to more effectively respond when a crisis occurs (Coombs, 2010b). Sturges (2011) suggested that using communication strategies that have been tested will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the communication thereby increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes for the organization. Prescribed messages for different crisis scenarios offer organizations the ability to communicate quickly while still addressing the needs of the stakeholders. Brody (1991) suggested that crisis communication

planning include message delivery to designated stakeholder groups, including specific goals and objectives for each group. To provide effective crisis communication Brody (1991) suggested an organization should identify involved stakeholders, the behaviors it seeks from those stakeholders, messages that will induce these desired behaviors, validation of those messages, channels of delivery, and measurable results.

2.7 Types of Information

Coombs (2012) recognized three types of information necessary to the crisis communications process: instructing, adapting, and reputation management. Coombs claimed these information types are sequential. He suggested that some crises can be managed effectively using only instructing and adjusting information.

Organizations provide instructing information first because it is information needed by stakeholders and they expect it of the organization (Sturges, 2011). When immediate behaviors are required to keep stakeholders safe, as in an immediate physical crisis, instructing information is used to deliver the information. Instructing information can be used to address what happened, how stakeholders are being protected, and how the problem is being corrected so recurrence can be prevented (Coombs, 2015). Instructing information is also a means of demonstrating control of the crisis situation (Sturges, 2011), although a study by Coombs (2015) suggested compassion, not instructing information, gave the impression of organizational control in a crisis.

Coombs appears to question the results of this study by suggesting additional study to consider the factors involved in perceptions of control.

Compassion has socially oriented value that shows concern for stakeholders and helps stakeholders cope with the psychological stress of the crisis situation (Coombs, 2015;

Sturges, 2011). Compassion includes expressions of concern by the organization and advances the perception that the organization had gained control of the crisis situation (Coombs, 2013b).

Coombs (2015) tested the effect of compassion and instructing information on the organizational reputation in an accident crisis type. The study was performed on a group of crisis managers to overcome some of the criticism that most SCCT research uses students as a simulation of the general population. He found that there was a strong positive effect of compassion on organizational reputational, honoring accounts (accepting the crisis response strategy), and intended potential behaviors. There was little downside to voicing compassion during an accident crisis. Increasing instructing information during an accident crisis type had no effect on organizational reputation, account honoring, or potential intended behaviors (Coombs, 2011).

Reputation management follows instruction and compassion. Stakeholders attribute responsibility to organizations for negative, unexpected events (Weiner, 2015). These attributions affect how stakeholders feel and behave toward the organization. SCCT used attribution theory to develop crisis response strategies for use in reputation management. Because communication affects how stakeholders feel about the organization, knowing which communication response strategy, including words and actions, is most effective in a particular crisis types is crucial to the protection and repair of the organization reputation (Allen & Caillouet, 2011).

2.8 Messages

In the crisis response the organization needs to tell its side of the story by identifying the important issues and controlling the message stakeholders receive (Benson, 1988). Coombs (2013a) offered guidelines for the initial crisis response that included three core elements: 1) be quick, (2) be accurate, and (3) be consistent. If the organization is silent or slow to respond in a crisis, misinformation and speculation will fill the void (White, 2017). Stakeholders want to know what happened and will look for information anywhere (Fitzpatrick, 2015). Consistency within the messages, especially when delivered by multiple spokespersons, provides the organization the ability to speak with one voice, giving it the ability to maintain focus and accuracy with the message. Failure to provide consistent and regular messaging can make the crisis situation worse (Kriyantono, 2012). Fitzpatrick (2015) also suggested limiting spokespersons and preparing the spokesperson to not unnecessarily accept responsibility for a crisis.

In contrast to a quick response, Seeger (2012) suggested that rapid response about the cause and blame may not always be the best method for reducing threat and uncertainty in a crisis. Using chaos theory as a base, Seeger observed that a more realistic view of the disrupting features of a crisis takes time to emerge and that offering up precise messages too early as a short-term goal may be unwarranted and possibly unethical.

Crisis communication can be integrated at various levels to better protect the reputation of the organization. The social interaction between an organization and its stakeholders results in routines that are interrupted in a crisis. Thiessen and Ingenhoff (2011) suggested that crisis communication can be integrated at the sociological,

organizational, and the message or symbolic levels. This integration allows the message to be the correct message for the level of responsibility that addresses stakeholders inside and outside the organization while also addressing the social expectations of the publics. Coombs (2012) offered that message maps can be used to target messages to different stakeholder groups.

Knowledge of stakeholder interests, activities, and methods of communication will assist crisis managers with message delivery and influencing potential behaviors (Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011). The symbolic perspective of an integrative model of crisis communication put forth by Thiessen and Ingenhoff recognized both the short-run impact on organizational image and the long-run impact on overall organizational reputation.

Thiessen and Ingenhoff (2011) recognized a need to address both internal and external communications and they advocated for an integrated crisis communication strategy. Their model recognized the societal level of crisis communication that addressed the rules of society, the organizational level addressed the structures and processes within the organization, and the message level addressed the “patterns of interpretation, influencing the perception of crisis among key stakeholders and the public” (p. 18).

Employees, internal stakeholders, are often the source of rumors and miscommunication if they are not informed during a crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2011). Only focusing on external stakeholders fails to recognize the importance of employee communications during a crisis. Fearn-Banks advocated an integrative crisis communication approach that provides consistent messaging so that knowledge is

available to employees and external stakeholders without creating additional problems during the crisis.

Benoit (2017) studied the messages used by organizations when their reputation was attacked. He found that tarnished organizational image resulting from a crisis can be repaired using various message options targeted to specific audiences. In his development of image repair theory he found that messages matched to the salient audiences offered the best repair for the image. Benoit suggested five message categories for image repair: denial, evasion of responsibility, rejection or reduction of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness and corrective actions, and mortification.

Language is identified as one difficulty associated with delivering crisis communication messages (Mitroff, 2014). A word may have more than one meaning. Hart (2013) indicated “the most important instrument of crisis management is language” (p. 41). Crisis communication messages provide patterns of interpretation that influence the perceptions of the crisis among stakeholders (Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011).

Crisis communication may alleviate or reduce possible reputational damage, but it can sometimes even bring the organization a more positive reputation than before the crisis occurred (Fearn-Banks, 2011). A crisis usually implies that the outcome is negative on a reputation; however, a crisis may actually have a positive effect on a reputation as in the response from Johnson & Johnson over the Tylenol tampering case (Benson, 1988; Mitroff et al., 2016). Management may even see a crisis as a means to further its own aims as a crisis may open up opportunities (Hart, 2013). Ulmer and Sellnow (2012) suggested crises offer unique opportunities for renewal and growth when stakeholders

have a prior relationship of commitment to the organization. Ulmer and Sellnow suggested that not all crisis discourse needs to be about repairing the reputation. They observed that when the organization has done nothing wrong, the communication can be uplifting and more focused on rebuilding and renewal. Building confidence between the stakeholders and the organization is the goal.

Egelhoff and Sen (2012) related crisis response to information processing systems that include communications, decision-making, and the gathering and storage of information in the organization. They theorized that appropriate crisis management responses are matched to the characteristics of the sources of the crisis situation, whether the type of failure was technical or sociopolitical and if the source was in a remote or relevant environment.

2.9 Crisis Response Strategies

Stephens et al. (2015) reviewed crisis response strategies when technical explanations were required, recognizing the difficulty in conveying details to stakeholders. Complex technical details, such as those involved in recalls of previously implanted surgical devices, include messages that must be relayed to lay audiences. The details of involved technical explanations and descriptions to explain what happened can elude the lay message receivers. The study found that when the crisis involved technical details, the organizations either avoided providing technical details or stuck with an explanation that directly stated the facts and provided little additional explanation. Their study did not measure the effectiveness of the crisis response strategies used but did caution practitioners to be aware of different stakeholders as well as the message delivery venues for disseminating the messages. Egelhoff and Sen (2012) suggested

that preparation for technical crisis communications can be detailed prior to the crisis, whereas prepared communications for other types of crisis should be broader and not so narrowly focused.

Coombs (2012) suggested the emotional impact of a crisis on stakeholders reduces their ability to process information so clear and simple messages are most effective. He recommended preparation for possible crisis situations by identifying the various stakeholder groups of an organization, assessing the most highly ranked crises and questions that will arise by each of the stakeholder groups. Messages can be prescribed for different scenarios for clarity and simplicity.

Crises can be grouped by crisis type so that response strategies can be created for each group, as opposed to creating response strategies for each crisis type. Coombs (2016a) grouped crises by level of responsibility for the crisis: the victim cluster has very weak attributions of crisis responsibility, the accidental cluster has minimal attributions of responsibility, and the intentional cluster has the strongest attribution of responsibility. Pearson and Mitroff (2013) grouped crises into seven crisis types based on their shared characteristics. Their crisis types included: psycho, external economic attacks, mega damage, occupational health diseases, external information attacks, breaks, and perceptual. Coombs, as well Pearson and Mitroff, recognized that skills for addressing crises are transferable within crisis types.

In contrast to SCCT, Ferguson et al. (2012) observed that crisis response strategies were viewed as either good or bad regardless of the crisis type. They found good crisis response strategies included corrective action, compensation, mortification, and

bolstering. They suggested that good strategies could be used in messaging without regard to the crisis type. Their research suggested that strategies of denial, blame shifting, silence, and provocation were seen as bad and therefore should not be used as crisis response strategies.

While Coombs's crisis response strategies were based in the attribution of blame for the crisis, other scholars have identified crisis response strategies from different viewpoints. Allen and Caillouet (2011) created a list of strategies based on impression management literature: excuse, justify, ingratiation, denounce, and distort. Benoit (2017) examined interpersonal efforts to repair images to create a list of image repair strategies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reduce offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification.

2.10 Summary

Situational Crisis Communication Theory offers evidence-based strategies that allow an organization to select a crisis response strategy that best protects its reputation from the damage of a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). It matches the crisis response strategy to the level of responsibility for the crisis. SCCT uses a rhetorical approach as a response to a crisis and is based in attribution theory where stakeholders attribute blame to an organization for negative events.

SCCT recognizes that rhetorical responses to a crisis include the safety of stakeholders by providing instructing information to assist people to physically cope with the crisis, adjusting information to assist stakeholders to cope psychologically with the crisis, and reputational protection and repair where the crisis situation is matched to the level of

reputational threat (Coombs, 2012). Crisis threats to reputation are based on crisis types; victim, accidental, and intentional. Both crisis history and prior reputational relationship history intensify the threat to the reputation. The greater the threat to the reputation, the more the organizational response must be perceived to take responsibility.

SCCT is both predictive and prescriptive (Coombs & Holladay, 2013). It predicts stakeholder behavioral intentions and prescribes the organizational crisis response strategy that is most effective for protecting and repairing its reputation.

Positive reputations are crucial to the long-term survival of an organization (Coombs, 2013b). Crises impact the organizational reputation by compromising normal operations and stakeholder expectations. Crises include emergencies and situations that build up over time until they cannot be ignored and reach the level of awareness of stakeholders. Recognizing the stakeholder groups that impact the organization is a significant factor in understanding the possible damage to the organization.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

This chapter describes the methodological approaches used in this study. It further explains the research design, sampling, sampling size, respondents' background and MTN's PR unit structure, data collection, data instrument and its administration as well as data analysis used in conducting this study.

3.1 Research Design

A case study approach was applied to this study using both qualitative (in-depth interviews) and quantitative (survey) methods. A mixed strand methodology was applied because it is essential in studying any phenomenon. In addition, Daymon and Holloway (2002) have emphasized that case study is different from other methodologies by intensive assessment of a single unit which is bounded by time and place.

Qualitatively, the study employed in-depth interview method to gather information regarding the crisis communication strategies and channels used in MTN's crisis preparedness communication. Wimmer & Dominick (2011) defines interview as a purposive conversation aimed at eliciting responses to a particular phenomenon. The qualitative study was convenient because it has a holistic focus and when applied; it tends "to be oriented to a wide range of interconnected activities, experiences, beliefs and values of people in terms of the context in which they are situated" (Daymond & Holloway, 2002:6). Again, it helps to attain a rich data.

Quantitatively, the survey method was used because it enabled the researcher to “gather a large amount of data with ease from a diversity of people, the researcher can examine many variables and have an array of statistics to analyze the data” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011:185).

3.2 Sampling

This study employed a non-probability sampling method, specifically, the purposive sampling technique instead of the cluster sampling technique which the researcher preferred using but was challenged with. Purposive sampling is done on the basis of accessibility or purposeful judgement of the researcher. In purposeful selection, the logic is that the strategy for sampling must serve the purpose of the study (Patton, 2007). The units of analysis for this study were MTN Ghana employees in five MTN Regional offices and the Public Relations (PR) Manager in the head office. These five regional offices were chosen because of the nature of MTN’s operations and office locations. The MTN Regional offices were located in the capital towns of Ghana and averagely, all the categories of staff as well as all the (eight) departments were found in their Regional offices. Whereas, the district offices were scattered across the country, majority of the staff in the districts were of junior ranks and only about three major departments could be found in the district offices. These characteristics made it convenient sampling from the regional offices and not the districts.

Secondly, employees who had more than one year work experience were eligible to participate in this study. The reason being that crisis communication is an ongoing process and any employee who had worked in the company for a year would be

informed about his organization's crisis preparedness processes to be able to provide credible information and experiences towards this study.

The PR Manager who is located in the head office was purposively sampled for the interview because of his assigned roles. He was responsible for MTN's crisis management, represented the management of the organization and was well informed about the subject matter. This meant that interviewing more people in his role was not likely to show any significant differences in the results. Because of the subjective nature of non-probability sampling, the data attained with the study may not accurately represent the entire population therefore, findings from the study cannot be generalized to other cases.

3.3 Sample Size

A sample size of 100 employees formed the respondents for the survey, out of over 6,500 staffs that formed the population of MTN. Out of the nine MTN Regional offices, five regional offices (Accra East, Accra West, Tema, Western and Eastern) were purposively sampled for the survey. In each of the five regions, 20 employees were selected and the questionnaires administered to them as participants of this study. This was done to ensure that the information obtained is a true representation of employees' perceptions and experiences across the country. 100 questionnaires were administered to participants in all five regions. The researcher went to all five regional offices, sought permission officially from the Regional General Managers to administer the questionnaires to their employees. Then after, approached individuals within the office premises and sought their consent to participate in the survey. Due to the nature of MTN's operations, some of the questionnaires were completed and

returned shortly after they were given out but many were retrieved the on subsequent days. Similarly, The PR Manager was presented an interview request letter and an interview appointment was scheduled to commence the process.

3.4 Framing

Framing is a method to provide emphasis on relevant aspects of a crisis while deemphasizing others. Entman (2011) concluded that news media highlighted concepts through elements such as “keywords, metaphors, concepts, symbols, and visual images” (p. 7). Framing causes stakeholders to focus on particular ideas or concepts to influence their perceptions of the crisis. Kim and Cameron (2011) examined the effects of news media frames and their influence on audience perceptions, attributions, evaluations, and behavioral intentions following a crisis.

Their research suggested “the distinct emotions elicited by different news frames could influence publics’ information processing and attitudes toward the organization, and the organization could develop different strategies by considering the publics’ emotional needs” (p. 846). Carroll (2014) found that media set agendas by covering news and crises of certain firms more often and more prominently.

Frames are not only established by media. Crisis managers and special interest groups also frame messages (Hart, 2013). Framing can be used to symbolically reinterpret perceptions of the various publics, redefine the situation, and reset legitimization for the organization. The messages by these groups may undermine the capacity of organizations to deliver their own messages. Frames can be used to assist the

stakeholders with focus in the message. The organization can assist stakeholders to focus on specific parts of the message.

Conrad (2011) studied crisis coverage of different types of news media and blogs to determine if crises involving higher education was covered differently by each mode. Using framing theory he did find variations among the different media deliveries.

In order to emphasize topics in a crisis, crisis types can be considered a form of framing. Coombs (2012) suggested that crisis managers frame crises in such a way as to obtain a desirable response from top management but to also influence stakeholder perception of the crisis.

3.5 The Respondents' Background

At the time of this study, MTN had eight core departments headed by directors. Its offices were clustered into nine non-geographical regions and located in Ghana's district capitals. The regions were headed by Regional General Managers (RGM). The nine regions were further divided into 110 non-political districts and scattered in the catchment areas across Ghana. The district offices were headed by District Managers (DMs). The projects and head offices were situated in Accra. MTN had about 6,500 permanent employees working in all their offices across the country. Majority of these employees were field workers, they worked in smaller teams and belonged to the junior and senior staff categories. The senior staff is a supervisory rank and is responsible for assigning tasks and general information to the junior rank. The management staff categories included top managers, directors and assistant managers. The management staff is responsible for organizational decisions and policy making.

3.6 PR Unit Structure

Per the organization's organogram, the PR department was headed by the Director of Human Resource (HR) but in practice, the PR Manager (designated as the Divisional Manager) was the head of the PR unit and responsible for all PR activities in MTN. The PR department was not decentralized in the MTN regional offices. For that reason, the HR department assisted the PR department in the regional level. The PR manager was responsible for crisis communication, educating employees, writing memos and code of ethics and reported directly to the Managing Director (MD). Due to this role, he monitored issues and managed them to prevent the issues from developing into crisis. Aside the PR Manager are two Sectional Managers responsible for MTN's internal and external public relations whilst the PR Officers were responsible for internal public relations at the regional level. They all reported to the PR Manager.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments and Administration

3.7.1 Interview

An 11 semi-structured question guide was used in conducting an in-depth interview with MTN's Public Relations Manager (PRM) in his office. This was in response to research questions one and two; MTN's internal crisis communication strategies and effective channels used in conducting its crisis management practices with employees. The interview guide was used as a guideline to seek his views, experiences and facts on MTN's internal crisis preparedness communication practices and channels. In addition to that, related documents, articles, newsletters on MTN's crisis communication processes and channels, information on the notice boards relating to this study and non-verbal cues from the interviewee's reactions to questions were observed. This was done to ascertain the credibility of the information provided by the respondent and to serve

as a rich data for the problem under study (Rossman & Rallis, 1998; Sanger, 1996). The researcher rephrased information to be confirmed by the interviewee when necessary to attain information accuracy. The interview lasted 45 minutes and was recorded on an audio tape recorder. A note pad and pen were also used for notes taking whilst the observation was done using an observation guide.

3.7.2 Survey

The researcher focused on research questions three and four using concepts from the system's theory and literature reviewed to design a questionnaire for the survey. The questionnaire was made up of 14 questions and divided into three sections; the demographics and organizational factors of respondents, employees' most effective communication channel and most preferred channel. Most of the questions were closed ended and a couple was open-ended to give respondents an opportunity to express their opinion. A five-point Likert scale style of questioning (Not Preferred being the least and "Highly Preferred" the highest option) was also used in giving employees freedom to choose from varied options to deduce their levels of agreement on the preference of a communication channel. This standardized style of questionnaire helped to reduce biases in the study. It took about five minutes to complete.

Letters were sent to the RGMs of all the MTN regions under study to seek permission to administer the questionnaires to participants. All of the regions but two (Western and Easter regions) provided an employee to assist the researcher in distributing and collecting the questionnaires from the selected respondents. Employees were likely to cooperate when they knew the study was in their own interest and was supported by management. Possibly that was why responses from those two regional offices were

the least of the five regions surveyed. The questionnaire was tested using a pilot study in order to be certain the questions were clear and not confusing to respondents. After the pilot study, the researcher expanded some information in the questionnaire to include sources of crisis preparedness information and employee's participation in crisis training and drills to enhance understanding of the questions and enrich the data. The process of administering and collecting data lasted two working weeks. Out of the 100 administered questionnaires, 81 (representing 81%) were completed and returned.

3.8 Data Analysis

3.8.1 Qualitative Data

More descriptively, a qualitative analysis is a process of examining and interpreting data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008:1). Analysis of the qualitative data was done adopting Morgan's (1988) ethnography summary from Mazzei (2013) study reviewed in chapter two. Content of the data was transcribed on a word document, grouped in order of their importance to the research questions, order of frequency (or occurrence) and the originality. Finding the best statements which relates to the research issue, each answer in the interview guide was examined and quotations were selected. These quotation were used in discussing findings of the study.

3.8.2 Quantitative Data

The survey data was analyzed using descriptive analysis. Data from the completed questionnaire was entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and results were analyzed using frequencies and cross tabulation. This helped in describing and explaining the various variables as most preferred channel of communication, most

effective channel of communication. Results were further displayed in graphs and tables to give a pictorial representation of the data for better understanding. The responses to the open-ended questions were coded quantitatively but the data was analyzed and presented in qualitative forms.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that were generated from the questionnaires and the interview used in gathering data for this study. In addition, this chapter also analyses the findings based on the research questions, literature reviewed and the systems theory.

4.1 Qualitative Results and Analysis

This section presents the results of the in-depth interview that was conducted with MTN's PR Manager in response to this study's research questions one and two; to examine MTN's internal crisis preparedness communication strategy and channels. The following themes were generated from the transcribed interview.

4.1.1 How MTN Communicates its Crisis Preparedness to its Employees

The interview established that MTN, as an organization, attaches a great deal of importance to crises because of the negative consequences crises have on organizations when they occur. The interviewee further noted that one major strategy they adopt to manage crises, and largely to avoid the occurrence of crises is through effective internal communication practices. According to the PR Manager, the specific communication practices used in preparing employees towards crises involve series of organizational meetings at the head office, regional, district and departmental levels. The interviewee emphasized that MTN, as an organization, believes that having frequent meetings with the staff is a major part of their crises preparation process. This is because involving employees in meetings regularly makes them feel like they are a "part of the organization, so they understand you when you get into crises". The

interviewee elaborated on how meetings help them in communicating crisis preparedness information to their employees:

These include, the PR Manager and Managing Directors' meeting every Tuesday, a monthly regional general meeting at the head office, weekly meetings at the district level, emergency meetings when there are crises threats to be dealt with and monthly employee durbar which helps to bring employees and managers together to discuss and be informed of the organization's crisis plan. The quote below captures the thrust of the discussion:

'MTN's crisis communication begins with top management and it extends gradually to all employees and feedback flows from employees to top management through the same means of communication. We make sure that there is constant flow of information between management and the employees. This is how it works: the managing director of MTN holds meeting with me at the national head office every Tuesday to brief me on management's decisions and policies regarding the organization. After relaying the information to me (the PR manager), I in turn disseminate the information, decisions and policies to all the Regional General Managers (RGM). From there, the RGMs communicate with the District Managers (DMs). Subsequently, the DMs disseminate the information to all employees within their districts. There is also a crisis team in every region to respond appropriately and on time to crisis relating to the region. This crisis team is called Regional Management Team (RMT). And they are informed of any potential crisis in the region. It is the duty of the various DMs to inform members of the RMT, any crisis that is brewing in their districts. In consultations with the RMT, the DM is responsible for monitoring and managing any potential crises situations which may arise in the district'

The interview further showed that, when a crisis goes beyond the capacity of the RMT, the matter is referred to the national head office for the necessary interventions. The interviewee however stressed that not all crisis-related information is sent to the national head office.

Throwing more light on the information dissemination process, the PR manager said that information from the national head office is disseminated to all employees, without any proper segmentation. Because of MTN's inability to segment its employees, it develops a single message and shares with all employees. However, the practice is different at the district and regional levels:

Segmentation is virtually impossible because the intranet system which is the largest in terms of participants cannot segment employees; it broadcasts information to all workers. But I must say that this situation prevails only at the national level where the numbers make it impossible to segment the audience. At the regional, district and departmental levels where managers are able to communicate in the languages employees understand, messages are more personalized. Some even use the local languages because crisis issues are very sensitive, so understanding is key.

4.1.2 Channels used in Communicating Internal Crisis Preparedness Information

According to the PR Manager, MTN's crisis communication channels are the same as its Internal Crisis Communication (ICC) channels. He listed the channels as telephones, memos, e-mails, departmental meetings, durbars, intranet, website, notice board and newsletters. He categorized the channels into two – formal (departmental meetings, mobile phone calls, emails, website, notice boards, memos, durbars,

newsletters and the intranet) and informal (identified union bodies and the interactive social media platforms, interpersonal communication and grapevines). The PR Manager added that:

The telephone, memos and circulars are used during emergencies... Daily and monthly meetings are held all the time and managers work with employees throughout the day through the telephone to receive and disseminate timely information to deal with (potential) crisis situations... Feedback is also sought from the various employee unions examples of which are the union for Senior Staff, Junior Staff and the Power Queens Club at which levels employees feel comfortable to share their honest opinions and give genuine feedback on issues that needs to be tackled...

According to the PR Manager, departmental meetings, durbars and the intranet system are the most effective channels to communicate crisis prevention and response messages to employees because they ensure two-way communication and enhance interaction between spokespersons and employees.

Per the data from the interview, the informal channels are very effective as far as managing and communicating crisis information is concerned. The interviewee explained that the informal channels help receive information quicker than any other means of communication. This is further complemented by these channels of communication to ensure instant or immediate feedback. The quote below captures the relevance of the informal communication channels:

“Let’s take the social media platforms like our WhatsApp group chats and other informal channels such as the union groups or interpersonal conversation. Because they are informal, I receive information via them than the formal or official ones that

sometimes involve bureaucratic system of statistics and reports writing. Because most of these employees have my number, all they do is to call me or send me messages about a potential problem that can degenerate into a crisis. From there, I move on to tackle the issue, till formal complaints are lodged. Again, we have WhatsApp groups where we chat. I monitor from the conversations on the PR group chat which am part, to identify employees' grievances and the issues that deserve management's attention. I then move to solve the issue. Sometimes you can gather information through common informal conversation with the staff. I keep open lines of communication with leaders of the labor groups. Additionally, I am in same WhatsApp groups with them, so I am able to pick up information about their activities including strike actions, so sometimes before they move on with their plan, management would meet and discuss with them for peace to reign”.

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able to pick up information about their activities including strike actions, so sometimes before they move on with their plan, management would meet and discuss with them for peace to reign”.

In spite of the significant roles communication channels play in communicating information on crises, the interviewer said some of the channels also have their shortcomings. He explained the challenge with departmental meetings and durbars:

The success of durbar solely depends on employees’ readiness to be interactive... sometimes there is what I call zero rapport because employees are afraid to step on toes and be reported by management. Sometimes I do all the talking, which does not help in identifying potential crises.

According to the PR Manager, employees are not motivated to use the intranet because it is only accessible to employees who work within the office premises. He mentioned that the major challenges with this type of channel are poor internet connectivity and employees’ inability to understand the content of the messages sent. To solve challenges associated with the use of intranets, the interviewee said staff durbars and departmental meetings are used to complement the intranet so that the messages on the intranet they didn’t understand are discussed at the durbar. Moreover, employees who did not understand the messages on the intranet can seek clarity during durbar.

Regarding the use of social media platforms in communicating crisis information, it was discovered that MTN does not use social media (such as Twitter, Facebook, etc.) as its crisis communication channel. Although selected groups such as management and some departments use WhatsApp platforms for communicating the day-to-day

activities in the organization, it is not recognized as an official channel. The PR Manager confirmed that social media is “faster, reliable and effective to MTN’s operations”. The challenge with this platform is its limited number of participants at a time and poor network connectivity.

4.1.3 How Feedbacks are Managed Successfully

The interviewee said the information flow is from top management to employees and vice versa. Messages are transmitted from top management through memos, notice boards, newsletters, website, durbars, intranet and face-to-face meetings to spokespersons. Then spokespersons (DMs, PROs and union leaders) communicate across to all employees via monthly durbars at both district and regional offices. Employees’ feedback is received via the intranet, website, face-to-face meetings, departmental meetings, durbars and union bodies.

4.2 Quantitative Results and Analysis

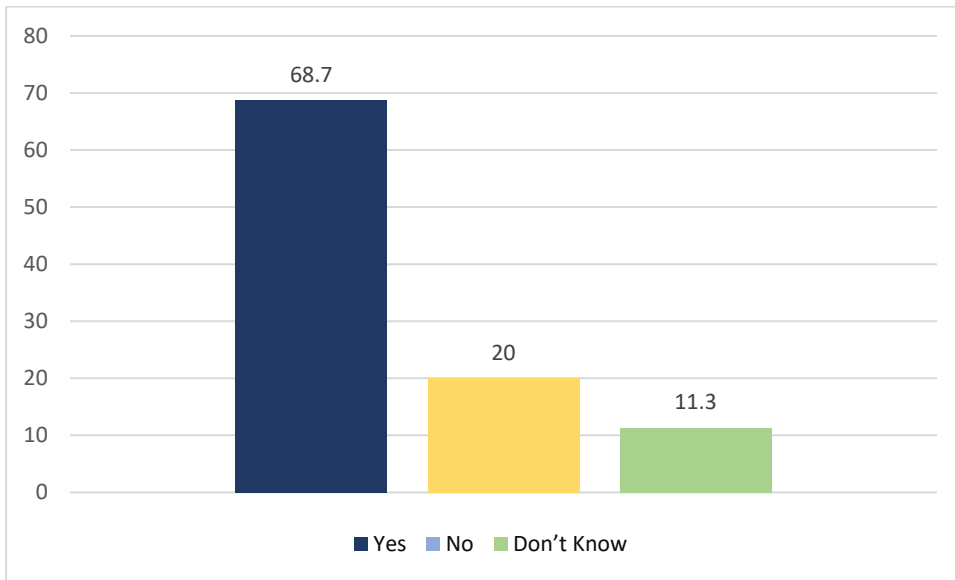
100 questionnaires were distributed to 100 employees from five MTN regions. 81 out of the 100 questionnaires were completed representing 81% response rate. This section presents the results of the questionnaires distributed to the MTN employees.

4.2.1 Demographics of Respondents

Most of the respondents were male (70.4%). More than half of the respondents (55%) fell between 36 to 45 years of age. 43 respondents (58%) had worked in MTN for more than 20 years, those who had worked between 11 and 20 years were 29 (33%) and 9 had worked for three and four years (11%). Out of the 81 respondents, more than 63 (66.3%) of them had tertiary and post graduate education and 16 (21%) had secondary,

technical and other education. 38 (46.9%) of the respondents were senior staff, 36 (44.4%) and 7 (8.6%) were junior and management staff.

4.2.2 Employee Awareness of their Organization’s Crisis Management Processes



Source: Field Survey, 2021

Figure 3: A graph showing Employees’ Awareness of the Existing Crisis Management Communications

Figure 3 above shows that a little more than half of the respondents (55 representing 68.8%) are aware that their company has a crisis communication plan in place and know about their responsibilities as employees in case there is a crisis. However, 16 respondents representing a quarter of the respondents (20%) have no idea it exists, whereas 9 respondents (11.3%) are saying their organization has no crisis communication plan.

4.2.2.1 A Cross-Tabulation of Staff Category and their Knowledge of CMP

Table 1: A table showing a cross-tabulation showing Staff Category and Their Awareness of Its Organization's ICC

Knowledge Of MTN's CMP	Which Staff Level Do You Belong To			Total
	Management	Senior	Junior	
No	0	2	7	9
	0.0%	22.2%	77.8%	100.0%
Yes	3	29	23	55
	5.5%	52.7%	41.8%	100.0%
Don't Know	4	6	6	16
	25.0%	37.5%	37.5%	100%
Total	7	37	36	80
	8.8%	46.2%	45.0%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The above table made it necessary to know which category of employees were aware of MTN's ICC processes. A relationship between the categories of staff and their awareness of their organization's crisis preparedness communications shows that 29 out of 37 senior staff (52.7%) are most informed. Whereas, four out of seven management staff (25.5%) and 13 out of 36 junior staff (55.3%) do not know it exists. By far, senior staff have a higher perception of their organizations' crisis preparations.

4.2.3 Sources of Crisis Information

Table 2: Sources of Employees Internal Crisis Communications

Source of Information on Crisis	Frequency	Valid Percent
Human Resource Department	37	45.7
Public Relations Department	21	25.9
Departmental Head	15	18.5
Co-Workers	5	6.2
Grapevine	1	1.2
Other	2	2.5
Total	81	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

More than half of the respondents (46%) representing majority, have identified their source of crisis information as the HR department. Roughly, a quarter of them are saying their source is from the PR department (26%), 15 respondents get their source of information from departmental heads (18%) and the rest of the respondents are saying their co-workers (6%) and the Grapevine give them crisis information (2%). This results show that majority of *MTN*'s crisis communications (45.7%) come from the HR department. PR department (25.9%) and other departmental heads (18.5%) also participates in the communications. Less of the information is from the grapevine and co-workers.

4.2.4 Employee Participation in Crisis Drills

Table 3: Employees' Participation In Crisis Drills

Participation in Crisis Drills	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	61	80.3
No	15	19.7
Total	76	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Shown on Table 3, 61 respondents (80.3%) have experienced crisis drills but 15 respondents (19.7%) are saying they have not been engaged in any crisis drill or exercises. This result indicates that majority of MTN employees have been prepared physically through crisis drills and knows how to manage real crisis situations when they occur.

4.2.5 Clarity of Crisis Communication Messages

Table 4: Clarity of Information Flow on Crisis Communication Plan

Clarity of Information	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	6.2
Disagree	14	17.3
Agree	55	67.9
Strongly Agree	7	8.6
Total	81	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 4 shows that more than two-thirds (68%) of the respondents perceive the information management communicates to them as comprehensible and 7 (9%) respondents are strongly in agreement. However, 14 (17%) respondents, are saying that

they hardly understand the information disseminated on their crises policies and procedures. 5 (6%) respondents strongly supported this statement. The results indicate that majority of employees understand the messages communicated to them.

4.2.6 Employees' Access to Crisis Preparedness Information and Feedback

Table 5: A table showing the extent of Information Flow on Crisis Preparedness

Access to Information on Crisis Preparedness	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	11	13.6
Disagree	23	28.4
Agree	42	51.9
Strongly Agree	5	6.2
Total	81	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

From table 5, 42 (52%) respondents are receiving consistent feedback and are accessing information on their organizations' crisis preparedness communication easily. 5 respondents (6%) are strongly in agreement with this statement. The rest of the respondents (42%) disagree with this statement; they have difficulty accessing information and feedback is delayed.

4.2.7 Knowledge of Crisis Communication Channels to Access Information during Crisis

Table 6: Awareness of Internal Crisis Communication Channels During Crisis

Knowledge on Crisis Communication Channels	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	8	9.9
Disagree	12	14.8
Agree	55	67.9
Strongly Agree	6	7.4
Total	81	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

68% of the respondents know which communication channel to access current updates on crises and 7% of the respondents agreed with them. However, 25% of the respondents do not know the channel to check updates from when there is a crisis.

4.2.8 Most Effective Crisis Communication Channel

Table 7: A table showing the most Effective Communication Channel for Communicating Crisis

Channel	Frequency	Valid Percent
Social Media	7	9.5
E-Mail	3	4.1
Durbar	32	43.2
Telephone Calls	8	10.8
Departmental Meetings	7	9.5
Intranet	2	2.7
Notice Boards	6	8.1
Memos	2	2.7
Company Website	7	9.5
Total	74	100.0

From table 7, the most effective channel employees want crisis information to be communicated through to them is durbar, according to 43% of respondents. 11% respondents are saying telephone calls and 10% respondents are saying communication through Social media, departmental meetings and company website is the most effective. Communication through e-mails, memos and intranet are ineffective and is not considered for effective communication.

4.2.9 A Cross-Tabulation of Staff Category and the Channel Considered Effective for Communicating Crisis Information Internally

Table 8: A table showing the relationship between staff category and their most Effective Channel for Communicating Crisis Information

Which One Do You Prefer As The Most Effective Channel To Be Used In Communicating Crises Information To You									Total
Social Media	E-Mail	Durbar	Telephone Calls	Departmental Meetings	Intranet	Notice Boards	Memos	Company Website	
0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	2	6
0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%	0.0%	16.7%	0.0%	33.3%	100.0%
4	3	19	4	1	1	3	1	1	37
10.8%	8.1%	51.4%	10.8%	2.7%	2.7%	8.1%	2.7%	2.7%	100.0%
3	0	12	3	5	1	2	1	4	31
9.7%	0.0%	38.7%	9.7%	16.1%	3.2%	6.5%	3.2%	12.9%	100.0%
7	3	32	8	7	2	6	2	7	74
9.5%	4.1%	43.2%	10.8%	9.5%	2.7%	8.1%	2.7%	9.5%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Considering the employee preferences of most effective communication channel across staff categories, 39% junior and 51% senior staff are saying durbar is the most effective channel for internal crisis communication. In addition to this, senior staff considers social media (11%) and telephone calls (11%) as other most effective channels in reaching them. In addition to durbar, junior staff considers departmental meetings (16%) and company website (13%). However, both senior and junior staff do not like the intranet (3%) and memos (3%) to be used in communicating with them. 33% of management staff considers the company website as the most effective channel in communicating with them.

4.2.10 Employees' Reasons for Selecting their Most Preferred ICC Channel

Table 9: A table showing Employees' why employees chose their most Preferred Channel

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Prompt	4	6.2
Enhances Communication	10	15.4
Interactive	15	23.1
Consistent Updates	2	3.1
Easily Accessible	19	29.2
Enhances Relationship	9	13.8
Clarity	6	9.2
Total	65	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Durbar is chosen as the preferred channel because it is easily accessible (29%), interactive (23%), enhances communication (15%) and enhances employee relations

(14%). However, information delivered through durbar is not prompt nor consistent. Social media is preferred because communication through it is prompt, consistent, easily accessible and enhances effective communication however, message is neither interactive nor self-explanatory.

4.3 Analysis of Findings

The study sought to examine the internal communication strategies and channels used by MTN in its preparations towards crises and its employees' perceptions of those channels used in the process. The analysis of the findings in this section of the chapter is done by answering the research questions based on the findings and linking the findings to the systems theory as well as the literature reviewed in chapter two.

4.3.1 How Do MTN's Crisis Communication Strategies Adequately Prepare its Employees for Crises?

From the findings, it was identified that MTN as an organization, acknowledged that crisis is a major threat to their productivity, hence preventive measures must be put in place and duly communicated to employees. Additionally, MTN has crises team which exist in the regional offices to address issues that have the tendency to escalate into a crisis. MTN's crisis preparedness information strategy targets all the employees of the organization. The strategy has been integrated into in the organizational culture where existing communication channels and processes are adopted in communicating its preparedness towards future crisis. The strategy includes series of meetings in all three levels of communication; individual, group and organizational levels, and employs a top-down and bottom-up communication approach. Before employees receive communication, decisions are made at the general manager's weekly meeting, then it is

shared with RGMs who also share the information at their regional monthly meetings with DMs and the members of the RMT. Then the DMs communicate directly to their employees in their monthly durbars.

This finding indicates that the principles of interaction and interdependence, as embedded in the systems theory, are practiced by MTN. Communication of crisis information involves all members of the system in order to respond to crises effectively. The two-way communication process where feedbacks to and from employees and management is essential and highlights on the nature of interdependence in the organization.

Findings from the survey confirms that majority of MTN employees (80%) have been prepared physically through crisis drills and on how to manage real crisis situations when they occur while more than half of employees (68%) understand clearly the messages communicated by management. This finding confirms the findings of Kooor et al (2000) and Boz and Kucukaltan (2013) that companies with pre-crisis planning strategies can overcome crises easily when they emerge. This study's finding differs from that of Fowler et al; that employees at management level know more about crisis preparedness than the lower-ranked employees. In this study, there was no difference in the level of awareness of CMP between the two employee groups.

4.3.2 What Channels do MTN use in Communicating its Crisis Preparedness to its Employees?

The same channels used for internal communication purposes are used by MTN in preparing its employees towards crisis. The channels are oral, electronic and written

forms. The channels include telephone calls, memos, e-mails, departmental meetings, durbar, the intranet, company website, WhatsApp chat, durbar, intranet, interaction with employee unions (for Senior Staff, Junior Staff and the Power Queens Club) and departmental meetings. The use of these channels enable both top-down and bottom-up approaches to communication, as most of the channels enable two-way communication. Based on feedbacks from employees, the PR department is informed of the potential crises and acts to prevent them from occurring.

As much as these channels aid in effectively communicating crisis information, they also possess some challenges. For instance, during group meetings such as departmental and staff durbars, junior employees feel intimidated to express their opinions. Therefore, suggestions and views tend to come from very few people. However, this challenge is dealt with through interpersonal communication and informal communication where employees who were unable to talk during discussions at durbars could also share their views among themselves and the union groups.

4.3.3. Which Communication Channels have MTN Employees Perceived as Effective?

Telephone calls, departmental meeting, social media and website were identified as the most effective channels of communication. Generally, durbar remains the most effective choice since a little below half of the respondents (43%) consider it as the most effective ICC channel. This finding is confirmed by responses from interviewee; that durbar, departmental meetings and union leaders are effective ICC channels but durbar is the most effective of all. The finding illustrates the assertion of Ampofo-Bekoe (2014) that, using channels that are easily accessible to employees is the most

effective communicating channel within an organization. Similarly, employees preferred face-to-face channels of communication because it strengthened interpersonal relationships within the organization, a finding which also supports Arins' (2013) study. The preference for durbars and departmental meetings also relates to the open system component of the systems theory where all employees are allowed to participate in discussions relating to the organization. It also means all the workers and the departments are connected.

4.3.4. Which of the Internal Communication Channels used by MTN Employees is the Most Preferred Channel?

Social media channels were chosen as respondent's preferred channel of communication. This finding is affirmed with a study on the use of social media as a crisis communication tool conducted by Heradstveit and Hagen (2011) in three oil and gas companies in America. The study found that information flow on social media is faster. It also has a wider coverage and helps in establishing good stakeholder relationships since it provides two-way communication. Although the social media platform, WhatsApp, is not officially accepted as a means of communication in the organization, the study finding suggested that it is still used in an informal way to disseminate and share information among employees. Social media is preferred by respondents because communication through it is prompt, consistent, easily accessible and enhances effective communication.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter is the concluding aspect of the study. The first section of the study comprises the summary of the study. Additionally, the chapter also contains the limitations, recommendations for further study and the conclusion.

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study focused on the internal crisis communication preparedness that exists in MTN Ghana , with the main objective of determining how the organization executes its crisis communication plan and employees' perception of the channels used in this process. This study was premised on the systems theory. In response to the research questions, an in-depth interview was conducted with the MTN PR Manager and results of the responses were analyzed using ethnography summary.

In addition, a survey was conducted with 100 MTN employees. Responses from the 81% of the respondents were analyzed using SPSS and results presented in graphs and tables. Findings from this study showed that MTN has a crisis preparedness strategy in place to inform employees of potential crises. In addition, the study uncovered that social media, group meetings and intranet were chosen as the preferred and most effective channels of communicating crisis-related information.

5.2 Conclusion

Crisis communication continues to attract the interest of scholars in public relations and organizational communication. It was in the same vein that this study was conducted to examine the crisis preparedness strategy of the MTN Ghana . Among other things, this

study sought to establish the effectiveness of the various communication channels that are used in communicating crisis-related information to employees. The study found that the crisis communication plan of MTN is modelled on their internal communication strategy. This means that the organization does not have a separate communication platform solely dedicated to crises. MTN crisis communication plan involves employees, regional and district managers as well as head office staff. Thus, the organization has a holistic approach to communicating crisis information. Durbar is the most effective channel of communication and employees prefer social media to be used in communicating crisis-related information with them.

This study agrees with Selart et al.'s (2002) statement, that the way leadership handles crises most often has an impact on its relationship with the employees. It is therefore, important that MTN has a communication plan to communicate information to its employees; although more efforts needs to be geared towards making the information readily available and accessible to all the employees. The findings of the study confirm previous scholarship on the subjects and also illustrate the tenets of the systems theory.

5.3 Limitations

The study encountered a number of challenges. It was very difficult gaining access to the employees; hence it took the researcher a long time to administer the questionnaires to the respondents. The sample size was also small so the findings cannot be generalized to other employees in other organizations. Future studies must expand the scope of the study and conduct it on a larger scale considering a different methodology.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings identified in the study and with considerations to the Ghanaian context and organizational culture, the following are outlined as recommendations for building strong internal crisis communication strategies:

- a) Internal crisis preparedness communication is important to enable organizations prepare towards crises. This debate is extensive and in order to help persuade organizations to take up crisis management plan and communication to help improve on crisis management, there is the need for more case studies on how crisis communication content is developed, the differences between internal and external crisis communication in Africa.
- b) In developing an internal crisis communication strategy, organizations need to consider factors such as the communication objective, the message, sender or communicator, categories of employees and management, the communication and timeline.
- c) Regular audit of the existing communication channels needs to be done to characterize the relationship between management and employees in order to help build better relationships prior crises.
- d) Empowering the crisis teams to properly define and assume their roles within the organization for them to perform their duties effectively.
- e) Rebranding the website to encourage usage, easy access to information and improve interaction between management and employees
- f) Enhancing the features of the intranet to consider employees who work outside the office premises so as to improve communication through the intranet.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE PR MANAGER

1. Can you give a brief background of your organization with regards to employee population and locations?
2. What roles do you play in terms of internal crisis communication?
3. Which strategic plans are in place to help you communicate with employees during crisis and which channels would they seek information from?
4. Which groups of employees are segmented to be communicated to and why?
5. Which specific channels are used in disseminating crisis preventive and response messages to employees and what are the reasons for choosing those channels.
6. What are the challenges involved in using the channels chosen?
7. What details or themes are considered appropriate when communicating the information to your employees, and why?
8. How do you receive feedback and in turn provide responses to the employees' feedback?
9. Do you use social media in communicating with your employees? If yes, how do you use social media in communicating crisis preparedness to your employees? What are some examples of the internal communication challenges you encountered using this selected channel?
10. Is there an internal audit in place to find out employees' perception of the communication and the effectiveness of your communication?
11. Was there an audit carried out to find out employees' perception about the communication strategies in place? What were the findings?

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EMPLOYEES

IMPACT OF EFFECTIVE CRISIS MANAGEMENT ON AN ORGANIZATION AND IT'S STAKEHOLDERS.

Dear Respondent,

I am gathering data to conduct a study on the topic: *“Impact of Effective Crisis Management on an Organization and Its Stakeholders”* as part of my long essay. I would appreciate if you could spend a little of your time to respond to this questionnaire. Information provided in this regard will be used purposefully for academic endeavor and shall be treated strictly confidential.

Thank you for your corporation.

Please fill the spaces provided. Mark (√) where applicable and specify where necessary.

Demographics

1. Gender:

1) Male []

2) Female []

2. Among which of the age groups do you belong?

1) 18-35 []

2) 36-45 years [] 3) 46-55 []

4) 56-60 years []

3. What is your highest level of education?

1) JHS []

2) Secondary or Technical []

3) Tertiary []

4) Post graduate []

5) Other []

4. Which staff level do you belong to?

1) Management Staff 2). Senior Staff 3). Junior Staff

5. How long have you been working with MTN?

Effective Communication Channels

6. As an employee, does your company have a communication plan which informs you on which actions to take when the company is in crisis?

1) No []

2) Yes []

3) Don't know []

7. I understand the messages communicated to me on crisis policies and procedures and know what is required of me during a crisis.

1) Strongly Disagree

2) 2). Disagree

3) 3). Agree

4) 4)Strongly Agree

8. Most of the information I receive on crisis comes from: (if other please specify)

1) Human Resource department

2) 2.) Public relations department

3) 3). My departmental head

4) 4). Co-workers

5) 6) Grapevine

6) 7) Please specify if other

9. I am well informed of the communication channel to access current updates or information in case my organization is in crisis?

- 1) Strongly Disagree
- 2) 2) Disagree
- 3) 3) Agree
- 4) 4). Strongly Agree

10. I have easy access and immediate responses to all the information the company communicates.

- 1) Strongly Disagree
- 2) Disagree
- 3) Agree

4). Strongly Agree

11. As an MTN employee, have you experienced any drill activity on a crisis situation?

1. Yes
2. No

If answer in question 11 is yes, then please answer the remaining questions.

12. Which of these communication channels were the most effective tools used in communicating MTN’s crisis activities to you? Please indicate your preference by ticking (√) on a scale of 1(least) to 5(highly).

No.	Channel of communication	Not Preferred	Least Preferred	Neutral	Preferred	Highly Preferred
1	Social media (Facebook, twitter etc.)					
2	E-mail					
3	Durbar					
4	Telephone calls					
5	Departmental meetings					
6	Intranet					
7	Newsletter					
8	Notice boards					
9	News fliers					
10	Memos					
11	Face-to-face meetings					
12	Company website					

Preferred Communication Channel

12. Out of the list chosen from question 11, which one do you prefer as the most effective to be used in communicating information to you?

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13. Why is this channel your most preferred?

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14. Is there any other channel you would like to be used to communicate with you that is not included in the list used by MTN?

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