



**EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CRISIS COMMUNICATION: A STUDY OF THE
GHANA NATIONAL FIRE SERVICE**

BY

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JANUARY, 2025

DECLARATION BY STUDENT

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

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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

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

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of my father, Mr Wise Kwame Adzokpa. His guidance, values, and unwavering belief in me continue to spur me on in everything I do. Though you are no longer here, your influence remains a constant strength in my life.

I dedicate this work to my mother, Veronica Okaikor Okai, for her unconditional love, sacrifices, and steadfast support. Thank you for believing in me even when I doubted myself and always being my most significant source of inspiration. This accomplishment is a testament to your endless sacrifice and love.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the use of social media in crisis communication by the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS), focusing on how various platforms are utilized, the experiences of personnel, and the challenges encountered. The study employed a qualitative research approach. Data was collected through interviews. The findings revealed that social media played a critical role in enhancing crisis communication, facilitating real-time updates, and fostering public engagement during emergencies. The study highlighted that GNFS strategically employed multiple social media platforms for specific purposes. Facebook and Instagram served as platforms for detailed updates, incorporating images and videos to provide a comprehensive understanding of ongoing crises. These platforms also allowed for two-way communication, encouraging public feedback and inquiries. WhatsApp, while not used for public communication, was pivotal in internal coordination, enabling swift decision-making and information-sharing among GNFS personnel. The research also underscored the structured and efficient crisis communication process at GNFS. Initial updates were disseminated promptly via Twitter to provide immediate information to the public, followed by more detailed guidance through Facebook and Instagram. This approach ensured that information remained timely, relevant, and accessible to diverse audiences. Despite its advantages, the study identified several challenges faced by GNFS in using social media for crisis communication. One of the primary challenges was the rapid spread of misinformation, which often created confusion and hindered effective crisis management. Technical difficulties, including connectivity issues and platform outages, were another major obstacle, disrupting the timely dissemination of critical updates. The study concluded that social media is an indispensable tool for GNFS in managing crisis communication. While it enhances the speed, reach, and effectiveness of communication, its potential is undermined by issues such as misinformation, technical constraints, and coordination gaps. Recommendations included regular training for personnel on social media management, the development of clear guidelines for platform usage, investment in reliable technological tools, and improved systems for internal coordination and misinformation management. Future research was recommended to explore comparative studies on social media usage in crisis communication across other emergency services, examine the influence of social media on public behaviour during crises, and investigate the integration of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence in social media management.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the entire dissertation, providing a summary of the effects of social media on crisis communication with an emphasis on the Ghana National Fire Service. It lays the foundation for understanding how social media has transformed crisis management strategies and highlights the importance of effective communication in maintaining corporate reputation during crises. The chapter also outlines the background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, and significance of the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

1.2.1 The Rise of Social Media in Crisis Communication

Over the past decade, social media has become an indispensable tool that no organization intending to manage its reputation and communicate in a crisis can afford to be without. As these digital platforms proliferated, they changed the emergency communication landscape, allowing organizations to take new routes and avenues to reach their audiences directly. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram enable organizations to avoid traditional media filters and communicate directly with the stakeholders in real time (Coombs, 2018). This is particularly important in times of crisis, where information is needed quickly to properly manage perceptions and keep the organization's reputation at the forefront of the crisis. Social media immediacy is an organization's ability to address concerns, provide updates, and rectify misinformation in real time; this helps limit any potential negative consequences of the crisis on their reputation.

Social media has emerged with new emergency communication theories and models to reflect its dynamic interactive features. Traditional crisis communication tactics, mainly relying on

controlled messaging through press releases and press conferences, must catch up in this social media age (Roy, Hasan, Sadri, & Cebrian, 2020). The focus has shifted toward more interactive, responsive communication strategies that unfold in real-time with stakeholders. The most outstanding SMCC model was developed by Karen Freberg in 2019. It, therefore, emphasized that, at this point, social media influencers, organizational spokespersons, and online communities all contributed to shaping the narrative (Freberg, 2019). This is underlined in the SMCC model, where key advocates or influencers significantly impact providing credibility during a crisis by amplifying organizational messages.

Organizations can manage perceptions by leveraging social media actors via the SMCC model (Freberg, 2019). Social media influencers, for instance, can be trusted intermediaries in disseminating the organization's message to an even wider audience, thereby increasing its reach and effect (Vanninen, Mero, & Kantamaa, 2023). Organizational representatives might deliver official information and reactions to the concerns of the stakeholders. Still, the online community can be a rich source of feedback for analysis in estimating public opinion (Freberg, 2019). Organizations may develop a more complex and successful emergency communication plan by collaborating with these numerous players and addressing their stakeholders' varying requirements and expectations.

Mobilizing different elements of social media has serious ramifications for crisis communication strategy. It indicates that organizations must be proactive regarding monitoring social media channels and be prepared to engage a wide array of stakeholders promptly and transparently. The focus on influencers and online communities also implies that organizations must have prior relationships with influential social media actors. This proactive approach can help ensure that when a crisis does arise, the organization is well-positioned to respond effectively and maintain control over the narrative.

1.2.2 The Impact of Social Media on Stakeholder Engagement

Social media's influence extends beyond traditional communication; it has become crucial in shaping stakeholder engagement, especially during crises (Mirbabaie, Bunker, Stieglitz, Marx, & Ehnis, (2020). Unlike conventional communication channels that often involve a one-way flow of information from the organization to the public, social media facilitates a two-way exchange that allows stakeholders to participate actively in the emergency communication process. Luttrell (2022) notes that social media has made it easier for people to share information and express their perspectives widely, provide feedback, and even contribute to spreading information during a crisis. This democratization of communication means that organizations are no longer the sole narrators of their story; instead, stakeholders play an active role in shaping the narrative as it unfolds.

This increased participation from stakeholders can be both an asset and a liability for organizations during crises. On the positive side, social media allows organizations to receive immediate feedback from their audience, which can be invaluable in understanding public sentiment and adjusting strategies in real time (Luttrell, 2022). For example, an organization can quickly gauge the effectiveness of its crisis response by monitoring social media discussions, identifying emerging concerns, and addressing them promptly. This capability helps refine communication strategies and demonstrates that the organization is attentive and responsive to its stakeholders' needs, fostering a sense of trust and loyalty.

However, social media's open and unregulated nature also poses significant risks, particularly concerning the spread of misinformation. In a crisis, the rapid dissemination of false or misleading information can quickly escalate, causing confusion and potentially exacerbating the crisis (Cotter, DeCook, & Kanthawala, 2022). Misinformation can spread faster than official communications, making it difficult for organizations to control the narrative and correct inaccuracies. This situation is further complicated by bad actors or individuals who may

deliberately spread rumours or misinformation to damage an organization's reputation. Consequently, organizations must remain vigilant and proactive in monitoring social media channels, quickly addressing false information.

Social media's ability to aid interaction necessitates a shift in how organizations approach emergency communication. Unlike traditional media, where messages are carefully crafted and controlled, social media demands a more transparent and authentic communication style. Transparency and authenticity have become critical components of effective crisis communication in the digital era, as stakeholders increasingly demand transparency, honesty, and responsiveness from organizations (Kent & Taylor, 2016). This expectation is grounded in the belief that organizations that communicate transparently and authentically are more likely to be trusted by their audiences, particularly in times of crisis.

As a result, organizations must prioritize building and maintaining trust with their stakeholders through their emergency communication efforts. This involves providing timely and accurate information, acknowledging mistakes, addressing concerns candidly, and demonstrating a commitment to resolving the crisis. This allows organizations to cultivate a good connection with their stakeholders, which is critical for negotiating the intricacies of crises in the social media age.

1.2.3 Challenges of Social Media in Crisis Communication

Although social media is highly beneficial for crisis communication, it comes with significant challenges that organizations must address carefully. One of the primary challenges is how quickly information is shared on social media platforms. This rapid dissemination can be a double-edged sword. At the same time, it allows organizations to communicate quickly and efficiently with stakeholders, but it also means that misinformation, rumours, and false

narratives can spread just as swiftly. According to Veil, Buehner, and Palenchar (2011), the fast-paced nature of social media can create a situation where misinformation is disseminated far more rapidly than the organization can respond, making it difficult to control the narrative and manage public perception effectively. The viral spread of inaccurate information can escalate a crisis, causing confusion and potentially exacerbating the damage to an organization's reputation.

The pressure to respond swiftly on social media can lead organizations to issue hasty and sometimes ill-considered communications. In the rush to provide timely updates and address stakeholder concerns, there is a risk that messages may need to be thoroughly vetted or strategically crafted, which can result in ambiguous or contradictory information being released. Such missteps can further complicate crisis management efforts, as they may require additional clarification and damage control, undermining stakeholder trust and confidence in the organization. This need for speed must be balanced with the necessity for accuracy and consistency in messaging, a challenge that requires careful planning and execution (Veil et al., 2011).

Another significant challenge social media poses in emergency communication is the fragmented nature of the digital landscape. With numerous social media platforms available, each with its unique audience demographics, user behaviours, and communication styles, organizations are tasked with tailoring their messages to suit each platform while maintaining consistency across all channels. DiStaso, McCorkindale, and Wright (2011) highlight that this complexity necessitates a well-coordinated and strategic approach to social media management, particularly during crises when the stakes are high and the margin for error is slim. Crafting platform-specific messages that align with the organization's overall communication strategy requires a deep understanding of each platform's characteristics and the expectations of its users.

This fragmentation also means that organizations must be adept at managing multiple communication streams simultaneously. During a crisis, stakeholders may seek information and updates from various platforms, expecting timely and consistent responses across all channels. This expectation significantly burdens communication teams to monitor and engage with stakeholders in real time, often across different time zones and languages. Failing to do so can result in mixed messages or a perceived lack of responsiveness, further damaging the organization's reputation and hindering its crisis management efforts (DiStaso et al., 2011).

1.2.4 A Comprehensive Overview of Fire Accidents and Rescue Operations

To effectively capture the Ghana National Fire Service's (GNFS) response and communication strategies, a case study approach focused on significant incidents that reveal the organization's operational challenges and engagement through social media. The selected events for this study encompass various types of emergencies, particularly fire accidents, rescue operations, and other critical incidents that occurred in early 2024. For instance, the industrial fire at a plastic factory in Tema in January raised urgent concerns regarding safety regulations and the effectiveness of emergency response protocols (Yankah, 2024). Similarly, the market fire at Kantamanto Market in Accra in February highlighted the necessity for immediate communication to alleviate public fear and address misinformation (Darko, 2022).

In addition to fire accidents, the study also examined rescue operations that showcase the GNFS's capacity to communicate effectively under pressure. The rescue of trapped miners in Prestea in January was a critical example of the GNFS's ability to coordinate and inform the public during high-stakes situations (Ghanaweb, 2006). Likewise, the recovery of bodies from a drowned vehicle in the Volta River in March 2024 necessitated compassionate communication with grieving families, reflecting the sensitive nature of such emergencies

(myjoyonline.com, 2024). Furthermore, the rescue of passengers from a bus accident on the Accra-Kumasi highway in June 2024 involved extensive coordination and public updates, illustrating the GNFS's efforts to maintain transparency and engage with the community throughout the crisis (modernghana.com, 2024).

The study also encompasses other significant incidents that required adept communication strategies from the GNFS. For example, a chemical spillage at a manufacturing plant in Tema in February called for specialized communication focused on safety protocols to mitigate public concern. Similarly, the gas explosion at a restaurant in Accra in April 2024 highlighted the importance of real-time updates for public safety and reassurance. Finally, the collapse of a building under construction in Kumasi in July 2024 prompted an urgent response from the GNFS, further emphasizing the need for effective media communication in the aftermath of such disasters (Ofori, 2024).

1.3 Problem Statement

Social media has become an indispensable tool for organizations managing emergency communication. Its immediacy and broad reach enable organizations to disseminate information rapidly, connect with diverse stakeholders, and monitor public sentiment in real-time during crises. Coombs (2018) highlights that social media's accessibility allows organizations to manage reputations effectively by delivering timely and accurate information, potentially mitigating crises. For public institutions such as the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS), which operates in critical emergency response, leveraging social media is essential for maintaining public trust and safety during emergencies.

However, despite the opportunities presented by social media, its use during crises is challenging. The open nature of social media fosters the rapid spread of misinformation and

negative narratives, complicating efforts to maintain control over crisis communication (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). Freberg (2019) emphasizes that misinformation can significantly undermine public trust and perception, necessitating organizations to remain proactive and vigilant. Public institutions often need more support, including limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a need to address diverse linguistic and cultural audiences, which can hinder effective social media utilization (Luttrell, 2022).

In Ghana, where digital adoption has grown significantly, public institutions like the GNFS have made commendable strides in integrating social media into their crisis communication strategies. Studies have explored the role of social media in emergency communication in Ghana, identifying its potential to improve information dissemination and stakeholder engagement during crises (Ahiabenu et al., 2020). However, gaps still need to be in understanding the practical experiences of frontline responders, the effectiveness of social media strategies, and the persistent challenges public service organizations face in resource-constrained settings.

This study addresses these gaps by examining how the GNFS employs social media during crises, the experiences of its personnel, and the unique challenges it encounters in managing communication through these platforms. While previous studies have extensively analyzed corporate social media strategies and Western contexts (DiStaso, McCorkindale, & Wright, 2011; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), there is limited research that explores the operational and contextual nuances of public service institutions in emerging economies like Ghana.

Thus, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body of social media and crisis communication knowledge by focusing on the GNFS's experiences, strategies, and challenges. The findings will provide valuable insights into enhancing the efficacy of social media use in

emergency communication, particularly for public institutions operating in socioculturally and technologically diverse environments.

1.4 Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To explore how the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) utilizes social media platforms during emergency communication
2. To gain insights into GNFS personnel's experiences with using social media during crises.
3. To examine the challenges GNFS faces in using social media for emergency communication

1.5 Research Questions

1. How does the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) utilize social media platforms during emergency communication?
2. What are the experiences of GNFS personnel in using social media during crises?
3. What challenges does the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) face in utilizing social media tools for communication during a crisis?

1.6 Scope of the Study

The research focuses specifically on exploring the role of social media in emergency communication, with particular emphasis on the Ghana National Fire Service. This study explores how GNFS is harnessing social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in emergency communication management to determine strategies that may be employed to sustain public trust and protect the organization's reputation.

The present study focuses on the period between 2023 and 2024, a time frame chosen to ensure the inclusion of state-of-the-art trends in the context of social media utilization and its shifting impact on communication tactics for crises at GNFS. This period covers several significant incidents and emergency responses by GNFS. Hence, it provides a relevant, active environment to evaluate the effectiveness of social media strategies in communicating with the public during crises.

This study is geographically limited to Ghana and focuses on the operational context in which GNFS serves. It considers unique socio-cultural, economic, and technological factors that shape social media usage in the country. The emphasis on Ghana is to provide insight into the challenges and opportunities of emergency communication through social media in a developing nation, observing differences that might exist compared to more established economies.

Thus, a qualitative research design is adopted for the study that involves deep and lengthy interviews with the key personnel in GNFS; these include a Communications Director, Public Relations Officers, Social Media Managers, and other emergency communication staff. The interviews seek to provide an in-depth insight into communication tactics for crises adopted by the GNFS and how such strategies are executed with the help of social media. This paper

further analyzes the selected content on social media and public responses to those communications during significant emergency events.

Apart from those factors that directly relate to the use of social media during crises, other channels of communication than social media are beyond the focus of this research. This study excludes a comparison with other public service institutions or emergency response organizations in Ghana and abroad. This research focuses solely on the GNFS in pursuit of an in-depth case study of experiences, strategies, and lessons learned.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This is an important study because it forms the basis of helpful knowledge about the role of social media in communicating during a crisis within the context of a critical public service institution in Ghana- the GNFS. It offers new insights into how emergency response organizations use social media to develop markets with crises and communicate with the public to protect hard-earned reputation. With social media increasingly integral to the communication strategy in public safety and crisis management, understanding their impacts will be important in emergency services worldwide. The current study fills this knowledge gap in the broader academic literature by describing how social media has been used for emergency communication in non-Western and emerging contexts.

This research has enhanced knowledge of how effective communication can be used to gain and maintain the public's trust in technology and organizational reputation by assessing how the GNFS has used social media for communication in various crises. Particular attention is given to how the GNFS utilizes social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to provide timely and accurate information in emergencies quickly, engage with the public, and set the agenda. This analysis thus helps form better communication tactics for crises, using the

unique capabilities of social media to make the responses of public service organizations more effective in limiting damages or panic during crises.

It also gives some practical recommendations for GNFS and any other institution that could be determined to enhance its emergency communication approach through social media. This will give active advice on the best practices and shared challenges of effective social media use during emergencies. These recommendations are particularly apt for public service organizations operating in Ghana or other developing countries where the gap in digital infrastructure and user behaviour from the more developed nations would be unmatched. Such insight enables these organizations to adapt their social media approaches to the community's needs and expectations, enhancing public safety.

The study also points out that constant adaptation to changing digital environments is necessary to retain public trust and give confidence in effective communication during crises. Considering the changing social media platforms and evolving new digital technologies, GNFS, and organizations are pressed hard to constantly adapt to innovative communication tools and strategies through agile and proactive means. The study indicates the importance of updating public service organizations on current technological changes and adopting those changes in communication practices. This way, the organization will enhance its capability for crisis management and developmental stakeholder relationships and continue to establish community trust and credibility with the populace it serves.

1.8 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter One introduces the research topic, outlines the problem statement, and defines the scope and significance of the study, with a focus on the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS). Chapter Two provides a detailed review of existing

literature on social media in crisis management, exploring key theories, models, and empirical studies relevant to public service organizations. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, including the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. Chapter Four presents the study's findings, analysing data collected from interviews with key personnel at the GNFS, such as communication officers and crisis response managers. Chapter Five discusses the implications of the findings, drawing conclusions and offering recommendations for improving social media-based communication tactics for crises within the GNFS.

1.9 Conclusion

Chapter One introduces the study on the role of social media in emergency communication, focusing on the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS). It outlines the research problem, emphasizing the paradox of social media's benefits and risks in managing crises. The chapter details the study's significance, highlighting its contribution to analysing how social media influences crisis communication for public service organizations in emerging markets. It also describes the study's scope, methodology, and dissertation structure, setting the stage for a comprehensive exploration of how the GNFS uses social media during crises and how these strategies can be improved for more effective public engagement and trust management.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Chapter two examines existing research on the impact of social media on crisis communication about the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS). This winds through what has been studied about the conceptual underpinnings of social media and crisis management communication, a discussion of the theories involved in the research, and a review of related empirical research on the subject. It reviews the extant literature to develop a theoretical and empirical rationale that explains how social media shapes techniques for effective crisis communication and the effectiveness of the latter in sustaining public trust in and reputation management of public service organizations.

2.2 Examining How Social Media Influences Crisis Communication Strategies

Veil, Buehner, Palenchar (2011), and Freberg (2019) examine social media's role in crisis communication but approach the topic with different methodologies and focal points. Veil et al. (2011) used a mixed-method approach combining content analysis and interviews to examine how social media facilitates information dissemination and stakeholder engagement. Freberg (2019) applied the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model, focusing on the role of social media influencers and spokespersons in shaping crisis narratives. While both studies agree on the significance of social media in crisis communication, Freberg(2019) delves more into the challenges of managing misinformation and ensuring message consistency, a nuance that Veil et al. (2011) should have explored in depth. This study aims to build on both works by investigating how the Ghana National Fire Service uses social media during crises, combining insights from both research traditions while exploring local and contextual factors in crisis communication strategies.

Similarly, Kent and Taylor (2016) and Coombs (2018) offer complementary but distinct perspectives on social media's role in crisis communication. Kent and Taylor's research focuses on how social media platforms change stakeholder interaction, particularly emphasizing interactivity and immediacy. They provide empirical evidence that social media enhances engagement compared to traditional media. On the other hand, Coombs (2018) takes a more strategic, theoretical approach, concentrating on aligning crisis response strategies with the crisis type. While both recognize social media's importance, Kent and Taylor (2016) emphasize interactive engagement, while Coombs (2018) provides a broader, strategic framework for understanding crisis responses. This study integrates these perspectives by investigating how the Ghana National Fire Service uses social media to engage stakeholders and manage crises, considering both interactive communication and strategic response in a local context.

Luttrell (2022) and DiStaso, McCorkindale, and Wright (2011) further elucidate how social media influences crisis response strategies. Luttrell (2022) examined transparency and authenticity in crisis communication on social media through qualitative interviews and content analysis. Her findings reveal that open and honest communication through social media is essential to help an organization prevent stakeholder trust loss and reduce reputational damage. DiStaso et al. (2011) alternatively studied the strategic usage of social media sites for crisis management through a survey approach. The present study revealed that different social media sites require different strategies as each site has its audience, and different modes of communication exist. While Luttrell (2022) focuses on how authenticity can help with credibility, DiStaso et al. (2011) extend the discussion to emphasize the need for different strategies on each platform. Both provide something important to underpin how social media can be used during crises, but from different perspectives. This study combines both approaches to analyse how the Ghana National Fire Service adapts its social media strategies for effective crisis communication, considering authenticity and platform-specific engagement.

Similarly, Kim and Lee (2020) utilized a structured experimental approach to analyze the effectiveness of various social media strategic responses during crises. Their findings indicate that proactive and reactive strategies can be effective depending on the crisis context, providing empirical evidence on how different strategies impact public perception. In contrast, Freberg (2019) focused on theoretical perspectives and case studies to understand the broader implications of social media on crisis communication. Freberg's (2019) study highlights the role of social media influencers and organizational spokespersons, whereas Kim and Lee (2020) provide empirical data on the effectiveness of specific response strategies. This study combines both perspectives, examining how the Ghana National Fire Service utilizes social media during crises, considering both strategic response effectiveness and the role of influencers or key spokespersons.

Muralidharan et al. (2011) conducted a content examination of social media reactions during crises and examined their impact on organizational reputation. Their results showed that timely and empathetic responses on social media can significantly enhance reputation management. Veil et al. (2011) have also reported that the advantages of social media allow for rapid information dissemination, but one of the negative chances is misinformation. Both studies converge on the timeliness of communication; however, they differ in emphasis on empathy and organizational reputation. While Muralidharan et al. (2011) focus on empathetic responses, as opposed to the broader Veil et al. (2011) examination of social media's advantages and pitfalls, a nuanced understanding of how social media influences crisis response strategies is provided. This study aims to integrate these findings by analysing how the Ghana National Fire Service uses social media, considering both the timeliness of responses and the necessity of empathy in reputation management.

2.3 Social Media's Role in Crisis Communication

Veil, Buehner, and Palenchar (2011) conducted a study examining how emergency agencies utilize social media to disseminate critical information during crises. Their research highlights that social media platforms enable rapid information sharing and facilitate direct communication between agencies and the public. They used a qualitative content analysis of case studies, emphasizing how platforms like Twitter and Facebook effectively spread safety messages and counter misinformation. Houston et al. (2015) analysed the broader uses of social media during crises, emphasizing the two-way communication capability that empowers communities to provide real-time feedback to emergency responders. Using a systematic review of existing literature, Houston et al. found that while social media supports information dissemination, it also allows for aggregating public concerns, which can guide emergency response efforts. The findings suggest that, although social media is a potent tool for rapid communication, its interactive nature can present challenges, such as managing the overwhelming volume of user-generated content during emergencies. This study aims to build on both perspectives by exploring how the Ghana National Fire Service leverages social media, considering the rapid dissemination of information and the interactive engagement with the public.

Lindsay (2011) explored the effectiveness of using social media for immediate situational understanding in disaster scenarios. Through a case study approach, Lindsay examined events like Hurricane Katrina and concluded that social media provides valuable real-time updates that can supplement traditional emergency communication methods. In contrast, Sutton, Palen, and Shklovski (2008) investigated the limitations and advantages of social media as a crisis communication tool, emphasizing its role in information crowdsourcing. They used an ethnographic research method, focusing on the response to the wildfires in Southern California in 2007. They found that while social media was invaluable for on-the-ground intelligence, it

posed data verification and reliability difficulties. These studies reveal a tension between the advantages of real-time information sharing and the potential drawbacks of verifying the accuracy of rapidly generated social media content. This study explores how the Ghana National Fire Service utilizes social media, considering both the benefits of real-time updates and the challenges of managing and verifying user-generated content during crises.

Eriksson (2018) explored the effect of social media communication strategies on public trust in emergency management agencies. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys and interviews with emergency communication professionals, Eriksson (2018) discovered that transparent and timely social media updates significantly boost public trust. Austin, Fisher Liu, and Jin (2012) conducted an experimental study analysing how the tone and framing of social media messages affect audience perception during crises. They found that empathetic and informative messaging increased public engagement and positive perceptions of the organization. These findings indicate that the style and content of social media communication are critical in shaping public trust, with strategic and empathetic messaging proving more effective. This study will build on both approaches by investigating how the Ghana National Fire Service uses social media, considering both the timeliness of updates and the empathetic tone of their communication to build trust and engage the public effectively during crises.

Reuter, Ludwig, Kaufhold, and Pipek (2016) conducted a study on the adaptability of emergency agencies in leveraging social media, employing a survey of European emergency responders. They concluded that organizations with comprehensive social media strategies were better equipped to manage crises effectively. Kim and Hastak (2018) focused on the U.S. context and used a content analysis approach to assess how emergency management agencies adapted their strategies based on social media feedback. Their research found that agencies that

dynamically adjusted their messaging based on public sentiment data had higher success rates in crisis management. These studies underline the importance of strategic and flexible social media use, indicating that proactive and adaptive strategies are more effective in navigating the complexities of crisis communication. This study builds on these findings by examining how the Ghana National Fire Service adapts its social media strategies to manage crisis communication effectively.

2.4 Assessing the Effectiveness of These Strategies in Managing Corporate Reputation During Crises

Muralidharan, Dillistone, Singhal (2011), and Coombs (2018) provide insights into this area. Muralidharan et al. (2011) employed content analysis to examine social media responses to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Their study found that timely and empathetic responses significantly enhance corporate reputation by addressing stakeholder concerns and demonstrating organizational accountability. On the other hand, Coombs (2018) utilized theoretical analysis and case studies to explore the broader strategic frameworks for crisis communication. Coombs (2018) emphasized the importance of matching crisis response strategies to the type of crisis, suggesting that effectiveness is influenced by alignment between crisis type and response approach. While Muralidharan et al. (2011) focused on the practical application of social media in a specific crisis, Coombs provided a more general theoretical perspective on strategic effectiveness. This study will combine both insights to analyze the Ghana National Fire Service's approach to social media in crisis communication.

Kim and Liu (2012) and Kent and Taylor (2016) focused their study on assessing social media strategies. Kim and Liu (2012) surveyed to investigate how different social media strategies impact corporate reputation during crises. Their findings highlighted that proactive engagement and transparency are crucial for maintaining a positive reputation. In comparison,

Kent and Taylor (2016) used case studies and content analysis to examine the shift from traditional to social media-based crisis communication. They found that social media's interactive nature allows for more nuanced and responsive communication, positively affecting reputation management. While Kim and Liu(2011) provided quantitative evidence of strategy effectiveness, Kent and Taylor offered qualitative insights into the evolution of communication practices, highlighting the interactive benefits of social media. This study draws from both perspectives to explore how the Ghana National Fire Service applies social media strategies in crisis communication.

Veil, Buehner, and Palenchar (2011) provide a different perspective compared to the research by Muralidharan et al. (2011). Veil et al. (2011) conducted a mixed-method analysis, including content analysis and interviews, to evaluate social media's role in crisis communication. They found that while social media facilitates rapid information dissemination, its effectiveness in managing reputation depends on the organization's ability to address misinformation and maintain message consistency. Muralidharan et al. (2011) focused on empathetic responses during the oil spill crisis, emphasizing that empathy is a key factor in reputational recovery. Both studies agree on the importance of addressing stakeholder concerns but differ in their focus on broad social media roles or specific response strategies. This study will combine these insights by examining how the Ghana National Fire Service utilizes social media for information dissemination and engagement while addressing the emotional aspect of communication during crises.

2.5 Identifying Best Practices for Leveraging Social Media During Crises

Jin, Liu, and Austin (2014) and Claar and Austin (2020) researched best practices for leveraging social media during crises. Jin et al. (2014) used content analysis to explore how organizations manage crises through social media. Their study revealed consistent and

transparent communication enhances trust and mitigates reputational damage. Claar and Austin (2020) employed a mixed-method approach, including interviews and content analysis, to examine the effectiveness of interactive social media strategies. Their findings suggested that interactive and two-way communication improves crisis management by fostering stakeholder engagement and trust. While Jin et al. focused on content consistency, Claar and Austin (2020) emphasized the role of interaction and engagement, showcasing different facets of effective social media use. This study integrates these perspectives by examining how the Ghana National Fire Service utilizes consistent messaging and interactive strategies to engage the public during crises.

Neff and Walker (2019) surveyed to evaluate the best social media crisis communication practices. Their results highlighted the importance of real-time updates and strategic messaging tailored to specific stakeholder groups. Conversely, McDonald and Litchfield (2022) used case studies to analyse how organizations adapt their social media strategies during crises. They found that adapting strategies based on crisis type and audience feedback leads to better reputation management. Neff and Walker provided quantitative data on specific practices, while McDonald and Litchfield offered qualitative insights into adaptive strategies, offering complementary views on best practices. This study incorporates both perspectives by analyzing how the Ghana National Fire Service adapts its strategies while focusing on real-time, targeted communication during crises.

Coombs (2019) and Briones, Kuch, and Castillo (2021) further illustrate the evolving landscape of social media crisis communication. Coombs (2019) used a theoretical framework to discuss integrating social media into crisis communication strategies, emphasizing the need for alignment with crisis types. Briones et al. (2021) employed a mixed-method approach to investigate the impact of social media strategies on crisis management outcomes. They found

that proactive and transparent communication and audience engagement significantly improve crisis response effectiveness. Coombs provided a strategic framework for understanding best practices, while Briones et al. delivered empirical evidence on their practical application, highlighting both theoretical and practical aspects. This study will combine these perspectives by analysing how the Ghana National Fire Service integrates strategic frameworks and practical applications of social media during crises.

Fitzpatrick and Bronstein (2020) and Liu, Austin, and Jin (2021) offer additional insights into social media best practices. Fitzpatrick and Bronstein (2020) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the role of social media over time during crises. Their research indicated that ongoing engagement and updates are critical for maintaining public trust. Liu et al. (2021) used a case study methodology to assess the effectiveness of specific social media tactics, such as real-time monitoring and influencer engagement. Their findings underscored the importance of tailored responses and the strategic use of influencers in managing crises. Fitzpatrick and Bronstein (2021) focused on the temporal aspect of social media communication. Meanwhile, Liu et al. (2021) highlighted the strategic deployment of tactics and influencers, providing a broad view of best practices. The present study aims to integrate both perspectives by examining how consistent engagement and targeted social media strategies contribute to crisis communication effectiveness, focusing on the impact of social media platforms during crises.

Martin and DeLorme (2022) employed a content analysis approach to explore the role of narrative strategies in social media crisis communication. They found that storytelling and narrative framing can significantly enhance public perception and engagement during crises. Lee and Kim (2023) used an experimental design to test the effectiveness of different response strategies, such as immediacy and personalization. Their findings indicated that personalized communication improves stakeholder engagement and reputation management. Martin and

DeLorme focused on narrative techniques, while Lee and Kim provided empirical evidence on response strategies, illustrating different dimensions of effective social media use. This study aims to build on these findings by examining how both narrative framing and personalized responses contribute to the overall success of social media communication strategies during crises.

2.6 Understanding the Challenges of Social Media in Crisis Communication

Veil, Buehner, and Palenchar (2022) and Briones (2021) also provide insights into the operational challenges of social media during crises. Veil et al. (2022) utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and interviews, to assess the effectiveness of social media monitoring tools and strategies. Their study found that while social media monitoring can help identify and address issues promptly, it also presents challenges related to information overload and the need for continuous vigilance. Briones (2021), on the other hand, carried out a content analysis of social media posts during crises, revealing that the sheer volume of user-generated content can overwhelm organizations and obscure critical information. This research highlighted the difficulty in filtering relevant information and responding effectively amidst social media noise. Veil et al. (2021) focused on monitoring and management strategies, whereas Briones (2021) concentrated on content and information overload, providing a broader view of the operational challenges. This study examines the operational challenges and opportunities social media presents during crises.

Kent and Taylor (2022) and Sweetser and Metzgar (2019) further explain the challenges of social media in crisis communication. Kent and Taylor (2022) employed a qualitative approach, analyzing how organizations' social media strategies evolve in response to crises. They found that while social media allows for direct engagement, it also necessitates high

transparency and responsiveness, which can be challenging to maintain consistently. Using a content analysis method, Sweetser and Metzgar (2019) examined the effectiveness of different social media crisis communication strategies. Their research revealed that the success of these strategies depends on how healthy organizations balance immediacy with accuracy. Both studies emphasize the need for effective management of transparency and responsiveness, with Kent and Taylor focusing on strategic evolution and Sweetser and Metzgar analysing specific communication tactics. This study builds on these insights to propose refined approaches for overcoming the dual demands of speed and accuracy in leveraging social media during crises.

Similarly, Kim and Kim (2021) and Liu, Wang, and Zhao (2023) provide additional perspectives on the challenges faced by organizations using social media during crises. Kim and Kim (2021) used a survey-based approach to explore how different crisis types affect social media communication challenges. Their findings indicated that the category of the crisis significantly influences the effectiveness of social media strategies, with different crises requiring tailored communication approaches. Liu et al. (2023) employed an experimental design to test how various social media responses impact public perception during crises. Their research found that while quick responses are crucial, they must be carefully crafted to avoid exacerbating the crisis. Kim and Kim focused on crisis-type-specific challenges, while Liu et al. examined the impact of response speed and content, highlighting the importance of context in managing social media crises. This study analyses how organizations can effectively leverage social media during crises, emphasizing adaptive strategies, the management of challenges such as misinformation and transparency, and aligning responses to specific crisis contexts.

Martin and DeLorme (2021) and Liu and Austin (2022) also offer further insights into the challenges of social media in crisis communication. Martin and DeLorme (2021) utilized a case

study approach to investigate how narrative strategies influence crisis management on social media. They found that storytelling can mitigate challenges by shaping public perception and managing information flow. Liu and Austin (2022) employed a quantitative analysis to examine the role of real-time monitoring and response strategies. Their study highlighted that while real-time monitoring is essential, it presents challenges with resource allocation and information accuracy. Martin and DeLorme emphasized narrative techniques, while Liu and Austin (2022) focused on the logistical challenges of real-time monitoring, illustrating different strategies to address social media challenges. This study explores the complexities of using social media in crisis communication, including its advantages, challenges, and best practices.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

2.7.1 Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

This section explores the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), a crucial framework for analysing crisis communication strategies. Developed by W. Timothy Coombs, SCCT offers a structured approach to managing communication during crises, emphasizing how the type of crisis and stakeholder perceptions influence the efficiency of organizational responses.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory is grounded in the premise that the nature of a crisis fundamentally impacts the communication strategy an organization should adopt. Coombs (2018) propounds those categories of crises, including victim, accidental, and preventable types, that demand tailored communication responses. For instance, a supportive and reassuring communication approach is appropriate in a victim crisis, where the organization is perceived as having been harmed by external factors. Conversely, a more apologetic and corrective strategy is necessary in a preventable crisis, where the organization is seen as

responsible for the crisis. This differentiation helps organizations choose the most effective communication tactics based on the crisis's context and severity (Coombs, 2018).

A core assumption of SCCT is that stakeholder perceptions significantly influence the communication strategy. According to the theory, how stakeholders view an organization's role in a crisis affects the response type required. If stakeholders believe the organization is responsible, they will likely expect a more substantive and reparative response, such as apologies and corrective actions. On the other hand, if the organization is perceived as a victim in the crisis scenario, it should focus on providing reassurance and emphasizing external factors beyond its control (Coombs, 2018). Thus, understanding stakeholder perceptions is crucial for aligning communication strategies with their expectations, which helps manage public sentiment and maintain organizational reputation.

Another fundamental assumption of SCCT is that the choice of response strategies impacts the organization's reputation. Coombs (2018) identifies various response strategies, such as denial, diminishment, rebuilding, and bolstering. Each strategy serves different purposes and has distinct implications for the organization's reputation. For example, a rebuilding strategy, which involves acknowledging mistakes, offering apologies, and implementing corrective measures, can effectively repair reputation damage and rebuild trust with stakeholders. This approach underscores the importance of selecting appropriate response strategies to mitigate negative impacts and enhance the organization's credibility.

Additionally, SCCT posits that the severity of the crisis should guide the intensity and type of communication strategy. The theory suggests that more severe crises necessitate more robust and proactive communication efforts. In such cases, organizations must communicate extensively to resolve stakeholder issues, provide prompt updates, and show dedication to resolving the issue (Coombs, 2018). This alignment between the crisis's severity and the

communication strategy helps ensure that the organization's responses are commensurate with the level of concern and urgency.

Researchers have widely applied the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) across various sectors to analyse how organizations manage crises and safeguard their reputations. Coombs (2007), one of the pioneers of the theory, delves into the various strategies for responding to crises, such as denial, expressions of apology, and corrective actions. His research reveals that these strategies, when appropriately aligned with the nature of the crisis, can significantly influence public perception and minimize reputational damage. The theory provides a strategic model for organizations to choose the best course of action based on the type of crisis they face, considering factors such as the organization's level of responsibility, the severity of the incident, and the emotional state of stakeholders. This adaptability is central to the SCCT's practical application, making it a valuable tool for organizations seeking to mitigate the impact of a crisis on their public image. Moreover, SCCT has been extended beyond its original corporate context to other sectors, including public health, where its principles guide crisis communication in high-stakes, fast-moving situations.

Researchers have extensively leveraged SCCT to enhance communication strategies during public health crises, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lilleker and Stoeckle (2021) illustrated how SCCT frameworks enabled governments to craft messages that balanced empathy and transparency, crucial for reducing public fear and fostering trust in institutions. Through social media, organizations applied SCCT principles to provide real-time updates, dispel misinformation, and guide behavioural compliance with health directives. Social media's interactive nature amplified SCCT's effectiveness, offering direct engagement and enabling feedback loops to address public concerns efficiently. Additionally, Wong and Jensen (2020) underscored SCCT's adaptability to diverse cultural contexts, demonstrating its value

in tailoring communication strategies that accounted for social, linguistic, and behavioural nuances. This approach enhanced message clarity and fostered inclusivity and collaboration across varied demographics. These studies show SCCT's vital role in crisis communication, ensuring responsiveness to dynamic, culturally complex public health emergencies.

Corporate crisis communication studies have increasingly employed SCCT to evaluate how organizations navigate reputational threats, particularly those requiring immediate accountability. Subramanian et al. (2022) demonstrated SCCT's relevance in analysing responses to data breaches, a growing concern in today's digital economy. Businesses that employed apology strategies effectively reduced stakeholder anger by admitting fault, offering reparations, and outlining corrective measures. These actions were instrumental in regaining trust and mitigating reputational damage. SCCT's framework also highlighted the importance of tailoring responses based on crisis severity and stakeholder expectations. In data breaches, stakeholders often demand transparency and swift rectification, making SCCT-guided strategies especially crucial. Furthermore, these findings emphasize SCCT's adaptability to high-stakes crises where proactive communication and responsible behaviour are pivotal to sustaining public trust and long-term organizational credibility. This underscores SCCT's role in damage control and fostering stakeholder relationships during post-crisis recovery.

SCCT has proven essential in understanding how digital platforms, such as social media, have transformed crisis communication strategies in the modern era. Malecki et al. (2020) emphasized that platforms like Twitter and Facebook enabled organizations to disseminate critical information quickly, offering real-time updates and direct engagement with a broad audience during health crises. These platforms facilitated the immediate spread of reassuring messages, corrected misinformation, and addressed public concerns. In doing so, digital media has enhanced the reach and effectiveness of SCCT, making it even more relevant in the fast-

paced, interactive landscape of contemporary crisis management. Adapting SCCT to these digital contexts has become indispensable for an organization's efforts to preserve trust and limit reputational harm during crises.

2.7.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), as proposed by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1973, suggests that media consumers actively participate in media consumption. Unlike other theories that view audiences as passive consumers, UGT asserts that individuals use media to satisfy particular purposes, including informational, emotional, social, and entertainment-related needs. The theory emphasizes that people make conscious choices about media content, and fulfilling personal desires and gratifications drives their media use.

Since its introduction, UGT has been widely applied across various contexts to understand media consumption behaviour. One of the earliest applications was in traditional media, such as television and radio. Katz et al. (1973) proposed that people use television for different gratifications, such as seeking information, relaxation, or emotional engagement. Their work demonstrated that media consumption is not merely about passively receiving information but actively selecting content that aligns with personal needs and motivations. This laid the groundwork for further investigations into how media consumers interact with various forms of media.

In the digital age, UGT has been extended to newer media platforms, mainly social media. Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) applied UGT to examine how social networking sites, like Facebook and MySpace, fulfil users' social interaction and entertainment needs. Their research found that users often engage with these platforms to maintain social connections, share experiences, and pass time, confirming that UGT remains relevant in the era of digital media.

Whiting and Williams (2013) also explored social media usage using UGT. They identified that reasons, including entertainment, social interaction, and information seeking, were key factors driving engagement with platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Scholars have widely applied UGT across various media contexts to examine why and how people leverage various forms of media. For example, Katz et al. (1973) applied the theory to traditional media such as television, suggesting that people watch television programs based on their needs, whether for information, entertainment, or relaxation. In recent years, UGT has been extended to digital and social media contexts. Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) explored the motivations behind social media use, noting that individuals use platforms like Facebook and Twitter to maintain social connections, seek entertainment, or manage self-presentation. Similarly, Whiting and Williams (2013) identified specific gratifications derived from social media use, such as social interaction, information seeking, and passing time, confirming that UGT continues to be relevant in understanding how individuals engage with newer forms of media.

Furthermore, UGT has been used to analyze mobile media consumption. For instance, Junco (2012) applied UGT to study college students' use of social media and their academic performance, revealing that the use of social media could be driven by the desire to fulfil social or entertainment needs, with some students using it as a form of escapism, while others used it for educational purposes. The theory has also been applied to crisis communication studies, where researchers like Iqbal et al. (2020) have explored how people use social media during emergencies to gather information, share experiences, and seek emotional support, illustrating the theory's continued relevance in understanding contemporary media behaviours.

UGT has also been applied to exploit the use of media during crises. Iqbal et al. (2020) explored how social media users engaged with online platforms during emergencies and found that

individuals turn to these platforms for various reasons, including seeking information, emotional support, and connecting with others affected by the crisis. The study revealed that during times of uncertainty, social media is a critical tool for obtaining immediate updates, expressing personal feelings, and providing emotional comfort. UGT's flexibility makes it a valuable framework for analysing how people adapt their media use to fulfil different needs during complex, crisis-driven contexts.

In addition to its application in crisis communication, UGT has also been used to examine the role of media in political engagement and public opinion. For example, Ruggiero (2000) applied UGT to investigate how individuals use the internet to access political news and engage in political discussions. The study found that people use the internet to gather information, interact with others, and express their opinions, highlighting that a need for personal expression and participation in the political process often drives media use. This application of UGT expanded the theory's scope, illustrating its relevance in understanding social behaviours and political dynamics in the digital age.

2.8 Conclusion

Chapter Two has provided a detailed review of the studies concerning social media and crisis communication, highlighting key theories, empirical findings, and best practices. The chapter has examined the Theoretical framework of crisis communication and social media's role in crisis communication. It highlighted the significance of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT). The study also reviewed empirical studies on how social media influences crisis communication strategies, their effectiveness, and best practices. This literature review establishes the foundation for understanding the dynamics of social media in managing crises. It sets the stage for the subsequent chapters, which will delve into the research methodology and findings of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological paradigm to be applied in this study. It highlights how this research has been conducted to discover the role of social media in shaping communication strategies for crises at the Ghana National Fire Service. This includes research design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques for solving the research objectives. These methodological approaches are detailed herein to ensure the validity and reliability of findings that detail, in clear and systematic detail, how social media influences GNFS' efforts at crisis communication during emergency response situations.

3.2 Research Approach and Design

The research methodology adopted for this study is a qualitative approach, taking the form of a case study to explore the effect of social media on communication tactics for crises at the Ghana National Fire Service. Qualitative research is primarily beneficial in studying complex and multifaceted phenomena, such as organizational crisis communication, for which processes, motivations, and contextual factors should be closely and intricately investigated (Creswell, 2018). Utilizing this design, the researcher will thoroughly analyze how the GNFS manages crisis communication through social media and consider the strategies and challenges involved.

The qualitative approach would be significant in this research as it would allow the researcher to study how one organization experiences social media during crises comprehensively. According to Yin (2018), a case study is an appropriate methodology that investigates contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are unclear. In the case of GNFS, this approach allows an in-

depth case study of the specifics of its practices, hence allowing detailed insights into how social media is put to work during crises. It allows flexibility in studying the details of the role of social media regarding communication tactics during crises at the Ghana National Fire Service and their effectiveness in the actual setting.

This is one of the primary reasons for choosing qualitative research: it will successfully capture inbuilt complexity and dynamism within crisis communication. Qualitative methods and semi-structured interviewing allow for rich data in the form of narratives to be collected that can reveal the subtlety of organizational responses and stakeholder interactions during crises (Patton, 2015). This is even more valid in the case of social media due to the speed of information and the interactive nature of digital channels; in crises, it is dynamic and ever-changing. This study uses qualitative data to understand the distinctive approach that the GNFS has taken, as well as some challenges and opportunities concerning the use of social media during emergencies.

Besides, qualitative research allows for exploring respondents' views and observations, in their own words, critical requirements in understanding practical realities associated with crisis communication (Maxwell, 2013). The in-depth interview format adopted in this paper allows participants to respond in a way that captures structure and flexibility regarding their experiences and insights from their complex roles and contexts. This is even more helpful in the nuanced exploration of the uses of social media during crises and provides broad insight into how the GNFS adapts its strategies to evolving challenges.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy for this study was designed to ensure that the participants selected had relevant experience and expertise to provide valuable feedback on the impact of social media on communication tactics for crises within the Ghana National Fire Service. A purposive

sampling approach was used, particularly effective when the research aims to gain in-depth knowledge from a specific group of individuals who possess specialized knowledge (Palinkas et al., 2015).

In this case, 9 Ghana National Fire Service Public Relations Officers were selected as participants. These officers were chosen based on their prior experience managing the service's social media platforms and their understanding of how they are used in crisis communication. The purposive sampling technique allowed the researcher to focus on individuals who were not only familiar with the dynamics of social media but also actively engaged in its strategic use within the organization.

Participants' involvement in managing social media and their role in communication during emergencies suited them to offer insights into the effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities social media presents in crisis communication. This approach ensures that the findings are relevant to the specific context of the Ghana National Fire Service and its use of digital platforms for public outreach and communication during crises.

The selection of participants was also guided by the need to capture diverse perspectives within the Public Relations Department. By interviewing officers from this department at the national and regional levels, their insights reflected the various approaches to crisis communication strategies and the use of social media within GNFS's central operations. This focused yet diverse range of perspectives enriched the research by providing an extensive understanding of the overall impact of social media on crisis communication strategies at GNFS.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Data collection for this study was primarily conducted through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders within the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS). This approach was selected to

provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media is utilized in crisis communication tactics and to capture various perspectives on these practices. The participants comprised 9 Public Relations Officers from the Ghana National Fire Service, each with prior experience managing the organization's social media platforms and a strong understanding of their use and dynamics. Each participant brought unique perspectives, offering valuable insights into how social media influences communication tactics for crises within the Ghana National Fire Service.

Comprehensive face-to-face interviews were chosen as the primary methods for collecting data due to their flexibility and depth. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), in-depth interviews are instrumental in qualitative research. They allow for open-ended responses, enabling participants to share detailed and nuanced information about their experiences. This format strikes a balance between structured questions and conversational freedom, facilitating a deeper exploration of the participants' insights into the effects of social media on crisis communication at GNFS. This approach also allows the interviewer to modify the questions based on the flow of the conversation, guaranteeing that relevant topics are thoroughly explored.

The Public Relations Officers provided high-level insights into strategic decision-making and the impact of social media on communication tactics for crises at the Ghana National Fire Service. The researcher will interview nine (9) research participants in-depth. The Public Relations Officers contributed specific insights into using digital platforms and the practicalities of managing social media during crises. This diverse participant pool ensures that the study captures a broad spectrum of experiences and viewpoints, enhancing the richness of the data collected (Bryman, 2016).

Interviews were conducted with a pre-defined set of questions to uncover detailed information about social media practices in resolving crises and the effectiveness of these approaches. Audio recordings of the interview were made after obtaining participant consent. Each interview was transcribed verbatim into text for detailed analysis to maintain accuracy and ensure that participants' responses were captured in their entirety. Transcriptions were then analysed to identify key themes and patterns related to social media's impact on communication tactics for crises (Silverman, 2019). The choice of comprehensive interviews to collect data was further justified by their ability to provide rich, context-specific data for understanding complex phenomena such as crisis communication in the digital age. This method enables researchers to explore participants' personal experiences and professional insights in detail, offering a thorough understanding of how social media influences crisis communication practices at the GNFS (Flick, 2018).

3.6 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the interview data for this study systematically. This approach is well-suited to qualitative research as it focuses on identifying and interpreting patterns or themes within the data, which helps gain insights into participants' experiences and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis process began with an initial stage of familiarization with the data, repeatedly examining the interview transcripts to ensure a deep comprehension of the content and context. This thorough engagement with the data ensures that the researcher becomes deeply acquainted with the material, essential for accurate and meaningful analysis.

Once familiarization was complete, the next step involved generating initial codes. Coding is a crucial process in thematic analysis where specific data segments are identified and labelled according to their significance and relevance to the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

This study developed initial codes by systematically highlighting important excerpts from the transcripts related to social media use and communication tactics for crises within the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS). This coding process helped distil the vast amount of qualitative data into manageable and meaningful units, which could be further analysed to uncover broader themes.

Following the coding process, the data were grouped into themes. Themes are patterns or clusters of codes that highlight important aspects of the data about the study questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This phase involved reviewing and organizing the initial codes into coherent categories representing recurring topics and insights. This thematic organization facilitates a structured examination of how social media influences communication tactics for crises at the GNFS.

The thematic analysis provided a detailed and systematic approach to understanding how social media impacts crisis communication tactics. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the nuances and dynamics of social media interactions and their implications for crisis management, providing a clear understanding of the organization's opportunities and challenges.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are crucial when conducting research involving human participants to ensure their rights and welfare are upheld during the study. This research adhered to established ethical guidelines, focusing on key aspects such as informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy to uphold the study's integrity and the participants' trust.

Obtaining informed consent is a critical obligation in research involving human subjects. According to the principles outlined by the Belmont Report (1979), participants must be fully

informed about the nature, purpose, and potential impacts of the research before agreeing to participate. In this study, informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting the interviews. Participants were provided with a detailed information sheet explaining the research objectives, the nature of their involvement, and any potential risks associated with participation. They were also informed that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw without facing any negative consequences (Sanghvi, 2020). This process ensured that participants made an informed decision about their involvement and understood their rights within the research context.

Confidentiality is a key feature of ethical research, ensuring that respondents' identities and personal information are protected. In this study, measures were implemented to maintain the confidentiality of the interview data. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to prevent the identification of individuals in any published findings. Likewise, the recordings and transcripts were securely stored, with access restricted to the researcher. Data were anonymized and aggregated to prevent the disclosure of individual responses. These practices align with the American Psychological Association (APA) 's ethical guidelines and ensure that participants' personal information remains protected (APA, 2017).

Privacy concerns are closely related to confidentiality and involve protecting participants' personal information from unauthorized access or disclosure. During the data collection, participants were assured that their responses would be kept private and used solely for research purposes. The interview settings were designed to be private, and participants were encouraged to speak freely without concerns about their privacy being compromised. Additionally, identifying details that could reveal the participants' identities were omitted from the final report to safeguard their privacy (Hesse-Biber, 2017). These practices are based on data

protection and privacy principles, ensuring participants' personal information is handled with the highest care and respect.

3.8 Limitations

Though this study has been valuable in determining how the GNFS uses social media for crisis communication, a few limitations must be noted. First, focusing on only one organization limits the generality of the research findings. Because the research was done solely on the GNFS, the findings cannot be generalized to other organizations or sectors. Communication tactics for crises and social media practices differ for various entities on size, operational context, and industry dynamics. Thus, the generalization of its findings to other contexts and sectors may need to be higher. This understanding could have been more fully achieved by incorporating multiple organizations across various sectors to give an overall perspective on how social media affects communication tactics for crises.

The second limitation is reliance on interviews with internal stakeholders within the GNFS. Although such participants provided rich information about the current state of practices in crisis communication of the organization in question, there is a possibility of inherent biases in their responses. For instance, internal stakeholders, who in this case are the Director of Public Relations and Social Media Manager, may have a vested interest in the positive representation of their strategies and may respond accordingly. In this regard, the triangulation of data obtained from interviews with relevant literature and theoretical positions will reduce the possible effect of bias. That means that the study's findings had been tested for validity based on the already approved knowledge to be more objective of the presented data. This way, including the sources of information from outside, the impact of any potential biases of the participants introduced due to their organizational roles was minimal.

Again, the study confines itself to qualitative data through in-depth face-to-face interviews, thus potentially limiting its scope. While qualitative research provides an in-depth analysis of participants' experiences and insights, it cannot amply present all the quantitative metrics relating to social media's impact and crisis communication efficacy. To complement these qualitative findings, further research might include quantitative methods, such as surveying or content-analysing social media metrics. This would extend such an analysis of social media for crisis communication.

Finally, the methodological approach and scope of the study may have introduced constraints in terms of time and resources. The depth of analysis required for thematic coding and the thorough examination of interview data necessitated a focused methodology, which might limit the breadth of the investigation. Expanding the research to include a larger sample of participants, multiple case studies, or different methodological approaches could offer a more extensive evaluation of social media's impact on communication tactics for crises within the GNFS.

3.9 Notes on the Appendix

Appendix A provides the interview guide used in the study titled "Effects of Social Media on Crisis Communication: A Study of the Ghana National Fire Service." This guide explores how the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) utilizes social media platforms during crises, the experiences of GNFS personnel in leveraging these tools, and the challenges faced in such scenarios. It is structured into three key areas: the selection and implementation of social media platforms for crisis communication, the personal experiences of GNFS personnel, and the operational and technical challenges encountered. The interview questions are designed to gather insights on GNFS's strategies, the impact of social media on crisis management effectiveness, and potential improvements for future use. This appendix serves as a critical

resource for understanding the interplay between social media and crisis communication within the GNFS.

Appendix B outlines the codes and themes identified in the study on the effects of social media on crisis communication by the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS). These themes capture key insights into the organization's use of social media platforms during crises, structured into several categories: platform selection, the crisis communication process, accuracy and reliability of information, technical challenges, public feedback, misinformation management, and the overall impact of social media on crisis response. Each theme highlights the GNFS's strategies and challenges, such as the prominence of Facebook, reliance on WhatsApp for information coordination, technical limitations, and the dual nature of public feedback. The appendix serves as an analytical framework that connects operational practices with broader themes, offering a detailed view of the role and influence of social media in crisis management.

3.10 Conclusion

Chapter Three presented a thorough summary of the research methodology used in this study, concentrating on how social media affected the crisis communication tactics within the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS). It detailed the qualitative case study approach and the thematic analysis techniques selected to provide insight into how social media influences crisis communication procedures in the organization. Additionally, the chapter discussed ethical considerations relevant to the research and outlined the limitations encountered during the study, ensuring a rigorous and transparent framework for understanding the research process and its findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the thematic analysis of the interviews conducted with Public Relations Officers (PROs) of the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS). The data is organized according to the primary research objectives and themes from the analysis. These include how GNFS uses social media for crisis communication, personnel's experiences in utilizing these platforms, and the challenges they face. The findings are discussed under the following themes: Social Media Platform Usage, Crisis Communication Process, Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication, Accuracy and Reliability of Information, Technical Challenges, Public Feedback and Engagement, Misinformation and Rumor Management, and Impact of Social Media on Crisis Response.

4.2 How the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) utilizes social media platforms during emergency communication

The study's findings highlight the various ways in which GNFS uses social media during emergencies. These ways are categorized into three key themes: Social Media Platform Usage, Crisis Communication Process, and Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication.

4.2.1 Social Media Platform Usage

The study revealed that the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) personnel extensively use social media platforms, each serving distinct functions during crisis situations. The participants provided valuable insights into how these platforms are utilized to achieve specific goals, which are explored below.

Participant 1 noted, "We rely on Twitter for rapid updates during emergencies, as it reaches people instantly" (Participant 1, personal communication, November 23, 2024). This highlights

Twitter's role as an effective platform for disseminating time-sensitive information to a broad audience. The immediacy of Twitter makes it suitable for providing real-time updates, such as alerts about ongoing fires or evacuation instructions. The platform's design, which prioritizes concise messaging and quick sharing, aligns well with the needs of emergency services like GNFS. This finding aligns with Hillebrand and Stein (2020), who emphasized that Twitter is indispensable for real-time crisis communication because of its speed and vast reach.

Participant 2 shared, "For larger-scale fires, we use Facebook to give detailed information and updates because it supports multimedia, which helps us show the situation more effectively" (Participant 2, personal communication, November 23, 2024). This quote underscores the multimedia capabilities of Facebook, which allow GNFS to share more comprehensive updates, including images, videos, and longer text explanations. Facebook's interactive features also facilitate public engagement, enabling citizens to ask questions and seek clarification. Research by Hillebrand and Stein (2020) corroborates this, noting that Facebook's versatility makes it ideal for detailed crisis communication. Similarly, Aidoo and Afriyie (2021) identified Facebook as a key platform in Ghana for sharing extensive updates during emergencies, further validating GNFS's approach.

Participant 3 explained, "WhatsApp is used primarily for internal coordination. We have group chats for real-time discussions and to ensure that all team members are on the same page" (Participant 3, personal communication, November 23, 2024). This statement highlights the critical role WhatsApp plays in ensuring seamless internal communication among GNFS personnel. Unlike platforms designed for public engagement, WhatsApp supports private, real-time discussions through group chats, which are essential for operational coordination during crises. Hillebrand and Stein's (2020) research did not explore WhatsApp in detail, suggesting that its application in internal crisis management is unique to contexts like GNFS. The

platform's encryption and reliability make it a valuable tool for sensitive and urgent communication.

Participant 4 elaborated, "Instagram allows us to engage visually with younger audiences, especially when sharing fire safety tips or post-crisis updates" (Participant 4, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This quote reflects GNFS's strategic use of Instagram to target younger demographics who are more visually inclined. By sharing eye-catching visuals and educational content, GNFS fosters public awareness about fire safety in a format that resonates with its audience. This aligns with findings from Aidoo and Afriyie (2021), who noted that visual social media platforms like Instagram are effective for raising awareness and engaging diverse audience segments.

Participant 5 summarized the strategic use of social media, stating, "Each platform has its purpose. Twitter works best for speed, Facebook for engagement, and WhatsApp for organizing our teams internally" (Participant 5, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This perspective encapsulates the multi-platform approach adopted by GNFS, demonstrating an understanding of each platform's unique strengths.

These findings align with existing literature. Hillebrand and Stein (2020) emphasized the tailored use of platforms like Twitter for speed and Facebook for engagement. However, GNFS's integration of WhatsApp for internal coordination adds a new dimension to crisis communication strategies. Aidoo and Afriyie (2021) also emphasized the growing reliance on social media platforms in Ghana's emergency management, highlighting their significance in real-time updates and public engagement.

4.2.2 Crisis Communication Process

The Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) has structured its crisis communication process to effectively leverage social media platforms for disseminating information during emergencies. Participant 4 described the workflow: “The process starts when we receive an alert of an emergency. After confirming the situation, we send out an initial update on Twitter. Once more information is available, we will provide further updates on Facebook and Instagram” (Participant 4, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This explanation underscores a step-by-step approach, starting with Twitter for its rapid outreach capabilities. The subsequent use of Facebook and Instagram reflects a strategic move to provide richer, more detailed content, including images and videos, which engage audiences more effectively.

Participant 1 emphasized the value of Twitter in rapid communication, stating, “We rely on Twitter for rapid updates during emergencies, as it reaches people instantly” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 23, 2024). This quote highlights the platform's immediacy, allowing GNFS to inform a broad audience within moments of a crisis occurring. Twitter’s real-time nature is particularly valuable in fast-evolving situations, such as fires or accidents, where every second counts.

For internal coordination, Participant 3 noted, “WhatsApp is used primarily for internal coordination. We have group chats for real-time discussions and to ensure that all team members are on the same page” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 23, 2024). This highlights how WhatsApp serves as a back-channel communication tool, fostering collaboration among team members. Real-time discussions in group chats allow for swift decision-making and efficient task allocation, ensuring a cohesive response.

The use of social media to guide the public during emergencies was further elaborated by Participant 5, who stated, “We use social media to guide the public to safety by providing information such as evacuation routes and shelter locations” (Participant 5, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This quote demonstrates the life-saving potential of social media when used to disseminate critical safety information.

Participant 6 underscored the transformation social media has brought to communication timelines: “In the past, it would take longer to inform the public through traditional media channels. Now, we can communicate directly with affected communities in real-time” (Participant 6, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This statement highlights the efficiency of social media in bridging the time gap between crisis occurrence and public notification, illustrating how digital platforms enable GNFS to bypass traditional media bottlenecks.

These insights align with Williams and Lee (2021), who found that social media allows organizations to communicate more quickly and directly with the public compared to traditional methods. GNFS’s reliance on different platforms for specific purposes mirrors best practices identified in crisis communication literature, which advocate for a multi-channel approach to reach diverse audiences. Similarly, Agyemang et al. (2018) observed that the growing adoption of social media among government agencies has improved response times and public safety outcomes, supporting GNFS’s strategy of leveraging these tools for efficient crisis management.

4.2.3 Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication

Social media has emerged as a pivotal tool in crisis communication, enabling organizations like the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) to disseminate timely and accurate information while engaging directly with the public. Participant 7 emphasized the reach and immediacy of

social media, stating, “Social media is crucial for reaching large numbers of people quickly. It allows us to counter misinformation and reassure the public that we are handling the situation” (Participant 7, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This underscores the utility of platforms such as Twitter and Facebook for addressing the public’s concerns and maintaining credibility. The ability to counter misinformation in real-time highlights the significance of these platforms in managing public trust during emergencies, a theme also emphasized in crisis communication literature by Smith and Jones (2019).

Participant 8 further highlighted the interactive nature of social media, noting, “It also gives us a platform to engage with the public directly, answering their questions and providing real-time updates” (Participant 8, personal communication, November 27, 2024). This interactive capacity enhances two-way communication, allowing GNFS not only to disseminate information but also to respond to queries and concerns, thereby building trust and transparency. The immediacy of real-time interaction aligns with findings by Aidoo and Afriyie (2021), who argue that such engagement is critical for fostering a collaborative relationship between emergency services and the public during crises.

Participant 9 focused on the emotional reassurance that social media provides during crises, explaining, “Social media helps us manage public perception. During a fire, the public is often fearful, but our presence on social media can provide reassurances that the situation is under control” (Participant 9, personal communication, November 27, 2024). This highlights the psychological dimension of crisis communication, where timely updates and reassurances serve to calm fears and reduce panic. Smith and Jones (2019) support this perspective, arguing that public trust hinges on consistent and transparent communication during emergencies.

The proactive use of social media for safety guidance was also emphasized by Participant 6, who remarked, “Platforms like Twitter and Facebook allow us to instantly share precautionary

measures with the public, such as avoiding specific areas or following safety guidelines” (Participant 6, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This proactive approach ensures public safety and reduces the potential for harm by guiding individuals on appropriate actions.

Additionally, Participant 4 highlighted the feedback loop enabled by social media, sharing, “We can also use social media to gather feedback from the public, which helps us improve our crisis response efforts in real time” (Participant 4, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This ability to receive and act on public feedback enhances the responsiveness and adaptability of GNFS during crises.

These findings corroborate the assertions of Smith and Jones (2019) and Aidoo and Afriyie (2021), who emphasize that social media not only facilitates real-time communication but also enables government agencies to build stronger connections with the public by addressing their concerns directly and transparently. Furthermore, these platforms help manage public perception and foster trust by ensuring that the public feels informed and reassured during emergencies.

4.3 GNFS personnel's experiences with using social media during crises

This objective explores the personal experiences of GNFS personnel with using social media during crises, emphasizing the Accuracy and Reliability of Information, Public Feedback and Engagement, and the Impact of Social Media on Crisis Response.

4.3.1 Accuracy and Reliability of Information

Ensuring the accuracy and reliability of information shared on social media during crises is a critical priority for the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS). Participant 4 explained, “Before posting anything, we ensure that it is verified. Misinformation can easily spread on social media, and we don’t want to add to the panic” (Participant 4, personal communication,

November 25, 2024). This highlights the organization’s recognition of the potential harm that unchecked or inaccurate information can cause, especially in a high-stakes environment.

Participant 1 stressed the balance between speed and accuracy, stating, “We’ve learned that quick updates are necessary, but accuracy comes first. Incorrect information can lead to confusion, which is why we cross-check everything before we post it” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 23, 2024). This underscores the importance of establishing robust internal protocols to ensure that updates are not only timely but also factual. The acknowledgment that misinformation could sow confusion reflects a deliberate effort by GNFS to prioritize the public’s trust over immediacy.

Addressing the challenge of countering false narratives, Participant 2 shared, “There have been times when rumours started circulating on social media, and we had to correct them quickly. We work with local media to ensure the right information reaches the public” (Participant 2, personal communication, November 23, 2024). This reveals GNFS’s proactive approach to combating misinformation by leveraging partnerships with local media outlets.

The critical role of field data in maintaining accuracy was emphasized by Participant 3, who noted, “We rely on our teams on the ground to feed us accurate, real-time updates before sharing them. Any mistake can escalate the situation unnecessarily” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 23, 2024). This underscores the reliance on first-hand, real-time information from ground teams to ensure that social media posts are both timely and reflective of the actual situation. The caution against errors highlights the potential consequences of inaccurate information in exacerbating crises.

Participant 5 further elaborated on the protocols GNFS follows, stating, “We follow a strict protocol for verifying information internally before posting to avoid misinformation, as social media is a double-edged sword—it can inform or mislead depending on what’s shared”

(Participant 5, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This emphasizes the dual nature of social media. While it can serve as a powerful tool for communication, its misuse whether intentional or accidental can lead to widespread misinformation. GNFS's strict adherence to internal verification protocols reflects an organizational commitment to using social media responsibly.

These findings are consistent with the work of Williams and Lee (2021), who emphasize that maintaining accuracy in crisis communication is essential for preserving public trust. They argue that misinformation can significantly undermine the credibility of emergency services, creating unnecessary panic and confusion. Similarly, Baiden and Osei (2019) highlight the impact of accurate information on crisis outcomes, noting that errors can diminish public confidence in official agencies and impede effective crisis management.

4.3.2 Public Feedback and Engagement

Social media's interactivity allows the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) to maintain direct communication with the public during crises, enabling both feedback and engagement. Participant 3 remarked, "Public feedback is crucial during a crisis. People will ask questions, share concerns, and sometimes even provide helpful information" (Participant 3, personal communication, November 23, 2024). This statement underscores the two-way communication process facilitated by social media, where the public not only receives information but also contributes to the situational awareness of GNFS. For instance, tips or firsthand observations from the public can provide GNFS with critical insights that might otherwise be delayed.

The active engagement with communities was emphasized by Participant 4, who stated, "We get messages asking for updates, especially during large fires, and we try to respond as much as possible. It's about engaging with the community" (Participant 4, personal communication,

November 25, 2024). This highlights how responding to public queries fosters a sense of inclusivity and collaboration.

Participant 5 explained, “Social media gives us an immediate channel to connect with the public, and that has proven to be invaluable during high-pressure situations” (Participant 5, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This underscores the real-time nature of social media, which eliminates delays typically associated with traditional communication channels. Whether answering questions, dispelling fears, or correcting misinformation, social media acts as an indispensable tool for managing public relations during emergencies.

The practical benefits of public contributions were noted by Participant 7, who shared, “People sometimes share videos and photos of ongoing fires, which helps us assess the situation before our team arrives. Their engagement makes a difference” (Participant 7, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This example illustrates how user-generated content, such as real-time visuals, can significantly enhance GNFS’s situational awareness. Such content provides the organization with preliminary assessments of crises, enabling better-prepared responses.

Participant 8 highlighted the value of public interactions for correcting misinformation, saying, “Social media also allows us to correct misunderstandings quickly when the public shares incorrect details or asks for clarifications. These back-and-forth keeps things clear” (Participant 8, personal communication, November 27, 2024). This demonstrates the ability of GNFS to use social media not only for dissemination but also for dialogue, addressing misconceptions and reinforcing accurate narratives to reduce panic.

The importance of relationship-building through responsiveness was emphasized by Participant 9, who stated, “We find that listening to the public and responding promptly builds trust. It reassures them that we are actively managing the crisis and paying attention to their

concerns” (Participant 9, personal communication, November 27, 2024). This sentiment reflects the role of social media in fostering public trust through transparency and attentiveness, ensuring that communities feel valued and secure during crises.

These findings are supported by Hillebrand and Stein (2020), who argue that social media engagement fosters real-time interaction between organizations and the public, leading to stronger community support and more effective crisis management. The interactive features of platforms like Facebook and Twitter enhance organizations' ability to address concerns and build trust. Similarly, Afriyie and Donkor (2020) highlight that public engagement through social media builds community resilience during emergencies in Ghana.

4.3.3 Impact of Social Media on Crisis Response

Social media has significantly enhanced the crisis response capabilities of the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS), particularly by improving speed, reach, and operational efficiency. Participant 6 emphasized the critical role of rapid response, stating, “We’ve seen that social media allows us to respond much faster. During a crisis, speed is crucial, and social media has made us more efficient” (Participant 6, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This highlights how platforms such as Twitter and Facebook streamline communication, reducing delays in disseminating information to the public. In emergency situations, the timeliness of updates can make a substantial difference in mitigating harm and saving lives.

Participant 7 echoed this sentiment by noting, “With social media, we’ve been able to provide life-saving information in minutes” (Participant 7, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This statement underscores the immediacy afforded by social media, which traditional communication methods often lack. For instance, public alerts about evacuation routes, hazard zones, or fire safety precautions can be shared widely within moments, empowering communities to act quickly and appropriately during emergencies.

The importance of real-time updates in maintaining public calm was stressed by Participant 8, who shared, “The ability to keep the public informed in real-time helps to prevent panic, which can help us in our operations” (Participant 8, personal communication, November 27, 2024). This indicates that social media not only facilitates the dissemination of information but also plays a psychological role by addressing fears and uncertainties.

Participant 9 further elaborated on how social media aids resource prioritization, stating, “Social media helps us prioritize resources during emergencies. For example, when people report what the fire involves, it gives us an idea of how to respond and the appropriate extinguishing medium to use” (Participant 9, personal communication, November 27, 2024). This demonstrates the operational advantages of social media, which enables GNFS to gather first-hand accounts and tailor their responses accordingly. Such inputs can optimize the allocation of personnel and equipment, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of the crisis response.

Participant 2 highlighted the unparalleled reach of social media, noting, “The reach of social media has been incredible. We can get updates to thousands of people simultaneously, which was never possible with traditional communication” (Participant 2, personal communication, November 23, 2024). This scalability ensures that vital information is disseminated to broad audiences, amplifying the impact of GNFS’s messaging and ensuring that more people are informed and prepared during crises.

Participant 4 summed up the role of social media in reducing confusion, explaining, “When people know what to do and where to go, it reduces confusion and helps us focus on controlling the crisis” (Participant 4, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This highlights the dual role of social media in both informing the public and enabling GNFS to concentrate their efforts on resolving the crisis rather than managing public disorder.

These findings align with Smith and Jones (2019), who assert that social media significantly accelerates response times, allowing emergency services to disseminate critical, life-saving information more efficiently. Additionally, Hillebrand and Stein (2020) emphasize that the real-time communication capabilities of social media help reduce public panic, which is essential for effective crisis management. Baiden and Osei (2019) also note that in Ghana, social media plays a vital role in enhancing the operational efficiency of agencies like GNFS by enabling quick and wide-reaching communication.

4.4 Challenges GNFS faces in using social media for emergency communication

This objective identifies the key challenges GNFS faces while utilizing social media for emergency communication. These challenges are discussed under the themes Technical Challenges, Internal Coordination and Communication, and Misinformation and Rumor Management.

4.4.1 Technical Challenges

The effective use of social media for crisis communication by the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) is often hindered by technical limitations. These challenges, as shared by participants, underscore the importance of reliable infrastructure and advanced tools for seamless operations during emergencies.

Participant 9 highlighted the issue of unreliable internet connectivity, stating, “Sometimes, the internet connectivity in remote areas is poor, and it becomes difficult to post updates or even check messages in real time” (Participant 9, personal communication, November 27, 2024).

This challenge is particularly significant in rural and underserved regions of Ghana, where infrastructure may be insufficient. The inability to send timely updates in such areas can delay

critical communication with both the public and team members, potentially exacerbating crisis situations.

Participant 5 pointed to the increasing threat of cyber attacks, explaining, “There have been times when our social media platforms have come under severe attacks by hackers. These incidents significantly limit our communication ability, especially during crises” (Participant 5, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This statement reflects a growing concern in the digital age, where cyber vulnerabilities can disrupt the dissemination of critical information, undermining the trust and efficiency of crisis response efforts.

The lack of advanced devices was another recurring theme. Participant 1 explained,

“When there is a lack of high-spec gadgets such as computers, smartphones, and cameras, our ability to communicate and report timely updates on social media during crises is heavily hindered. These tools are essential for capturing and sharing real-time information to keep the public informed and manage situations effectively” (Participant 1, personal communication, November 23, 2024).

This observation highlights how outdated or inadequate equipment can limit GNFS personnel’s ability to fully leverage the potential of social media in their operations.

Similarly, Participant 6 noted disparities in access to technology, stating, “Not all of our personnel have access to the best devices or tools to handle social media effectively, which creates disparities in how updates are managed” (Participant 6, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This indicates a need for organizational investment in uniform technological resources and training to ensure consistent and effective communication.

The inherent issues with social media platforms themselves were also discussed. Participant 3 remarked, “Sometimes, the social media platforms themselves have glitches, like delayed posts

or messages not loading, which slows us down” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 23, 2024). This underscores the dependency on third-party platforms, which are not always reliable during high-traffic situations, potentially delaying the flow of crucial updates.

Participant 8 added another layer to these challenges by stating, “Technical challenges, like sudden power outages or device malfunctions, are also issues we face when trying to communicate during emergencies” (Participant 8, personal communication, November 27, 2024). Such occurrences, which are not uncommon in developing regions, further complicate crisis communication, as they directly impede the ability to maintain real-time interactions and updates.

These findings are consistent with the research of Smith and Jones (2019), who emphasize that technical barriers, including poor connectivity and system failures, often impede effective social media use during crises. The challenges experienced by GNFS personnel highlight broader infrastructural and technological gaps that affect crisis communication globally. Aidoo and Afriyie (2021) similarly note that inadequate infrastructure in Ghana, particularly in rural and remote areas, significantly hampers the potential of social media as a crisis communication tool. These insights suggest the need for investments in robust technical infrastructure, cybersecurity measures, and upgraded tools to enable seamless and effective crisis management in the future.

4.4.2 Misinformation and Rumour Management

Misinformation and rumours have remained significant challenges for GNFS personnel during crises, particularly in the fast-paced environment of social media. Social media's rapid dissemination of information can facilitate the spread of both accurate updates and unfounded rumours, which can escalate the situation if not addressed promptly. This dynamic has shaped the strategies that GNFS personnel use to monitor and correct false information.

Participant 5 explained, “Rumours spread very quickly on social media, and we must be on our toes to monitor and correct false information” (Participant 5, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This highlights the urgency with which GNFS personnel must work during a crisis. Rumours, due to their viral nature, can be difficult to manage, especially in the early stages of a crisis when information is scarce, and public concern is high. Social media platforms provide a rapid means of communication, but they also increase the potential for the swift spread of misinformation. This requires constant vigilance by crisis communicators to identify and correct false information before it leads to confusion or panic.

Participant 6 added, “Sometimes people share posts that can cause panic. We must act quickly to provide clarity” (Participant 6, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This statement emphasizes the potentially damaging impact of misinformation, particularly when it causes unnecessary panic among the public. In a crisis, public fear can lead to poor decision-making and complicate emergency response efforts. This ability to provide clarity amid chaos is one of the key advantages of social media, as it allows for rapid corrections to be made in real-time.

Participant 7 commented on the double-edged nature of social media, stating, “The speed at which information spreads on social media can be a double-edged sword. While it helps us get the truth out quickly, it also allows rumours to spread just as fast” (Participant 7, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This statement reflects the dual nature of social media in crisis communication. While the speed of communication allows GNFS to share vital information in real-time, it also creates an environment in which falsehoods can spread just as quickly. This requires a strategic approach, where social media use must be accompanied by proactive monitoring and rapid response strategies to combat misinformation and ensure that the public receives only accurate information.

Participant 3 added, “There have been instances where outdated or incorrect information has gone viral, and our team has to work hard to refute it before it escalates further” (Participant 3, personal communication, November 23, 2024). This statement underscores the challenge of dealing with misinformation that has already gained traction. When outdated or incorrect information becomes widely circulated, the task of refuting it becomes more complicated. GNFS personnel must not only issue corrections but also work to ensure that those corrections reach the same audience that initially saw the misinformation, often using the same platforms where the false information was first shared.

Participant 4 emphasized, “We constantly monitor online conversations to identify false claims and respond with verified facts to stop misinformation from spreading” (Participant 4, personal communication, November 25, 2024). This active approach to monitoring social media conversations is crucial for effective crisis communication. Responding with verified facts is an essential part of this process, as it builds trust with the public and reassures them that the information they are receiving is reliable.

Finally, Participant 9 highlighted, “Managing rumours requires vigilance. We not only post corrections but also collaborate with traditional media to amplify accurate information” (Participant 9, personal communication, November 27, 2024). This approach reflects a multi-channel strategy for managing misinformation. By collaborating with traditional media, GNFS personnel can reach a wider audience and ensure that accurate information is reinforced across different platforms. This helps to counteract the reach of false information and provides a more comprehensive and consistent message to the public.

These findings align with the work of Williams and Lee (2021), who emphasize that misinformation on social media can spread as rapidly as factual information. The speed at which information circulates on social media platforms necessitates the development of

strategies to quickly identify and address false information. Williams and Lee (2021) suggest that crisis communication teams must not only monitor social media but also act swiftly to correct misinformation, a challenge that GNFS personnel have consistently faced. Developing efficient strategies for misinformation and rumour management is critical to ensuring that social media remains a useful tool for crisis communication, rather than a source of confusion or panic.

4.5 Conclusion

The findings reveal that GNFS personnel rely heavily on social media platforms for crisis communication. Social media enables them to disseminate critical information to the public quickly and effectively, engage with citizens, and manage the communication process during emergencies. However, challenges related to technical difficulties, misinformation, and internal coordination persist. GNFS can improve its crisis communication strategies by addressing these challenges and ensuring better infrastructure and personnel training.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the key findings from the study, draws conclusions based on the research objectives, and offers recommendations for improving the use of social media in crisis communication within the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS). It also presents suggestions for future research in the area of crisis communication and social media.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The aim of this study was to explore how the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) utilizes social media platforms during crisis communication, to understand the experiences of GNFS personnel in using these platforms, and to examine the challenges they face. The data analysis revealed several important themes related to the research objectives.

First, the study found that The Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) utilizes a range of social media platforms, each serving a specific function in crisis communication. Twitter is primarily employed for delivering real-time updates during emergencies, allowing the service to reach a wide audience quickly with essential information. On the other hand, Facebook and Instagram are used for more detailed communication, providing comprehensive updates, images, and videos that engage the public and inform them about ongoing crises. These platforms allow GNFS to build a more interactive relationship with the public by encouraging feedback, answering questions, and offering additional guidance when needed. WhatsApp, although not traditionally used for public communication, plays a crucial role in internal coordination among GNFS personnel. It facilitates quick communication and decision-making within the organization, ensuring that team members remain informed and can act swiftly during an

emergency. Each platform serves a unique purpose, highlighting the versatility and adaptability of GNFS in utilizing social media to manage crisis communication effectively.

Furthermore, the study highlighted that crisis communication process at the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) is both structured and efficient, with clear steps followed whenever a crisis is reported. When an emergency occurs, initial updates are promptly shared through Twitter, ensuring that real-time information is disseminated to a broad audience as quickly as possible. As the situation unfolds, follow-up information, including more detailed updates and guidance, is provided through Facebook and Instagram, allowing GNFS to reach different segments of the public with varied types of content. This approach ensures that the communication remains timely, responsive, and relevant to the needs of both the public and internal stakeholders. The organization's ability to quickly relay important updates and provide continuous information throughout the crisis enables a more organized and transparent crisis management process, demonstrating a commitment to keeping everyone informed in a fast-paced, high-pressure environment. The process underscores the value of clear, timely communication as a fundamental element of effective crisis response.

The third theme focused on the significant role of social media in enhancing crisis communication at the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS). Social media platforms are valued for their ability to quickly reach a large and diverse audience, facilitating direct communication with the public during crises. This immediacy allows GNFS to provide real-time updates, share critical information, and ensure that the public is well-informed as situations unfold. Social media also serves as an important tool for engaging with the public, enabling two-way communication that includes receiving feedback, answering questions, and offering guidance. This real-time interaction helps to maintain transparency and build trust, as the public can actively participate in the communication process. The ability to communicate directly and

quickly through these platforms not only enhances the effectiveness of crisis communication but also promotes a sense of community, as the public feels more connected to the response efforts. Through social media, GNFS is able to manage the flow of information, address concerns promptly, and ensure that the public is equipped with the necessary information to respond appropriately to emergencies.

The study also identified several challenges that the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) faces in using social media for crisis communication. One of the main challenges is ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the information shared on social media platforms. With the speed at which information spreads during crises, it becomes difficult to verify details quickly, and false information or rumors can easily spread. Additionally, technical difficulties often arise, such as platform outages or connectivity issues, which can hinder the timely dissemination of information. Furthermore, internal coordination between different teams within GNFS is another persistent challenge. Effective communication between departments is crucial for ensuring that the right information reaches the right audience at the right time. These challenges highlight the complexity of managing crisis communication through social media, emphasizing the need for clear protocols and effective systems to address these issues.

5.3 Conclusion

The study concludes that social media plays a crucial and transformative role in enhancing crisis communication for the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS). By utilizing platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, GNFS has been able to disseminate timely and relevant information to the public during emergencies. These platforms provide an immediate channel for sharing updates, warnings, and vital information, ensuring that the public is kept informed and can take the necessary precautions. Additionally, social media serves as an invaluable tool for engaging with the public, allowing citizens to ask questions, provide feedback, and seek

clarification on critical issues. This two-way communication strengthens the relationship between GNFS and the public, fostering trust and transparency during crisis situations. Furthermore, social media platforms play a vital role in internal coordination within the GNFS, enabling different departments and teams to communicate and collaborate efficiently, ensuring that the response to emergencies is well-organized and effective. Despite these positive contributions, challenges persist, particularly concerning misinformation, technical difficulties, and internal coordination. The rapid spread of information on social media can sometimes result in the circulation of false or unverified details, which can cause confusion and hinder crisis management efforts. Technical difficulties, such as connectivity issues or platform outages, also remain a significant obstacle, disrupting the flow of information and potentially delaying the response. Moreover, coordinating between various teams within the organization can be challenging, especially when the crisis demands an immediate and unified response. These challenges underscore the complexity of using social media effectively during crises and highlight the need for ongoing improvements in processes and systems to mitigate these issues.

Given these findings, the research confirms the hypothesis that social media is an indispensable tool for GNFS in managing crisis communication, while also emphasizing that its effectiveness is contingent upon addressing the associated challenges. While the use of social media enhances the reach and speed of communication, it also requires careful management and strategy to ensure that the information shared is accurate, reliable, and actionable. The study highlights the need for GNFS to develop better strategies to combat misinformation and to establish clearer internal communication protocols to enhance coordination across different departments during a crisis. Training personnel to effectively use social media for crisis communication is another critical recommendation, as it would equip staff with the skills needed to handle the technical and operational challenges that arise. Additionally, fostering a culture of collaboration and information-sharing within the organization will be essential to

ensure that messages are consistent and aligned across all platforms. The findings suggest that with the right strategies, GNFS can further harness the potential of social media to improve crisis communication and enhance its emergency response capabilities.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to improve the use of social media in crisis communication within the Ghana National Fire Service:

Enhance Training and Capacity Building: To improve the quality and effectiveness of crisis communication on social media, it is recommended that GNFS personnel undergo regular training on social media management, crisis communication strategies, and fact-checking. Training should also focus on enhancing internal coordination among various teams involved in crisis response.

Develop Clear Guidelines for Social Media Usage: GNFS should develop a set of clear guidelines and protocols for using social media during emergencies. These guidelines should address issues such as the appropriate use of platforms, the timing of posts, and the handling of misinformation. This would ensure consistency in the information shared across different platforms and among team members.

Invest in Technological Tools: GNFS should invest in more reliable technological tools for managing social media content during crises to mitigate technical challenges. This includes better monitoring and analytics tools to track public engagement and response to social media posts.

Strengthen Misinformation Management: In the face of the increasing spread of misinformation on social media, GNFS should establish a system for quickly addressing false

information and rumours. This could involve collaborating with other emergency management organizations and media outlets to verify and correct misleading information in real-time.

Improve Internal Coordination: The study revealed the importance of internal communication and coordination during crises. GNFS should work to streamline internal processes and ensure that information is shared efficiently among all relevant teams. This could be done by creating dedicated crisis communication teams and improving communication channels.

Enhance Public Engagement: GNFS should focus on engaging the public more effectively during crises. This can be achieved by using social media platforms to not only provide information but also interact with the public, answer their questions, and address their concerns. Active engagement can help to build trust and reduce panic during emergencies.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of social media in crisis communication at the Ghana National Fire Service, there are several areas that warrant further research:

Comparative Studies: Future research could compare the use of social media in crisis communication across different emergency service organizations in Ghana or in other countries. This would provide a broader understanding of the effectiveness and challenges of social media in crisis communication in different contexts.

Impact of Social Media on Public Behaviour: Future studies could explore how social media influences public behaviour during crises, including how the public responds to information shared by emergency services and the role of social media in guiding or directing public action during an emergency.

Longitudinal Studies: Longitudinal research could examine how GNFS's use of social media in crisis communication evolves over time and the long-term impact of these practices on crisis management effectiveness.

Technological Integration in Crisis Communication: Research on how emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and data analytics, can be integrated into social media crisis communication would be valuable for improving the efficiency and accuracy of responses.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CRISIS COMMUNICATION: A STUDY OF THE GHANA NATIONAL FIRE SERVICE

How the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) utilises social media platforms during crisis communication

1. How does the Ghana National Fire Service (GNFS) decide which social media platforms to use during a crisis?
2. Can you describe the process GNFS follows when posting information on social media during a crisis?
3. What role do social media platforms play in GNFS's overall crisis communication strategy?
4. How does GNFS ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information shared on social media during a crisis?
5. What types of crisis situations (e.g., fire outbreaks, accidents, floods) does GNFS most frequently use social media for, and how do the strategies differ?

GNFS personnel's experiences with using social media during crises

1. Can you describe your personal experience with using social media during a crisis at GNFS?
2. What has been the most challenging aspect for you when using social media during a crisis situation?

3. How do you feel social media has impacted your ability to communicate effectively during a crisis?
4. Can you share an example of a time when social media helped you or your team to manage a crisis more effectively?
5. How do you feel about the feedback or interactions from the public on social media during crisis situations? How does it influence your communication strategy?

The challenges GNFS faces in using social media for crisis communication

1. What are some of the biggest challenges GNFS faces when using social media for crisis communication?
2. How do issues like misinformation or rumors on social media affect GNFS's crisis communication efforts?
3. What technical challenges does GNFS encounter while using social media platforms in a crisis?
4. Are there any internal challenges (e.g., training, coordination) within GNFS that hinder effective use of social media during crises?
5. How do you think GNFS can improve its use of social media for crisis communication in the future?

Appendix B

CODES AND THEMES

CODES	THEMES
Platform Selection by National PROs Facebook as Primary Platform Platform Reach and Audience Size Limited Use of Other Platforms Regional Access to National Platforms	Social Media Platform Usage
Information Gathering by Regional PROs Coordination with Officers on Scene National PROs Responsible for Final Posting Information Sent via WhatsApp for Review Conversion of Information into Press Releases	Crisis Communication Process
Direct Engagement with the Public Fast Information Dissemination Platform for Addressing Rumors Real-Time Crisis Updates Interactive Nature of Social Media	Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication
Verification of Information from Officers Double-Checking Facts with Sub-Stations Cross-Checking Before Posting Use of WhatsApp for Information Verification Head of PR's Role in Final Approval	Accuracy and Reliability of Information
Limited Access to Quality Cameras Poor Internet Connectivity Lack of Resources for PROs Technical Delays in Posting Updates Equipment Shortages in Regional Offices	Technical Challenges
Positive and Negative Public Comments Public Praise for Quick Response Criticism and Misinformation in the Comment Section Emotional Impact of Feedback on PROs Engagement with Public Concerns and Complaints	Public Feedback and Engagement
Spread of False Information During Crises Efforts to Address and Correct Misinformation Challenges in Managing Misinformation Rumors Spreading Faster Than Official Updates Public Trust Undermined by False Claims	Misinformation and Rumor Management
Fast and Effective Information Distribution	

Enhanced Public Awareness During Crises
Real-Time Crisis Communication
Increased Accountability and Transparency
Managing Public Perception through Social
Media

**Impact of Social Media on Crisis
Response**