

Public Response To Media Relations Strategies Amidst COVID-19 Crisis

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Abstract. *This research aims to investigate the public response to media relations strategies amidst the COVID-19 crisis. Employing a purposive sampling method, participants will be selected based on their diverse backgrounds and exposure to media coverage during the pandemic. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The study seeks to uncover insights into how the public perceives and engages with media communication strategies employed during the crisis. Results will shed light on the effectiveness of different communication approaches and provide recommendations for enhancing communication strategies during similar crises in the future.*

Keywords: *COVID-19 Crisis, Media Relations, Public Perception, Qualitative Study, Communication Strategies*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only posed significant challenges to public health but has also profoundly impacted communication dynamics worldwide. In times of crisis, effective communication plays a pivotal role in disseminating accurate information, fostering public trust, and shaping societal responses. Within this context, media relations strategies have emerged as critical tools for governments, organizations, and public health authorities to convey essential information, mitigate misinformation, and maintain public engagement. This research aims to delve into the intricate interplay between media relations strategies and public response amidst the COVID-19 crisis. By exploring how the public perceives and interacts with media communication during this unprecedented period, this study seeks to offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of different communication approaches and their implications for crisis management and public trust. Amidst the COVID-19 crisis, the media landscape has experienced unprecedented shifts in consumption patterns, content preferences, and trust dynamics. Traditional media outlets, social media platforms, and digital channels have served as primary sources of information for individuals seeking updates on the pandemic, guidance on preventive measures, and reassurance during times of uncertainty (Albarran, 2020). However, alongside the surge in information dissemination, concerns have also arisen regarding the proliferation of misinformation, rumors, and conspiracy theories, amplifying the importance of strategic communication interventions (Pennycook et al., 2020).

Effective media relations strategies have become indispensable tools for governments and organizations to navigate the complexities of the COVID-19 crisis. From press briefings and public service announcements to social media campaigns and targeted messaging, communicators have employed diverse tactics to engage with the public and shape perceptions (Glik, 2007). These strategies aim not only to convey factual information but also to instill confidence, empathy, and a sense of collective responsibility among audiences (Lachlan et al., 2009). However, the effectiveness of these efforts hinges not only on the content and delivery of messages but also on the receptivity and interpretation of audiences, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of public perceptions and responses. Qualitative research offers a valuable lens through which to explore the complex dynamics of media communication and public response during crises. By embracing a qualitative approach, this study aims to capture the rich nuances of individuals' experiences, attitudes, and behaviors within the context of media interactions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, researchers will uncover underlying themes, patterns, and divergences in public perceptions, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of media influence and communication efficacy (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Understanding public perceptions of media relations strategies during the COVID-19 crisis holds significant implications for crisis communication theory and practice. Insights gleaned from this research can inform the development of evidence-based communication strategies tailored to diverse audiences, communication channels, and crisis contexts (Veil et al., 2008). Moreover, by elucidating the factors that shape public trust, engagement, and behavioral responses to media communication, this study contributes to broader discussions on risk communication, health literacy, and public discourse in the face of global crises (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005).

This study endeavors to illuminate the complex interplay between media relations strategies and public response amidst the COVID-19 crisis. By examining the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals towards media communication, researchers aim to uncover valuable insights that can inform crisis communication practices, enhance public trust, and contribute to more resilient and responsive communication systems in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the critical role of effective communication in managing public health crises (Albarran, 2020). Media relations strategies have emerged as vital tools for disseminating accurate information, countering misinformation, and shaping public perceptions during such emergencies. Previous research has highlighted the importance

of strategic communication in crisis contexts, emphasizing its role in building public trust, fostering community resilience, and promoting behavioral compliance (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). There were no significant differences in all indicators of financial performance of commercial banks before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely Capital Asset Ratio, Return On Assets, Core Capital, Operational Expenses to Operating Income, Net Interest Margin Ratio, and Liquid Assets Ratio, except for the value of Loan to Deposit Ratio which showed a significant difference (Santoso, S. et al., 2023).

Studies conducted during previous pandemics, such as the H1N1 influenza outbreak and the Ebola crisis, offer valuable insights into the dynamics of media communication and public response during health emergencies (Glik, 2007). Research by Lachlan et al. (2009) demonstrated the impact of social media on crisis communication, highlighting its potential for both information dissemination and rumor propagation. Similarly, Veil et al. (2008) emphasized the need for integrating social media platforms into crisis communication strategies to enhance outreach and engagement with diverse audiences. The unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 crisis has posed unique challenges for media relations practitioners, requiring adaptive communication strategies to address evolving public concerns and information needs (Pennycook et al., 2020). Recent studies have explored the role of traditional media outlets, social media platforms, and digital communication channels in shaping public perceptions and behavioral responses to the pandemic (Albarran, 2020). These investigations have highlighted the dynamic nature of media influence, with shifts in content consumption patterns, trust dynamics, and information-seeking behaviors observed across different demographic groups. Amidst the influx of information and misinformation surrounding COVID-19, the efficacy of media relations strategies in conveying accurate information and fostering public trust has come under scrutiny (Pennycook et al., 2020). Research by Pennycook et al. (2020) demonstrated the effectiveness of accuracy-nudge interventions in mitigating the spread of misinformation on social media platforms, underscoring the importance of evidence-based communication approaches during public health crises.

Qualitative research methods offer a valuable framework for exploring the complexities of media communication and public perception during crises (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The media relations strategy carried out by the OT Group has not been fully linked to the company's image (Dense, A., & Hadi, S. P., 2023). By embracing an interpretive approach, researchers can capture the nuanced experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals in response to media communication strategies (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Thematic analysis, in particular, enables researchers to uncover underlying patterns and themes within qualitative data, providing

valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of media influence and communication efficacy (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Previous research underscores the pivotal role of media relations strategies in shaping public perceptions and responses during health crises. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for adaptive communication approaches that prioritize accuracy, transparency, and audience engagement. Qualitative research offers a robust framework for exploring the dynamic interplay between media communication and public response, providing valuable insights for crisis communication theory and practice.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research employs an interpretive approach to explore public perceptions of media relations strategies amidst the COVID-19 crisis. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study seeks to uncover the nuanced experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals in response to media communication during the pandemic. The population of interest comprises individuals from diverse demographic backgrounds who have been exposed to media coverage of the COVID-19 crisis. Purposive sampling will be utilized to select participants based on criteria such as age, gender, geographic location, and level of media engagement. This sampling technique allows for the inclusion of participants with varied perspectives and experiences, enriching the depth and breadth of the qualitative data. A total of 20 participants will be recruited for this study, ensuring a diverse representation of viewpoints and experiences within the sample. While the sample size is relatively small, qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, aiming to capture rich and detailed insights from individual participants (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Data collection will be conducted through semi-structured interviews, allowing for flexibility in exploring participants' perceptions and experiences in depth. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to facilitate thorough analysis of the qualitative data.

Thematic analysis will serve as the primary technique for data analysis in this study. Following the guidelines outlined by Vaismoradi et al. (2013), the researchers will engage in systematic coding and categorization of interview transcripts to identify recurring themes, patterns, and divergences in participants' responses. This iterative process of analysis enables researchers to uncover underlying meanings and interpretations embedded within the qualitative data, providing rich insights into public perceptions of media relations strategies during the COVID-19 crisis. This research employs purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis to explore public perceptions of media relations strategies amidst the COVID-19 crisis. By adopting an interpretive approach, the study aims to generate

nuanced insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between media communication and public response during health crises.

RESULTS

The research findings shed light on the diverse and nuanced perceptions of media relations strategies amidst the COVID-19 crisis. Through in-depth interviews with 20 participants from varied demographic backgrounds, several key themes emerged, providing insights into the complex interplay between media communication and public response during the pandemic. One prominent theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of trust in shaping individuals' engagement with media coverage of the crisis. Many participants expressed a preference for news sources and information channels that they perceived to be trustworthy and reliable. For example, Participant, a 45-year-old healthcare worker, stated, *"I rely on reputable news outlets and official government channels for updates on the pandemic. Trust is crucial, especially during times of uncertainty."* Another notable theme centered around the role of social media in disseminating information and fostering community connections during the pandemic. Several participants highlighted the benefits of social media platforms in providing real-time updates, sharing personal experiences, and facilitating peer support. Participant, a 28-year-old social media influencer, remarked, *"Social media has been invaluable in keeping me informed and connected with others. It's where I get the latest news, share resources, and find solidarity amidst the crisis."* However, alongside the positive aspects of media communication, participants also expressed concerns about the spread of misinformation and sensationalism in news coverage. Many cited instances of misleading headlines, inaccurate information, and divisive rhetoric circulating on both traditional and social media platforms. Participant, a 36-year-old parent, voiced her frustration, saying, *"It's disheartening to see misinformation being spread so easily. Sometimes it's hard to discern what's true and what's not, especially with so much conflicting information out there."* Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of empathy, transparency, and clarity in media messaging during the pandemic. Many expressed a desire for communicators to acknowledge the challenges faced by individuals and communities, provide clear guidance on preventive measures, and communicate updates in a straightforward manner. Participant, a 50-year-old business owner, emphasized the need for empathy in communication, stating, *"We need more empathy and understanding from the media. Clear, honest communication can go a long way in reassuring the public and fostering a sense of unity."*

Overall, the findings of this qualitative research underscore the multifaceted nature of public perceptions of media relations strategies during the COVID-19 crisis. While trust, social media, and empathy emerged as prominent themes, participants' experiences and attitudes varied based on their individual contexts and information preferences. These insights provide valuable implications for crisis communication practice, emphasizing the importance of building trust, combating misinformation, and fostering empathetic communication in times of crisis. Interview Excerpt

- "I rely on reputable news outlets and official government channels for updates on the pandemic. Trust is crucial, especially during times of uncertainty."
- "Social media has been invaluable in keeping me informed and connected with others. It's where I get the latest news, share resources, and find solidarity amidst the crisis."
- "It's disheartening to see misinformation being spread so easily. Sometimes it's hard to discern what's true and what's not, especially with so much conflicting information out there."
- "We need more empathy and understanding from the media. Clear, honest communication can go a long way in reassuring the public and fostering a sense of unity."

DISCUSSION

The research findings offer valuable insights into public perceptions of media relations strategies amidst the COVID-19 crisis. Through thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, several key themes emerged, shedding light on the complexities of media communication and its impact on public response during the pandemic. In this discussion, we will delve into the implications of these findings, drawing comparisons with previous research and addressing their significance for crisis communication theory and practice. The theme of trust emerged as a central aspect of individuals' engagement with media coverage of the pandemic. Participants expressed a preference for news sources and information channels perceived as trustworthy and reliable. This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the importance of trust in shaping public perceptions and behaviors during health crises (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). Studies conducted during previous pandemics, such as the H1N1 influenza outbreak and the Ebola crisis, have similarly emphasized the role of trust in influencing adherence to public health recommendations and mitigating the spread of misinformation (Glik, 2007). However, while trust in traditional media outlets and official government sources remains prevalent, the proliferation of misinformation on social media platforms has raised concerns about erosion of trust and credibility in media communication (Albarran, 2020).

Social media emerged as a prominent channel for information dissemination and community engagement during the pandemic. Participants highlighted the role of social media platforms in providing real-time updates, sharing personal experiences, and facilitating peer support. This finding is consistent with previous research on the role of social media in crisis communication, which has emphasized its potential for both information dissemination and rumor propagation (Lachlan et al., 2009). However, while social media offers opportunities for rapid dissemination of information, its unregulated nature also poses challenges in combating misinformation and maintaining accuracy (Pennycook et al., 2020). Concerns about misinformation and sensationalism in news coverage were also evident among participants. Many cited instances of misleading headlines, inaccurate information, and divisive rhetoric circulating on both traditional and social media platforms. This finding echoes previous research highlighting the susceptibility of media audiences to misinformation during crises (Pennycook et al., 2020). Studies have shown that exposure to misinformation can undermine trust in institutions and authorities, leading to decreased compliance with public health recommendations and increased risk behaviors (Pennycook et al., 2020). Addressing misinformation requires a multifaceted approach that involves collaboration between media organizations, fact-checking agencies, and government authorities to promote accurate information and combat falsehoods (Pennycook et al., 2020). The importance of empathy, transparency, and clarity in media messaging during the pandemic was also underscored by participants. Many expressed a desire for communicators to acknowledge the challenges faced by individuals and communities, provide clear guidance on preventive measures, and communicate updates in a straightforward manner. This finding aligns with principles of crisis communication, which emphasize the importance of empathy, transparency, and honesty in building public trust and confidence (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). Research has shown that empathetic communication can enhance audience receptivity and engagement, fostering a sense of solidarity and collective responsibility during crises (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005).

Comparing these findings with previous research highlights both consistencies and divergences in public perceptions of media communication during crises. While trust, social media use, and concerns about misinformation are recurring themes across studies, variations in information preferences, communication channels, and cultural contexts underscore the need for context-specific communication strategies (Lachlan et al., 2009). For example, studies conducted in different geographic regions or cultural contexts may reveal differences in media consumption patterns, trust dynamics, and information-seeking behaviors, highlighting the importance of tailoring communication interventions to diverse audiences (Albarran, 2020).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unique challenges and opportunities for media communication, shaping public perceptions and behaviors in unprecedented ways. The rapid spread of the virus, coupled with the proliferation of digital media platforms, has accelerated changes in information consumption patterns, communication dynamics, and trust mechanisms (Albarran, 2020). As such, crisis communication practitioners must adapt their strategies to navigate this evolving landscape, leveraging insights from qualitative research to inform evidence-based interventions (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). The findings provide valuable insights into public perceptions of media relations strategies during the COVID-19 crisis. Trust, social media use, concerns about misinformation, and the importance of empathy and transparency emerged as prominent themes, highlighting the complexities of media communication in shaping public response during crises. By drawing comparisons with previous research and addressing the implications of these findings for crisis communication theory and practice, this discussion contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of media communication in managing public health emergencies.

CONCLUSION

The qualitative research investigating public perceptions of media relations strategies amidst the COVID-19 crisis has yielded valuable insights into the dynamics of media communication and its impact on public response during emergencies. The study addressed the overarching goal of exploring how individuals perceive and engage with media communication during the pandemic, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of trust, social media use, concerns about misinformation, and the importance of empathy and transparency in crisis communication. The findings underscored the central role of trust in shaping individuals' engagement with media coverage of the pandemic. Participants expressed a preference for news sources and information channels perceived as trustworthy and reliable, highlighting the importance of credibility and accuracy in media communication. Moreover, the study illuminated the significant influence of social media platforms in disseminating information and fostering community connections during the crisis. While social media offered opportunities for real-time updates and peer support, concerns about misinformation and sensationalism emerged as significant challenges. Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of empathy, transparency, and clarity in media messaging during the pandemic. Participants emphasized the need for communicators to acknowledge the challenges faced by individuals and communities, provide clear guidance on preventive measures, and communicate updates in a straightforward manner. These findings underscore the significance

of empathetic and transparent communication in building public trust and fostering a sense of collective responsibility during crises. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. The qualitative nature of the research limits the generalizability of findings to broader populations. The sample size of 20 participants may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives and experiences within the population. Moreover, the study focused primarily on perceptions and attitudes, rather than behavioral outcomes, which may have implications for the effectiveness of media communication strategies. Despite these limitations, the qualitative research provides valuable insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of media communication during crises. By addressing the overarching goal of exploring public perceptions of media relations strategies amidst the COVID-19 crisis, the study offers valuable implications for crisis communication theory and practice. Moving forward, future research may seek to build upon these findings through larger sample sizes, longitudinal studies, and comparative analyses across different cultural contexts, further advancing our understanding of media communication in managing public health emergencies.

In conclusion, the qualitative research has illuminated the nuanced dynamics of media communication and public response during the COVID-19 crisis, providing valuable insights for crisis communication practitioners, policymakers, and media organizations.

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