

Crisis Communication and Response Strategies in Car Manufacturing Companies: A Multiple Case-Study Approach in Gauteng, South Africa

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Abstract: South Africa has several car manufacturing companies or plants, referred to as open systems, and in fact, the automotive industry is the biggest employer in the country with 120 000 employees and a 6.4% stake of the national GDP (against 8% of the mining sector, 5 years ago). Although its contribution to the economic prospects of this nation is undeniably huge (more or less 14.2% of national exports and 24% of manufacturing output), the car manufacturing industry also comes with its own challenges and, at worse, crises.

This study, amongst the other things, sought to address car manufacturing crises by looking into four car manufacturing companies' chaotic situations and related theories. The research shows that crises are inevitable in business and industry alike. It also demonstrates that crisis communication steps and response strategies thereof, if followed and adhered to, could help to better understand potential crises, avoid them, address them at hand or in their aftermath. Through this research, it is obvious that the car manufacturing industry, specific models tend to have potentially fatal defects, leading to numerous car recalls as shown in selected case studies. This research followed a multiple case study and qualitative approach.

The research was conducted by administering semi-structured indepth interviews, doing thematic and content analyses of obtained raw data, making sense of them and inferring/deriving knowledge for all to use. The participants were four car manufacturing companies (herein referred to as Companies A, B, C and D) with their head offices in Gauteng, South Africa. The crisis management teams were selected as the target population because they actively attempt to remedy the crises and interact with various organisational stakeholders when a chaos occurs.

The findings identified gaps in crisis communication planning and implementation, given the ever-changing business and public relations' environments in which organisations operate. As a result, recommendations are made to assist public relations and communications practitioners today and in the future to handle various crises effectively. Ultimately, car manufacturing companies will benefit by improving the protection of their organisations and stakeholders from threats, thus reducing those threats' negative impacts on business and the economy.

Future research could be done either at national level to include more car manufacturing companies in order to allow comparison, or selectively across the regions in the continent, to pursue an hybrid study which equally considers crises in the only other truely African industrial economy, namely Egypt.

Keywords: Crisis communication, crisis management, response strategies, car manufacturing, chaos and systems theories, multiple case-study.

INTRODUCTION

This research elaborates on crisis communication as one of the means to remedy latent or arising crises. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is discussed as a theoretical framework that public relations practitioners could utilise to maximise protecting the organisation's reputation following the crisis occurrence. The study also touchbases on the Chaos Theory which ought to be viewed on a positive note by industry and other stakeholders. Systems theory are said to be applicable to the motor car manufacturing companies and as such the theory is also explained.

In studying for this work, research problems are addressed using tables and figures where applicable. There has been a significant rise in the number of motor car manufacturing companies in South Africa that have recalled some of their 2007 to 2017 car models due to technical glitches that could result in the cars catching fire. It causes significant concern for the consumers' safety and the companies' reputation and credibility, making timeous and effective communication essential. This crisis ignited in South Africa at the beginning of the world economic crisis of 2007/8/9 (starting in the USA) which only exacerbated the already many difficulties in the car manufacturing industry.

This study, therefore, indicates that crisis and mass communication are important and should be addressed correctly - that is effectively. It talks to the core of mass communication and addresses theories applicable to

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this research. It further demonstrates that when crisis management principles are observed a lot could be achieved in addressing and sometimes preventing or resolving organisational problems or challenges.

SELECTED CASE STUDIES

Company A, B, C, and D

In this first case study, *The Witness* (2012: 1) and *Mail and Guardian* (2012: 1) reported that 3 350 Company A customers will be affected by a worldwide technical recall of its 2006 to 2010 models in January of that year. The company told *Algoa FM* (2012: 1) that owners need not panic as the company had not received any injury reports regarding the matter. *Shepardson* (2012: 1) added that the company had to recall several other versions built between 2006 and 2011, totalling 90 000 recalls worldwide. By this time, 81 water pump failures had been reported and four-engine fires worldwide since 2009. However, of the 2 864 vehicles affected in South Africa since expanding the technical campaign worldwide at the end of 2018, only 50 cars have been serviced, according to *Buso* (2019: 1) of *Cape Talk*. The company sought to address the problems through the use of effective communication and the available media of conveying the messages. It remains to be seen whether all the stakeholders were involved as shown above including owners, service providers and mechanical engineers.

In another case study, *Fourie* (2018: 1) reported in *Cars* that just less than 15 933 Company B 2007 to 2011 makes were being recalled in South Africa because the plug of the power distributor may degrade over time as a result of frictional corrosion and vehicle vibration, which can result in a loss of power. Worldwide, there have been just under 400 000 recalls. In May 2018, *Barry* (2018: 1) reported *Consumer Reports* that in North America, Company A and Company B are recalling 47 806 of their 2011 and 2012 models due to the auxiliary water pump that could fail and result in the circuit board overheating and potentially leading to fire. In October 2018, Company B recalled a further 27 000 of their 2011 to 2017, thus extending the recall to include diesel models. There have been reports of multiple fires in yester years in the United Kingdom, with the recall of over 268 000 cars. Globally, 1.6 million vehicles were affected (*Hull*, 2018: 1). Through the use of goal framing or message framing, the company has shown the consequences of what happened abroad, in this case in England, to teach employees and other stakeholders (suppliers,

mechanics, etc.) how to handle effectively such crises. Whether that was done correctly remains to be investigated.

A third case study, from the year 2015 when Company C saw a total of 48 of one of their models burst into flames, with one incident resulting in the loss of life in December 2015 when a motorist was trapped inside the burning car. *Hosken* (2017: 1) reported in *Herald Live* that this company had been aware that their 2012 to 2014 models have a potentially deadly safety flaw since 2014 and yet chose not to address the matter. In 2017, Company C decided to recall all 2012 to 2014 models for a thorough inspection, to which *Buthelezi* (2017: 1) in the *Independent Live* said was "too little too late". In the meantime, the company said it would be in talks with insurance companies to help customers resolve the matter (*Times Live*, 2017: 1). *Cameron* (2017: 1) has made it clear that this incident points to flaws in management's ability to run the company executively. *Cameron* cites *Theron-Wepener* (2017: 1), who maintains that Company C ruined its reputation by failing to implement effective crisis management and communication. Fuel was added to the fire when, just four months later, Company C announced another recall for 15 600 of their entry-level vehicles as they pose fire-risk. In this case study, the consequence of ineffective stakeholder communication is costly to the company.

Last but not least, another case study shows that in February 2015, *Wheels24* (2015: 1) reported that in March, Company D will recall 2200 units in South Africa, manufactured between 2013 and 2015, to fix a problem with an engine compartment seal that could ignite. Globally, 147 224 cars were affected. According to the automaker, a rubber seal silences noises at the back of the engine bay. This seal can stick to the bonnet when it opens, meaning that it can fall into the engine and increase the likelihood of fire.

Media strategies could be developed to ensure the targeted audience is reached, that is all the companies' stakeholders, and that the message is conveyed correctly and at the right moment/place. This, will therefore ensure that all can contribute to problem-solving, and prior to that, to unpacking the complex difficulties which the industry is facing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History has seen mass communication theorists emerge including but not limited to *Bernard Berelson*, *Wilburg Schramm*, *Donald Shaw*, *Noam Chomsky* (*Kumar* n.d), and possibly others. In Africa, authors

have also made their marks in the field of communication, particularly on media theory, public opinion and languages.

Communication Theorists' Contributions Summarised

As far as mass communication theories are concerned, Table 1 is not exhaustive. It demonstrates, however, the contemporary, euro-centric or western-oriented communication scholarship, notwithstanding the fact that communication co-existed with human beings on the planet earth. Decolonising this field of study, one is tempted to trace back communication theories (oral tradition?) in Africa, the cradle of humanity for example in its former universities in Mali (Tumbouktu?) and in Egypt, respectively, many centuries (15th – 16th Century) or millennia ago (3250 BC – c. 400 AD). However, as the field suffices to say that the contemporary theories should take precedence – inspite of the fact that, the contemporary communication literature herein studied included not constructed language theorists and initiators of the calibre of Ludovik Lazare Zamenhof with his historic invention of Esperanto and related theories thereafter (Isheloke 2020).

As far as this study is concerned, a number of theories were applicable including: the Chaos Theory, Systems Theory and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). Alshammari *et al.* (2016: 1) cite Smith (2007), saying that Chaos Theory is the qualitative study of how current phenomena (such as minor changes or behaviour) that seems insignificant can have immense consequences for the future- such an occurrence is also known as the butterfly effect. It alludes to the interconnected nature of complex systems. The premise of the theory is that organisations (systems) dwell in the hub of chaos. In

agreement, Galacgac and Singh (2016: 1) characterise chaos as confusion, disorder, and lack of control, adding that the dynamic world in which organisations operate is chaotic and unpredictable. Indeed, with the constant advancing of technology and continued adaptability, coupled with humans' complex creatures who function in complex systems (organisations), organisations are prone to chaos or crises.

The behaviour of complex systems is very sensitive to the slightest of changes in conditions, which results in minor changes giving rise to more unpredictable, prominent effects on the system. Humans then attempt to control or remove the darkness and uncertainty of this chaos (Galacgac and Singh, 2016: 1). Thus, according to Levy (2017: 168), this requires or translates to strategic planning and forecasting organisational phenomena and the impact of change on organisations and industries. This theory is an extension of the Systems Theory. Systems theory is, therefore, one which takes matters to be interconnected systems in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, just as in a synergy. Systems theory thus addresses the problem at hand holistically and interdisciplinarily. Khuzwayo (2021) elaborates in line with that explanation of systems theory.

For the purpose of this study, last but not least, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) was looked at. The SCCT stems from a hypothesis that crisis participants constantly have a psychological attitude towards the crisis, affecting how the concerned parties interact (Kryuchok 2017: 55). The connection between events and emotions creates the foundation for this theory. This theory helps organisations understand the public's response and, consequently, their crisis response strategy (Rouweler, 2020: 6). The SCCT consists of three key elements: the crisis (clusters), crisis response strategies, and a system that

Table 1: Communication Theories and Scholars

Period	Scholar	Major contribution
Mid-20 th century	Bernard Berelson	Social research and mass communication
Worked in 1940s-1950s	Wilbur Schramm (Considered as the father of communication theory)	Established Communication as an academic field. Communication process & Mass media effects
1970s	Donald Shaw (Maxwell McCombs his co-author)	Developed "The Agenda Setting Theory". Emphasis on the role of the media in public priorities
1960s onwards	Noam Chomsky	Critiques of media and power. A leading figure in linguistics and political analysis. Influence on communication theory

Source: adapted by the researcher (Kumar n.d.).

matches it with a suitable crisis response strategy (Cooley and Cooley, 2011: 205). Suffice it to say that it is far out of the ambit of this research to elaborate on the theories above.

Types of Crises to Deal with

Skinner *et al.* (2016: 278) identify three main categories of crises: immediate crises, emerging crises, and sustained crises. An immediate crisis occurs suddenly and unexpectedly and is thus the most dreaded as there is little or no time to conduct research or plan. For example, burning an organisation's building or an employee's sudden death counts as an immediate crisis. An emerging crisis allows for research and planning and includes things like general employee dissatisfaction, which could have severe consequences for the organisation should it not be addressed timeously. Lastly, a sustained crisis persists over months or years, regardless of its efforts to combat it. Ongoing retrenchment falls under this category. Research indicates that the car industry contribute at least 14.2% to national exports and 24% to its manufacturing output. It also contributes to economy as the biggest employer in South Africa with 120 000 employees and constituting up to 6.4% of the GDP against 8% for the mining sector (Isheloke 2018)

Tripp (2016: 14) adds a fourth category of *social media or social-mediated crisis*. Social media initiates or amplifies this crisis (one of the organisational

communication channels) and results in undesirable media coverage, a change in the corporate process and possible financial loss. Skinner *et al.* (2016: 41) add that social media now allows millions of ordinary people to comment about organisations' products and services, with implications for online reputation management. Observing crisis management principles can help a great deal in understanding, addressing and remedying to the chaos going forward. Below is a number of crisis management principles that car manufacturing and their stakeholders or other business people ought to learn:

Crisis Management (CM) Principles' Facts

Table 2 presents key Crisis Management Principles used and ascertained by other organisations. It shows that crisis management ought not to be taken as a one-time effort but rather as a regular one. The process entails continuous preparation, response and learning or even unlearning where necessary.

Stages of Crisis Communication

The first stage at which crisis communication occurs is before the crisis occurs (pre-crisis stage). The second stage is where a risk materialises into a crisis, meaning that prevention was not possible. At this stage, critical information needed by the crisis team must be collected and processed to inform decision-making. Finally, crises messages are created and sent

Table 2: Key Crisis Management (CM) Principles

Statistics		Crisis Challenges, Outcome & Effective Communication	Additional Information
1	95% of business leaders	Expect a crisis every year	Yet only 49% have a crisis response plan ready
2	Institute of crisis management	Reports that it takes over a year to resolve a crisis if no plan is ready	Failure or difficulty to weather successfully a crisis
3	PWC's Global Crisis Survey	42% of organisations that win over crises had a proper plan in place	With specific procedures, responsibilities, communication protocols and various crisis scenarios
4	McKensy's research shows that organisations with:	Dedicated crisis team respond 25% faster to emergencies	Team: executive Leadership, communication and public relations, legal department, operations, HR, ITC, financial department, Security
5	The Harvard Business Review reveals	Transparent communication during a crisis leads to 30% more stakeholders' trust than otherwise	Internal and external messages are crucial, regular update to maintain productivity and morale is necessary
6	74% of organisations conducting thorough post-crisis reviews	Improve on crisis management practices: response timing, communication success rates, resource allocation, etc.	Planning, organising, leading and controlling. Regular evaluations a must. Better team performance. Stakeholder feedback. Financial impact and recovery measures

Source: Researched by the authors (adapted from (Key Principles of Crisis Management 2025)).

to various stakeholders using relevant communication tools. Once the crisis has occurred, the post-crisis stage begins, where an assessment of the crisis management processes must occur.

The Role of Mass Media in Crisis Communication

Approximately twenty-eight percent (28%) of crises on social media spread worldwide within just in seconds, a few minutes, or one hour, yet it takes most organisations almost 21 hours to issue a response. According to Muck Rack (2018: 1), a public relations software platform, traditional media platforms were the only forms of conveying organisational messages to the public in the past. However, today's digital landscape brings a variety of new platforms to reach mass audiences. Murdock (2010) in Austin and Jin (2017: 165) argues that the public with high involvement in crises is highly likely to utilise active media channels such as newspapers and magazines when retrieving and processing news and crisis information. Austin and Jin (2017: 166) conclude that social media can enable sharing of information, opinions, and expressing emotions regarding crises in ways that spread far beyond those of traditional public relations communication tactics, such as press releases or public statements.

Traditional Mass Media Versus Non Traditional Media

The average person still listens to at least 112 minutes of radio and watches almost five hours of television daily in countries such as South Africa and many more. Over fifty percent of all newspapers are still print only, and although many now have digital versions, some of the content requires the audiences to be subscribers. It is also important to note that of the people using traditional media, over two-thirds trust the information they receive from newspapers, radio or TV (Alpine, 2017: 1). Traditional media refers to communication methods that focus on delivering news to the public in general or a targeted group. It includes print publications such as newspapers and magazines, broadcast news like television and radio, and recently these media outlets have introduced digital versions like online newspapers and magazines (Muck Rack, 2018: 1). This study looks into different media such as Radio, Television (TV), Newspapers, Magazines, as well as New Mass Media (Social Media).

Non traditional media include numerous social/digital media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, X

(formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram, Mixit, Snapchat, Threads, Telegram, Tiktok, etc., (some of which are specialised and professional such as LinkedIn, Researchgate, and many more) and other for entertainment or non-professional. In the age of the fourth industrial revolution both traditional media, and non-traditional (and even better digital media) are very important and should be used for information getting, sharing as well as management, where necessary, in order for the company to capitalize on them and avoid any drawback in business. This is important knowing that information is actually the fourth power both in politics and business.

Types of Crises Situations and Response Strategies

Table 3 summarises several response strategies corresponding to the type of crisis considered the most applicable and practical. First, the organisation sees themselves as victims, meaning that the occurrence was not their fault; they can deny the crisis and consequently the responsibility by attacking the accuser, denying or scapegoating by blaming external entities. Second, when it is accidental, the organisation is advised to diminish the crisis by either explaining why and how it occurred or minimising its responsibility. Alternatively, the organisation may justify the crisis occurrence, which also involves minimising the perceived damage caused by the crisis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed for this study is qualitative in nature. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data as they allowed for further probing when the study matured. One of the advantages of this interviewing technique is that, although there are predetermined questions, the interviewer had the option of modifying their order and even the questions where the need arose, and could allow related, reformulated or new ones to pop in. The interviews primarily consisted of open-ended questions administered to the Crisis Management Teams. They were conducted face-to-face and took about 30 minutes per session. The researcher recorded using a dictaphone for accurate transcription, replaying and analysing at a later stage. Credible and relevant primary and secondary sources were consulted to assess the planning and management of crisis communication at Companies A, B, C, and D. These sources included, but were not limited to, company websites, newspaper articles, books and journals. A

Table 3: Types of Crises Situations and Response Strategies

Crisis Types	Crisis response strategies	
Victim Cluster	Deny crisis response strategies	
Natural disaster Rumor Workplace violence Product tampering/malevolence	Attack the accuser	Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization.
	Denial	Crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis.
	Scapegoat	Crisis manager blames some person or group outside of the organization for the crisis.
Accidental Cluster	Diminish crisis response Strategies	
Challenges Technical-error accidents Technical-error product harm	Excuse	Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.
	Justification	Crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis.
Preventable Cluster	Rebuild crisis response strategies	
Human-error accidents Human-error product harm Organisational misdeed with no injuries Organisational misdeed management misconduct Organisational misdeed with injuries	Compensation	Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims.
	Apology	Crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.

(Athens University of Economics and Business, 2015).

pilot study was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the research instruments. With the help of a statistician and the supervisors, those research instruments were improved, approved and administered to the respondents. The triangulation of data also took place at different stages to allow comparison and polishing of the final product.

DATA ANALYSIS

This study employs Thematic Analysis as data analysis technique which Herzog, Handke and Hitters (2019: 1-4) refer to as the cornerstone of qualitative research examination. It develops and applies modes of classification and interpretation that aid when deducing non-obvious and credible connotations from complex data. The researcher did this by identifying codes or frequently used terms, then themes or statements or phrases and lastly, patterns in the data acquired.

Type/s of Crises the Organisation has Faced

Alshammari *et al.* (2016: 1) agree with Galacgac and Singh (2016: 1) that all organisations, as complex systems, are prone to chaos. Indeed, all the respondents said their organisations had experienced

four out of four (100%) crises. In other words, all four car manufacturing companies have faced an immediate crisis, an emerging crisis, a sustained crisis and a social-mediated crisis as seen in Figure 1. As seen in Figure 1, the respondents explained that one of their biggest crisis challenges (60%) was COVID19 which “halted all business proceedings” then. Research indicates that 95% of organisation leaders expect a chaos at least once a year in their business, and this is inline with the chaos theory that teaches to prevent, manage and evaluate chaos occurrences because chaos will one day happen to be a reality (Key Crisis Management Principles 2025).

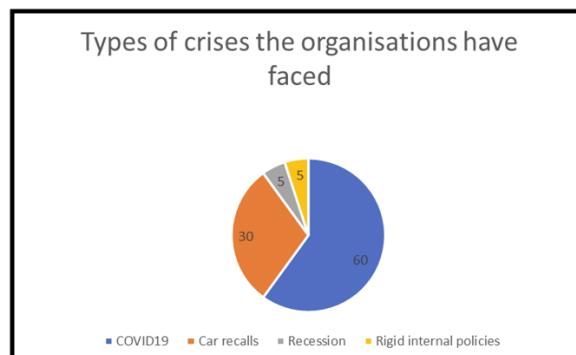


Figure 1: Types of crises the organisations have faced.

Crisis Management (or prevention) Plans in Place for the Different Crises

Zamoum and Gorpe (2018: 209) stress that an uncontrolled issue can turn into a crisis. Where car defaults are concerned, car manufacturing companies are supposed to test cars thoroughly, which is aimed at early detection of any possible risks and issues before they develop into a crisis.

Stage/s of the Crisis at which the Crisis is Communicated to Internally

Figure 2 shows that none of the companies communicates internally about the crisis at its potential stage. A total of 75% of the companies begin communicating about the crisis when it emerges as per Kadarova, Marković and Mihok's (2017: 61) suggestion. All the companies (100%) communicate with their internal stakeholders while the crisis occurs and at the dormant stage. Adopting communication theories and approaches as advocated by the gurus, Bernard Berelson, Wilbur Schramm, Donald Shaw and Noam Chomsky would possibly proven to be salvatory to the companies under study (Kumar n.d.).

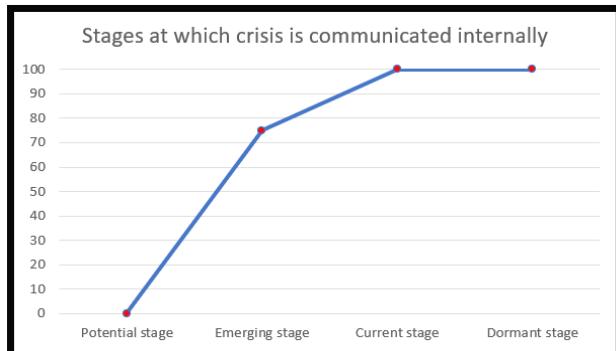


Figure 2: Stages at which crisis is communicated internally.

It may be a problem that 25% of the organisations only start communicating about the crisis at its current stage and not as it emerges. Employees play a vital role in combating crises and require as much information and time as possible. Thus, an organisation should have a crisis communication plan that establishes a framework for disseminating information to all stakeholders affected by the situation. This is inline with research which indicates that failure to have a crisis management plan in place is costly and time consuming to the company and that the company, in that case, could take over a year to solve-problems if no plan is available (Key Crisis Management Principles 2025).

Stage/s of the Crisis at which the Crisis is Communicated to Externally

Figure 3 shows that, just as with Figure 2, the crisis is not communicated to external stakeholders at its potential stage. Once again, 75% of the companies start communicating the crisis when it emerges, and (100%) all companies communicate or continue communicating as it develops and at the dormant stage. It is in line with Bernstein (n.d.), who recommends that organizations communicate by releasing an immediate statement about the crisis instead of only communicating once it has fully developed.

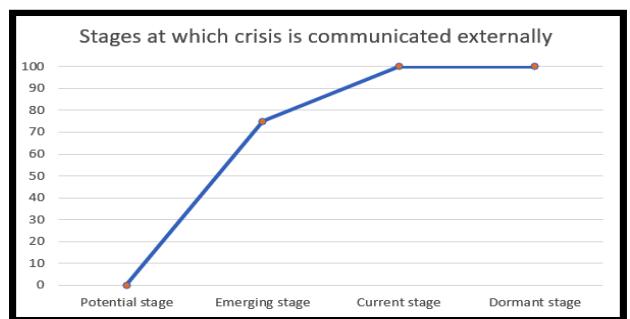


Figure 3: Stages at which crisis is communicated externally.

Mediums used to disseminate information externally during a crisis

In Figure 5, it is evident that social media and company websites are equally important as they make up 35% of the mediums used to disseminate information externally and promptly during a crisis. On the other hand, traditional media comes second in importance as it makes up 25%, and then emails make up 5% of the external crisis communications strategy. On the other hand, internally, it was found that both websites and emails scored 50% as media used to disseminate information. Note that the other figure is hidden for space economic reason. Other research

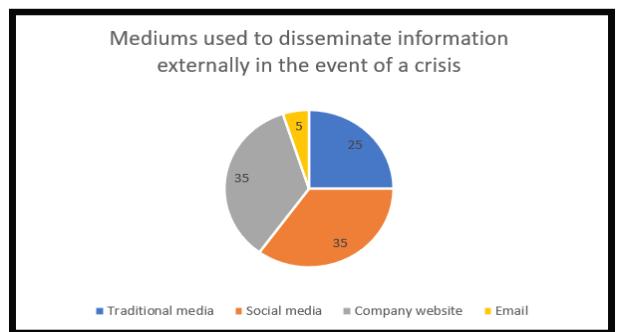


Figure 5: Mediums used to disseminate information externally in the event of a crisis.

further indicate that approximately, twenty-eight percent (28%) of crises on social media spread worldwide within seconds, a few minutes, or one hour. Austin and Jin (2017: 166) conclude that social media could be essential in enabling the sharing of information, opinions, and the expression of emotions in the organisation.

How Outgoing Messages are Monitored within the Organisation

All companies (100%) utilise their websites, as well as social media- especially X (formerly known as Twitter) - to monitor outgoing messages. Figure 6 illustrates that company websites and X (Twitter) are monitored the most (20% each), followed by Facebook and print media (15% each). LinkedIn (6%) and Instagram (8%) are the least monitored mediums. This research output confirms as well Austin and Jin (2017: 166) who agree on the importance of social media in the organisation.



Figure 6: How outgoing messages are monitored within the organization.

How incoming Messages are Monitored

Harmonious with Austin and Jin (2017: 166), Figure 7 shows that various social media platforms are most monitored to determine what the public is addressing to the companies. One respondent added that "...some people choose to use the direct messaging options that

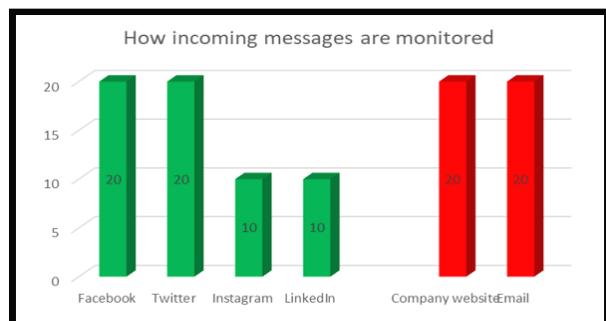


Figure 7: How incoming messages are monitored.

are available on social media". Twitter and Facebook were in the lead as all companies use them where social media is concerned.

How external messages about the organisation are monitored

In accordance with the literature, Figure 8 indicates that traditional media play an equally important role in communicating within the organisation. The research output shows that 25% scores were obtained for each and every media (Radio, TV, Print media as well as Digital print). This support the optimists who see the importance of traditional media not questioned. The traditional media are known to be the mainstream channels of communication for state owned and private companies, albeit at a higher cost.

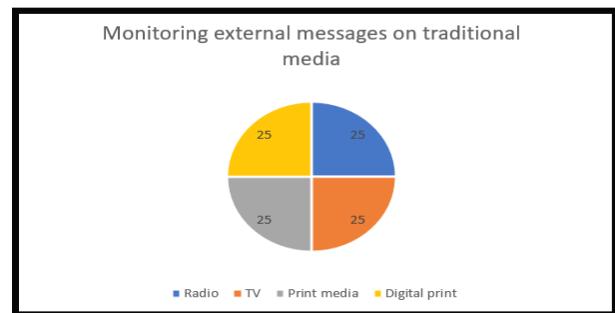


Figure 8: Monitoring external messages on traditional media.

Monitoring External Messages on Social Media

An interesting observation in Figure 9 was that, especially in crises, all organisations monitor traditional media- namely, radio, TV and print media equally (25% each). Digital print is also monitored equally (25%) by the companies. All organisations monitor social media equally (30% each), namely, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn (as seen in Figure 9). However, Instagram only amounts to 10% of importance and monitoring. The study did not look many other social media especially those deemed for mere entertainment or

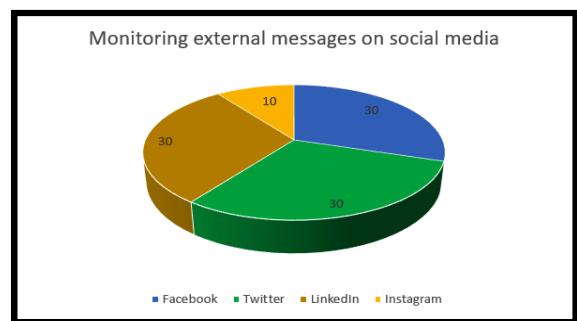


Figure 9: Monitoring external messages on social media.

"unprofessional" or again more specialised. In agreement with research, Figure 9 indicates that social media play an equally important role in communicating within or outside the organisation. Of recent, one could think that the promotion of social media is due to the velocity with which non traditional media convey messages externally.

The literature survey further informs that, in the age of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), both traditional, and non-traditional (and even better digital) media are very important. Information is actually the fourth power both in politics and business. Albeit, when social media and related platforms or applications infringe on the rights of other stakeholders including the public or would-be individual consumers, social media should be promoted responsibly. Reckless usage is costly as the owner or perpetrator of crime runs the risk of being criticized, sued, arrested or censured, just as it happened in the case of Elon Musk's X (formerly Twitter) Application which could enable willing users to sexualize others without consent – This caused an alarm internationally, forcing the controversial futurist to step back at least for now (BBC News 2025). It is evident in the section above that social media, unlike traditional media, influence crisis response differently, promptly with the possibility of alarming the nations around the world in seconds. This is inline with research which confirms that social media message spreads faster (Austin and Jin 2017: 166).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the yester years communication and related theories developed in many ways. From Egyptian hieroglyphs to African oral traditions, communication theories were completed by contemporary scholars of western origin. In their chronological order, Bernard Berelson embarked on research and mass communication whereas the father of communication theory, Wilbur Schramm described the communication process and explained the mass media effects. On the other hands, it is Donald Shaw and Maxwell McCombs who produced the "Agenda Setting Theory" while Noam Chomsky critiqued media and power as pioneers (Kumar n.d).

As a particular aspect, this research used multiple cases (A, B, C, D) in the motor vehicle manufacturing industry qualitatively to gather data, make conclusions after a thorough analysis. Based on theories such as chaos theory, system theory and Situational Crisis Communication Theory, the investigation went on to

investigate crisis management principles, and response thereof in order to garner, derive, decode, use, interpret data turned-information and produce knowledge.

The study confirmed amongst the other discoveries that all organizations as complex systems are prone to chaos or crisis. It was also confirmed that none of the studied companies communicated either internally or externally about a crisis before hand, or simply put, at the potential stage. In the age of the fourth industrial revolution, also known as 4IR, it is important to underline that all social media should be monitored equally, although this research indicates that websites and emails were first and foremost concerned.

Based on the above, it is recommended that proactive planning and implementation of crisis management be embraced in companies. The study further recommends that continuous training and motivation of employees become the modus operandi for the automotive or car manufacturing companies. Brainstorming should be extended to all employees for them to contribute towards the crisis response strategy, according to this research. Management should hold regular meetings and organise workshops in times of crisis in order to effectively respond to it. It is further recommended that the companies affected by the crisis should equally use both traditional and social media, where necessary, to address the problem at hand, bearing in mind that new social innovative media continue to proliferate nowadays.

Last but not least, future studies could involve a wider population by including other car manufacturing companies' crisis management teams and interviewing other organisational employees across the provinces for example, in a national study. A comparison with the only other truly industrialised economy of Africa, namely Egypt, would be interesting to see in the future.

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