Crisis Communication: Conceptualizing the Efficacy of Information Source Credibility on Crisis Message Acceptability and Reputation Sustainability

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Abstract

Recent studies have shown that social media users' perception of message acceptance and compliance during a crisis depends on its source credibility, and this has been relatively underexplored in the crisis communication context. The credibility of social media/information sources influences the users' attitudes and information quality, public engagement, and information believability during a crisis. In response to crisis communication, scholars revealed that despite the wide use of SCCT by crisis communication researchers, the theory still has limitations in evaluating factors that could potentially affect an organizational reputation. Response source credibility is a factor that influences crisis response strategies and sustains reputation. During emergencies, unreliable and untrustworthy sources of information and media coverage of content perceived as threatening can elicit aversive emotions, such as distress, depression, and mental damage, and further generate more crises. This study proposes a conceptual model for the efficacy of source credibility on message (crisis response) acceptability and reputation sustainability. To monitor the streams of research conducted on source credibility, the authors used the Scopus database to examine the numbers of research on source credibility in the domain of crisis communication and subject areas. The results revealed that the perceived information source credibility during a crisis influences message acceptance and mediates the relationships between crisis response strategies and reputation. The paper will help the crisis management team appreciate the value of source credibility and save reputation during a crisis.

Keywords: message (crisis response strategies), source credibility, organizational reputation, situational crisis communication theory

1. Introduction

When crisis strikes unverifiable and untrustworthy sources of information could be very threatening and misleading. The article argued that the concept of trustworthiness embedded in information source credibility guarantees message acceptability, believability, and message complaint. Thus, this paper aims to demystify the efficacy of Information source credibility on message acceptability and reputation sustainability. In this context, a crisis message and a crisis response strategy are interchangeable terms.

A crisis can bring an opportunity, reputational threat, or mixture of both (Peiritsch, 2019; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2022).

Crises are unexpected organizational problems exposed to the public's attention that adversely threaten reputation (Gigliotti, 2020). Public Relations define a crisis as "a significant threat to operations that can have negative consequences if not handled properly" (Institute for Public Relations, 2018) quoted by Reber, Yarbrough, Nowak, & Jin (2020). However, Seeger & Mitra (2019) defines an organizational crisis as a "specific, unexpected and no (routine) event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and simultaneously present an organization with both opportunities for and threats to its ultimate priority goals.

Thus, any violation of stakeholders' expectations that has a dismissive effect on stakeholders and organizational reputation is considered a potential crisis (Coombs & Tachkova, 2023). Crisis response strategy (message) on the other hand, is the communication, information and responses employed by the organizations facing challenging crises, which entail what crisis managers do or say during and after a crisis (Coombs, 2006; Coombs, 2020; Dominic et al., 2021).

Crisis response strategies in this context originated from the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, propounded by W. Timothy Coombs in 2007, and it identifies response strategies organizations can use to handle crises and protect their reputation. However, despite the wide use of this theory, it still has limitations in evaluating the factors or variables that could enhance the crisis response strategies and protect reputation. The effectiveness of the crisis response strategy depends on the credibility (trustworthiness) of the source. This concept has not been given adequate attention in crisis communication research (Kim & Park, 2017; Aladhadh et al., 2019; Spence, Lin, Lachlan, & Hutter, 2020).

Response source credibility is the reliability, trustworthiness, and positive message attitude, which activates stakeholders' believability in the response strategies employed by an organization during a severe crisis to protect the reputation and allow continuity. It influences the effectiveness of crisis response strategies during a challenging time. It is adjudged as the trust and void of being questioned in the message source (Aladhadh, Zhang & Sanderson, 2019; Tkalac Verčič et al., (2019).

A credible source is a medium, channel, or someone who is reliable and tenable in their discipline and is free of errors and bias, representing an organization and furnishing crisis information to the public. The abstinence of this concept has created a lot of complications among crisis managers, especially with the emergence of the internet and social media (Dominic et al., 2021).

Globally, the first blogging sites became accessible in 1999 for user-generated content, creating a social media sensation that's still popular today. However, the internet got its start in the United States. In West Africa, the Internet operation started in 1995, making Ghana the first to have a permanent Internet connection. In Nigeria, the internet began to operate on January 1st, 1997, with Skannet, PINET, Linkserve, Steineng, Cyberspace, Infoweb, Hyperia, etc. In Nigeria, social media usage has reached about 27 million as of the year 2020. In January 2023, Nigeria had over 31.6 million active social media users (Okolo et al., 2022; Akeusola, 2023). Thus, this has unveiled the reality, perceptibility, discernibility, and complexity of crises locally and internationally (Alexander, 2014; Dominic et al., 2021).

Consequently, the emergence of social media has exposed organizational, political, religious, and societal crises globally (Holmes, 2011; Zhu et al., 2017; Dominic et al., 2022). During emergencies, unreliable and untrustworthy information and media coverage of content perceived as threatening can elicit aversive emotions, such as distress, depression, and mental damage, and further generate more crises (Siebenhaar, Köther, & Alpers, 2020). According to Dominic et al. (2023), there is a "global paradigm shift in the citizens' acceptability of political decisions, crisis resolution, and political promises, especially in Nigeria context, because of information source credibility gaps.

In response to crisis communication, scholars revealed that despite the wide use of SCCT by crisis communication researchers, the theory still has limitations in evaluating factors that could potentially affect an organizational reputation (Jiang, Luo & Kulemeka, 2016; Jamal & Abu Bakar, 2017; Ndlela & Ndlela, 2019; Shah & Wei, 2022). Crisis information source credibility is a factor that influences crisis response strategies (Tkalac Verčič, Verčič, & Coombs, 2019). Source credibility is the 'extent to which the source is perceived as possessing trustworthiness relevant to the communication topic and can be trusted to give an objective opinion on the subject' (Shah & Wei, 2022).

Therefore, these gaps have resulted in the downscale of public's trust in the organizations/government during a crisis. Thus, the conceptualization of information source credibility remains sacrosanct and inviolable towards achieving effective crisis response strategies and sustaining reputational capital.

During crises, the relevant stakeholders need to learn and evaluate the information received through listening, understanding, and trust. Then, verify and respond to the (response strategies) warning and solution message. Consequently, when a crisis strikes, the victims act quickly based on the information received to prevent loss of life, human suffering, and loss of property (Zakaria & Mustaffa, 2014).

No organization is immune to crisis. The style of crisis management is what makes or mars the organizational reputation (Dominic et al., 2021). Unverified information sources during a crisis can further complicate the cataclysm and generate

additional challenges. Thus, the importance of source credibility during an organizational quandary is indispensable and inalienable in the lens of crisis communication, so as to maintain reputation. Reputation is the aggregate evaluation stakeholders make about how well an organization meets with their expectations based on its past and current behavioral history. It encompasses a reservoir of goodwill protecting organizations in times of crises (Gotsi, & Wilson, 2001; Wong, Ou, & Wilson, 2021). The article tends to answer the research question below:

Research Question

The authors proposed one significant research question (RQ) to support a knowledge synthesis of present literature on the factor that enhances the effectiveness of crisis response strategies (message) and maintains organizational reputation during a crisis.

RQ1: Is there any mediating role of response source credibility on the relationship between crisis response strategies (message) and organizational reputation?

2. Conceptualizing Crisis Response Source Credibility

In the course of an organizational upheaval, message acceptability is influenced by the chosen source of crisis response. When the channel of crisis information is not credible, there is the possibility of indecision and confusion, which threatens the organization's reputation. This concept of source credibility in crisis communication has not been given full attention as a variable that influences the acceptability of crisis response strategies used by an organization in crisis (Kim & Park, 2017; Tkalac Verčič, Verčič, & Coombs, 2019). Furthermore, Jiang, Luo & Kulemeka (2016) found that a great challenge in crisis communication now is to quickly build a credible response source.

Irrespective of the crisis response strategies used by an organization, the source is predominant in achieving its purpose or objective. In crisis communication, source credibility implies a communicator's positive characteristics, competence, sociability, and trustworthiness (The degree of trust in the response source) that affect the stakeholders or receiver's acceptance of a message (Ismagilova, Slade, Rana, & Dwivedi, 2020).

It does not matter if the crisis is a financial crisis, personnel crisis, organizational crisis, technological crisis, natural disaster, natural crisis, confrontation upheaval, workplace violence crisis, a crisis of malevolence, confrontational crisis, accident crisis, rumor, a crisis of deception, terrorism, earthquake, a cataclysm of malice, artificial /man-made/ machine-made disasters, political crisis, victim crisis, intentional crisis, pandemic crisis, epidemic crisis, Para-crisis, source credibility supports the hypothesis that interpersonal trustability is dependent on a listener's perceptions of a speaker's credibility (Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010; Moreso, Fuentes Lara, & Navarro, 2020; Kim, & Kim, 2020; (Lim, & Brown-Devlin, 2021). Source credibility (trustworthiness) strengthens the relationships between the crisis response strategies and the organizational reputation. According to Chu & Kamal (2008), the results reveal that source trustworthiness influences message (crisis response) accuracy. Similarly, Jamal & Abu Bakar (2017) established that credible sources will be perceived as more persuasive in their communication strategies during crises.

Therefore, high-source credibility leads to more favorable attitudes and provides an atmosphere of crisis response acceptability thus, reduce the reputational threat. Source credibility also advances the permissibility and admissibility in advertising (Wu & Wang, 2011). The information quality of social media content gains acceptability and believability via its source credibility (Xie, Miao, Kuo, & Lee, 2011; Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2014; Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). Source credibility answers the question of doubt and assures compliance with the crisis response strategies used during an organizational crisis.

As shown in Fig.1 below, a crisis affects stakeholders and organizations. However, it takes a trustworthy response source to ensure message acceptance and protect reputation in an emergency phase. The effectiveness of crisis response strategies is subject to their source credibility. According to Park & Cameron (2014), source credibility influences stakeholders' evaluations of a message, such as accuracy and truthfulness. Credibility judgment is a paramount determinant for the effectiveness of organizational crisis responses in increasing positive outcomes. Thus, it is cardinal for an organization to choose the right spokesperson to represent the organization during a crisis. Again, source credibility and information quality influenced stakeholders' engagement in organizations during a severe crisis and sustained reputation (Shah, & Wei, 2022).
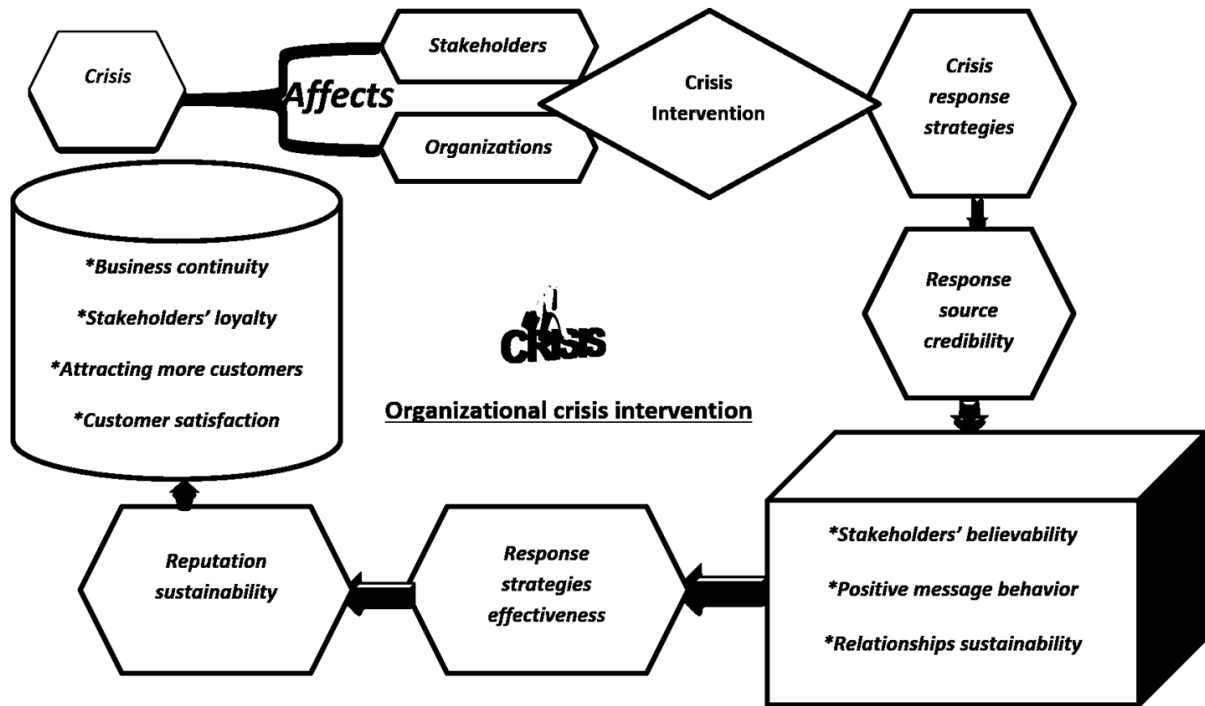
Figure 1. Graphical illustration on gaining stakeholders' trust via response source credibility

Philosophical rationale: Source credibility strengthens the effectiveness of crisis response strategies. Worthy of note, in the field of crisis communication, source credibility has not been extensively examined as a significant factor that enhances the effectiveness of crisis response strategies and restores organizational reputation in times of crisis. In dealing with a critical organizational crisis, the response (crisis message/information) source credibility is crucial to enhance trust and confidence in the response strategies employed by the organization. When organizational reputation is threatened by a crisis, using an appropriate crisis response strategy is indispensable and effective; when the response source is credibly reliable to avert stakeholders' doubt and maintain reputation (The Lancet, 2020; Hursti, 2021).

2.1 The Conceptual Framework: Crisis Response Strategies, Source Credibility, and Organizational Reputation

The concept of source credibility has been given attention in various disciplines: marketing, advertising, and health information. However, in crisis management, only a few studies have been done to demystify the potency of source credibility on the effectiveness of crisis response strategies. Thus, previous studies found that source credibility significantly influences the recipient of crisis response strategies. In the same vein, when the source of the response is not credible, it will further damage the reputation (Jamal & Bakar, 2017). The credibility of crisis management during a potential crisis promotes message trust, a positive attitude, message compliance, and stakeholders' persuasive knowledge by increasing the perceived message threat and efficacy of the response strategy used by an organization in a crisis.

Again, source credibility affects how stakeholders react to crisis response strategies used by an organization in a crisis (Tkalac Verčič, Verčič, & Coombs 2019). According to Jamal & Bakar (2017), credibility is the extent to which an organization being the source of information is perceived as trustworthy and reliable, and determines the survival of an organization in crisis. The perceived credibility of the messages will either strengthen or worsen the reputation. Source credibility is the overriding factor that triggers the relationship between crisis response strategies and organizational reputation.

An experimental design by van Zoonen, & van der Meer (2015) found that the judgments of organizational reputation are not only dependent on the crisis response strategy employed by an organization in a crisis but also on the response source credibility. Furthermore, the scholars posited that source credibility mediates the effect of crisis response strategies and protects organizational reputation during crises. Again, Shah & Wei (2022) found that source credibility, which leads to quality information, has a significantly positive relationship with perceived message benefit during a crisis. The authors further explained that to improve crisis response strategy, a careful selection of response sources should not be overlooked.

Despite the growing evidence that trustworthiness can affect public crisis engagement behaviors, improve stakeholders' believability, enhance trust in the crisis response, and sustain reputation, it is surprising that so few studies have been conducted on the concept, especially dealing with crisis and maintaining reputation. This study proposes a conceptual

model for the efficacy of source credibility on message (crisis response) acceptability and organizational reputation sustainability (see fig.2).

Figure 2 below is a conceptual framework that elucidates the mediating role of source credibility on the efficacy of or relationships between crisis response strategies and influences organizational reputation.
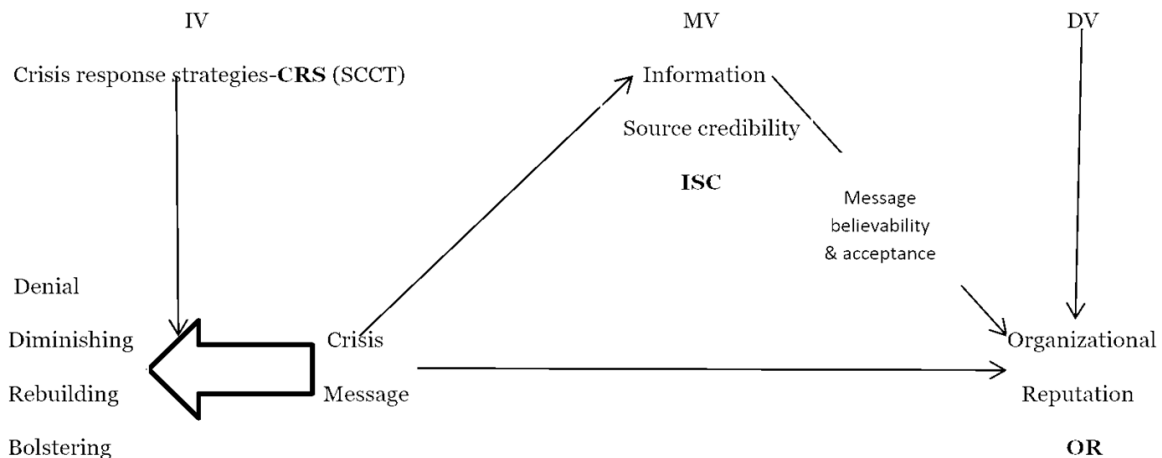

Figure 2. A proposed conceptual framework

Information source credibility intensifies the relationships between (crisis message) crisis response strategies and organizational reputation. Simply put, there is a mediating role of source credibility in the relationship between crisis response strategies and organizational reputation (Aladhadh, Zhang, et al., 2019; Jamal & Bakar, 2017). Therefore, based on the existing literature, the current paper advances the hypothesis that states:

H1. There is a mediating role of response source credibility in the relationships between crisis response strategies (denial, diminishing, rebuilding, and bolstering) and the organization's Reputation.

3. Methods

The authors further validate the extent to which this concept of information source credibility has gained visibility in the field of crisis communication by applying a systematic literature review approach. A systematic review can advance the scientific understanding of source credibility accuracy in crisis communication (Eriksson, 2018; Tkalac Verčič et al., 2019). However, in establishing transparency and accuracy, the authors applied the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) methodology in the systematic literature review search. The PRISMA Framework used in this review has four stages: Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and inclusion.

Scholars divulged that a systematic literature review is a valuable tool for academic research, owing to its tendency to reduce biases, increase reliability, and promote valid research findings in crisis communication. Comprehensiveness, transparency, and rigorousness are the indispensable hallmarks of systematic literature review (Okoli & Schabram, 2015; Xiao & Watson, 2019; Dominic et al., 2022).

To monitor the streams of research conducted on source credibility, the authors used the Scopus database to examine the numbers of research on source credibility in the domain of crisis communication, subject areas, and by country document. The keywords used in the search include information ("source credibility" and "crisis communication"). According to Dominic et al. (2022), Scopus is a booming abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature with over 22,800 journals from 500 publications globally.

From the results, only 15 documents were found from 2012 to 2023, especially from the angle of crisis communication. 2021 has the highest number of research on source credibility in crisis communication, probably because of the emergence of covid-19 crisis and its proliferation of fake news. From the lens of the subject areas, business management and social sciences got the highest percentage each 28.0%. Brown-Devlin, Lim, Park, Spence, Bickham, Bowen, Cameron, Coombs, Francis, George, Hayasaka, Hutter, Isochi, Ito, Jin, Kim, and Lachlan happen to be the leading scholars. The United States has the highest number of documents (11) from 2012 to 2023, followed by Japan with (2) documents.

A systematic literature review evaluates and synthesizes research results and helps to identify the current state of knowledge, the main theories, methods, and findings, and the gaps or limitations that need further investigation. Contextually, from the results of the review, the concept of source credibility has been underexplored in crisis communication research.

Despite numerous research in crisis communication, especially on the power of SCCT's crisis response strategies, it is surprising that so little empirical research has been conducted on source credibility from the perspective of crisis management and organizational reputation. Secondly, the few studies that focused on the source credibility in enhancing the effectiveness of crisis response strategies were mainly from the United States perspective. Thus, there is a deficiency in the literature that necessitates more study on 'source credibility' as a factor that intensifies crisis response strategies in crisis communication and helps maintain reputation- contextual gap.

There was no study regarding the efficacy of source credibility on the relationship between crisis response strategy acceptability and reputation sustainability from the African context, especially in Nigeria. Therefore, there is a call for more studies on the potency of information source credibility towards enhancing crisis response strategies and sustaining organizational reputation.

The figures below demonstrate the systematic literature review results from Scopus database accordingly.
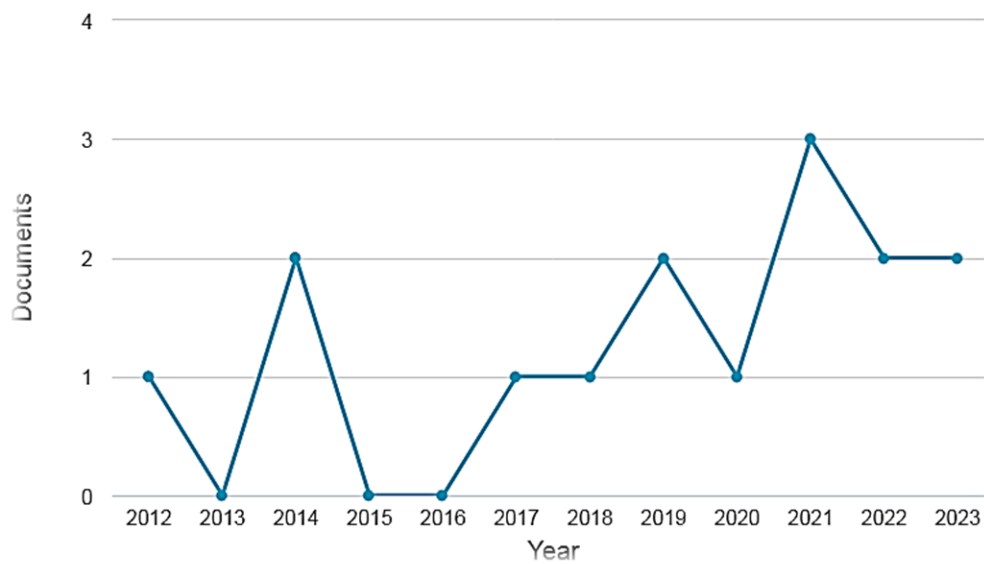

Figure 3. Document by year

Figure 4. Document by authors

Documents by country or territory

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.
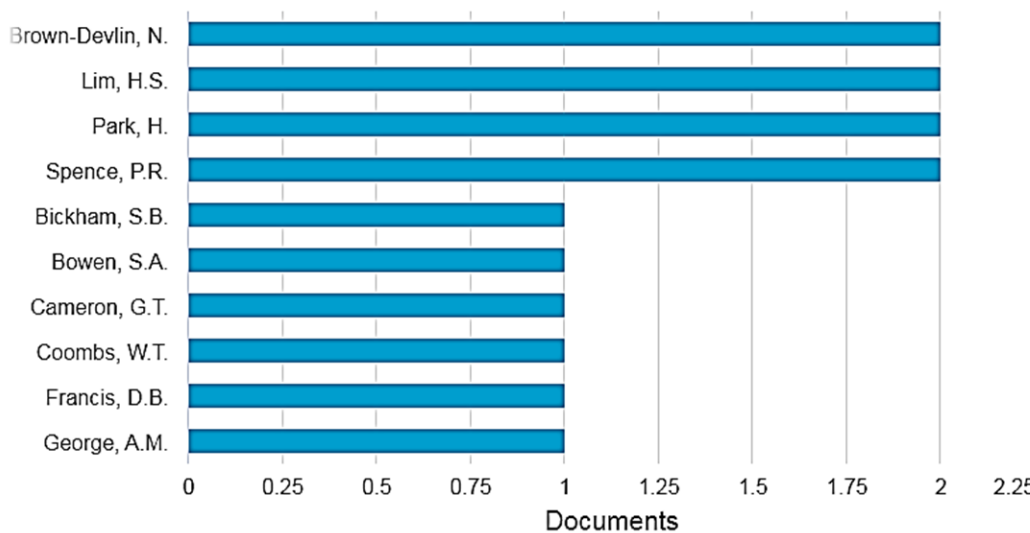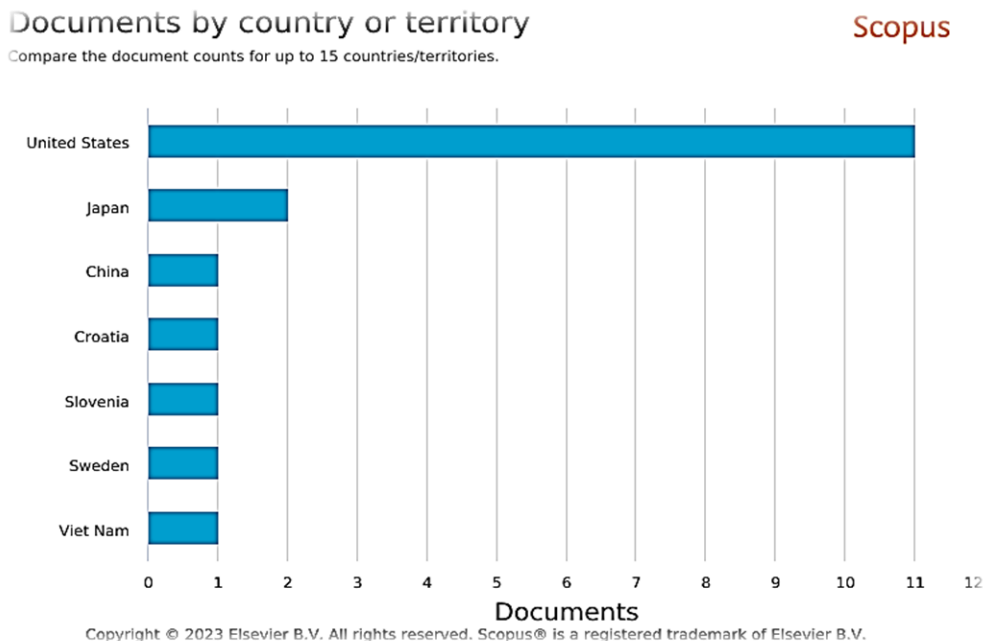
Scopus

Figure 5. Document by country
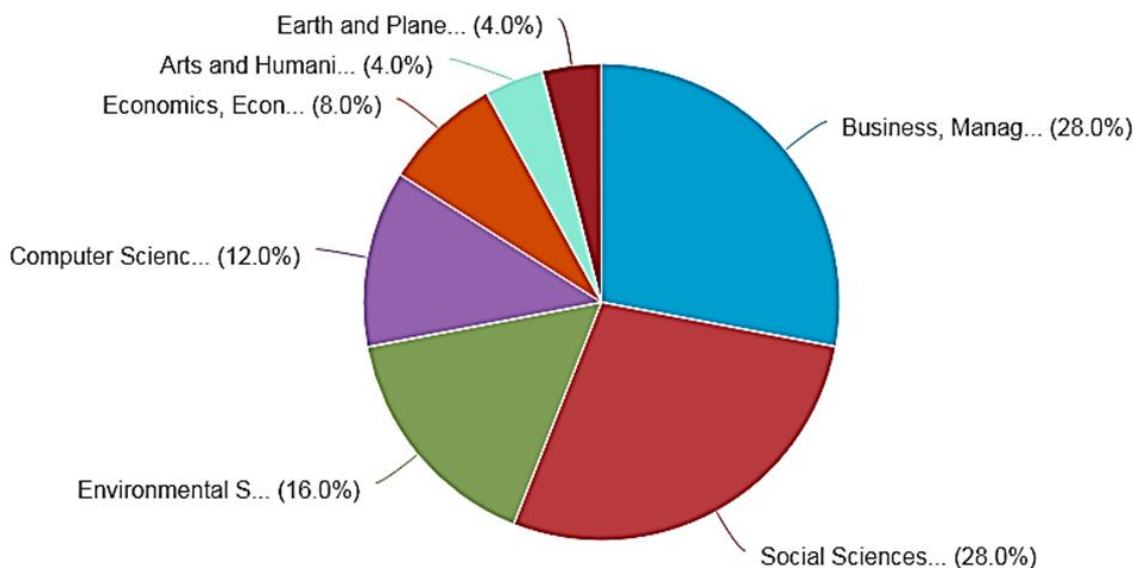
Documents by subject area

Figure 6. Document by subject area

4. Discussion

After synthesizing the document results and identifying the state of current knowledge, the finding shows that source credibility has not received much attention in crisis communication. Therefore, there is an urgent need to examine this concept as an indispensable factor that strengthens crisis response strategies and sustains reputation during organizational crises. Risk-related information demands a credible source to be effective and qualitative. The findings assist practitioners in enhancing crisis communication effectiveness via the improvement in source credibility.

From the findings, the precursory of source credibility gained little attention because of the covid-19 crisis and the diversities of channels furnishing the covid-19 related response information. However, apart from the United States, crisis message source credibility has not gained much attention from the contextual perspective as a salient variable that enhances the effectiveness of crisis response strategies and protects reputation during an organizational crisis.

Irrespective of the nature of the crisis, when the organization lacks a credible spokesperson, channel, or source, this will heighten the seriousness of the emergency and threaten its reputation. Again, Sellnow-Richmond et al. (2023) found that source credibility is critical to crisis response behavioral compliance regardless of message content adherence. Source credibility helps to guarantee trust and loyalty during organizational crises and sustains reputation. Again, Kim Park (2017) found that source credibility mediated the effect of source on reputation and behavioral intentions toward the effectiveness of response strategies. Stakeholders tend to have a positive attitude and adhere to the instructions, messages, and information provided by an organization in crisis when the message source is credible. However, Tkalac Verčič, Verčič, and Coombs (2019) argued that 'the selection of the source has little effect on how people react' to crisis response techniques.

Furthermore, Spence, Lin, Lachlan, and Hutter (2020) found that source credibility variable (trustworthiness) is 'essential for the protection of people's physical health' before a risk event. Effective crisis communication increases customers' safety and protects the organization's reputation. A credible crisis communication source promotes brand loyalty and strengthens reputation. Furthermore, Nguyen and Le (2021) posited that information relevance is a strong predictor of source credibility. The results of the systematic review conducted in the study are shown in Table 1 below.

The findings revealed that the selection of the source has little effect on how people react to crisis response strategies (Tkalac Verčič, Verčič, Coombs, 2019). However, Sellnow-Richmond, George, Lukacovic, Salazar, and Sellnow (2013) found that perceived source credibility is critical to behavioral compliance regardless of message content adherence. Source credibility guarantees reputation evaluations, and crisis response strategies acceptance, stakeholders' positive behaviors during a crisis (Brown-Devlin, Lim, Tao, 2022).

5. Findings

Table 1. Systematic review results

No	Title	Authors	Year	Sources	Findings
1	A comparative analysis of U.S. state government communication and resident compliance to CDC COVID-19 guidelines	Sellnow-Richmond, D.D., George, A.M., Lukacovic, M.N., Salazar, S.E., Sellnow, D.D.	2023	Journal of Applied Communication Research	Findings illustrate that perceived source credibility is critical to behavioral compliance regardless of message content adherence and that political ideology may become a competing narrative and may influence resident decisions.
2	Interacting arguments in crisis communication: The influence of message convergence on risk and crisis messages	Soares, R., Jin, X., Spence, P., Sellnow, T.L.	2023	Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management	Results indicated that those participants viewing content with high convergence had heightened perceptions of source credibility, risk severity, and message consistency
3	Examining the Influence of Algorithmic Message Personalization on Source Credibility and Reputation	Brown-Devlin, N., Lim, H.S., Tao, J.	2022	International Journal of Business Communication	Results revealed that reputation repair strategy selection indirectly influenced stakeholders' reputation evaluations via source credibility.
4	Messenger Nationality, Media Skepticism, and Crisis Communication Effectiveness: Huawei's YouTube Messages as Perceived in the U.S.	Zhu, Y., Bowen, S.A., Lyu, X.	2022	International Journal of Strategic Communication 16(1), pp. 111-126	Showed that Russian nationality decreases source credibility perception in comparison to U.K. and control conditions, while the latter two showed no differences.
5	The Public's Perceptions of Government Officials' Communication in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic	Bickham, S.B., Francis, D.B.	2021	Journal of Creative Communications 16(2), pp. 190-202	Survey findings revealed that message exposure influenced respondents' perceived credibility of and trust in government officials during and after the stay-at-home order.
6	How social media fosters the elders'	Nguyen, T.H., Le, X.C.	2021	Library Hi Tech 39(3), pp. 776-795	Information relevance is a strong predictor of source credibility.

	COVID-19 preventive behaviors: perspectives of information value and perceived threat			
7	The Value of Brand Fans during a Crisis: Exploring the Roles of Response Strategy, Source, and Brand Identification	Lim, H.S., Brown-Devlin, N.	2021	International Journal of Business Communication	Brand fans are more likely to evaluate other brand fan's social media accounts as a credible crisis communication source, whereas those who are not brand fans are more likely to evaluate brand and/or brand executives as credible.
8	Listen up, I've done this before: The impact of self-disclosure on source credibility and risk message responses	Spence, P.R., Lin, X., Lachlan, K.A., Hutter, E.	2020	Progress in Disaster Science 7,100108	Source credibility variables are essential for the protection of people's physical health before a risk event.
9	The effect of different crisis communication channels	Sano, K., Sano, H.	2019	Annals of Tourism Research 79,102804	The results reveal that consumer-to-consumer crisis communication effectively increases consumers' safety perception and willingness to travel by the equal degree as business-to-consumer communication does for groups with a high perceived risk.
10	Convergence of crisis response strategy and source credibility: Who can you trust?	Tkalac Verčič, A., Verčič, D., Coombs, W.T.	2019	Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management 27(1), pp. 28-37	Apology as a strategy results in higher postcrisis reputation of both organization and speaker. However, the selection of the source has little effect on how people react to crisis response strategies.
11	It is Not About Facts – It is About Framing. The App Generation's Information-Seeking Tactics: Proactive Online Crisis Communication	Sjöberg, U.	2018	Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management 26(1), pp. 127-137	Using the 2014 Ebola outbreak as a case in point, special attention is drawn to how source credibility is assessed on the Internet.
12	Is there still a PR problem online? Exploring the effects of different sources and crisis response strategies in online crisis communication via social media	Kim, Y., Park, H.	2017	Corporate Reputation Review 20(1), pp. 76-104	The path analysis indicated that perceived source credibility mediated the effect of source on reputation and behavioral intentions. This mediation appeared to be contingent on the type of crisis response strategy.
13	Keeping it real: Exploring the roles of conversational human voice and source credibility in crisis communication via blogs	Park, H., Cameron, G.T.	2014	Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly 91(3), pp. 487-507	Results indicate that first-person voice and personal narratives increased perceptions of social presence and interactivity in online communication. These perceptions subsequently resulted in positive postcrisis outcomes, such as reputation and behavioral intentions.
14	Social Media as Information Source: Recency of Updates and Credibility of Information	Westerman, D., Spence, P.R., Van Der Heide, B.	2014	Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 19(2), pp. 171-183	Data indicate that recency of tweets impacts source credibility; however, this relationship is mediated by cognitive elaboration.
15	Trusting tweets: The Fukushima disaster and information source	Thomson, R., Ito, N., Suda, H., (...), Isochi,	2012	ISCRAM 2012 Conference Proceedings - 9th	We look at the sources, credibility, and between-language differences in information shared in the month

credibility on Twitter	R., Wang, Z.		International Conference on Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management	following the disaster. Messages were categorized by user, location, language, type, and credibility of information source. Tweets with reference to third-party information made up the bulk of messages sent, and it was also found that a majority of those sources were highly credible, including established institutions, traditional media outlets, and highly credible individuals.

6. Conclusion

Trustworthiness plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of a crisis response master plan. If the source of the response is trustworthy, then the message conveyed is more believable, which strengthens the crisis response strategy and safeguards the reputation of the organization. According to a study conducted by Badu, Kruke, and Saetren (2023), two critical determinants of effective crisis management are crisis communication (the response strategy) and trustworthy response source (being a credible source). A trustworthy source is all-inclusive of integrity, reliability, believability and dependability in times of crisis. Crisis communication is a field that guides crisis managers in minimizing harm to stakeholders and the organization.

Scholars have found that while SCCT is widely employed by crisis communication researchers, it has limitations when it comes to evaluating factors that may impact an organization's reputation (Jiang, Luo & Kulemeka, 2016). This article is a conceptual paper that demystifies the significance of source credibility as an indispensable factor that enhances the acceptance, believability, and compliance of SCCT's crisis response strategies. Irrespective of how superb an organizational crisis response strategies seem to be when the source is not credible, it will not be effective, instead, generate a further crisis.

Shah and Wei (2022) define source credibility as the degree to which the source is perceived as trustworthy and relevant to the crisis information and can be relied upon to provide an unbiased viewpoint on the challenges. In addition, Dalla-Pria and Rodríguez-de-Dios (2022) found a strong correlation between response source credibility and the concept of crisis response strategies.

Crisis communication scholars have found that a major challenge in crisis response is quickly establishing a credible source, as source trustworthiness affects message accuracy and acceptance (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Jiang, Luo & Kulemeka, 2016).

It is important to note that social media has increased the availability/visibility of crisis response sources, when examining the mediating effect of crisis source trustworthiness (credibility) on the relationship between crisis communication strategies and organizational reputation. During epidemic or pandemic crises, source credibility is crucial for protecting people's physical health. Information relevance and acceptability strongly predict source credibility (Nguyen & Le, 2021).

The complex nature of crisis communication in the new era of socially mediated communication requires a careful selection of credible sources to enhance message believability and guarantee stakeholders' trust during crises. It's important to keep in mind that strategies that are successful on traditional media may not necessarily be effective on social media. Organizational social media sources hold a greater level of credibility compared to non-organizational sources (Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2014). The ability to uphold reputation in times of crisis is heavily reliant on the trustworthiness of the source.

Source credibility is essential for crisis response strategies to be accepted, regardless of the communication medium used (traditional media, social media, or word-of-mouth). Social media platforms are essential sources of information during a crisis or paracrisis, as confirmed by recent research (Hong & Len-Riós, 2015). However, crisis communication researchers have not thoroughly examined the significance of source credibility in socially mediated crisis communication. The reputation of an organization during a crisis is not solely determined by their response strategy but also heavily influenced by the credibility of the source delivering the crisis message (Kim, & Park, 2017).

Online crisis communication is a critical tool for organizations to quickly disseminate information to their stakeholders. However, recipients of this information often have preconceived notions about the motives, behavior, and acceptability of message sources. Thus, it is imperative to investigate how source credibility, specifically trustworthiness, impacts the relationship between crisis response strategies and organizational reputation.

Managing social media during a crisis can be challenging for those responsible for crisis management. Social media platforms have the power to trigger crises and influence traditional news media's coverage. Social media can be a double-edged sword, as it can be used to communicate an organization's response and address stakeholders concerns. Despite numerous studies on crisis response strategies through social media, little is known about how social media source

credibility can enhance the relationship between crisis response strategies and organizational reputation. Trustworthy social media sources can strengthen the believability and acceptance of messages, ultimately impacting an organization's reputation. When used appropriately, social media can help rebuild an organization's reputation and restore public trust. However, misusing social media during a crisis can have detrimental effects on an organization's reputation (Triantafillidou & Yannas, 2020).

Significantly, the findings from this review aroused the awareness of risk communicators, reporters or spokespersons, and crisis managers in crisis communication research, promoting the role of source credibility in enhancing crisis response strategies and minimizing reputational threats. It provides valuable information to the crisis management team regarding the importance of source credibility and reputation sustainability during a crisis.

Every organizational crisis generates a reputational threat or an opportunity (Schneider, Kallis, & Martinez-Alier, 2010; Gkeredakis, Lifshitz-Assaf, & Barrett, 2021). However, when not properly handled could lead to an organizational extinction. The most vital aspect to examine in every crisis is- how to maintain reputation and sustain customers' relationships and loyalty. In achieving all of these, organizations need to prioritize crisis response source credibility to guarantee the effectiveness of crisis response strategies and maintain their reputation. It takes years to build an organization's reputation. When a crisis hits, it could take a minute to destroy it if not guided. Organizational reputation creates organizational value, worth, and relevance in a business world driven by competition. Source credibility effectuates the effectiveness of crisis response strategies and protects reputation during a crisis situation.

The source of information in this socially mediated era in the course of Crisis communication compels that- the judgments of organizational reputation are not only dependent on the crisis response strategy but also on the information source of credibility (Van Zoonen & Van Der Meer, 2015).

In terms of its implications for risk communicators, source credibility results in a positive adherence or submissiveness in the crisis response (message) acceptance and maintains a healthy and reliable relationship between the stakeholders and the organization. An infodemic is a cataclysm generated by untrustworthy crisis information sources. This article will help policymakers gain an awareness of the importance of credible sources during a crisis phase. It will ensure policymakers make the right decision regarding trustworthy source selection during a crisis and safeguard reputation.

Regarding directions for future research, subsequent scholars in crisis communication are recommended to use quantitative or qualitative studies on this concept to prove results consistency or otherwise. Again, other prospective scholars should consider conducting systematic literature review studies to explore the efficacy of source credibility on crisis response strategies during organizational crises. Again, only the Scopus database was used in this article. Prospective authors using systematic literature review should consider using more than one database to examine results consistencies.

In times of crisis, having sufficient, credible, and reliable information is essential. It is imperative that the source of the {information} response is credible and trustworthy as it determines the believability, adoption, and compliance of the information provided, as well as the quality and value of the message. The credibility of the source is a significant predictor of stakeholders' attitudes towards the organization during a crisis. It can have a profound impact on the organization's reputation. A credible source enhances the understandability of the message and plays a crucial role in maintaining a positive reputation during a crisis.

In conclusion, during a crisis, the relationships between stakeholders and the organizational reputation can be affected (van der Meer et al., 2017). Therefore, it becomes necessary to intervene to protect the reputation. The trustworthiness of the response source activates stakeholders' believability in the crisis response strategies employed by an organization during a crisis to protect its reputation (Aladhadh et al., 2019).

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

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The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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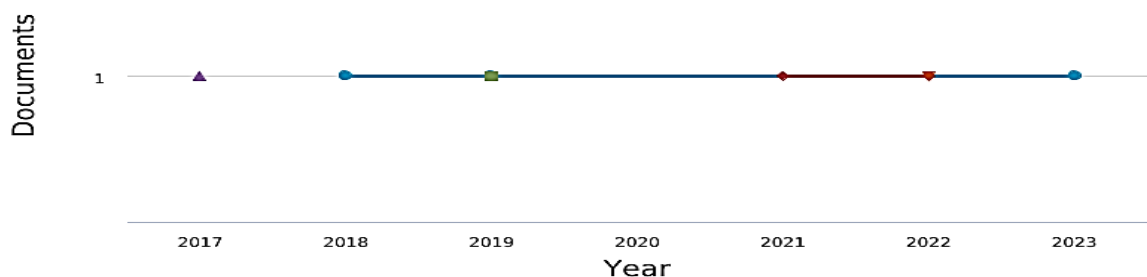
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Appendix

Documents per year by source

Compare the document counts for up to 10 sources. Compare sources and view CiteScore, SJR, and SNIP data

Scopus

- Journal Of Contingencies And Crisis Management
- International Journal Of Business Communication
- Annals Of Tourism Research
- Corporate Reputation Review
- International Journal Of Strategic Communication