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KOMUNIKASI KRISIS KORPORASI DI ERA MEDIA SOSIAL: TINJAUAN LITERATUR TENTANG ADAPTASI STRATEGIS DAN KETERLIBATAN PUBLIK

CORPORATE CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: A LITERATURE REVIEW ON STRATEGIC ADAPTATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of corporate crisis communication in the digital age, with a particular focus on the role of social media platforms in shaping organizational strategies. Using a qualitative approach and library research method, the research systematically reviews academic literature, industry reports, and documented case studies to understand how corporations respond to crises in a hyper-connected environment. The study highlights how traditional theories such as Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Repair Theory (IRT) must be adapted to meet the demands of real-time, interactive, and ethically sensitive digital spaces. Through comparative analysis of successful and failed crisis responses—including global cases such as United Airlines and local cases such as Tokopedia—the research reveals that timely, transparent, and empathetic communication on social media significantly influences public perception and corporate reputation recovery. The findings emphasize that a well-designed digital crisis strategy must integrate technical responsiveness with human-centric values to restore trust and sustain long-term relationships with stakeholders.

Keywords: crisis communication, corporate strategy, social media, digital reputation

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi dinamika komunikasi krisis korporasi di era digital, dengan fokus khusus pada peran platform media sosial dalam membentuk strategi organisasi. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode studi pustaka, penelitian ini secara sistematis menelaah literatur akademik, laporan industri, dan studi kasus terdokumentasi untuk memahami bagaimana perusahaan merespons krisis dalam lingkungan yang sangat terkoneksi. Studi ini menyoroti bahwa teori-teori tradisional seperti *Situational Crisis Communication Theory* (SCCT) dan *Image Repair Theory* (IRT) perlu diadaptasi untuk menghadapi tuntutan ruang digital yang berlangsung secara real-time, interaktif, dan sensitif secara etis. Melalui analisis komparatif terhadap respons krisis yang berhasil dan gagal—termasuk kasus global seperti United Airlines dan kasus lokal seperti



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Tokopedia—penelitian ini mengungkap bahwa komunikasi yang cepat, transparan, dan empatik di media sosial secara signifikan memengaruhi persepsi publik dan pemulihan reputasi perusahaan. Temuan ini menekankan bahwa strategi krisis digital yang dirancang dengan baik harus mengintegrasikan respons teknis dengan nilai-nilai yang berpusat pada manusia untuk memulihkan kepercayaan dan menjaga hubungan jangka panjang dengan para pemangku kepentingan

Kata Kunci: komunikasi krisis, strategi korporat, media sosial, reputasi digital

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of communication and information technologies—particularly the emergence of social media—has fundamentally altered the interaction dynamics between organizations and the public. While social media offers corporations opportunities to build direct and personalized relationships with consumers, it simultaneously poses critical challenges in crisis management. Incidents that were once confined within controlled environments now unfold in real-time on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. This transformation necessitates a reconsideration of conventional crisis communication strategies.

In an organizational context, crisis communication encompasses a series of strategic processes aimed at mitigating, managing, and restoring a company's reputation during events that threaten operational continuity or institutional legitimacy (Coombs, 2007). Traditionally, such communication has followed a one-way, centralized model in which organizations exercise full control over the narrative. However, this approach has become increasingly ineffective in a decentralized, dialogic digital environment.

Social media platforms have redefined public discourse by empowering users as active participants in information exchange. A single viral post or comment can exert intense pressure on a company's reputation. Any delay or inconsistency in response—sometimes within hours—can escalate the crisis significantly. As such, social media now functions not merely as a channel for crisis communication, but as the very arena in which crises evolve(Veil et al., 2011).

Within this context, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007), suggests that crisis response strategies must align with public perceptions of organizational responsibility. The degree of attributed responsibility determines whether the organization should pursue defensive, corrective, or accommodative approaches. Nevertheless, in the social media landscape, these strategies are challenged by the proliferation of usergenerated content and competing narratives, which collectively shape public opinion in real time.

In a digital crisis, being responsive and showing empathy are very important. Public engagement is now seen as a key sign of trust and organizational credibility. People online expect communication to be honest, open, and involve them directly. If organizations fail to meet these expectations, their reputation can suffer seriously (Austin et al., 2012).

The way crisis communication works in the digital era also reflects wider changes in society, such as the rise of cancel culture, online boycotts, and internet-based social movements. Today, control over information no longer belongs only to organizations. Instead, the public—empowered by digital platforms—can shape conversations, influence public opinion, and demand accountability from institutions. That's why crisis communication must



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include not just persuasive messages, but also clear and strategic storytelling(Bruns et al., 2014).

This paradigm is particularly relevant in Indonesia, which ranks among the highest globally in terms of social media usage. According to We Are Social (2024), over 170 million Indonesians are active social media users, with peak engagement on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. In this highly connected environment, various corporations have faced reputational crises triggered by allegations of labor violations, discrimination, and service failures. In many cases, public reactions have outpaced and outpowered official responses, resulting in boycotts, legal actions, and a significant erosion of public trust.

This phenomenon reflects a paradigm shift that requires theoretical and strategic adaptation in organizational communication. Communication processes are no longer linear but multidirectional, immediate, and public-driven. Corporations must adopt a new communicative logic that integrates speed, empathy, transparency, and dialogic engagement. However, existing literature reviews seldom provide an integrated analysis that aligns classical crisis communication theories with the demands of the contemporary digital environment.

Accordingly, this article presents a comprehensive literature review on the transformation of corporate crisis communication strategies in the era of digital connectivity. It synthesizes theoretical frameworks, current trends, and evolving best practices, with a particular focus on the implications and challenges of social media. This review aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to enhancing organizational preparedness and responsiveness in managing crises in today's fast-paced, hyper-connected communication landscape.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method, which aims to critically examine and analyze various literatures related to corporate crisis communication in the age of social media. This method enables the researcher to explore theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and practical crisis communication strategies as discussed in scholarly and industry sources ((Zed, 2004; Creswell, 2014).

The literature analyzed includes peer-reviewed national and international journals, academic books, industry reports on digital communication, and relevant case study documentation. The sources were retrieved from databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and ScienceDirect, using keywords such as "crisis communication," "corporate crisis," "image repair," and "social media strategy" (Coombs, 2007; Benoit, 1997; Jin et al., 2011).

Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques, involving the systematic identification, recording, and classification of content based on relevant themes. Data analysis followed a thematic approach by identifying patterns, theories, and best practices across the selected literature. Core frameworks examined in this study include Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by W. Timothy Coombs (2007) and Image Repair Theory (IRT) by William Benoit (1997), both of which are widely used in crisis communication research. To ensure data validity, the study applies source triangulation and emphasizes the use of credible and up-to-date academic references(Patton, 2002). Research ethics are observed through proper



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3. FINDING

Crisis Communication Framework: Integrating SCCT and IRT in the Social Media Context

This literature review reveals that effective crisis communication in the digital era is grounded in two dominant theoretical models: Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Repair Theory (IRT). These models provide a complementary framework for understanding organizational strategies to protect and restore reputation under crisis pressure, especially in the dynamic environment of social media.

1. SCCT: Matching Response to Crisis Type

SCCT, developed by W. Timothy Coombs (2007), categorizes crises into three clusters—Victim, Accidental, and Preventable—and emphasizes the alignment between the perceived responsibility and the communication strategy adopted. In a victim-type crisis (e.g., natural disasters, external attacks), organizations are advised to bolster their reputations. In accidental crises, diminish strategies are more appropriate, whereas preventable crises, where the organization is clearly at fault, demand rebuild strategies including apology and compensation.

Table 1: Key SCCT strategies

Crisis Type	Level of Responsibility	Recommended Strategy
Victim Cluster	Low	Bolstering, Denial
Accidental Cluster	Moderate	Diminishment
Preventable Cluster	High	Rebuilding, Apology

SCCT has proven particularly effective in guiding pre-crisis planning and real-time decision-making during crisis outbreaks. William Benoit's Image Repair Theory (1995) expands the post-crisis strategic options by categorizing five major strategies to address reputational threats:

Tabel 2: Key Strategies in Image Repair Theory

Strategy	Sub-strategies	Objective
Denial	Simple Denial, Shift the Blame	Remove organizational link to the crisis
Evasion of Responsibility	Provocation, Defeasibility, Accident, Good Intentions	Reduce perceived responsibility
Reducing Offensiveness	Bolstering, Minimization, Differentiation, Transcendence, Attack Accuser, Compensation	Mitigate negative perceptions
Corrective Action	Concrete changes (e.g., system upgrades, training)	Rebuild public trust through action
Mortification Apology, Acceptance of fault, Regret		Evoke empathy and restore moral standing



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IRT emphasizes message clarity, sincerity, and appropriateness—especially crucial in social media environments where scrutiny and interactivity are intensified.

The Social Media Shift: A New Crisis Landscape

The rise of social media has fundamentally reshaped crisis dynamics, turning what was once a controlled, one-way communication process into a volatile, real-time dialogue with global audiences. Key Transformations:

- Real-time Amplification: Issues escalate rapidly through virality.
- User Empowerment: Public users are no longer passive receivers; they actively cocreate crisis narratives(Aula, 2010).
- Decentralized Information Control: Organizations lose full narrative control due to user-generated content.
- Increased Skepticism: Digital audiences critically analyze and verify statements (Lazer et al., 2018).
- Misinformation Threat: Fake or distorted information exacerbates crises (Apuke & Tunca, 2018)

Strategic Responses in the Social Media Era

Based on the reviewed studies, successful digital-era crisis strategies require hybridization of SCCT and IRT with new digital tools and approaches:

Component	Application in Social Media Crisis Communication	
Speed & Responsiveness	Immediate acknowledgment and consistent updates across platforms	
Empathy & Authenticity	Tone that reflects care, sincerity, and emotional intelligence	
Engagement & Dialogue	Active listening (social listening tools), Q&A sessions, comment management	
Transparency	Open explanation of facts and decision-making processes	
Influencer & Leadership	Involving credible figures like CEOs or CSR leads in public messaging	
Cross-Platform Integration	Coordinated messaging across Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and official websites	

Table 3: Strategic Responses

Synthesis: Evolving Crisis Communication Paradigm

This study concludes that traditional crisis communication theories like SCCT and IRT remain foundational, but they must evolve to meet the demands of a hyperconnected, participatory, and skeptical digital society.

Thus, organizations must:

- Build proactive monitoring systems (e.g., social listening).
- Cultivate public dialogue rather than one-way defense.
- Combine strategic planning (SCCT) with rhetorical and reputational repair (IRT).
- Train communication teams for multimodal engagement across visual, textual, and short-form video content.

Ultimately, the future of crisis communication lies in hybrid adaptability: theoretical rigor, technological agility, and ethical transparency.



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Instead, organizations must adopt a proactive and integrated approach. This approach combines continuous digital monitoring, active public engagement, and the implementation of adaptive communication strategies tailored to the characteristics of each social media platform. Internal digital preparedness and media literacy are key to enabling corporations to manage crises effectively and minimize negative impacts on their reputation and business continuity in this era of global connectivity. Balancing social media interactions with the organization's desire to control information is essential to communicate most effectively with stakeholders and the public. When used wisely, social media can enhance risk and crisis communication efforts (Veil et al., 2011). Below is a table outlining the key characteristics of major social media platforms and recommended crisis communication strategies:

Table 4: Crisis Communication Strategies by Social Media Platform

Social Media	Key Characteristics	Recommended Crisis Communication Strategy
Twitter	Rapid and real-time information dissemination; short messages (280 characters); hashtags enhance reach and issue monitoring.	imeccaming Employ relevant nachtage fort
Facebook	Broad and diverse audience; supports long posts, videos, and live streaming; high interaction via comments and groups.	explanations. Actively manage interactions
Instagram	photos and short videos; captions support messaging; Stories and Live features enable real-time	Use engaging and authentic visuals to build empathy. Respond promptly to comments and direct messages. Leverage Stories and Live features for more personal and transparent communication.
LinkedIn	Professional and business- oriented audience; formal content focused on credibility and social responsibility.	Deliver official and strategic messages. Emphasize long-term solution commitments. Use the platform for communication with professional stakeholders and investors.
YouTube	storytelling and in-depth explanations; comment sections	Produce official and educational video statements. Utilize storytelling to build trust. Monitor and respond to comments to protect reputation.



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Table 5: Strengths and Weaknesses of Social Media in Crisis Communication

Social Media	Strengths	Weaknesses
Twitter	 Rapid, real-time information dissemination enables swift crisis response. Short messages convey the core issue concisely. Hashtags facilitate issue tracking and discussion organization. 	 Character limits restrict detailed information. Vulnerable to rumors and misinformation, potentially worsening the crisis. Pressure to respond quickly may lead to communication errors.
Facebook	 Supports various content formats (long posts, video, live) that enhance transparency. Broad and diverse audience enables wide information spread. Two-way interactions through comments allow for feedback and conflict mitigation. 	 Long content may be less effective during time-sensitive crises. Negative comments or misinformation can spread and escalate crises. Platform algorithms may limit the reach of official posts, especially with negative engagement.
Instagram	 Emphasis on visual content builds empathy and audience engagement. Stories and Live features enable quick, personal communication. Highly effective among younger, active social media users. 	- Less effective for technical or detailed narratives. - Comments and messages must be tightly moderated to prevent conflict or misinformation. - Important messages may be overlooked if visuals lack relevance or appeal.
LinkedIn	 Professional audience suits official and strategic communications. Supports corporate and CSR messaging to enhance credibility. Effective for long-term stakeholder engagement. 	 Limited reach to the general public and ineffective for rapid public communication. Interaction is formal and less dynamic. Less suitable for fast-paced crisis response.
YouTube	 Facilitates storytelling through rich, educational video content. Builds trust via official, visual-based communication. Videos can be personal and emotionally impactful. 	Video production is time-consuming and resource-intensive, limiting rapid response. Comment sections may become hubs for criticism or misinformation. Audience engagement depends on interest in long-form content.



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Recommendations to Mitigate the Weaknesses of Social Media in Crisis Communication

- ✓ Build a dedicated crisis communication team trained specifically in social media response for accuracy and speed.
- ✓ Implement social listening tools to monitor public conversations in real time and detect early signs of a crisis.
- ✓ Apply transparent and consistent information policies to quickly and honestly address misinformation or disinformation.
- ✓ Develop flexible and adaptive communication protocols aligned with the unique characteristics of each social media platform for message effectiveness.
- ✓ Utilize comment moderation and content filtering tools to prevent the spread of hate speech, hoaxes, and harmful content.
- ✓ Provide digital literacy and media training for communication staff to enhance their ability to identify and manage digital challenges.
- ✓ Conduct post-crisis evaluations and lessons-learned analysis to refine future crisis communication strategies.

By implementing these measures, organizations can minimize the limitations of social media in crisis communication and utilize it more effectively and strategically.

Corporate Digital Crisis Communication Strategy

In response to the changing crisis communication landscape brought on by the rise of social media, corporations increasingly adopt digital crisis communication strategies that are adaptive, responsive, and human-centered. These strategies require organizations to act not just as information broadcasters, but as conversational partners capable of fostering emotional connections with the public.

A key element in this approach is transparency. By providing clear, accurate, and timely information, companies can build trust and reduce speculation or negative rumors that often exacerbate crises. This transparency must be supported by consistent messaging across all digital channels to preserve credibility and avoid contradictions that could confuse audiences.

Additionally, deploying competent and credible official spokespeople on social media is vital. These individuals are responsible for delivering official statements, answering questions, and directly engaging with the public. Their role extends beyond traditional PR, involving senior leaders such as the CEO or other executives who actively participate in digital platforms. Research by Ki and Nekmat (2014) demonstrates that direct engagement by CEOs or senior executives during a social media crisis can strengthen emotional connections with the public, accelerate reputation recovery, and enhance perceptions of corporate transparency.(Ki & Nekmat, 2014)

Collaborations with influencers or Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) also play a crucial role in digital crisis communication. Influencers possess their own reach and credibility among followers, meaning crisis messages delivered through them are more easily received and have broader reach. This approach effectively breaks down formal communication barriers and makes crisis messaging feel more authentic and relatable.

A real-world example of this in Indonesia occurred in 2020, when Gojek a leading technology firm providing ride-hailing and digital payment services faced serious concerns regarding user data security. Widespread social media reports about a potential data breach created significant public anxiety and threatened the company's reputation and public trust.

To address this, Gojek implemented a digital crisis communication strategy involving collaboration with influencers and KOLs respected in technology, cybersecurity, and digital education. These influencers, selected for their relevant audiences and ability to explain



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technical issues clearly to the general public, created educational content on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. They detailed mitigation and corrective measures taken by Gojek to protect customer data, using a personable and relatable style that felt more trustworthy than traditional corporate statements.

Beyond technical explanations, influencers educated the public on the importance of protecting personal data, recognizing digital fraud, and everyday preventive measures. This educational approach not only reassured the public, but also improved digital literacy, preparing audiences for future scenarios. Because influencers are trusted by their followers, they effectively bridged the communication gap between the company and its users, creating a humanistic and transparent approach. What began as a reputational threat transformed into an opportunity to reinforce trust with customers. Combining rapid response, transparency, and influencer engagement proved effective in mitigating the crisis's negative impact and accelerating Gojek's reputation recovery. This demonstrates the strategic importance of influencers and KOLs in digital crisis communication in today's social media era.

In digital crisis communication, empathetic messaging is essential. Such messages go beyond factual information, expressing genuine concern for the crisis's impact on stakeholders—customers, employees, partners, and the broader community. By centering on human values, companies show they care not only about profits, but also about the well-being of their audiences (Coombs, 2015).

Empathetic messages are often delivered through visually compelling formats, such as short videos, infographics, animations, or digital storytelling that narrate the crisis's true story and the company's concrete response. Visual content serves two purposes: it conveys messages clearly and emotionally, and it enables quicker dissemination on visually driven platforms where shareable and viral content thrives (Muralidharan et al., 2011). For example, a short video featuring a sincere apology from a company's CEO, along with explanations of product recall steps and support for affected customers, can humanize the organization. Producing warm visuals and heartfelt narratives—which was effectively done by an Indonesian food company facing a product recall in 2022 can garner positive public responses and defuse backlash (Harahap, M., & Sipayung, 2022). Thus, integrating empathetic visual messaging is a vital element of corporate digital crisis strategy. It not only improves message effectiveness but also builds emotional connection, prevents crisis escalation, and speeds up reputation recovery.

However, effective digital crisis communication extends beyond transparency, spokesperson engagement, influencer collaboration, and empathetic messaging. Speed of response is also crucial. In today's fast-moving information environment, a slow response can worsen public perception and allow rumors or false news to spread. Companies must therefore have real-time monitoring systems and pre-established response protocols to respond quickly without compromising message consistency.

Rapid response is strongly supported by communication scholars like W. Timothy Coombs. In *Ongoing Crisis Communication* (4th ed., 2015), Coombs emphasizes that prompt responses are essential for controlling the narrative and reducing reputational harm. Moreover, research by Austin, Liu, and Jin (2012) in their article "How Audiences Seek Out Crisis Information: Exploring the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model" (Journal of Applied Communication Research) stresses the need for organizations to provide fast, active responses on social media to manage public perception during crisis events. In digital crisis communication, message consistency is fundamental. Messages must remain uniform across all social media platforms and communication channels. All official spokespeople—from



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CEOs and communication managers to designated spokespersons—should deliver information in the same tone and content. Any inconsistency often leads to confusion among audiences, which can escalate into public distrust.

Inconsistent messaging may signal a lack of professionalism or transparency during crisis management. Discrepancies across channels or contradictory statements can raise suspicions, suggesting the company is hiding facts or lacks control. This can exacerbate reputational damage and erode public trust over the long term. Consistent messaging not only ensures clarity but also builds a cohesive narrative throughout the crisis. A coherent story helps the public understand the crisis context, the company's actions, and its commitment to resolution. Unified messaging reassures audiences that the organization is truthful and in control, reducing opportunities for speculation or misinformation that can exacerbate the crisis.

Moreover, consistency extends beyond message content—it includes communication style, tone, and visual cues that reinforce a professional and empathetic image. In the digital age, even minor inconsistencies can go viral and spark new communication crises. Real-world corporate case studies—from global brands to local enterprises—reinforce these principles. In 2017, United Airlines faced a reputational crisis when an onboard passenger was forcibly removed, highlighting the company's initial failure to respond with empathy a misstep that worsened public perception. In contrast, when Tokopedia experienced a data breach in 2020, swift official statements via social media and media collaborations effectively calmed public anxiety. These cases demonstrate that timely, empathetic crisis responses especially on platforms like Twitter and Instagram are critical to shaping public opinion.

Comparison of Effective and Failed Strategies on Social Media

In the practice of digital crisis communication, valuable insights can be derived from both global and local case studies. A widely cited global example is the United Airlines crisis in 2017, where a passenger was forcibly removed from an overbooked flight. The company's initial response delayed and lacking empathy—ignited widespread public outrage and significantly damaged its reputation. This incident demonstrates the critical importance of speed and empathy in digital crisis responses (Coombs, 2015; Grégoire et al., 2010).

In contrast, a successful local example occurred in Indonesia with Tokopedia in 2020, when a major data breach exposed millions of user accounts. Tokopedia responded quickly by issuing official statements via multiple digital channels, including Twitter, Instagram, and its corporate website. The company also collaborated with traditional media to deliver accurate and transparent information. This quick, transparent, and empathetic strategy helped calm public concerns and restore trust more effectively than silence or delayed responses(Austin et al., 2012)).

These cases underscore the growing necessity for corporations to adopt responsive, human-centered, and transparent crisis strategies in social media environments, where public expectations are high and attention spans are short.

Comparative Insights: Effective vs. Ineffective Crisis Strategies

Analyzing various crisis communication approaches reveals some consistent patterns:

- Effective strategies emphasize:
 - ✓ Rapid response
 - ✓ Empathetic messaging
 - ✓ Transparency and proactive information sharing
 - ✓ Direct engagement on social media

These elements make the public feel acknowledged and respected, thereby facilitating faster recovery of corporate reputation.



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- Ineffective strategies, on the other hand, often include:
 - ✓ Delayed or no response
 - ✓ Shifting blame
 - ✓ Lack of clear and unified messaging

Such approaches, especially in the context of social media, often lead to increased misinformation, rumors, and public hostility. The absence of timely and empathetic communication not only worsens the crisis but also erodes public trust in the long term.

Scientific Contribution

This literature review contributes to bridging the theoretical and practical gap between classical crisis communication models and the evolving dynamics of digital engagement. By critically integrating Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Repair Theory (IRT) within the context of real-time, user-driven social media environments, this study highlights the necessity for hybrid crisis strategies that emphasize not only strategic alignment but also emotional intelligence, platform-specific adaptation, and ethical responsiveness. Particularly in the Southeast Asian corporate landscape—where digital penetration is high and public scrutiny is intensified this research provides a contextualized framework for organizations to develop human-centered, responsive, and transparent crisis communication protocols. The findings offer both conceptual advancements for communication scholars and actionable insights for practitioners seeking to navigate reputational risks in an era characterized by participatory media and decentralized public discourse.

4. CONCLUSION

Overall, this discussion underscores that corporate crisis communication in the era of digital connectivity requires strategies that not only draw from classical theories such as the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Repair Theory, but also adapt to the unique characteristics of social media platforms. Organizations must adopt a more open, empathetic approach, while building digital communication systems that are responsive, fast, and consistent across all channels.

The interactive nature of social media, along with its sensitivity to ethical issues and corporate social responsibility, demands that organizations internalize and reflect these values in every message they deliver. A successful digital crisis communication strategy is one that balances the technical aspects of information management with a humanistic touch, enabling organizations to rebuild trust and foster long-term relationships with the public.

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