

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**RESTORATIVE RHETORIC AND
IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONING IN
LEADERSHIP DISCOURSE ON
GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA
CRISIS COMMUNICATION**

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ABSTRACT

Crisis communication plays a pivotal role in shaping public understanding, influencing behavior, and preserving institutional credibility during crises. In this digital era, social media has transformed how information is shared and how global communities participate in crisis narratives. This study integrates the Restorative Rhetoric Framework, the Dialogic Communication Model, and the Social Amplification of Risk Framework, with attention to the linguistic features embedded in leaders' crisis messages, to examine how six leaders from international organizations governing global food security used Twitter (now known as X) between March 2020 and December 2022 to communicate on the food security crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study examines how leaders used linguistic strategies to construct crisis narratives, foster public morale, and reinforce institutional legitimacy amid global uncertainty. Restorative rhetoric was used as both a strategic tool and a humanitarian approach, acknowledging public difficulties, extending support, and projecting hope. This dual function fostered trust and positioned leaders as authoritative yet empathetic actors in global food security discourse. Findings reveal that crisis communication was shaped through intentional language choices aimed at guiding public perception and maintaining organizational credibility. Findings from the ideological positioning analysis also indicate that institutional messages during crises were not always neutral. Dialogic communication showed inconsistent engagement, with exchanges largely one-directional and mutuality and commitment present but minimal, while propinquity was absent. The social amplification of risk analysis revealed that early crisis messaging employed risk-intensifying linguistic cues and emotive framing, elevating public concern, while later discourse shifted toward recovery and collective resilience. This shift represented a strategic recalibration of risk-related communication to sustain trust and reduce anxiety. The study concludes that effective digital crisis communication requires more than timely updates as it demands coherent rhetoric, emotionally attuned messaging, and ethical commitment to meaningful two-way interaction. This research offers theoretical insights and practical guidance for strengthening crisis communication strategies to support public reassurance and institutional credibility in future global crises.

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I close this remarkable chapter with humility and a sense of fulfilment. This thesis was driven by the conviction that language is more than words. It is the foundation upon which leadership, organization identity, and public trust are built. I hope this work contributes to a world where crisis communication is not only strategic but also sincere, inclusive, and transformative.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The world today is characterized by rapid technological advancements, increased global interconnectedness, and evolving social paradigms. These dynamics have brought about profound transformations across all facets of life, including the field of crisis communication. Traditional research approaches are being redefined, and new avenues for exploration are emerging, demanding a deeper understanding and adaptation to these changes. As societies navigate the complexities of the modern world, effective crisis communication strategies have become increasingly vital. Crisis communication plays a crucial role in ensuring the accuracy of information dissemination and mitigating potential misunderstandings or misinformation among the public (Coombs et al., 2010). This chapter outlines the foundational elements of this study. It begins by providing the background of the research, highlighting the key issues, and setting the context. The problem statement describes the specific challenges addressed, followed by research objectives and research questions that guide the direction of this study. The scope and limitations of the study are discussed, offering insights into areas for future research. Finally, the significance of the study is discussed, and operational definitions of key terms are provided to ensure clarity and coherence throughout the research.

1.2 Background of Study

The world has seen its share of catastrophes, disasters, and adversities throughout the decades. These challenges are better known as crises, and most have been the result of unprecedented events. Various types of crises have compromised the well-being of populations all around the world. The field of international crisis communication remains dominated by Western perspectives despite being more than 20 years in existence (Lehmberg & Hicks, 2018). As crises are becoming global and more complex because of extended supply chains of products and services, the effects of crisis communication on international context is not widely understood (Coombs et al., 2010). Lehmberg and Hicks (2018) further add that the difference in communication perspectives on