

## **Factors influencing Effective Communication and its Impact towards Malaysian Post pandemic perception: The case of Malaysian Government Trust**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A new pandemic with no record of disease has caused a communication crisis in one country. Failure to find appropriate crisis management methods has resulted in a decline in public faith in one government's ability to handle a crisis. Which has contributed to widespread confusion, ignorance, and disinformation. Failure to regulate the phenomenon will result. Thus, the study's main aims are to identify characteristics that influence successful communication during crises, particularly pandemics in Malaysia, and to investigate the effects of good communication on public perception during pandemic crises in Malaysia. The quantitative method will be used to achieve the study's purpose by randomly distributing the survey to 200 Malaysians. Research findings indicate that the Malaysian public's foremost concern was the accessibility of information, scoring at 0.89 with a correlation of 53%. Following closely behind was the credibility of information at 0.76, with a correlation of 42%, trailed by consistency at 0.75 and a 30% correlation, and transparency at 0.67 with a 25% correlation. These factors collectively hold a significant influence, with more than 70% impact on the public's perception of trust in the government. This situation has become critical amidst the endemic due to rampant misinformation. Insufficient public knowledge exacerbates this issue, as highlighted by recent findings. The prevalence of misinformation during the ongoing endemic amplifies the urgency for ensuring accurate and accessible information. Addressing these concerns is pivotal in fostering a more informed society and rebuilding trust between the government and the public during these challenging times.

Keywords: Effective Communication, Post Pandemic, Government Trust, Malaysia.

## INTRODUCTION

This extensive exploration delves deep into crisis communication within various contexts, highlighting the gravity of effective crisis management and the pivotal role of communication in navigating crises. COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped global dynamics, emphasising the significance of crisis communication, especially for governments and organisations (Wodak, 2021; Kuhlman et al., 2021; Lovari, D'Ambrosi & Bowen, 2020). Communication during a crisis meant to explain the situation, predict its effects, and provide harm-reduction information promptly and precisely to affected groups. Its role extends beyond defending credibility to saving lives and minimising confusion. Thus, crisis management is critical for any entity especially the publics. Failures in this lead to severe consequences, including financial losses and reputational damage (Thakur & Hale, 2022; Tonn et al., 2021). Therefore, public relations within crisis management teams play a crucial role. The understanding on crisis readiness and preparation is vital due to the increasing frequency and diversity of crises, often stemming from legislative failures, ignored warnings, and inadequate responses. Measuring the effectiveness in managing the crises are importance, and the measurement also might take effects from public perception or sentiment towards the situation handled.

As many agreed that communication is pivotal during any crises. Failures in communication will worsen the impacts of crises and undermine management effectiveness (Ruiu, 2022; Christensen & Lægreid, 2020; Adnan & Yaacob, 2021). Thus, Effective crisis communication not only helps manage the crisis but also influences public perception of the government's actions and image repair. The disruption caused by a pandemic affects routine activities, with substantial negative consequences for individuals, organisations, and society as a whole. In addition, the lacking in preparedness and ineffective crisis response will lead to reputational damage, economic issues, and other far-reaching ramifications (Blyth & Mallett, 2020).

This has portrayed in many high-profile figures that embroiled in crises face sustained public scrutiny, necessitating a nuanced understanding of crisis management strategies to mitigate reputational damage, same goes and apply towards the organisation or one government. Effective crises management helps in maintaining or restore credibility, with public response significantly influencing its success (Dwiedienawati et al., 2021). Other factors such as the media's role in disseminating accurate information during crises, particularly in the age of widespread connectivity and immediate access to global news, is important.

In addition, the effective crisis management also has the capability to transform a crisis from a threat to an opportunity, necessitating strategies for preparation, management, and resilience enhancement (Tagarev & Ratchev, 2020). Communication's pivotal role in organisations, akin to blood circulation in the human body, underscores its importance in synchronising various components. Meanwhile, leadership's role also taken place in ensuring effective communication. This will help in crisis recognition, planning, decision-making, and emotional control, facilitated through excellent communication, is highlighted. Overcoming communication obstacles, such as filtering and selective perception, is crucial for successful crisis communication. Therefore, the present study aims to explore below objectives: -

RO1: To identify factors, influence effective communication during crises especially during pandemic in Malaysia.

RO2: To explore the effects of effective communication towards public perception during pandemic crises in Malaysia.

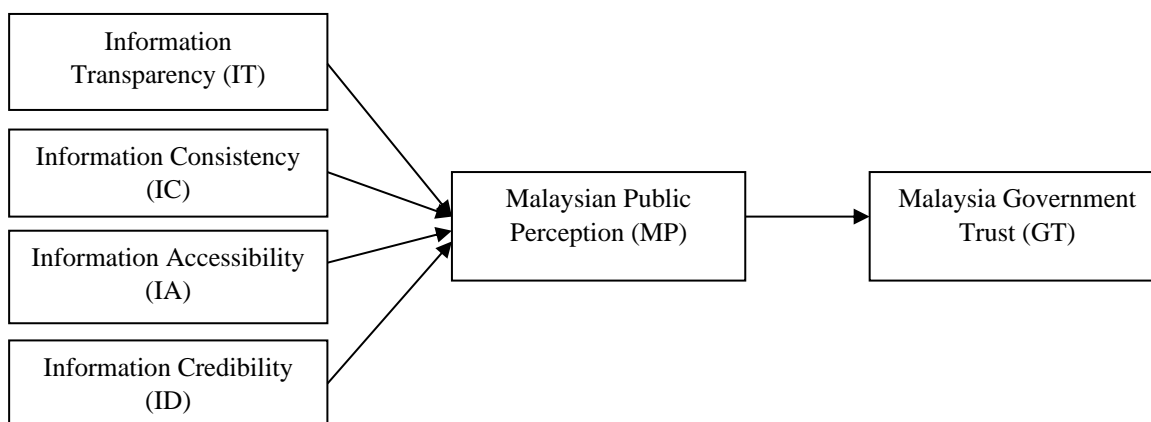


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Effective Communication

Effective communication forms the backbone of successful organisational management, fostering planned, sequential, and systematic interaction among individuals within an organisation. It serves to establish connections while nurturing awareness among employees. Miscommunication can trigger various adverse reactions such as litigation, strikes, low morale, and reduced productivity, emphasising the importance of creating communication channels to prevent conflicts (Budd, Colvin & Pohler, 2020). Communication, as defined by various scholars, revolves around the transmission and reception of ideas, feelings, and attitudes to evoke positive responses (Grewal et al., 2022). The description of it as a process driving behavior is to emphasis on message transmission between sender and receiver, communication encompasses the exchange of information that is comprehended and prompts action. This simplifies it as any means through which a notion is conveyed from one person to another, emphasising effective understanding between individuals or groups.

The interchange of ideas, emotions, and opinions through words, letters, and symbols is seen as a technical fact (Al-Sharqi & Abbasi, 2020). However, questions arise regarding the accuracy of conveyed symbols, their alignment with the intended message, and the efficiency of reception by the receiver (Neuvonen et al., 2022). Communication encompasses reading, listening, speaking, and writing, aiding in the clarification of unknowns or uncertainties, thus unravelling life's mysteries. Other views on communication act as a method to inform subordinates about tasks, resources, roles, responsibilities, and expected outcomes. It

highlighted the importance of effective communication in human daily lives (Zito et al., 2021). Fundamentally, it involves the transmission of information (a message) from one person to another, emphasising effective transmission followed by feedback to confirm comprehension, thereby constituting effective communication.

### **Factors Responsible for Crisis in an Organisation**

Crises in organisations able to stem from various sources, these include internal disputes among personnel, technological breakdowns, internet-related issues, violence, terrorism, and unethical behaviors like fraud and non-compliance with financial obligations (Atere, 2022). Recognising and addressing these diverse triggers is vital for effective crisis management. Encouraging a respectful work environment, technological upkeep, and ethical conduct while meeting financial obligations are crucial preventive measures. Crisis management is a multifaceted process that goes beyond just addressing the immediate crisis. It encompasses risk management, involving efforts to prevent and evaluate potential threats and taking protective measures to reduce their impact. Prioritising public safety during a crisis is paramount, followed by addressing reputation and economic concerns.

The overarching goal is to shield the organisation and stakeholders from risks while minimising their impact. The characterises crisis management as the art of making decisions to prevent or mitigate the effects of a crisis, often requiring decisions made under pressure and with limited information (Sellnow & Seeger, 2021). The primary aim is to minimise harm to the organisation and its stakeholders. Crisis management operates across three phases: pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis. The pre-crisis phase involves prevention and preparation, while the crisis response phase deals with managing and containing the crisis's impact (Mikušová & Horváthová, 2019). The post-crisis phase focuses on long-term recovery and image restoration. Mishandling a crisis can lead to significant harm to stakeholders and substantial losses for the organisation, potentially jeopardising its existence.

### **Effective Communication during Pandemic**

During a pandemic, effective communication becomes crucial for disseminating information, ensuring safety, and maintaining cohesion. Factors contributing to effective communication during such crises and transparent communication is paramount. People need accurate, understandable information about the virus, safety measures, guidelines, and any changes in protocols (Van den Broucke, 2020; Adnan et al., 2021). Avoiding jargon and providing straightforward, factual details helps in comprehension and compliance. Consistent messaging across all channels and authorities helps in building trust and reducing confusion. Timely updates are essential to keep the public informed about the evolving situation, new regulations, and any emerging risks (Wang, Hao & Platt, 2021). Therefore, during crises like pandemic, communication must be accessible to everyone, irrespective of language, ability, or access to technology to prevent chaotic situation on the ground.

Providing information in multiple languages, through various mediums (visual, audio, written), and considering diverse needs ensures inclusivity. This includes empathetic communication that acknowledges people's concerns, fears, and hardships is essential. Besides,

providing reassurance, highlighting collective efforts, and offering support resources can alleviate anxiety and encourage compliance with health guidelines. All the information should come from credible sources like health authorities, scientists, and experts. Avoiding misinformation or speculation is critical (Peng, Lim & Meng, 2023). Communicating scientific evidence, backed by experts, builds credibility, and encourages trust in the provided guidance are all important contributors towards effective communication during the pandemic crises.

### **Malaysia and public perception: Post Pandemic**

The public's views post-pandemic in Malaysia are likely to be government response explaining on the efficiency of government in managing the pandemic, including vaccination drives and crisis communication strategies (Mohd Hanafiah, Ng & Wan, 2021). The success and speed of economic recovery efforts will impact public sentiment, particularly in terms of job creation and financial stability (Begum et al., 2022; Yap, 2020; Jomo & Chowdhury, 2020). In addition, the healthcare system evaluation was also included in the public perception that shaped by the healthcare system's ability to handle the crisis and provide adequate resources and services. Failure in providing an efficient healthcare system during the pandemic will cause the negative sentiment among the public at this crucial time (Barach et al., 2021). This proven on the changes in societal behaviour are mainly due to health precautions and the adoption of remote work and digitalisation that might influence Malaysians view in the future.

Trust in institutions, government agencies, and authorities may have shifted during the pandemic based on their response and transparency. This has been proven in many studies conduct on the changes of public opinion and their trust towards the responsible agencies during the crises (Liu, Shahab & Hoque, 2022; Pramiyanti et al., 2020). Positive perception might arise from the resilience shown by communities and volunteer groups in supporting each other during the crisis. Besides, the public perception may also be influenced by the pandemic's long-term effects on mental health, education, and overall quality of life (Zhang & Ma, 2020). The communication effectively captures the diverse factors that could shape public opinion in Malaysia post-pandemic, providing a comprehensive understanding of the potential elements impacting societal perception.

### **Malaysian government during pandemic crises**

In January 2022, the opinion regarding the Malaysian government's management of the pandemic displayed a complex and changing landscape. Initially, there was a blend of positive and critical views based on distinct phases and actions taken during the crisis. At the onset, there was commendation for the government's rapid imposition of movement restrictions and implementation of containment measures (Hafifi et al., 2021). This swift response garnered some praise and support from segments of the population. However, as the pandemic progressed, divergent perspectives emerged, leading to a nuanced perception of the government's efforts. As time passed, concerns surfaced regarding inconsistencies in decision-making processes. Communication gaps and perceived discrepancies in enforcing restrictions contributed to a growing sense of dissatisfaction. Criticisms centered around unclear guidelines and perceived delays in addressing emerging situations, impacting public trust (Mohd

Hanafiah, Ng & Wan, 2021). The trajectory of public opinion shifted with the initiation of vaccination campaigns. The rollout of vaccines prompted varied reactions. Some individuals expressed dissatisfaction with the pace of vaccination and limitations in accessing vaccines. Issues related to distribution processes and the availability of vaccines fuelled discontent among certain segments of society.

The government's pandemic response was also viewed through the lens of its economic impact. Acknowledged and appreciated financial aid and support extended during restrictions, others felt it was insufficient or failed to reach those most in need. Economic considerations thus influenced perceptions of the government's overall handling of the crisis. The fluctuations in public sentiment regarding the government's management of the pandemic stemmed from a multitude of factors (Salman et al., 2022). Changing circumstances, perceived deficiencies in strategies, and differing public opinions all contributed to the oscillating levels of trust and confidence in the government's pandemic response. As the situation evolved, the government faced the challenge of addressing these multifaceted concerns to regain public confidence. Achieving a more cohesive and transparent approach to decision-making, improving communication channels, ensuring equitable vaccine distribution, and bolstering economic support were pivotal in stabilising public sentiment and fostering greater trust in the government's handling of the ongoing crisis.

### **Post pandemic effects to Malaysian.**

The post-pandemic landscape in Malaysia may see several effects across various sectors. The pandemic impacted Malaysia's economy significantly, causing job losses, business closures, and a slowdown in various industries (Pathma, 2023). Post-pandemic, efforts toward economic recovery will be crucial. Initiatives to stimulate growth, support businesses, and create employment opportunities will be vital for bouncing back. Pandemic exposed weaknesses in healthcare systems globally, including Malaysia (Ang et al., 2021). Post-pandemic, might be a focus on strengthening healthcare infrastructure, improving accessibility, and ensuring readiness for future health crises. Therefore, at that situation, remote work became prevalent during the pandemic as what Malaysian and other countries has experienced (Hashim et al., 2021). Post pandemic, a hybrid work model emerged, blending remote work and office presence.

Organisations started to reevaluate office spaces and prioritise flexi post-pandemic arrangements. Besides, the education sector faced disruptions with school closures and remote learning. Post-pandemic, there may be innovations in education delivery, a focus on digital literacy, and strategies to address learning gaps (Alashhab et al., 2021). Post-pandemic, continued adherence to health protocols and a heightened focus on health and hygiene may persist. In addition, the tourism industry suffered due to travel restrictions and border closures. Post-pandemic, the sector may gradually recover with the resumption of international travel, although it might take time to reach pre-pandemic levels. The pandemic highlighted mental health challenges too, as the post-pandemic, there might be increased awareness and initiatives addressing mental health issues, including support services and destigmatisation efforts.

However, the pandemic has been agreed by many that it helps in accelerating digital transformation, increased reliance on technology, e-commerce, and digital solutions across sectors like healthcare, education, and business may continue (Nanda, Xu & Zhang, 2021). The post-pandemic phase in Malaysia will likely involve a period of recovery, adaptation to changed circumstances, and efforts to address the aftermath of the crisis. Its extent and pace of recovery will depend on various factors, including government policies, vaccination rates, global economic trends, and societal responses to the new normal.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

Study was conducted quantitatively using the distribution of online survey randomly to Malaysian public in order to achieve objectives of the present study. The instrument was divided into six (6) sections inclusive Section A (Demographic), Section B (Information Transparency), Section C (Information Consistency), Section D (Information Accessibility), Section E (Information Credibility), Section F (Malaysian Perception) and Section G (Government Trust). The present study was design by adapting previous studies relating to the variables used in measuring public perception on effective communications (Seale et al., 2020). The research aims to answer specific research objectives as highlighted in introduction and to test specific hypotheses require the three process (1) data collecting, (2) instrument construction, and (3) sampling. To examine tangible sampling and data validity, visual and communication researchers prefer to use quantitative methodologies and approaches.

### **Research Sampling**

The sample is the representative of the population. Due to the limitation of time in collecting the data, non- probability sampling was used in the present study, and data was selected randomly (Stratton, 2021). Although the findings obtained later will not be able to reflect the total Malaysian perception, yet the study able to give an early understandings and overview of Malaysian public perception on communication crises specifically during the pandemic as well as the effects towards public trust on government at the critical moment. A total of 200 respondents were chosen randomly from 8,420,000 populations of Klang Valley, Malaysia. The respondents are selected to amplify the variable study of public perceptions. Thus, the public are authentic in validating their response towards the research objectives. The techniques for determining sample size and performing power analysis are mostly determined by the study's design and main measure.

### **Instrument Development**

Table 1 summarises the instrument development which was scale from 1-5 (1 Strongly Disagree – 5 Strongly Agree). It involves the six (6) variables and items was taken based on previous literature which was later adapted for the present study to suit with Malaysian context. Variables includes (1) Information Transparency, (2) Information Consistency, (3) Information Accessibility (4) Information Credibility, (5) Malaysian public perception and (6) Government Trust.

Table 1 Summary of Instrument Development

Variable	Items	Sources
Information Transparency (IT)	IT1: Malaysian government has been transparency in providing Covid-19 status updates through its broadcast channel.	Yusof et al., 2020
	IT2: Malaysian government has been transparency in providing Covid-19 status updates through its social media platform.	
	IT3: Malaysian can clearly see the process of handling the death and infectious patience through MOH process updates.	
	IT4: The Malaysia government disclosed sufficient information during Pandemic Covid- 19.	
	IT5: Malaysian aware of the entire process, once infected. Process was transparent.	
Information Consistency (IC)	IC1: Updates from many government platforms on Covid-19 status are similar.	Aharon, Ruban & Dubovi, 2021
	IC2: There is no contradiction of facts shared through Malaysian government platforms during Covid-19.	
	IC3: Official social media belongs to government agencies are consistently sharing information about the status.	
	IC4: Regular updates on Covid-19 were governed by the strategic communication in govt agencies.	
	IC5: Official Website belongs to government agencies are consistently sharing information about the status.	
Information Accessibility (IA)	IA1: Malaysian government websites are accessible in getting Covid-19 status updates.	Yusof et al., 2020



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	IA2: Malaysian government social media are accessible and updated on Covid-19 status	
	IA3: Malaysian main broadcast channels are accessible among public to get latest updates on Covid-19 status.	
	IA4: MOH websites are accessible during Covid-19 pandemic.	
	IA5: MOH social media are accessible during Covid-19 pandemic.	
Information Credibility (ID)	ID1: Updates from many government platforms on Covid-19 status are reliable.	Aharon, Ruban & Dubovi, 2021
	ID2: There are disinformation of facts shared through Malaysian government platforms during Covid-19.	
	ID3: Official social media belongs to government agencies are credible in sharing information about the status.	
	ID4: Trusted updates on Covid-19 were governed by the strategic communication in govt agencies.	
	ID5: Official Website belongs to government agencies are reliable in sharing Covid-19 status.	
Malaysian Public Perception (MPP)	MP1: The government managing the crises well.	Yusof et al., 2020
	MP2: The government has ensured the public to get updates on Covid-19 situation status.	
	MP3: The government has ensured the public to get updates on Covid-19 situation status through its mainstream media.	
	MP4: The government has ensured the public to get updates on Covid-19 situation status through its social media.	
	MP5: Malaysia government initiates application in updating the public	

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	through text messages via mobile phone.	
Government Trust (GT)	<p>GT1: Malaysia Government websites provide a detailed and right information about the Covid-19 status.</p> <p>GT2: Malaysia Government social media provide a detailed and right information about the Covid-19 status.</p> <p>GT3: Malaysia Government broadcast provide a detailed and right information about the Covid-19 status.</p> <p>GT4: MOH Websites provide a detailed and right information about the Covid-19 status.</p> <p>GT5: MOH social media provide a detailed and right information about the Covid-19 status.</p>	Sounderajah et al, 2021

**Pilot Testing**

Instrument was tested to 30 samples that has been distributed online the reliability and normality of the data was tested to ensure the consistencies of items prepared for each variable in every section (Pesämaa et al., 2021). Table 2 shows the Cronbach alpha and skewness and Kurtosis for each variable after computed. Pilot testing is an important step in ensuring the data collected for the present study for the actual 200 samples were fit and reliable. All the six (6) variables Cronbach alpha values are reliable ranging from 0.75 – 0.89 (moderate to good), meanwhile the normality of the data is within the normal range of +2 to -2 with majority are skewed positively to right.

Table 2 Summary of Cronbach Alpha & Skewness - Kurtosis

Variable	Items	Cronbach Alpha	Skewness & Kurtosis (+2 to-2)
Information Transparency (IT)	5	0.87	0.03/0.05
Information Consistency (IC)	5	0.75	1.03/0.04
Information Accessibility (IA)	5	0.89	1.05/1.03
Information Credibility (ID)	5	0.96	0.01/0.07
Malaysian Public Perception (MP)	5	0.86	1.06/0.04
Government Trust (GT)	5	0.88	1.02/0.03

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Respondent profile participating in the present study are as follows. There are divided into five groups including age, gender, income level, occupation group and marital status. There are 200

participants that majority were belongs to 18-37 years old (78.0%), and majority of them were executive females that obtained salary within RM 2,000 - RM 12,000 per months. Also majority are single 54% over married 46%. Details of the respondent profile are as per Table 3 below.

**Table 3 Respondent Profile**

Section	Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
A1	Age		
	18 – 27 Years old	83	41.5%
	28 – 37 Years old	75	37.5%
	38 – 47 Years old	25	12.5%
	47 Years old and above	17	8.5%
A2	Gender		
	Male	53	26.5%
	Female	147	73.5%
A3	Income Level		
	Below RM 2,000	51	25.5%
	RM 2,000 – RM 12,000	106	53.0%
	RM 13,000 -22,000	36	18.0%
	More than RM 22,000	7	3.5%
A4	Occupation Group		
	Executive	149	74.5%
	Non-Executive	51	25.5%
A5	Marital Status		
	Single	108	54.0%
	Married	60	46.0%
	Divorced	32	16.0%
	Others	0	-

From the distribution of the survey, there are five hypothesis was tested in order to meet the objective withdrawn from the study. The highest significant factors contribute towards Malaysian public perception was Information Access (IA) (0.89; r= 53%), followed by Information Credibility (0.76; r=42%), Information Consistency (0.75; r=30%) and Information Transparency (0.67; r= 25%). This explains that information access is the main factor Malaysian public are concern about during the pandemic as limited sources and knowledge available among the publics. Meanwhile, findings also shown that alaysian public perception are significant towards government trust. Results of Pearson Correlation and Regression among factors towards Malaysian Public perception are as pet Table 4.

**Table 4: Summary of Hypothesis Results**

Hypothesis	Relationship	Correlation	Regression	Results
H1	IT-MP	0.67	.25 (25%)	Accepted
H2	IC-MP	0.75	.30 (30%)	Accepted
H3	IA -MP	0.89	.53 (53%)	Accepted
H4	ID -MP	0.76	.42 (42%)	Accepted

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H5	MP -GT	0.56	.70 (70%)	Accepted
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## CONCLUSION

This can be concluded that all factors identified are contributed towards Malaysian public perception, however findings show the most important factor is the access towards the information ads during pandemic, the case of misinformation was wildly disseminated among the public that deem to get the real info pertaining the pandemic. In order to have an effective communication during covid 19 pandemic situation with the enforcement of Movement Control Order (MCO) among Malaysian from (March 18, 2020 – December 31, 2021). It has been the challenged for public to get access towards the information. Majority was spending and access towards the data on the mass media platform. Since, everyone was forced to stay at home, the access to the information on pandemic status, death and any updates are available and reliable through the mass media. Post pandemic situation meanwhile, making everyone moving and therefore the accessibility on the online platforms is crucial, in balancing the daily life at work and live with the pandemic situation lead public in accessing data through online platforms, google, social media and websites (Xie, Siau & Nah, 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2020).

Once the accessibility of the data has solved. Malaysian were reported facing issues relating to miscommunication and disinformation. Thus, results show the second important factor contributed towards effective communication during pandemic is the information credibility. The information which is fake or misleading and spreads unintentionally is known as misinformation (Akram, Nasar & Arshad-Ayaz, 2022; Giglietto, Iannelli, Valeriani & Rossi, 2019). Misinformation may lead the public to misunderstand the situation and lead them to be panic on the situation as what Malaysian faced during Covid-19 on the panic buying, where Malaysian are facing hardship in obtaining good supply for their food as it's no longer available on the shelves. The total chaos created from the misinformation regarding the incidence rate, prevalence, and spread of the virus has contributed significantly towards the complacent attitude of Malaysian public. Additionally, the misinformation about COVID vaccines resurfaced the general public's mistrust in science, which, combined with the rampant spread of falsified information, made vaccine hesitancy a parallel pandemic (Caceres et al., 2022; Mohd Hanafiah, Ng & Wan, 2021). Thus, it is recommended that evidence-based and factual data must be shared to the public from Malaysian reliable platforms and urge the public to be media literate by checking all info at the fact check platform such as [sebenarnya.com](http://sebenarnya.com) to confirm on the information received. As a result, this has shed new light on the importance of having credible sources of healthcare information and continuous monitoring of social media platforms to determine whether accurate information is being relayed to the public.

Finally, to ensure continuous effective communication, the consistency of media reporting during pandemic also plays and important role, as the contradiction of information obtain lead public to misunderstand the situation. The right explanation and consistency on the status of the pandemic situation, lead public to have positive perception towards the government in handling the crises that later lead to government trust (Rieger & Wang, 2022). The data obtained was from the endemic situation where many of the public now are aware on

what is happening during the pandemic. Thus, the perception obtained from the public are the actual experience.

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