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**SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION  
GRADUATE STUDIES**

**CRISIS COMMUNICATION DURING THE COVID-19  
PANDEMIC: THE CASE OF THE ETHIOPIAN INVESTMENT  
COMMISSION. (2019-2022)**

**BY: HIKMA AHMED**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND  
COMMUNICATION PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ART IN PUBLIC  
RELATIONS AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION.**

**OCTOBER, 2022**

**ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

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**OCTOBER, 2022**  
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**SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION GRADUATE  
STUDIES**

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Hikma Ahmed entitled: Crisis communication during the COVID-19 pandemic: The case of the Ethiopian Investment Commission (2019-2022) and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Communications complies with the regulations of the university and meets the accepted standards to originality and quality. This certifies that the Master thesis of Hikma Ahmed is approved by the examining committee:

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Chair of department or Graduate Coordinator

## **Declaration**

I, Hikma Ahmed, declare that this thesis entitled crisis communication during the COVID-19 pandemic: the case of the Ethiopian investment commission (2019-2022) is my original work. I have carried it out independently with the guidance and suggestions of the research advisor. And it has not been presented in any other University, at least to my knowledge. All the sources of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

**Hikma Ahmed**

**(The Researcher)**

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**Signature**

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## **Abstract**

The main aim of this study is to assess crisis communication management employed by the Ethiopian Investment Commission during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic; specifically to assess the crisis preparedness strategies of the commission in protecting its reputation, to examine the extent to which the crisis communication management strategies were aligned with the corporate strategies, to analyze the crisis communication strategies employed through the crisis phases, to evaluate stakeholders' engagement strategies during the crisis.

To answer the research question, mixed methods research, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods, was chosen. The researcher looked into 5 randomly selected newsletters for content analysis. Distributed 20 questionnaires among stakeholders to have their perspective on the response of the EIC on the COVID-19 pandemic and did an in-depth interview with 2 key informants to better understand how the crisis was handled from the commission's community perspective.

The results of this study showed EIC didn't have a crisis communication strategy manual even before the COVID-19 pandemic. EIC also lacked experts in the field of communication; EIC's primary communication channels were letter exchanges, telephone calls, and other online communication channels such as zoom calls and emails. Email and online communication channels were the most successful among the rest. In addition, the commission lacked experts in the communication team; the last finding of this study showed that EIC understood crisis management infrastructures are important and is investing financial, human resources, and other capital to build these infrastructures

# Chapter one

## Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the study

The global COVID19 pandemic is a crisis of unprecedented scale. The crisis came in clear view, nonetheless, it caught everyone off guard: politicians, hospital administrators, experts, business owners, and the general public. (Boin, Ekengren & Rhinard, 2020).

According to a report by the World Health Organization, the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on the 30th of January 2020 and a pandemic on the 11th of March 2020. ("Strategic Response to COVID-19 in the WHO African Region", 2021).

The COVID19 pandemic has caused serious disruption in the global economy. Economic activity is affected by reduced face-to-face interactions due to both formal restrictions and private choices. Post-pandemic economic conditions and policy uncertainties have discouraged investment. The interruption of education delayed the accumulation of human capital. Concerns about the functioning of the global value chain and the course of the pandemic weigh heavily on international trade and tourism. As with the previous economic crisis, pandemics are expected to have a long-term negative impact on global economic activity and per capita income. It has the potential to amplify the slowdown in global production growth, the level of production that the global economy can sustain with full employment and capacity. (World Bank, 2021).

COVID-19 is no longer just a dismantling of the economy; In addition, it will transform the way human transactions of all kinds take place domestically and globally. Indeed, we are witnessing the overwhelming impact of COVID-19 by changing the way political enterprise functions; but its impact of reshaping intra-non-public & inter-non-public communications too. Scholars also predict its effect on restructuring the world order via way of triggering worldwide movements forward, something the arena has been lacking inside for a long time or so. (Girma Demiessie, 2020).

In Ethiopia, 493,353 confirmed cases of COVID19 with 7,572 deaths were reported to WHO from January 3, 2020, to September 13, 2022. As of July 30, 2022, a total of 52,509,414 vaccine doses had been administered. ("Ethiopia: WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard with Vaccination Data", 2021).

A crisis is not only due to clumsiness and insufficient management of organizational structures, but also to general economic uncertainty and instability, technological development, political, legal, social, and cultural changes, and the international environment. It can also result from fierce competition resulting from disadvantages and impacts. (Tekin, 2014).

By mid-March 2020, most European governments decided that a dangerous pandemic could no longer be denied and that the crisis had to be dealt with promptly. Government leaders have begun various types of crisis communication to persuade people to adhere to several measures to combat the spread of the virus, thereby reducing fear and uncertainty. (Wodak, 2021).

(Porritt, 2005) writes, in a time of crisis, conventional management practices are inadequate and ways of responding are usually insufficient. Crisis management requires evidence-based guidelines for crisis communication. Evidence-based guidelines for crisis decision-making need to be supported by scientific evidence from empirical research, not personal preference or non-scientific experience. (Rousseau, 2006).

To the shock of many, African governments have replied fast and boldly to the COVID19 crisis. For example, Ethiopia's precise technique displays the country's restricted monetary and human resources, in addition to its low degree of global support. Despite those intense limitations, the outcomes to date had been higher than expected.

From the beginning, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's authorities understood that Ethiopia's fulfillment within side the combat against COVID19 will now no longer rely on the variety of ventilators Ethiopia has, but on the general public fitness measures taken to save from the unfold of the virus. Abiy's administration additionally desires to keep away from intense harm to one of Africa's fastest-developing economies, which grew at a median annual charge of 10.5% from 2004 stays inclined. It is critical to maintain those profits, avoid job losses and make sure the survival of businesses.

So, as opposed to enforcing a national lockdown like different governments, which includes some in Africa as well, Ethiopia added different measures in January, earlier than most developed countries. The government then improved its response in mid-March, whilst the first COVID19 case became reported in Ethiopia and declared a state of emergency on April 8, 2020. Furthermore, it encouraged the continuation of manufacturing and other economic activities during the crisis, significantly reducing pressure on vulnerable social groups and the informal sector. (Oqubay, 2020)

While many advanced and emerging economies have launched massive stimulus and bailout packages, the Ethiopian government has been constrained by falling revenues and the need to reallocate fiscal spending to contain the pandemic. It cannot please everyone and therefore has had to prioritize its modest resources.

The government's COVID19 economic assistance program is based on the principle of cost-sharing and sacrifice. For example, a coalition of employers, unions, and the government have agreed on a tripartite protocol to prevent layoffs during the crisis. Government subsidies have enabled manufacturing exporters to benefit from zero-cost rail transport and reduce export logistics costs. And the government's new strategy for industrial zones envisages the establishment of production centers to produce personal protective equipment for the domestic and foreign markets.

Ethiopia continues to mobilize domestic resources and encourage volunteering to address the public health emergency, with the government ensuring close coordination among federal agencies in all areas at all levels. And while the government's response to the pandemic is underway, its success to date illustrates what African countries can achieve despite severe resource constraints. (Oqubay, 2020).

The commissioner of the Ethiopian Investment Commission, Ms. Lelise Neme expressed the stance of their office on COVID-19 on their website; The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has caused an unprecedented global business disruption and could notably affect the worldwide financial system on many fronts, a few predictable and some unpredictable.

Despite the apparent crisis facing the global economy, there is also reason to hope that this worst-case scenario has been avoided/avoided. Governments have learned from previous crises that the effects of a demand-driven recession can be countered with government spending.

Consequently, many governments are growing their provision of financial welfare to residents and making sure organizations get admission to budgets needed to preserve their personnel hired throughout the pandemic. Further, the particular nature of this disaster is a possibility for a few sectors like e-commerce, food retail, and the healthcare industry - providing a few economic increases to offset the damage. Finally, there's the fact that the disaster can also additionally have a clear end date whilst all regulations in motion may be lifted (for example, whilst a vaccine is developed). Taken together, the global economy could experience a sharp rebound once the pandemic is over.

Over the past few months, the Ethiopian Investment Commission has been able to serve its clients in a limited capacity as it has also been affected and had to take precautionary measures to protect its staff and investors. As the global economy is now heading towards a more stable and moderate recovery, the EIC will continue to strengthen its engagement with investors to provide clear information on the pandemic situation in the country and the measures taken by governments regarding COVID-19. As a result of good management in the country, the state of emergency has been lifted and all government agencies including the EIC office have resumed normal operations.

COVID-19 has been properly handled in the country and the state of emergency has been lifted as a result and all government offices have resumed normal operation, including the office of EIC. It has resumed providing full services at the Commission and is operating business as usual. EIC's interactive COVID-19 website will continue to be active to provide information on the status of COVID-19 in Ethiopia, information on support provided by the government, answers to the most frequently asked questions, and any other information that is beneficial for its investors and clients' operations.

The commissioner of the Ethiopian Investment Commission assured that investors can count on the EIC as their steadfast partner, and the full team will stand ready every day to work in partnership with investors to realize their common vision. ("Message of the Commissioner", n.d.)

Given the above background, the study examines the Crisis communication management of the Ethiopian Investment Commission on the COVID-19 pandemic crisis with the business community and stakeholders that are of paramount importance to the commission of assessing procedures, strategic planning, challenges, and management applied.

## **1.2.Statement of the problem**

The COVID19 (coronavirus) pandemic has modified the global economy and therefore the daily lives of individuals around the world. According to the World Bank's latest shared report on poverty and prosperity, a pandemic will drive about 100 million people into extreme poverty in 2020 alone, doubtlessly resulting in exaggerated international poverty for the first time since 1998. (Dione, 2020).

Though Ethiopia has taken many measures to keep COVID19 infection levels low and minimize its economic impact, the country continues to be severely affected by the virus. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on business operations. Over 42% of companies registered in the national capital have utterly ceased operations and 37% reported no financial gain in March or April. Businesses have bit by bit reopened; however, knowledge shows solely 58% are open regularly and a couple of quarters were still closed by mid-September. (Dione, 2020).

Corporations were mainly affected by a significant drop in demand, leading to exceptionally low sales. Recovery expectations stay down, with only 2% of companies aiming to hire new employees immediately. Falling earnings and adjusted expectations can considerably weigh down the economic recovery. The World Bank currently estimates that growth in Ethiopia is four percentage points below the pre-COVID19 forecast. (Dione, 2020).

According to (CEPHEUS Research and Analytics, 2020), While the government has acted pretty quick and decisively with many public health measures, interventions on the economic policy front are nonetheless in their early stages—mainly if seen in opposition to the competitive moves being taken in different evolved and growing nations. A variety of economic, monetary, and sector-specific guidelines has been positioned into impact, however an excellent broader and deeper set of interventions in those regions ought to doubtlessly do greater to lessen unfavorable effects for companies and employees. Based on a ‘limited virus spread scenario,’ and if the

stimulus measures visible in different nations had been to function as a guide, we estimate that economic sources wished for public relief programs ought to attain Birr 90bn (2.3% of GDP) and that principal financial institution liquidity interventions around Birr 47bn (1.2% of GDP) can be required.

Looking at, sector-specific impacts: even under a ‘limited virus spread scenario’, at least four economic sub-sectors should be expected to face severe and disruptive shocks:

The hospitality industry is going through a nearly entire loss of customers, with plenty of proof in the course of Addis Ababa of near-empty hotels, restaurants, bars, barbers/salons; taxis barely finding riders, and tourist sites experiencing cancellations for the following 3-6 months. Occupancy rates are reportedly at just a few percent of capacity (consistent with Bole Airport entry figures of as low as 50-100 per day). Many hotels have commenced giving employees mandatory leave (some paid, some unpaid) with the expectancy that this can be temporary, however, if situations persist for lots of months a massive percentage of these workers can be laid off (probably affecting tens of thousands of employees).

Flower exporters are vulnerable to many quarters of close-to-zero revenue if conditions in Europe—the primary market—take an extended time to recover. the primary half-year exports were \$225mn and also the year outlook was for around \$450mn in exports (possibly second-largest after coffee); if the last four months of flower exports are near zero, then year total exports are going to be \$150mn under expected. The recent removal of the point minimum worth set for flowers (USD 3.8 per kilogram) isn't that meaningful since the underlying downside is the collapse of European demand. Around 150,000 employees are reportedly utilized in the sector (including horticulture), thus numbers of recently at leisure in very few targeted areas may doubtless be quite significant.

Textile exporters have confronted a suspension of orders from massive US, European, and Chinese agencies and face vast uncertainty on how long this could last; a few have reportedly been advised they may be informed within the following few months. Textile exports were \$100mn within the first half of the 12 months and an extended suspension can also additionally for this reason value up to \$50mn in foregone exports per quarter.



Manufacturers, especially the ones depending on overseas inputs from China (which elements 26% of Ethiopia's general imports), are reporting delays in getting vital inputs, machinery, raw materials, or accessories. Manufacturers also are having trouble with travel interruptions affecting incoming/current expatriate staff. Such supply chain interruptions are specifically intense for import-based manufacturers (a great percentage in Ethiopia), and this may lessen or prevent their operations for numerous quarters if the Chinese recovery is gradually picking up.

Banks are facing tight liquidity conditions even before the corona crisis (most personal banks have effective loan-to-deposit ratios near/above 100%), and banks are currently vulnerable to a potential jump in NPLs as businesses become unable to service loan repayments. whereas Birr 15bn of liquidity support has recently been proclaimed for the sector, bankers are underwhelmed by this offer and found it mostly incompetent. As relayed by those within the sector, the Birr 15bn has been offered against the stock of north by east Bill repayments that Banks were to receive from the north by east in the returning year up to June 2021; effectively, the NBE bill repayments that Banks were to receive from NBE in the coming year up to June 2021; effectively, the NBE is buying back these Bills and providing banks direct liquidity in exchange (similar to central bank bond-buying programs in countries with open market operations). However, we tend to perceive those deductions are applied to amounts the banks might have still owed to NBE when the policy was discontinued back in November 2019, so the general liquidity injection for banks is a smaller amount than the headline figure may suggest. Moreover, as banks already had outstanding short-term loans because of NBE from recent borrowings (which added up to Birr 14.5bn from emergency loans given in January and February 2020), most of the contemporary funds created obtainable as a part of the corona response might effectively be absorbed by those repayments, leaving banks and therefore their customers with fewer network resources.

Looking at a multi-sectoral impact: number of firms and employees

Seen from the viewpoint of the numbers of corporations affected—throughout all sectors—a tough estimation indicates a number on the order of 15,000 to 20,000. The quantity of hotels in Addis Ababa is anticipated at 500-800 establishments (relying on definition/coverage) and a comparable number is probably assumed for the rest of the country. Others within the

hospitality and provider industry (e.g., restaurants, and bars) might range from 6,000 to 8,000 companies in Addis Ababa alone, using historical data and applying recent economy-wide growth rates. Broadening the net, the inclusion of different affected provider vendors along with private care vendors (barbers, salons, gyms), tour operators, taxi drivers, and SMEs providing foodstuffs, and different inputs to hotels may want to conceivably additionally a same 6,000 to 8,000 companies.

Flower exports, in step with association data, aren't any extra than a hundred growers even though the pinnacle 10 companies—maximum primarily based totally withinside the Ziway area—absolutely account for the majority of general income and general employment. Horticulture exporters might be a broader institution of possibly numerous hundred growers. Textile organizations' quantity within the variety of 300-400 hundred companies in step with CSA statistics and current Industrial Park figures at the same time as different closely affected manufacturers (dealing with delivering chain disruptions connected to their imported inputs) can be withinside the variety of 1,000 to 2,000 companies. All taken into consideration a practicable estimate appears to be withinside the variety of 15,000 to 20,000 corporations—in general, SMEs—withinside the hospitality, export, and production sectors that might face fabric declines in sales over the approaching year.

Focusing on the capacity length of affected employees, the numbers concerned should exceed a million primarily based totally on a few attainable assumptions. Starting from the most important enterprise groups, flower and horticulture farms are mentioned to hire 150,000 employees in numerous focused locations. Another substantially affected export group, specifically textile exporters, employs withinside a variety of 50,000 to 70,000 workers. For set up hotels, an assumed 1200 institutions nationally and 40 workforces per median hotel could suggest around 50,000 workforces. Given the envisioned count of several affected SMEs stated earlier, assuming a mean of 10 workers according to SME could advise 150,000 to 200,000 affected employees. Adding up those estimates could advise a figure of 400,000 to 500,000 people on a conservative basis. Taking some other approach, CSA data on urban employment tiers can offer some other approximation as those figures display the sector-by-sector breakdown of the 7.5mn hired city men and women in Ethiopia as of 2018. Applying a low-end/high-end variety of 10 to 20 percent of this figure as probably affected employees could advise 750,000 to 1.5mn employees can be

affected, or a midpoint of 1.1mn employees. Of course, now no longer all of that personnel are always vulnerable to work losses, however, an illustrative matrix displaying distinctive combos of affected employees and the percentage of these affected employees that would face work loss dangers famous magnitudes (taking a mid-variety) at the order of 330,000 to 560,000 people. (CEPHEUS Research and Analytics, 2020),

One of the main potential socio-economic impacts of the pandemic in Ethiopia is an increase in poverty rates of at least 3% over the next year. Second-best scenarios can increase this effect by up to 10%. The analysis also found that 329,000 and 685,000 jobs for “salary workers” and “self-employed” could be lost in 2020/21 due to the impact of COVID-19. This potential job loss amounts to about 1 million people, a decrease of 14% (the potential job loss for 'Self-employed' and 'SMEs' is 22.2% and 15.6% respectively). This potential unemployment has also proven skewed toward female workers. This is because before COVID-19 there was a systemic bias against female workers in the Ethiopian labor market. This is reflected in disparities in average wages and disparities in urban unemployment rates, further accentuated by the economic impact of job losses due to COVID-19. Despite this potential damage, the likelihood of it happening in 2020/21 is due to new government legislation banning worker layoffs during the pandemic and the gradual business recovery documented in the study. Thanks to you it's kept to a minimum. But despite the recovery, corporate earnings are still well below last year's levels, according to the latest survey. Businesses continue to struggle with weak demand for their products and services. Moreover, most companies, especially those in the industrial sector, face high costs on some inputs and bottlenecks on others. Given this situation and the economic slowdown estimates in this study, the potential for unemployment could continue beyond the end of 2020/21. Moreover, even for potential hires, he earns only 3,132 birrs (US\$76) a month on average. (Geda, 2021).

The above findings show how much the economic sector of Ethiopia has been affected by the COVID-19 crisis thus creating a big responsibility on the Ethiopian Investment Commission on various levels.

By considering the above issues the researcher tried to look into the handling and quality of crisis communication management during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic by the Ethiopian Investment Commission and attempted to bridge the gap and provide feasible recommendations.

### **1.3.Objectives of the study**

#### **1.3.1. General Objectives**

The general objective of the study is to assess the crisis communication management employed by the Ethiopian Investment Commission to manage its crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **1.3.2. Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives of the study are to: -

- 1) Assess the crisis preparedness strategies of the commission in protecting its reputation.
- 2) Examine the extent to which the crisis communication management strategies were aligned with the corporate strategies.
- 3) Analyze the crisis communication strategies employed through the crisis phases.
- 4) Evaluate stakeholders' engagement strategies during the crisis.

### **1.4.Research Questions**

The overall objective of the study is to examine how the Ethiopian Investment Commission managed its crisis communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, the researcher tailored the study to the research questions specified below.

**Q1:** How did the Ethiopian Investment Commission prepare for the crisis in terms of communication strategy?

**Q2:** What communication strategies did the Ethiopian Investment Commission employ to manage stakeholders' engagement during the crisis?

**Q3:** How did the Ethiopian Investment Commission optimize crisis communication management strategies to maintain its reputation?

**Q4:** What crisis communication lessons did the commission take from the crisis to maintain preparedness and turn crises into opportunities?

### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

While this research focuses on the crisis communication management of the Ethiopian Investment Commission during the COVID-19 pandemic; it will be an addition to any research that was conducted by the EIC and can be used as a basis for further research. The research will serve as guidance material for the commission itself and other companies to emulate crisis management and communication strategies, and to develop preparedness and flexibility to reduce the damage that the crisis may cause to organizations. Generally speaking, the research will provide references for public relations and communications experts and companies in the field of strategic communications.

In this regard, the research could benefit the Ethiopian Investment Commission public relations professionals who plan for and implement crisis plans; to evaluate their previous crisis communication management during the crisis and most importantly, to manage their future crisis communication better during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **1.6. Scope of the study**

While the immediate negative issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic are well documented in various respects, the impact of COVID-19 on the investment industry and how the Ethiopian government communicated the crisis needs to be identified with more research.

The scope of the study focuses on crisis communication management strategies adopted by the Ethiopian Investment Commission; in the first year of the COVID19 pandemic. Drawing on their management involvement and experience in the EIC communication department, the researcher used key informant interviews with 2 EIC communication professionals, using purposive sampling.

To provide multiple perspectives and draw valid conclusions, EIC primarily uses Email newsletters to interact with external stakeholders and attach follow-up statements, a simple random sampling of probability sampling was employed for the selection of the newsletters. Therefore, the researcher collected all of the company's statements from its newsletters. The researcher also collected quantitative data through questionnaires from 15 companies that were EIC's clients during the pandemic by random selection based on the theory of probability.

## **1.7.Thesis Outline**

This thesis comprises five chapters. The first chapter is an introductory section that provides an overview of the research area, the problem statement, and the research questions. The second chapter presents a review of the literature. It covers the topics of crisis, types of crises, crisis communication, and various theories of crisis communication management. Chapter three defines the methodology and discusses the selected data collection methods. Chapter four presents the research findings from the interviews, questionnaire and content analysis and discusses the findings. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the study and suggests pertinent recommendations.

## Chapter Two

### Review of Related Literature

This chapter reviews the critical literature for the field of organizational crisis communication by describing how the field of crisis has evolved due to multiple factors. This chapter reviews crisis management and related concepts that are inseparable from crisis communication, thus providing a good basis for exploring this research.

#### 2.1. Crisis

Defining the concept of crisis is very difficult. It comes from the Greek word "Krisis", which means the stage of development of a situation at which a decision should be made. This concept represents a break in the progression of a phenomenon that makes decisions difficult. (Stegăroiu, 2005.)

The acquainted term crisis encompasses both personal and global crises and all feasible nuances among those extremes. While "crisis has become an overworked phrase" (Krystek, 1987), there may be no clear information on its conceptual substance, which permits numerous interpretations in specific fields of thought. (Bloch, 2013)

Today's understanding of the term 'crisis within the context of a company or an organization is impacted by its etymology. If one summarizes different interpretations of the meaning of the term, it can be stated that its content is ambivalent and implies two extreme interpretations: "threat," "danger," and "disease" on the one hand and "opportunity," and "turning point" on the other hand. This ambivalence illuminates a host of core assumptions about the meaning of the crisis in the economic sense. (Bloch, 2013).

Bloch, 2013 asks, So, what an organizational crisis is? Though there is no universal agreement on its definition, some typical characteristics are often distinguished. Fink, 1986 defines a crisis as "a situation that may if left unattended, escalate in intensity, fall under close media or government scrutiny, interfere with normal business operations, jeopardize the company's or officer's public image or damage the company's bottom line".

From this definition, it can be assumed that a crisis can range widely in intensity and severity. The ambivalence and unpredictability of the negative impact of crisis are its main characteristics. At the same time, Fink, (1986:15) describes the crisis as a “turning point, not necessarily laden with irreparable negativity but is characterized by a certain degree of risk and uncertainty”. Following this explanation, it can be concluded that despite the risk and instability of the situation, crises can bring positive change to the company's routine. (Bloch, 2013).

Krystek (1987) also understands crisis as a vital process. He defines it as an unwanted and unplanned process of limited duration with an ambivalent outcome, terminated by the non-achievement of its dominant goals. At the same time, it can lead to the collapse of a company. Seeger, Sellow, and Ulmer (2001:156) define crisis similarly, adding, however, the aspect of threat: “Crises are specific, unexpected, and non-routine events or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organization’s high priority goals”.

## **2.2.Key Elements of Crisis**

According to Madrid-Morales (2017), there are four key elements of crisis;

**Unpredictability:** A crisis is always unpredictable because an organization cannot know when it will occur, but it should not be unexpected. Every organization needs to know how to respond to a crisis.

**Violation of Expectations:** Every crisis violates stakeholder expectations; We expect planes to land safely and products to be safe. During a crisis, expectations change and reputation suffers.

**The seriousness of impact:** For an event to become a crisis, it must disrupt and affect the entire organization. Limited impact events are not crises, they are incidents.

**Undesired outcomes:** A crisis ends up in fortuitous consequences: monetary loss, injury, death, structural damage, blemished reputation, damaged brand, and environmental damage. (Madrid-Morales, 2017)

Most crises develop with great alacrity, and news of the crisis travels around the world with the same speed. Companies that haven't equipped themselves to alter a crisis risk being confronted



with a full series of notably annoying threats: boycotts of the company's products or services, the collapse of the share price, Serious legal claims, the loss of credit, possible bankruptcy, serious damage to the company's image and reputation, the threatened loss of corporate senior and middle management, possible closure of the company or parts of it.

Companies in crisis will face one or more of these serious consequences. Companies that are well-ready and armed can survive even the foremost serious crisis. Not only that, they will emerge even stronger than before. (Anthonissen et al, 2021)

### **2.3.Crisis Communication and Crisis Management**

**Crisis Communication** refers to a special wing that deals with the reputation of the individuals as well as the organization. Crisis communication is an initiative aimed at protecting the organization's reputation and keeping its public image. Various factors such as criminal attacks, government investigations, and media inquiries can tarnish the image of an organization. Crisis communication specialists battle various challenges that tend to damage the organization's reputation and image. (Juneja, 2020)

Crisis communications are the dialogue between the organization and its public(s) before, during, and after the negative occurrence. (...) Effective crisis management entails crisis communication, which may not cast off the crisis but also give the organization a more positive reputation than before the crisis. (Fearn-Banks, 2016)

**Crisis Management** involves dealing with threats before, during, and after they have occurred. (Tewfik, 2020). A set of factors designed to combat the crisis and lessen the actual damage inflicted. (Coombs, 2007). Crisis management is a process of strategic planning, that removes some of the risks from crises and allows organizations to be in greater control of their destiny. Effective crisis management is one in which – Plans are not just run once on the day of a crisis. – Organizations are constantly aware of potential crises. – It is a core part of an organization's activities. (Madrid-Morales, 2017)

According to Coombs (2007), Crisis management represents a set of factors designed to combat crises and lessen the actual damage inflicted. – We take measures to minimize the negative outcomes on the organization, the stakeholders, and the industry. There are four components in crisis management: prevention, preparation, response, and revision.

## **2.4.Crisis management factors**

**Prevention (mitigation):** These are the measures taken to avoid crises. Prevention is largely invisible to the public.

**Preparation:** This includes creating a Crisis Management Plan (CMP). It's the most well-known factor. – This also includes the diagnosis of weak points, the formation of a crisis management team, and a crisis portfolio.

**Response:** is the application of the preparedness components to a (simulated or real) crisis. A response to a crisis is very public and scrutinized by the media.

**Revision:** Includes evaluating the organization's response to simulated and real-world crises to determine what it did right and what it did wrong. (Marker, A. 2020).

## **2.5.Need for crisis communication**

A crisis can damage the image of the brand. Crisis communications professionals are hired to protect an organization's reputation from diverse undesirable threats and challenges. Brand identity is one of an organization's most valuable assets. The primary objective of the crisis communications team is to protect brand identity and maintain the organization's strong position within the industry. Crisis communication specialists work hard to overcome difficult situations and help the organization get out of difficult situations in the best possible way and faster. (Juneja, 2020)

## **2.6.Crisis Scenarios**

Any number of scenarios could manifest as a business crisis that requires your organization to communicate. Some of the more common types of crises are:

**Financial:** Financial loss consisting of declaration of bankruptcy or shutdown of businesses.

**Personnel:** Personnel changes that may affect operations or reputation, such as vacation or terminations of employees.

**Organizational:** An apology for misconduct or irregularities because of organizational practices.

**Technological:** Technological failure leads to failures that cause reduced or loss of practicality.

**Natural:** A natural crisis requiring notice or change of procedure. For example, shaping safety precautions in the middle of a health crisis.

Anything else you can think of that could hold up or stop business continuity is also a good example of a crisis that warrants communicating with customers and/or the public. While your communication plan will vary depending on the crisis you're dealing with, here are some common strategies companies use to respond effectively. (Amaresan, 2021).

## 2.7. Staged approaches to Crisis Communication Management

Crisis have a transparent life cycle and managers got to realize this life cycle as a result every stage needs completely different responses.

This life cycle has been reworked into “staged approaches to crisis management” (Coombs 2016). – This implies that researchers have come up with an ordered list of functions that require to be killed in times of crisis.

Fink	Mitroff	Three-staged
Prodromal	Signal detection	Precrisis
	Probing & Prevention	
Crisis breakout	Containment of damage	Crisis
Chronic	Recovery	
Resolution	Learning	Postcrisis

Table I. Source (Coombs 2016).

### 2.7.1. Fink’s four stages

1. Prodromal: Hints or indications of a possible crisis are beginning to emerge
2. Crisis breakout or acute: a triggering event with associated damage occurs;
3. Chronic: the effects of the crisis remain while efforts to resolve the crisis continue;
4. Resolution: There is a clear signal that the crisis no longer concerns interest groups -it is over. Marker, A. (2020).

### **2.7.2. Mitroff's five stages**

1. Signal detection: we need to identify warning signs of crisis and act to prevent crisis
2. Probing and prevention: organizations search and work to reduce the harm of known crisis risk factors
3. Damage containment: a crisis hits and organization members prevent damage to spread.
4. Recovery: members of the organization are working to return to normal business operations as soon as possible
5. Learning: organizations review and critique their Crisis Management efforts, adding to the organization's memory. Marker, A. (2020).

### **2.7.3. Three-Stage Approach**

1. Precrisis or pre-disaster phase: signs of warning appear and people try to eliminate risks.
2. Crisis impact or rescue phase: The crisis occurs and support is provided for those involved.
3. Recovery or demise phase: stakeholder confidence is restored. (Coombs 2016).

## **2.8. Significance of Strategic Communication in Crisis Management**

According to (Zemke, 2020), communication is the basis for crisis management. Create clarity and guidance for employees, customers, and partners at an otherwise uncertain and confusing time. The key role of strategic communication during a crisis is to stabilize and move the organization forward by building trust and engaging stakeholders. Clear and consistent communication is critical to successfully maintaining business continuity and recovery.

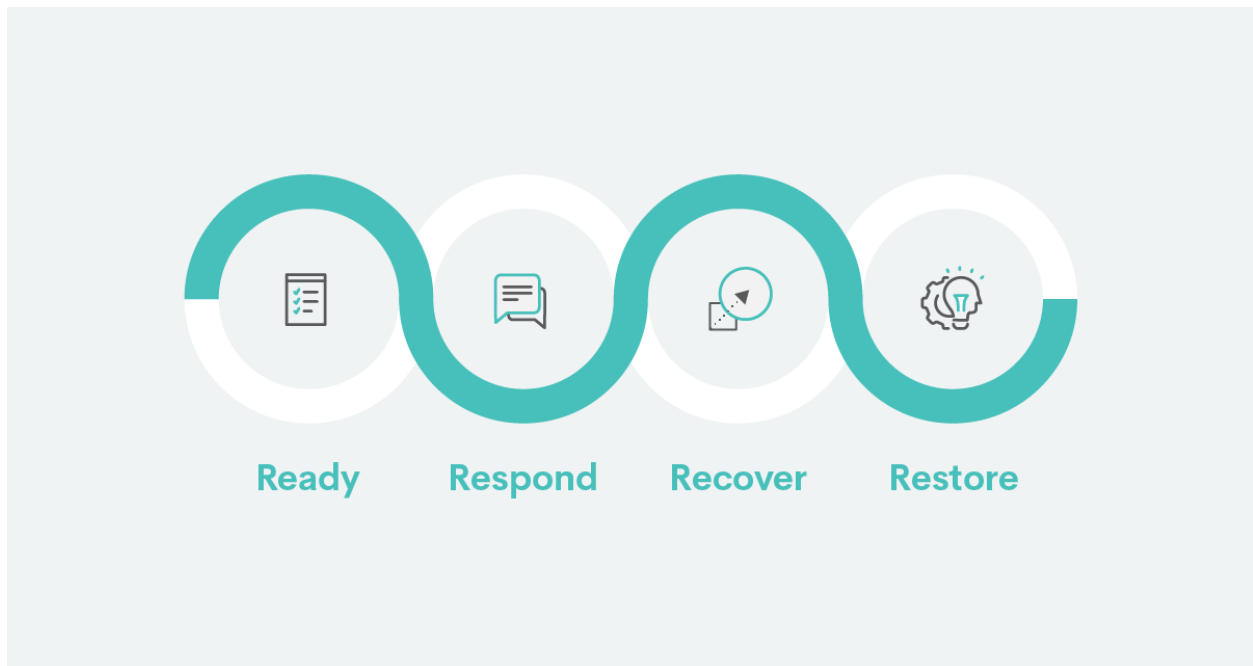


Figure I. Stages of strategic communication in crisis management

Source: <https://beehivepr.biz/strategic-communication-in-crisis/>

### **2.8.1. Ready Phase**

The role of strategic communication in the Ready phase is to provide the necessary foundation for organizations to respond effectively and maintain trust. This phase occurs before a crisis when a company proactively identifies high-probability crisis scenarios and develops plans to address them. How well an organization prepares its crisis communication strategies affects how well it can handle an actual crisis.

The crisis management plan created in this phase should define dedicated response teams with clear roles and communication responsibilities. It should include an inventory of internal and external stakeholders with preferred communication channels for each target audience. By creating communication materials with templates for these channels, organizations can quickly adapt and implement communications when a crisis arises. Managers should receive communication training in this phase to learn how to react authentically and transparently to future crises. (Zemke, 2020)

### **2.8.2. Respond Phase**

Organizations enter the crisis management response phase when a crisis occurs. The role of strategic communications in this phase is to provide timely and credible information that keeps stakeholders informed. Communication also serves as an instrument for building trust. Organizations that share authentic, transparent, and consistent messaging are more likely to earn trust, maintain brand awareness, and retain loyal customers, employees, and partners.

Strategic communication in a crisis creates a connection between companies and their stakeholders. Organizations that use a feedback loop during crisis management can better understand how their key audiences are feeling and show empathy for what they are experiencing. Acting with empathy and providing simple, factual information across multiple channels helps organizations allay confusion and concerns. Taking control of the crisis story and meeting stakeholders where helps organizations stabilize and manage the immediate crisis. (Zemke, 2020)

According to (Amaresan, 2021), when your company makes a mistake (or falls into crisis), the best thing you can do is to apologize and be human. The most effective way to do this is to designate a spokesperson to speak on behalf of your brand. After all, it is much easier to refer to one person than to a group of lawyers.

This person could be your CEO, an executive, or someone you feel would be best suited to represent your company. It is important to choose a good communicator as their actions affect how key stakeholders react to the situation. Humanizing your business and making your mistakes seem manageable will play a big part in maintaining stakeholder support.

### **2.8.3. Recover Phase**

Businesses enter the recovery phase when they begin to experience stability. Use strategic communications at this stage to evaluate new opportunities and provide stakeholders with clarity on what the future may hold. While it may feel repetitive, proactive and consistent communication is critical at this stage, as stakeholders can still feel uncertain even as the organization begins to stabilize and recover. Executives can use communications to define and articulate the company's vision for the future while keeping people updated on the company's improved stability.

Internal messages at this stage can focus on motivating employees to think and act differently because of the crisis. Externally, the company can still tackle the crisis, but start preparing customers for the future. Learn where stakeholders are and how their expectations have changed by using monitoring and listening tools and engaging stakeholders in two-way communication. These insights will help the organization identify what adjustments might be needed as the business recovers. Change is common at this stage, and incorporating change management communication strategies into the business plan can help move the business forward effectively. (Zemke, 2020)

#### **2.8.4. Restore Phase**

The role of strategic communication in the Restore phase is to confidently move the business forward for sustained growth. It is an opportunity for an organization to realign its communications with its purpose, mission, and values and to provide a rationale for any changes made as a result of the crisis. This communication helps the company create meaningful connections with stakeholders that positively differentiate its brand and culture.

Organizations in the Restore phase shift messages from crisis-focused to forward-looking. Managers play a crucial role in communication at this stage, inspiring and motivating employees. It is also an important time to say thank you to the internal and external stakeholders who have supported the company during the crisis.

Organizations that use communications effectively during a crisis to authentically connect with stakeholders have the best chance of long-term success. Companies build trust when they communicate authentically, transparently, and clearly. People who trust organizations are more likely to support and endorse the brand. Strategic communication in a crisis gives companies the confidence to move forward with business plans and re-enter the market to serve their stakeholders in a meaningful way. (Zemke, 2020).

#### **2.9.Theories, practice, and use**

A crisis communication theory is used to clarify what will work, what arrangements need to be made and how; what actions are likely to result and how, and how things relate. It is a prediction based on what has happened before. (Fearn-Banks, 2016)

Researchers are focused on designing and testing theories that help explain phenomena. Professionals can benefit from employing this knowledge in crisis communication management. Good theories improve crisis communication management and are not just academic exercises. Theories supply evidence-based problem-solving rather than opinion-based problem-solving. (Madrid-Morales, 2017).

### **2.9.1. Theory of Attribution and Theory of Situational Crisis Communication**

Attribution theory states that companies suffer reputational and business damage when the public blames them for a crisis. Situational crisis communication theory builds on this idea by recommending that companies tailor crisis communication to the potential of the crisis to damage the company's reputation.

People closely associate Coombs with both theories: Attribution theory starts from the premise that it is human nature to try to explain why events occur, especially sudden and damaging occurrences such as crises. Typically, humans attribute responsibility to an entity, including an enterprise or a situation. When people blame an organization, they direct negative emotions toward them. Coombs found that this can damage an organization's reputation, reduce intention to do business with the company, and increase the tendency to speak negatively about the organization to others.

While Coombs didn't anticipate the power of social media to amplify reputation damage, tweets and other posts can be a particularly pernicious form of the negative word-of-mouth he describes. These networks have introduced a level of high-speed, two-way communications between consumers and businesses that did not previously exist and are testing the ability of businesses to control messages. Therefore, social media control is an essential part of crisis communication management.

In the theory of situational crisis communication, Coombs said that crisis managers must first determine the threat to the organization's reputation by assessing which of the three groups the crisis fits into: the victim group (the organization is a victim); the random cluster (the organization unintentionally caused the crisis); or the intentional group (the organization intentionally misconducted). Clusters have a growing potential to damage the company's reputation due to the level of responsibility attributed to the company (minimal, low, or strong).



Based on an assessment of the situation and reputational risk, Coombs believes the organization must respond with one of three strategies: deny, diminish, or rebuild. The organization takes no responsibility in deny strategies; diminishing strategies aim to downplay the seriousness of the crisis, and rebuilding responses usually involve apologies.

Secondary responses are called bolstering and include reminders (e.g., drawing attention to past good deeds by the organization); flatter (praise stakeholders); and victimizing (including the organization's victim status).

Coombs compiled the following 10 best practices for crisis communication based on attribution theory, including apologizing in certain circumstances:

Provide instructions to all victims or potential victims, such as recall information.

Offer condolences to all victims, along with information on remedial action and trauma counseling.

For crises where the organization faces minimal culpability and there are no so-called compounding factors (crisis history and negative reputation in the past), the previous two steps are sufficient.

If there is an aggravating factor, offer apologies and/or justifications. The same reaction applies to a crisis where the blame is low and there is no history of crises or bad reputation.

If there is little attribution of responsibility and an aggravating factor, add compensation or apology to the first two steps.

If the public attributes responsibility to the organization, offer the first two steps plus compensation or an apology.

Use compensation when a victim suffers serious harm.

Complete each answer with the strategies of reminding and insinuating. Apart from denial and attacking the accuser for crises with rumors and challenges where a stakeholder claims the organization is doing something wrong. (Marker, 2020)

### **2.9.2. Theory of Apology**

Researchers recognize the powerful role apologies play in crisis management. This has been formalized as an area of study under the term corporate apology, which means using rhetoric to protect your reputation while explaining what happened.

In apologia, crisis response options are denial of responsibility, deferral of responsibility, or acceptance of full responsibility with an apology.

In Keith Michael Hearit's 2011 book *Crisis Management by Apology*, in which he developed the apology theory, he notes that companies often refrain from making apologies and instead make public comments out of concern that an apology might harm their business increase liability, or weaken your reputation court. However, Hearit (2011) argued that a PR-driven strategy where the organization apologizes and tries, to be honest, is more effective. Further research by Coombs and Sherry Holladay (in Marker, 2020) disproved this claim, finding that an apology is not necessarily more effective in reducing reputational damage and negative word of mouth among non-victim stakeholders. In these studies, apologizing was about as effective as other victim-centered strategies, such as expressions of sympathy and compensation.

### **2.9.3. Image Restoration or Repair Theory**

Image repair theory, also known as image restoration theory, shares the approach of rebuilding an organization's reputation when it has been damaged by a crisis.

Communications scholar William Benoit (in Marker 2020) founded image restoration theory in his 1995 book *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies*, which focuses on the messages a company needs to communicate during a crisis. He offers five categories of image repair strategies: Denial, Avoiding Responsibility, Reducing the Perceived Offense of the Action (as in Compensation), Corrective Action, and Punishment (Confession and Asking Forgiveness).

### **2.10. The strategy of crisis response**

Crisis response is considered to be the most studied aspect of crisis communication, encouraging scholars to investigate the role of crisis communication in having the desired impact on stakeholders and ultimately producing positive outcomes.

“Reacting too late to a crisis can be perceived not only as indifference but even as arrogance, even an evasion that conforms to dishonesty” (Doorley & Garcia, 2007), p.331).

The authors further write those routine corporate events can usually happen using normal communication methods, but in times of crisis, routine communication trends lead to negative outcomes. Crisis response strategies target stakeholders with carefully crafted messages tailored to mitigate financial, reputational, and image damage. Therefore, corporate communications professionals need to anticipate the possible consequences of untimely post-crisis responses. (Doorley & Garcia,2007)

As Struges, 1994, argues: The first goal of a crisis response strategy is to notify stakeholders and ensure safety. The second objective of the strategic response to the crisis is to tailor information that is essentially addressed to stakeholders with messages of sympathy and reassurance and to update them on measures to prevent a recurrence of the crisis. Ultimately, crisis response strategies are designed to minimize the damage a crisis does to an organization's reputation.

### **2.11.New media communication during a crisis**

During crises, media are “primary channels to those who determine the reputation and a media strategy is a critical component of a broader crisis communications strategy.” (Griffin, 2014, p.214). Thus, communication plays a pivotal role in shaping stakeholders’ perceptions and safeguarding their image during a crisis (Ray, 1999).

Social media can be used as the primary means of communication or as an alternative or additional method of communication. Social networks offer many opportunities to spread information quickly, cheaply, and efficiently. When combining the ability to disseminate information to a network of people online, and then have this initial group extent information in a variety of other electronic and non-electronic ways to reach these networks, both online and offline (i.e., going viral), shows the basis of which social media can continue to be used. This helps get the right information to the right people at the right time. This real-time environment helps support the decision-making needs of the public and emergency management during a time of critical situations. (White, 2012)

Social media is a wonderful marketing tool that companies can use to reach audiences around the world. But that reach works both ways, as customers can share stories, post pictures, and upload

videos for the world to see. A viral video that casts your business in the wrong light can cause millions of people to develop a negative perception of your brand.

Crises are fought both in-person and online. So, your business needs a social media plan that can manage the digital excitement around your business. This may include assigning more staff to monitor your social channels or updating followers with new information. But no matter how you use it, social media cannot be ignored when your business is in crisis. (Amaresan, 2021)

There is still limited evidence of the impact of social media on crisis communication and crisis management. Followers of social networks in emergencies may have different strategies, as noted in the literature, depending on why they are on social networks in times of crisis: to help, to be concerned, to know if it is possible to return to the affected area, Supporting responders, grieving, taking advantage of the situation, being curious are very different incentives to use social media, and may require a different strategy for the officers involved. The costs and benefits of using social media in risk and crisis communication are also difficult to estimate precisely.

During a crisis, Regester and Larkin (2008) write, an organization must develop relevant information to help members of the press develop accurate stories to fill the post-crisis information gap. Regester and Larkin (2008) further note; that a press conference on a crisis should be given by the company's most senior executive.

## **2.12. Challenges for risk and crisis communication**

### **2.12.1. Multiple players and channels of communication**

The first challenge for risk and crisis communication is that different actors can communicate via several channels at the same time. This multitude of actors and channels raises the question of coordination, the inclusion/exclusion of actors or communication channels, and the directions of communication. This also raises the question of time: the Internet is accelerating all processes to an extent not seen in recent history, which represents an opportunity as it can speed up appropriate emergency response, but poses challenges in terms of spreading inappropriate rumors. (Wendling et al., 2012)

### **2.12.2. Collecting and Analyzing Customer Feedback**

Sometimes a crisis can happen, but it doesn't make the front page of the news go viral on social media. Instead, you quietly influence your customers and cause churn, but you don't realize it because you're not collecting enough feedback from your customers.

Gathering feedback is a great way to prevent a crisis. This is because it gives insight into what customers think of your business. This allows you to spot major obstacles before they become a crisis. And it allows customers to share negative reviews, which you can use to improve other customers' experiences.

When faced with a dissatisfied or escalated customer, our success team sees this as an opportunity to gather customer feedback. They start interactions by asking customers to review their experience and discuss any unsatisfactory items. This helps our team create actionable steps to align with customer needs. (Amaresan, 2021)

### **2.12.3. Managing perceptions**

Risk and crisis communication must address perceptions. The polarization between the perception of the public and the perception of the authorities/regulators/experts is a key issue. In addition, the boundary between the public and the professional world is porous. Social scientists studying risk have shown that not only scientists or regulators can be experts on a particular risk, but also that certain groups of people can gain experience and expertise by working in NGOs or being victims of an event, etc. The layman expertise that these specific individuals have acquired implies that they can communicate their analysis and perceptions of risk or crisis and shake the traditional boundaries between those who know and those who don't. Moreover, social media like YouTube or Facebook can give the perception that not only experts are the ones who know and that individuals who become aware of risk can also report in real-time using their mobile phones. New forms of communication stands are also changing perceptions even further. Ripley, in the book *The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes and Why People Turn to Other to Decision*, shows, for example, when to evacuate during a hurricane. The average person consults four or five sources before making a decision. The new social networks could transform the types of sources people use and the way they make their decisions. The new social media could change the type of sources that people use and how they reach their decisions. This can

also help people in their need for comfort and human connections, hence changing their perception of the risk and crises they face. (Wendling et al., 2012)

#### **2.12.4. The combination of facts and values**

Risk and crisis communication are as much about facts as it is about values. Scientific expertise is often mixed up with ethical or political considerations and concerns. Communication in times of disaster has both an objective part that conveys facts and a subjective part about emotions and feelings. Stephane Koch explains that in times of crisis, social networks can become emotional networks in which the facts are conveyed through emoticons, certain signals of emotions. This blending of shared facts and values with a new tone and vocabulary becomes a new area of research. Fact-sharing is a priority for some experts, while others, based on behavioral research, point out that values and emotions can be important levers to improve risk awareness among the population and strengthen preparedness. A high-priority issue on the political agenda Risk and crisis communication issues are high on the political agenda as they are picked up and politicized by the media. They can be instrumentalized, especially if the risk is harming some people and a positive one for others. For example, the BSE crisis harmed the meat industry but was viewed positively by vegetarians in their struggle to limit meat consumption. The existence of multiple social media and communication channels increases the potential for instrumentalization. Possible Errors and Provision of Inaccurate Information Errors may occur such as providing inaccurate or incomprehensible information, or mishandling of sensitive information. Mitigating these errors is a major challenge. Cultural bias Risk and crisis communication vary by culture. In the global context, risks and crises are perceived differently in different countries and communities. It becomes very difficult to appeal to both a local and global audience during a major crisis. The diversity of risks and crises Risk and crisis communication needs to be tailored to the type of risks and crises people face, as there is no one size fits all. For example, communication should separate voluntary exposure to risk from the rest. Taking risks voluntarily takes place in full knowledge of the possible consequences and therefore implies the responsibility of people, an element to be addressed in communication. For the other risks, the responsibility of individuals may not be affected, but the public still wants to be informed about corrective actions. Risk and crisis communication can also differ between natural and man-made risks as the social impacts can be different. Finally, a distinction must be made between routine

risks such as a tornado in a region that is frequently hit and nonroutine risks and major events such as 9-11 in the United State, or the earthquake and tsunami in Japan in 2011. The Impossibility of not Communicating silence also sends a message and may no longer be an option. Organizations that choose not to use social media during a crisis may be viewed by the public as disorganized or even send a signal of disinterest or disdain. This choice can be seen as revealing the organizational culture of the organization, and its way to consider the public, etc. (Wendling et al., 2012)

These theories demonstrate an understanding of concepts that are relevant to the topic of crisis communication management and broadly relate to the research and will help design the research questions, guide the selection of relevant data, interprets the data, and proposes explanations of the underlying causes or influences of observed experiences.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

This chapter reviews and discusses the selected research methods and explains the data collection methods used in this research project. Gaps identified through surveys, content analysis, and key informant interview research methods are designed to help answer the research questions. Finally, the procedures for the content analysis of the results and the procedures for key informant interviews are discussed.

#### **3.1. Paradigm and Research Design**

Mixed methods research, which combines qualitative and quantitative research methods, was chosen to provide a complete understanding of the research topic and to answer research questions. The Qualitative data collection focuses on crisis communication research on newsletters sent to stakeholders via email. The qualitative data provides access to perspectives of practitioners working in the communication field at EIC, answering the research questions about preparedness for the crisis in terms of communication strategy, the applicability of crisis communication management strategies, optimization of crisis communication management strategies to maintain its reputation, organizational learning from the crisis to maintain preparedness and turn crises into opportunities. A Quantitative data collection method is done through a questionnaire which was answered by companies that are licensed by the Ethiopian Investment Commission. Mixed methods are used to increase the reliability and validity of the results. The three main methods of data collection used were questionnaires, content analysis, and key informant interviews.

#### **3.2.Data Sources**

In this particular study, purposive sampling was used. The reason for choosing this approach is for the researcher to seek insight into the views of the communication professionals on crisis communication management from the Ethiopian Investment Commission, and for the participants to provide these views based on their experience and involvement. Interviews have been conducted at the Ethiopian Investment Commission with employees who were working



during and were the communications handlers of the Ethiopian Investment Commission when the COVID-19 pandemic was first reported in Ethiopia. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method and it happens when “factors selected for the sample are decided by the judgment of the researcher. Researchers often believe that they can obtain a representative sample by using a sound judgment, which will allow in saving time and money”. (Black, 2010) It is often used in qualitative research, in which the researcher wants to gain detailed knowledge about a particular phenomenon rather than make statistical inferences, or where the population could be very small and specific. An effective purposive sample should have clear criteria and principles for inclusion. (McCombes, 2019)

For the aim of getting feedback from investors licensed by the EIC, a simple random sampling of probability sampling was employed. Probability sampling means that each member of the population has a chance of being selected. It is mainly used in quantitative research. If you would like to provide results that are representative of the full population, probability sampling techniques are the most valid choice. (McCombes, 2019)

A sample of participants was chosen from a population of investors whose businesses were affected because of the Covid-19 pandemic based on the theory of probability. A survey was distributed to randomly selected investors licensed by the Ethiopian investment commission.

A newsletter sent through email by the Ethiopian investment commission to stakeholders has been randomly selected for qualitative content analysis. A simple random sampling of probability sampling was also employed to analyze the crisis communication management in the contents of the newsletters.

### **3.3.Instruments**

#### **3.3.1. Key-Informant Interview**

The researcher interviewed two key informants; out of the three communications practitioners at EIC to gather data from the practitioners' perspectives and answer the research questions of the study.

The chief of staff of the deputy commissioner, Mr. Mebrahtom Gebreyesus who had been leading the commission's communication along with Ms. Yeabsira Kefelegn in assistance whose role is Industrial Park Expert at the EIC was interviewed.

The researcher planned the interview with key informants in the following procedures. (Needs Assessment Techniques: Using Key Informant Interviews, n.d.)

The researcher first collected and reviewed distributed newsletters via email, website news, and third-party data to determine what information is needed from Key interviewees.

The researcher then identified the possible key informants who can answer the needed information for the research by identifying who handles communication matters of the Ethiopian Investment Commission which led the researcher to Mr. Mebrahtom Gebreyesus and Ms. Yeabsira Kefelegn; because of their first-hand knowledge and involvement with how the Ethiopian Investment commission handled the crisis they were selected for interview.

After selecting the key informants, the researcher decided on a face-to-face interview with Mr. Mebrahtom and a telephone interview with Ms. Yeabsira Kefelegn based on their availability and it is their preferred choice.

The interview consisted of a list of open-ended questions relevant to the research topic beginning with an introduction of the research topic, its purpose to establish credibility for the interview, and an explanation of the importance of the key interviewees' cooperation and what will happen to the collected information.

The other components of the interview tools included key questions designed to elicit more information about how they handled the crisis communication management during the covid-19 pandemic, probing questions to encourage them to reveal more and deeply and if there are any roots for further incapability and closing questions to provide an opportunity for the key informants to give any additional information or comments. The interview was documented with tape recording and note-taking methods.

Field researchers usually try to cultivate close relationships with one or two respected and knowledgeable people in the early stages of the research. These people are called key informants.

Participant observers also look to key informants to provide them with a deep understanding of the setting. Since field research is limited in time and scope, key informants can give the history of the setting and fill in the researcher on what happens when he or she is not there.

In some studies, participant observers have used key informants to check out emerging themes, hunches, and working hypotheses. (Taylor et al., 2016)

Interviews with key informants involve a series of open and closed questions (prepared but not rigidly applied). They are a useful way to gather softer data and test claims or assumptions about a project/program. These interviews can provide rich data and typically last between half an hour and an hour. ("Key Informant Interviews", n.d.)

The right key informant can make or break a study. However, you should be prepared to leave relationships formed early in a study if circumstances permit. (Taylor et al., 2016). Commonly key informants are the providers of a service and the research project evaluates the impact and use of that service on participants. (Cossham & Johanson, 2018). (Kumar, 1989) writes, Key informant interviews have advantages and limitations.

#### **3.3.1.1. Advantages of Key Informant Interviews**

1. Since the information comes directly from knowledgeable people, key informant interviews often provide data and insights that cannot be obtained with other methods. Key informants may offer sensitive information that would not be disclosed in other situations. You can report incidents, local events, or conditions that explain implementation issues.
2. Key informant interviews provide flexibility to explore new ideas and problems that were not anticipated when the study was planned, but are relevant to its purpose. For example, let's say a key informant claims that one of the main reasons entrepreneurs refuse to borrow in a small business development project is the complex and cumbersome loan application process. The researcher can discuss this topic with other key informants, even if it was not included in the original interview guide. This change is not possible in the case of sample surveys and population censuses.

3. In general, it is easy to find people with the skills necessary to conduct key informant interviews, as most social scientists have the necessary professional training and experience.
4. Key informant interviews are one of the most cost-effective social science research methods. An investigator can conduct two or three interviews a day, requiring only assistance with transportation and possibly a translator. Sometimes a useful study can be designed based on a dozen interviews.

#### **3.3.1.2. Disadvantages of Key Informant Interview:**

1. Because interviews with key informants provide a very limited basis for quantification, they are rarely appropriate where quantitative data is required. Decision-makers often expect accurate statistical data to design a project or monitor its progress. In such situations, key informant interviews cannot be conducted without survey-based data.
2. Results may be biased if informants are not carefully selected; a common mistake, especially when interviewers are unfamiliar with local conditions
3. Choosing informants based on their social and economic status or proficiency in an international language rather than their knowledge of the local situation. For example, it is not uncommon to rely heavily on village elites to understand the problems faced by small farmers, or on government officials to study the problem of small business owners who do not seek technical assistance. This problem can easily be avoided by consciously trying to recruit key interviewees from a larger pool of experts.
4. Results are prone to interviewer bias. For example, the interviewer collects information and ideas that confirm their preconceived notions, gives more credibility to the opinions of elites than those of the lower socioeconomic classes, or reacts more to descriptive descriptions and selective data than to abstract ideas and explanations. Therefore, researchers must familiarize themselves with these pitfalls.
5. When only a few people (fewer than 15) are interviewed, it may be difficult to demonstrate the validity of the findings. It is not easy to prove that the interviewees are, in fact, knowledgeable and informed and that they are representative of their peers in their information and recommendations.

### **3.3.2. Questionnaire**

The researcher went on some steps to develop questions for the questionnaire.

The first step was to adapt the questions based on the research objectives of the study. To tailor the questionnaire, the researcher used crisis communication best practices from previous research by renowned crisis communication experts such as Coombes.

The other way the researcher developed these questions was from the gaps identified while interviewing key informants and looking through analyzed content on the research.

A sample of participants was chosen from a population of investors provided by the Ethiopian Investment Commission whose business was affected because of the Covid-19 pandemic based on the theory of probability.

The questionnaire was constructed with the Likert scale, open-ended questions, a rating scale, yes or no questions, and interval options

A total of twenty questionnaires were distributed to randomly selected investors licensed by the Ethiopian investment commission. Out of the twenty, fifteen respondents had given their responses. The questionnaire was three and a half pages long and was sent out via email to companies that are licensed by the Ethiopian Investment Commission to provide quantitative answers to the research.

Questionnaires can be divided into quantitative and qualitative methods depending on the type of questions. In particular, answers obtained through closed-ended questions with multiple choice answer options are analyzed using quantitative methods and may include pie charts, bar charts, and percentages. The responses to the open-ended questions of the questionnaire are analyzed using qualitative methods and involve discussion and critical analysis without using numbers and calculations. (Dudovskiy, 2021)

A questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a sequence of questions and other prompts designed to gather information from respondents. Although they're frequently designed for statistical evaluation of the responses, this isn't always constantly the case. (Sajjad Kabir, 2016)

### **3.3.2.1. Questionnaires: Advantage**

Questionnaires allow for large amounts of information to be gathered from a large number of people in a short time and a relatively inexpensive manner; It can also be performed by the researcher or by any number of people, with limited impact on its validity and reliability. Questionnaire results can usually be quickly and easily quantified by a researcher or through the use of a software package. It can be analyzed more scientifically and objectively than other forms of research. Once the data has been quantified, it can be used to compare and contrast other research and used to measure change. Positivists believe that quantitative data can be used to generate new theories and/or test existing hypotheses. (Sajjad Kabir, 2016)

### **3.3.2.2. Questionnaires: Disadvantages**

Questionnaires' disadvantages include their inability to understand certain forms of information - i.e., changes in emotions, behavior, feelings, etc. Phenomenologists claim that quantitative research is simply an artificial creation of the researcher who only asks for a limited amount of information without explanation. There is no way to tell how truthful a respondent is being. There is no way of knowing how much thought a respondent has put in. The respondent may be forgetful or not think in the full context of the situation. People may read each question differently and therefore answer based on their interpretation of the question, i.e., what is 'good' for one may be 'bad' for another, hence there is a level of subjectivity that is not acknowledged. (Sajjad Kabir, 2016)

### **3.3.3. Content Analysis**

For this study, a qualitative content analysis was employed using five newsletters out of the total eight sent to investors and other stakeholders to evaluate the commission's response to the COVID-19 crisis, as well as to evaluate the topics addressed alongside the crisis.

The researcher will focus on interpreting and understanding the content of the newsletter to see through the Ethiopian Investment Commission's crisis communication management strategies. Numerous studies use qualitative content analysis. which addresses some of the weaknesses of the quantitative approach.

Qualitative content analysis was defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data the process of systematically classifying coding and identifying themes or patterns. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) Qualitative Content Analysis is an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, according to content analytic rules and step-by-step models, without rash quantification. (Mayring, 2000, p.2), and any qualitative data reduction and meaningful effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings (Patton, 2002, p.453).

Comparing qualitative content analysis with its fairly familiar quantitative counterpart can improve our understanding of the method. First, the research areas from which they developed are different. Quantitative content analysis is often used in mass communication as a way to count manifest textual elements, an aspect of this method that is often criticized for the lack of syntactic and semantic information embedded in the text. (Weber, 1990).

By contrast, qualitative content analysis was developed primarily in anthropology, qualitative sociology, and psychology, to explore the meanings underlying physical messages. Second, quantitative content analysis is deductive to test hypotheses or answer questions that have emerged from previous empirical research or theories. In contrast, qualitative content analysis is primarily inductive in that it bases the study of topics and themes, and the conclusions drawn from them, on the data. In some cases, qualitative content analysis attempts to generate theory. The data sampling techniques required by the two approaches differ. Quantitative content analysis needs the data to be selected using random sampling or other probabilistic approaches, to confirm the validity of the statistical inference. By contrast, samples for qualitative content analysis usually contain purposively selected texts which can inform the research questions being investigated. Lastly, the results of the two approaches are different. The quantitative approach produces numbers that can be manipulated with numerous statistical methods. By contrast, the qualitative approach mostly produces descriptions or typologies, along with expressions from subjects reflecting how they view the social world. By this means, the perspectives of the producers of the text can be better understood by the investigator as well as the readers of the study's results (Berg, 2001).

### **3.4.Procedures and Pilot Report**

#### **3.4.1. Procedures**

After identifying the issues to collect the data for this research, the researcher set goals and planned the approach and methodology appropriate for this research. The procedures of data acquisition of this paper included a key informant interview with the chief of staff of the deputy commissioner who has been leading the commission's communication along with other practitioners and another key informant interview was conducted with one communication officer serving as an assistant in the crisis communication management team using a purposive sampling method.

The researcher distributed questionnaires via email to companies that are licensed by the commission to provide quantitative answers using a simple random sampling of probability sampling.

A newsletter sent through email by the Ethiopian investment commission to stakeholders had also been randomly selected for content analysis using the simple random sampling of probability sampling.

#### **3.4.2. Pilot study**

Before the main study, the researcher conducted a pilot study. The main objective of the pilot study was to verify the effectiveness and adequacy of the data collection tools and certain aspects of the theoretical framework. For the pilot study, a limited sample was considered and only the content of two newsletters and an interview with an EIC communications officer were analyzed. During the pilot study, some issues with the data collection tools were discovered and corrected.

To keep the data simple and clear, the researcher preferred to analyze the qualitative data (the interview and the content analysis) together; while also working on the quantitative data separately (questionnaires) which modified and improved the pilot study, tools, and theoretical knowledge. However, the pilot study helped the researcher to realize the feasibility of the study. In general, the pilot study allowed the researcher to review the methodology and observe the



responses of some of the pilot respondents to the questions. During the main research, solutions to the problems were found.

### **3.5.Methods of Analysis**

To assess the crisis communication management of the Ethiopian Investment Commission during the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher has interpreted important theories such as attribution theory, Situational Crisis Communication, theory of apology, image restoration or repair theory, and models of crisis communication management.

The analysis of research data took place in two phases. First, the commission's interview transcripts and crisis responses from emailed documents were reviewed multiple times to identify recurring themes. The researcher highlights sentences and quotes from interviews and documents. The researcher then categorizes the sentences and citations, coding the data relevant to the research questions. Second, the researcher collects data analysis of the questionnaire through IBM SPSS Statistics Version 28.0.0.0. Finally, the researchers compiled the categorized data for analysis.

### **3.6.Ethics and Limitations**

Research ethics is a code of conduct that helps explain whether research is free from plagiarism and other fraudulent practices during sampling and data collection. In addition, the relationship between participants and data fabrication is one of the principles to be considered. The following ethical considerations have been taken by the researcher.

- The identity of the researcher and the purpose of the study were explained to each participant.
- Participants volunteered to participate and were informed that they could stop participating at any time if they felt uncomfortable.
- They are assured that their answers will be kept confidential and that they have the full right to opt out.

- Samples were taken based on the requirements of the research method. Since the study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods, the researcher relies on a reasonable basis to select the sample.
- Interviews are conducted at a place and time convenient to the interviewees.

The researcher faced some limitations in the process of the acquisition of data for this research. Time constraints were the main ones. The process of scheduling interviewees and getting responses to the online questionnaire from selected stakeholders was a time-consuming process thus resulting in time restraint for the researcher to analyze the findings.

## Chapter Four

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

#### 4.1.Introduction

This chapter presents the content analysis, the key informant interview, and the questionnaire results. The content analysis provides a general overview of crisis communication management, while the key informant interviews examine perspectives of communication employees, the crisis communication plan applied by EIC, and the applicability of the strategy; while the questionnaire gets insight from other stakeholders.

#### 4.2.Demographic characteristics of survey respondents

Table II. Gender of Respondents

	N	%
Male	11	73.3%
Female	4	26.7%

Table III. Level of Education of Respondents

	N	%
1 <sup>st</sup> degree	11	73.3%
2 <sup>nd</sup> degree	4	26.7%
PhD	0	0%

Table IV. Role of Respondents

	N	%
Advisor	1	6.7%
Employee	3	20.0%
Management	7	46.7%

Public Relations/Communications	4	26.7%
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### 4.3.Prevention of crisis and Preparedness

The researcher tried to put answers to the first research question; how well did the Ethiopian Investment Commission prepare for the crisis in terms of communication strategy? By presenting the data gathered for this research.

A pre-crisis phase is a time of crisis preparation and prevention. At this stage, companies are expected to focus on several challenges related to prevention and crisis preparedness. Developing a crisis communication plan, appointing a spokesperson, detecting signals, and enhancing capacity are some of the main activities or tasks in the pre-crisis stage to minimize risk and avoid problems as soon as possible.

Yeabsira Kefelegn, an Industrial Park Expert at EIC and who had a leading role in assisting of the crisis communication management of the EIC responded, *“the EIC has no such documents prepared,”*

Mr. Mebrahatom Gebreyesus who was mainly leading commissions’ communications further explains, *“If you are asking me if we have a manual to manage a crisis when it happens, no we do not have that, but we have an operation manual for our service deliveries. EIC follows the Ethiopian citizen charter which is not updated. After EIC changed from an investment agency to a commission the citizen charter has not been updated. But we have the investment directorate which has its directory. They use their manuals. We have manuals for industry park facilitation, industry park regulation, and investment/industry park service coordination directorate, since we also give service to producers in the industry park, we also have a general manual for that. But we do not have a manual specific for organizational crisis handling.”*

Another key issue being appointing a spokesperson, detecting signals, and enhancing capacity are some of the main activities or tasks in the pre-crisis stage;

*“The EIC has no crisis communication, management team. So, the COVID-19 pandemic was not handled in a way that was planned and organized. We tried to manage it after the occurrence of the pandemic.”* (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)

*“Direct engagement with higher management (the commissioners), Setup a team that dedicatedly worked on Covid-19, Tailored follow up tasks related to the pandemic;”* (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021) were the measures taken by EIC to prepare for the crisis as early as it started.

Regarding whether the company has a clear written crisis communication document or a crisis management plan, the researcher found that the company did not have a formal document in place with clear procedures and an action plan to serve as crisis guidance.

#### **4.4. Response to the crisis**

The researcher studied five newsletters sent to stakeholders via email for content analysis and compared them to determine the crisis communication management, response, and whether the content was effective and ethical for the COVID-19 pandemic. The content analysis will help to identify the intentions, focus, or communication trends of the Ethiopian Investment Commission. While answering the second and third research questions, what communication strategies did the Ethiopian Investment Commission employ to manage Stakeholders’ engagement during the crisis? And how did the Ethiopian Investment Commission optimize crisis communication management strategies to maintain its reputation? The topics in the newsletters are used to guide content analysis.

Based on the information and documents collected by the researcher, EIC only sent 11 weekly newsletters to stakeholders. 5 of the 11 weekly newsletters were selected using the simple random sampling method of probability sampling.

The researcher used QDA Miner lite to do a qualitative analysis of the 5 newsletters sent out by the EIC.

The EIC responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by providing vital information in the newsletter. The researcher coded the content of the newsletter based on the way the newsletters were presented and tried to analyze them accordingly.

The researcher classified the newsletter into Four categories based on the content the newsletters had and their correspondence to crisis communication management strategies. The categories are News, Useful Information, New Government Policies strategies and plans, and Government updates.

The researcher further classified the above categories into Eleven codes to determine their frequency in the newsletter.

Below is the presentation of the Coding frequency of the content of the newsletters:

Table V. Coding frequency of newsletters

Category	Code	Description	Count	%Codes	Cases	%Cases
News	Government measures	Measures adopted by the government to make investors work easier during COVID-19	13	38.2%	5	100.0%
News	Survey Results	Results of surveys taken during COVID-19	3	8.8%	3	60.0%
Useful Information	Shipping and Logistics Services	Information on shipping and logistic services during COVID 19	2	5.9%	1	20.0%
Useful Information	Demand for COVID-19 goods	Goods that their demand peaked during COVID 19	5	14.7%	3	60.0%
Useful	Measures taken	Measures that are taken to	1	2.9%	1	20.0%

Information	to keep businesses running	keep business running				
New Government Policies, Strategies and Plan	New Proclamation	New Government Policies, Strategies, and Plan introduced during COVID19	1	2.9%	1	20.0%
New Government Policies, Strategies and Plan	New Strategy	New Government Policies, Strategies, and Plan introduced during COVID19	2	5.9%	2	40.0%
New Government Policies, Strategies and Plan	New Bill	New Government Policies, Strategies, and Plan introduced during COVID19	1	2.9%	1	20.0%
Government Updates	Public Health Response	Updates on government response on different public health issues	3	8.8%	2	40.0%
Government Updates	Economy	Updates on government response on different public health issues	2	5.9%	2	20.0%
Government Updates	Social	Updates on government response on different public health issues	1	2.9%	1	20.0%

The researcher also includes this topic answers from key informant interviewees to answer the second and third questions of this research.

To better understand their qualifications and their stand to answer the questions for the interview the researcher has asked the following questions;

What was your role in EIC when the COVID-19 Pandemic hit Ethiopia?

*“When the COVID19 pandemic hit Ethiopia, my main personal role at EIC was to collect data from EP manufacturers. The government has made decisions related to the prevention of COVID 19, so I had the responsibility to assist in implementing those decisions. My other responsibilities included following up with investors who wanted to work exclusively in industrial parks. There were other cases related to COVID 19 too, and I organized workshops and follow-up actions.”*  
(M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)

Key Interviewee 2: *“I work as an Industrial Park Expert; I am a park lead and key account manager for companies inside the industrial park.”* (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)

Has there been a change in your role since then?

*“No, I still handle similar communication responsibilities.”* (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)

*“I was a focal person for various companies that were repurposing their products to PPE Manufacturing and I was the PR expert that communicated relevant information for investors.”*  
(M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)

One effect COVID 19 brought with it is completely changing the work dynamic; which in turn can affect how a crisis is responded to; the researcher asked the following questions in such regard;

How has the workflow of EIC changed after the COVID-19 pandemic hit Ethiopia? Can you please give us a comparison of the before and after of COVID 19?



*“Most of the services we provide have not changed. But we have changed the way we deliver them. For example, most of our work before Covid 19 was paper-based. There were also some services we had completely stopped after COVID-19. For example, when a foreign investor or employee comes to Ethiopia to stay and work, they were required to obtain a residence ID and renew it once a year; but when COVID19 struck Ethiopia because of the restrictions requiring to not have any direct contacts, foreign investors and employees were allowed to stay interactively without renewing their residence permit. Our office via a special collaboration with the Main Department for Immigration & Nationality Affairs of Ethiopia we situated for foreigners to get any required support and to stay without not having to renew their residence IDs. The other changes we had were in our communications. For example, most of our communication and interactions became online, before that, unless it was for the exchange of documents our use of email and online platforms was very limited; but when COVID19 happened almost 100% of our interactions went online. Others were our physical meetings, workshops, and promotional forums held online. Another change is, we used to go abroad for the sake of doing promotions before but now that has stopped totally. So, these are the comparisons, most of the services we deliver have become automated and some that we had completely stopped providing have now resumed.” (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)*

*“Before the pandemic, EIC was open for 5 working days, starting from 8:30 am -5:30 pm. However, during the pandemic, the government had implemented a “state of emergency” which stated that all government offices should start at 7:30 am -3:30 pm and also employees come to work by shift. This made it hard given the number of services we had to give to our clients with limited staff.” (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)*

What businesses are your stakeholders involved in?

*“They are many in terms of sectors. If we classify them based on their economic terms there are those that we classify as primary, secondary, and tertiary. We can start from modern agriculture, agriculture-related manufacturing activities, and processing, we have livestock-related subsectors, such as dairy, meat, and honey products. We also have service sectors; it is similarly a wide sector such as agriculture. One of the mandates for EIC is to make its main focus on foreign investors. So, those foreign investors are involved in the service sectors such as hotels*

*with different star levels. there are services foreign investors get as long as they are involved in level one scale constructions; only if they are working as level one contractors, such as general contractors working in building constructions, road constructions, tools, and operations. The other one is the manufacturing sector. It is a sector both the country and also our office gives a high level of focus to. There are labour intensives and also private sectors. When I say manufacturing sector; it includes the textile and apparel, leather, chemical, pharmaceutical, steel products, etc... so when we talk about industry parks specifically the sector engagement is not different from what I mentioned. What makes industry parks different is their infrastructure. For example, when an investor wants to be a manufacturer and we give them a license, the investor will next go to the city government office in Addis Ababa or Dire Dawa if not they will go to the regional investment offices to get land, then to get electric power they will go to the Ethiopian electric power office, then to get water service they will get to the Ethiopian water authority office, etc... the offices the investor has to deal with are many. But when it is an industry park all these processes will not be there. All infrastructures will be easily provided for them in the industry park and all the manufacturers only had to do was build the factory.” (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)*

*“The investors I am key account manager to are more involved in textile and apparel, and leather production and agro-processing.” (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)*

Has the Ethiopian Investment commission faced a financial loss due to the COVID 19 pandemic?

*“The EIC is a civil service office. It is not a profit-driven institute. So, we do not declare a profit or loss statement. So, I cannot say we have faced a loss during the pandemic.” (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)*

*“No, because EIC is not a profit-making institution, it’s a government institution.” (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)*

What communication channels did EIC use for any sort of engagements with stakeholders?

*“Our communication channels were and are 3 of numbers. One was through letter exchanges, which we used to communicate with even before covid 19 happened except that in the past we had to go to the customs office in person and these letters were mandatory for the requirements of our work. After Covid 19, we used email as a communication channel for scanned versions of these letters. The second way is through personal meetings, discussions, and forums. But due to Covid 19, they were very limited and restricted to the smallest possible range. The telephone is also our other main communication channel, we usually use it more than any other communication channel. Other communication channels include online meetings and zoom calls. They have been greatly utilized and eventually became our preferred method and our office plans to keep on utilizing them after now. because it's efficient when it comes to two-way decision-making, it is challenging sometimes due to network problems. But we don't have any institutional plan in this regard.” (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)*

*“EIC had a COVID-19 tab on its website which released all the necessary information from relevant government stakeholders that are important for investors. Also, EIC had a weekly newsletter that was disseminated to investors via email and EIC assigned a focal person for investors who will communicate with the investors once a week to discuss the challenges they are facing and provide a solution as well.” (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)*

Which communication strategy worked best for EIC in terms of communicating with stakeholders?

*“Email and other online communication channels.” (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)*

*“I would say Email and phone call because the investors could contact EIC via email and have a discussion with the assigned focal people which were more impactful for the investors.”. (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)*

What was your relationship with media organizations like?

*“We used to have multiple encounters with media every 3 weeks on average in which our promotion teams or managers gave a direct exchange of information with journalists. And we*

*also sent data for media organizations about business flow and other information every 1-2 days.” (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)*

*“Better than before, since we are striving to be more transparent than before.” (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)*

Did EIC send newsletters to stakeholders and is it currently ongoing?

*“Currently, we have stopped releasing the newsletter, but before we used to release it weekly and bi-weekly. The newsletter's impact on the commission was very important to explore our gaps and helped unify the commission's staff. It also helped the community know about the commission's work using real-time data. Media, researchers also used it as a reference for their works.” (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)*

*“We had started to send out newsletters to our investors the first few months since the pandemic. However, we have currently stopped due to lack of experts.” (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)*

To answer the fourth question posed in this study, what crisis communication lessons did the commission take from the crisis to maintain preparedness and turn crises into opportunities? The researcher asked the key informants the following questions.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the relationships of EIC with its stakeholders?

*“Okay, I find this to be a very important question. So, EIC writes various support letters, when investors are facing problems, we send representatives to go to them personally and support them in solving their problems. So, physical contact is an inevitable thing in our work. An expert will go out a couple of times a day to solve cases. So, the pandemic has limited most of our movements. It has altered our interaction ways. It has affected the way we went ahead to solve problems negatively. Some of our letters were rejected. For example, the customs office once declared they will not accept physical letters, but only emails. So, that created a situation in which we had to be looking for the email addresses that were concerned for different cases. That has disrupted our interactions at the time. Many of the physical documents we were sending out*

were being rejected and so on. The other affected interaction is the one with our clients. One of the methods of measurement of our work successes in our office is by seeing how many investors have come to us, how many of them have started working, and so on because we are not profit-driven as I have said earlier. So our success is based on the results of the works of the investors. We go and do promotional works, we write support letters for them when they come to our offices, we go to several projects and give support. But when the COVID 19 pandemic hit our physical promotions completely stopped. The support was stopped both at the expert and managerial levels. Most of our clients' export orders were cancelled. Since their success is our success; and their failure is ours. So whatever support we provided, if they don't export and their work fails, we have similarly failed. The investors were unable to take orders and export goods to different countries, and import raw materials, so most of them declared their losses. So, when they were disconnected from the international market the plan B they took was to produce PPE products that can be consumed locally. So, we facilitated that without them needing to take out other licenses. In a normal scenario, a textile manufacturer cannot produce anything other than textile. If they are importing raw materials, the raw materials they were allowed to import are only those that can be used for textile production. But in this special scenario, even when they were textile manufacturers, we had allowed them to produce masks. We have allowed them to bring raw materials necessary for mask production. The other thing is these manufacturers were not allowed to sell their products in Ethiopia, not even one-dollar equipment if it was manufactured in the industry park. But in this context, for the reason that these masks were highly needed locally and the production of these manufacturers was stopped, and they were at loss, for the sake of not letting them lay off their employees, we made support for them to sell locally. So that was the level of the negative impact of COVID-19." (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)

"It was challenging because the investors had a lot of inquiries in terms of importation of raw materials, the exportation of goods, shed rent and bank loans ... etc. Even though the majority of the inquiries they are facing are related to other government stakeholders (Customs, National Bank of Ethiopia, Industrial Park Development Corporation...) all the challenges needed the involvement of EIC and sometimes the problems they had faced took a longer time to be resolved

*and other times the problem was not able to be resolved which made the relation between EIC and its investors have a rough relationship.” (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)*

Has the EIC done any research on the negative impact of COVID 19?

*“We have done due diligence on who was manufacturing what during the COVID 19 pandemic when our clients suggested producing PPE products. Before starting the manufacturing process, we assessed how much personal protective equipment we need as a country so that they can ensure that they do not lose the market by estimating the demand and sharing the numbers early.*

*Therefore, we have documents to share with you about the negative impact of Covid19 on our facilities. However, we don’t have any declaration from investors related to the impact. But we can cross-check the figures from industrial parks specific about who declared a loss during 2020. We also have data on who was producing which PPE so, I can also share with you those data.” (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)*

*“Yes, EIC with the support of other donor companies such as Tony Blaire Institute, McKinsey and Company.” (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)*

Has the crisis given any advantage or disadvantage to EIC?

*There are plenty of disadvantages to mention but the advantage being what I have stated above (promotion and easy accessibility of partners abroad), It helped us think outside the box. The main disadvantage I can mention is that it hinders our promotion which is the main target of our work. Our legal international name is the Investment Promotion Agency IPA. Therefore, our important role has been compromised. The attraction to our country has also dropped dramatically. Including trade and global trade rates. Except for a very small number of Asian and Sub-Saharan countries, many growth rates are negative. Many transactions, orders, and shipping operations were stopped. In terms of exports from our country’s industrial parks, we used to export a lot of raw materials to Europe, but the epidemic forced the country to postpone orders to another date. This industry can no longer export and accept more offers, so we have lost a lot of potential capital and partners. We lose money to pay wages and debts. Other investors in the country couldn’t withstand the pressure on their investment, so the pandemic has*

*forced them to reduce their labour force as much as possible. These effects on the families of laid-off workers are foreseeable, including across the country. We tried to impose a commission in this regard by forcing investors to keep on producing their goods so that employees will not be fired and be non-employed. We also supported by allowing import raw materials to be tax-free so that they can produce PPE products, thereby incentivizing investors to continue production. We have also left a 2-month income tax for many organizations with the help of the Ministry of Finance and provided tax-free goods for their employees to keep their health.” (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)*

*“The major mission of EIC is: - to create job opportunities, increase FDI(Foreign Direct Investment) and transfer skills and knowledge. Therefore, the pandemic has a significant negative impact on the mission of EIC. Also, the covid-19 virus has made us lose a few of our colleagues and their families as well...” (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)*

How is the work of EIC currently and its relation with stakeholders?

*“Our employees have now resumed their daily work. At the beginning of the pandemic, we worked in shifts, 5 out of 10 days. We also do not need to report our presence through fingerprint devices to prevent contact, but now things are normalizing through paper signatures. The lessons we learned during the pandemic are also considered to continue with our routines simultaneously.” (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)*

*“It is better than before since we consistently follow up on them. However, due to the current management team, we are less result-oriented than before (when Covid-19 started to spread). (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)*

Is there anything extra you can tell me about how you have managed your crisis communication during the COVID 19 pandemic?

*“I can add one thing if it is no organized strategy for crisis communication it doesn't necessarily mean it is weak. Yes, we had issues when it comes to being organized, having a communication team, plus crisis is not a usual thing, therefore, the practice, especially in governmental offices, is weak.” (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)*

“I believe that we have covered all the communication we have done in the EIC during the pandemic.” (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)

#### 4.5. Stakeholder Views on the EIC's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The researcher distributed questionnaires by email to randomly selected investors, management of industrial parks, and others to answer research questions. Of 20 questionnaires distributed; only 15 were responded to; therefore, the researcher developed the analysis using IBM SPSS version 28 with the given responses.

The responses are presented as follows.:

Table VI. Enterprise support of Investors

##### Is your enterprise is supported by investors?

	N	%
No, we are not supported by investors	3	20.0%
Yes, we are supported both by foreign and local investors	2	13.3%
Yes, we are supported by foreign investors only	10	66.7%

10 (66.7%) respondents, responded with; *Yes, we are supported by foreign investors only*, 2 (13.3%) respondents responded with; *Yes, we are supported both by foreign and local investors*, and 3 (20%) other respondents responded with; *No, we are not supported by investors*.



Table VII. The sector of business enterprise involved

**What sector of business is your enterprise involved in?**

	N	%
Agriculture	1	6.7%
agro-processing	1	6.7%
Leather and Leather Products	3	20.0%
Technology	1	6.7%
Textile and Apparel	9	60.0%

9 (60%) respondents, responded with; Textile and Apparel, 3 (20%) respondents responded with; Leather and Leather products, 1 (6.7%) respondent responded with; agro-processing, 1 (6.7%) respondent responded with; technology and 1 (6.7%) other respondent responded with; agriculture.

Table VIII. Location of enterprise 1

**Where in Ethiopia is your enterprise Located?**

	N	%
Addis Ababa	4	26.7%
Amhara Region	1	6.7%
Oromia Region	5	33.3%
Sidama Region	1	6.7%
Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region	4	26.7%

5 (33.3%) respondents, responded with; the Oromia region, 1 (6.7%) respondent responded with; the Amhara region, 4 (26.7%) respondents responded with; Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region, 4 (26.7%) respondents responded with; Addis Ababa and 1 (6.7%) other respondent responded with; Sidama region.

Table IX. Location of enterprise 2

**If your answer to the above question was "other" please tell us the region your enterprise is located in?**

	N	%
	11	73.3%
Addis ababa	1	6.7%
Addis Ababa	2	13.3%
Sidama Region	1	6.7%

Table X. Government imposed restrictions 1

**What would best describe the current state of government-imposed restrictions (e.g. lockdown, curfew) due to COVID-19?**

	N	%
Government restrictions have not been lifted	1	6.7%
Government restrictions were lifted and re-imposed due to increasing COVID-19 cases	2	13.3%
Most restrictions have been lifted	12	80.0%

12 (80%) respondents, responded with; Most restrictions have been lifted, 2 (13.3%) respondents responded with; Government restrictions were lifted and re-imposed due to increasing COVID19 cases, 1 (6.7%) respondent responded with; Government restrictions have not been lifted.

Table XI. Government-imposed restrictions 2

**If the state of government-imposed restrictions (e.g. lockdown, curfew) due to COVID-19 have been lifted could you tell us for how long it was imposed before it was lifted?**

	N	%
	2	13.3%
1 year	4	26.7%
6 months to 1 year	1	6.7%
6 months to 1 year	1	6.7%
8 months to 1 year	1	6.7%
A year	1	6.7%
for almost one year	1	6.7%
I am not sure	1	6.7%
It is not such a restriction in Ethiopia, but as we are exporters it affects our presence in the international market. The restriction varies from place to place and it is not time-specific. In Ethiopia, during the initial stage of covid, it was affecting labour performance and productivity.	1	6.7%
It was mainly once. The directive was issued by the Ministry of Health	1	6.7%
The first 3 or 4 months	1	6.7%

Table XII. Government-imposed restrictions 3

**Has your enterprise resumed business after the government restrictions were lifted?**

	N	%
Yes, we are operating fully on site	14	93.3%
Yes, we are operating partially (working on-site and/or from home)	1	6.7%

14 (93.3%) respondents, responded with; Yes, we are fully operating on-site, 1 (6.7%) respondent responded with; Yes, we are operating partially (working on-site and/or from home)

Table XIII. Challenges of company

**What is the biggest challenge your company currently faces, due to COVID-19.? Select all that apply.**

	N	%
Insufficient cash flow to maintain staff and business operations., Business partners were severely affected and were unable to work normally., Customers/clients were affected and their demand was lower than normal.	1	6.7%
Insufficient cash flow to maintain staff and business operations., Employees were absent due to illness or official duties., Raw materials are not delivered or become very expensive and operations are interrupted., The supplier cannot make any input., Business partners were severely affected and were unable to work normally., Customers/clients were affected and their demand was lower than normal.	8	53.3%

Insufficient cash flow to maintain staff and business operations., Employees were absent due to illness or official duties., Raw materials are not delivered or become very expensive and operations are interrupted., The supplier cannot make any input., Business partners were severely affected and were unable to work normally., Customers/clients were affected and their demand was lower than normal., Customers'/clients demand was higher than normal.	1	6.7%
Insufficient cash flow to maintain staff and business operations., Employees were absent due to illness or official duties., Raw materials are not delivered or become very expensive and operations are interrupted., The supplier cannot make any input., Customers/clients were affected and their demand was lower than normal.	1	6.7%
Insufficient cash flow to maintain staff and business operations., Raw materials are not delivered or become very expensive and operations are interrupted., The supplier cannot make any input., Business partners were severely affected and were unable to work normally., Customers/clients were affected and their demand was lower than normal.	1	6.7%
Raw materials are not delivered or become very expensive and operations are interrupted.	1	6.7%
Raw materials are not delivered or become very	1	6.7%

expensive and operations are interrupted., Customers/clients were affected and their demand was lower than normal.		
The supplier cannot make any input., Business partners were severely affected and were unable to work normally., Customers/clients were affected and their demand was lower than normal., Customers'/clients demand was higher than normal.	1	6.7%

Table XIV. Lay-off of employees

**Have there been lay-offs of employees in your enterprise because of the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic?**

	N	%
Maybe	5	33.3%
No	5	33.3%
Yes	5	33.3%

5 (33.3%) respondents, responded with; Yes, 5 (33.3%) respondents responded with; No, 5 (33.3%) respondents, responded with; Maybe.

Table XV Communication with EIC 1

**Have you been reached out by the Ethiopian Investment Commission during the COVID pandemic?**

	N	%
Maybe	6	40.0%
No	3	20.0%
Yes	6	40.0%

6 (40%) respondents, responded with; Yes, 3 (20%) respondents responded with; No, 6 (40%) respondents, responded with; Maybe.

Table XVI Communication with EIC 2

**Do you believe any contact or communication from the Ethiopian Investment Commission made work operations easier for your enterprise?**

	N	%
Maybe	7	46.7%
No	3	20.0%
Yes	5	33.3%

5 (33.3%) respondents, responded with; Yes, 3 (20%) respondents responded with; No, 7 (46.7%) respondents, responded with; Maybe.

Table XVII Communication with EIC 3

**In which ways had there been any contact from the Ethiopian Investment Commission during the COVID19 pandemic? Select all that apply.**

	N	%
Email Newsletters, Physical (Representatives coming to the site in person)	1	6.7%
Email Newsletters, Teleconference	2	13.3%
Email Newsletters, Teleconference, Physical (Representatives coming to the site in person)	6	40.0%
get an update on the website	1	6.7%
I Don't know	1	6.7%
Physical (Representatives coming to the site in person)	4	26.7%

Table XVIII. Communication with EIC 4

**If your answer to the above question was “other”, could you specify how your enterprise was contacted by the Ethiopian Investment Commission during the COVID19 pandemic?**

	N	%
	13	86.7%
get an update on the website on the covid situation	1	6.7%
Letters	1	6.7%

Table XIX. Communication with EIC 5

**Do you believe the Ethiopian Investment Commission has handled the crisis communication expected during the COVID19 efficiently?**

	N	%
Maybe	12	80.0%
No	1	6.7%
Yes	2	13.3%

2 (13.3%) respondents, responded with; Yes, 1 (6.7%) respondent responded with; No, 12 (80%) respondents, responded with; Maybe.



Table XX. Communication with EIC 6

**If you believe the Ethiopian Investment Commission **\*\*has not\*\*** handled the crisis communication efficiently during the COVID19, can you briefly state the commission's shortcomings?**

	N	%
.	1	6.7%
I am not sure	1	6.7%
I don't know	1	6.7%
I Don't know	2	13.3%
In some cases, there was less response rate on some inquiries.	1	6.7%
It created a market gap and there was a financial loss so I think the government should support the investors in some way.	1	6.7%
Most of the works were affected during the pandemic. it was not EIC but the government's measure that mostly helped us to resume our work even if we faced loss.	1	6.7%
n/A	1	6.7%
No comment	1	6.7%
The communication started	1	6.7%

as expected, however, it was for a very short period of time even though the pandemic is still ongoing.		
there was a delay in responding to the crisis	1	6.7%
There was some communication gap	1	6.7%
There were no strategies on hold for crisis management.	1	6.7%
They were cooperative but communication during the early stages was limited	1	6.7%

Table XXI. Communication with EIC 7

**If you believe the Ethiopian Investment Commission has handled the crisis communication efficiently during the COVID19, can you briefly state the commission's strength?**

	N	%
	6	40.0%
1. There was a weekly newsletter sent to us via the email address or it was attached to their website for everyone to access. 2. Our company repurposed to manufacturing Personal Protective Equipment(PPE) which was face masks, and EIC had delegated a focal person for us to help us with producing the product	1	6.7%

and also with our marketing as well by connecting us with buyers		
I am not sure	1	6.7%
I don't know	1	6.7%
I Don't know	1	6.7%
Information sharing and update on the covid situation and there was an effort to effectively communicate with us to address the challenges that we are facing in these new normal conditions.	1	6.7%
N/A	1	6.7%
The commission worked on providing special incentives, outstanding policy considerations and a relaxed mechanism.	1	6.7%
Their offices have made some work easier for us but they had some shortcomings	1	6.7%
Yes, I can say they were also quick to act to keep our businesses running even if there were some problems.	1	6.7%

#### **4.6.Organizational Learning**

To understand what EIC has learned from the crisis the researcher directed the question to the key informant interviewees:

What crisis communication lessons did the commission take from the crisis to maintain preparedness and turn crises into opportunities?

*“I can answer this question in two ways. On the one hand, we are working hard to build the infrastructure, starting with the purchase of Zoom licenses, to preparing training materials for the commission’s staff so that they can use these various online platforms effectively. Many colleagues who did not have institutional emails now have them. So, we have taken a lesson that these infrastructures are important and we are investing financial, human resources other capital to grow to build these infrastructures. We believe they are critically important. Secondly, the internet saved us the trouble of meeting with people abroad by enabling us to communicate easily without the embassy and other money-related obstacles. Before COVID 19 it took us months of preparation. It could be embassy appointments to get our visa or getting foreign currency at the CBE. Online communication helped us to promote our country's investment opportunities easily without being physically there, which also helped us save resources and learn promotion strategies that are smooth, efficient, and effective.” (M. Gebreyesus, Personal Communications, 2021)*

*“The lessons taken are; It has made EIC more transparent (to share the information, documents and other necessary things to investors), reachable (to be easily accessed: it can be the experts or commissioners), and become more result-oriented (making decisions, following up on inquiries faced by the investors, pushing other government stakeholders to take action....).” (Y. Kefelegn, Personal Communications, 2021)*

#### **4.7.Discussion of main findings**

Throughout this study, the EIC's crisis communication management during the COVID19 pandemic was examined to assess the crisis preparedness strategies of the commission in protecting its reputation, examine the extent to which the crisis communication management

strategies are aligned with the corporate strategies, analyze the crisis communication strategies employed through the crisis phases to maintain corporate reputation and Evaluate stakeholders' engagement strategies during the crisis.

This section is therefore to summarize the main findings of the study that is generated through the research approaches applied.

To address the first research question, how did the Ethiopian Investment Commission prepare for the crisis in terms of communication strategy? The research has produced relevant data on the understanding and efforts of pre-crisis operations. Among these duties, in particular, research-focused and explored the company's crisis communication plan, crisis spokesperson, risk signal detection efforts, and capacity building.

The results show that the EIC did not have a crisis communication strategy manual even before the COVID19 pandemic, which could allow it to serve as a guideline for crisis response.

To address the second research question, what communication strategies did the Ethiopian Investment Commission employ to manage stakeholders' engagement during the crisis? The researcher was able to find out. Through letter exchanges, telephone calls and other communication channels such as zoom calls and emails the EIC was able to manage Stakeholders' engagement during the crisis while email and online communication channels were the most successful among the rest.

To address the third research question, how did the Ethiopian Investment Commission optimize crisis communication management strategies to maintain its reputation? Although the EIC had no organized strategy for crisis communication, the way it handled the crisis wasn't necessarily weak. EIC had problems with organization and a lack of experts in the communication team.

To address the last research question, what crisis communication lessons did the commission take from the crisis to maintain preparedness and turn crises into opportunities? The researcher was able to find that the EIC has taken several measures such as the purchase of Zoom licenses, and preparing training materials for the commission's staff so that they can use various online platforms effectively, employees who did not have institutional emails now have it. EIC

understood such infrastructures are important and are investing financial, human resources, and other capital to grow to build these infrastructures. With online communication, the EIC easily now meets with people abroad to promote the country's investment opportunities without being physically there avoiding embassy and other money-related obstacles which was a problem before.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter includes the conclusion of the study, and based on the results, the investigator recommends several points.

#### 5.1. Conclusion

The COVID19 pandemic has created severe turmoil in the global economy. Economic activity has reduced due to a decline in personal interaction, both from government restrictions and private decisions; uncertainty about the economic outlook and post-pandemic policies has discouraged investment; disruptions in education slowed the accumulation of human capital; concerns about the viability of global value chains and the development of the pandemic negatively affect international trade and tourism. The pandemic, like previous economic crises, is expected to have a lasting negative impact on global economic activity.

The purpose of this study was to examine how the EIC utilized crisis communication management strategies to prepare for the crisis in terms of communication strategy, What communication strategies did the EIC employ to manage Stakeholders' engagement during the crisis, How did the EIC optimize crisis communication management strategies to maintain its reputation, What crisis communication lessons did the commission take from the crisis to maintain preparedness and turn crises into opportunities.

The Ethiopian Investment Commission (EIC) is an autonomous Government institution whose main function is to promote foreign and national investors to take into account the country's investment prospects.

The EIC also issues investment approvals, commercial licenses, construction permits, work permits, and trade registration certificates.

It also certifies memorandums and articles of incorporation, registers trade/firm names and any amendments, evaluates construction companies, negotiates and signs bilateral investment promotion and protection agreements with other countries, registers technology transfer

agreements, and seeks non-participatory actions. export-oriented. foreign corporate associations based on local investors.

Assuming that crisis communication efforts begin as early as the pre-crisis phase and should continue even after the crisis has been resolved, the following four research questions were developed to address crisis phases with a particular focus on critical analysis of crisis communication management. of the EIC on COVID-19 -Pandemic.

The research questions were:

Q1: How did the Ethiopian Investment Commission prepare for the crisis in terms of communication strategy?

Q2: What communication strategies did the Ethiopian Investment Commission employ to manage stakeholders' engagement during the crisis?

Q3: How did the Ethiopian Investment Commission optimize crisis communication management strategies to maintain its reputation?

Q4: What crisis communication lessons did the commission take from the crisis to maintain preparedness and turn crises into opportunities?

To answer the questions, various related literature was critically reviewed to analyze the data in the context of what scholars and researchers demonstrate. In addition to the quantitative approach of the study through questionnaires, in-depth interviews with key informants and content analysis were used to generate primary and secondary data.

To address efforts to prevent and prepare for crises, the study sought to assess the existence of important pre-crisis plans in the EIC. Therefore, the availability of a crisis communication plan, the effort required to identify signals and opinions about the crisis spokesperson, and the company's ability to be called were evaluated and analyzed. In this sense, the overall result showed that crisis prevention and company preparation still require more work.



For instance, regarding the availability of a crisis communication manual, the study finds out that the EIC does not have a clear written manual on crisis communication management, therefore there were no guidelines to follow while handling the COVID19 pandemic.

The study also finds that through letter exchanges, telephone calls and other communication channels such as zoom calls and emails the EIC was able to manage Stakeholders' engagement during the crisis while email and online communication channels were the most successful among the rest.

The study also finds the EIC had no organized strategy for crisis communication, therefore the way it handled the crisis was in an unplanned manner plus the commission lacked experts in the communication team which according to key informant interviewees' responses resulted in the discontinuation of the weekly newsletter is used to send via email.

In terms of crisis response efforts, it can be argued that the EIC managed to respond to the crisis. The EIC did not have any organized crisis communication strategy to follow, but it has incorporated some of the important elements found in the implementation of crisis communication strategies to save its stakeholders and the Commission itself from the harm brought by the pandemic of COVID-19.

In this study, some core tasks of post-crisis activities could not be assessed because the COVID19 pandemic is still ongoing and the EIC does not have any strategy for crisis communication management, making it one more task. great to investigate the effectiveness of the post-crisis phase of the EIC in the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **5.2.Recommendations**

A crisis management manual should be viewed as a high-level document with underlying contingency plans. Provides general organizational guidelines and general procedures for crisis communication, managing information, activities, and operations during a growing emergency. It is the basis of the decision-making process. Therefore, the researcher recommends the EIC prepare a crisis management manual to better handle future crises and efficiently proceed in handling the ongoing COVID19 pandemic.

In a crisis affecting any organization, a **crisis management team** should be composed and located at the top level of the organization, provided tasks that should include; situation assessment, crisis level decision, activation of crisis organization, determination of necessary expertise, determination of necessary measures, coordination of necessary decisions, announcement and documentation of decisions, coordination with authorities (high level), and decision on internal and external communication policy

The researcher recommends the EIC have a qualified team of crisis communication management team.

The researcher also recommends that the EIC should have a designated **crisis management infrastructure** sooner to efficiently combat the COVID19 pandemic.

The intensity and outcome of a crisis can be strongly influenced by the way the press and media are handled. Therefore, the EIC should have enough experienced media professionals to handle public communications, including other communication works of the commission.

Furthermore, security and safety partnerships should be established with other authorities. Collaborations should include; cooperation agreements, exchange of information on threats, development of joint emergency plans (where infrastructure is included), etc...The researcher recommends the EIC have a planned strategy for such collaborations.

The researcher also has observed the discontinuation of a weekly/bi-weekly newsletter that used to be sent out to stakeholders which included vital information; the researcher, therefore, recommends, that the EIC work on the continuation of the newsletter.

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