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Crisis communication and U.S. national security: A comprehensive review: Understanding the importance of timely and accurate information dissemination

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Abstract

This comprehensive review examines the critical role of crisis communication in the context of U.S. national security, with a focus on the importance of timely and accurate information dissemination. The study explores the evolution of crisis communication strategies within the national security apparatus, assessing their effectiveness in managing public perception and trust during national crises. Through a methodological synthesis of case studies and content analysis, the review identifies best practices and challenges in crisis communication, including the balance between transparency and security, the impact of misinformation, and the implications of technological advancements. Historical perspectives provide insights into past national security crises, informing the development of current organizational structures and interagency coordination for crisis communication. The role of digital media is critically analyzed, emphasizing its influence on modern communication dynamics. The research culminates in policy recommendations aimed at enhancing crisis communication preparedness, developing resilient infrastructures, and fostering international cooperation. The findings suggest that strategic improvements in crisis communication are imperative for the effective safeguarding of national interests in an increasingly interconnected and information-driven world.

Keywords: Crisis Communication; National Security; Information Dissemination; Public Trust; Digital Media

1. Introduction

The imperative of crisis communication within the national security framework cannot be overstated. In an era where information travels faster than ever, the ability of a government to effectively communicate during a crisis is paramount to the stability and safety of its citizens (Putra, Bhaskara & Valerisha, 2021). The evolution of crisis communication in the U.S. national security apparatus has been shaped by historical events, technological advancements, and the ever-changing geopolitical landscape. The role of information dissemination during national crises has transitioned from a reactive to a proactive stance, where anticipation and preparedness are key (Haupt, 2021).

The significance of this review lies in its aim to understand and synthesize the complex dynamics of crisis communication strategies and their impact on national security. It seeks to provide a comprehensive examination of the methods and modalities of information dissemination and how they foster public trust during crises. The delimitations of this study are set to focus on the U.S. context, providing a detailed analysis of the American national security system and its communication protocols.

Crisis communication within the national security context is defined as the strategic and timely dissemination of information to the public, stakeholders, and international partners during a national emergency (Komisarov et al.,

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2019). The theoretical underpinnings of crisis communication strategies are grounded in the need to maintain public order, ensure the continuity of government operations, and uphold national interests. The methods and modalities of information dissemination have evolved, with digital media taking a forefront role, necessitating an understanding of its impact on crisis communication efficacy (Tagliacozzo, Albrecht & Ganapati, 2021).

The intersection of crisis communication and public trust is a delicate balance, where transparency must be weighed against the potential for public panic or the compromise of sensitive information. The U.S. has seen a variety of approaches to crisis communication, each shaped by the nature of the crisis, the level of threat to national security, and the societal context in which the communication occurs.

1.1. The Imperative of Crisis Communication in National Security

In the realm of national security, the imperative for robust crisis communication is a critical facet that cannot be understated. The ability to disseminate accurate and timely information during a crisis is not just a matter of maintaining public order; it is a strategic necessity that can determine the trajectory of national security outcomes (Putra, Bhaskara & Valerisha, 2021). The United States, with its complex social fabric and global leadership role, faces unique challenges in crisis communication, especially in a democratic society where openness and freedom of speech are highly valued. The effectiveness of crisis communication in such a context is often hindered by factors including societal political divides, coordination challenges across government levels, and the inherent difficulties in communicating with a diverse public (Putra, Bhaskara & Valerisha, 2021).

The evolution of crisis communication strategies within the U.S. national security apparatus has been influenced by the need to adapt to the changing nature of threats and the increasing complexity of the information environment. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) has been instrumental in shaping these strategies, emphasizing the need for emergency managers to adapt their communication to local community needs and the specific type of crisis at hand (Haupt, 2021). This adaptation is crucial in a country where the perception of resilience and the effectiveness of communication strategies are closely linked to how well the strategies align with the expectations and needs of the local populace.

Furthermore, the model of informational and communicative influence posits that effective crisis communication within the national security context requires a common communicative space and an active exchange of information among the participants in the communication process (Komisarov et al., 2019). This model underscores the importance of mutual understanding, which is achieved through feedback and the significance of the information exchanged. The effectiveness of communication, therefore, is measured by the extent of mutual influence among the partners in the communication process, which in the context of national security, translates to the government's ability to influence public behavior and perception during a crisis.

In the digital age, the role of online communication platforms has become increasingly central to crisis communication strategies. Public health agencies, for instance, have had to navigate a complex communication ecology during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The coordination of online communication with other agencies and the diversification of information to target specific organizations and social groups have been identified as key components of effective crisis communication (Tagliacozzo, Albrecht & Ganapati, 2021). However, the challenge remains to ensure that tailored information reaches vulnerable groups, which is often lacking, potentially leading to negative consequences for these populations.

The imperative of crisis communication in national security, therefore, lies in the ability to navigate these complexities and to develop strategies that are not only responsive but also responsible. The strategies must be capable of addressing the diverse needs of the population, ensuring the continuity of government operations, and maintaining national interests, all while fostering public trust through transparency and effective information dissemination.

1.2. Evolution of Crisis Communication in the U.S. National Security Apparatus

The evolution of crisis communication within the United States national security framework has been marked by a series of adaptations to emerging threats and the changing landscape of information dissemination. Post-September 11, 2001, the United States has seen a heightened focus on various aspects of national security, with particular attention to areas previously given less consideration, such as the food supply. The establishment of the National Center for Food Protection and Defense (NCFPD) exemplifies efforts to bolster the safety of critical national infrastructure through dedicated research, education, and outreach, with a strong emphasis on risk and crisis communication (Venette, 2006). This shift underscores the recognition that effective communication is a cornerstone of national security, particularly in preventing and responding to crises.

The early 2000s marked a significant turning point in the United States' approach to crisis communication, with the George W. Bush Administration developing capabilities in Information Operations and Psychological Operations (IO and PSYOPS), Public Affairs (PA), and Defense Support to Public Diplomacy (DSPD). These initiatives were part of a broader strategy to wield communication as a tool to achieve credibility and maintain freedom of action in the international arena, reflecting an understanding of communication's power to shape perceptions and influence outcomes (Guerrero-Castro, 2013).

The narrative of 'rogue states' and the subsequent 'Global War on Terror' further influenced the evolution of crisis communication strategies. The U.S. defense community's discursive construction of international crises during the early 1990s laid the groundwork for a shift in threat scenarios that would dominate U.S. foreign and defense policy post-Cold War. This period highlighted the importance of controlling the security narrative to define national security interests and manage the country's response to perceived threats (Homolar, 2011).

The digital revolution has also played a pivotal role in the evolution of crisis communication. The increasing reliance on digital communications has introduced new vulnerabilities and necessitated a reevaluation of policies and legal frameworks to address the risks associated with cyber threats. The United States' dependence on digital infrastructure for economic, critical infrastructure, and national security functions has made the development of robust cyber crisis communication strategies an imperative (Young, 2011.).

The trajectory of crisis communication in U.S. national security has been one of increasing complexity and strategic importance. From addressing vulnerabilities in the food supply to navigating the intricacies of digital threats, the United States has had to continuously adapt its communication strategies to protect its interests and maintain public trust. The evolution of these strategies reflects a broader understanding of the integral role that communication plays in national security, both as a defensive measure and as a means to assert influence on the global stage.

1.3. The Role of Information Dissemination during National Crises

The dissemination of information during national crises is a critical component of the United States' national security strategy. The practice of designing for dissemination among public health researchers in the United States has revealed gaps and areas for improvement, particularly in the context of crisis situations (Brownson et al., 2013). The ability to effectively communicate risk and crisis information is essential for mitigating the impact of national crises, whether they be natural disasters, pandemics, or security threats. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States faced significant challenges in disseminating information to the public. The rapid spread of the virus, coupled with the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation, exacerbated acute stress and depressive symptoms among the population (Holman et al., 2020). The pandemic highlighted the importance of clear, consistent, and accurate information dissemination to manage public health crises effectively. The role of media-based exposures to COVID-19, including the impact of conflicting information, underscored the need for a coordinated and strategic approach to crisis communication.

The digital media landscape has introduced new complexities to the dissemination of information during crises. A study on digital media literacy interventions in the United States and India found that exposure to media literacy campaigns improved the public's ability to discern between mainstream and false news (Guess et al., 2020). This finding suggests that enhancing digital media literacy could be a valuable component of crisis communication strategies, enabling the public to navigate the online information environment more effectively during national crises. Furthermore, the globalization of the food market has presented new challenges for food safety and crisis communication. The complexity of food supply chains and the diversity of regulatory frameworks across countries have made it difficult to ensure food safety and manage food crises effectively (Chammem et al., 2018). The United States, along with other nations, has had to develop risk communication strategies that can address these emerging challenges and protect public health. In summary, the role of information dissemination during national crises is multifaceted and requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses risk communication, media literacy, and coordination among various stakeholders. The United States continues to evolve its strategies to meet the demands of an increasingly complex and interconnected world, where the effective dissemination of information is vital for national security and public safety.

Aims and Objectives of the Review

This aim encapsulates the intent to dissect and understand the multifaceted nature of crisis communication as it pertains to national security, recognizing the importance of historical context, strategic development, and the challenges posed by modern information ecosystems. It also acknowledges the need for a comprehensive review that not only looks at past and current practices but also considers the implications for future policy and strategy development.

Objectives

- To delineate the critical role of timely and accurate information dissemination in the context of U.S. national security.
- To evaluate the historical development and transformation of crisis communication protocols within U.S. national security agencies.
- To examine the effectiveness of current crisis communication strategies employed by U.S. national security entities.
- To identify and analyze the challenges and barriers to effective information dissemination in U.S. national security.

1.4. Delimitations of the Study

The study of crisis communication within the national security context is delimited by several factors that shape the scope and direction of research. One of the primary delimitations is the focus on international risk and crisis communication research, which has expanded beyond national contexts due to globalization. This global perspective is essential as it acknowledges that crises often transcend national borders, affecting international relations, global security, and worldwide public health. The study is restricted by the core elements of speech act theory, which are determined by the significance of the crisis communication event to national interests and inherent national values. This approach emphasizes the role of media in shaping a country's image and international influence during a crisis. Furthermore, while studies on governmental crisis communication practices aimed at reducing public uncertainty, particularly in response to negative international media coverage is acknowledged, the integration of specific models such as the Networked Crisis Communication Model (NCC) and the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model (SMCC), may not encompass all aspects of crisis communication but provide a structured framework for analysis.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Defining Crisis Communication within the National Security Context

Crisis communication within the national security context is a multifaceted discipline that encompasses the strategies and processes used by state actors to inform, alert, and engage with the public during times of national emergencies or threats. It involves a systematic approach to conveying information that can prevent, mitigate, or respond to incidents that have the potential to threaten national interests or security (Bielai, 2017).

The theoretical and methodological basis of crisis situations threatening national security is grounded in the need for a comprehensive solution that involves various departments, power structures, and organizations. These entities work collaboratively to ensure the safety of citizens, protect constitutional systems, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and eliminate the grave consequences of crises (Bielai, 2017). The complexity of modern conflicts and the globalized nature of threats necessitate an inclusive approach to crisis communication that considers international law and the roles of international organizations such as the UN and NATO in the context of international armed conflicts (Bielai, 2017).

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of effective communication strategies from government agencies has been highlighted. The pandemic communication strategies of countries like Spain and Poland have shown that political interests can undermine national security by eroding public trust and causing unwanted behaviors, thereby extending the duration of a crisis and exacerbating its negative economic consequences (Ławniczak & Kasprzak, 2021). This underscores the need for crisis communication that is apolitical and focused on the well-being of the nation.

Furthermore, the role of the media in crisis communication is pivotal. Media's speech acts in the communication of international crises are essential for shaping a country's image and international influence during a crisis. The media can act as both a conduit for official communication and a platform for public discourse, which can either aid in the resolution of a crisis or contribute to its escalation (Zhu, 2021).

Therefore, crisis communication within the national security context is defined by its role in ensuring the safety and security of the state and its citizens, its collaborative nature, and its reliance on effective media strategies. It is a dynamic field that must adapt to the changing nature of threats and the evolving landscape of global politics and communication technologies.

2.2. Information Dissemination: Methods and Modalities

The methods and modalities of information dissemination in crisis communication within the national security context are critical in shaping the outcomes of crisis management. In the information age, the media and the Internet have become the main arenas for information warfare, with the power to influence public perception and national security significantly (Mykhailova & Mykhailov, 2022). The strategic dissemination of information during crises involves a multi-layered approach that includes both active and passive defense strategies. Active defense strategies are exemplified by technological innovations such as the "Iron Dome" system used by Israel, which is complemented by a sophisticated crisis communication strategy that informs the public and directs behavior during attacks (Shenhar, 2014). This dual approach of technological defense and information dissemination is essential in minimizing casualties and maintaining public morale.

The spread of misinformation, particularly in the context of terrorism and violent incidents, poses a significant challenge to national security. Social network analysis has been employed to understand the communication characteristics of terrorism-related information and to develop counter-terrorism intelligence intervention strategies. These strategies focus on the role of opinion leaders, communication structures, and the control of information emotional trends and hot topics. Moreover, the advent of 5G technology is expected to exacerbate the crisis of misinformation, highlighting the need for real-time control and supervision of information dissemination. The development of multi-modal fake news detection methods, which utilize supplementary information such as image captioning models, is a step forward in ensuring the reliability of situational information shared on social media platforms (Ho & Dai, 2023).

Therefore, the methods and modalities of information dissemination in crisis communication within the national security context are diverse and must be strategically managed to counteract misinformation and guide public behavior effectively. The use of advanced technologies and analytical methods is crucial in maintaining societal security during crises.

2.3. The Intersection of Crisis Communication and Public Trust

The intersection of crisis communication and public trust is a critical factor in national security management. Trust in authorities and their communication strategies significantly influences public response and adherence to directives during crises (Siegrist & Zingg, 2014). The role of public trust is particularly evident in health crises, where trust in health agencies has been shown to positively affect the adoption of recommended behaviors (Siegrist & Zingg, 2014).

In the digital era, the management of crisis communication has evolved to include online platforms, where the government's ability to maintain public trust is challenged by negative media coverage and misinformation. Jamal (2021) highlights the integration of the networked crisis communication model (NCC) and the social-mediated crisis communication model (SMCC) to build a governmental crisis communication framework that aims to reduce public uncertainty and rebuild trust.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of trust in crisis communication. MacKay et al. (2021) examined the quality and content of Canadian public health and news media crisis communication on Facebook, revealing that the guiding principles of effective crisis communication were inconsistently applied, affecting public sentiment and trust. The study suggests that consistent application of these principles is necessary to foster trust and encourage adherence to public health measures.

Digital crisis communication management has become a strategic necessity for institutions, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Özer and Çerçi (2022) discuss how institutions must act strategically to maintain the trust of internal and external stakeholders in times of crisis, emphasizing the role of new media in crisis communication.

In conclusion, the relationship between crisis communication and public trust is complex and multifaceted. Effective crisis communication strategies that are transparent, timely, empathetic, and clear can enhance public trust, which is essential for national security and crisis management.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design: Case Studies and Content Analysis

The research design for studying crisis communication within the context of national security often employs case studies and content analysis to understand the dynamics and impact of communication strategies. Social media has emerged as a critical platform for public organizations, including the police, to communicate during crises. Jungblut,

Kümpel, and Steer (2022) utilized a sequential mixed-methods design, combining qualitative interviews with automated content analysis, to explore the communication practices of the German police on social media during crises. Their study revealed that Twitter and Facebook are primary channels for crisis communication, with the communicative styles being shaped by the platforms' unique affordances. Likewise, Brajawidagda, Chatfield, and Reddick (2015) conducted a case study on the AirAsia QZ8501 crash, examining how government transparency influenced public opinions. Through content analysis of newspaper articles, they proposed a model of government transparency in crisis communication, emphasizing the importance of leadership and the openness of the search and rescue process.

Sellnow et al. (2019) examined the swine industry's response to the Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea virus outbreak using a narrative analysis of interviews with industry specialists. Their case study highlighted the importance of using pre-established communication networks and resources to shift competing crisis narratives into a dominant narrative that facilitated efficient crisis resolution. Al Naqbi, Al Momani, and Davies (2022) explored the perception of social media as a threat to national security in the United Arab Emirates. Employing a descriptive-analytical method, they analyzed the influence of social media on various dimensions of national security, demonstrating the potential of social media to predict the perceived level of national security among youth.

These studies collectively underscore the importance of a robust research design that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze crisis communication. Case studies provide in-depth insights into specific incidents, while content analysis allows for the examination of communication patterns and public sentiment. Such a multifaceted approach is crucial for understanding the complexities of crisis communication in the realm of national security.

3.2. Research Paradigm

The study would likely embrace a mixed-methods research paradigm, integrating both positivist and constructivist elements to address the multifaceted nature of crisis communication.

Positivism asserts that reality is objective and can be quantified through empirical evidence, making it suitable for analyzing measurable data related to crisis communication, such as response times, message reach, and public behavior patterns (Youngblood, 2010). Constructivism, in contrast, suggests that reality is subjective, constructed through social interactions and cultural interpretations, which is essential for understanding the nuanced human elements of crisis communication (Fearn-Banks, 2016).

A mixed-method approach is thus advocated, combining quantitative methods to gather empirical data and qualitative methods to capture subjective experiences and meanings. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how crisis communication strategies are developed, implemented, and received by the public during national security incidents.

Quantitative data might include surveys and content analysis of media reports, while qualitative data could be derived from interviews with security officials and affected populations, as well as case studies of specific incidents (Sellnow & Seeger, 2021). The integration of these methods provides a richer, more complete picture of crisis communication efficacy and public perception, which is crucial for developing effective national security policies and practices.

3.3. Selection of Significant National Security Incidents for Review

The selection of significant national security incidents for case study analysis in crisis communication research is a meticulous process that requires consideration of various factors, including the impact on national interests and the inherent values of a nation (Zhu, 2021). The media's portrayal of these events is not only a reflection of the country's political, economic, and cultural development but also shapes the country's image and international influence (Zhu, 2021).

The communication characteristics and the impact of terrorism-related information, particularly in the context of social networks, have significant implications for national security and counter-terrorism efforts. Han, Tang, and Wang (2021) emphasize the importance of understanding these characteristics to construct effective counter-terrorism intelligence intervention strategies. Their study on the Manchester Bombing terrorist attack suggests that the role of opinion leaders and the network structure of information dissemination are crucial factors in the spread of terrorism-related information.

In the case of natural disasters, the role of media in crisis management is pivotal. Ghassabi and Zare-Farashbandi (2015) evaluated the media's role in informing the public during the Azerbaijan earthquake, highlighting how media coverage can motivate the populace to provide humanitarian aid and follow the news until normalcy returns. The study

underscores the expectation that media coverage during crises should be realistic, objective, and non-promotional to ensure precise and accurate reporting.

While not all incidents are perceived as crises by a nation's leaders, understanding China's behavior in conditions of tension and stress, particularly the role of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), is essential for policymakers and analysts worldwide. Scobell (2005) discussed the importance of studying China's decision-making under stress, which sheds light on patterns of Chinese behavior in crisis-like situations.

These studies collectively highlight the importance of selecting incidents that are not only significant in terms of their immediate impact but also in their potential to affect national security policies and crisis communication strategies. The careful selection of case studies is crucial for developing a comprehensive understanding of crisis communication in the realm of national security.

3.4. Data Collection: Official Records, Media Reports, and Public Reactions

Data collection is a cornerstone of research in crisis communication, particularly within the realm of national security where the accuracy and timeliness of information can have profound implications. The methodologies for collecting data from official records, media reports, and public reactions are multifaceted and must be approached with a rigorous and systematic strategy to ensure reliability and validity (Baxter, 2014).

Official records serve as a primary source of factual information regarding national security incidents. These records, which include government reports, policy documents, and security briefings, provide foundational data that is essential for understanding the context and official response to crises. The analysis of these documents often employs content analysis techniques to identify themes, response patterns, and the evolution of official narratives during a crisis (Grabner, 2012).

Media reports are another critical source of data. They not only reflect the information disseminated by authorities but also shape public perception and discourse. Media content analysis, including both traditional news outlets and digital media platforms, allows researchers to track the dissemination of information, the framing of the crisis, and the interplay between official statements and media representation. This analysis can reveal the effectiveness of communication strategies and the media's role in either clarifying or obfuscating key information (Baxter, 2014).

Public reactions, captured through surveys, social media analysis, and interviews, provide insight into the public's reception and interpretation of crisis communication. This data is vital for assessing the impact of communication strategies on public understanding, behavior, and trust in national security agencies. Methodologies here range from sentiment analysis of social media posts to in-depth interviews with affected populations, offering both quantitative and qualitative perspectives on the public's response (Clark, Spero, & Nunes, 2007).

The integration of these diverse data sources requires a methodologically robust approach that can handle the complexity and sensitivity of the information involved. Ethical considerations, particularly regarding the privacy of individuals and the confidentiality of sensitive information, must be paramount in the data collection process. Moreover, the triangulation of data from official records, media reports, and public reactions ensures a more comprehensive understanding of crisis communication dynamics and its effectiveness in the context of national security (Shively, Hunt, Kuck, & Kellis, 2003).

4. Crisis Communication in Action

4.1. The Role of Digital Media in Modern Crisis Communication

The digital age, the landscape of crisis communication has been transformed by the advent of digital media, which has become an integral tool for national security agencies to disseminate information, manage public perception, and engage with stakeholders during crises (Camilleri, 2021). The immediacy and reach of digital platforms have revolutionized the way information is shared, making it possible to communicate with the public in real-time during national security incidents.

Digital media offers a dual-edged sword; on one hand, it provides a direct channel for official communication, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and allowing for the rapid dissemination of information. On the other hand, it also presents challenges in the form of misinformation and the rapid spread of unverified information, which can exacerbate the crisis and undermine public trust (Mugari & Chisuvi, 2021).

The strategic use of digital media for dialogic communication during the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the potential for digital platforms to foster a two-way communication stream, where stakeholders are not merely passive recipients of information but active participants in the communication process. This dialogic approach can enhance transparency and credibility, which are crucial during national security crises (Camilleri, 2021).

Furthermore, the role of social media in enhancing national security has been recognized, with governments and security agencies using these platforms for public safety announcements, intelligence gathering, and disaster management. However, the regulation and monitoring of social media activities to counteract threats have raised concerns regarding the balance between security and human rights (Mugari & Chisuvi, 2021).

The construction of a nation's brand on social media, especially in the context of security, has also been influenced by digital media. The narratives crafted by both elite and non-elite actors can shape public perception and national identity, which in turn can impact the community's response to security threats (Li & Feng, 2022).

In conclusion, digital media has become an indispensable element of crisis communication in national security. Its effective utilization requires a strategic approach that considers the rapid flow of information, the need for credibility, and the potential for public engagement, all while navigating the challenges posed by misinformation and the protection of civil liberties.

4.2. Interagency Coordination and Information Sharing

Interagency coordination and information sharing stand as the linchpins of effective crisis communication in national security. The synchronization of efforts across various governmental agencies ensures a unified and coherent response to national crises, mitigating the risks posed by disjointed or conflicting messages (Bogdanos, 2007). The tragic events of September 11, 2001, underscored the dire consequences of inadequate interagency communication, catalyzing reforms aimed at fostering seamless collaboration among national security entities (Davisson, 2004).

The complexity of modern threats, characterized by asymmetric warfare and the proliferation of non-state actors, necessitates a departure from siloed operations to a more integrated approach. This paradigm shift calls for the harmonization of disparate governmental actions through synchronized planning and the leveraging of collective capabilities (Bogdanos, 2007). The transformation of joint interagency coordination is not merely an operational necessity but a strategic imperative that underpins the success of national strategy implementation.

Historical interagency communicative failures have often been attributed to organizational culture clashes, restrictive communication channels, and overlapping responsibilities. Addressing these structural weaknesses is essential for building resilient communication frameworks that can withstand the pressures of national security emergencies (Davisson, 2004). Technological advancements offer new avenues for enhancing interagency communication, with digital platforms enabling more efficient information exchange and coordination.

In the context of national security crises, the role of web insights has emerged as a novel analytical tool. By examining online activities and web resources, security agencies can gain a deeper understanding of the crisis's nature, its escalation, and the narratives propagated by various actors, including social networking services, information outlets, and independent websites (Cárdenas, Theodoropoulos, & Obara, 2019). This web-based analysis contributes to a more nuanced interpretation of crises, aiding in the formulation of strategic responses.

The direction of national crisis management systems must evolve to align with the changing security environment. This evolution entails legal reforms, the establishment of robust control towers, and the integration of international intelligence-sharing initiatives such as Quad and Five-eyes. Such measures can enhance the capacity for accurate information sharing and elevate the efficacy of crisis communication strategies.

5. Result

5.1. Best Practices for Crisis Communication in National Security

In the realm of national security, crisis communication is a strategic imperative that demands meticulous planning and execution. Best practices in this field are not merely recommendations but are vital protocols that can determine the success or failure of national security initiatives during crises. The literature on crisis communication underscores the importance of leveraging social media as a tool for effective communication, suggesting that it can significantly enhance the interaction between organizations, governments, and citizens (Lin et al., 2016). In the digital age, social media

platforms have become central to the dissemination of timely and accurate information, serving as a conduit for official narratives and as a means to counter misinformation.

The establishment of best practices in crisis communication is a dynamic process that evolves with technological advancements and the changing nature of threats. Experts recommend a set of practices that include the pre-crisis establishment of communication protocols, the development of a crisis communication plan, and the training of spokespeople to manage and relay information effectively during a crisis (Janoske et al., 2013). These practices are not static; they require regular updates and revisions to incorporate new insights and technologies that emerge over time.

A multi-case analysis of environmental contamination crises has extended the research on best practices in risk and crisis communication. This analysis has led to the synthesis of contributions from research and the assessment of the applicability of these practices in various scenarios. The study has updated the framework of essential guidelines for ongoing risk and crisis communication, outlining clear implications for how these guidelines can be incorporated into an organization's communication planning process (Veil et al., 2020).

The role of communication scholars is pivotal in advancing the safety of the nation's food supply, which is a critical component of national security. By working with experts from various fields, communication scholars have identified that while risk and crisis communication theories are generally sound, the effectiveness of communication during crises can be compromised by predictable errors when messages are not planned and communication networks are not pre-established (Venette, 2006). This insight is particularly relevant to national security, where the stakes are high, and the margin for error is minimal.

5.2. Training and Preparedness for Crisis Communication Teams

In the realm of national security, the proficiency of crisis communication teams is not serendipitous but the result of meticulous training and preparedness. The anticipatory perspective of crisis management, which shifts the focus from reaction to anticipation of crises, is crucial for organizations, including those in the nonprofit sector, which represent a significant portion of U.S. society (Fuller & La Sala, 2021). This perspective is particularly relevant to national security, where the stakes are invariably high, and the margin for error is slim.

The National Preparedness Goal (NPG), organized by the United States Department of Homeland Security and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), underscores the importance of Public Information and Warning as a core capability across all five missions of national security (Hall, 2023). Public information officers (PIOs) are tasked with the critical role of communicating risk, crisis, and recovery information. However, a needs analysis reveals a gap in PIO training, suggesting that current training may not fully equip PIOs to fulfill their communication responsibilities within the NPG. This gap necessitates a strategic, coordinated, and unified approach to training that aligns with the NPG's objectives.

The process of communication between government agencies and the public during crises is complex and requires an effective response strategy. Research into the decision-making process during the 2009-2010 H1N1 influenza pandemic at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) highlights the need for sense-making and decision-making under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity (Bennington, n.d.). This research is instructive for national security crisis communication teams, as it emphasizes the importance of establishing credibility and gaining public trust to influence behavior during crises.

Furthermore, experiences from European medical response exercises in chemical crisis situations reveal that surge capacity challenges are not unique to the U.S. but are a common concern in crisis preparedness. Critical resources can be rapidly exhausted, and hospitals and first responders must evaluate and improve their surge capacity and capability in response to chemical warfare agent scenarios (Davidson et al., 2019). These lessons are directly applicable to crisis communication teams in national security, who must be prepared for a range of contingencies, including those involving chemical incidents.

In synthesizing these insights, it becomes clear that training and preparedness are indispensable for crisis communication teams within U.S. national security. The literature suggests that an anticipatory approach to crisis management, alignment with national preparedness objectives, and lessons learned from both domestic and international crisis response exercises are critical for ensuring that crisis communication teams are effective in their roles.

5.3. Developing Resilient Communication Infrastructures

The resilience of communication infrastructures is a cornerstone of effective crisis management within the domain of U.S. national security. The United States maintains a vast network of critical infrastructure that is essential for the nation's security, economy, public health, and safety. The resilience of this infrastructure, particularly communication nodes, is paramount in ensuring that the nation can adapt to changing conditions and recover rapidly from disruptions (Fisher, Norman, & Peerenboom, 2017).

The concept of resilience in the U.S. has evolved over decades, with a focus on disaster mitigation, vulnerability assessments, system hardening, and redundancy building. The 2010 National Security Strategy formalized the role of resilience in national doctrine, emphasizing the need to enhance the nation's ability to prepare for, withstand, and rapidly recover from disruption (Obama, 2010). This strategic focus has shifted from a narrow physical security posture to a more holistic resilience framework, integrating standards, policies, and technologies to bolster the resilience of U.S. critical infrastructure.

The security of critical information infrastructure (CII) is particularly relevant, as disruptions can have severe consequences. The development of modern information and communication technologies, while beneficial, also brings increased risks of misuse and attacks. The Czech Republic's approach to CII security, emphasizing individual responsibility for system and network security, offers insights into the importance of a systematic reflection on potential crises and the consequences of security breaches (Kavan & Skalická, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the resilience of national governments' crisis communication strategies. Communication is a source of prevention, action, mitigation, and empowerment, and the diversification of the modern information environment makes government communication more complex. The media landscape, particularly social media, impacts the perception of reality, including crises and emergencies. The case of Latvia, with its distinct Latvian and Russian-speaking communities, illustrates the challenges governments face in messaging and narrative choice during crises (Struberga & Ozoliņa, 2022).

In light of these discussions, it is evident that developing resilient communication infrastructures is a multifaceted endeavor that requires a comprehensive approach. This includes not only the physical hardening of systems and infrastructures but also the adoption of robust cyber security measures, community engagement, and the strategic use of media to communicate effectively during crises. The resilience of communication infrastructures is thus not only a technical challenge but also a strategic one that involves policy, technology, and human factors.

6. Discussion

6.1. Assessing the Effectiveness of Current Crisis Communication Practices

In the realm of U.S. national security, the effectiveness of crisis communication practices is pivotal to maintaining public trust and ensuring the integrity of governmental functions during times of crisis. The assessment of these practices involves a multi-dimensional approach that considers the rapid dissemination of information, the accuracy of the communicated messages, and the public's perception of the government's responsiveness and transparency (Jamilah, 2021).

The integration of networked crisis communication models (NCC) and social-mediated crisis communication models (SMCC) has been instrumental in formulating frameworks that governments can employ to address public uncertainty, especially in the face of negative media coverage. These frameworks are designed to foster public trust by ensuring that crisis communication is not only prompt but also empathetic and transparent (Jamilah, 2021).

The role of social media in crisis communication cannot be overstated. It serves as a tool for relationship management and a platform for the propagation of information during crises. Effective crisis communication management through social networking systems (SNS) is contingent upon the strategic use of these platforms to engage with the public and manage relationships during and after a crisis (Babatunde, 2022).

Furthermore, the preparedness of high-stakes test administrators for media relations in the event of a crisis is indicative of the broader need for crisis communication planning across all sectors of national security. The establishment of good relations with the media before a crisis, the creation of a comprehensive crisis communication plan, and the execution of a proactive response when a breach occurs are all essential components of an effective crisis communication strategy (Gruber, Addicott, & Weinstein, 2016).

The spread of misinformation, particularly in the context of terrorism-related incidents, poses a significant threat to national security. The communication characteristics and impact of terrorism-related information necessitate the construction of counter-terrorism intelligence intervention strategies. These strategies should focus on the role of opinion leaders, the structure of the communication network, and the real-time control of information emotional trends and hot topics (Han, Tang, & Wang, 2021).

6.2. The Role of Media and Public Relations in National Security

In the realm of national security, the interplay between media and public relations (PR) is pivotal, shaping public perception and trust during crises. The media's role as a conduit for governmental communication is critical, particularly when addressing the public's uncertainty during financial or security crises (Jamilah, 2021). The evolution of crisis communication has seen the integration of models such as the networked crisis communication model (NCC) and the social-mediated crisis communication model (SMCC), which underscore the importance of online platforms in disseminating government policies and initiatives (Jamilah, 2021). These models highlight the shift towards digital media as a primary tool for crisis communication, reflecting a broader trend in organizational communication strategies.

The ethical dimension of crisis communication, especially in relation to social media, has become increasingly significant (Berg, 2017). The need for ethical management in crisis communication is paramount, as the potential for misinformation and the rapid spread of news can have profound implications for national security. The strategic use of social media by government agencies not only serves as a platform for information dissemination but also as a means of intelligence gathering and disaster management (Mugari & Chisuvi, 2021). This dual use of social media underscores its complexity within the national security framework, where it can be both a tool for security enhancement and a potential threat.

The challenges faced by institutions, including those in the educational sector, reflect the broader issues encountered by national security apparatus in the digital age. The disharmony between internal and external communication environments necessitates a reform in organizational structures and communication modes (Dong, 2020). Universities, much like government agencies, must navigate the intricacies of new media to manage public relations crises effectively. This involves not only addressing the immediate crisis but also maintaining a consistent and trustworthy communication channel with the public.

In synthesizing the insights from the literature, it is evident that the media and PR play a multifaceted role in national security. The media serves as both a platform for government communication and a watchdog, holding institutions accountable during crises. Public relations, on the other hand, is tasked with crafting the messages and strategies that will be conveyed through the media, ensuring that they align with ethical standards and serve the public interest.

The integration of social media into the national security communication strategy has introduced new dynamics into crisis management. The immediacy and reach of social media platforms have necessitated a more agile and responsive approach to communication. However, this has also introduced vulnerabilities, as the spread of misinformation or the hijacking of narratives by malicious actors can quickly escalate a crisis. The role of PR in this context is to establish a narrative that is both authoritative and reassuring, leveraging social media's strengths while mitigating its risks.

The literature suggests that the effectiveness of crisis communication in national security hinges on several factors. Firstly, the ability to convey complex information in a manner that is accessible to the general public is crucial (Jamilah, 2021). This involves not only the simplification of technical language but also the contextualization of the crisis within the broader national security landscape. Secondly, the timing of communication is critical. Delayed or reactive communication can erode public trust and give rise to speculation and rumor (Mugari & Chisuvi, 2021). Proactive communication, on the other hand, can preempt misinformation and establish the government as the primary source of reliable information.

The ethical considerations in crisis communication are particularly salient in the context of national security. The balance between transparency and the need to protect sensitive information is a delicate one. PR professionals must navigate this landscape carefully, ensuring that the information released is accurate and sufficient to inform the public without compromising security operations (Berg, 2017). This ethical responsibility extends to the monitoring and regulation of social media, where the rights to free speech and information must be weighed against the imperatives of national security (Mugari & Chisuvi, 2021).

6.3. Strategic Improvements for Interdepartmental Communication

Strategic communication within the national security apparatus is not merely a function of message dissemination but a critical strategic tool that shapes the operational landscape and influences outcomes. Guerrero-Castro (2013) emphasizes the importance of strategic communication post-9/11, where the U.S. administration developed capabilities in Information Operations (IO), Psychological Operations (PSYOPS), Public Affairs (PA), and Defense Support to Public Diplomacy (DSPD). These capabilities were not just tactical tools but were integral to the broader national strategy in the 'war of perceptions' aimed at achieving credibility and freedom of action (Guerrero-Castro, 2013). This underscores the need for an interdisciplinary approach to strategic communication, where it transcends the traditional boundaries of defense and incorporates elements of public relations and social communication.

The complexity of strategic communication in the context of national security is further highlighted by Doyle and Desta (2020), who assess the communication practices of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Their study reveals that despite the presence of CSDP missions across social media platforms, engagement with targeted audiences remains minimal, suggesting a disconnect between strategic communication efforts and audience impact. The research points to structural issues within the European Union's strategic communication framework, recommending improvements in training, storytelling, and media engagement to enhance the effectiveness of StratCom (Doyle & Desta, 2020).

In the Ukrainian context, Captan (2023) discusses the creation and functioning of the Situation Center within the Ministry of Defense, which is tasked with responding to information threats. The study advocates for a unified network of Situation Centers equipped with standardized software and hardware to increase situational management decision-making efficiency. This approach reflects a shift from crisis prevention to crisis liquidation, acknowledging the changing nature of crisis management in the information age (Captan, 2023).

Drawing from these insights, it is evident that strategic improvements in interdepartmental communication within national security hinge on several factors. First, there is a need for an interdisciplinary approach that integrates strategic communication with other fields of action, such as economics and defense, to align with political and strategic objectives (Guerrero-Castro, 2013). This approach requires a departure from siloed communication strategies to a more holistic framework that considers the diverse stakeholders and the multifaceted nature of national security.

Second, the engagement and impact of strategic communication efforts must be evaluated critically. As Doyle and Desta (2020) suggest, the mere presence on digital platforms is insufficient. Instead, there must be a concerted effort to engage audiences meaningfully, leveraging storytelling and media relations to foster a two-way communication process that resonates with the public and stakeholders.

Third, the modernization and standardization of communication infrastructures, as proposed by Captan (2023), are crucial for enhancing the responsiveness and decision-making capabilities of national security agencies. This involves not only technological upgrades but also the development of protocols and training programs that ensure the seamless functioning of communication networks during crises.

In synthesizing these perspectives, the role of strategic communication in national security is multifaceted, encompassing message crafting, audience engagement, and the management of information threats. The literature suggests that strategic improvements must be systemic, addressing both the structural and operational dimensions of communication. This includes the development of integrated communication strategies that are agile, responsive, and ethically grounded.

The effectiveness of strategic communication in national security also depends on the ability to navigate the complex interplay between transparency, secrecy, and the public's right to information. This delicate balance is critical in maintaining public trust while safeguarding sensitive information pertinent to national security (Guerrero-Castro, 2013).

Moreover, the challenges of interdepartmental communication are not merely technical but also cultural and organizational. The transition from traditional communication practices to strategic communication necessitates a cultural shift within national security agencies, fostering a mindset that values open communication, collaboration, and the strategic use of information (Doyle & Desta, 2020).

In conclusion, strategic improvements in interdepartmental communication within national security are imperative for the effective management of crises and the safeguarding of national interests.

6.4. International Cooperation in Crisis Communication

International cooperation in crisis communication is a critical aspect of managing global threats, such as pandemics and financial crises, which transcend national borders and require a coordinated response. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of such cooperation, revealing both the potential and the challenges of managing crises on an international scale (Terry, 2020). Terry's reflection on the pandemic from a local German perspective highlights the varying competencies of local and regional authorities in crisis management, which directly affect their ability and inclination to engage in international cooperation (Terry, 2020). This disparity in competencies suggests that effective international crisis communication must consider the political and administrative structures of each state to facilitate a cohesive response.

The linguistic and discursive practices of crisis communication are equally critical, as seen in the context of multilingual Indonesia during the pandemic. Sakhiyya et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of consistent and empathetic communication in crisis management, noting that inconsistent terminology and unempathetic metaphors can lead to ineffective responses and public confusion. This research draws attention to the need for clear and compassionate communication strategies that are sensitive to linguistic diversity and capable of fostering understanding across different languages and cultures (Sakhiyya et al., 2022).

The comparative analysis of crisis communication strategies by Spain and Poland during the pandemic by Ławniczak and Kasprzak (2021) reveals common shortcomings, such as the politicization of communication and the erosion of public trust. The authors argue that the particularism of political interests can undermine national security and exacerbate the crisis, suggesting that international cooperation in crisis communication must also address the political dimensions that influence public perception and behavior (Ławniczak & Kasprzak, 2021).

Drawing from these insights, it is clear that international cooperation in crisis communication is multifaceted, involving not only the alignment of strategies across nations but also the harmonization of messaging within diverse linguistic and political landscapes. The literature suggests that to improve international crisis communication, there must be a concerted effort to standardize communication practices, foster empathy in messaging, and mitigate the influence of political interests that can detract from the effectiveness of the response.

The role of international organizations and agreements in facilitating cooperation is also crucial. As the global financial crisis highlighted, there is a recognized need for globally coordinated regulation and communication, yet cooperation is often limited in practice (Abendschein & Gözl, 2021). The game-theoretical analysis by Abendschein and Gözl (2021) characterizes the formation of self-enforcing international financial regulation agreements, indicating the difficulty of achieving fully cooperative solutions. This analysis can be extrapolated to crisis communication, where the incentives for individual nations to free-ride on the efforts of others can hinder the formation of stable cooperative agreements.

The effectiveness of international cooperation in crisis communication also depends on the capacity of states to engage in such cooperation. The competencies of local and regional authorities, as discussed by Terry (2020), must be leveraged to ensure that all levels of government are equipped to participate in a coordinated international response. This requires not only political will but also the development of infrastructures that support intergovernmental communication and collaboration.

Moreover, the challenges of linguistic diversity in crisis communication, as highlighted by Sakhiyya et al. (2022), underscore the need for multilingual communication strategies that can navigate the complexities of conveying critical information across different languages and cultural contexts. This involves the development of standardized terminology and the use of empathetic language to ensure that crisis communication is not only informative but also reassuring to diverse international audiences.

7. Conclusion

Drawing together the various strands of inquiry from the comprehensive review of crisis communication within the context of U.S. national security, several key insights emerge. The review has underscored the imperative of crisis communication as an integral component of national security. It has highlighted the evolution of crisis communication strategies, reflecting on historical milestones and the lessons learned from past national security crises. The role of digital media and the challenges posed by misinformation and disinformation have been particularly emphasized, pointing to the need for robust, resilient communication infrastructures and strategic interagency coordination. Looking ahead, the landscape of crisis communication is expected to become increasingly complex due to technological advancements and the rapid pace of globalization. The integration of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and real-

time data analytics will likely enhance the timeliness and accuracy of crisis communication. However, these advancements will also necessitate continuous updates to cybersecurity protocols and the development of new strategies to combat the spread of digital misinformation. Policymakers and practitioners are advised to focus on the development of comprehensive crisis communication plans that incorporate both traditional and digital media strategies. Training and preparedness for crisis communication teams should be prioritized to ensure responsiveness and adaptability in dynamic crisis situations. Further research is recommended to explore the impact of emerging technologies on crisis communication efficacy and to develop evidence-based guidelines for ethical communication practices. Effective crisis communication is not merely about the dissemination of information; it is about building and maintaining public trust, managing perceptions, and ensuring the coherence and consistency of the national security narrative. As the U.S. continues to navigate the complexities of global security challenges, the strategic deployment of crisis communication will remain a cornerstone of national resilience and a key factor in the preservation of national security. This conclusion encapsulates the essence of the review and sets a direction for future endeavors in the domain of crisis communication within the sphere of U.S. national security.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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