A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL-MEDIA CRISIS COMMUNICATION TO BUILD STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS IN GHANA

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Thesis title: A conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships in Ghana.

I declare that the above-named thesis is my own work and that all the sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

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ABSTRACT

People are spending more time on social media, which means that public-relations professionals need to pay more attention to managing the reputation of their organisations. However, many Ghanaian organisations are not leveraging the relationship-building opportunities afforded by social media when managing crisis communication. It was put forward in this thesis that proactive strategies such as dialogic communication, relationship renewal and relationship enhancement can help public-relations practitioners in Ghana to achieve organisation–stakeholder objectives when managing crisis communication on social media. The main goal of this study was therefore to propose elements for a conceptual framework comprising crisis preparedness, dialogic communication, discourse of renewal and organisation–stakeholder communication that would be strategic in strengthening organisation–stakeholder relationships. In pursuit of this goal, the study answered four research questions, using an online survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews to empirically verify the proposed elements.

The study gathered vital insights, first from the literature review; and second from public-relations practitioners in Ghana who are responsible for social media communication in their organisations. On completion of empirical verification, the final elements of the proposed conceptual framework were founded on the fundamentals of social-media crisis communication preparedness, dialogic communication strategies for social-media interaction with stakeholders during a crisis; renewal strategies for mending relationships with stakeholders following a crisis; and on strengthening organisation-stakeholder relationships by means of social-media crisis communication. The proposed conceptual framework not only provides new insight into the field of communication, but also contributes to this field, specifically to public-relations as far as crisis management on social media is concerned.

Key terms: crisis communication; crisis management; dialogic communication, discourse of renewal, Ghanaian public-relations practitioners; organisation-stakeholder relationship; social media; social-media crisis communicatio

OPSOMMING

Mense bestee al hoe meer tyd op sosiale media, wat beteken dat professionele mense in openbare betrekkinge meer aandag aan die bestuur van hulle organisasies se reputasies moet gee. Baie Ghanese organisasies benut egter nie die geleenthede wat sosiale media bied om verhoudings te bou wanneer krisiskommunikasie bestuur moet word nie. In hierdie proefskrif word aangevoer dat proaktiewe strategieë soos dialogiese kommunikasie, verhoudingsvernuwing en verhoudingsverbetering openbarebetrekkingepraktisyns in Ghana kan help om organisasie-belanghebberdoelwitte te bereik wanneer krisiskommunikasie op sosiale media bestuur word. Die belangrikste doelwit van hierdie studie was derhalwe om elemente vir 'n konseptuele raamwerk voor te stel, wat uit krisisgereedheid, dialogiese kommunikasie, gesprekvoering oor vernuwing en organisasie-belanghebberkommunikasie bestaan, en wat strategies sal wees om organisasie-belanghebberverhoudings te versterk. Ten einde hierdie doelwit na te streef, beantwoord die studie vier navorsingsvrae met behulp van 'n aanlyn ondersoek en semigestruktureerde, omvattende onderhoude om die voorgestelde elemente empiries te staaf.

Die studie het noodsaaklike insigte bekom, aanvanklik met behulp van die literatuuroorsig; en daarna by openbarebetrekkingepraktisyns in Ghana, wat vir sosialemediakommunikasie in hulle organisasies verantwoordelik is. Na voltooiing van die empiriese verifiëring is die finale elemente van die voorgestelde konseptuele raamwerk op die beginsels van sosialemedia-krisiskommunikasiegereedheid, dialogiesekommunikasiestrategieë vir sosialemedia-interaksie met belanghebbers tydens 'n krisis; vernuwingstrategieë om verhoudings met belanghebbers na 'n krisis te herstel; en die verstewiging van organisasie-belanghebberverhoudings deur middel van sosialemediakrisiskommunikasie, gefundeer. Die voorgestelde konseptuele raamwerk bied nie net insig in die vakgebied kommunikasie nie, maar dra ook tot hierdie vakgebied by, in die besonder tot openbare betrekkinge wat betref krisisbestuur op sosiale media.

Sleutelterme: krisiskommunikasie; krisisbestuur; dialogiese kommunikasie; gesprekvoering oor vernuwing; Ghanese openbarebetrekkingepraktisyns; organisasie-belanghebberverhouding; sosiale media; sosialemedia-krisiskommunikasie

KAKARETŠO

Batho ba šomiša nako ye ntši go dikgokagano tša leago, go rago gore ditsebi tša dikamano tša setšhaba di swanetše go hlokomela kudu go laola seriti sa mekgatlo ya tšona. Le ge go le bjalo, mekgatlo e mentši ya Ghana ga e diriše dibaka tša go aga kamano tšeo di neelwago ke dikgokagano tša leago ge e laola kgokagano ya mathata. Go boletšwe mo thesising ye gore maano a tlhohleletšo a bjalo ka kgokagano ya poledišano, mpshafatšo ya kamano le matlafatšo a kamano a ka thuša bašomi ba dikamano tša setšhaba ka Ghana go fihlelela maikemišetšo a mokgatlo le baamegi ge ba laola kgokagano ya mathata go dikgokagano tša leago. Ka gona nepišo ye kgolo ya nyakišišo ye e be e le go šišinya dielemente tša tlhako ya kgopolo yeo e akaretšago go itokišetša mathata, kgokagano ya poledišano, polelo ya mpshafatšo le kgokagano ya mokgatlo le baamegi yeo e tla bago ya maano go matlafatša dikamano tša mokgatlo le baamegi. Ka go fihlelela nepo ye, nyakišišo e arabile dipotšišo tše nne tša dinyakišišo, e šomiša tekolonyakišišo ka inthanete le dipoledišano tše di tseneletšego tša go se latele lenaneo la dipotšišo go netefatša ka kgonthe dielemente tše di šišintšwego.

Dinyakišišo di kgobokeditše ditemogo tše bohlokwa, ya pele go tšwa go tshekatsheko ya dingwalo; le ya bobedi go tšwa go bašomi ba dikamano tša setšhaba ka Ghana bao ba nago le maikarabelo a kgokagano ya ditaba tša leago mekgatlong ya bona. Ge go phethwa netefatšo ya kgonthe, dikarolo tša mafelelo tša tlhako ya kgopolo ye e šišintšwego di theilwe godimo ga metheo ya go itokišetša kgokagano ya mathata a ditaba tša leago, maano a kgokagano ya poledišano ya tirišano ya ditaba tša leago le bakgathatema nakong ya mathata; maano a mpshafatšo a go lokiša dikamano le bakgathatema ka morago ga mathata; le ka go matlafatša dikamano tša mokgatlo le baamegi ka kgokagano ya mathata a ditaba tša leago. Tlhako ya dikgopolo ye e šišintšwego ga e fe fela temogo ye mpsha ka ga lefapha la kgokagano, eupša gape e tsenya letsogo lefapheng le, kudukudu go dikamano tša setšhaba mabapi le taolo ya mathata go dikgokagano tša leago.

Mareo a bohlokwa: kgokagano ya mathata; taolo ya mathata; kgokagano ya poledišano, therišano ya mpshafatšo, bašomi ba dikamano tša setšhaba ka Ghana; kamano ya mokgatlo le bakgathatema; dikgokagano tša leago; kgokagano ya mathata a dikgokagano tša leago

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LIST OF ABRREVIATIONS

PRP	Public-relations practitioners
IPR	Institute of Public Relations
USA	United States of America
APRA	African Public Relations Association
NIPR	Nigerian Institute of Public Relations
ISD	Information Services Department
GIJ	Ghana Institute of Journalism
PRAG	Public Relations Association of Ghana
CIPR	Chartered Institute of Public Relations
eWOM	word of mouth on social media
OSR	organisation stakeholder relationship
WWW	World Wide Web
ANOVA	2 One way Analysis of variance
SAS	Statistical Analysis System

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The growth of social media has redefined the nature of communications within and outside the corporate environment and created new opportunities and challenges for the practice of public relations. Audiences of both traditional and new media are now fragmented and expect organisations to be responsive to the information needs of audiences or stakeholders and interact with them, especially on crisis-related issues (Moller, Wang & Nguyen 2018; Kleineidam 2018:274; Schwarz 2019:280). However, in Ghana, even though there is a high penetration of social media (Tabong & Segtub 2021:2), some Ghanaian social media audiences are dissatisfied that some Ghanaian organisations are not using social media as a platform for providing information on crisis-related matters such as misconceptions about Covid-19 (Tabong & Segtub 2021:11).

Stakeholders are spending more time on social media. Public-relations practitioners therefore must be competent in the use of social media and encourage their organisations to use social media for relationship and reputation management purposes especially during a crisis (Ott & Theunissen 2015:97; Fearn-Banks 2017:1). Stakeholder discontent can harm an organisation's reputation, particularly in the era of social media, as the discontent can escalate a crisis (DiStaso, Vafeiadis & Amaral 2015:223). Managing a crisis will involve how communications are handled and managed by public-relations practitioners. Effective public relations require the need to establish, maintain and sustain enduring relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders, particularly during challenging times, such as a crisis (DiStaso et al. 2015:223; Nurintan & Kartosapoetro 2020:255).

The researcher's reason for undertaking this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning social-media crisis communication in the field of public relations in an African context. The insights gathered from this study will assist Ghanaian organisations to build organisation-stakeholder relationships through a verified conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication.

The purpose of this first chapter is to provide the background to and explain the justification for the study. As a result, the chapter outlines the following: definition of concepts used in the study, providing an explanation of the context of the study, conceptualising social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships, explaining the research, theoretical and empirical approaches adopted, ethical considerations and operationalising the study.

It is important to highlight how the study is contextualised within the field of communication. In the section below, the context of the study is discussed.

1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The subject areas of this study are crisis communication and social media, with a focus on how social-media crisis communication can be applied by public-relations practitioners in Ghana to build relationships with stakeholders before, during and after a crisis.

Public-relations practitioners in Ghana were used for the study because there is a research gap in the application of proactive strategies in the management of crisis communication on social media in the Ghanaian context (Gladstone 2015; Bosumtwi 2015; Abachingsa 2021; Adjeidu 2021; Appah 2021). The use of proactive strategies (dialogic communication strategies, relationship-mending strategies and relationship-enhancing strategies) is not promoted and encouraged. This is because a good number of practitioners do not put in place a plan to manage and handle crises (Abachingsa 2021:5; Adjeidu 2021:17; Appah 2021:4) – rather, they allow issues to develop into crises (Abachingsa 2021:5).

A number of public-relations practitioners have expressed their concern regarding negative comments made on social media by individuals and customers against their organisations (Dornyo 2014:175). Even though negative comments can threaten the organisation-stakeholder relationship, an understanding of how to use social media in facilitating an engagement with stakeholders can help in achieving an understanding with stakeholders and minimise the impact of a crisis (Lin, Spence, Sellnow & Lachlan 2016:602; Eriksson 2018:526; Cannaerts 2020:116).

The call by public-relations practitioners in Ghana for organisations to have a communication strategy on social media in order to respond to issues, rumours and falsehoods about the organisations (Dornyo 2014:175; Brown 2020:7) shows that there is a gap in Ghanaian public-relations practice regarding insights on the need for strategies in handling and managing crises on social-media platforms. The proposed elements for a conceptual framework put forward in this study will enable public-relations practitioners in Ghana to handle and manage crisis communication on social media in ways that will foster the building of stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis.

1.2.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this cross-sectional mixed-method study is to investigate social-media crisis communication to propose elements for a conceptual framework to build stakeholder relationships on before, during and after a crisis.

The conceptual framework provides guidelines to assist public-relations practitioners to manage crisis communication on social media in order to ensure a more consistent practice. To achieve this, the importance of building relationships with stakeholders when managing crises on social media was first ascertained. Thereafter, it was investigated how public-relations practitioners in Ghana manage crises on social media. The study further gathered information on communication approaches public-reactions practitioners used in managing crises on social media. The relationship-management criteria required for organisation-stakeholder relationships when managing a crisis on social media were also investigated.

1.2.2 Background of the study

In recent years, information dissemination through television, radio and newspaper has expanded and now includes the use of the internet as well as Web 2.0 technologies, such as social media. Web 2.0 can facilitate interactive and collaborative sharing of content (Caruso

2018:89; Jena, Bhattacharjee, Devi & Barman 2020:25). The nature and character of social media are markedly different from the media of television, radio and newspapers. Social media, unlike the mainstream media, allow users to create or generate content and disseminate the content with little or no gatekeeping processes. The use of the mainstream media as channels for crisis-communication management is now complemented with social media (Jensen 2014:8; Eriksson 2018:541).

Social-media platforms, with their unique features, make available to organisations new opportunities and challenges when engaging with different stakeholders in times of crisis, compared to mainstream media (Jensen 2014:7; Xu & Saxton 2019:30-31). The presence of organisations on social media can thrust organisations into risky situations, such as potential bad news and, as such, all organisations must be prepared to face such challenges that potentially can damage their reputations (Zade, Shah, Rangarajan, Kshirsagar, Imran & Starbird 2018:195; Kaufhold, Rupp, Reuter & Habdank 2020:320).

Crisis-related issues have over the years engaged the attention of the media in Ghana and other stakeholders, including government agencies and officials, customers, politicians, commentators, citizens and public-relations practitioners. The country has in the last decade experienced crises including energy, aeroplane crashes, financial malfeasance, building collapses, pandemics, fire and flood disasters, leading to injuries and deaths of hundreds of people (Oteng-Ababio 2013:1; Boakye, Twenefour & McArthur Floyd 2016:39 Tella, Suraya, Bonsu & Anani-Bossman 2020:54; Kamason 2020:2).

Crisis incidents always generate discussions, conversations and dialogue among stakeholders who are affected by the crises. The organisations involved usually issue statements through the media, assuring stakeholders that the crisis is under control and the necessary assistance is being offered to victims of the crisis (Ghana News Agency 2015). Some of the organisations, however, have been criticised for not handling the crisis effectively (Osam 2015).

Crisis communication remains an under-researched area in Ghana. The body charged with the accreditation of public-relations practitioners in Ghana, the Institute of Public Relations

(IPR) Ghana, occasionally organises programmes to offer insights into new trends in the field of public relations. A workshop organised from 24 to 25 June 2015 for registered members of IPR examined a number of key themes in crisis communication (IPR 2015). Areas explored included how to assist an organisation to emerge from a crisis; effective crisis response for competitive advantage; ineffective crisis response strategies; what to do and say during a crisis; crisis response capability, strategy and planning in crisis response; and case studies of effective and ineffective planning. The target groups for the workshop were public-relations professionals, corporate planners, brand executives, risk managers and corporate executives of government and private institutions. Hence, this study addresses a critical area in public relations in the context of Ghana.

In addition, searches in the literature indicate that expositions on theoretical underpinnings, such as dialogic communication, discourse of renewal and relationship-management interactions with social-media crisis communication are yet to be investigated in Ghanaian settings. This study's integration of crisis communication, dialogic communication and social-media communication addresses the gap in social-media crisis communication research in Ghana. More importantly, the findings and conceptual framework of this study can be applied not only in Ghanaian settings, but also in other African contexts, as social media communication and the consequences of crises on organisation-stakeholder relationships are not necessarily restricted to regional or continental situations, provided that the research setting is similar.

It is important to highlight the vital nature of the topic to public-relations practice in Ghana. The relevance of the topic is discussed in the next section.

1.2.3 Relevance of the topic

The topic for this study is relevant when viewed against the status quo of the lack of a strategic focus in crisis-communication management on social media by some Ghanaian organisations. Social-media platforms have largely been used by Ghanaian companies for brand building

(William 2015:77). The use of social media for managing stakeholder relationships, reputation, rumours and negative comments is not popular with a number of Ghanaian organisations (Dornyo 2014:175; William 2015:77; Abotsitse 2020:10; Eyifah 2021:5).

The elements proposed for the conceptual framework contribute to social-media crisis-communication management by offering strategies public-relations practitioners in Ghana can use in building organisation-stakeholder relationships when managing crisis communication on social media. The study also yielded useful insights into how public-relations practitioners in Ghana manage crisis communication on social media. Additionally, the study revealed that, if organisations want to build stakeholder relationships during a crisis, then the social-media crisis communication must revolve around dialogic communication aspects such as collaboration, grounding, empathy, responsiveness, genuineness, transparency and accessibility. Furthermore, as organisations would need to rebuild relationships with stakeholders after a crisis, the study provides both theoretical and practical on renewal concepts such as communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value as essential for social-media crisis communication. The study also provides evidence that social-media presence and social-media management are requisite components of crisis preparedness that potentially enable organisations to be proactive in crisis communication. In essence, the proposed framework can become a heuristic to public-relations practitioners charged with social-media crisis communication for Ghanaian organisations in both public and private sectors.

1.2.4 Relationship of the topic to the discipline of communication

The study addressed public relations, which is an area in the field of organisational communication in the communication science discipline (Barker & Angelopulo 2013). Different concepts applicable to public relations were also explored, namely, crisis communication, dialogic communication and social-media crisis communication. While the relationship-

management theory is multidisciplinary, it was adopted for this study through the lens of dialogic communication and social-media crisis communication.

1.2.5 Previous research on the topic

A search on databases such as Google Scholar, Nexus database at Unisa and the databases of Ghanaian universities revealed that no study was being undertaken or completed on the topic of this study.

Table 1.1. is a summary of Ghanaian studies relating to social media and crisis communication. The evidence shows the scanty nature of research on the topic under investigation.

Table 1.1: Summary of Ghanaian social media and crisis communication studies related to this study

AUTHOR	TOPIC	FOCUS
Lilian Akandeliba Abachingsa (2021)	The Role of Social Media in Crisis Management: Social Media Strategies of the Ghana Armed Forces.	The use of social media strategies in managing a crisis
Patrick Owusu Ansah (2022)	COVID-19 Dialogue on Facebook: Crisis Communication Relationship between Ghanaian Authorities and Citizens	Crisis communication Dialogue Social media
Appah, Biamah Nana (2021)	The Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication; A Study of Selected Organisations in Accra	Social-media crisis communication Public relations
E Eyifah (2021)	Contribution of Social Media in Ghana's Covid-19 Risk and Crisis Communication Activities	Social-media crisis communication
AA Bosumtwi (2015)	Communicating Crisis Preparedness: A case study of Electricity Company of Ghana	Crisis communication Public relations
Senyo Komla Gladstone (2015)	Assessing the use of social Media By Electricity Company of Ghana and its influence on their publics	Social media Public relations
Lydia Andoh-Quainoo Philip Annor-Antwi (2015)	The use of social media in public relations: A case of Facebook in the Ghanaian Financial Services Industry	Social media Public relations
Harriet Ama Bampoe (2020)	The Ghana National Communications Authority's use of website and social media in stakeholder engagement: A public relations dialogic perspective	Social media Dialogic communication Public relations
Mark Brown (2020)	Examining social media Use in public-relations practice in Ghana Police Service	Social media Public relations
Joseph Antwi-Boasiako & Enoch Nyarkoh (2021)	Government Communication during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Ghana	Crisis communication
Adjeidu, Priscilla Mawuena (2021)	Examining the use of strategic communication for organisation image during crisis. A study of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA)	Strategic communication Crisis communication

In the entire study, different meanings are assigned to many concepts. In Section 1.3, concepts that are used in this study are defined and explained.

1.3 CONCEPTUALISATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The following are the main key concepts of the study, which are covered in much detail in the literature review chapters.

1.3.1 Public relations

The study's definition of public relations is influenced by the International Public Relations Association (IPRA 2019) definition. The definition adopted for this study, however, expands the IPRA definition. The following working definition is proposed:

> "Public relations is defined as a decision-making process incorporated into management practice designed to be culturally relevant, communalist and relational, with the objective of building relationships between organisations and stakeholders based on ethical and dialogic communication".

This definition has been adopted to highlight the need for organisations to practice public relations within the context of relationship-building, ethics, dialogic communication and culture.

1.3.2   Public-relations practitioners

Public-relations practitioners refer to public-relations practitioners in Ghana registered with the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) Ghana, which is responsible for fulfilling functions such as communication, reputation management and relationship management. These functions are to ensure that the relationship between organisations and stakeholders is mutually beneficial (Ferguson 2018:172-173).

1.3.3 Ghanaian organisations

An organisation refers to "a collection of resources that are working together somehow to achieve a common purpose" (Management Library 2022). *Ghanaian organisations,* in the context of this study, refers to public- and private-sector organisations that have a social-media presence and active public-relations departments.

1.3.4 Crisis

As discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.1, crisis as a concept has many definitions. For the purpose of this study, *crisis* refers to the apparent violation of the expectations of stakeholders and a crisis can lead to negative outcomes for both the organisation and stakeholders (Coombs 2019:19).

1.3.5 Crisis management

Based on the many definitions of crisis management and the study's purpose, the researcher proposes the following working definition to refer to crisis management:

> "A strategic process that involves a series of activities to prevent, prepare, respond, mitigate and resolve a crisis event in order to protect the interests of both an organisation and stakeholders so that, in the long-term, the relationship between the organisations and its stakeholders will continue to exist."

This definition provides a comprehensive view of crisis management and specifies the activities organisations are to implement in the crisis-management life cycle.

1.3.6   Crisis communication

Following a review of crisis communication definitions in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 and for the purpose of this study, the following working definition is proposed and adopted for this study:

> "A communication plan that is designed to enable organisations to manage potential crisis situations and actual crisis events; and involves gathering and disseminating crisis-related information to stakeholders and also creating interactive crisis communication opportunities between the organisation and stakeholders".

This definition is adopted because it factors in interaction opportunities between the organisation and stakeholders enabled through social-media platforms.

1.3.7   Social media

The concept of social media is discussed and explained in Chapter 3 (Section 3.4; 3.4.1; 3.4.2; 3.4.3; 3.5; 3.5.1; 3.6; 3.6.1; 3.6.2; 3.6.3; 3.6.4; 3.6.5). Based on the many definitions in the literature on social media reviewed in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1 and for the purpose of this study, the following working definition of social media is proposed and adopted because it specifies how internet users are to use social media in communicating:

> "An internet-based digital tool that serves as a platform for internet users (individual and corporate users) to generate, share and broadcast content and the content potentially can stimulate conversations, create identities and establish mutually beneficial relationships."

1.3.8   Social-media communication

Social-media communication in this study refers to the use of social media by organisations to inform, engage, interact, monitor and attend to the needs of stakeholders (Floreddu et al. 2014; Lahti 2015; Watson & Wagen 2015; Roshan et al. 2016).

1.3.9 Social-media crisis communication

Based on the literature discussed in Chapter 3 concerning social media and its use for crisis communication, this study proposes the following working definition of social-media crisis communication because it highlights the need for social-media crisis communication to be dialogic before, during and after a crisis:

> "the communication and messaging activities of an organisation that are dialogic communication in nature, and deployed on social media platforms before, during and after a crisis, and targeted at satisfying the information needs of stakeholders who are or could be the victims of a crisis."

1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND STATEMENT

A research problem necessitates the need to conduct research because it is an issue or concern that needs to be addressed (Creswell 2014:49). Creswell (2014:49) asserts that the problem could be a result of a void or gap in the literature, conflict in research results in the literature, topics that have not attracted attention in the literature or an area in the field that need to be explored and studied.

The literature on social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships is scant in Ghana (as discussed in Section 1.2.2) and almost non-existent (Kwafo 2015:8). Some organisations in Ghana have been criticised for not handling crisis incidents effectively (Osam 2015; Mensah 2018) and it will not be out of place to connect this ineffectiveness to some public-relations practitioners lacking the right expertise and knowledge in handling crises, particularly communication on both mainstream media and social media. Actions on crisis management and communication by some of these organisations have been described as reactionary and knee-jerk (Osam: 2015; Cofie 2013; Fortune, Suraya, Bonsu & Anani-Bossman 2020). Organisations can suffer damage to their reputations (Walton, Cooley &

Nicholson 2012; Coombs 2019) unless communication is managed correctly (Petrovici 2014:714; Coombs 2019:13).

The problem in crisis-communication management in Ghana lies in the lack of a comprehensive and proactive strategy supported with theory that can effectively contribute to social-media communication practice.

The research problem for this study can be stated as follows:

To ascertain with a mixed-method research approach what elements are imperative for inclusion in a proposed conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication practice in Ghana to build relationships with stakeholders before, during and after a crisis.

As the problem of the study is defined, the next step is to detail the research questions.

1.4.1 Research questions

A research question is a statement emanating from an identified problem of a study which seeks to provide indications about variables and it is related to research objectives and gives a focus to the data-gathering process (Wimmer & Dominick 2011:25; Leavy 2017:71).

Through this study, the researcher attempted to answer the following research questions:

Research question 1: In what way is building relationships with stakeholders important for managing crises on social media?

Research question 2: How do public-relations practitioners in Ghana manage crises on social media?

Research question 3: What are the communication approaches public-relations practitioners in Ghana should use in managing a crisis on social media?

Research question 4: What relationship-management criteria are necessary for effective stakeholder relationships when managing a crisis on social media?

1.5 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study is applied communication research, which is concerned with the investigation of practical issues and offers immediate solutions (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2006:45; Du Plooy 2009:50; Baimyrzaeva 2018:6; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:2). The study applied communication research in that the study proposes a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis by Ghanaian public-relations practitioners. The outcome of this study is expected to improve public-relations practice in Ghana.

1.5.1 Objectives

An objective is a measurable outcome that leads to the accomplishment of some goal (Michaelson, Wright & Stacks 2012:4; Leavy 2017:62). In other words, an objective specifically outlines what a study intends to accomplish on completion.

There are two kinds of research objectives, namely, exploratory and descriptive and an exploratory objective involves exploring a phenomenon that is being studied that little information is available on (Leavy 2017:5; Swedberg 2020:17; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:25) and a descriptive objective involves a description of characteristics of a phenomenon under study (Leavy 2017:5; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:27). This study used exploratory as well as descriptive objectives, because little information is available on the topic, and it is also necessary to provide a description of characteristics of the phenomenon under study (Leavy 2017:5; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:27).

The research objectives for the study are the following:

Objective 1: To explore the importance of building relationships with stakeholders when managing crises on social media.

Objective 2: To explore how public-relations practitioners in Ghana manage crises on social media.

Objective 3: To describe the communication approaches public-relations practitioners in Ghana should use in managing a crisis on social media.

Objective 4: To determine the relationship-management criteria necessary for effective stakeholder relationships when managing a crisis on social media.

In order to address the study's research questions and objectives, it is vital to highlight the research methodology for this study in the next section.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research process involves the application of a methodology. A methodology involves the use and adoption of techniques and approaches for the purpose of producing knowledge. The knowledge can be generated in several ways and each way has its own premise, values and logic (McGregor & Murnane 2010:2; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:2). It is important that a researcher's observations and experiences concerning a phenomenon and the experiences of others in relation to the phenomenon provide meaning to the researcher to explain the phenomenon. In this section, the researcher discusses the research paradigm, research approach, research methods, population, target population, accessible population, sample method and unit of analysis, data collection, data analysis and ethical consideration. Each methodology piece has a certain value and significance in providing answers that explain the phenomenon connected to the research.

1.6.1 Research paradigm adopted for the study

A research paradigm is "a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study" (Creswell 2014:5; Kivunja & Kuyini 2017:26). In many research scenarios, the researcher's beliefs or orientations influence the use of qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods. In pursuit of the key objective of this study, which is to propose elements for a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders in Ghana, the study's research approach is thus built on the pragmatism worldview. This is because the pragmatism worldview supports the mixed-method approach of drawing data through the use of quantitative and qualitative methods (Goldkuhl 2012; Morgan 2014a; Creswell & Creswell 2017). Additionally, as pragmatism encourages "action", there are required actions that public-relations practitioners must promote and encourage for adoption by their organisations in implementing a social-media crisis communication strategy. Therefore, the researcher investigated the ways in which Ghanaian organisations use social media for crisis communications. For this study, the pragmatic approach provided the most realistic way for understanding the social-media crisis communication strategy deployed by Ghanaian organisations. The research paradigm is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

1.6.2 Research approach

The study adopted a mixed-method research approach involving the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. For the mixed-method design, the study adopted the concurrent design so as to provide triangulation of data (Creswell & Creswell 2017). Triangulation encompasses merging findings from different methodologies (quantitative and qualitative) (Levanon, Lavee & Strier 2021). The selection of this design was informed by the descriptive and exploratory nature of this study, which required conducting both surveys and interviews.

The use of this method enabled a comprehensive and better understanding of the research problem. The research approach is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

1.6.3. Research methods

The study adopted an online survey to address research questions 3 and 4. The use of the online survey method enabled the researcher to apply probability measures in selecting 105 public-relations practitioners registered with the Institute of Public Relations, Ghana.
The semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to interview public-relations practitioners responsible for public relations and social media in Ghana and addressed research questions 1 and 2. The research method is discussed in detail in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.4.

1.6.4 Population

The population comprises both the target and accessible population. A population is the "totality of persons, event, organisation units, case records or other sampling units with which the research problem is concerned" (Fox & Strydom 2014; Leavy 2017; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021). The population for both quantitative and qualitative aspects of this study comprised all public-relations practitioners in Ghana, which is discussed in depth in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.5.1.

1.6.4.1 Target population

A target population comprises a set of elements larger than or different from the group that was sampled and to which the researcher intended to generalise the study findings (Bachman & Schutt 2012:108; Pascoe 2014:132). The target population for this study was all public-relations practitioners in Ghana. The target population is discussed in depth in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.5.1.

1.6.4.2 Accessible population

The *accessible population* refers to the final group of people from which data for a study is collected (Asiamah, Mensah & Oteng-Abayie 2017:1613; Leavy 2017:76). The accessible population of this study was the 400 public-relations practitioners who were registered with the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) Ghana in 2020, which is the most recent list available at the time of the study. The accessible population for the study is discussed in detail in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.5.1.

1.6.5 Sampling method and unit of analysis

A sample is the segment of the population that a researcher selects for a study. In other words, it is the subset of the population from which the data for the research is generated. The selection method may be on the basis of probability or non-probability (Bryman 2012:715; Leavy 2017:268).

The study used both probability and non-probability types of samples. Probability sampling is a sampling method that utilises some form of random selection. Probability sampling provides each case in the accessible population an equal chance of being selected to be part of the sample representative of the target population (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin 2013:392; Bryman 2012:715; Leavy 2017:110). For the online survey, the probability sampling method was applied in the selection of public-relations practitioners who belong to IPR Ghana. Systematic random sampling was used to select the respondents for the online survey.

A non-probability type of sample does not require statistical randomisation. The sample is rather selected as a result of prior knowledge of the issue and also based on the researcher's judgement (Bryman 2012:187; Buelens, Burger & Van den Brakel 2018:323). The purposive sampling method was used to select the participants representing organisations in Ghana, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.5.2.

In a research study, the *unit of analysis* refers to the entity that a researcher studies in a research study. A unit of analysis could be individuals, groups, artefacts, social interactions, etc (Trochim 2020). In this particular study, public-relations practitioners in Ghana (thus individuals) constitute the unit of analysis. The sampling method is discussed in detail in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.5.2.

1.6.6 Data collection

The online survey was conducted through the use of a web-based questionnaire which was distributed to respondents via email. A web-based questionnaire is designed to allow for only one question at a time and enables the recording of emails that ensures an accurate measure of the sample size (Bryman 2012:671; Saleh & Bista 2017:64). The semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted through the use of an interview guide. The guide enabled the researcher to collect the same type of information from each study participant (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson & Kangasniem 2016:6). The data-collection methods are discussed in detail in Chapter 6, Section 6.2.6.2.

1.6.7 Data analysis

Trent and Cho (2014:652) define analysis as "summarising and organising data". Analysing data enables a researcher to determine the outcome or results of the data (Leavy 2017:111). Analyses were done for both quantitative and qualitative data gathered from study participants. The data analysis process in quantitative research involves a statistical presentation of the data, which covers descriptive and inferential statistics, such as frequencies, means, standard deviations, and parametric and non-parametric tests (Leavy 2017:111; Creswell & Creswell 2018:290). Both descriptive statistics (frequency distribution, mean, standard deviation and median) and inferential statistics (parametric tests) were used to analyse the quantitative data.

In addition, the quantitative data were analysed with Statistical Analysis System (SAS) JMP version 14 and R version 4.02, with the assistance of a statistician.

Data analysis in qualitative research is a recursive process, which means analysis leading to interpretation (Leavy 2017:150). For this study, a deductive thematic analysis for the semi-structured in-depth interviews was adopted. A deductive thematic analysis involves the use of theoretical propositions derived from the literature and these propositions inform how a study's themes are analysed (Pearse 2019).

Furthermore, the NVivo software by QSR International was used to generate codes that also assisted the researcher to prioritise and maintain the original language used by participants (Leavy 2017:151). The data analysis of the study is discussed in detail in Section 6.4.2 of Chapter 6.

1.7 Ethical considerations

The researcher adhered to all required ethical principles by taking the following steps: ethical clearance was obtained on 26 June 2021 to undertake the empirical part of the study (see Addendum D). This requirement is stipulated in the Unisa (2016) policy on research ethics. The clearance ensured that the research adhered to the values and principles expressed in the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics. With regard to Covid-19, the researcher read Unisa's Covid-19 protocol and abided by the protocol at the time of implementing the study. As a result of Covid-19 restrictions put in place by organisations of participants, the interviews were conducted on the online platform Zoom.

In collecting data for both the online survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews, the following ethical considerations were followed: first, the researcher obtained the informed consent of the research participants. For the online survey, the introductory part of the questionnaire provided information to study participants, that their participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. The web-based questionnaire was administered on the basis of the respondents agreeing to partake in the study. Informed consent was built into

the questionnaire, which respondents ticked before proceeding to answer the questions. For the semi-structured in-depth interviews, the researcher obtained the informed consent of participants before the interviews were conducted on the Zoom video conferencing platform. Participants signed the consent forms, which they returned to the researcher prior to conducting the interviews.

Second, the researcher adhered to keeping the identities of participants anonymous. Anonymity involves keeping participants' identities secret (Saunders et al. 2015:617). The researcher assured the respondents for the online survey that their responses would remain anonymous in the introductory part of the questionnaire. For the interviews, all participants were assured that their identities would not be revealed and that codes would be assigned to their responses. Participants' names were not recorded and they were referred to as participant 1, participant 2, etc. In addition, their organisations were not identified while, with permission, only audio was recorded during the interviews and no visuals.

Lastly, the researcher made a statement on the questionnaire that data collected from participants would be treated as confidential. Confidentiality refers to all information that is kept hidden from everyone except the primary research team (Saunders et al. 2015:617). On the participant information sheet, the researcher agreed to keep data collected from participants confidential. For the semi-structured in-depth interviews, the data provided by participants were treated as confidential while the organisations of participants were not named.

1.8 THESIS OUTLINE

The thesis is organised into nine chapters, as presented in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Thesis outline

Chapter	Purpose
Chapter 1: Background and rationale for the study	The researcher in this chapter identifies background to the study, context of the study statement of the problem, research questions, objectives of the study and significance of the study for Ghanaian public-relations practice as it relates to social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships.
Chapter 2: Contextualising public relations	The researcher in this chapter contextualises public relations within the African and Ghanaian contexts and positions public relations as relevant for building relationships with organisational stakeholders.
Chapter 3: Social-media crisis communication with stakeholders before, during and after a crisis	The researcher in this chapter provides an overview of essential literature pertaining to crisis communication and social-media crisis communication before, during and after a crisis.
Chapter 4: Theoretical points of departure for this study	In this chapter, the researcher explicates the study's theoretical points of departure, namely the relationship management, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal theories as essential for building an organisation-stakeholder relationship.
Chapter 5: Proposed elements for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders before, during and after a crisis	The researcher in this chapter focuses on the proposed elements for a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis for the purpose of empirical verification.
Chapter 6: Research methodology and operationalisation	The researcher in this chapter outlines the methodology adopted for the study and how the study was operationalised.
Chapter 7: Discussion and interpretation of the findings of the online survey	The researcher explains the findings of the online survey in this chapter.
Chapter 8: Qualitative findings, interpretation and overall findings of the study	In this chapter, the researcher focuses on analyses and findings of the qualitative part of this study and ends with a discussion of the overall findings of the study in accordance with the proposed elements of the conceptual framework.
Chapter 9: Conclusions and recommendations	The researcher in this chapter focuses on the conclusions of and recommendations for the study including the refined elements of the conceptual framework after empirical verification.

1.9 SUMMARY

This chapter provides the background to the study and explains the justification for and the research design for the study. Also, the researcher discussed the relevance of the study and how the goal set for the study if achieved will improve public-relations practice in Ghana. The important issue of a paucity of research on social-media crisis communication strategies in Ghanaian public relations was highlighted and discussed. The argument was advanced that there is an urgent need for a study that will propose elements for a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication practice by Ghanaian public-relations practitioners to build stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, contextualises public relations through the lens of building relationships with stakeholders.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALISING PUBLIC RELATIONS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter contextualises the broader discipline of public relations as relevant for building relationships with stakeholders. This explanation is essential since crisis communication, a sub-discipline of public relations, seeks to assist an organisation to be responsive to stakeholders in order to protect the organisation and stakeholders. In doing so, the discussion in this chapter revolves around the concepts of public relations, corporate communication, reputation management, relationship management, and stakeholder and communication management. This chapter also discusses strategic communication and its relevance to the public-relations discipline and explores the beginnings of public relations, the practice of public relations in Africa and Ghana. The overall purpose of Chapter 2 is to provide a comprehensive exposition of the concept of public relations and the influence of public relations in the relationship-building focus of organisations.

2.2 WHY A PUBLIC RELATIONS AND NOT A CORPORATE COMMUNICATION FOCUS

It is important to first provide an explanation of the concept of corporate communication, as it is sometimes confused with the discipline of public relations. The explanation will properly establish the context of the study, purpose and objectives.

Public-relations practice is often confused with the corporate communication field (Garcia 2016:61-62). However, while public relations and corporate communication are closely related, the focus of corporate communication is the use of communication by corporate entities in engaging with stakeholders in honest ways about organisational values and the behaviour of the organisation must be consistent with these values to build social capital and establish legitimacy (Tench & Yeomans 2017:493). Public relations, on the other hand is described as a management function that is focused on enduring interaction between an organisation and its publics. This interaction is supposed to enhance the relationship between the organisation and stakeholders, thereby generating mutual understanding between them

(Smith 2020:62). It is therefore evident that corporate communication is a broader communication concept than public relations. However, as both corporate communication and public relations value relationships with stakeholders, the outcome of this study is useful to the broader field of corporate communication, which also includes public relations.

The next section now explores the history of public relations, including the African and Ghanaian contexts.

2.3 HISTORY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Historical accounts of public relations in several public-relations textbooks highlight the practice of public relations as an American innovation and creation (Hoy, Raaz & Wehmeier 2007; Bentele 2015; Fitch & L'Etang 2020). Evidence available, however, shows that the history of public relations is not limited to the experience of a particular country (L'Etang 2008; Raaz & Wehmeier 2011; Bentele 2015; Fitch & L'Etang 2020). There is a multiplicity of histories on public relations (Raaz & Wehmeier 2011:257; Fitch & L'Etang 2020:705). In this section, the different views and explanations of the various historical perspectives of public relations are now provided.

2.3.1 Overview of the history of public relations

One challenge in the public relations history discourse is the identity or name for public relations. As a result, several names and identities have been used to describe or make a reference to public relations. Individuals connected to the beginnings of public relations in the modern era used concepts such as press agentry, publicity, propaganda, and advertising and press bureau to identify public relations. These names, as well as current tags and concepts such as public affairs, public diplomacy, strategic communication and public information, have contributed to the confusion and a lack of perspective on the history of public relations (Vos 2011; Brown 2015).

To move away from the identity debate, scholars such as Myers (2014:676) suggest that the historical focus of public relations should centre on the meaning of public relations as applied

today, namely, reputation building and relationships. The concept of 'public relations' appeared in the press in the early part of the 18th century and, by the 1830s, it was used to describe reputation building and relationships the same as how it is applied today (Myers 2014:681).

Even though the views of Cutlip (2013) on the history of public relations offer some useful insights into the beginnings of public relations, particularly in the United States of America (USA), these views do not necessarily reflect the history of modern public-relations practice. Cutlip (2013) asserts that the practice of public relations in the USA, particularly in the 21st century, was largely influenced by developments in industry, railroads and utilities. Wire communications and mass-media growth also helped create the foundation for the emergence of public relations (Cutlip 2013:1). Cutlip (2013) advances the argument that the economic system of the era created powerful monopolies, such as the United States Steel Company whose business practices created public disaffection. Public relations emerged from this confusion to enable organisations to use public-relations tactics to change the dominant communication strategy of "…the less the public knew…the more efficient and profitable…operations would be" (Cutlip: 2013:1).

The non- U.S. history of public relations is also important (Myers 2021:23). Other histories of public relations such as the European accounts emphasise strongly on models and theories (Raaz & Wehmeier 2011; Bentele 2015). Bentele (2015) articulates that early public relations practice in Europe was influenced by the stratification model. The stratification model contends that public relations evolves over time and relies upon past public relations practices. The model does not view past practices of public relations as anomalies. Rather, the past practices are seen as providing the right foundation and influence for public relations practice (Raaz & Wehmeier 2011; Bentele 2015). Thus, the public relations function has changed over time – from "interpersonal communication", "public communication", "organisational communication" and "public relations as a profession and occupation" (Raaz & Wehmeier 2011; Bentele 2015; Myers 2021).

Bentele (2015:23) proposes that the history of public relations should be examined from the

perspectives of "fact or event-based" and "model and theory-based". Fact or event-based is broad-based, as it demands some level of common understanding of public relations. Model and theory-based, on the other hand, involves assessing public relations on the basis of a system that is studied through a social scientific filter. The model and theory-based approach gives meaning to public relations, as it clearly provides a theoretical basis for public relations origin, practices and structures (Bentele 2015:26-27).

In contrast to the public relations histories of U.S. and Europe, the history of public relations in Asia is linked to the "governance expert systems" during nation building. For example, when India gained independence from the British, the new government established the information bureau to fulfil public relations functions (Halff & Gregory 2014:401).

Meanwhile in China, public relations functions were instituted by the Communist Party to protect the political system during fundamental socio-economic changes (Halff & Gregory 2014:401).

In most of Asia, the governance expert system influences the growth and direction of public relations (Halff & Gregory 2014:401). However, the entry of foreign companies into Asian markets in the 60s led to the introduction of the "corporate expert system" of public relations practice (Sudhaman 2013). This system of public relations practice was targeted at ensuring that these foreign companies were profitable in their operations.

Halff and Gregory (2014) point out that Asia has its own unique public relations history. They argue that any reference to the public relations history of Asia must be linked to both the national governance expert system and global corporate expert system.

The debate on the history of public relations has also shifted to the intent of public relations. In this regard, public-relations activities in various eras were driven by profit, recruitment, legitimacy, advocacy, agitation and fear motivations (Russell & Lamme 2016:744). Additionally, McKie and Sriramesh (2017:5) provide a supporting view that the public-relations histories of countries such as Germany and India point to the use of public relations for business intent and in pursuit of corporate social responsibility objectives respectively.

The various views, opinions, assertions and thoughts on the history of public relations show that there is no general consensus on a particular or general history of public relations. The

history of public relations should be studied in the context of individual country histories rather than a concept of a universal history of public relations (Salcedo 2008; McKie & Sriramesh 2017). The American-focused history of public relations has been widely questioned and criticised. Scholars around the world have provided the history of public relations specific to countries in Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa (McKie & Sriramesh 2017:5; Fitch & L'Etang 2020:705).

The overview of the history of public-relations practice in Africa is discussed next. The purpose is to establish Africa's contribution to the emergence, practice and development of public relations.

2.3.2 The practice and development of public relations in Africa

Public relations study and practice in Africa have not been exposed effectively to the rest of the world (Akpabio 2009:351). As a result, Africa's practice of public relations has not yet succeeded in getting the rest of the world to acknowledge Africa's contribution to the public relations field (Akpabio 2009:351).

To understand the status quo of public-relations practice in Africa, a discussion of the history of public-relations practice in Africa is important.

Public relations roots can be traced to the town crier, gatherings in the village square and the rhetoric of chiefs. Also, the use of traditional communication forms, such as talking drums, to inform and persuade people has been recognised to be akin to early public-relations practice (Wilson 2008; Akpabio 2009).

Public-relations practice in Africa existed before colonialism, independence and achievement of nationhood (Akpabio 2009; Amujo & Melewar 2009). Amujo and Melewar (2009) situate the beginnings of public-relations practice in Nigeria in the year 1859.

The African continent's independence agitations and the advocacy of the promoters attracted the attention of the media and hence information was made available to people (for example, citizens) (Akpabio 2009). Thus, these political agitations provided a foundation on which public-relations practice in Africa evolved. Africa's public-relations history based on political

agitations is in tandem with Lamme and Russell's (2010) assertion that public-relations history is "attached to an approach to deliberately influence the sentiments of the public".

The practice of public relations in Africa has evolved over the years and gone through phases of historical developments. The three phases of public relations conceptualisation and development in Africa are (Okereke 2002:2-3; Tench, D'Artrey & Fawkes 2009:40; Akpabio 2009:352):

- Colonial era phase

- Post-independence era phase

- Democratisation of the national politics phase

The colonial era phase witnessed the formal use of public relations in several African countries. Contemporary and formalised public relations started in the 1940s (Okereke 2002:2-3). Public relations of the 1940s was largely focused on Grunig's "Public information" model where the colonial government provided one-sided information to people of the colonies (Van Heerden 2004:109). Despite the one-way approach to public-relations practice in the colonial era, evidence exists that the colonial government deployed strategies similar to Grunig's two-way symmetric model (Kiambi 2014:70). Watson (2014:3) adds that the British colonial government used public relations in some instances to engage with local communities and achieve mutual understanding on the implementation of government policies. Whereas the colonial government used public relations to create awareness of government policies and programmes, the African leaders fighting for self-rule used persuasive public-relations tactics, such as advocacy and the media (private press) to attract support for the African independence cause. Public relations departments were established to fulfil the interests of commercial organisations (Okereke 2002:4-5).

The post-independence era phase of 1950 to 1970 ushered in a public-relations practice that had a formal structure of programmes, budgets and implementation outline (Okereke 2002:4–5). The public-relations practice of the 1980s had minimal impact on organisational goals, as it was relegated to the background. Public relations of the 1980s witnessed the increased use

of the "Press agentry" model and media relations were regarded as the most relevant public-relations function and public-relations officers had to be skilled in media relations (Van Heerden 2004:110).

The last phase of the development of public relations in Africa is connected to the democratisation of national politics that swept through several countries in the 1990s. The democratisation process phase has continued into the 2000s and has had the most useful impact on the development of public relations in Africa. Public relations in this era were influenced by public power, which created accountability and transparency (Van Heerden 2004:110). Pressure groups, such as trade unions, student groups, commercial groups and academia, carried out activities that put pressure on tyrannical national governments to introduce political, economic and media reforms. These reforms brought about plurality in party politics and media practice. The World Bank also engaged with governments to introduce economic models that brought some minimal positive developments to the economies of some African countries (Pratt & Okigbo 2004:283; Blankson 2009:184-185).

The nature and practice of public relations in Africa in present times is comparable to other parts of the world. Evidence from the field indicates that public-relations practice in several African countries is founded on both two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric communication (Wu & Baah- Boakye 2007; Anani-Bossman 2021). Also, globalisation, industrialisation and massive developments and innovations in science and technology have positively contributed to the development of public relations in Africa (Anani-Bossman & Bruce 2021:134). Public-relations practitioners in Africa have leveraged off and benefitted from scientific and technological innovations to improve their public-relations practice. Additionally, major international corporations and businesses have set up operations in some African countries, thereby creating more opportunities for public-relations practice to grow (Blankson 2009:186; Skinner 2013:15-16).

Even though it can be firmly argued that African public-relations practice has witnessed positive growth, challenges such as a dearth of information and communication technology,

political upheavals, unstable economies and unique public-relations models have impacted negatively on public-relations practice (Skinner 2013:15-16; Anani-Bossman 2022:5). Current developments on the continent, however, point to a good future for public relations moving forward. For example, there are national public relations associations and a continental body known as the African Public Relations Association (APRA). These national and continental bodies oversee training, continuing education, ethical standards and the professionalism of public-relations practitioners. Some national governments support and endorse the activities of these bodies. For example, in Nigeria, the government recognises the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) as the mandated national registry for practitioners in Nigeria. This has given legitimacy to Nigerian practitioners (Modella & Alhassan: 2006; Ukonu, Anyadike & Okoro 2018). Also, fast-growing markets, such as Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana and Kenya, have the capacity to provide global companies' public relations solutions. This is because of the established research ability of practitioners, expanded public-relations education in tertiary institutions and effective public-relations practice (Kiambi & Nadler 2012; Wu & Baah-Boakye 2014; Ngondo 2019).

2.3.3 Public-relations practice in Africa and worldview influences

Public-relations practice in Africa has its own peculiarities. The idea of culture as an influence on public relations practice is widely discussed in public relations literature (Edwards and Hodges 2011; Chmielecki 2011; Anani-Bossman 2020). Anani-Bossman (2020:75) for instance, argues that even though Grunig's models of public relations are quite integrated into public relations practice, cultural interpreter and personal influence models also influence the practice of public relations in Africa. As these two models emphasise building of relationships with stakeholders and an understanding of language, culture, custom and national politics of a country respectively (Wu & Baah-Boakye 2009; Anani-Bossman 2020), it is expected that culture will be integral in the practice of public relations in Africa. The cultures of many African countries are built on interpersonal relationships, language and customs. These models provide public relations practitioners with the requisite knowledge in

analysing and interpreting the attitudes and behaviours of stakeholders in building organisation-stakeholder relationships. (Anani-Bossman 2020)

Kiambi and Nadler (2012:67) and supported by Dlamini (2016:29) emphasise that the practice of public relations in Africa is driven by socio-cultural influences. Africa has charted its own public relations course. For example, Thompson (2018:476) asserts that public-relations education in Ghana is influenced by socio-political and economic factors. Additionally, Anani-Bossman and Mudzanani (2020:543) and Anani-Bossman (2021:92) found that, in Ghana, the public-relations profession is also backed by the two-way asymmetric/symmetric communication and the personal influence model. Thus, it is fair to state that public-relations practice in Africa cannot be viewed only within the scope of the western model of the excellence theory, but also viewed in terms of the African worldview and culture (Alaimo 2017; Steenkamp & Rensburg 2019; Anani-Bossman & Tandoh 2022). Any framework for public-relations practice must consider both the African worldview or culture and also other relevant worldviews, including western worldviews (Anani-Bossman & Tandoh 2022). Anani-Bossman and Tandoh (2022:12) propose that such a framework must have humanistic, communalist, strategic and relational components as its elements. As already highlighted, culture could be useful for public relations practice in Africa, the scope of this study does not include culture and hence culture and its influence on public relations practice is not explored in detail.

It is evident from the discussion on Africa's public-relations history that the contemporary practice of public relations in Africa has largely been influenced and shaped by history, phases of development and strategy. The study area for this study is Ghana and therefore the beginnings and the current state of the public-relations profession are discussed in the next section.

2.3.4 Ghana's public-relations history

The history of public-relations practice in Ghana has not been formally studied and documented. The rhetoric that surrounds Ghanaian public-relations history is similar to the

origin of public-relations practice in Africa – proverbs, drum language, traditional protocol through the linguist, festivals and a traditional conflict resolution system (Allotey-Pappoe 2009). Allotey-Pappoe (2009) points out that the history of public relations in Ghana can be placed into four phases. The phases are pre-colonial traditional societies dated up to the year 1482; the 1482 to 1956 era, known as the colonial and pre-independence period; and 1957 to 1990, known as the post-independence era.

2.3.4.1 The early beginnings of public-relations practice in Ghana

Gyan's (1991) seminal study on the practice of public relations in Ghana provides an overview of the public-relations history of Ghana. The British colonial government introduced public relations in Ghana (Thompson 2018). The nature of public-relations practice involved the use of the public information model that had British and European expatriates performing communication and information roles (Amoakohene 2015; Thompson 2018).

When Ghana gained independence, the new government under Dr. Kwame Nkrumah took steps to replace the expatriates with Ghanaians (Thompson 2018). The next section discusses the practice of public relations in the post-independence era.

2.3.4.2 Post–independence public-relations practice in Ghana

The period after Ghana's independence in 1957 saw a change in the nature of public-relations practice in Ghana (Gyan 1991; Amoakohene 2015). According to Amoakohene (2015), expatriates working in public relations were replaced with indigenous Ghanaians by the new government of Kwame Nkrumah. These Ghanaians worked in government ministries and agencies and performed public-relations tasks such as information dissemination.

The Ghana Information Services Department (ISD) oversaw providing information, press and public-relations services. Amoakohene (2015) points out that the ISD dispatched officers to various ministries and agencies to work as "press secretaries" or "information officers". These officers had no training or education in public relations but backgrounds in journalism and other disciplines. Multinationals also followed the government's example and established

positions geared towards public-relations functions. The lack of employees with training and education in public relations led to the establishment of the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) by the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, for the training of not only journalists but also public-relations officers (Gyan 1991; Amoakohene 2015).

2.3.4.3 Public-relations practice in the era of multi-party democracy

Public relations in Ghana transformed in the 1990s and it was because of the democratisation process that introduced multi-party politics to replace the military regime that had been in power for over a decade (Blankson 2009). Multiparty democracy gained ground in 1992 with the conduct of the first presidential and parliamentary elections that ushered in the Fourth Republic. Subsequently, the media became pluralised, allowing for more private participation in the media space (Blankson 2009; Thompson 2015).

The changes in Ghana's political landscape also advanced the cause of public-relations, as the Public Relations Association of Ghana (PRAG), the professional body for public-relations practitioners in Ghana, was renamed the Institute of Public Relations, Ghana (IPR), in 1992, with a new leadership. The IPR became strengthened as a result of a legal status that allowed it to put together a code of ethics, a process of instituted membership and accreditation examinations (Blankson 2009).

2.3.4.4 Contemporary public-relations practice in Ghana

Public-relations practice in Ghana has been redefined in recent times. For example, Anani-Bossman and Tandoh (2022) argue that public-relations practice in Ghana and Africa must be defined by humanistic, communalist, strategic and relational approaches. Humanistic and communal approaches mean that public-relations practice in Ghana will be practised in a humane, socially responsible and consultative manner; whereas a relational and strategic orientation will involve an organisation-stakeholder-centric approach to public-relations practice that is considered critical to the strategic management of an organisation (Bossman &Tandoh 2022:12-13).

In contemporary times, public-relations practice in Ghana is driven by the two-way asymmetric/symmetric and the personal influence models (Anani-Bossman & Mudzanani 2020:543). A positive development in the practice of public relations in Ghana is also the increasing importance attached to the use of research (Anani-Bossman & Tella 2017:68). In spite of all these positive outlooks for the practice of public relations in Ghana, public relations specialities, such as issues management, crisis-communication management, the use of social media for communication including crisis communication and community relations, are not well entrenched in the public-relations programmes and planning of some organisations (Tabi, Boakye & Nsor 2012:49; Cofie 2013:88; Kwafo 2015:8).

The problem in crisis-communication management in Ghana lies with the absence of a comprehensive and proactive strategy supported with theory that can effectively contribute to practice. This is evidenced in the study of public-relations practice in selected charismatic churches in Ghana (Cofie 2013:81). There is a call for both private and public organisations in Ghana to have a communication strategy in dealing with crisis situations (Dornyo 2014:175).

Insufficient management recognition has not also helped public relations to assume a key role in management (Freitag & Stokes 2009:191; Anani-Bossman 2018:148). The lack of recognition has resulted in managerial decisions that have hampered the growth of the public-relations profession in Ghana, as practitioners are not fully allowed to perform key public-relations functions (Tabi et al. 2012:53-54; Anani-Bossman 2018:147). Practitioners combine public-relations functions with duties and tasks that are distinctively administrative (Anani-Bossman 2018:147).

This study adds to the growing knowledge of public-relations practice in Ghana, particularly in the crisis-communication management field. The participants and respondents who were selected for this study work in organisations and industries which have experienced or are likely to experience events that threaten the operations of the organisations. The study therefore assists in providing some perspectives on the position of public-relations practitioners on crisis-communication management and the attainment of organisational

goals specific to relationship-building. The information gathered from public-relations practitioners in Ghana is also useful, as it enables the researcher to know the status quo of the practice in Ghana in respect of the management of crisis communication on social media. Having explained the history of public relations, in the next section, a definition of public relations for this study is adopted.

2.4. ADOPTING A DEFINITION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR THIS STUDY

A uniform definition of public relations has been a challenge the public-relations discipline has faced for decades. As a result, there have been various attempts to define public relations over the years. Defining public relations has especially created difficulties around how to identify public relations as an area of study and practice (Russell & Lamme 2016:742; Myers 2018:12). A review reveals that definitions of public relations have largely centred on function, two-way communication and relationships (Colbert 2012; Cutlip Centre & Brom 2013; Russell& Lamme 2016). The various definitions of public relations focused on these three areas are discussed in the next subsections.

2.4.1. Definition of public relations as a function

Public relations has many definitions (Wilcox, Cameron & Reber 2014:33). Among the many definitions of public relations is the definition that revolves around the concept of function (Cutlip, Centre & Brom 2012; Russell & Lamme 2016:742; Myers 2016:821). For example, Cutlip et al. (2012:29) define public relations as "a management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends".

Other definitions of public relations as a function revolve around public-relations tactics and specialities, such as internal relations, publicity and issues management (Cutlip et al. 2012:30-39). For example, as an internal relations function, public relations is defined as "the specialised part of public relations that builds and maintains a mutually beneficial relationship between managers and the employees on whom an organisation's success depends" (Cutlip

et al. 2012:30).

However, the description of public relations as a function has attracted criticism. Brown (2015), for example, asserts that describing public relations based on function makes public relations operate on the level of a top-down structure or focused only on strategies and tactics – "a container of management abstractions". The argument against public relations as a function is that it makes public relations seem more like a tactic (Bentele 2015).

As discussed below, the two-way communication dimension has been advanced as vital to the description of public relations (Theunissen & Noordin 2012; Myers 2016; Myers 2022). The use of the two-way communication concept is intended to give public relations a strategic focus in the management of relationships with stakeholders.

2.4.2. Definition of public relations as a two-way form of communication

Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models typology of press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric have helped establish the two-way communication paradigm used to describe public relations. Scholars such as Theunissen and Noordin (2012) maintain that the two-way communication view of public relations promotes the dialogue (see Chapter 4) necessary for attaining a mutual understanding with stakeholders. The idea of two-way communication is to incorporate feedback and is geared towards fostering mutual respect between the organisation and stakeholders (Myers 2016). One of the proponents of the definition of public relations as a two-way form of communication is Fraser P Seitel. Seitel (2017:34) defines public relations as: *"*Public relations is a planned process to influence public opinion, through sound character and proper performance, based on mutually satisfactory two-way communication." The Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ 2022) offers the following definition of public relations as a two-way communication form:

> "The deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding and excellent communications between an organisation and its publics. Communications management shall be defined as the systematic planning, implementing, monitoring, and revision of all the channels of communication within an organisation, and between organisations."

This definition identifies public relations as a two-way communication process (PRINZ 2022). The two-way communication idea given to public relations is seen as a criticism of the management-function definition of public relations as the management-function definition evokes ideas of control and top-down, one-way communication (Myers 2016; Myers 2022). The popular view in support of two-way communication is that it can ensure an effective and satisfactory relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders (Huang 2004; Waters & Lemanski 2011; Wilcox et al. 2017; Myers 2022).

Discussed next are the definitions of public relations as centred on relationships.

2.4.3 Definitions of public relations centred on relationships

In recent times, the public relations field has been described and identified as focused on relationship-building (PRSA 2012; Smith 2012; Myers 2022). Waymer (2013:323) points out that the description of public relations as focused on relationships is to ensure that the relationship concept enables organisational advantage and also to improve the public-relations practice. The relationship-management focus is used to assess the value of public relations to organisations and their publics (Ki, Kim & Ledingham 2015:29). Ledingham (2015:19) articulates the view that the objective of public relations is to act as a link in helping an organisation attain its set goals while enabling benefit for both the organisation and stakeholders. Ledingham (2015:19), for example, provides a definition of public relations as revolving around the relationship concept by stating:

> "Public relations is the ethical and holistic management of organisation-public relationships focused over time on common interests and shared goals, in support of mutual understanding and benefit for organisations and their stakeholders."

The definition indicates a focus on a balanced approach to the relationship that should exist between the organisation and its stakeholders. This definition also puts the stakeholders as core to the success of public-relations efforts.

Seitel (2017:42) provides a relationship-management definition of public relations by stating that "public relations is all about managing relationships, crafting strategic stories, conveying expertise and solving organizational problems through strategic communications."

While the relationship perspective is important in defining public-relations practice, a strategic function that is focused on the performance of the public-relations role is imperative in the attainment of organisational goals. In the next section, public relations as a strategic function is discussed.

2.4.4 Definitions of public relations as a strategic function

Many scholars have argued that the focus of public relations on stakeholders and the co-creation of meaning and value have thrust public relations into taking a commanding role in pushing strategy at both practitioner and academic levels (Valentini, Kruckeberg & Starck 2012; Luoma-aho 2015). The concept "strategic" has been positively emphasised as significant to the practice of public relations because its application in public relations renders public relations valuable (Ruck 2018; Dottori, Seguin & O'Reilly 2018). The strategic management focus of public relations has received support from public relations bodies such as the United Kingdom's Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), which points to the role public relations plays in organisational success (CIPR 2018).

It is important that this study considers some definitions of public relations as a strategic function. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA 2012) definition below captures the essence of strategy to the public relations field:

> "Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics".

The concept of relationship is prominent in the PRSA definition and it is supposed to bring benefits to both the organisation and stakeholders (Wilcox et al. 2015). Seitel (2017:34) points out that public relations is a strategic function, as it is a process based on sound character and good performance planned to persuade stakeholders to achieve mutually beneficial two-way communication. In addition, Seitel (2017:34) explains that the elements "two-way communication" and "character and performance" indicate listening and effectiveness respectively. Both character and performance are influenced by ethics and proper action (Seitel 2017). Another definition of public relations as a strategic function is the International Public Relations Association's (IPRA 2019) definition provided below:

> "Public relations is a decision-making management practice tasked with building relationships and interests between organisations and their publics based on the delivery of information through trusted and ethical communication methods."

The two definitions of public relations as a strategic function provide the scope within which public relations is to be seen as strategic. Words such as "planned", "strategic communication", "two-way communication", "building relationships" and "ethical communication" imply strategic functions that can contribute to the attainment of organisational goals. Dottori et al. (2018:76) articulate that, for public relations to be successful, PR practitioners must integrate the strategic function into their roles in order to ensure they provide the leadership needed by the organisation to be successful.

The various public-relations definitions discussed above offer important perspectives on public relations. Having reviewed these definitions, this study adopts the IPRA public relations definition but expands the definition to include an emphasis on the African worldview. Therefore, the following working definition is proposed:

> "Public relations is a decision-making process incorporated into management practice designed to be culturally relevant, communalist and relational, with the objective of building relationships between organisations and stakeholders based on ethical and dialogic communication."

Even though the importance of public relations as a strategic function was discussed and justified, the need for public relations to have a strategic communication focus is equally important. In the next section, therefore, public relations as part of strategic communication is discussed.

2.5 PUBLIC RELATIONS AS STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Strategic communication has been applied as an instrument to assist in attaining organisational goals (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2013:74; Holtzhausen 2015:4; Van Ruler 2018:374). A good corporate reputation is a goal on the agenda of organisations; however, a crisis situation can jeopardise an organisation's reputation and its goals. The value of strategic communication to corporate goals is seen in its ability to ensure a good reputation for the organisation (Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2015).

Several definitions on strategic communication have been advanced by scholars across the fields of communication and management. The following are selected definitions of strategic communication.

Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2013:74) provide a holistic view of strategic communication by asserting that strategic communication is:

> "the practice of deliberate and purposive communication that a communication agent enacts in the public sphere on behalf of a communication entity to reach set goals."

Other scholars hold the position that strategic communication is a process. For example, Falkheimer and Heide (2014b) and Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015) describe strategic communication as targeted and formal communication processes that are planned and implemented for the attainment of organisational goals. Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015:4) assert that:

> "the strategic communication process typically is a communication process that follows from an organisation's strategic plan and focuses on the whole communication in enabling the organisation's strategic goals and objectives."

A review of the definitions shows that strategic communication is important, especially in the attainment of organisational goals. Van Ruler (2018:372) points out that, if the intent of the communication of an organisation advances the mission of an organisation, then it is strategic.

In the section that follows, the role of public relations in strategic communication is discussed.

2.5.1 The role of public relations in strategic communication

On the notion that public relations can be considered as a part of strategic communication or is strategic communication, it is imperative to point to the position of Macnamara (2012). Macnamara (2012:208) explains that it is incumbent on public relations to be positioned appropriately in order to satisfy ethical and social equity objectives. The essence of public relations in terms of strategic communication therefore must not be seen to be only focused on the attainment of organisational goals. Such a perception and identity will only render public relations as asymmetrical and controlling.

Several protagonists of excellence theory and the two–way symmetrical model in public relations argue that "strategy" and being "strategic" not only allows but requires organisations to consider the views and interests of their publics and accommodate them in a "win-win" way. In situations where strategic communication is viewed negatively, it is as a result of its application to satisfy organisational interests (Dulek & Campbell 2015:124; Toledano 2018:133).

The new communication freedom enjoyed by online users on new media and social media positions strategic communication as useful to the practice of public relations (Kent & Li 2020:1; González-Padilla & Tortolero-Blanco 2020:120). If the organisation–stakeholder relationship is geared towards a win–win strategy where the interests of both stakeholders

and organisation are to be satisfied, strategic communication, as suggested by Van Ruler (2018:378), can serve a good purpose in the attainment of organisational goals.

As advanced strongly by Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015:4), strategic communication should be seen and practised as a communication process that is part of the strategic plan of the organisation. This means that key actors in the organisation must encourage the use of strategic communication in all spheres of communication processes of the organisation. Not to do so will mean that the strategic plan of the organisation is not supported. Additionally, it will mean that the organisation is not committed to fulfilling its mission.

A strategic communication approach can enhance the understanding of information and be valuable to relationship-building with stakeholders (Heide, Von Platen, Simonsson & Falkheimer 2018:465; Van Ruler 2018:379). This means that, in situations such as a crisis, strategic communication must be a top priority in the organisation. Based on the earlier point that strategic communication is core to the strategic plan and considers the interest of stakeholders, any information meant for stakeholders that is executed in a strategic communication manner will be understood, accurately retained and appropriately applied (O'Connor & Shumate 2018:401). Furthermore, the implementation of strategic communication by an organisation in a crisis can help the organisation succeed in attaining its goals (Lwin, Lu, Sheldenkar & Schulz 2018:17).

This section on strategic communication has highlighted the need for organisations to incorporate strategic communication when dealing with stakeholders. The concept of stakeholders is important for the attainment of public relations and organisational goals. The next section discusses the stakeholder concept.

2.6 PUBLIC RELATIONS STAKEHOLDERS

Public relations' contribution to successful outcomes of organisational goals is assessed largely on the basis of building successful relationships (Smith 2012; Ferguson 2018; Cheng 2018). The expectation is that public relations can, through communication, provide the

organisation with support in developing and maintaining mutually beneficial relations between the organisation and stakeholders. Clearly, stakeholder engagement is core to public-relations practice (Richardson & Hinton 2015:1).

In the section that follows, the concept of stakeholder in the context of public relations is discussed.

2.6.1. Concept of stakeholders in the context of public relations

The word "stakeholder" originates in political theory as a result of the debate that accompanied the corporate governance thought of the 1980s (Tench & Yeomans 2006:241). The debate called for organisations to be more responsive to the interests of shareholders (Tench & Yeomans 2006:241). The concept of stakeholder first appeared in the management literature in 1963 (Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar & De Colle 2010). The term was applied to refer to a particular group that is supposed to be the direct target of the activities of an organisation (Freeman et al. 2010:31). The idea of a stakeholder was conceptualised for the purposes of organising information seen as relevant to strategic planning (Freeman, Phillips & Sisodia 2020:214).

The stakeholder concept has since its origin been defined in many ways (Slabbert 2012:6). Stakeholder as a concept nowadays conveys the thought of individuals or groups who have vested interests in an organisation's activities expressed through interactive communication and have certain expectations of the organisation in terms of performance (Newsom, Turk & Kruckeberg 2013:88; Tench & Waddington 2021:75). The concept of stakeholder hence connotes an active participant of an activity. Furthermore, the stakeholder concept maintains that the actions of organisations directly or indirectly affect both internal and external stakeholders. On the basis of organisations affecting these stakeholders, the stakeholders therefore have a genuine claim on the organisation (Goyal 2020:2).

It is important to now properly situate the words "stakeholder" and "publics" as they have been used interchangeably in the literature.

2.6.1.1 Stakeholders and publics

Slabbert (2012:8) opines that the "publics" characterisation suggests a reactive approach. Newsom et al. (2013) contend that, while publics as used in public relations emerged to create a distinction between passive and active audiences, the description of stakeholder provides the view that stakeholder as a concept is more proactive in nature. The literature indicates that the concept of publics is applicable when the relationship between an organisation and stakeholders is not managed well (Tench & Yeomans 2006; Tench & Waddington 2021).

In view of the aforementioned on the meanings of public and stakeholder, this study adopts the concept of stakeholder instead of publics as it conveys the sense of participation and active involvement in the activities of an organisation in contrast to the concept of public (Newsom et al. 2013:88; Tench & Waddington 2021:75). Additionally, crisis management and communication require a proactive approach (Seeger et al. 2007; Frandsen & Johansen 2011; Fearn-Banks 2016; Coombs 2019). If people who are affected by the actions of an organisation are treated as publics instead of stakeholders, crisis-management efforts may lack a strategic focus. The stakeholder concept suggests ongoing and existing relationships and as crisis communication involves information exchange and interaction before and during a crisis (Fearn-Banks 2010:2; Abramenka 2013:12), the adoption of the stakeholder concept for this study is justified.

2.6.1.2 Components of the stakeholder concept

It is important to identify the components of a stakeholder. In the early 2000s, Freeman (2010:25) asserts that any assessment of a stakeholder must consider all internal and external stakeholders in the position to affect and be affected by the organisation. Freeman et al. (2010) identify the government, local competitors, media, employees, special interest groups, environmentalists and suppliers. The identification of various stakeholders that affect or are affected by an organisation is an important undertaking that must be given good thought and consideration (Tench & Waddington 2021:76).

As this study explores the views of public-relations practitioners across varied areas of

expertise and industries, the stakeholder group identification is broad rather than specific. Since the industries include financial services, telecommunication, education, sanitation, tax and revenue and health, an approach to stakeholder categorisation that is broad and not narrowly defined to refer to a particular industry is appropriate and relevant for this study.

The discussion of the concept of stakeholder is quite emphatic on the importance of stakeholders in the attainment of organisational objectives. Public-relations practitioners implement a number of roles to help organisations achieve set objectives. Facilitating communication between organisations and stakeholders, problem-solving, monitoring and evaluation are some of the important roles public-relations practitioners perform for their organisations. A discussion on the roles public-relations practitioners perform is important for this study, as it helps in understanding roles associated with the public-relations function and how strategic the role is in the attainment of the goals of organisations. In the next section, different public relations roles are now discussed.

2.7 PUBLIC RELATIONS ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

Public-relations practitioners adopt a number of roles to assist organisations with achieving set objectives by performing particular functions. Message development and dissemination, problem-solving, crisis communication (which is discussed in-depth in Chapter 3), monitoring and evaluation; stakeholder engagement and stakeholder communication are some of the important functions that public-relations practitioners perform for their organisations.

2.7.1 Contemporary public relations roles

Roles refer to the collection of daily activities that people perform (Ngondo & Klyueva 2020:4). The different public-relations functions provide an understanding of how public relations functions in an organisation, as well as the activities practitioners are expected to perform. These functions contribute to the production of the right public-relations campaigns or programmes and influence strategic planning, bottom-line objectives and organisational goals

(Beurer Zullig, Fieseler & Meckel 2009; Lattimore et al. 2012).

A review of the literature on public relations roles and functions shows that modern public relations cover a spectrum of roles that include managing relationships, facilitating communication, designing strategic stories, using strategic communication in advising and solving organisational problems and online reputation management (Neill & Moody 2015; Seitel 2017; Ngondo & Klyueva 2020).

Contemporary public-relations practice largely centres on technical and managerial roles for the fulfilment of public relations and organisational objectives, which are dominant in public-relations practice (Vieira & Grantham 2013:60). While the public-relations practitioner as a technician creates and disseminates messages, the manager task of the practitioner is focused on problem-solving (Vieira & Grantham 2013:60). The practitioner as a manager also conducts formative and evaluative research and this entails the proactive activity of environmental scanning for the strategic management of the relationships between the organisation and its publics (Nxumalo 2015: 42). Practitioners in the role of managers are more likely to participate in the decision-making processes of the organisation (Nxumalo 2015:42; Anan-Bossman 2018:247-260).

2.7.2 Public-relations practitioner roles in Ghana

Public-relations practice in Ghana, particularly in the financial services sector, involves both technician and managerial roles (Anani-Bossman 2018:147). Ghanaian practitioners in this sector perform technician roles such as visitations to media houses, organising press soirees (events) and sponsorship programmes for media houses. Managerial roles performed include strategic planning, advising management on operational and behavioural issues that can degenerate into crises, and developing and implementing a communication strategy (Anani-Bossman 2018:243-260).

As arguments by Anani-Bossman (2018) are limited to the financial services sector of Ghana, it will be useful for this study to also explore the views of practitioners across many sectors

and industries other than the financial sector regarding the technician and managerial roles they perform. More specifically, the study will interrogate technician and managerial activities implemented by public-relations practitioners in the management of crises on social media.

Crisis events can affect the relationship an organisation has with stakeholders and negatively impact the organisation's reputation (Dutta & Pullig 2011:1281-1282; Claeys & Cauberghe 2012:83; Lahti 2015:13; Coombs 2019:19-20).

Communication can assist organisations in managing crisis situations, which must be positioned to be proactive and results-driven (Zaremba 2010; Coombs & Holladay 2011; Frandsen & Johansen 2011; Coombs 2019; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger 2019).

In the next section the concepts of relationship management, communication management and reputation management and how these concepts are applicable to the study are explained.

2.8 THE CONCEPTS OF RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT, COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

The various functions public-relations practitioners perform are expected to contribute to the attainment of organisational goals. These functions must ensure positive outcomes in terms of organisation-stakeholder relationships, communication effectiveness and reputation enhancement. It is important that relationship management, communication management and reputation management are discussed and contextualised.

2.8.1 Relationship management

Relationship management is an important topic in public relations and other disciplines, such as marketing, psychology, politics and customer service (Grunig 2011; Chandler 2014; Labarca & Ampuero Ruiz 2021). In recent times, the concept of relationship management has become a central focus for public-relations research, with an increased call for the public-relations practice to encourage relationship management (Waters & Bortree 2012; Avidar,

Ariel, Malka & Levy 2014; Ledingham & Hung-Baesecke 2015; Labarca & Ampuero Ruiz 2021).

The building of relationships with stakeholders is one of the key objectives of public relations, to create and maintain a favourable image of the organisation (Grunig 2011; Global Alliance 2013a; Archer & Harrigan 2016; Ferguson 2018). In this regard, Ledingham (2015:19) articulates that the organisation-stakeholder relationship will be effective if public relations is used to ensure that the interests of the organisation and stakeholders are balanced to benefit both the organisation and stakeholders. Public-relations practitioners must work towards facilitating organisational engagement with stakeholders by promoting dialogue, accommodative strategies, consultation and encouraging the need for mutually beneficial relationships (Cornelissen 2014:325; Cheng 2018:127).

In the light of the above, it is strikingly optimistic for public-relations practice to be viewed as a discipline that needs to make relationship management a central focus. In this regard, the progressive assertion by Willis (2015:682) that public relations must move away from perception management to relationship management is useful and relevant.

While in this study the researcher recognises that relationship management is strategic to public-relations practice, the researcher argues in this thesis that the relationship management concept can only be relevant to the organisation-stakeholder relationship in crisis situations on social media, if relationship elements such as openness, trust, commitment and collaboration are integrated into an organisation's communication strategy, as explained in more detail in Chapter 4.

As communication is an important topic in this study, it is essential that the concept of communication management is discussed next.

2.8.2 Communication management

Communication is of strategic importance to organisations to build relationships and create a dialogue between organisations and stakeholders (Holtzhausen, Fullerton, Lewis & Shipka

2021:69). The important topic of communication management is seen as key to strategic communication (see Section 2.4), which can impact positively on organisation-stakeholder relationships.

Communication management legitimises the recognition of practitioners as communication experts by superiors, colleagues and subordinates (Tindale & Holtzhausen 2011:89). Additionally, contemporary arguments on communication management include the view that it positions communication managers as communication problem-solvers and providers of counsel to top management (Zerfass et al. 2021). Also, communication management allows practitioners to engage in environmental scanning so as to counsel management on stakeholder behaviour and expectations (Tindale & Holtzhausen 2011:89). In this regard, Taljaard and De Beer (2019:6) posit that it is therefore imperative that organisations integrate communication management at the strategic level for the purposes of responsible organisational behaviour.

From the above and other arguments made by researchers and scholars in the communication science field, the concept of communication management must be influenced and driven by excellence in communication. The excellence theory is widely discussed as providing interesting perspectives on communication management. The descriptive and prescriptive role of public relations in strategic management is a strong theme in excellence theory (Tindale & Holtzhausen 2011; Steyn & De Beer 2012; Meintjes 2012; Kim, Hung-Baesecke, Yang & Grunig 2013; Smith 2020). In this study, communication management is examined within the scope of strategic communication and dialogic communication, which are both relevant to relationship management and reputation management. As such, they constitute important discussion points for communication management. Additionally, the scope will include the role of the public-relations practitioner in describing and prescribing meaningful communication solutions that obtain the endorsement of top management. This study offers a different perspective on communication management, as it delved into the subject of crisis communication and social-media communication and the expected role of practitioners in improving communication efficiency and effectiveness.

As the focal point of this study is crisis communication on social media, the conceptualisation of a framework for this study must include communication and the role it can play in the public relations effectiveness of public-relations practitioners in Ghana.

2.8.3 Reputation management

It is essential that organisations take appropriate steps to align their mission to the beliefs of stakeholders, since the perceptions of stakeholders, if tracked, can provide organisations valuable insights into how to align their mission and goal to stakeholder expectations (Carroll 2013; Van den Heever 2018).

Without a doubt, the deliberate and non-deliberate actions of organisations can impact the reputation of organisations (Coenen, Von Felten & Schmid 2010:259). For example, media activities, stakeholder activism and competition for visibility by organisations have in some ways put organisations under pressure in the management of reputation (Romenti et al. 2015). It is for this reason that organisations must seek to strategise in managing their reputations.

2.8.3.1 Defining reputation

In contemporary public-relations practice, public relations are heavily focused on reputation management (Hogan 2011; Şirzad 2022). In some definitions of public relations, public relations is described as focusing on enhancing the reputation of organisations by seeking to earn the understanding and influence the behaviour of stakeholders (Theaker 2012; Şirzad 2022). The focus on reputation management in the public relations field could be attributed to its impact on organisation-stakeholder relationships. For example, Sizad (2022) articulates the view that reputation has become important because organisations are confronted with the need to shape stakeholder perceptions, manage crises, and create and develop a positive image. Although the concept of reputation has been variously defined, there is no one definition that is accepted as fully describing reputation (Lange, Lee & Dai 2011; Tkalac

Verčič, Verčič & Žnidar 2016).

For example, some scholars describe reputation as revolving around perceptual identity, which cannot be imposed but earned (Romenti 2012; Blass & Laird 2015; Murtarelli, Romenti & Carroll 2021). Another view on reputation is that it represents a collective of an organisation's past actions and performance that determine the value multiple stakeholders ascribe to organisational outcomes (Cornelissen 2011; Barnett & Pollock 2014; Tench & Yeomans 2017; Tench & Waddington 2021). Huang-Horowitz (2015:346) describes reputation as referring to perceptions that people have about an entity (for example, an individual or organisation). Reputation in the context of an organisation is associated with the acts of the organisation and the values stakeholders use in assessing the appropriateness of the behaviour of the organisation (Tench & Yeomans 2017:215). Tench and Waddington (2021:247-248) describe reputation as representing the activities and practices of an organisation in terms of its relations and promises to stakeholders.

Despite the various viewpoints and definitions of the concept of reputation, a number of notable features that can be associated with reputation are discussed. First, reputation involves the experiences of stakeholders of an organisation, its products or services, communication and behaviour (Fombrun 2012; Tench & Yeomans 2017; Tench & Yeomans 2021). Second, the financial performance of organisations can strongly influence perceptions they form about an organisation (Walter 2014; Tench & Yeomans 2017). Thirdly, reputation is largely based on the views of stakeholders (Huang-Horowitz 2015; Tench & Yeomans 2017; Tench & Yeomans 2021). Lastly, the media and other purveyors of information can have an impact on reputation (Tlou & Govender 2015; Van den Bogaerd & Aerts 2015; Murtarelli et al. 2021).

As discussed above, reputation is important and it could be an important organisational asset that can enhance organisational-stakeholder relationships. The next section looks briefly into the role of reputation in the attainment of organisational goals.

2.8.3.2 The role of reputation management in the attainment of organisational goals

The best tool available to any organisation for achieving corporate objectives and concretising credibility is an excellent reputation perceived on values such as reliability, credibility, social responsibility and trustworthiness (Tench & Yeomans 2017:215). The successful implementation of operations to sell an idea, product or service, attracting qualified human resources, governmental and community support and the patronage of a target market is driven largely by an established organisational reputation. Even though stakeholders have a strong role in determining organisational reputation, organisations can through strategic means shape stakeholders' perception of the reputation of an organisation. Many organisations are determined to create a strong and positive reputation, since it is a strategic way of remaining competitive, attracting the most qualified workforce and also gaining influence with stakeholders (Tench & Yeomans 2017::215).

In spite of the efforts by organisations in establishing and maintaining a positive reputation, crisis events can negatively impact the reputation of an organisation. A crisis can tarnish the reputation of an organisation and make it lose its competitive status, stakeholders' trust and loyalty and revenue (Aula 2010; Coombs 2019). Also, many organisations face the daunting task of not knowing how to adequately manage their reputations. This is because organisations have the challenging task of how to manage the reality of stakeholders with respect to credibility, competence, reliability and trustworthiness (Helm, Liehr-Gobbers & Storck 2011; Tench & Yeomans 2017). As already highlighted in this section, the experiences of stakeholders of organisations and its products are critical in determining the reputation of organisations. Thus, in crisis situations (see Chapter 3), it is important that reputation-enhancing activities such as crisis communication are performed so that stakeholder experiences of organisations are positively influenced. This study views reputation management as including activities such as crisis communication, which, if applied strategically, can help organisations protect their reputations.

In recent times, the use of social media has introduced a new challenge to organisations in the management of reputation. Consequently, the next section addresses the issue of

internet/online platforms and reputation management.

2.8.3.3 Online reputation management

The era of social media, as discussed in the next chapter, has allowed stakeholders to be the originators of content that potentially can damage the reputation of organisations. The experiences of stakeholders can trigger their reputational opinions of organisations (Laaksonen et al. 2012; Coombs 2015; Coombs 2019). This means that organisations must extend their reputation management activities to online platforms. As reputation includes perceptions of stakeholders about organisations (Horowitz 2015:346; Zimand-Sheiner, Levy & Eckhaus 2021:1), it is important that organisations deploy online tools that allow them to influence the perceptions of stakeholders.

When deploying internet tools for the management of their online presence, organisations are expected to be strategic in their online behaviour in order to protect their reputations. Online platforms can yield significant reputational gains for organisations. For example, through the use of internet tools such as social media, stakeholders can access real-time data and get interactive with organisations (Veil et al. 2011; Schniederjans, Cao & Schniederjans 2013; Wang 2016; Fearn-Banks 2017; Kim et al. 2022).

The researcher advances the position that it is imperative that organisations have a presence on social media and be active in engaging with stakeholders with content generated by both the organisation and stakeholders. It is, for example, argued in Chapter 3 that an effective organisational social-media strategy for crisis communication can foster positive organisation-stakeholder relationships and enhance an organisation's reputation.

To conclude the discussion on reputation management in this section, it should be noted that public-relations practitioners are expected to play important roles in reputation management. The ability of practitioners in using crisis-communication management strategies is critical in ensuring that the reputation of their organisations are not destroyed or experience negative outcomes. In Chapter 4, reputation will further be discussed within the context of social media.

2.9 SUMMARY

In this chapter, public-relations definitions, roles, and history and how public relations compares with other disciplines were explained. The chapter also addressed the role of strategic communication in public relations. The argument was made that, for public-relations activities to be meaningful, it is important that an approach to strategic communication is adopted. The chapter further discussed the concepts of stakeholder relationship management, communication management and reputation management. The chapter concluded by justifying the reputation management of the online presence of organisations, especially in the era of social media.

The next chapter, Chapter 3, is focused on the concept of social-media crisis communication and its relevance in enabling the building of stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis.

CHAPTER 3: **SOCIAL-MEDIA CRISIS COMMUNICATION AS AN INSTRUMENT TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER A CRISIS**

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2, public relations and its associated concepts were discussed extensively. Furthermore, the relevance of public relations in terms of relationship management, communication management and reputation management was highlighted. This chapter now provides an explanation of the concepts of crisis communication, crisis management, crisis preparedness, internal and external communication, leadership in crisis communication, social media, social-media crisis communication, using social media as an organisational communication tool, public relation's role in social-media crisis communication and the strategic and dialogic approaches to the use of social media for crisis communication. All these concepts are essential to relationship management, communication management and the reputation-management objectives of organisations.

3.2. CRISIS COMMUNICATION

The section delves into crisis communication by providing the various scholarly positions on crisis communication and its relevance to the crisis-management process of organisations.

3.2.1 Defining a crisis

Several definitions have been proffered on the meaning of crisis in the context of organisations (Coombs, Holladay & Tachkova 2019; Bukar, Jabar, Sidi, Nor, Abdullah & Othman, M. 2020; Trevithick 2020). The concept of crisis is broadly associated with disastrous situations in that a crisis creates negative outcomes (Coombs 2015b; Fearn-Banks 2016; Coombs et al. 2019).

There are diverse positions when defining a crisis. These positions reflect either an organisational crisis or crisis event context. Both contexts are explained below:

- ***Organisational crisis definition***

The organisational crisis-centred definitions show the organisation as the entity that suffers the negative consequences of a crisis (McClelland Jr 2015; Fearn-Banks 2016; Coombs et al. 2019).

Snoeijers and Poels (2018:66) define an organisational crisis as "referring to a situation when stakeholders have the perception that an organisation is incapable of meeting stakeholder expectations". The organisation provides little information concerning the crisis, which can work against the reputation of the organisation. A crisis potentially can draw the attention of other stakeholders and the media to the organisation and this attention on the organisation can aggravate the crisis (Snoeijers & Poels 2018:66).

Coombs, Holladay and Tachkova (2019) offer quite a profound definition of crisis by suggesting dire consequences as a manifestation of a crisis. They define a crisis in the context of an organisation as "situations that affect the relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders" (Coombs et al. 2019:31). In other words, a crisis situation can violate the expectations of stakeholders, affect the operations of the organisation and damage the organisation's reputation (Coombs et al. 2019:31).

Ulmer Sellnow and Seeger (2019:37) define an organisational crisis as "a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and simultaneously present an organisation with both opportunities for and threats to its high-priority goals".

All these definitions point to a crisis potentially harming the relationship stakeholders have with an organisation.

- ***Crisis event definition***

The concept of a crisis has been described generally as unpredictable and dangerous (Baron 2010; Fearn–Banks 2011; Austin, Lin & Jin 2012; Coombs 2019; Gigliotti 2020). McClelland Jr (2015:15) states that a crisis is an event that is uncertain and leads to a challenging

situation within a short period. He adds that crisis events grab the attention of organisational leaders for longer periods of time and take away a focus on organisational operations.

Coombs (2019:19) defines a crisis as "the perceived violation of salience stakeholder expectations that can create negative outcomes for stakeholders and/or the organisation." A crisis situation can upset stakeholders and put in danger the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Coombs 2019:19).

Rauh's (2022:968) definition appropriately summarises the position on the dire effects of a crisis on organisations as he asserts that a crisis "involves high levels of uncertainty and urgency. Where low levels of information combine with high time pressure, even the most well-meaning crisis manager may not enact the most appropriate and proportional countermeasures."

The unpredictability of a crisis potentially can lead to the emergence of issues, and these issues can have lives of their own and gain strength (Austin, Lin & Jin 2012:191; Gigliotti 2020:560).

Both sets of definitions (namely, the organisational crisis definition and crisis event definition) offer insights into the disastrous nature of a crisis. Crises potentially are dangerous and negative. The use of words such as "threats", "uncertainty", and "negative outcomes" connotes an occurrence that is serious, as there are possibilities that both the organisation and stakeholders can suffer harm. In addition, a crisis also has the peculiar characteristics of inevitability and being unavoidable. If the crisis occurrence is attributable to a natural disaster, then there is no chance of prevention (Ndlela 2019:7; Coombs 2019:18).

Given the impact of a crisis, organisations are usually placed in vulnerable positions. However, organisations have the opportunity to use the crisis situation to build trust with stakeholders (Gigliotti 2019).

The next section explores the important subject of crisis types in order to appreciate and apply appropriate communication strategies required to manage different crisis situations.

3.2.2 Types of crisis

Crisis researchers have developed typologies to characterise crises and potential crises that organisations may face. Crisis situations organisations may face have been classified into types (Fuller & La Sala 2021). For example, Coombs (2019:20-21) offers two categories of crisis, namely, an operational crisis and a paracrisis. An operational crisis involves the complete disruption or partial disruption of the operations of an organisation. Computer system breakdown, workplace violence, product recall, disease outbreaks, industrial accident, malfeasance, mismanagement and natural disasters are all examples of operational crises (Coombs 2019:20-21; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger 2019:40-41).

Coombs (2019) points out that, on the other hand, a paracrisis looks like a crisis but it does not affect the operations of the organisation. A paracrisis situation is rather a warning signal and if it is not managed well it can deteriorate into an operational crisis. Examples are negative word of mouth on social media (eWOM), stakeholder boycotts, negative media coverage, a government investigation and unsubstantiated rumours.

Ulmer et al. (2019:40-41) categorise crises into two, namely, intentionally caused crises and crises caused by natural, uncontrollable factors. Intentional crises include examples such as terrorism, sabotage, workplace violence, poor employee relationships, hostile takeovers and unethical leadership (Ulmer et al. 2019). Examples of crises that are categorised as natural and uncontrollable are natural disasters, disease outbreaks, unforeseeable technical interactions, product failure and downturns in the economy (Ulmer et al. 2019:40-41).

However, Adebayo (2017:50) points out that each crisis type has a peculiar impact on an organisation and its stakeholders on the basis of how the organisation manages the crisis. The classification enables the organisation to determine how to respond to a crisis.

The review of the different crisis types shows that classifying crises is an important exercise for effective crisis management. Even though there are other crisis types not discussed in this section of the study, the review shows organisations and stakeholders are confronted with crisis situations that require communication actions for the management of the crisis. Crisis

types on social media have been researched and discussed. It is important for this study to provide views and the position of the study on social media crisis types (crises types on social media are discussed in the section on social media).

The position of this study is that, even though there are different typologies of crises (see Coombs 2019; Ulmer et al. 2019), Coombs' (2019) categorisation of operational and paracrisis provides a good approach to developing communication strategies that can be applied at the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis stages. The literature review provides a good foundation for a key objective of the study, which involves exploring how public-relations practitioners in Ghana manage crises on social media.

It is worth repeating that crisis communication is an important area of strategic communication (see sections 2.5 and 2.5.1 in Chapter 2) which puts a demand on organisations to act in order to repair or restore the corporate image. The expectation in times of crisis is for an organisation stricken by a crisis to handle any negative occurrences (Murphy 2015).

In the next section, a definition of crisis communication for this study is adopted.

3.2.3 Adopting a definition of crisis communication

How an organisation uses communication before, during and after a crisis is key in determining the organisation's ability to recover from the crisis (Zaremba 2010:36; Coombs 2019:22; Ulmer et al. 2019:78). In crisis situations, when an organisation's image, brand or reputation is challenged, crisis communication is required and channelled through various media to acknowledge and provide feedback on the crisis (Fearn-Banks 2011; Coombs 2019). Coombs (2019:22) asserts that crisis communication is core to crisis management and articulates further that, when crisis communication efforts are weak, the whole crisis-management programme becomes ineffective.

It has been argued that, for stakeholders to understand the crisis communication of an organisation and deem it relevant, the organisation must be accurate with its crisis communication (Ulmer et al. 2019:83). Communication failures during crisis situations pose

a danger to stakeholders (Lanard & Sandman 2014; Levinson 2014; McKay 2015; Ndlela 2019). The key goals of any crisis communication include communicating quickly, consistently and accurately (Heath 2010; Lahti 2015; Coombs 2019).

Earlier definitions of crisis communication focused on a reactive communication strategy response targeted at minimising damage to the reputation of an organisation in crisis (Williams & Treadaway 1992; Seeger 2006). However, these definitions and their applicability lack a pre-crisis strategy. The communication strategy is limited to crisis and post-crisis periods. Other schools of thought on crisis communication hold that the approach to communication in crisis times must be comprehensive, proactive and holistic (Frandsen & Johansen 2011; Fearn-Banks 2016; Ulmer et al. 2019).

These definitions encompass pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis approaches to communication. Unlike earlier crisis-communication definitions, current definitions include communication approaches targeted at recognising the communication needs of stakeholders.

Coombs (2010:20) asserts that crisis communication is "the collection, processing, and disseminating of information required to address a crisis situation". The act of communication as described in the definition is triggered only when the crisis hits an organisation. The definition, however, fails to provide a comprehensive position on pre-crisis and post-crisis-communication planning. The definition is also inadequate in helping an organisation to strategically use communication as a key element in crisis management. Even though the use of the word "processing" in Coombs's (2010) definition connotes purposive packaging after assembling all relevant information associated with a crisis, the definition does not provide a proactive framework on strategic crisis communication that is positioned to satisfy crisis victims and stakeholders. Coombs's (2010) definition falls short of addressing concerns raised by researchers such as Du Plessis (2018:2), that crisis communication researchers "have not adequately treated the topics of stakeholder support and relationships in crisis communication."

Zimmerman (2013:188), on the other hand, asserts that crisis communication involves the "dissemination of messages implemented over a period in dynamic and enduring situations

targeted at different stakeholders of an organisation". The definition suggests a strategic approach to communication as the communication must be scheduled and made available to different stakeholders who may have different communication needs.

Another scholar, Abramenka (2013:12), opines that crisis communication involves "an exchange of information or interaction between an organisation and its stakeholders before, during and after the occurrence of a crisis". The emphasis on information exchange and interaction in the definition is relevant in the era of social media, as stakeholders expect the organisation to interact with them (Roshan et al. 2016).

The view of Jury (2014:18) on crisis communication points to "an action geared towards recovery from a crisis event meant to restore an organisation's reputation". Jury (2014:18) articulates that crisis communication, as a discipline, "focuses on the necessary communicative acts that can occur before, during and after a crisis to enable successful recovery from crisis and minimise potential damage to the intangible asset of good reputation". However, this definition does not make any reference to stakeholders. The focus largely is rather on communication strategies geared towards restoring the reputation of the organisation and it fails to effectively highlight how the information and communication needs of stakeholders will be addressed. This position of Jury (2014) is also not consistent with the view on making stakeholders legitimate partners in the crisis communication process by adopting a proactive two-way symmetric crisis communication process (Adebayo 2017; 57). It is evident that Jury's (2014) definition of crisis communication does not provide public-relations practitioners with a good framework as required for the effective management of crisis events.

Crisis communication has also been described as "an ongoing communication process beginning from the preparation for crises to the resolution of the crisis and learning from it" (Lahti 2015:25). Lahti's definition contains the idea of a crisis also serving as a lesson to the organisation which is stricken by a crisis. It can be deduced from the definition that the crisis communication strategy is targeted at ensuring the protection of organisational reputation.

In this regard, Fearn-Banks (2016:2) explains crisis communication as a communication plan

that is designed to enable organisations to manage potential crisis situations and actual crisis events; and involves gathering and disseminating crisis-related information to stakeholders. The core focus in the definition of Fearn-Banks (2016) is communication preparedness at pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis phases. Fearn-Banks's (2016) crisis communication definition satisfies the definition of public relations as a relationship-management concept popularised by Ledingham (2015), which was referred to in Section 2.4.3 of Chapter 2. The crisis communication definition of Fearn-Banks (2016) offers a more comprehensive insight into the application of communication in the management of a crisis than Coombs' (2010) definition of crisis communication.

Coombs (2019:13) provides an interesting perspective on crisis communication by defining it as "an intervention designed to lessen the negative effects of a crisis for stakeholders and the organisation in crisis". This definition shows that both the organisation and stakeholders must derive some positive outcomes from the crisis-communication efforts of the organisation.

The various crisis-communication definitions discussed above point to the different positions held by theorists and practitioners towards the management of crises. All the above-mentioned definitions of crisis communication are clear about two objectives, namely, restoration of organisational reputation and a sense of responsibility towards stakeholders affected by the crisis.

After reviewing the definitions, it is evident that the dominant communication strategy to deal with crises has been one-way communication. As this study also considers stakeholders as important partners in the crisis communication process, especially with the increasing influence of social media and the ability of stakeholders to influence the crisis-communication discourse, the study proposes a crisis-communication working definition that recognises the role of stakeholders. Fearn-Banks's (2016) definition is quite comprehensive but it is weak on encouraging a two-way communication approach. The study therefore adopts Fearn-Banks's (2016) definition but expands the definition to include a two-way communication emphasis. Hence, the following working definition for crisis communication is proposed:

> "…a communication plan that is designed to enable organisations to manage potential crisis situations and actual crisis events; and involves gathering and disseminating crisis-related information to stakeholders and also creating interactive crisis communication opportunities between the organisation and stakeholders."

In this section, the various definitions on crisis communication were highlighted and discussed. A working crisis communication definition for the study was also proposed. Having discussed and described the concept of crisis communication, the concept of crisis management is introduced and explained.

3.3 CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Crisis events can happen to any corporate entity, profit or non-profit (Ulmer 2012; Verhoeven, Tench, Zerfass, Moreno & Vercic: 2014; Tomastik, Strohmandlb & Ceche 2015; Zhu, Anagondahalli & Zhang 2017; Lee & Atkinson 2019). The expectation of any organisation in a crisis is to resolve the crisis situation as quickly as possible.

The way a crisis is handled and managed contributes immensely to the restoration of normality and reputation to the organisation (Zuzak & Konigova 2009:50-55). The subject of crisis management is an important theme in the ecosystem of crisis. Effective crisis management potentially can strengthen stakeholders' trust and enhance the reputation of organisations (Petkeviciene 2014:4531; Motarjemi 2014:1053). Any discussion of the concept of a crisis or crisis communication will be limited in scope if the concept of crisis management is not highlighted (Hetu, Gupta, Vu Tan 2018:16). In the next subsection, the various schools of thought on the meaning of crisis management are discussed, critiqued and analysed. Also, the position of the study on crisis management is explained.

3.3.1 Defining crisis management

Eminent crisis communications scholar Timothy Coombs's description of crisis management offers an insight into activities an organisation has to implement in order to manage a crisis.

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Coombs (2019) asserts that "crisis management involves four connected factors: prevention, preparation, response and revision." This definition reveals two strategic actions available to the organisation in crisis, namely, proactive and reactive strategies. Prevention and preparation connote proactive measures (for example, issues detection, crisis plan and crisis team) that put the organisation in readiness to control a crisis (Swart 2010; Coombs 2014; DiStaso Vafeiadis & Amaral 2015; Coombs 2019; Ulmer et al. 2019). The other aspects, such as response and revision, point to the organisation's reaction to the crisis event and include actions such as the use of communication to manage the crisis situation and lesson opportunities that can improve the organisation's reputation and relationship with stakeholders (Swart 2010; David 2011; Bernstein: 2011; Van der Meer et al. 2017; Coombs 2019).

The concept of crisis management is explained as involving a number of actions decided upon to prepare, respond to and minimise a crisis event. The core objective is to reduce the effect of a crisis (Hetu, Gupta, Vu Tan 2018:16). However, Hetu et al.'s (2018) views on crisis management do not emphasise the aspect of prevention. Rather it strongly emphasises the crisis stage. But like Coombs (2015), Hetu et al. (2018) acknowledge the important role preparation plays in managing a crisis situation.

In this section, crisis preparedness, crisis communication strategy and crisis communication's role in organisational reputation, internal and external communication, and the role of leadership in crisis communication are now discussed as key components of crisis management.

3.3.2 Crisis preparedness

The management of a crisis can be done effectively if the organisation knows what to do in the event of a crisis. This involves having a crisis plan, crisis team, monitoring mechanisms and the allocation of resources. All these measures are pre-crisis activities and, if properly harnessed and utilised, can enable the organisation to mitigate incidents of false information

and the spread of rumours (Comunello, Parisi, Lauciani, Magnoni & Casarotti 2016:1; Derani & Naidu 2016:652; Tampere, Tampere & Luoma-Aho 2016:416).

Crisis preparedness can enable the organisation to minimise the impact of a crisis (Selart & Johansen 2013:100; Coombs 2019:58). In view of this, some scholars have argued that crisis preparedness must be approached from 'present crisis preparedness' and 'prospective crisis preparedness' positions (Carmeli & Schaubroeck 2008:184; Getchell & Sellnow 2016:599; Ghaderi, King & Hall 2021:294-295).

Present crisis preparedness involves the ability of the organisation to manage a crisis situation that has just hit the organisation. A present crisis preparedness approach means that the organisation knows what to do about the crisis; understands and knows what to do for the various phases of a crisis, including a social-media crisis; and the organisation's scope to deal with the crisis is good (Carmeli & Schaubroeck 2008; Ghaderi et al.2021). On the other hand, prospective crisis preparedness refers to the ability to deal with a crisis situation in the distant future. Organisations in the prospective crisis preparedness position know how to diagnose the causes of a crisis; have the resources needed to manage the crisis; and identify and manage the needs and expectations of stakeholders (Carmeli & Schaubroeck 2008:184; Avery & Park 2019; Ghaderi et al. 2021).

The growing importance of social media has called for a new approach towards crisis preparedness by organisations. Preparations towards dealing with crises must now include the use of social media. When organisations include social media in their crisis management plans, they can avoid "information vacuums" before, during and after a crisis. The crisis preparedness strategy potentially can enable organisations to provide crisis messaging which can reduce the harmful effects of rumours on social media (Crook et al. 2016).

Since crisis preparedness is useful to strategy, the next section looks into the concept of crisis communication strategy.

3.3.3 Crisis communication strategy

As this study largely centres on crisis communication, it is important to discuss strategies that are applied in crisis-communication management. The purpose of strategies in crisis communication is to enable an organisation to reduce the damaging effects of crisis, restore trust and repair the negative outcomes on the organisation's reputation (Claeys, Cauberghe & Vyncke 2010; Park & Reber 2011; Schoofs, Claeys, De Waele & Cauberghe 2019; Triantafillidou & Yannas 2020).

Crisis communication is deemed to be strategic if it is planned before the onset of a crisis and ends when normality is restored and stakeholder satisfaction is achieved (Palttala & Vos 2012; Tella, Suraya & Bonsu 2020). Patashnick (2016:19) asserts that the implementation of crisis communication strategies must include aspects such as media, audience, form and content. This means that appropriate and effective media channels (for example, social-media platforms) must be selected and deployed.

3.3.3.1 Types of crisis communication strategies

Crisis communication that is curated is expected to lessen the impact, severity and negative outcomes connected to a crisis (Patashnick 2016:15-16). It is imperative that crisis communication is well thought out and planned to keep an organisation's reputation intact and to fulfil the expectations of stakeholders. It has been suggested that crisis communication be curated for the purposes of accurate and expedited information (Schraagen, Veld & De Koning 2010; Wardman 2020; Pöyry, Reinikainen & Luoma-Aho 2022). In other words, the crisis information-gathering process must be properly collected, selected and presented.

There are three key types of crisis communication strategies, namely, instructing information, adjusting information and internalising information or reputation repair (Coombs 2007b; Brown 2013; Chung & Lee 2016; Olsson 2014; Park 2017; Page 2020). The sections below provide an explanation of the strategies:

- ***Instructing information crisis communication strategy***

Crisis situations create the need for information. This is because people want to be informed about the actions and activities put in place by the crisis-stricken organisation. When victims of a crisis are provided with information on the crisis situation, uncertainties are reduced. Instructing information is geared towards informing people on how to react with respect to personal protection (Olsson 2014:5; Coombs 2015:142; Page 2020:2).

- ***Adjusting information crisis communication strategy***

The occurrence of a crisis can be devastating and as a result a victim of a crisis can suffer both physical and psychological injuries. Adjusting information involves providing information to stakeholders in order to help them cope with the psychological effects of a crisis and uncertainty. In crisis situations, stakeholders look forward to organisations to address their emotional needs, such as the expression of sympathy and to explain measures taken to prevent a recurrence of the crisis (Coombs 2010; Coombs 2015; Page 2020:2).

- ***Internalising information crisis communication strategy***

It is important that the organisation, in its attempt to protect its reputation during a crisis, must help stakeholders make sense of the crisis (Sturges 1994; Coombs 2019; Mendy, Stewart & VanAkin 2020). The internalising information strategy approach in crisis-communication management seeks to protect the reputation of the organisation (Coombs 2019; Mendy et al. 2020). The crisis situation that the organisation faces is a threat to the organisation's reputation. Therefore, the use of internalising information as a strategy allows the organisation to deploy crisis response strategies to address the crisis and defend the organisation (Coombs 2019; Mont, Curtis & Palgan 2021).

For this reason, the deployment of relevant crisis communication strategies is critical to the crisis management efforts of the organisation. Organisations that have in place appropriate crisis communication strategies can return to business and also win back the trust and

confidence of stakeholders, in contrast to organisations with no crisis communication strategies (Coombs 2016:120; Ferguson, Wallace & Chandler 2018:265).

Organisations are usually the subject of crisis events in that the events are disruptive of organisational operational processes and the crisis events can lead to stakeholders forming perceptions about such organisations. The reputation of organisations usually is threatened when there is a crisis. If the crisis is not managed effectively, an organisation's most valuable asset, namely, its reputation, will be lost (Coombs 2019:19; Ndlela 2019:6).

In the following section, crisis communication, a crisis management concept relevant to organisational reputation, is discussed.

3.3.4 Crisis communication and organisational reputation

In Section 2.8.3 of Chapter 2, the concept of reputation management was discussed. The view that crises can have adverse effects on the reputation of organisations is popular in the crisis management literature (Coombs 2014; Jensen 2014; Lahti 2015; Coombs & Holladay 2019; Ahmad & Idid 2020; Saroj & Pal 2020).

Organisations in crises are at risk of damage to their reputation, especially when the crisis event is highlighted by the media. A crisis always brings along attention from the media – both mainstream and social media (Kleinnijenhuis, Schultz, Utz & Oegema 2015; Sng Au & Pang 2021). This media focus can create dilemmatic situations, such as whether the organisation should release information about the crisis (Laar 2015; Sng et al. 2021) or take an action which eventually can make the organisation the object of negative stories (Fennis & Stroebe 2014; Wen, Aston, Liu & Ying 2020; Yu, Li, Yu, He & Zhou 2021). Organisation reputation is critical to the survival of any organisation. The study argues that organisations should effectively use crisis communication in order to build organisation-stakeholder relationships. A good organisation-stakeholder relationship can impact on organisational reputation.

It is argued in this study that, when it comes to the crisis management activities of organisations, they must strategise for internal crisis communication. The next section is

focused on internal crisis communication.

3.3.5 Internal crisis communication

Although not the main focus of this study, internal crisis communication is also briefly addressed. It is important to mention internal communication as a subject relevant to crisis-communication management, since studies on crisis communication have revolved around external stakeholders (Heide & Simonsson 2014a; Strindberg 2016; Strandberg & Vigsø 2016; Schoofs et al. 2021).

If an organisation has an effective internal communication strategy in place, the crisis management efforts of the organisation can be successful (Kim 2018; Fitriasari 2020). It is important that organisations encourage employees to display positive communication behaviours in times of crisis (Kim 2018). Organisations need the commitment of employees in the pursuit of organisational goals (Johansen, Aggerholm & Frandsen 2012:270; Kim, Kang, Lee & Yang. 2019:2). Internal communication practices are expected to make the organisational–stakeholder relationship, especially the employee relationship effective (Mbhele 2016; Kim et al. 2019).

The previous discussion has provided some background on internal crisis communication and its relevance to the crisis-communication management concept. It is evident that many crisis communication efforts are directed at external stakeholders and that most crisis communication strategies are suited to external crisis-communication management. In order to have a holistic view of crisis-communication management, this section now explores external crisis communication.

3.3.6 External crisis communication

The relationship external stakeholders have with the organisation is important for the organisation's reputation (Aula & Mantere 2020; Mattinen 2022). The organisation-stakeholder relationship is usually tested during crisis situations. When an organisation

experiences a crisis, stakeholders, both victims and non-victims of the crisis, can exert pressure on the organisation to provide critical information about the crisis. The status quo usually is for the organisations to keep the media and other external stakeholders at a distance in the initial phase of the crisis (Van der Meer, Verhoeven, Beentjes & Vliegenthart 2017; Valentini 2018; Gool 2022). It is imperative for the organisation to deploy effective external communication strategies that will seek to satisfy the information needs of stakeholders (Kapucu, Arslan & Demiroz 2010; Pecha et al. 2010; Steelman et al. 2014; Stewart & Wilson 2016; Gool 2022).

The deployment of external communication strategies by organisations during a crisis has become more imperative with the advent of social media (Cooper, Stavros, Dobele 2019; Reuter, Stieglitz & Imran 2020). It has been established that social-media patronage and usage increase during crises (Heath & O'Hair 2010; Liu, Austin & Jin 2011; Ali Taha, Pencarelli, Škerháková, Fedorko & Košíková 2021). The ability of external stakeholders to frame crisis communication is increased with social media. In this regard, the growing influence of social media has enabled consumers, crisis victims, individuals and communities to have an avenue to communicate (Van der Meer et al. 2017:427; Mohammed & Ferraris 2021:7). The organisation must have a strategy for crisis communication targeted at ensuring that stakeholders are proactively engaged with communication on social media (Van der Meer et al. 2017:428; Mohammed & Ferraris 2021:7). If stakeholders are made to make sense of the crisis on their own without the strategic intervention of the organisation, stakeholders will find it difficult to understand the position of the organisation with regards to the crisis (Van der Meer et al. 2017:435).

In pursuit of external communication during a crisis, Du Plessis (2018) posits that it is important that an organisation relies on a social-media crisis communication framework that is dialogic in nature. A framework that is dialogic can be useful to the organisation at the post-crisis phase. Du Plessis (2018) advocates the adoption of the discourse of renewal (see Section 4.4 of this chapter for more details) concept at the post-crisis phase as it potentially can enhance the organisation-stakeholder relationship. This is because the organisation will

be interested in ethical communication, as such an approach can yield positive gains for the organisation.

The discussion on external communication has provided more insight into crisis communication engagement with external stakeholders. The nature of the communication engagement can yield positive or negative results for the organisation. It is important for the organisation to do effective external stakeholder mapping so as to identify and use appropriate communication strategies that help in managing the crisis-management efforts.

The role of leadership is important in the crisis-management process. Corporate leaders' approach to crisis management can mitigate, escalate or worsen a crisis event (Varma 2021:30-31; Dirani et al. 2020:381-382). It is thus important how leadership is involved in the crisis management effort is discussed. The next section addresses the involvement and expected role of leadership in crisis management.

3.3.7 Involvement of leadership in crisis communication

Communication is a key requirement of leadership (Grill, Ahlborg & Wikström: 2014; Savolainen, Lopez-Fresno & Ikonen 2014; Hogg 2018; Men, Yue & Liu. 2020). Organisational leaders are thus expected to have good communication skills as leadership involves communication activities (De Vries, Bakker–Pieper & Oostenveld 2010; Levine, Muenchen & Brooks 2010; Hackman & Johnson 2013; Jamal & Bakar 2015; Roman, Van Wart, Wang, Liu, Kim & McCarthy 2019).

In this regard, organisational leaders are expected to actively promote effective communication within their organisations so as to promote excellence (Gundersen, Hellesoy & Raeder 2012; Meng & Berger 2019; Men et al. 2020). Leaders use communication to interact with both internal and external audiences for the purpose of change and to inspire a vision that enhances the image and reputation of the organisation (Roebuck 2012; Ewing, Men & O'Neil 2019). The use of communication by leaders can impact either positively or negatively on organisational performance (Buble, Juras & Matic 2014:161–193; Bourne

2015:141-159; Adıgüzel. 2019:144-145). When using communication to engage with stakeholders, leaders must display open and transparent communication in difficult situations, such as crisis situations (Zerfass, Bentele, Schwalbach & Sherzada 2014; Lacerda 2019). In crisis situations, leadership is critical in the management efforts to contain the crisis (Zerfass et al. 2014; Lacerda 2019).

For this study, it is important to consider the role leadership plays or is expected to play in crisis situations. The discussion that follows explores the concept of crisis leadership.

3.3.7.1 Crisis leadership

Even though organisations are supposed to be proactive to be able to successfully manage a crisis, organisations in many cases are reactive and wait for criticism of stakeholders, emergencies and negative publicity before taking steps to deal with a crisis situation (Girboveanu & Pavel 2010; Bowers, Hall, Srinivasan 2017; Coombs 2018). The role of leadership in determining a proactive approach to a crisis is crucial for effective crisis management. In crisis situations, when leadership provides responses deemed appropriate, stakeholders' perception of the organisation is largely positive (Coldwell, Joosub & Papageorgiou 2012; Coombs 2018). However, if the response is assessed to be negative, the reputation of the organisation can experience negative outcomes (Coldwell et al. 2012; Bhaduri 2019).

Leadership is key to crisis-management efforts. A leader who is present and accessible in times of crisis and is involved in the crisis messaging process can influence the perceptions of stakeholders towards the reputation of the organisation (Bhaduri 2019:541; Coombs 2019:29; Varma 2021:30-31).

It must be noted that the involvement of organisational leadership in crisis management has become very significant due to the increasing influence of social media. The leadership of the organisation must use the opportunities afforded by social media in shaping perceptions connected to the crisis (Gottlieb & Dyer 2020:640). The framing of perceptions with communication in crisis situations must be the responsibility of the leadership. The objective

of the framing of perception is to persuade stakeholders that the crisis is under control and to minimise the focus of the media on the organisation (Bowers et al. 2017; Gottlieb & Dyer 2020).

Leaders are also expected to define and establish an organisational culture that will influence the decision-making processes of the organisation (Bhaduri 2019:539-541; Cortellazzo, Bruni & Zampieri 2019:17). In crisis situations, the culture of the organisation can influence leadership in how they perceive, prepare and position for a crisis response (Bhaduri 2019). The literature review on leadership and crisis communication has revealed that the crisis communication and management process require the involvement of the leadership of an organisation. As the goals of the organisation are largely directed by the organisational top hierarchy, any challenging situation that can affect the fortunes of the organisation requires leaders to provide inspired leadership and motivate other employees to work towards positive outcomes. It has been stressed previously that crisis situations are difficult times and hence the role leaders are to perform must seek to restore or repair damaged relationships and ultimately repair the reputation of the organisation.

Having explained crises and crisis communication, in the next section, using social media for crisis communication is now explored.

3.4 USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR CRISIS COMMUNICATION

The phenomenon of social media has become an important subject in organisational crisis communication discourse (Wendling, Radisch & Jacobzone 2013:7; Roshan, Warren & Carr 2016:351; Derani & Naidu 2016:653). Positive and negative attributions are connected to the use of social media (Hosseinali–Mirza, Marcellis–Warin & Warin 2015; Nisar, Prabhakar & Strakova 2019).

In strategic crisis-communication management, the use of social media provides organisations with opportunities to reduce the effects of a crisis (Wendling, Radisch & Jacobzone 2013; Lin, Spence, Sellnow & Lachlan 2016). For example, social media can facilitate engagement and

help achieve an understanding between an organisation and stakeholders (Romenti & Murtarelli 2014:13; Smith & Gallicano 2015:83; Castelló, Etter & Årup Nielsen 2016:407). The use of social media also provides organisations with opportunities to disseminate crisis information quickly (Eriksson & Olsson 2016:198; Stieglitz, Mirbabaie, Fromm & Melzer 2018:1; Lovari & Bowen 2020:320).

The interest in social media largely is because of the perceived benefits social media offer organisations (Macnamara & Zerfass 2012; Lin et al. 2016; Eriksson & Olsson 2016; Nisar et al. 2019). Social media technologies have positively changed the relationships organisations have with stakeholders (Navarro, Moreno & Al-Sumait 2016; Kent & Li 2020). For example, the interactivity between organisations and stakeholders has been enriched since the adoption and use of social-media platforms for organisational communication (Navarro et al. 2016; Kent & Li 2020). A significant reason for the increase in the use of social media is how it empowers stakeholders to become active participants in the narratives connected with the image, reputation and social capital of organisations (Men & Tsai 2016; Chen & Men 2017; You & Hon 2019; Kent & Li 2020). Organisational stakeholders who have and share common interests are now able to use the platform of social media to engage, interact, act and react to issues that affect stakeholders and the organisation without the organisation exercising control over the communication process (Adebayo 2017; Men & Tsai 2016; You & Hon 2019; Kent & Li 2020).

Social media have enabled the sharing of information freely and instantly (Coombs 2012; Sengar. 2021; González-Padilla & Tortolero-Blanco 2020). The social media environment is deemed ideal for the creation and nurture of dialogic processes and supports symmetrical communication opportunities for organisations and their stakeholders (Kang & Sundar 2016; Zerfass, Moreno, Tench, Verčič & Verhoeven 2017; Camilleri 2018a; Capriotti, Zeler & Camilleri 2021).

In crisis situations, social media can provide the platform for both the organisation and stakeholders to access up-to-date information on a crisis. This usefulness of social media can improve the relationship organisations have with stakeholders. The social media environment also helps organisations to communicate directly with stakeholders instead of through third parties (Salminen 2017:22).

The communication opportunities that social media afford users have impacted strongly how organisations operate and communicate (Zerfass et al. 2017; Camilleri 2018a; Capriotti et al. 2021). The adoption and use of social media for information dissemination and interaction is quite new. It is important to review social media definitions in order to understand reasons behind the widespread popularity of social media. In the next section, the various viewpoints on the meaning of social media are provided and explained.

3.4.1 Adopting a definition of social media for this study

As pointed out in the previous section, social media have become popular and widely used as a form of communication by both individuals and corporate entities. Social media as a modern-day technological concept keep on evolving and it is difficult to have one universal definition to describe social media (Dyer 2020). This study reviews definitions of social media categorised into concepts of application and "affordances" (what social media is used for).

First, this study reviews definitions of social media that revolve around application.

Ellison and Boyd (2013:159) belong to the school of thought that expresses the view that social media are internet applications. They define social media as "a social network site is a networked communication platform in which participants:

● have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data;

● can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and

● can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site."

Jin, Liu and Austin (2014:75) also acknowledge the application functionality of social media by defining social media as "various digital tools and applications that facilitate interactive communication and content exchange among and between publics and organisations."

A supporting view on the definition of social media as an application is espoused by Leyrer-Jackson and Wilson (2018). Leyrer-Jackson and Wilson (2018:222) assert that social media are "web sites and technological applications that allow its (sic) users to share content and/or to participate in social networking." Similar viewpoints describe social media as "… various user-driven platforms that facilitate diffusion of compelling content, dialogue creation, and communication to a broader audience" (Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana, Patil, Dwivedi & Nerur 2018:532).

The "affordance" definition of social media provides a clearer perspective on the reasons for the patronage of social media. The affordance definition explains social media as "activities, practices and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media" (Safko & Brake 2009:6). The 'what it is used for' definitional position is seen in the description of social media as revolving around the concepts of identity, conversations, sharing, presence, reputation and groups (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre 2011). Andres and Woodard (2013:8) add that social media is "user-generated information, opinion, video, audio and multimedia."

As is evident from the above discussion, it is important that, in describing or defining social media, it should be viewed largely from the experience of the user. Social media has become a mainstream channel for communication and interaction for individuals and organisations. While all the above definitions are useful and relevant in providing a description of social

media, most of the definitions are too focused on the individual user. This study argues that the idea of social media and its use should include corporate users. Therefore, to make social media meaningful for interactions and relationships, the researcher defines social media as:

> "An internet-based digital tool that serves as a platform for internet users (individual and corporate users) to generate, share and broadcast content and the content potentially can stimulate conversations, create identities and establish mutually beneficial relationships."

3.4.2 Characteristics of social media

The characteristics of social media have contributed to the widespread use of internet technology. Social media characteristics have largely influenced the active use of social media. In the next section, social media characteristics are discussed.

The social-media platform is popular with internet users largely because of its inherent characteristics. The defining features of social media include personal profiles/identity, connectivity, interactive, community-driven and relationships (Schultz, Utz & Goritz 2011; De Vries, Gensler & Leeflang 2012; Omilion-Hodges & McClain 2015; Schreiner, Fischer & Riedl 2021). Table 3.1 below outlines the characteristics associated with social media and social networking sites.

Table 3.1: Social media characteristics

Characteristics	Meaning
Personal profiles/Identity	Users are allowed to reveal information about their identities and provide content on their walls.
Interactive	Social media allows users to chat, send and receive messages from other users. They are also allowed to upload pictures and videos.
Connectivity	Social media affords users opportunities to connect with one another even when they are distances apart.
Relationship	Relationships on social media makes it possible for users to have friendships that lead to interactive activities such as conversation, content sharing and communication on an array of issues.
Community-driven	Social media allows users to come together and become a community for a particular objective. Users can get in touch with old friends.

Sources: Kaplan & Haenlein (2010:61-62); Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman (2015:190); Phua, Jin & Kim (2017:115); Whaite, Shensa, Sidani, Colditz & Primack (2018:47).

There are various types of social media available for both personal and organisational use. It is important that, as this study on crisis communication is conducted within the context of social media, a discussion of the various types of social media is appropriate. In the next section, the different types of social media are explained.

3.4.3 Types of social media

As already mentioned (Section 3.4.1 in Chapter 3), social media encompasses applications and tools that facilitate communication engagement among online internet users. Social media is categorised into social networking sites, collaborative projects, content communities, blogs and microblogs (Kaplan & Haenlein: 2010; Niederer & Van Dijck: 2010; Grajales, Sheps, Ho, Novak-Lauscher & Eysenbach 2014; Lai & Tai 2021). Table 3.2 below covers the various types of social media, description and examples:

Table 3.2: Different types of social media

Type	Description	Examples
Social networking sites	These are platforms that enable users to create profiles, socialise, share information, videos, images and interact	Facebook, Instagram and Tiktok
Collaborative projects	These are websites created by multiple-end users. They make it possible for users to collaborate and add information to the users.	Wikipedia
Content communities	These refer to sites meant for the sharing of different contents such as videos and images. Users can comment on uploaded content.	YouTube, Slideshare
Blogs	These are sites that allow users to upload information to the site as journals. Such journals allow for collaborative and interactive discussion between users.	Blogger.com, Wordpress.com
Microblogging	Allows users to post short updates or messages in real time.	Twitter
Professional networking sites	These are sites dedicated to career and professional networking.	LinkedIn
Virtual social worlds	Avatars are used for interactions among users. The interactions are conducted in 3D environments	Habbo Hotel, Second Life

Sources: Adapted from Kaplan & Haenlein (2010:61-62); Berente, Hansen, Pike & Bateman (2011:2); Aggarwal, Gopal, Sankaranarayanan & Singh (2012:6); Grajales et al. (2014:3) Mull & Lee (2014:192-193); Bakhshi, Shamma & Gilbert (2014:965-966); Voorveld (2019:15); Lai & Tai (2021:2); Al-Maroof, Alshurideh, Salloum, AlHamad & Gaber (2021:2).

These social media types do not entirely define the social media environment, as social media keep on evolving and new applications are introduced to enhance the online experiences of users. Some of the tools are used prominently more than others for organisational communication. Studies show that the majority of organisations are on Facebook and Twitter (see Wigley & Zhang 2011:7; Kalsnes & Larsson 2018:1674; Valenzuela, Correa & Gil de Zuniga 2018:121; Wang & Yang 2020:2-3; Troise & Camilleri 2021:4).

The next section examines the use of social media as an organisational tool to deal with crises. Social media have become critical to the organisational communication process. It is appropriate for the study to discuss the relevance of social media to organisational communication, especially in crisis situations.

3 .5 SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION TOOL TO DEAL WITH A CRISIS

Social media have afforded organisations interactive ways of reaching stakeholders (Roshan, Warren & Carr 2016:352; Xu & Saxton 2019:30-31). The predominant communication model adopted by most organisations some years ago was one way. Currently, social media has to a good measure influenced organisational communication by creating a more interactive communication process where stakeholders are active communication participants (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden 2011; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, Silvestre 2011; Roshan et al. 2016; Xu & Saxton 2019). A strong argument for the increasing use of social media by organisations is the flexibility social media provides in facilitating internal communications and online collaboration and reducing the bureaucratic processes connected to traditional communication processes (Kasavana, Nusair & Teodosic 2010; Vuori 2012; Aral et al. 2013; Lovari & Valentini 2020).

The advent of social media has made it possible for organisations to access and dispatch information faster than before. This progressive approach to communication has improved the efficiency and effectiveness of the decision-making process of organisations (Wright, Khanfar, Harrington & Kizer 2010; Lovari & Valentini 2020; Luo 2021). Many organisations have come to recognise the value of social media as a communication engagement tool useful for attaining marketing and public-relations objectives (Kaganer & Vaast 2010; Leidner, Koch & Gonzalez 2010; Kent & Li 2020; Quesenberry 2020).

Organisations can no longer ignore the important role social media play in organisational reputation (Ott & Theunissen 2015:97; Etter, Ravasi & Colleoni 2019:28-29). Social media has redefined the way business is conducted and influences how stakeholders think, behave and react to information (Lange-Faria & Elliot 2012:201; Dumpe 2015:133; Kent & Li 2020:5). Consequently, social media also has had an impact on crisis-communication strategies, as explained next.

3.5.1 The impact of social media on crisis-communication strategies

The application of crisis-communication strategies to the management of crises has been enhanced with new media technologies, such as social media. With the emergence of social media, ideas and concepts on crisis-communication strategies suited for social media engagement have been discussed (Jin & Liu 2012; Liu, Jin, Briones & Kuch 2012; Utz, Schultz & Glocka 2013; Eriksson 2018; Eismann, Posegga & Fischbach 2021).

Social media is influencing the behaviour, thoughts and reaction of stakeholders to organisation-centred issues (Lange-Faria & Elliot 2012; Dumpe 2015; Adim & Ekpa 2020; Cannaerts 2020). For example, issues such as crises can attract significant attention to an organisation and the reputation of the organisation can be damaged if the crisis situation is not properly managed (McDonnell & King 2013; Pang, Hassan & Ching 2014; Cannaerts 2020). Stakeholders expect organisations to communicate and engage with them on crisis-related matters (Ehnis & Bunker 2013; Shahid & Elbanna 2015; Potter 2016; Shahid & Elbanna 2016; Liu & Xu 2019).

The ways and means the organisation uses in communicating and engaging with stakeholders in recent times require the use of both traditional media and social media (Latonero & Shklovski 2011; Denef Bayerl & Kaptein 2013; Hughes & Chauhan 2015; Eriksson 2018; Wang & Yang 2020). Organisations are expected to deploy communication strategies through media platforms in order to inform, interact and engage with stakeholders (Hughes & Chauhan

2015; Plotnick, Hiltz, Kushma & Tapia 2015; Shahid & Elbanna 2016; Eriksson 2018; Wang & Yang 2020).

In strategic terms, social media are better suited to fostering open communication and interaction between organisations and stakeholders (Fidelman 2012; Smith, Smith & Knighton 2018; Yang, Basile & Letourneau 2020). Since in this study the researcher examines how social media can be used strategically in managing a crisis, the researcher argues in this study that the deployment of crisis-communication strategies in managing must revolve around dialogic communication (see Section 4.3 of Chapter 4)

The use of social media has enabled organisations to boost their dialogic communications with stakeholders (Eriksson & Olsson 2016; Wang & Yang 2020). The use of dialogic communication approaches is viewed as contributing to improving crisis communication, particularly on social media (Liu, Xu & Tsai 2020; Camilleri 2021). Organisations that deploy on social media dialogic communication approaches as communication strategies during a crisis are able to encourage two-way communication with stakeholders. When dialogic communication approaches are used strategically during crisis situations, stakeholders tend to have a positive attitude and behaviour towards the organisation (Wang & Zhou 2015; Wang & Yang 2020; Camilleri 2020).

Social media have also impacted the use of crisis-communication strategies in both internal and external ways. For example, the deployment of strategies such as instructional information during crises has been enhanced on social-media platforms such as Twitter. Features on Twitter such as hashtags now serve a useful instructional information purpose – it is used to provide real-time updates on crisis events (Eriksson & Olsson 2016; Eriksson 2018). For strategic widespread use of crisis communication to stakeholders, an organisation's Twitter updates on a crisis, for example, can be accessed by traditional media outlets and broadcast to stakeholders. In such instances, Twitter serves as a useful tool for alerting and warning

stakeholders whose source of information is the traditional media (Lindsay 2010; Ericksson & Olsson 2016; Saroj & Pal 2020).

Another way social media has influenced the application of crisis-communication strategies is in monitoring. In crisis periods, monitoring can provide organisations with access to genuine data (Eysenbach 2009; Coombs & Holladay 2014; Mirbabaie, Bunker, Stieglitz, Marx & Ehnis 2020). These monitoring opportunities can prepare organisations to be strategic with communication (Lindsay 2010; Gallaugher & Ransbotham 2010; Coombs & Holladay 2014; Saroj & Pal 2020) and be decisive in issuing warnings and alerts, assisting with recovery efforts and real-time information (Lindsay 2010; Saroj & Pal 2020). Furthermore, social-media monitoring enables organisations in a crisis to track the perceptions of stakeholders and early warning signals of crisis (Kavanaugh et al. 2012; Natsev 2012; Ndlela 2019; Sng et al. 2021).

In strategic terms, organisations can, through social media, now access large amounts of information regarding the thoughts, feedback and behaviour of stakeholders in a timely manner (Chen et al. 2012; Murray et al. 2010; Hong & Kim 2019). Social media also provides organisations with intelligence-gathering opportunities (Kietzmann et al. 2011:249-250; Eriksson & Olsson 2016:204; Ghani, Hamid, Hashem & Ahmed 2019:421). The intelligence-gathering function can strengthen the crisis-communication management of the organisation. If the organisation is committed to organisation-stakeholder principles, the organisation's crisis response messages on social media will be more targeted and could generate positive feedback from stakeholders. Organisations that effectively make use of these monitoring and intelligence-gathering opportunities afforded by social media can enhance their reputations (Schultz et al. 2011; Graham, Avery & Park 2013; Nisar, Prabhakar & Strakova 2019).

Furthermore, as the different social-media platforms have distinct functions and uses, the deployment of crisis-communication strategies on social-media platforms must not be uniformly applied. As strongly argued by Manika, Papagiannidis, and Bourlakis (2015), the effect of a particular crisis-communication strategy deployed on a social-media platform such

as Twitter will not necessarily be the same on Facebook. Therefore, an organisation's crisis response strategy that revolves around apology and deployed on targeted social-media platforms might not be strategic and effective. That is why it is necessary that the various social-media platforms are assessed by organisations to establish how each platform should be used in responding to a crisis situation. Such an approach to strategic social-media communication can help to minimise negative reactions from stakeholders (Chewning 2015; Triantafillidou & Yannas 2020).

In concluding the discussion on the influence of social media on crisis-communication strategies, it is clear from the above discussions that social media have become an important component of the communication management architecture of organisations. While providing numerous opportunities for interactivity, collaboration and engagement, thereby facilitating organisation-stakeholder relationships, social media can make organisations vulnerable. That is to say, organisations can lose control over sources of communication channels and activities (Wigley & Fontenot 2010; Pang et al. 2014; Effing & Spil 2016; Zade, Shah, Rangarajan, Kshirsagar, Imran & Starbird 2018; Kaufhold, Rupp, Reuter & Habdank 2020).

The aforementioned reasons provide an understanding of social-media adoption and the prominent position social media occupies in organisational communication. In the next section, social-media crisis communication is discussed.

3.6 SOCIAL-MEDIA CRISIS COMMUNICATION

In this section, the concept of social-media crisis communication and its associated concepts are discussed and explained.

3.6.1 Social-media crisis

The subject of crisis and its unpredictability was highlighted extensively in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.1. Now, the advent of social media, together with the freedom of expression afforded to social media users, has led to organisations becoming conscious of potential crisis cases on social media. Crisis scholars such as Coombs and Holladay (2012:409) have described crises such as a social-media crisis as a "para-crisis" that refers to "a publicly visible crisis threat that charges an organisation with irresponsible or unethical behavior". A para-crisis is thus a crisis threat and not a fully blown crisis (Coombs 2019). For example, Ott and Theunissen (2015:100-101) point out that negative sentiments expressed publicly on social media by users can within a short period of time go viral. This is the situation with a social-media crisis and organisations must have a sense of duty in reacting to such a crisis (Kim, Zhang & Zhang 2016:904). Even though a social-media crisis resembles an actual crisis situation, it must be managed well in order to lessen damage to the reputation of an organisation (Coombs & Holladay 2012b; Coombs 2015; Coombs 2019).

There are types of social media crises addressed in the next section.

3.6.2 Types of social-media crisis

There are three broad categories of social-media crisis (Van den Hurk 2013; Coombs 2015; Frandsen & Johansen 2016; Frandsen & Johansen 2017). They are:

- customer complaint (refers to when an online user negative comment on social media goes viral)
- accidental misuse of social media by the organisation
- challenge crisis (refers to when stakeholders point out a disparity between the organisation's words and actions)

As already emphasised, social-media crises pose a potential damage to the reputation of the organisation. For example, when an organisation is confronted with a 'challenge crisis',

stakeholders perceive the organisation to have lost touch with its own values. Stakeholders portray the organisation as a bad corporate entity and campaign against the organisation, and stakeholders confront the organisation for a disparity between the organisation's words and actions (Coombs 2015:24). It is thus imperative that the organisation has a communication strategy to manage such crises.

3.6.3 The concept of social-media crisis communication

The importance of communication in the crisis-management process has been discussed extensively in Section 3.2.3 of Chapter 3, where it was pointed out that crisis communication messages must be disseminated on media channels such as traditional and social media. This section examines the phenomenon of social-media crisis communication. As already discussed, social media has become a dominant channel for all kinds of human interaction and communication. Social media use has been described in both positive and negative terms for crisis communication and has become a useful tool for the dissemination of information in the management of organisational crises. On the other hand, social media can also trigger a crisis situation (Veil et al. 2012; Hosseinali-Mirza, De Marcellis-Warin & Warin 2015; Coombs 2019; Triantafillidou & Yannas 2020). For example, in 2017, United Airlines experienced a crisis situation because a video of a security officer who assaulted a passenger from an overbooked flight was uploaded on Twitter (Victor & Stevens 2017).

In crisis situations, organisations face communication challenges as they sometimes are unable to control the flow of information and the deployment of communication channels (Mei et al. 2010; Wigley & Fontenot 2010; Coombs 2020). As social media has made it possible for users to produce and disseminate content, organisations must participate in the conversations on social media, especially during crises (Romenti & Murtarelli 2014:12; Kim et al. 2022:1276).

The challenge to the deployment of social media and its benefits to organisations is a question of strategy (Piskorski 2011; Weber 2011; Parveen 2012; Mirbabaie et al. 2020). When

organisations fail to understand the strategic role social media serve, the consequences can be dire (Bott, Montagno & Lane 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein 2010; Piskorski 2011; Aggarwal et al. 2012; Hauer & Sood 2020).

From the aforementioned, it is evident that social media are important for crisis-communication management. Organisations that want to be effective in the crisis-management effort must seek to be on social media to provide their own perspectives on a crisis as social media have ushered in a sense of urgency in information dissemination and interaction (Fink 2002; Liu et al. 2011; Saroj & Pal 2020).

Having examined, discussed and explained social-media crisis communication from various perspectives in the literature, it is clear that a comprehensive definition of social-media crisis communication is still lacking. It is thus imperative that the researcher proposes a working definition of social-media crisis communication as follows:

> "the communication and messaging activities of an organisation that are dialogic communication in nature, and deployed on social media platforms before, during and after a crisis, and targeted at satisfying the information needs of stakeholders who are or could be the victims of a crisis."

In section 3.5.1 of this chapter, it was argued that social media has enhanced the application of crisis communication strategies and improved the crisis management capabilities of organisations. Similarly, in many African countries, social media is used during crisis situations by organisations in managing their communication with stakeholders. In the next section, social media use for crisis communication purposes within the African context is discussed.

3.6.4 The use of social media in Africa for communicating during a crisis

As previously discussed (see section 3.6.3), social media platforms provide an important avenue for organisations to manage a crisis. In many African countries, social media is increasingly being adopted for crisis communication purposes (Batta, Batta & Mboho 2015;

Ehondor & Unakalamba 2021:49). For example, some Nigerian companies now use social media to issue regular communication and engage with stakeholders during crises (Batta et al. 2015). In Ghana, the Ghanaian Armed Forces have in crisis situations used social media to understand and obtain feedback from various stakeholders (Abachingsa 2021:54).

It is important that public relations practitioners in Africa have an understanding of using social media in managing a crisis as it will enable their organisations mititgate the damaging impact of crises (Zhu et al. 2017; Zheng et al. 2018. Social media use for crisis communication allows organisations to participate in the conversations on social media about a crisis (Romenti & Murtarelli 2014:12; Kim et al. 2022:1276). The incorporation of social media into the crisis communication strategy of Ghanaian organisations will enable public relations practitioners deploy the right social media strategies in managing a crisis situation (Appah 2021:5). Furthermore, social media provides Ghanaian organisations that are managing pandemic outbreaks with opportunities to monitor comments, attitudes and behaviours of stakeholders (Ansah 2021:77). Chedza (2023:229-230) argues that even though social media use for crisis communication by organisations in Botswana is at the embryonic stage, organisations in Botswana must begin to consider social media crisis communication as crucial to protecting and repairing the reputation of organisations.

It is evident from the discussions in this section that the use of social media for crisis communication by organisations is supported by many African scholars. As there are no studies in Africa and more specifically Ghana on the use of social media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis, the call for more research on social media use for crisis communication by Chedza (2023:228) is a progressive call. That is why the conduct of this study and the findings will fill the gap in Africa and more specifically Ghana in the use of social media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis.

The role of the public-relations practitioner in social-media crisis communication is critical especially in the management of challenges in the use of social media. The next section explores the role of public-relations practitioners in social-media crisis communication.

3.6.5 The role of the public-relations practitioner in social-media crisis-communication management

Social media can influence the perception of stakeholders in crisis situations because this platform has afforded stakeholders the ability to be heard (Liu, Austin & Jin 2011:346; Zimand-Sheiner, Levy & Eckhaus 2021:1). The control and management of information during crises are more needed now than ever before, as a result of the dynamics in the use of social media (Wigley & Zhang 2011:2; Jurgens & Helsloot 2018:83). Also important to keep in mind is that stakeholders have become citizen journalists who can anonymously express dissent and provoke organisations to respond to crisis issues (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith 2008; Stephens & Malone 2012; Camilleri 2021).

Since stakeholders have become empowered to communicate and share information on social media as citizen journalists, public-relations practitioners are expected to play critical roles in managing social-media crisis communication that plays out on social media (Lee, Oh & Kim 2013; Lyon & Montgomery 2013; Phang, Zhang & Satanto 2013; Eriksson 2018; Smith et al. 2018).

The eminent crisis communication scholar Kathleen Fearn-Banks (2017) provides some interesting and valuable advice to public-relations practitioners on crisis-communication management on social media. Fearn-Banks (2017:1) admonishes that public-relations practitioners must seek to develop the right and specific crisis-communication messages and disseminate the messages to appropriate stakeholders. Additionally, public-relations practitioners must be competent in the use of social media in communicating to stakeholders during a crisis. Practitioners must ensure that crisis messages meant to be deployed on social

media must be thoughtfully crafted, dialogic communication in nature and geared towards building relationships with stakeholders (Fearn-Banks 2017:1).

The literature on social-media crisis communication reflects that social media have transformed the work of public-relations practitioners. Social media are also credited for enhancing dialogic relationships between organisations and their stakeholders (Kent, Carr, Husted & Pop 2011; DiStaso & McCorkindale 2012; Allagui & Breslow 2016; Kent & Du Plessis 2018).

As early as 2010, Taylor and Kent (2010:208) argued that only a few practitioners will not support the use of social media in their public-relations practice. These arguments were supported in the later literature because, when practitioners use social media, they are able to engage directly with stakeholders (Valentini & Kruckeberg 2012; Kent 2013; Eriksson 2018; Smith et al. 2018). Currently social media allows public-relations practitioners to nourish relationships with stakeholders as the features of social media create opportunities for interaction and information exchanges between practitioners and stakeholders (Solis & Breakenridge 2009; Verhoeven, Tench, Zerfass, Moreno & Vercic 2012; Eriksson 2018; Smith et al. 2018).

In Ghana, public-relations practitioners have welcomed the value of social media for crisis-communication management. The interactive and dissemination opportunities social media facilitate are seen as positive for organisational communication (Dornyo 2014:175; Asante 2016:49; Djabanor 2019:42). While recognising the interactive benefits of social media, some Ghanaian public-relations practitioners are quite hesitant in using social-media platforms for crisis communication. This is because of the fear of aggrieved stakeholders using social-media platforms to criticise their organisations and post messages that can damage the reputation of their organisations (Dornyo 2014:175; Adu & Asante 2018:49; Suraya, Bonsu, Odai & Abdallah 2019:46). This negative perception of social media is as a result of the desire by some of these organisations to use social media to only satisfy organisational interests (Dulek & Campbell 2015:124; Toledano 2018:133).

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It is clear from the above discussion that social media use is relevant for public relations and communication activities connected to crisis communication.

In conducting this study, identifying and discussing empirical studies that have enriched the social media crisis communication literature is imperative. A discussion of related studies that have contributed to filling the knowledge gaps in the social media crisis communication field is provided in the next section.

3.6.6 Empirical studies on social media crisis communication

Bridging existing knowledge gaps in the social media crisis communication field is important for the public relations discipline. Recent studies have focused on addressing some of the following gaps: crisis response strategies suitable for social media crisis communication, dialogic content for encouraging relationship building, and using social media crisis communication to enhance corporate reputation (Roshan, Warren & Carr 2016, Du Plessis 2018; Appah 2021). In a study by Roshan et al. (2016), they investigated 17 Australian organisations on how they use social media to communicate during a crisis. They found out that many of the organisations used crisis response strategies that potentially could affect the reputation of these organisations. Based on the findings, a taxonomy of social media crisis messages that can help organisations in their social media crisis communication activities was recommended for adoption.

Du Plessis (2018) conducted a case study of how dialogic content initiated on social media can enhance discourse of renewal during and after a crisis. The case study was on GitLab, a virtual, open-source software development company, and involved the analysis of 15,650 Facebook and Twitter messages. The findings revealed that transparent and interactive engagement on social media with stakeholders can win stakeholder support and stimulate relationship building.

Appah (2021) in a study of the use of social media for crisis communication by four Ghanaian organisations found out that these organisations when hit with a crisis, largely use social media to enhance the reputation of their organisations. Additionally, Appah (2021) points out that

social media offered the organisations the platform for engagement with stakeholders in times of crises.

On the evidence of these empirical studies discussed above, gaps on the use of social media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis still exist. An exploration and investigation of concepts such as crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal influencing organisation-stakeholder relationship, are important in addressing the knowledge gaps as far as social media crisis communication is concerned. It is for this reason that the present study is being conducted to fill the gap.

In section 2.4.4 of chapter 2, public relations as a strategic function was discussed. It is therefore, important to explore how public-relations practitioners must apply strategy and dialogic communication approaches in the use of social-media crisis communication. In the section below, the strategic approach by public-relations practitioners to social-media crisis communication is explored and discussed.

3.6.7 Strategic and dialogic communication approaches to social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders

The concept of strategic communication was discussed in Chapter 2 of the study, indicating how strategic communication can build relationships with stakeholders. Some strategic-communication scholars assert that, in the attempt to build relationships with stakeholders, organisations must be strategic in their communications (Hallahan 2015:249-250; Zerfass, Verčič, Nothhaft & Werder 2018).

Both Hallahan (2015) and Zerfass et al. (2018:492) articulate that the implementation of strategic communication by organisations is purposively for the creation of understanding on an issue between an organisation and its stakeholders and the expected output is a strengthening of the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

The deployment of social media in the management of crisis communication must be geared towards strategic communication and dialogic communication. One key area to consider in any social-media strategy towards crisis-communication management is the choice of the right message. The message chosen for social-media communication must stimulate the right feedback from stakeholders. In Section 3.6.5 of Chapter 3, the point was made that crisis response strategies such as apology, mortification and corrective actions can lead to positive outcomes (Canhoto, Vom Lehn, Kerrigan, Yalkin, Braun & Steinmetz 2015:13). However, the choice of a message for specific crisis situations cannot be deemed to generate the same results in all crisis contexts. For example, even though the crisis response message of apology could seem appropriate in some crisis contexts, some stakeholders might resist the apology even if it comes from a high-ranking official (Ngai & Jin 2016:487).

Other researchers state that accommodative strategies are better suited to social media than denial strategies (Ott & Theunissen 2015:102). The point has also been advanced that informational messages from crisis-stricken organisations are generally acceptable to stakeholders. Informational messages potentially can facilitate the secondary dissemination of crisis communication on social media (Schultz et al. 2011; Chung & Lee 2016; Wang, Schuetz & Cai 2021). It is not clear if the information message approach supports an interactive exchange between the organisation and stakeholders. If the informational message from the organisation is monological and not designed for engagement, stakeholders may not find it appropriate for organisation-stakeholder relationships. Any decision on the appropriateness of a message (apology, corrective or informational) should be gauged against the communication reactions of stakeholders (Veil, Buehner & Palenchar 2011; Fayon & Alloing 2012; Im, Youk & Park 2021).

It is important to highlight the role of dialogic communication (see Chapter 4) in building stakeholder relationships during a crisis. In dialogic communication terms, social media can be used in crisis times to support collaborative and participatory activities between organisations and stakeholders (Wendling et al. 2013; Du Plessis 2018). The collaborative and participatory advantages of social media ensure that organisations commit to providing

the current status and updates on crises (Liu et al. 2020). The focus on open, engaging and reciprocal communication can be valuable to the organisation-stakeholder relationship and enhance the reputation of the organisation (Husain et al. 2014; Camilleri 2021). As stakeholders are becoming more empowered on social media (Christodoulides, Jevons & Bonhomme 2012; Coombs & Holladay 2018; Obembe et al. 2021), crisis-communication strategies such as apology, mortification and corrective actions, if applied in collaborative ways, can be effective in the management of a crisis (Canhoto et al. 2015; Im et al. 2021). That is why it is imperative that public-relations practitioners understand social media and be prepared to deploy crisis-communication strategies in dialogic communication ways that benefit their organisations and stakeholders (Lambret & Barki 2017:295; Santoso, Agra, Kurnia, Arviani & Achmad 2021:304).

Another dialogic communication approach to using social media during crises to strengthen organisation-stakeholder relationships is social listening before a crisis. Social listening is defined as "an active process of attending to, observing, interpreting, and responding to a variety of stimuli through mediated electronic and social listening" (Stewart, Atilano & Arnold 2017:86). The social-listening strategy should be a top priority for organisations before the onset of the crisis (Stewart & Young 2018). The use of a social-listening strategy enables organisations to set listening objectives, identify where to listen, select listening tools, set up a listening structure and listen continuously. Organisations can consider social-media platforms such as the "Advanced Search" on Twitter and "Facebook Insights" on Facebook. These features can help organisations understand audience dynamics. The public relations department must oversee the social listening activity. That is, public-relations practitioners must have the responsibility of receiving and providing feedback to stakeholder opinions or views regarding a crisis. Other employees can be encouraged to also provide supporting roles to make the social-listening strategy more effective. By listening, organisations will demonstrate to stakeholders that they are interested in the needs of stakeholders, especially in times of crisis. Organisations must show through social listening that they are committed to disseminating useful and valuable information (Jackson 2017). Social listening can empower

organisations to have an engaging presence on social media (Stewart et al. 2017), which can potentially yield positive organisation-stakeholder relationship outcomes for the organisation.

Even though the discussion on strategic and dialogic communication approaches to social media use in crisis communication is not fully exhaustive on social-media strategies, the explanations on the choice of a message, collaborative and participatory approaches and social listening provide a strong basis for the use of social media for crisis communication. Organisations can benefit from the strategic and dialogic communication approaches to the use of social media in managing crises. The relationship between organisations and stakeholders can improve if there is a strong commitment by organisations to listen, engage, collaborate and allow stakeholders to participate in online conversations about the crisis.

It is important for public-relations practitioners to have a good grasp of the theoretical underpinnings for crisis-communication management. Theories can help practitioners to conceptualise frameworks that support the implementation of communication strategies.

3.7 SUMMARY

The main purpose of this chapter was to provide a comprehensive exposition on crisis communication and social-media crisis communication. In discussing crisis communication, the various definitional positions on crises were explained and analysed. Crisis management was also explained. It was pointed out that crisis preparedness, crisis-communication strategy, internal crisis communication, external crisis communication and crisis leadership are necessary crisis-management concepts that must be considered by organisations in their approach to managing a crisis.

The chapter further discussed social-media crisis communication by pointing out the relevance of social-media crisis communication to crisis communication. Other important issues articulated included types of social media, the benefits of social media and using social media as an organisational communication tool to deal with a crisis. The chapter also explored the social media impact on crisis-communication strategies, social-media crisis-

communication management by public-relations practitioners and the relevance of strategic and dialogic communication in the use of social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships.

In the next chapter, relationship management, dialogic communication and the discourse of renewal theories adopted for the study are discussed.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the relationship management, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal theories as theoretical points of departure for this study. The chapter is structured as follows. First, the relationship-management theory is discussed while also highlighting dimensions of relationship management applicable to this study. Second, dialogic communication theory is discussed as essential to building relationships when it comes to dialogic communication. Lastly, the discourse of renewal theory is justified as a theory of inclusion critical for renewing organisation-stakeholder relationships during and after a crisis.

4.2 RELATIONSHIP-MANAGEMENT THEORY

The yardstick for measuring excellent public relations revolves around strong organisation-stakeholder relationships (Taylor & Kent 2014:395; Ledingham & Hung-Baesecke 2015:2; Ferguson 2018:171). The excellent public relations argument has led to a call by leading public relations scholars—for example, Grunig (2011), Huang (2011), Taylor and Kent (2014), Ledingham (2015) and Ferguson (2018)—to have a relationship-management approach towards public-relations practice in order to achieve organisational effectiveness. The argument for a relationship approach has been made because it is more relevant to the attainment of organisational objectives than the traditional view of public relations, which is seen as focused on tactics and one-way communication (Ledingham & Hung-Baesecke 2015). In this regard, Labarca and Ampuero Ruiz (2021:781) add that the relationship perspective must supersede communication, which hitherto was seen as the dominant emphasis of public relations.

Even though numerous other scholars have contributed to the public-relations debate concerning the relationship concept, one of the key proponents of the relationship-management theory of public relations is still John Ledingham. In the early 2000s, Ledingham (2003:190) defined relationship management as:

> "…the ethical and efficient management of an organisation-stakeholder relationship, focused over time, on common interests and shared goals in support of mutual understanding and mutual benefit".

Essentially, this definition points out that the relationship that should exist between the organisation and its stakeholders must be about understanding. Furthermore, the relationship must be influenced by ethical considerations and in satisfying the interests of both the organisation and stakeholders. The definition is relevant and applicable to contemporary public relations today as its idea of common interests supports the need for both the organisation and stakeholders to see each other as partners (Ledingham & Hung-Baesecke 2015; Ferguson 2018; Labarca & Ampuero Ruiz 2021).

The basis of the relationship-management theory is that the organisation must realise that a long-term relationship with stakeholders must be founded on a commonality of interests. However, if the interests of both stakeholders and the organisation are different, the relationship will be short-term (Ledingham & Hung-Baesecke 2015:10). Cheng (2018:127) adds that a relationship-management approach must have a goal of building and maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship between the organisation and stakeholders. The organisation and stakeholders must see each other as partners; both must have a sense that they care about the interests of the other, or the relationship will not last (Ledingham & Hung-Baesecke 2015; Ferguson 2018).

As highlighted in the section above, the relationship-management theory of public relations is important for studying organisation-stakeholder relationships. In the next section, the justification for the adoption of the relationship-management theory is discussed.

4.2.1 Adopting the relationship-management theory for this study

This study adopts the relationship-management theory, which states that the relationship between the organisation and stakeholders must be efficiently managed and ethical and focused on ensuring that the common interests of both the organisations and stakeholders lead to mutual benefits and understanding (Ledingham 2003; Cheng 2018; Ferguson 2018).

Although this theory is multidisciplinary, it is applicable to public relations for several reasons. Public-relations functions such as stakeholder engagement and stakeholder communication can contribute to ensuring effective organisation-stakeholder relationships (Meintjes & Grobler 2014:162-163; Smith 2020:191). It has become imperative for public-relations practitioners to play a leading role in managing relationships with different stakeholders. The relationship-management concept is essential for public relations since it reinforces the notion that the organisation is interactive with stakeholders and connotes interpersonal communication in the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Coombs & Holladay 2015:691-692).

With the emergence and increasing importance of social media in public relations (Shin, Pang & Kim 2015; Pang et al. 2018) relationship management has become even more popular, as organisations are now required to interact and engage with stakeholders on social media networking sites. There is hence a call from scholars for the use of dialogic communication approaches on social media by public-relations practitioners, since dialogic communication is seen as one of the enablers of relationship-building (Pang et al. 2018).

As argued in Section 2.8.1 in Chapter 2, the pursuit of relationship-management objectives must revolve around ensuring that the interests of both the organisation and stakeholders are balanced for the benefit of both.

Furthermore, stakeholder expectations of an organisation in satisfying their needs can be affected by crisis situations and the relationship that exists between the organisation and the stakeholders can be hampered (Coombs & Holladay 2018; Coombs 2019). For organisations to successfully win the confidence of stakeholders during crisis situations, it is dependent on the approach to the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Cheng & Shen 2020).

Adopting the relationship-management theory for this study positions the public-relations practitioner well in satisfying both the interests of the organisation and stakeholders. For example, the relationship-management approach for public-relations practice allows public relations to extend beyond strategic planning and the attainment of communication objectives (for example, influencing, informing and obtaining feedback from stakeholders) to include

ensuring mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders (Chandler 2014; Ferguson 2018; Smith 2020; Pressgrove, McKeever, McKeever & Waters 2022).

The adoption of the relationship-management theory for this study is especially justified when examined within the context of social media. The emergence of social media as a useful platform for cultivating and maintaining organisation-stakeholder relationships (Wang & Yang 2020) has become relevant to the concept of relationship management. This is because the social-media platform advances the objective of the organisation-stakeholder relationship, as it creates opportunities for both the organisation and stakeholders to engage and interact on issues that affect the organisation and stakeholders (Men & Tsai 2016:932; Adebayo 2017:81; You & Hon 2019:1). Additionally, the use of social media, particularly during crises, can enable the organisation to improve its relationship with stakeholders, as it creates avenues for the organisation to communicate directly with stakeholders (Salminen 2017). Therefore, adopting the relationship-management theory will help the course of this study as the basis of the theory is to ensure a long-term relationship outcome founded on a commonality of organisation-stakeholder interests (Ledingham & & Hung-Baesecke 2015; Ferguson 2018).

In order to properly situate the relationship-management theory as a core theory for this study, the relationship-management criteria or dimensions applicable to the theory and study are discussed next.

4.2.2 Relationship-management criteria applicable to this theory and study

As highlighted in Section 2.8.1 of Chapter 2, the essence of the relationship-management theory is to foster strong and positive relationships between the organisation and stakeholders (Cheng 2018; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019). In order for this positive approach to the organisation-stakeholder relationship to happen, various criteria or dimensions have been suggested by different scholars (Cheng 2018:120; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019:5). These relationship criteria were put forward by scholars in the late nineties and early twenties and are still well-known and cited. Collectively these scholars argue that the relationship must be mutually beneficial to both the organisation and stakeholders. For example, in the late

nineties, Ledingham, Bruning, Thomlison and Lesko (1997) proposed dimensions such as trust, openness, involvement, investment and commitment. These were followed by Ledingham and Bruning (1998), who recommend trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment as relationship-management dimensions. Other relationship-management dimensions include those suggested by Hon and Grunig (1999), which include control mutuality, trust, satisfaction and commitment in assessing the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Grunig and Huang, on the other hand (2000), proposed control, mutuality, trust, relational satisfaction, relational commitment, and goal attainment. These dimensions are to serve as scales for measuring an organisation-stakeholder relationship. However, the most widely used scales for measuring an organisation-stakeholder relationship now are the relationship-management dimensions of trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction, proposed by Hon and Grunig (Cheng 2018; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019).

Since the four dimensions of trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction are validated scales (Yang, Kang & Cha 2015; Yue et al. 2019; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019), they are adopted for this study and are now discussed.

● *Trust*

Trust is an important dimension of relationship management, and disciplines, including marketing and communication, have explored, researched and discussed trust within the context of the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Yue, Men & Ferguson 2019). For example, in relationship marketing, trust is conceptualised as the belief that a party to a transaction can be depended upon to fulfil its obligations to the other and is expected to behave in a caring manner (Scheer 2012; Brown, Crosno & Tong 2019). In communication, specifically in public relations, Yue et al. (2019) cite scholars such as Hon and Grunig (1999:2), who refer to trust as the decision by one party to a relationship retaining a level of confidence in another party, and the willingness of both parties to be open to each other. Shen (2017), on the other hand, explains trust as the level of mutual confidence a partner in a relationship has in the other partner in the relationship. Trust is also described as the

stakeholders' level of confidence in the other relational party's (for example, organisation) existence in a relationship (Cheng, Shen & Jiang 2020).

In terms of competition, trust can provide organisations with relationship advantages in both internal and external terms (Weber, Bauke & Raibulet 2016; Weber, Weidner, Kroeger & Wallace 2017). Furthermore, trust makes possible successful relationships (Yuan, Feng, Lai & Collins 2018). To sum up what trust represents in the context of an organisation-stakeholder relationship, as discussed in the literature, trust requires that two parties in a relationship are expected to keep to promises made and show respect for each other.

The trust dimension of the organisation-stakeholder relationship (relationship management) consists of three elements (Hon & Grunig: 1999:2), namely, (1) integrity, which denotes the belief that the company is fair and just; (2) dependability, the belief that the organisation will fulfil what it says it will do; and (3) competence, the belief that the organisation is capable of doing what it says it will do.

As this study explores the organisation-stakeholder relationship concept in terms of using social-media crisis communication to build the organisation-stakeholder relationship, the study adopts Hon and Grunig's (1999) concept of trust and its elements of integrity, dependability and competence. The trust dimension and its elements have been validated and used to measure organisation-stakeholder relationships in many studies (Yang, Kang & Cha 2015; Yue et al. 2019; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019; Celebi & Bilir 2019; Pressgrove, McKeever, McKeever & Waters 2022). For example, trust was found to be the most important dimension in relational outcomes with respect to patrons of sports centres. Sports centres interested in long-term relationships with their stakeholders (ie, patrons) must demonstrate trust to patrons (Çelebi & Bilir 2019). Similarly, Pressgrove et al. (2022) found out that trust is positively associated with the communicative actions of stakeholders. In effect, trust, as a dimension of relationship management is important for stakeholder communication (Pressgrove et al. 2022).

● *Control mutuality*

Control mutuality is one of the key dimensions in Hon and Grunig's (1999) exposition on relationship management. Hon and Grunig (1999) describe control mutuality as the extent to which partners in a relationship come to an agreement on which partner has the legitimate power to influence the other. Control mutuality is seen as relevant to establishing and maintaining a satisfactory connection between an organisation and its stakeholders (Colquitt, Baer, Long & Halvorsen-Ganepola 2014).

In the quest for an organisation-stakeholder relationship, a decision on power balance must be made (Çelebi & Bilir 2019). Celebi and Bilir (2019) emphasise that a stakeholders' perception about an organisation in respect of a steady and quality relationship can be impacted by the balance or imbalance of power between the organisation and stakeholders. It is a view of a potential power imbalance between the organisation and stakeholders that it has been argued that the power held by the organisation and its stakeholders must be balanced in the interest of both the organisation and stakeholders. The assessment of such a power must be done in a rational way (Le Roux 2014; Steyn & Niemann 2014; Celebi & Bilir 2019).

Control mutuality is regarded as useful for measuring the quality relationship between organisations and stakeholders (Kim & Sung 2016; Suter & Gmür 2018; Celebi & Bilir 2019; Yue et al. 2019; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019; Celebi 2020). For example, it has been established that control mutuality correlates with an organisation's communicative process with stakeholders and, therefore, must be given recognition in public-relations practices, including relationship management (Celebi 2020).

It is clear from the discussion above that control mutuality, which is also validated, is relevant for measuring social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships. This study therefore adopts control mutuality as one of the constructs in measuring the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

- *Commitment*

Commitment is regarded as an important criterion of organisation-stakeholder relationships and it is the conviction that two parties in a relationship must devote time and resources in developing and maintaining the relationship (Hon & Grunig 1999). Dhanesh and Duthler (2019:5) refer to commitment as the degree to which two parties in a relationship have the belief that time and resources must be invested in the relationship in order to maintain the relationship. Furthermore, commitment is described as the ability by two parties in a relationship to devote time and resources to maintaining and growing the relationship (Le Roux 2014; Steyn & Niemann 2014; Lee & Li 2020).

Much attention has been devoted to the relationship-management dimension of commitment (Vohra & Bhardwaj 2019; Xu 2019). This could be because commitment involves loyalty and an aspiration to preserve a cherished relationship (Celebi & Bilir 2019). Commitment displayed by the organisation towards stakeholders can positively influence the behaviour and intentions of stakeholders (Celebi & Bilir 2019; Cheng et al. 2019).

Commitment is furthermore seen as a viable measure for assessing the quality of a relationship between an organisation and stakeholders (Kim & Sung 2016; Celebi & Bilir 2019; Yue et al. 2019; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019; Celebi 2020). In a study by Celebi (2020:774) for example, it was found that the communication process established by public institutions positively influenced the commitment of stakeholders towards public institutions.

It is evident that the commitment dimension, which is also validated is useful for measuring social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships. Therefore, this study adopts commitment as one of the constructs in measuring the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

- *Satisfaction*

Satisfaction as a concept is considered a positive expectation parties in a relationship consider in order to strengthen the relationship. Hon and Grunig (1999) describe satisfaction

as an outcome whereby the benefits derived from a relationship by the parties compensate for the costs. Satisfaction involves the degree to which parties in a relationship gain more from the relationship than what both invested in the relationship (Kim 2018). Dhanesh and Duthler (2019:5) state that satisfaction refers to how the organisation and stakeholders feel positively about each other.

The satisfaction dimension is an expectation both the organisation and stakeholders need in order to strengthen the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Celebi & Bilir 2019:456). Satisfaction as a relationship outcome can enable an organisation to have a competitive advantage, as it focuses on meeting the needs and expectations of stakeholders. In situations where the reputation of the organisation is not favourable, the organisation must ensure that it implements strategies that meet the expectations of stakeholders (Celebi & Bilir 2019:463).

Ferguson (2018:171) articulates that both the organisation and stakeholders must consider whether the relationship is satisfactory to only one party in the relationship or both parties. There are four states of satisfaction available to both the organisation and stakeholders: organisation satisfied, stakeholder satisfied; organisation satisfied, stakeholder unsatisfied; organisation unsatisfied, stakeholder satisfied; and both organisation and stakeholder unsatisfied (Ferguson 2018:171). For a positive relational outcome, the researcher in this study argues that organisations must pursue the organisation satisfied, stakeholder satisfied state.

Satisfaction has been validated and used to measure organisation-stakeholder relationships (see Celebi & Bilir 2019; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019; Celebi 2020). For example, satisfaction was used as a construct to measure how stakeholders feel about the communication processes of public institutions (Celebi 2020). The researcher in this study adopts satisfaction as a construct to assess social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships. As is evident from the above discussion, almost all the dimensions emphasise organisation-stakeholder relationships. The organisation-stakeholder relationship (OSR) is fundamental to

the relationship-management theory and can yield satisfaction for both the organisation and stakeholders (Steyn & Niemann 2014:172). It is argued in this thesis that the public-relations profession must seek to be in the middle in ensuring trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction between organisations and stakeholders. This consciousness is more vital to the work of public relations in situations such as crises, where the reputation of the organisation is at risk.

Table 4.1: A summary of the relationship dimensions adopted by the study

Dimension	Meaning of the dimension	Principles adopted for the study
Trust	Trust refers to the extent of confidence that an organisation and stakeholders have in each other and their inclination to be transparent to each other.	The study adopts integrity, dependability and competence as the principles.
Control mutuality	Control mutuality refers to the extent to which both the organisation and stakeholders are content with the degree of control they both have over the relationship	The understanding that the power held by both the organisation and stakeholders are balanced and acceptable for their relationship.
Commitment	Commitment means the degree to which both the organisation and stakeholders have a conviction that they should both be devoted to the relationship	The principle adopted for the study is that both the organisation and stakeholders must commit to devoting time and resources in building and strengthening their relationship.
Satisfaction	Satisfaction is focused on the degree to which both the organisation and stakeholders view each other in a favourable manner	The study views satisfaction as the delight both the organisation and stakeholders derive from their relationship.

Sources: (Hon and Grunig 1999:2; Ferguson 2018:171; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019:5; Celebi & Bilir 2019:456; Celebi 2020:774)

Also important to note is that in this study relationship management is seen through the lens of dialogic communication, which must be an important consideration in any discussion on organisation-stakeholder relationship (Taylor & Kent 2014; Capriotti, Zeler & Oliveira 2019). The next section explains the concept of dialogic communication as a theoretical point of departure for this study and which will also be extended to social-media crisis communication.

4.3 DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION THEORY

The dialogic communication theory has attracted much interest from communication and other humanities scholars in the last 20 years (Wilcox 2019:2). This interest emanates from the need to promote dialogue between organisations and stakeholders for the purpose of building consensus and building mutually beneficial organisation-stakeholder relationships (Wilcox 2019:1). The theory has become identified with the public-relations discipline and it is seen as a focal point in the positioning of public relations as relevant to ensuring positive organisation-stakeholder relationships (Uysal 2018; Chen, Hung-Baesecke & Chen 2020).

In the sections below, the theory of dialogic communication; dialogic communication theory and public relations; dialogic communication and relationship-building, including interactivity on social media; and dialogic communication principles are discussed.

4.3.1 Explicating the dialogic communication theory

Dialogic communication theory has been widely researched for the purposes of creating mutual understanding with and building relationships with and between stakeholders (Yang, Kang & Johnson 2010; Briones, Kuch, Liu & Jin 2011; Wilcox 2019; Chen et al. 2020). The assumption is that the effective integration of dialogic communication principles into the communication management of organisations can enhance public-relations practice. In this regard, Wilcox (2019:2) posits that the emergence of the internet and the World Wide Web (WWW) ushered in a new communication challenge for communication and public-relations practitioners. Since the WWW and social media are influencing every facet of contemporary society, dialogue between organisations and stakeholders has become a focal point for public-relations research and practices (Chen et al. 2020). Organisations are now expected to communicate directly with stakeholders and not through only the traditional media. The need for organisations to effectively situate organisational communication within the two-way communication spectrum caused Kent and Taylor to propose the dialogic communication theory in 1998 (Wilcox 2019; Chen et al. 2020).

The dialogic theory emerged from Grunig's two-way symmetric model of public relations (see Section 2.4.2 of Chapter 2), which basically focused on a balanced approach to communication between organisations and stakeholders (Wilcox 2019:2). The key emphasis of the model is mutual understanding for the objective of relationship-building between an organisation and stakeholders. The theory is a departure from the four models of Grunig and Hunt (1984) to an interpersonal, relational and public-centred form of engagement (Johnston 2014; Taylor & Kent 2014a; Sommerfeldt & Kent 2015).

The key proponents of the dialogic theory, Michael Kent and Maureen Taylor, defined the theory as "…an orientation that values sharing and mutual understanding between interactants." Interaction and the forming of relationships are key elements in the theory (Kent & Lane 2017:569). The theory, as defined by Kent and Taylor, requires the commitment of both parties (the organisation and stakeholders) towards ensuring that the interaction between the parties is geared towards a shared understanding.

4.3.1.1 Adopting a definition of dialogic communication

In order to fully appreciate the concept of dialogic communication, it is useful to look at the various definitions of dialogic communication. There is no universally and generally agreed definition of dialogic communication (Blank & Franklin 2008; Pieczka 2011; Lee & Desai 2014). However, a number of positions on what dialogic communication is have been expressed by both theorists and practitioners in the literature.

In the seminal work of Kent and Taylor (1998:325), they described dialogic communication as "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions". Wilcox and Cameron (2009) describe dialogic communication as "involving mutual exchanges between an organisation and its stakeholders." Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009:13) define dialogic communication as "two-way communication where the process and its outputs are open-ended and the scope explores issues and generates new knowledge and solutions, rather than merely transmitting information."

The various definitions on dialogic communication discussed above are all clear about how balanced communication can yield benefits for both the organisation and stakeholders.

As relationship-building is an important component of this study, this study adopts the definition of Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009:13). Their definition is adopted because it highlights that a successful dialogic communication outcome must include a commitment to open lines of communication, exploration of issues that affect organisations and their stakeholders, and an opportunity for organisations and stakeholders to gain new knowledge of one another.

Given the popularity of the dialogic communication theory among public-relations researchers (Duhé 2015; Huang, Wu & Huang 2017), the next section explores the application of dialogic communication theory in public relations.

4.3.2 Dialogic communication theory and public relations

The concept of dialogic communication and its application in public relations has attracted interest from many public relations scholars (for example, Theunissen & Rahman 2011; Muckenstrum 2013; Lane 2014; Gutierrez-Garcia, Recalde & Pinera-Camacho 2015; Watkins 2016; Wilcox 2019; Chen 2020; Ao & Huang 2020).

In an endorsement for the use of the dialogic theory, Gutierrez-Garcia, Recalde and Pinera-Camacho (2015:746) assert that the idea of dialogue has become dominant in public-relations research as there is an increasing need to show a commitment to stakeholder needs. Furthermore, as there is a call for an increased organisation-stakeholder engagement, the application of the dialogic communication theory to public-relations practice will make public relations ethical and stakeholder-centric (Yang, Kang & Cha 2015; Chen et al. 2020).

The communication language of organisations is largely created by public-relations practitioners and practitioners can help organisations to be co-creators of dialogue (Leitch & Motion 2010; Taylor & Kent 2014; Thelen, Robinson, Yue & Men 2021). The dialogic communication approach can enable organisations to achieve positive outcomes, such as mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders (Valentini, Kruckeberg & Starck 2012;

Wilcox 2019; Kent & Li 2020; Thelen et al. 2021). Some scholars have argued that, if the concept of the dialogic theory is encouraged and supported, practitioners will be empowered to assume prominent roles as community-building facilitators (Sommerfeldt 2013:286; Kent & Li 2020:4; Joshi 2022:5-6). Proponents of dialogic communication theory have pointed out further that public-relations practitioners must seek to persuade their organisations to show commitment towards dialogic communication strategic approaches, such as organisational listening (Kent & Theunissen 2016; Taylor, Kent & Xiong 2019; Wilcox 2019). A commitment to organisational listening can foster ethical communication and transparency between organisations and stakeholders (Chen et al. 2020). This progressive strategic approach towards dialogic communication by public-relations practitioners will provide organisations with opportunities to understand the voices of stakeholders and to gain knowledge of the network of stakeholders and how the networks operate (Gulbrandsen & Just 2016; Lovari, D'Ambrosi, L & Bowen 2020).

Having discussed the importance of dialogic communication to public-relations practice, it is imperative to look at the principles of the dialogic communication theory.

4.3.3 Dialogic communication based on dialogic communication theory principles

The position of public relations on what dialogue encompasses is a two-way communication between organisations and stakeholders and that dialogue is characteristically founded on a framework consisting of concepts such as mutuality, propinquity, commitment, empathy and risk (Kent & Taylor 2002; Kent 2008; Lane & Kent 2018; Lane 2020). Table 4.2 provides an overview and explanation of the principles.

Table 4.2 Dialogic communication principles

Principle	Description	Benefit
Mutuality	• It refers to the recognition that both the organisation and stakeholders are linked together. In dialogue, it is expected that participants in a dialogue are allowed to have positions and defend the positions. • The concept of mutuality is that dialogue enables understanding between the participants. • The key features are collaboration and spirit of mutuality equality (Taylor et al. 2019:82).	Enhanced understanding between the organisation and stakeholders. It will be in the strategic interest of the organisation to incorporate mutuality in its dialogic communication agenda.
Propinquity	• Propinquity is when the organisation consults stakeholders on matters of interest to stakeholders and the willingness of stakeholders to voice out their demands to organisations. • Neutrality is not a popular consideration; participants are expected to appreciate the various positions they both hold. According to Kent and Taylor (2002:26), propinquity if it is embraced by an organisation can lead to good gains as it makes an organisation know in advance potential issues and likely solutions. • Propinquity is characterised by immediacy of presence, temporal flow and engagement (Taylor et al. 2019:82).	Respect is encouraged and promoted between the organisation and stakeholders.
Commitment	• Commitment is explained as genuineness, commitment to the conversation and commitment to interpretation (Taylor et al. 2019:82). • Dialogue must be honest and sincere. Also, participants must understand each other (Kent & Taylor 2002:29). In context, dialogue is deemed ethical when the values of mutuality and respect are displayed by participants (Toledano 2018:140).	Commitment to dialogue can lead to openness and trust between organisations and stakeholders.
Empathy	• Empathy refers to trust and support and it is core to dialogue (Kent & Taylor 2002:27). They assert that empathy provides the Foundation for relational approach to public relations. If an organisation is sympathetic to stakeholders, the organisational – stakeholder relationship would be enhanced (Kent & Taylor 2002). Supportiveness, communal orientation and confirmation are the attributes of empathy (Taylor et al. 2019:82).	The relationship between organisations and stakeholders sometimes is bedeviled with challenges. For example, in crisis situations, organisations must display concern, show care and support stakeholders. A dialogic communication strategy will enable organisations to easily demonstrate empathy to stakeholders.
Risk	• As dialogue involves a certain degree of self-disclosure, both participants are vulnerable to risks. The dialogic risk can serve a good purpose as it creates opportunities for both participants to understand each other as uncertainties are reduced (Kent & Taylor 2002:28). • The key features are vulnerability, unanticipated consequences and recognition of strange otherness (Taylor et al. 2019:82).	A dialogic communication approach is not always positive. There are negative consequences to dialogic communication. However, opportunities may arise for new knowledge that will serve the interests of both the organisation and stakeholders.

The overview of the five principles as presented in Table 4.2 highlights dialogic communication as positive for relationship-building in terms of aspects such as trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction, which were explained in Section 4.2.2. The five principles justify the organisation-stakeholder relationship concept and fulfil the relationship-management theorists' expectation of the public-relations discipline.

Despite the enriching nature of dialogic communication, it has been criticised on the basis of its practicability in organisational settings. Table 4.3 summarises the criticisms against dialogic communication.

Table 4.3: Criticisms against dialogic communication

Criticisms against Dialogic communication
Dialogic communication can be exploited and misapplied by a party to a communication against another party. Stakeholders stand the risk of having their disclosures used against them (Kent & Taylor 2002:33).
Dialogic communication requires the willingness of an organisation to make dialogue commitments to its stakeholders in that (Kent & Taylor 2002:24).
Some public-relations practitioners have challenged the principles of dialogic communication who find it difficult to adopt the dialogic approach in daily practice. Resource constraints is a challenge many practitioners face in practicing dialogic communication Sommerfeldt, Kent, & Taylor 2012:310)
There is a call for the theory to evolve and adapt in order to accommodate technological innovations and trends such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data (Sommerfeldt & Yang 2018:61)

As already articulated, the dialogic communication theory supports the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Chen et al. 2020; Kent & Li 2020); it is therefore appropriate to discuss the theory and its relevance to relationship-building, especially with the increasing use of social media by organisations.

4.3.4 Dialogic communication theory and relationship-building

The dialogic communication theory is one of the theories that helps improve the understanding of the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Taylor; Kent & Xiang 2019). As public-relations practitioners are expected to act as the conscience of their organisations and counsel management on good ethical conduct, the place of the dialogic communication theory

in relationship-building should not be downplayed (Taylor et al. 2019).

For dialogic communication to have an impact on relationship-building with stakeholders, it is argued in this study that interactivity, orientation of mutuality, climate of openness and engagement must be promoted and accepted. These dialogic communication concepts must be applied in strategic ways in building relationships with stakeholders. For example, a dialogic communication approach on social media intended to be mutuality and openness-centred, must include social listening. The social-listening strategy (as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.6.5) will enable the organisation to set up a listening structure and "listen" continuously in order to understand the dynamics of stakeholders (Stewart & Young 2018). This strategy can be beneficial to the organisation-stakeholder relationship, especially in crisis situations, as the organisation will be tolerant of the views and opinions of stakeholders.

As these dialogic communication concepts are critical to relationship-building with stakeholders, the following sections delve into each of the concepts and their relevance to relationship-building.

4.3.4.1 Interactivity and dialogic communication

An important dialogic communication concept is interactivity and it is usually associated with computer-mediated communication technologies. Interactivity is defined as involving interpersonal communication mediated through web-based communication. The communication involves reciprocal messages among senders and receivers (Sundar, Bellur, Oh, Jia & Kim 2016; Qiao 2019). Stakeholders have opportunities on web-based communication platforms such as social media to interact with organisations (Roshan et al. 2016). Social media users have access to interactive features to engage in dialogic communication (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden 2011; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre 2011; Roshan et al. 2016; Wang & Yang 2020).

Due to the growing importance of social media and consequent support for interactive communication, organisations that are highly interactive on social media are well placed to

enjoy the favour of stakeholders (Xu & Saxton 2019). The stakeholder's positive orientation towards the organisation can positively influence the organisation-stakeholder relationship in that stakeholders have interactive opportunities to engage with the organisation (Saffer, Sommerfeldt & Taylor 2013; Valentini 2018; Cheng & Shen 2020).

In the context of crisis events (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2.1), it is important that organisations are interactive with stakeholders, particularly crisis victims (Ndlela 2019; Coombs 2019). The need to be interactive has become very necessary in the era of social media because social media have created avenues for stakeholders to produce and distribute all kinds of content, including content that can damage or enhance the reputation of organisations. That is why the suggestion that organisations must interact and engage with stakeholders is relevant (Romenti & Murtarelli 2014; Valentini 2018; Cheng & Shen 2020).

The concept of interactivity within dialogic communication is especially relevant to this study. As already pointed out above, interaction on web-based platforms allows both the sender and receiver of a message to engage in an interpersonal manner. Issues such as crises require both organisations and stakeholders to have a conversation and hopefully achieve some understanding. Interactive opportunities and exchanges can enhance understanding between stakeholders and organisations on crisis-related issues.

In the pursuit of interactivity along the lines of dialogic communication, it is argued in this study that an orientation of mutuality and a climate of openness must be the key principles upon which dialogic communication is practised, if it is geared towards building stakeholder relationships. As opined by the proponents of organisation-public dialogic communication (OPDC; see Yang, Kang & Cha 2015:176), dialogic communication between organisations and stakeholders must be conducted and practised along the lines of mutuality and openness. It is therefore important that dialogic communication must involve the collaboration of stakeholders. In the sections that follow, the concepts of orientation of mutuality and a climate of openness are explained.

4.3.4.2 Orientation of Mutuality

The concept of orientation of mutuality refers to the recognition that both the organisation and stakeholders are linked together in achieving a mutual goal, even though they are both allowed to have positions in a dialogue and defend those positions (Yang, Kang & Cha 2015:176; Carpenter, Takahashi, Lertpratchya & Cunningham 2016:524; Song & Tao 2022:3). An orientation of mutuality has six attributes, namely, grounding, collaboration, confirmed equality, responsiveness, respect and empathy, as explained in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Attributes of Orientation of Mutuality

Attribute	Meaning of attribute	References
Grounding	Grounding in communication is explained as knowledge the sender and receiver know and mutually share.	(Clark & Brennan 1991:223; Brown-Schmidt & Duff 2016:723; Park & Kang 2020:8).
Collaboration	Collaboration refers to the orientation that allows both the organisation and stakeholders to aim at achieving shared communicative goals.	(Yang et al. 2015:178; Song & Tao 2022:10).
Confirmed equality	Confirmed equality is described as a communication orientation that is aimed at ensuring that both the organisation and stakeholders see each other as equal in the dialogue.	(Yang et al. 2015:178; Song & Tao 2022:10).
Responsiveness	Responsiveness refers to a shared orientation which places a responsibility on both the organisation and stakeholders to be thoughtful in identifying the needs of each other	(Yang et al 2015:178; Song & Tao 2022:10).
Respect	Respect is the shared understanding between the organisation and stakeholders to be supportive of each other unconditionally.	(Yang et al 2015:178; Song & Tao 2022:10).
Empathy	Empathy, is explained as the orientation that requires the organisation to be empathetic towards the feelings of stakeholders (Yang et al. 2015:178; Song & Tao 2022:10).	(Yang et al 2015:178; Song & Tao 2022:10).

The various attributes of orientation to mutuality are essential in building relationships with stakeholders. In crisis situations, these attributes can become useful in interactional situations on social media between organisations and stakeholders. The organisation-stakeholder relationship can be enhanced (Husain et al. 2014) when stakeholders have access to

collaborative and interactive means to communicate and also engage in reciprocal communication (Men, Tsai, Chen & Ji 2018; Tsai & Men 2018).

4.3.4.3 Climate of Openness

When describing the climate of openness, Yang et al. (2015:179) articulate that both the organisation and stakeholders must be willing and create opportunities for open and honest communication. The attributes of a climate of openness are accessibility, genuineness, and transparency (Yang et al. 2015:179: Neill, Men & Yue 2019:289) and they are explained in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Attributes of a climate of openness

Attribute	Meaning of attribute	References
Accessibility	Accessibility refers to allowing both the organisation and stakeholders equal access to information and to share their views freely.	(Yang et al. 2015:179; Chen, Ji & Men 2021:5).
Genuineness	Genuineness is described as a communication atmosphere that produces genuine interest in communication between the organisation and stakeholders.	(Yang et al. 2015:179: Chen, Ji & Men 2021:5).
Transparency	Transparency is explained as a communication atmosphere that promotes clarity in the organisation's communication to stakeholders.	(Yang et al. 2015:179: Chen, Ji & Men 2021:5)

A climate of openness can lead to a shared understanding, trust, and commitment and can enhance the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Ghazinejad, Hussein & Zidane 2018). Even though an organisation's commitment to openness is seen as positive, sometimes, for strategic reasons, some organisations are not willing to be open and share information about their activities, actions and operations (Gibbs et al. 2013:103; Boholm 2019:1703). There is a certain conviction that an approach to openness can lead to conflict and risk (Gibbs et al. 2013:103; Boholm 2019:1703).

It is important to highlight the relevance of social media to a climate of openness during a crisis. In turbulent times, such as crisis events, organisations that show some commitment to

open communication on social media recover faster from a crisis and minimise crisis threats (Veil et al. 2011; Du Plessis 2018; Yuan, Lin, Filieri, Liu & Zheng 2020). Social media features, such as status updates, videos, photos, retweets, links and notes, provide opportunities for organisations to engage in open communication with stakeholders by informing stakeholders on progress made on crisis-related issues (Hysenlika 2012; Guo & Saxton 2018; Liu et al. 2020).

Organisations must show commitment to openness in their dialogic communication engagement with stakeholders. As already argued, openness can yield positive outcomes for organisation-stakeholder relationships (Yang, Kang & Cha 2015; Ghazinejad et al. 2018).

A careful examination of all the attributes (both orientation of mutuality and climate of openness) reveals that the purpose is to ensure that the relationship between the organisation and stakeholders is mutually beneficial. The relationship will be mutually beneficial as the dialogic communication exchanges will be honest, open, respectful, empathetic and collaborative (Liu et al. 2022; Tong & Chan 2022).

This study is supportive of the concepts of orientation of mutuality and a climate of openness and its relevance to dialogic communication. A crisis can have dire consequences for organisations. Organisational crisis-management actions including communication must thus be scrutinised and interpreted. Although it can be argued that an orientation of mutuality and a climate of openness can enhance the organisation-stakeholder relationship in crisis times, a communication strategy that is also balanced to ensure that the reputation of the organisation, including its interests, is not overly compromised. Public relations, as already discussed, are essential for relationship management. This function performed by practitioners must yield outcomes that are mutually beneficial for both organisations and stakeholders. Exploring the angles of orientation of mutuality and openness in dialogic communication is relevant to this study since they constitute core elements of dialogic communication, which can add value to crisis-communication management on social media.

The concept of engagement is relevant to dialogic communication and relationship-building. The next section discusses engagement as a concept for dialogic communication.

4.3.4.4. Dialogic communication and the concept of engagement

Organisational interest in relationship-building must also emphasise engagement. Engagement allows stakeholders to be involved in the activities of the organisation (Sloan 2009; Devin & Lane 2014; Johnston 2014). Taylor and Kent (2014:391) define engagement as "an interaction that involves give-and-take between two parties. It is geared towards mutual understanding, relationship-building, shared decision-making and the co-creation of reality." As a principle of communication, engagement involves conversation or discussion and occupying the attention of someone (Lane & Kent 2018). In other words, engagement is "an interactive concept characterised by psychological and behavioural elements of connection, participation and involvement intended to accomplish an individual, organisation or social outcome" (Johnston 2018:19).

It is posited that stakeholders' trust and satisfaction with an organisation can increase the level of their engagement with the organisation (Kang 2014). Engagement is a critical aspect of dialogic communication. In this regard, Kent (2014:384) argues that, when organisations make engagement a priority, the organisation-stakeholder relationship can function effectively and lead to mutual understanding and cooperation. In the context of stakeholders, engagement is viewed as positive or beneficial if it brings about more knowledge or stronger feelings towards a product or service. Engagement is deemed valuable by organisations if the outcome brings about social relationships (Johnston 2018).

In recent times, the concept of engagement has been extended to social media and is a key feature of social-media use. Social media has extended onto computer-mediated communication the human-communication value of interactivity and conversation (Men & Tsai 2014; Xu & Saxton 2019). There is hence a positive orientation towards using social media for relationship development by some organisations (Ihlen 2013; Xu & Saxton 2019; Kent &

Taylor 2021). When engagement is seen as a principle to be promoted and supported in the communication agenda of an organisation, it can allow organisations and stakeholders to recognise their interdependence and work together for their mutual benefits (Taylor & Kent 2014; Chen et al. 2020; Kent & Taylor 2021).

There is an erroneous assumption by some public-relations practitioners that their organisations are at risk if they encourage engagement and dialogic communication, as both can be time-consuming (Taylor & Kent 2014:395). It is in view of this that Taylor and Kent (2014:395), supported by Lane and Taylor (2018:68), suggest that professional public relations bodies such as IPR Ghana incorporate dialogic communication and engagement in their training programmes for the purpose of enhancing the capacity of public-relations practitioners. Such a training curriculum will enable public-relations practitioners and other communication professionals to become competent in what Taylor and Kent (2014:395) describe as "dialogic engagement".

As the issue of a crisis can call for dialogue and engagement in order to hold steady the organisation-stakeholder relationship, this study sought to assess practitioners' knowledge and understanding of dialogic communication and engagement. It is important that public-relations practitioners have the requisite skills in dialogic engagement. These skills must equip them effectively to handle and manage crises on social media. Exploring the concept of engagement as a key component of dialogic communication is relevant to proposing a conceptual framework for crisis communication on social media. It has become imperative for organisations to engage on social media with stakeholders. As users have become gatekeepers of online content and can potentially set the discussion agenda on organisational activities, organisations must intentionally engage on social media.

As suggested by Ferguson (2018:71), relationship satisfaction can be conceived along the lines of organisation satisfied, stakeholder satisfied; organisation satisfied, stakeholder unsatisfied; stakeholder satisfied, organisation unsatisfied; and both satisfied. For this reason, this study argues that, on the important subject of social-media crisis communication, the

relationship satisfaction concept must seek to encourage organisation satisfaction, stakeholder satisfaction. The satisfaction must, however, be influenced by interactivity, an orientation of mutuality, a climate of openness and engagement.

The discussions on dialogic components such as interactivity, orientation to mutuality, climate of openness and engagement offer positive views on the need for organisations to consider the dialogic communication approach in building relationships with stakeholders. The study will in Chapter 5 present dialogic communication approaches proposed as part of elements proposed for the conceptual framework for social-media communication to build relationships with stakeholders.

Table 4.6 summarises the dialogic communication components that will serve as proposed elements of the conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships.

Table 4.6: Components for communication effectiveness in relationship-building with stakeholders

Concept	Description	Study context	Relevance to the study
Grounding	The communication process whereby both the sender and receiver agree that the communication exchanges between them have been understood.	In this study, grounding refers to social-media crisis communication involving the organisation and stakeholders and both agreeing that the communication exchanges between them in times of crises have been understood	The concept of grounding is relevant to this study because in crisis situations, it is important that both the organisation and stakeholders understand each other. The interests of both parties must be served. In the pursuit of relationship-building with stakeholders, organisations must be willing to commit to the grounding principle.
Collaboration	Refers to the orientation or mind-set by both the organisation and stakeholders to aim at a shared communication goal.	Collaboration in this study is described as communication engagements on social media during a crisis, aimed at ensuring that both the organisation and stakeholders are focused on a common communication goal.	Collaboration as a dialogic communication approach is relevant to this study as it positions the organisation as committed to allowing stakeholders to use social media in finding solutions to the crisis.
Equality	Equality refers to a communication orientation aimed at ensuring that both the organisation and stakeholders recognise that both are equal in the dialogue.	In the context of this study, equality means that the organisations recognises that in its use of social media to communicate during a crisis, stakeholders equally can use social media to communicate about the crisis	Equality is relevant to this study as it makes both the organisation and stakeholders accept the need to be accommodative to views they both express on social media during a crisis
Responsiveness	Responsiveness refers to a shared orientation which places a responsibility on both the organisation and stakeholders to be thoughtful in identifying the needs of each other and also to be supportive of each other unconditionally.	Responsiveness in this study is described as organisations using social media to listen to views expressed about a crisis and responding to the posts of stakeholders.	As strongly emphasised in Chapter 7 of this study, responding to stakeholders on social media during a crisis can help in building relationships with stakeholders. Hence, applying responsiveness in this study is relevant.

Empathy	Empathy refers to the orientation that requires the organisation to be empathetic towards the feelings of stakeholders	Empathy in this study refers to the orientation by organisations to be empathetic on social media during crisis when engaging with stakeholders.	The concept of empathy is relevant to this study as it can enable organisations to use social media during crises to show that it is concerned about the welfare of stakeholders who are the victims of a crisis. This attitude potentially can lead to relationship-building with stakeholders.
Accessibility	Accessibility refers to allowing both the organisation and stakeholders have equal access to information and to share their views freely	In the context of this study, accessibility means that stakeholders must have access to crisis information on social media and they must also be allowed to share their views freely on social media.	When stakeholders are provided with crisis communication on social media and they also can share views freely, the pursuit of organisation-stakeholder relationship can be attained. Therefore, accessibility as a dialogic communication concept is relevant to this study.
Genuineness	Genuineness is described as a communication atmosphere produces genuine interest in communication between the organisation and stakeholders	Genuineness refers to both the organisation and stakeholders being committed to honest communication on social media about a crisis.	The concept of genuineness is relevant to this study as stakeholders can view organisations positively if they communicate honestly on social media.
Transparency	Transparency is explained as a communication atmosphere that promotes clarity in the organisation's communication to stakeholders. The purpose is to not hide information from stakeholders	Transparency is explained in this study as focused on the organisation not being deceptive with crisis information shared on social media to stakeholders.	The organisation is expected to act with integrity even when in crisis. Transparency allows the organisation to use social media to come clear on crisis issues. This approach portends well for organisations as it can make stakeholders trust the organisation. Therefore, transparency is relevant to this study.

In spite of these criticisms as highlighted in table 4.3 of section 4.3.3, dialogic communication provides a functional theoretical point of departure for social-media crisis-communication management. The integration of the theory into social-media crisis communication may not necessarily solve crisis problems of the organisation, but it can promote understanding and

can help resolve disagreements between organisations and stakeholders (Kent & Lane 2017:569). As the theory seeks to ensure a balance in communication and to foster genuine relationships between organisations and stakeholders (Kent 2017:2), it offers public-relations practitioners useful ways of serving the interests of organisations and stakeholders in mutually beneficial ways.

This chapter concludes with the discourse of renewal theory, which is also adopted for this study as a theoretical point of departure for after the crisis. Organisations in crisis will usually seek to renew their relationships with stakeholders after a crisis. Social media in recent times have been used as a communication channel to safeguard the support of and relationship with stakeholders during and after a crisis (Du Plessis 2018). The next section discusses the discourse of renewal theory and its relevance to this study.

4.4 DISCOURSE OF RENEWAL THEORY

The discourse of renewal theory is an important addition to crisis communication theories in that, when resolving crises, reputation and image-related activities are important, but are often inadequate in effectively resolving a crisis (Ulmer et al. 2015:29). The main thrust of the theory is that organisations stricken with a crisis can use the crisis to create renewal, growth and new opportunities with stakeholders (Sellnow & Seeger 2013:96; Narverud 2016:13; Xu 2018:109). As aptly suggested by Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2019:183), crises must be seen as the crossroad of both "danger and opportunity".

In the following sections, the discourse of renewal theory is defined, the dimensions of the theory are explained, weaknesses of the theory are highlighted, the relevance of the theory to relationship-building is argued and the discourse of renewal use in social media is discussed.

4.4.1 What is the discourse of renewal theory?

The key proponents of the discourse of renewal theory now are Robert R Ulmer, Timothy L Sellnow and Matthew W Seeger (Du Plessis 2018; Xu 2018; Marsen 2020).

The definitions of the discourse of renewal revolve around the concept of organisation-stakeholder renewal. The discourse of renewal theory can be defined as "a development process intended to move organisations to 'higher stages progressively and to preclude a decline toward a lower stage" (Sellnow & Seeger 2013:96). Xu (2018:117) defines the discourse of renewal as "a normative crisis communication theory focused on addressing the information and communication needs of stakeholders concerning a crisis, picking lessons from the crisis, and disseminating crisis communication that is ethical."

The discourse of renewal theory emerged from the image restoration theory that focuses mainly on a threat of crisis to an organisation's reputation (Taylor 2011:49; Xu 2018:109) and was put forward by Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow (2007). The renewal of discourse approach allows the organisation to communicate reality in its crisis response to stakeholders so that stakeholders' perception will be favourable towards the organisation. Overall, the theory proposes that organisations must inspire optimism in stakeholders in ways such that both the organisation and stakeholders will see the crisis as an opportunity (Ulmer et al. 2007:131; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger 2010:691; Xu 2018:117). Furthermore, the discourse of renewal theory is an optimistic approach to how organisations should become after a crisis (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger 2018). As the organisation looks forward to refining its identity after a crisis, it must be seen as devoting its resources towards corrective measures rather than seeking to find faults (Anderson & Guo 2020:213).

It is important to provide an overview of the theoretical dimensions that define the discourse of renewal theory. The dimensions constitute the framework for the application of the theory in the management of crises. In this section, the criteria are discussed.

4.4.2 Theoretical dimensions of the discourse of renewal theory

Ulmer et al. (2007), in their seminal work on discourse of renewal theory, describe the dimensions as provisional communication, ethical communication, prospective vision and positive rhetoric, which are presented in Table 4.7 below.

Table 4.7. Theoretical dimensions of discourse of renewal

Theoretical dimension	Meaning	Reference
Provisional communication	Provisional communication refers to a communication approach that is natural, immediate and organic used by an organisation for the purpose of dealing with a crisis. The communication must not be seen as calculated and strategic that is geared towards protecting the reputation of the organisation.	Ulmer et al. (2007:131); Xu (2018:110); Ulmer & Pyle 2021 (5-6)
Ethical communication	Ethical communication is a value-driven form of communication that ensures that the organisation is projected as supporting social values. The ethical communication approach is an opportunity for the organisation to communicate its virtues and commitment to stakeholders (	Xu (2018:110); Wombacher, Herovic, Sellnow & Seeger 2018:165); Ulmer & Pyle 2021 (5-6)
Prospective vision	Prospective vision is when through communication, the organisation must inspire optimism and the purpose is to improve the organisation-stakeholder relationship. A prospective stance which also refers to an optimistic stance for the future can encourage stakeholders to contribute towards the rebuilding of the organisation. It is important that organisational leaders display credibility in their engagement with stakeholders. The responses provided by the organisation after the crisis must be driven by honesty and the virtues of the organisational leaders	Ulmer et al. (2007:132); Xu (2018:110); Ulmer & Pyle 2021 (5-6)
Positive rhetoric	The positive rhetoric focuses on the role of the organisational leader in shaping the reality of stakeholders by inspiring stakeholders to have a prospective vision about the company	Ulmer et al. (2007:132); Xu (2018:110); Ulmer & Pyle 2021 (5-6)

Organisations that consciously apply the discourse of renewal are well-positioned to have their images restored (Coombs 2010; Sellnow, Parrish & Semenas 2019). The integration of the

discourse of renewal theory to an organisation's crisis-communication strategy enables the organisation to move forward after the crisis and demonstrate a forward-thinking perspective towards stakeholders (Xu 2018; Du Plessis 2018; Ulmer et al. 2019).

To summarise, Xu (2018:117) articulates that the dimensions are progressive as they embody a change from an image and reputation focus to a prospective and renewal-based approach to building organisation-stakeholder relationships. When the organisation shows a commitment to the needs of stakeholders, especially at the post-crisis phase, the organisation relationship with stakeholders can be strengthened (Xu 2018).

4.4.3 Weaknesses in the discourse of renewal theory

As discussed above, the discourse of renewal theory offers organisations relationship-building and reputation-enhancement opportunities. However, the application of the theory does not lead to positive results for every crisis type. For example, Ulmer et al. (2007) assert that the discourse of renewal theory might not be the best response to all crisis types. Any decision to deploy the discourse renewal theory in the management of a crisis must be viewed against the type of crisis the organisation must deal with and manage.

The discourse of renewal strategy will not likely be an effective crisis-communication strategy in internal crisis situations (Shi 2017:33). As it is largely geared towards external stakeholders, Shi (2017) argues that other crisis-response strategies should be considered in the management of internal crisis events.

The prior reputation of the organisation is significant in the successful use of the discourse of renewal theory. A good reputation before the crisis event can inspire stakeholders to support the organisation in its discourse renewal efforts at the post-crisis phase (Wombacher et al. 2018:166).

Although the discourse of renewal has some weaknesses, as pointed out in Section 4.8.3, the dimensions such as prospective vision, ethical communication and positive rhetoric can

enable organisations to build relationships with stakeholders (Xu 2018; Du Plessis 2018; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger 2019).

In recent times, the discourse of renewal theory has been applied to social media. The next section discusses the theory's application to social media.

4.4.4 Discourse of renewal in social media

Over the years, the discourse of renewal theory has been applied in numerous studies related to disasters, for example, Carlson's (2018) case analysis of the Enbridge oil spill and Manzie's (2018) examination of Royal Dutch Shell's crisis response in Nigeria's Niger Delta region concerning an oil spill and environmental degradation. Only recently, this theory is also seen by scholars as useful for social-media crises. Du Plessis (2018) applied the theory to GitLab's data loss crisis while Pyle's (2016) analysis was of the case of the DiGiorno social-media team tweet with the hashtag #WhyIStayed as two examples of social media crises where the discourse of renewal theory was used.

Social media are valuable to organisation-stakeholder relationships (Navarro et al. 2016). Organisations in crisis have come to accept the use of social media as a way of communicating during a crisis (Hughes & Chauhan 2015; Shahid & Elbanna 2016). Organisations usually face the dilemma of how to navigate through reputation and relationship challenges when communicating during the crisis and the post-crisis phase. The discourse of renewal theory can be used on social media to enable organisations to project positivity to stakeholders (Ulmer et al. 2015). Du Plessis (2018:2) posits that social media can be used in strategic ways by organisations for crisis communication to win stakeholder support and improve stakeholder relationships. As articulated by Du Plessis (2018:2), organisations that look forward to prospective vision and ethical communication approach to communication, can use social media during and after the crisis to have regular and timely interaction with stakeholders. Social-media platforms will provide the organisation with an opportunity to listen and have an

understanding of the needs of stakeholders and ways of addressing these needs (Johannson, Brynielsson & Onijano 2012; Rainer, Grubmuller, Pejic, Gotsch & Leitner 2013).

Social media offer discourse renewal and dialogic opportunities to organisations and potentially can thus support relationship-building during and after a crisis event (Du Plessis 2018). It is possible that the integration of dialogic content and a discourse of renewal can generate stakeholder support for an organisation. Organisations can use discourse renewal in dialogic ways on social media and demonstrate to stakeholders that they have learnt from the crisis and are committed to using the crisis as an opportunity for renewal and growth (Ulmer 2013).

As emphasised in sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2, the discourse of renewal theory has a positive orientation towards relationship-building. It is thus important to discuss the theory's influence on organisation-stakeholder relationships. In the next section, how organisation-stakeholder relationships can be impacted by the discourse of renewal theory is discussed.

4.4.5 Discourse of renewal theory and organisation-stakeholder relationship

Ulmer (2012:532) advises that "organisations should work to develop strong stakeholder relationships with key stakeholders before any crisis." Organisations must approach organisation-stakeholder relationships with seriousness and must therefore collaborate with stakeholders (Ulmer 2012:532; Xu 2018:110). The ethical communication dimension can help organisations to rebuild relationships with stakeholders if it is geared towards addressing stakeholder needs (Ulmer et al. 2019). It is important that public-relations practitioners impress on top management that they must integrate the ethical communication dimension into the crisis response strategy. In applying the ethical communication dimension, the organisation must be open and honest with its approach to crisis communication at the post-crisis phase (Hu 2012).

Xu (2018:117) asserts that organisations must, during and after crisis events, treat the needs of stakeholders with the utmost importance in order to improve their relationship with

stakeholders. The theory posits that paying attention to the needs of stakeholders is necessary for the forward-looking perspective of the discourse of renewal theory and can ultimately be positive for the stakeholder-organisation relationship. Furthermore, the theory suggests that organisations must use the opportunities afforded at the post-crisis phase to take action to correct wrongdoings that emerged at the crisis phase. Such an approach will yield gains for the organisation to rebuild its relationship with stakeholders (Xu 2018:117).

The four dimensions of the discourse of renewal theory are quite structured to foster the confidence of stakeholders in the organisation. Also, the theory can provide organisations with relationship-building opportunities as the organisation engages stakeholders in resolving issues connected with the crisis (Xu 2018).

4.5 SUMMARY

The chapter comprehensively explored and discussed relationship management through the lens of dialogic communication. It was argued in this chapter that any attempt by organisations to build relationships with stakeholders must be built on principles of dialogic communication. Important relationship-management dimensions, such as trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction, were discussed and justified as parameters relevant for relationship-building with stakeholders. The chapter also provided explanations of dialogic communication aspects, such as interactivity, orientation of mutuality, climate of openness and engagement, as necessary for relationship-building with stakeholders. Theories on relationship management and dialogic communication were explained and how these theories impact contemporary public-relations practice. The argument was made that public relations will be deemed valuable to organisations if dialogic communication processes are integrated into the public-relations discipline. It was articulated further that with the emergence of computer-mediated communication technologies such as social media, organisations are expected to use dialogic communication in engaging with stakeholders. The chapter further justified that, for relationship-building with stakeholders to happen and be effective in the use of social media,

dialogic communication must be practised in the lines of orientation of mutuality (grounding, collaboration, respect, responsiveness and empathy) and climate of openness (accessibility, genuineness and transparency). The chapter concluded with the discourse of renewal theory as relevant to after a crisis. This part of the chapter highlighted important aspects of the theory, such as provisional communication, ethical communication, prospective vision and positive rhetoric, as important for building relationships with stakeholders during and after a crisis. It was argued that organisations can use these aspects even on social media and achieve organisation-stakeholder relationships in times of crisis.

In the next chapter, Chapter 5, elements of the conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships are proposed based on the literature.

CHAPTER 5: PROPOSED ELEMENTS FOR A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL-MEDIA CRISIS COMMUNICATION TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER A CRISIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Based on the literature in the previous chapters, this section now focuses on proposed elements for a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders before, during and after a crisis. These elements were empirically verified. After being empirically tested, the elements were revisited and adjusted for the proposed conceptual framework as explained in Chapter 9.

5.2 PROPOSED ELEMENTS OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The following four elements with encompassing sub-components are proposed for the conceptual framework and for empirical verification:

Element 1: Fundamentals of crisis preparedness

Element 2: Managing crises on social media with interactions

Element 3: Mending stakeholder relations after a social-media crisis

Element 4: Enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationships with social-media crisis communication

These elements and their sub-components are first summarised in Table 5.1 below before being explained in more detail.

Table 5.1: Proposed elements with sub-components and supporting literature for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders before, during and after a crisis

Proposed elements and sub-components	Supporting literature	Chapters and sections in the thesis
Element 1: Fundamentals for crisis preparedness	Carmeli & Schaubroeck (2008); Selart & Johansen 2013; Comunello et al. 2016; Tampere et al. 2016; Spence et al. 2017; Avery & Park 2019; Ghaderi et al. 2021	Chapter 3 (section 3.3.2)
Sub-component: Present crisis preparedness	Carmeli & Schaubroeck (2008); Crook et al. 2016; Ghaderi et. Al. 2021	Chapter 3 (section 3.3.2)
Sub-component: Prospective crisis preparedness	Carmeli & Schaubroeck (2008); Crook et al. 2016; Avery & Park 2019; Ghaderi et. Al. 2021	Chapter 3 (section 3.3.2)

Element 2: Managing crises on social media with interactions	Johnston (2014); Taylor & Kent (2014a); Sommerfeldt & Kent (2015); Kent & Lane (2017); Uysal (2018); Wilcox (2019); Taylor et al. (2019); Chen, Hung-Baesecke & Chen (2020); Chen et al. (2020)	Chapter 4 (sections 4.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3; 4.3.3.1; 4.3.5; 4.3.3.4; 4.3.4)
Sub-component: Collaboration	Gibbs et al. (2013); Cha 2015; Yang et al. (2015); Carpenter et al. (2016); Chen & Ji (2018); Men et al. (2018) (2018); Men, Tsai & Men (2018); Taylor et al. (2019); Wang & Yang 2020; Song & Tao (2022)	Chapter 4 (section 4.3.3.2)
Sub-component: Grounding	Gibbs et al. (2013); Cha 2015; Yang et al. (2015); Carpenter et al. (2016); Chen & Ji (2018); Men et al. (2018) (2018); Men, Tsai & Men (2018); Taylor et al. (2019); Wang & Yang 2020; Song & Tao (2022)	Chapter 4 (section 4.3.3.2)
Sub-component: Empathy	Gibbs et al. (2013); Cha 2015; Yang et al. (2015); Carpenter et al. (2016); Chen & Ji (2018); Men et al. (2018) (2018); Men, Tsai & Men (2018); Taylor et al. (2019); Wang & Yang 2020; Song & Tao (2022)	Chapter 4 (section 4.3.3.2).
Sub-component: Confirmed Equality	Gibbs et al. (2013); Cha 2015; Yang et al. (2015); Carpenter et al. (2016); Chen & Ji (2018); Men et al. (2018) (2018); Men, Tsai & Men (2018); Taylor et al. (2019); Wang & Yang 2020; Song & Tao (2022)	Chapter 4 (section 4.3.3.2).
Sub-component: Responsiveness	Gibbs et al. (2013); Cha 2015; Yang et al. (2015); Carpenter et al. (2016); Chen & Ji (2018); Men et al. (2018) (2018); Men, Tsai & Men (2018); Taylor et al. (2019); Wang & Yang 2020; Song & Tao (2022).	Chapter 4 (section 4.3.3.2)
Sub-component: Accessibility	Yang et al. (2015); Du Plessis (2018); Ghazinejad et al. (2018); Boholm (2019); Neill, Men & Yue (2019); Holland et al. (2021)	Chapter 4 (section 4.3.3.3).
Sub-component: Genuineness	Yang et al. (2015); Du Plessis (2018); Ghazinejad et al. (2018); Boholm (2019); Neill, Men & Yue (2019); Holland et al. (2021).	Chapter 4 (section 4.3.3.3)

Sub-component: Transparency	Yang et al. (2015); Du Plessis (2018); Ghazinejad et al. (2018); Boholm (2019); Neill, Men & Yue (2019); Holland et al. (2021).	Chapter 4 (section 4.3.3.3)
Element 3: Mending stakeholder relations after a social-media crisis	Ulmer et al. (2015); Xu (2018); Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2019); Du Plessis 2018; Marsen (2020)	Chapter 4 (sections 4.4; 4.4.1; 4.4.2; 4.4.3;4.4.4;4.5)
Sub-component: Communication efficiency	Ulmer et al. (2015); Xu (2018); Du Plessis (2018); Wombacher et al. (2018); Ulmer et al. (2019); Marsen (2020)	Chapter 4 (sections 4.4.2; 4.4.4; 4.4.5)
Sub-component: Prospective vision	Ulmer et al. (2015); Xu (2018); Du Plessis (2018); Wombacher et al. (2018); Ulmer et al. (2019); Marsen (2020)	Chapter 4 (sections 4.4.2; 4.4.4; 4.4.5)
Sub-component: Culture and value	Ulmer et al. (2015); Xu (2018); Du Plessis (2018); Wombacher et al. (2018); Ulmer et al. (2019); Marsen (2020)	Chapter 4 (sections 4.4.2; 4.4.4; 4.4.5)

		Chapter 4 (sections 4.2; 4.2.1; 4.2.2)
Element 4: Enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationships with social-media crisis communication	Meintjes & Grobler (2014); Steyn & Niemann (2014); Ledingham (2015); Grunig & Hung-Baesecke (2015); Coombs & Holladay (2015); Shin, Pang & Kim (2015); Pang et al. (2018); Xu (2018)	
Sub-component: Trust	Hon & Grunig (1999); Scheer 2012; Yang, Kang & Cha 2015; Yuan, Feng, Lai, & Collins (2018); Yue et al. (2019); Dhanesh & Duthler (2019; Yue, Men & Ferguson (2019); Brown, Crosno & Tong (2019); Cheng, Shen & Jiang (2020).	Chapter 4 (section 4.2.2)
Sub-component: Control mutuality	Hon & Grunig (1999); Colquitt et al. (2014); Le Roux (2014); Steyn & Niemann 2014; Celebi & Bilir (2019)	Chapter 4 (section 4.2.2).
Sub-component: Commitment	Hon & Grunig (1999); Le Roux (2014); Steyn & Niemann (2014); Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019); Xu (2019); Celebi & Bilir (2019); Cheng et al. (2019); Lee & Li, (2020)	Chapter 4 (section 4.2.2)
Sub-component: Satisfaction	Hon & Grunig (1999); Taylor & Kent (2014); Kim (2018); Celebi & Bilir (2019); Dhanesh & Duthler (2019); Ferguson (2018); Capriotti, Zeler & Oliveira (2019); Celebi (2020)	
		Chapter 4 (section 4.2.2)

The proposed elements and sub-components identified above are now explained in the next section.

5.2.1 ELEMENT 1: FUNDAMENTALS OF CRISIS PREPAREDNESS

The essence of the crisis preparedness element is to establish the practical basis for ensuring communication effectiveness that satisfies the interests of both the organisation and

stakeholders before an eventuality such as a crisis. For communication to be effective, the study argued in Section 3.3.2 of Chapter 3 that the organisation must be crisis prepared. This means that the organisation must have a plan, crisis team, monitoring mechanisms and the allocation of resources. The approach to crisis preparedness involves strategising on the levels of present crisis preparedness and prospective crisis preparedness.

5.2.1.1 Present crisis preparedness

Present crisis preparedness is an important sub-component for the element to be investigated. The justification for inclusion was argued in Chapter 3. For any organisation that looks forward to building relationships with stakeholders during a crisis, the organisation must have the ability to manage a crisis. The ability includes crisis communication preparedness. An existing crisis-communication strategy plan will position an organisation well in managing a crisis. For example, scholars such as Spais and Paul (2021:324-325) emphasise that crisis communication is deemed to be strategic if it is planned before the onset of a crisis and ends when normality is restored and stakeholder satisfaction is achieved.

The crisis-communication strategy of the organisation should include communication channels and communication messages. The crisis communication channels strategy of organisations, as argued in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.3), must now include the use of social-media platforms. Strategising towards managing organisational crises in current times now requires the deployment of messages on social-media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. Thus, a practical approach to managing a crisis by organisations must also be implemented on social-media platforms. That is why this study argues that Ghanaian organisations must have a social-media presence. Furthermore, Ghanaian organisations must identify specific social-media platforms that will best serve the strategic interests of both the organisation and stakeholders. Additionally, organisations must clearly specify how identified social-media platforms will be used in building relationships with stakeholders in times of crisis. There is no

doubt that social-media platforms can help organisations create and nurture relationships with stakeholders (Capriotti, Zeler & Camilleri 2020:3; Chen et al. 2020:2).

As discussed in the literature, organisations should know how to properly collect, select and present their crisis communication messages, as such an approach enables the organisation to minimise the impact and negative outcome associated with a crisis (Patashnick 2016; Wardman 2020; Pöyry, Reinikainen & Luoma-Aho 2022; see Section 3.3.3.1).

5.2.1.2 Prospective crisis preparedness

The purpose of this sub-component is to identify the crisis readiness organisations require in dealing with a crisis in the future. The inclusion of this element was justified in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2). It is important that organisations must have a plan to mitigate the effects of a crisis in the future. As a result, organisations must be competent in diagnosing the causes of a crisis, resources required to manage a crisis and in identifying and managing the needs and expectations of stakeholders.

In justifying the inclusion of the prospective crisis preparedness in the conceptual framework, the study argues that any crisis readiness to manage a crisis in the future must include the use of social media. Ghanaian organisations must have a social-media strategy. It is necessary and expedient that Ghanaian organisations are active on social media and understand how social media should be used to attain positive outcomes with stakeholders. Organisations that are not on social media and experience a crisis in the future may find it challenging to manage crisis issues that are highlighted on social media. Challenges such as misinformation and misrepresentation can further harm the reputation of the organisation stricken with a crisis. An active presence on social media can influence how stakeholders think, behave and react to information (Chen & Men 2017:248; You & Hon 2019:2; Kent & Li 2020:5-6).

Organisations can be confronted with different crisis situations, including crises that emerge on social media. Customer complaints (when an online user's negative comment on social

media goes viral), accidental misuse of social media by organisations, challenge crises (when stakeholders point out a disparity between an organisation's words and actions) are crisis situations organisations can be hit with and be expected to manage (Su, Stepchenkova & Kirilenko 2019:1-2; Triantafillidou & Yannas 2020:8). Organisations must be prepared and be capable of confronting and dealing with these situations.

It is the position of this study that Ghanaian organisations that consider a prospective crisis preparedness approach will be able to identify and manage the needs and expectations of stakeholders in the event of a crisis. The integration of social media into the crisis-communication planning of these organisations will be useful in identifying and addressing the needs of stakeholders. For example, through the use of social media, Ghanaian organisations will be able to deploy crisis messaging strategies such as instructing, adjusting and internalising messages in addressing the crisis expectations of stakeholders. Any instructing messaging strategy must provide directives on the personal protection of stakeholders (Olsson 2014:5; Coombs 2015:142; Page 2020:2); adjusting a messaging strategy on social media must create emotional bonds between the organisation and stakeholders (Page 2020:2). The information disseminated by public-relations practitioners on behalf of their organisations should help stakeholders cope with the psychological effects of a crisis (Carbon, Arnold, Görgen & Wüller 2022:6; Kanso, Nelson & Kitchen 2020:723). Even though internalising information is necessary, it may be seen as self-serving by stakeholders, as it seeks to protect the reputation of the organisation (Coombs 2019; Mendy et al. 2020). It is important for the organisation to prioritise instructing information and adjusting information as they are geared towards satisfying the information needs of stakeholders and also helping stakeholders cope with the psychological effects of the crisis (Coombs 2015:142; Page 2020:2). PR practitioners must not create the impression that their messaging activities are largely designed to satisfy the interests of the organisation. The interests of stakeholders must also be considered and factored into the approach to messaging strategy.

5.2.2 ELEMENT 2: MANAGING CRISIS ON SOCIAL MEDIA WITH INTERACTIONS

The purpose of this element is to provide a basis for how organisations should respond to crises through the use of dialogic communication approaches. It is imperative that an organisation's interest in building relationships with stakeholders be inspired by the intent to be dialogic in how it communicates. In Section 4.3.2 in Chapter 4, the point was made that dialogic communication represents the most ethical form of public-relations practice. More importantly, organisations need to support a dialogic communication approach in their strategic communication so as to effectively build relationships with stakeholders (Uysal 2018; Chen et al. 2020). As crises can disrupt the relationship an organisation has with stakeholders, the issue of dialogic communication, as discussed in Chapter 3, is useful for organisation-stakeholder relationships. The dimensions of dialogic communication necessary for managing crises on social media with interactions are discussed in the sections below.

5.2.2.1 Collaboration

This is one of the key sub-components for this proposed element, which this study considers as necessary for managing crises on social media with interactions. In Chapter 4, Section 4. 3.3.2, it was articulated that both the organisation and stakeholders must aim at shared communication goals. This understanding during a crisis can help in relationship-building between the organisation and stakeholders. Ghanaian organisations must be ready to entertain the diverse opinions stakeholders express on social media during a crisis. Eriksson and Olsson (2016:204-205) state that, by allowing stakeholders to use social media in expressing their views about a crisis, organisations will not miss out on intelligence-gathering opportunities. In Chapter 3, Section 3.6.7, it was argued that, for strategic reasons, when organisations collaborate and are interactive with stakeholders, they will have information regarding the thoughts, feedback and behaviour of stakeholders. Additionally, a collaborative approach can strengthen the communication management of the organisation and make the

crisis communication messaging of the organisation more targeted and audience-focused (Liu et al. 2020; Littlefield, Sellnow & Sellnow 2021).

5.2.2.2 Grounding

The application of the sub-component of grounding in managing crises on social media with interactions is imperative as it can potentially enable the organisation to achieve credibility with stakeholders. As argued in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3.2, the grounding principle enables both the organisation and stakeholders to come to terms regarding understanding their communicative exchanges (Park & Kang 2020). The pursuit of such a communication goal during a crisis will yield positive gains for the organisation-stakeholder relationships. The inclusion of this element in the proposed conceptual framework is justified, as it allows the organisation to invite stakeholders to post comments about the crisis on channels, including social media. It also allows the organisation through the medium of social media to know if the organisation's crisis communication has been understood by stakeholders. Such a communication environment potentially can be beneficial to the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

5.2.2.3 Confirmed equality

In times of crisis, organisations sometimes approach communication management in a defensive manner (Cheng 2018; Kim et al. 2019). This approach by organisations may be interpreted by some stakeholders as not showing concern for stakeholders. It is for this reason that this study justifies the inclusion of 'confirmed equality' in the proposed framework. As pointed out in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3.2, confirmed equality allows both the stakeholder and the organisation to see each other as equal partners in a dialogue. Such an approach to communication allows stakeholders to be expressive and the organisation will not attempt to control the views of stakeholders concerning a crisis. In essence, stakeholders will see the

organisation as not authoritative. It is important that organisations cede some control of communication to stakeholders and get them to be involved in the crisis-communication narrative. Such opportunities can gain the support of stakeholders in the organisation's crisis-management effort (Ott & Theunissen; 2014; Cheng 2018). Including the element of equality in the proposed framework can improve the organisation-stakeholder relationships. It is a progressive interactive approach to managing crises on social media.

5.2.2.4 Empathy

Organisations that demonstrate empathy in their crisis communication towards stakeholders are better placed to improve the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Kim & Cameron 2011; Claeys et al. 2013; Smith et al. 2018; Schoofs et al. 2019). The inclusion of empathy as an element in the proposed framework is necessary. As emphasised in Chapter 3, crisis situations can have dire consequences for stakeholders. It is important that the organisation disseminate crisis messages that show that the organisation is concerned about the predicament of stakeholders. Furthermore, the interaction on social media with stakeholders about the crisis must include expressions of empathy towards stakeholders (Schoofs et al. 2022:2).

It is a useful crisis-communication strategy when the organisation is seen to be engaging in social listening (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6.7). Ghanaian organisations must be seen to be deeply concerned about the well-being of stakeholders. Failure by the organisation to show empathy can be interpreted negatively by stakeholders. Stakeholders expect the organisation to address their emotional needs (Coombs 2015). This element is important for building relationships with stakeholders during a crisis. The interactive opportunities afforded by social media can be used by Ghanaian organisations to direct empathetic messages to stakeholders.

5.2.2.5 Responsiveness

Responsiveness is considered by this study as a key sub-component for this proposed element of the conceptual framework. As pointed out in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3.2, responsiveness involves a shared responsibility between two parties to a dialogue to be thoughtful to each other. Stakeholders expect organisations to respond to their needs, including information (Kao, Huang & Lu 2017), especially in crisis situations. An organisation's response to stakeholders can yield positive or negative results for the organisation. In proposing responsiveness as critical to managing a crisis on social media with interactions, this study argues that organisations that are responsive to stakeholders are likely to be perceived in positive terms. A positive stakeholder perception can produce reputation gains for the organisation (Kim et al. 2019).

For organisations to respond to stakeholders, they must first have an orientation towards social listening (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6.7). As social media are a channel available to organisations to engage with stakeholders, it is important that organisations are receptive to listening to stakeholders. Being responsive to stakeholders is vital for quality organisation-stakeholder relationships (Yang et al. 2015; Stewart & Arnold 2017). Public-relations practitioners must lead the campaign and persuade organisational leaders to accept the integration of responsive principles into the strategic communication of the organisation. There is a chance that organisations can build relationships with stakeholders when they demonstrate commitment towards responding to stakeholders in situations such as crises (Marsen 2020).

5.2.2.6 Accessibility

It is imperative that the organisation provides stakeholders with access to crisis information. Doing so potentially can let stakeholders conclude that the organisation is open and is not hiding information from stakeholders. For example, it has been proven that organisations that

commit to a climate of openness on social media are able to recover faster from a crisis (Yuan et al. 2020).

The inclusion of accessibility as a sub-component for this element is necessary, since Ghanaian organisations must attempt to avoid blocking access to information relevant to the needs of stakeholders. In the era of social media, opportunities are available for stakeholders to start the crisis conversation elsewhere on social media. The organisation must seek to be involved in the crisis communication narrative on the same platform with stakeholders. This can happen if stakeholders have access to the organisation's social-media platforms (Lee 2020:804-806).

The interactive exchanges on social media can lead to an understanding between the organisation and stakeholders and this potentially can improve the organisation-stakeholder relationship. When organisations are not interactive, they can suffer reputational damage (Panagiotopoulos, Barnett & Brooks 2013; Nor'izah, Sharmini & Narimah 2018). Creating access to stakeholders will also mean that the organisation will provide up-to-date crisis information to stakeholders. Access is necessary, as it can earn organisations credibility (Spence et al. 2016; Nor'izah et al. 2018), in that, when the organisation freely interacts with stakeholders on social media, the organisation-stakeholder relationship can be enhanced.

5.2.2.7 Genuineness

Lee (2020:807) points out that one way to deal with the spread of rumours about a crisis is for the organisation to provide stakeholders with honest and truthful information. Being genuine with stakeholders can be valuable to organisation-stakeholder relationships. The inclusion of this sub-component for this element is appropriate as its adoption by Ghanaian organisations in their crisis communication activities will show that such organisations are committed to a climate of openness. This element was highlighted in Section 4.3.3.3 in Chapter 4 which basically involves the organisation showing a commitment to creating a communication environment that is genuine (Yang et al. 2015). As emphasised in several aspects in the

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literature on crisis communication in Chapter 3, a crisis creates challenging situations to both the organisation and stakeholders. The organisation in its interaction with stakeholders must demonstrate to stakeholders that it has a genuine interest in their welfare and its communication in times of crisis is honest. When stakeholders are able to access credible information from the organisation, the organisation stands to benefit, as stakeholders will find the organisation trustworthy (Lin, Spence, Sellnow & Lachlan 2016).

5.2.2.8 Transparency

This sub-component is considered important for this element since the purpose of its inclusion is to encourage Ghanaian organisations to avoid sharing on social-media platforms deceitful crisis information.

Transparency is necessary for openness in communication. For example, Du Plessis (2018:837) states that organisations must commit to being transparent in their social-media interactions with stakeholders. This orientation can make social-media interactions between organisations and stakeholders during crisis foster organisation-stakeholder relationships. Organisations must not hide crisis information relevant to the needs and welfare of stakeholders but stakeholders must rather be provided with both negative and positive information about the crisis. Being transparent can enhance the reputation of the organisation and assuage the anger of stakeholders (Holland et al. 2021). It is important that Ghanaian organisations are transparent in their social media interactions when managing crises. Transparency is a progressive element and positive for building relationships with stakeholders.

5.2.3 ELEMENT 3: MENDING STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS AFTER A SOCIAL-MEDIA CRISIS

The whole essence of strategic communication is for organisations to have mutually satisfying relationships with stakeholders (Zerfass et al. 2018). The purpose of this element is to identify communicative ways for rebuilding the organisation-stakeholder relationship that have been badly affected by a crisis.

The need to build relationships with stakeholders in times of crisis must tie in with the idea that organisations look for opportunities in crisis situations. Evidence from the literature supports the notion of organisations leveraging on crisis opportunities to build relationships with stakeholders. The discourse of renewal approach allows organisations to make use of crisis opportunities to renew organisation-stakeholder relationships after a crisis. It was argued in the literature (see Chapter 4, Section 4.4) that organisations stricken with a crisis must explore for opportunities to renew relationships with stakeholders (Sellnow & Seeger 2013:96; Narverud 2016:13; Xu 2018:109). Additionally, when the crisis subsides, organisations must look for opportunities to grow the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Ulmer et al. 2018).

The discourse of renewal theory, as explained in Chapter 4 (see sections 4.4; 4.4.1), provides a theoretical foundation for mending relationships with stakeholders after a crisis. The theoretical dimensions necessary for mending the relationship after a crisis are provisional communication (communication efficiency), prospective vision, positive rhetoric and ethical communication (culture and value). Communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value have been validated and used as scales to measure the discourse of renewal with regard to organisation-stakeholder relationships (Xu 2018).

The study considers that, in order to mend relationships with stakeholders affected by a crisis, the organisation must use social media to inspire optimism, be sincere in its communication and use organisational leadership to highlight the organisation's culture and value. The sub-components are discussed below.

5.2.3.1 Communication efficiency

Stakeholders expect the organisation's crisis communication to be sincere and spontaneous (Ulmer et al.2015). As argued previously in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2, the organisation's inclination is to be calculated in its crisis messaging to stakeholders. It is important that the organisation is seen as responsible and by applying communication efficiency in its interaction on social media with stakeholders, the organisation's actions are likely to be interpreted as genuine (Wombacher et al. 2018:165).

The inclusion of this sub-component for the proposed element will assist in attaining the objective of mending relationships with stakeholders, especially after a crisis. The organisation must not appear rigid in its communication but it must rather focus on a communication strategy that stakeholders will perceive as sincere (Xu 2018). The organisation's communication must not revolve only on its reputation but also focus on the interests of stakeholders. A communication efficiency approach is natural and not calculated and can inspire stakeholders to work with the organisation towards rebuilding the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

5.2.3.2 Prospective vision

The inclusion of the prospective vision sub-component is justified as it positions the organisation as inspiring optimism for the future. Prospective vision, as discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2, points to the readiness of the organisation to learn from the crisis, grow and seek to do things differently (Xu 2018).

The crisis situation must be seen by the organisation as an opportunity to behave in ways to inspire optimism in stakeholders about the future. The element is a progressive approach to mending relationships with stakeholders.

The interactive nature of social media can assist Ghanaian organisations to share lessons about the crisis and receive feedback from stakeholders on how both the organisation and stakeholders can work together in mending the relationship. Prospective vision allows the

organisation to share information on social media with stakeholders regarding corrective actions taken and that the crisis is a learning opportunity. These prospective-vision actions can potentially lead to stakeholders rebuilding trust in the organisation (Xu 2018:117). This is important if the organisation seeks to continue doing business with stakeholders. The inclusion of the element is thus necessary and relevant to the mending of the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

5.2.3.3 Culture and Value

The culture and value sub-component is important, as it projects the organisation as commited to its core values and culture. A crisis presents organisations opportunities and it includes highlighting corporate values and culture (Kaul, Shah & El-Serag 2020:809). In the pursuit of mending relationships with stakeholders, it is useful that the organisation's crisis communication is driven also by its culture and value.

This sub-component is justified for inclusion in the proposed element for the conceptual framework. The emphasis on the organisation's value and culture in crisis communication can appeal to stakeholders and cause them to support the organisation in its rebuilding efforts especially after the crisis. The crisis communication in this regard must be led by the organisation's leadership. In Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.7.1), it was argued that leadership must play a central role in the crisis effort and communicate the culture and value of the organisation in order to establish the ethical responsibility of the organisation. The emergence of social media has even placed more responsibility on organisational leaders to lead the crisis-communication conversation. Through social media, leaders can help in shaping the perceptions of stakeholders (Bowers et al. 2017) and solicit the support of stakeholders in mending the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Furthermore, the leaders must communicate the values of the organisation in order to inspire stakeholders (Kaul et al. 2020).

The involvement of leadership and its use of the culture and value of the organisation as communication action points can lead to positive outcomes in the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Therefore, this study holds the position that the inclusion of this element is necessary and justified.

5.2.4 ELEMENT 4: ENHANCING ORGANISATION-STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL-MEDIA CRISIS COMMUNICATION

The purpose of this element is to identify organisation-stakeholder relationship strategies that are relevant in managing crisis communication on social media. It is important that organisations know what is required in building and enhancing their relationship with stakeholders.

As discussed in Chapter 4, sections 4.2 and 4.2.2, the concept of relationship management is defined by trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction. These theoretical dimensions, as argued in Section 4.2.2, can enhance organisation-stakeholder relationships. They are even more relevant in crisis situations where a crisis can disrupt the relationship organisations have with stakeholders (Lahti 2015; Cheng & Shen 2020). Furthermore, the advent of social media has enhanced opportunities for stakeholders to be vocal about matters connected to the organisation. It is therefore important that organisations approach their relationship with stakeholders in ways that meet the needs and expectations of stakeholders, even in crisis situations. This study argues that, if Ghanaian organisations approach relationships with stakeholders on the basis of trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction, these organisations' strategic communication will support dialogic communication.

5.2.4.1 Trust

Trust as used in this study is adopted from the validated construct espoused by Grunig and Huang (2000). Integrity, competence and dependability are the attributes of trust (Hon & Grunig 1999; Grunig & Huang 2000; Le Roux 2014; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019; Celebi & Bilir 2019; Pressgrove, McKeever, McKeever & Waters 2022).

The inclusion of trust as a sub-component for this proposed element is justified because trust is at the core of the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Cheng 2018). In crisis situations, the organisation must demonstrate integrity by providing honest communication; competence by its ability in managing communication and dependability by indicating to stakeholders through its communication that it can be relied upon.

The position of this study is that Ghanaian organisations must apply this construct of trust in their social-media interaction with stakeholders during a crisis. Trust can impact positively on the communication actions of stakeholders and, as such, it is important for stakeholder communication (Pressgrove et al. 2022). For example, the organisation must ensure that promises made to stakeholders with regard to the crisis and posted on social media are fulfilled. Failure to fulfil promises can lead to stakeholder distrust and this will definitely affect the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Cheng & Shen 2020).

Trust is necessary in the social-media communication of Ghanaian organisations, as it can enhance organisation-stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis.

5.2.4.2 Control mutuality

It is important that the organisation achieves an understanding with stakeholders, especially in crisis situations. The element of control mutuality is valuable in crisis situations, as stakeholders need to have a sense that their relationship with the organisation is one of interdependence or symmetry (Waters 2011; Le Roux 2014; Steyn & Niemann 2014; Celebi & Bilir 2019). Even though crisis situations are difficult times for both the organisation and

stakeholders, the organisation must be willing to share power with stakeholders so as to enhance its relationship with stakeholders (Pressly 2016; Celebi & Bilir 2019).

Including control mutuality as a sub-component is necessary for the social-media crisis communication of Ghanaian organisations. As social media foster interaction, a control mutuality approach with stakeholders during and after a crisis potentially can enhance the organisation-stakeholder relationship. For example, if the organisation integrates social listening into its social-media crisis communication, both the organisation and stakeholders will benefit from the information exchanges (Jackson 2017). Control mutuality will also mean that the organisation will not only be concerned about disseminating crisis information to stakeholders but also committed to attending to concerns of stakeholders about the crisis and even involving stakeholders in some decisions about the crisis (Slagle, McIntyre, Chatham-Carpenter & Reed 2021).

This proposed element of the conceptual framework will be enriched with the sub-component of control mutuality and is an important addition to the other sub-component also proposed for adoption by Ghanaian organisations.

5.2.4.3 Commitment

The organisation must value its relationship with stakeholders. As pointed out in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2, commitment will mean that the organisation is ready to commit resources and time in growing and maintaining its relationship with stakeholders (Le Roux 2014; Steyn & Niemann 2014; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019). This show of commitment to stakeholders must manifest also in crisis situations. Including commitment as an element for the conceptual framework will yield positive gains for the organisation in its relationship with stakeholders.

It is important that the organisation engages in a climate of openness and collaborates with stakeholders in order to show its commitment to stakeholders (Du Plessis 2018). Ghanaian organisations must look beyond the crisis and seek for a long-term relationship with

stakeholders. This can happen if these organisations encourage stakeholders to use channels such as social media to let the organisation know their thoughts concerning a crisis (Buhmann, Maltseva, Fieseler & Fleck 2021).

The inclusion of this sub-component is justified as it is valuable in enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationships during and after a crisis.

5.2.4.4 Satisfaction

It is imperative that both the organisation and stakeholders get satisfaction from their relationship. Overall satisfaction is necessary for the organisation-stakeholder relationship to be successful. It is important that both the organisation and stakeholders have a positive feeling towards one another (Dhanesh & Duthler 2019).

The organisation, especially in times of crisis, must be willing to engage with stakeholders and engaging with stakeholders can lead to mutual understanding, shared decision-making and co-creation of reality (Taylor & Kent 2014). Including this element in the proposed framework is necessary and can enhance organisation-stakeholder relationships. In implementing social-media crisis communication and incorporating the satisfaction sub-component, Ghanaian organisations must follow the suggestion of Ferguson (2018:71) that relationship satisfaction must be based on organisation and stakeholder satisfaction.

Based on the discussion in this chapter, the proposed elements for social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships with stakeholders before, during and after a crisis are presented in Table 5.2 below. The elements were empirically tested in the Ghanaian public-relations environment.

Table 5.2 Summary of the proposed elements for a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders before, during and after a crisis.

Element 1: Fundamentals for crisis preparedness

- **Present crisis preparedness**: organisation is prepared for different types of crisis including social-media crisis; organisation knows what to do at every possible phase of   a crisis including social-media crisis.
- **Prospective crisis preparedness:** knows what resources and quantities to allocate in order to manage a crisis successfully; organisation knows how to detect and manage the needs and expectations of stakeholders in the crisis.

Element 2: Managing crisis on social media with interactions

- **Collaboration**: communicates with stakeholders on social media to mutually benefit from these interactions
- **Grounding**: uses social media to invite stakeholders to comment on a crisis; use of social media enables it to share common ground of communication with stakeholders
- **Empathy:** uses social media to empathise with affected stakeholders; uses social media to try to understand a crisis from the perspectives of stakeholders.
- **Equality:** organisation is not authoritative in communicating on social media with stakeholders; organisation does not seek to control views of stakeholders expressed on social media.
- **Responsiveness:** organisation responds promptly to stakeholder concerns posted on social media.
- **Accessibility:** organisation shares open access to information on social media to stakeholders.
- **Genuineness:** organisation is honest in communicating on social media with stakeholders about the crisis.
- **Transparency:** organisation does not hide information from stakeholders when using social media to communicate about the crisis

Element 3: Mending stakeholder relations after a social-media crisis

- **Communication efficiency:** organisation is sincere with stakeholders when sharing information on social media about the crisis; organisation interacts in a spontaneous manner on social media with stakeholders about the crisis.
- **Prospective vision:** organisation shares information on social media of its commitment to corrective actions to improve the organisation
- **Culture and value:** communication from leadership to stakeholders about the crisis shared on social media reflects the core values of the organisation

Element 4: Enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationship with social-media crisis   Communication

- **Trust:** important decisions about the crisis that concern stakeholders are made available on social media; social media is a trustworthy platform for letting stakeholders know my organisation's ability to manage a crisis.
- **Control mutuality:** social media is useful for listening to what stakeholders have to say about the crisis.
- **Commitment:** organisation uses social media to attend to crisis concerns of stakeholders in order to maintain its long-term commitment to stakeholders.
- **Satisfaction:** use of social media for crisis communication has enhanced the relationship between my organisation and stakeholders.

5.3 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed and explained the proposed elements for a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders before, during and after a crisis. The elements proposed for the conceptual framework are fundamentals of crisis preparedness, managing crises on social media with interactions, mending stakeholder relations after a social-media crisis and enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationships with social-media crisis communication.

These proposed elements of the conceptual framework emerged from the literature and theories discussed in chapters 2 to 4.

In the next chapter, Chapter 6, the research methodology and operationalisation used to empirically test the proposed elements are discussed.

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND OPERATIONALISATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 5, elements for a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders before, during and after a crisis were proposed based on the literature. The key objective of this chapter is to outline the methodology and operationalisation adopted for this study to empirically verify the proposed elements.

In order to understand how the methodology assisted in the empirical testing of the proposed elements, it is important to highlight the purpose of the study and the research problem, explain the research paradigm and research design that was used to empirically test the proposed elements, sampling design, data-collection methods adopted for the study and ethical issues relevant for the testing of the proposed elements of the conceptual framework.

6.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Any scientific enquiry must be informed by a research design, which must influence the conclusion of the study. Denzin and Lincoln (2011:14) describe a research design as the process of enquiry that informs research processes, research methods and procedures. As aptly stated by Akhtar (2016:68), a research design is the conceptual blueprint that informs the conduct of a study. In other words, a research design involves a strategy. A research design is vital to the conduct of a research or scientific enquiry. Creswell and Creswell (2018:53) express similar thoughts by defining research design as "…a type of inquiry within quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method approaches that provide specific direction for procedures in a research…" Through a research design, a researcher is able to have a structured plan that depicts the key components of the research work in harmony in an attempt to answer the research questions (Asenahabi 2019:77).

It is also important to point out the methodological design used for the study. The two main types of methodological designs are cross-sectional and longitudinal (Ruel, Wagner & Gillespie 2016). A cross-sectional design is characterised by the collection of data from a sample at a point in time and it is associated most of the time with both quantitative and qualitative research (Leavy 2017; Kessmodel 2018). There is no time dimension in conducting cross-sectional studies. The data collected in cross-sectional studies are collected during one period (Kessmodel 2018). A longitudinal design on the other hand refers to the collection of data repeatedly from the same sample over a long period of time (Ruel et al. 2016; Leavy 2017; Babbie & Mouton 2018). This study was cross-sectional as it involved collecting quantitative and qualitative data almost at the same time and it did not involve an extended period of time.

6.2.1 Worldview adopted for this study

For research to be conducted, it must be within a framework of some theoretical and methodological tradition. These traditions are referred to as *paradigms* (Kivunja & Kuyini 2017:26). A research paradigm essentially is about a study's beliefs and directs the researcher on what should be studied, how it should be studied and the interpretation required for the results of the study. Furthermore, the research paradigm determines the choice of research method for the study and the meaning to be derived from the study's data (Kivunja & Kuyini 2017:26). Khatri (2020:1436) defines a research paradigm as a researcher's judgement and beliefs concerning any issues and dictates the researcher's actions with regard to the investigation process involving the determination of the research problem, research questions and the methodology. In this regard, the research design selected by a researcher and the outcome of the study are influenced and informed by the research paradigm which a researcher chooses for a study.

A research paradigm is also informed by three assumptions, namely, assumptions about human knowledge (epistemological assumptions), assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology assumptions) and personal ethics and values (axiological assumptions; Saunders et al. 2015:124; Kivunja & Kuyini 2017:26). These assumptions are important and influence the formulation of research questions, methods selected and the interpretations drawn out of the study.

The most adopted research paradigms are positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, interpretivism, transformative, critical and pragmatic paradigms (Creswell 2014; Kivunja & Kuyini 2017). Similarly, the researcher was guided by a worldview for this study, namely, pragmatism, which is discussed in the next section.

6.2.2 Pragmatism paradigm

Morgan (2013:28) points out that pragmatists are interested in the outcome of an action. The pragmatist paradigm, as described by Scott (2016:255), is about meaning. The meaning derives its belief from the notion that the meaning of ideas is connected to the consequences of the ideas rather than the ability of the ideas. Tran (2016:10) asserts that pragmatism enables a researcher to change observations into theories and the theories can be assessed through an action. The pragmatic approach allows researchers to combine research methods in the conduct of a study, as it allows researchers to deploy the most appropriate research techniques in answering a research problem (Guthrie 2010:45; Ugwu, Ekere & Onoh 2021:117). Tran (2016:10) further adds that pragmatism creates a useful opportunity for making use of both qualitative and quantitative data. Pragmatism works well for researchers who value utility and the contextual nature of research questions (Leavy 2017:14).

As a research paradigm, pragmatism is focused on solving practical problems in the real world. In essence, pragmatism does not accept the philosophical dualism of subjectivity and objectivity (Biesta 2010; Tran 2016). Pragmatism promotes an empirical approach to research over an idealistic approach (Frega 2011; Tran 2016). The pragmatism worldview tends to bring

the scientific method closer to the structuralist orientation of older approaches (Creswell & Clark 2011; Creswell 2013; Kivunja & Kuyini 2017). The researcher who adopts pragmatism is expected to make use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Morgan 2014b; Kivunja & Kuyini 2017). In a broader perspective, pragmatism is a philosophical belief system that espouses the idea that there is no adherence to a specific set of rules or theories. The use of different tools for different research contexts by the researcher is considered useful in pragmatism (Hesse-Biber 2015; Patton 2015; Kivunja & Kuyini 2017).

In pursuit of the key objective of this study, which is to conceptualise a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships by Ghanaian public-relations practitioners, the study's research approach is built on the pragmatism worldview. This is because the pragmatism worldview supports the mixed-method approach of drawing data through the use of quantitative and qualitative methods (Goldkuhl 2012; Morgan 2014a; Creswell & Creswell 2017). Additionally, as pragmatism encourages "action", there are required actions that public-relations practitioners must promote and encourage for adoption by their organisations in implementing a social-media crisis-communication strategy. Therefore, the researcher investigates social-media crisis communication to build relationships by Ghanaian organisations. Furthermore, the researcher seeks to establish specific actions organisations take to ensure that their social-media crisis communication satisfies the interests of both organisations and stakeholders (see sections 5.2.1; 5.2.2; 5.2.3 and 5.2.4 in Chapter 5). For this study, the pragmatic approach provided the most realistic way for understanding the application of a social-media crisis-communication strategy by Ghanaian organisations.

The various philosophical underpinnings for the adoption of the pragmatist paradigm for the study are justified in the next section.

6.2.2.1 The philosophical rationale for the study: epistemology, ontology and axiology

Morgan (2014a: 26) argues that, in the worldview of the pragmatist, our beliefs concerning how to act are provisional and there are multiple views of reality and experiences. As a result, the worldviews of people cannot be identical. Therefore, it is possible that worldviews can be both unique to an individual and also socially shared (Morgan 2014a). Pragmatism is focused on "what works". It is targeted at solving practical problems in the real world and not relying on assumptions in respect of knowledge (Hall 2013; Creswell 2014; Shannon-Baker 2016). This study's pragmatist worldview was approached from ontology, epistemology and axiology philosophical stances as discussed below.

● *Pragmatist ontology*

The pragmatist ontology draws on the idea that reality is external and at the same time it is multiple. That is to say, the reality of a phenomenon can best be understood if viewed both subjectively and objectively (Saunders et al. 2009; Johnson & Christensen 2012). Lohse (2015) points out that a researcher's view of reality must be clear. A clear reality is critical for the researcher in making the right methodological choices. Maarouf (2019:7) concurs by adding that the ontological stance of pragmatism is situated within the subjectivity and objectivity continuum. In essence, the reality associated with a phenomenon must be viewed from both one and multiple views of the reality (Maarouf 2019:7).

The ontological stance of pragmatism holds that there cannot be an absolute proof of truth: knowledge should be evolutionary. Ontologically for pragmatists, every theoretical position must manifest also practically (Liszka 2012:561). As pragmatism emphasises concrete, practical and empirical experiences as key determinants of what is true and good (Liszka 2012:562; Morgan 2013:28; Leavy 2017:14), this study focused on the utility value of social media in fostering dialogic communication and ultimately helping to build stakeholder relationships. As a result, the objectives of this study were largely defined by the practical opportunities social media offer organisations in crisis. In previous chapters of this study

(chapters 4 and 5), the benefits and opportunities of social media for crisis communication were discussed and justified as relevant for this study.

With the ontological stance of pragmatism allowing for multiple views of reality (both objectively and subjectively) helping to determine what is true and good, gathering multiple views of public-relations practitioners in Ghana on social-media crisis communication will prove useful in proposing practical steps for the use of social media in building relationships in times of crisis. Therefore, adopting the pragmatist worldview for this study is justified.

● *Pragmatist epistemology*

Epistemology is concerned with the ways of generating, understanding and using knowledge considered valid and acceptable (Wahyuni 2012:69; Stoecker & Avila 2020:2).

Mertens (2010) asserts that the epistemological position the researcher assumes, in his relationship with study participants and respondents, is less important when compared to the convenience and opportunity of the research situations. The pragmatist approach to epistemology makes available to the researcher a framework for choosing the most appropriate research method (Kelly & Cordeiro 2020:6). Epistemologically, the pragmatic approach is not rigid in terms of how data should be gathered. It allows researchers to use more than one method (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009:99; Ugwu et al. 2021:122). Additionally, in order to understand and use knowledge, the focus is on the research problem and questions. The emphasis is not on the method (Parvaiz, Mufti & Wahab 2016; Kankam 2019).

The freedom to choose methods, techniques and procedures suits the whole concept of pragmatism. This is because it allows for the drawing of data through the use of the mixed-method approach (Creswell & Creswell 2017:55). The mixed-method approach provides the researcher with the advantage of using both quantitative and qualitative means of generating a complete understanding of the research problem rather than using one particular type of method (Creswell 2014; Molina-Azorin 2016; Creswell & Creswell 2017). Doing so can lead to the best explanation of data collected and also a better understanding of the phenomenon studied. In view of this, this study used both quantitative and qualitative data-collection

methods to gather data on crisis communication on social media from public-relations practitioners in Ghana working in different industries or sectors. Using both methods allowed the researcher to have a comprehensive understanding of the research problem and also generate knowledge that can satisfy both theoretical and practical demands of the crisis of communication on social-media phenomena. Epistemologically, this study employed more than one method to gather multiple views on the reality of crisis communication on social media to build stakeholder relationships. The study also ensured that the sample selected for the study provided the required data that fully satisfied the research questions and objectives set for the study.

● *Pragmatist axiology*

Axiology refers to the value and worth of a topic under investigation (Zhang & Gohary 2016). In this regard, it is important that a study's quality and relevance to knowledge are assessed on the basis of meeting ethical standards. The concept of axiology is important in the conduct of a study and is associated with defining, evaluating and understanding the issues of right and wrong when conducting research (Kivunja & Kuyini 2017:28). The researcher had to show a commitment towards ethical and moral uprightness when conducting the research (Kivunja & Kuyini 2017:28). The researcher ensured that ethical considerations were applied. For example, participants and respondents were given the opportunity to decide what information they did not want to share. Also, participants were not coerced to reveal information they considered sensitive. The researcher made the cross-checking of information given by participants a top priority. In addition, the confidentiality of information gathered was ensured.

In the next section, the research approach adopted for this study is explained.

6.2.3 Research approach

This study adopted a mixed-method-research approach, namely, a quantitative approach for the survey and a qualitative approach for the interview. The mixed-methods research

approach consists of the collection and mixing of quantitative and qualitative data in a single research project (Leavy 2017:164; Creswell & Creswell 2018:56; Mele & Belardinelli 2019:335). This approach to research allows the researcher to have a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. The mixed-method approach is a problem-centred approach to conducting research, as it allows for the use of methods and theories instrumentally on the basis of their applicability to the study. Both deductive and inductive designs can be used in a mixed-method research study for the generation of both qualitative and quantitative datasets.

When adopting the mixed-method approach, the researcher must select a design. The researcher has the option of conducting the research stages in a sequential or concurrent design order (Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017; Creswell & Creswell 2018; Mele & Belardinelli 2019). There are three types of mixed-method research design, namely, explanatory sequential design, exploratory sequential design and concurrent design (Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017; Creswell & Creswell 2018; Mele & Belardinelli 2019). The explanatory sequential design involves conducting the quantitative research first, followed by the qualitative research. The qualitative aspect is supposed to refine the results of the quantitative. On the other hand, in the exploratory sequential design, the qualitative research is conducted first, followed by the quantitative. The key contribution of the quantitative is to support the qualitative data by the generation of hypotheses or the development of instruments. The last, concurrent design, involves conducting quantitative and qualitative separately from one another. The findings of both are analysed individually and compared for the purpose of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017; Creswell & Creswell 2018; Mele & Belardinelli 2019).

This study adopted the concurrent design so as to provide triangulation of data (Creswell & Creswell 2017). Triangulation encompasses merging findings from different methodologies (quantitative and qualitative) (Levanon, Lavee & Strier 2021). The selection of this design was informed by the explanatory and exploratory nature of this study, which required conducting both a survey and interviews. The design enabled the researcher to have a better

understanding of the problem and also propose a conceptual framework that offers a fuller and more accurate explanation (through the measurement of the conceptual framework) of social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships. The use of the triangulation method enabled the researcher to capitalise on the strengths and minimise the weaknesses of both research approaches (Wiggins 2011; Daymon & Holloway 2011; Renz, Carrington & Badger 2018).

As already highlighted, quantitative and qualitative were the approaches used for this study. In the next section, quantitative and qualitative research approaches are explained.

6.2.3.1 Quantitative research approach

It is vital to describe quantitative research and its relevance as a research approach for this study. Bryman (2012:35-36) articulates that quantitative research expresses numeric description and emphasises a view of reality that is objective. Quantitative research involves deductive approaches towards the research process and the aim is to prove, disprove or cause the acceptance of existing theories (Leavy 2017:9). In conducting a quantitative study, researchers are expected to measure variables and test relationships between variables so as to establish correlations or causal relationships (Leavy 2017:9). Quantitative research is well suited for scientific enquiry that involves collecting quantifiable measures of variables and inferences from population samples (Queiros, Faria & Almeida 2017:370). The characteristics of quantitative research include neutrality, objectivity and the opportunity to acquire an appreciable level of knowledge (for example, conclusions derived from a large sample size) (Leavy 2017:9). A scientific enquiry that has the objective of explaining or evaluating a reality should be approached in a quantitative research manner (Leavy 2017:9).

Incorporating the quantitative approach into this study offered a wide range of useful numeric description insights from Ghanaian public-relations practitioners regarding their position on the reality of social-media crisis communication in building relationships with stakeholders.

6.2.3.2 Qualitative research approach

Creswell (2013:5) posits that a qualitative approach explores and seeks to understand what meaning individuals make of social or human problems. Qualitative research is inductive in nature and the objective is to build knowledge in order to generate meaning.

The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participants setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell 2013:5).

The qualitative approach places value on the in-depth meaning and the subjective experiences of individuals and their sense of meaning (Leavy 2017:124). Leavy (2017:124) further posits that a research approach that is qualitative enables the researcher to unravel meanings people attribute to their experiences. Qualitative approaches involve the use of inductive designs to generate meanings and produce rich descriptive data (Leavy 2017:124).

A number of unique characteristics are associated with the qualitative approach. The malleability nature of the qualitative approach is a useful feature that allows for qualitative methods to be revised on the basis of new knowledge that emerges as the research is ongoing (Brodsky, Buckingham, Scheibler & Mannarini 2016:13). Applying the qualitative approach can lead to the discovery of theories, processes and identifying factors and hypotheses that could call for further study (Brodsky et al. 2016:13). Researchers who use the qualitative approach show a commitment towards questioning existing assumptions of "scientific objectivity". The researcher and participants play active roles in the production of data and findings (Glesne 2011). Other features associated with the qualitative approach are the use of non-numerical data (for example, words, pictures, and observations), investigating a phenomenon by seeking to explore, discover and describe the experiences, meanings and purpose from the perspectives of participants. A vital component of qualitative research is the iterative nature of processes and knowledge. The researcher has the opportunity to be repetitive in the investigation and enquiry process (Brodsky et al. 2016:14). The qualitative

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approach assisted the researcher to gather in-depth information from public-relations practitioners who have useful insights in the use of social media for crisis communication.

It is evident from the above discussion that, for this study to propose a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships, both the qualitative and quantitative approaches were useful to this study's investigation. The qualitative approach is appropriate, as it provides in-depth insight into the reality of social-media crisis communication among public-relations practitioners in Ghana to build relationships with stakeholders. The meanings, interpretations and experiences gathered from practitioners provided the necessary knowledge and thoughts on how a conceptual framework can be developed to improve public-relations practice in Ghana. Furthermore, the use of interviews as a qualitative method allowed for practitioners to provide different views and interpretations of their experiences of the social-media crisis communication phenomenon and its ability to foster relationship-building with stakeholders.

Adding quantitative research to this study helped to emphasise the numeric description of Ghanaian public-relations practitioners towards the use of social-media crisis communication to build organisation-stakeholder relationships. It also increased the validity of the study (Burton & Bartlett 2009; Leavy 2017; Sürücü & Maslakci 2020).

As this study adopted the concurrent mixed-method design, the data collection for both quantitative and qualitative studies were done at about the same time.

Table 6.1 below highlights the differences between the quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method research approaches.

Table 6.1: Differences between Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed-method research approaches

	Quantitative Research	Mixed Research	Qualitative Research
Scientific method	Confirmatory – The researcher is interested in testing hypotheses and theory with data	It is focused on confirmatory and exploratory	Mainly exploratory. This approach allows the researcher to produce knowledge, hypotheses, and grounded theory from data gathered.
Ontology	Objective, structural, agreed-upon	Pluralism, accepts objective, subjective realities and interrelations	Subjective, personal and constructed
Epistemology	It is about the search for truth; scientific realism and involves universal scientific standards	Pragmatic justification. It is about what works for whom in specific contexts. It also emphasises dialectical pluralism.	Relativism; varying standards; individual and group justification.
View of human thought and behaviour	It is predictable	It is partially predictable but complex. There are a number of influences that include the environment, nurture, free will and chance.	Unpredictable, social, personal and contextual
Research objectives	Numerical description, causal explanation and prediction.	Multiple objectives; focused on complex and fuller explanation and understanding.	Subjective description; qualitative; empathetic understanding; and exploration.
Focus	Narrow-angle lens; hypotheses testing	Multi-lens focus	Wide-angle lens, seeks a deeper understanding of a phenomenon
Nature of observation	Behaviour is studied under controlled conditions	Focuses on multiple contexts, perspectives or conditions.	Individuals and groups are studied in their natural settings. The researcher tries to explore the views, meanings and perspectives of participants purposively selected.
Form of data collected	Quantitative data based on exact measurement using validated data-collection instrument	Multiple kinds of data are collected.	In-depth interviews, participant observations are the types of data collected from participants.
Nature of data	Variables	Involves a mixture of variables, words, categories and images	Words, images, categories
Data analysis	Seeks to identify statistical relationships among variables	Analysis of qualitative and quantitative done separately and in combination.	Descriptive data used, search for local patterns, themes, and communicate differences /variation.
Results	Findings can be generalised	Viewpoints gathered include both "subjective insider" and "objective outsider". Results presented involves integration of multiple dimensions and perspectives	The focus is on insider viewpoints.

	Formal statistical report (for example, correlations, comparisons of means)	Involves a combination of numbers and narrative	In-depth contextual description and direct quotations from participants
Form of final report			

Sources: Bryman (2012:35-36); Brodsky et al. (2016:13-14); Leavy (2017:9124); Queiros et al. (2017:370); Creswell & Creswell (2018:60).

6.2.4 Research methods

In this section, the two research methods adopted for this study are explained.

6.2.4.1 Online survey

For the quantitative research approach, the study adopted the survey research design. A survey is a way of collecting and assembling information from a group of people, usually known as a *sample*, for the purpose of quantitative description of trends or attitudes (Creswell & Creswell 2018:12). Surveys could be conducted through the use of paper, mail, telephone and the internet (online) (Dalati & Gomez 2018). This study used the online survey type in collecting data from respondents because it is faster to complete, allows the researcher to send timely reminders to respondents till a response is received and is suitable for cross-sectional studies (Nayak & Narayan 2019:32-33). The online survey is made up of questionnaire design, distribution and reporting and it allows for various question formats, such as text boxes, paragraph texts, scale and multiple choice (Nayak & Narayan 2019).

The survey approach allowed for a methodological approach to collecting data (Bhattacherjee 2012; Creswell & Creswell 2018) and addressed research questions 3 and 4. In adopting the survey design, the researcher was mindful of some of the weaknesses inherent in the survey research design, such as sampling bias, non-response, recall bias and social desirability bias (Johnson & Christensen 2012; Nayak & Narayan 2019).

6.2.4.2 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

The interview method is a flexible and attractive means of conducting qualitative research (Bryman 2012:469; Heath, Williamson, Williams & Harcourt 2018:31). The interview approach allows the researcher to have control over the interview environment and comprehensive answers from study participants (Bryman 2012:470; Heath et al. 2018:31). There are different interview methods used in qualitative research. They include in-depth, oral history or life history, biographic minimalist and focus-group discussions (Leavy 2017:139). Most interview methods involve the use of conversation as a tool to learn about the perspectives of participants on an issue (Leavy 2017:139).

The use of the interview method allows the researcher to gather the viewpoints of study participants. It provides insights into what the participant determines to be relevant and vital. The participant is not restricted to only responding to questions in the guide. As stated, a qualitative interview is not rigid and participants do not necessarily have to conform to how the researcher wants to direct the interview.

Interviews are thus designed to be conversational (Gibson & Brown 2009; Bryman 2012; Heath et al. 2018). There are different types of one-on-one interview methods available to researchers conducting qualitative research, namely, structured, unstructured and semi-structured (Leavy 2017; Haenssgen 2019). The structured interview is a highly standardised process of interviewing which does not allow participants to be detailed in answering questions (Burton & Bartlett 2009; Leavy 2017). For the unstructured type, the researcher does not rely on predetermined questions in the information-gathering process. The lack of structure enables the researcher to ask questions which comes to mind during the interview session (Leavy 2017:139). The semi-structured interview type has the unique quality of enabling reciprocity between the interviewer and participant (Galleta 2012; Haenssgen 2019). Furthermore, the semi-structured approach allows the researcher to conduct the interview with the use of a pre-determined set of questions known as an interview guide (Haenssgen 2019).

The semi-structured interview method was deemed relevant for this study in obtaining in-depth information from 11 public-relations practitioners regarding the proposed elements. The researcher had the opportunity to conduct the interview in a guided conversation style through the semi-structured approach (Babbie & Mouton 2011:289; Heath et al. 2018:31). The adoption of the semi-structured type enabled the researcher to ask questions that were not in the interview guide and the researcher was not required to strictly follow the order of the questions in the guide (Bryman 2012:471; Yavetz & Aharony 2020:448). The use of the semi-structured type ensured that the researcher focused on issues that participants considered meaningful. Participants were allowed to express divergent opinions (Cridland, Jones, Caputi & Magee 2015; Yavet & Aharony 2020). It also allowed the researcher to extemporise follow-up questions on the basis of the responses of the participant (Pasternak, Veloutsou & Morgan-Thomas 2017:418; Johansson & Odén 2018:1495). Through the semi-structured approach, the researcher was able to gather in-depth information from participants.

It is quite evident from the aforementioned that the semi-structured interview approach was well-suited for this study. The use of pre-determined questions, reciprocity, allowed participants to provide detailed and meaningful perspectives on the proposed elements for social-media crisis communication to build relationships. The data obtained from participants were necessary to answer research questions 1 and 2.

The next section focuses on the sampling design adopted for the study. Components of sampling design such as the unit of analysis, population, sampling, sampling frame and sample size are discussed.

6.2.5 Sampling design

Sampling is an important step in the research process as it involves the selection of individuals to constitute the population of a study. The method of selection may be based on a probability or a non-probability type of sample (Bryman 2012:187). This means that, in both quantitative and qualitative studies, sampling can be applied to select people to participate in a study.

Sampling refers to a process of choosing units such as people, organisations, objects and events from a population of interest. The results generated from a sample can be generalised for the population (Riffe, Lacy & Fico 2014:71). As aptly described by Leavy (2017:75), sampling specifies "who or what is in your study?" In simple terms, sampling addresses 'who' (for example, subjects, respondents or participants). The 'what' refers to non-living data (for example, content analysis of text or images; Leavy 2017:75-76).

In this section, the population, units of analysis, sampling frame and sampling methods adopted for this study are explained.

6.2.5.1 Target and accessible population

The researcher must select the objects of a research study from a population. In research terms, a population refers to the universe from which the research sample is taken (Bryman 2012:187; Babbie 2013:115; Leavy 2017:76).

In research, the population comprises both a target and an accessible population. A target population comprises a set of elements larger than or different from the group that was sampled, and to which the researcher intended to generalise the study findings (Bachman & Schutt 2012:108; Pascoe 2014:132). The target population for this study constituted public-relations practitioners in Ghana.

The accessible population is the population of subjects that is available to the researcher for the study of a phenomenon of interest (Vogt & Johnson 2011:73). In other words, the accessible population refers to the final group of people from which data for a study is collected (Asiamah, Mensah & Oteng-Abayie 2017:1613; Leavy 2017:76). The study sample is drawn from the accessible population. In other words, it is the subset of the target population. The accessible population of this study was the 400 public-relations practitioners registered with the Institute of Public Relations, Ghana for the year 2020 (IPR Ghana 2020). The 2020 list is the current updated list of IPR-Ghana at the time of data collection for the study. The list was

published in the *Daily Graphic* newspaper, a popular daily newspaper in Ghana (Daily Graphic 2020:40-43).

6.2.5.2 Sampling methods and inclusion and exclusion criteria

In conducting research, the researcher must select a sample in order to associate the findings of the research to a population group. A sample is the segment of the population that a researcher selects for a study. In other words, it is the subset of the population from which the data for the research is generated. The selection method may be on the basis of probability or non-probability (Bryman 2012:715; Leavy 2017:268). The study used both probability and non-probability types of samples. Probability sampling is a sampling method that utilises some form of random selection and provides each case in the accessible population an equal chance of being selected to be part of the sample, representative of the target population (Bryman 2012:715; Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin 2013:392; Leavy 2017:110).

Non-probability sampling, on the other hand, does not require statistical randomisation; the sample is selected as a result of prior knowledge of the issue and also based on the researcher's judgement (Denscombe 2010:24-25; Bryman 2012:187; Buelens, Burger & Van den Brakel 2018:323).

The sample method used for the online survey is discussed next.

- *Random sampling*

For the online survey, the probability sampling method was applied in the selection of public-relations practitioners who belong to IPR Ghana. Systematic random sampling was used to select the practitioners. Systematic random sampling involves selecting units out of a sampling frame on the basis of fixed intervals (Bryman 2012:717; Leavy 2017:110). In applying the systematic technique, Leavy (2017:110) states that the first element is randomly selected and subsequent elements are selected on the basis of an '*n*th' interval. In the instance of this study, the sampling interval was two and it was calculated by dividing the population for the study

(400) by the sample size derived for the study (178). After the random selection of the first respondent, the subsequent respondents were selected after every second interval. Thus, using the systematic sampling technique, the 178 public-relations practitioners who constitute the sample size of this study were selected.

In order to ensure that respondents selected for this study provide the data required for meeting the objectives of the study, the researcher had to set criteria for selection. The criterion-based selection occurs when the researcher "creates a list of the attributes essential" to the research and "proceeds to find or locate a unit matching the list" (Le Compte & Preissle, in Merriam 2009:77). Bryman (2012:418) points out that the researcher must have predetermined criteria of what is relevant to the inclusion or exclusion of study participants or respondents. The selection criteria will define which cases or units are selected on the basis of providing the required information that will help answer the research questions. It is important that the criteria are properly defined so that, when the cases or units are selected, the data gathered and the conclusion arrived at will effectively fulfil the research objectives. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the quantitative aspect of the study were:

Inclusion criteria:

- ·Only public-relations practitioners registered with the Institute of Public Relations Ghana (IPR) were selected.

- Only public-relations practitioners with experience in social media management were selected.

- Only public-relations practitioners with experience in social-media crisis communication were included.

Exclusion criteria:

- IPR members of the rank of 'Affiliate Member' were excluded. An Affiliate Member is yet to write the professional examinations (Daily Graphic 2020).

- Public-relations practitioners not registered with IPR Ghana were excluded.

- Public-relations practitioners with no experience in social-media crisis communication management were excluded.

In conducting the online survey, the 178 public-relations practitioners were randomly selected from the IPR membership list, which served as the sampling frame (see sample size discussed below). A sampling frame is the list of all units in the population from which the sample will be selected (Bryman 2012:187). In order to select the respondents (online survey) and participants (interviews) for the study, the IPR Ghana list of members in good standing for 2020 was used as the sampling frame. The number currently stands at 400 (IPR Ghana 2020). The list of members as published in the *Daily Graphic* newspaper edition of Thursday, 12 November 2020, served as the sampling frame. The *Daily Graphic* newspaper is one of the leading, credible newspapers in Ghana (Adjei & Opoku 2017).

- *Purposive sampling*

The researcher used a non-probability type of sample for the semi-structured in-depth interviews to select organisations who met the criteria for selection and adopted purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves "the deliberate selection of specific individuals, events or settings because of crucial information they provide that cannot be obtained so well through other channels" (Liamputtong 2013:14). When a researcher uses purposive sampling, the objective is to target a particular population on the basis of specific characteristics (for example, experience or demographic; Brodsky et al. 2016:15). There is always an element of bias exercised by the researcher in using purposive sampling, which this researcher tried to overcome by ensuring that the participants answered the questions on their own terms and the interview process for each participant was the same.

Although there is always an element of bias exercised by the researcher in using purposive sampling, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria guided the selection of participants:

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Inclusion criteria:

● Only Ghanaian organisations with a social-media presence were selected.

● Only Ghanaian organisations with public relations/communications departments were selected.

● Only Ghanaian organisations with some level of experience in social-media crisis communications management were selected.

● One public relations practitioner was selected from each organisation.

Exclusion criteria:

● Ghanaian organisations that do not have public relations/communications departments were excluded.

● Ghanaian organisations that do not have a social-media presence were excluded.

6.2.5.3 Unit of analysis

In a research study, the unit of analysis refers to the entity that a researcher studies in research. A unit of analysis could be individuals, groups, artefacts, social interactions, etc (Trochim 2020). Kumar (2018:71) offers a supporting view by stating that the unit of analysis concept refers to the person or object from which the researcher collects data. In this study, PR practitioners in Ghana (thus individuals) constituted the unit of analysis.

6.2.5.4 Sample size for the online survey

Considering the selection criteria as explained above, the sample size for this study is now explained. The sample frame was used to select the sample size for this study. Using

Yamane's sample size determination formula (Chaokromthong & Sintao 2021), given as shown below, the sample size for the online survey was calculated as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N\varepsilon^2}$$

Where; nn = sample size required, ε = level of precision set to 0.05, N is the population size = 400. With level of precision ε that is 0.05, the estimated sample from a population of 400 potential respondents;

$$n = \frac{400}{1 + 400 \times 0.05^2}$$

$$= \frac{400}{2.25} = 177.778$$

$$\approx 178$$

With a confidence level of 95%, the sample size determined for the online survey was 178 respondents, namely public-relations practitioners. Thus, from a population of 400, a sample size of 178 was randomly selected, as explained.

However, the researcher encountered some challenges in getting the selected public practitioners to participate in the study. For example, some practitioners who were selected declined to participate and the researcher had to repeat the sampling procedure in order to satisfy the sample size selected. Also, affiliate members who were selected had to be dropped on the basis of the exclusion criteria. Furthermore, even though some practitioners selected had social-media communication experience, the organisations they work for do not have any social-media presence. In spite of all these challenges, 105 practitioners met the inclusion criteria and agreed to complete the survey. However, the realised sample included only a total of 83 practitioners who completed the online questionnaire, representing a 79% response rate. This percentage was arrived at based on those who met the criteria and agreed to participate (105) and those who completed the questionnaire.

6.2.5.5 Sample size for the interviews

The sample size selected for the semi-structured in-depth interviews was also guided by the principles of data saturation. Data saturation refers to the point in the collection of data and analysis when new inbound data yield little or no new information required to answer the research question (Olshansky 2015; Given 2016; Alam 2020). After a total of 11 interviews with 11 organisations (one participant per each organisation), data saturation was attained. As the purpose was to gather in depth information, the interview was terminated as new insights and information were not obtained from participants. The participants provided rich qualitative information and a wide range of perspectives on the topic.

The 11 interviews conducted were with public-relations practitioners working for these 11 organiisations. These organisations operate in the educational, pension scheme, banking, telecommunications, utilities, tax and revenue management, and non-governmental and consulting sectors in Ghana.

6.2.6 Data-collection methods for the online survey and interviews

This part of the chapter discusses the data-collection methods the researcher used in this study.

6.2.6.1 Web-based questionnaire

The online survey was conducted through the use of a web-based questionnaire. A questionnaire is a collection of questions that a researcher administers on subjects of research (Bryman 2012:715). The respondent is expected to provide answers to questions made available on a questionnaire (Bhattacherjee 2012). The way the questionnaire is organised is vital to the research design. Respondents must find it easy to comprehend information on the questionnaire and the researcher must understand and process the data provided by respondents (Ruel et al. 2016)

The web-based questionnaire was administered by Google forms and included an invitation to prospective respondents to visit a particular website at which a questionnaire has been uploaded and for respondents to fill-out the questionnaire online (Bryman 2012:671). The decision of the researcher to use a web-based questionnaire is driven by the advantages inherent in online surveys. First, the questionnaire could be programmed to allow for only one question at a time. Second, the answers respondents provided could be downloaded automatically into a database, thereby removing the tedious task of coding a large number of questionnaires (Bryman 2012:671). Third, the web-based questionnaire allowed for the recording of emails that can be delivered, which is a good way for keeping an accurate measure of the sample size (Saleh & Bista 2017:64). Fourth, when there was a filter question, it automatically moved to the next relevant question (Bryman 2012:671). The relatively low cost of a web-based questionnaire also made it attractive (Saleh & Bista 2017:65). Due to the limiting nature of the online survey in allowing for respondents to provide more in-depth information, the semi-structured interviews were conducted to yield additional information necessary in answering the research questions.

a)   *The design of the web-based questionnaire*

As mentioned, the researcher used the Google Forms software programme in administering the questionnaire online. Google Forms is reliable and widely adopted online software for conducting online surveys. A web or email address was created and respondents were sent the email link for them to access the questionnaire. Respondents had a period of 30 days to complete and submit the questionnaire. Several reminders to complete the survey were sent during the 30-day period.

i.*Types of questions used in web-based questionnaire*

The question items were close-ended. Close-ended questions require respondents to choose from a set of alternatives (Hyman & Sierra 2016:2). The researcher used close-ended type of questions because close-ended questions are easier to answer, data can be quickly coded, entered and analysed (Hyman & Sierra 2016:2). Even though close-ended questions offer

some useful benefits for quantitative data collection, they do not allow the researcher to obtain in-depth responses and new insights. It is in view of the lack of in-depth information in the quantitative approach that interviews were conducted to supplement the quantitative data.

ii. *Response format*

The response format chosen for the study was a five-point Likert-scale (for example, strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree), differential scale (Song, Son & Oh 2015). Taherdoost (2019:4) explains that the Likert-scale allows respondents to indicate whether they agree or disagree with a particular statement. The Likert-scale works on the assumption that the strength of an attitude is linear from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Apart from measuring statements of agreement, it also measures frequency, quality, importance and likelihood (Taherdoost 2019).

b)   *Quality of the web-based questionnaire*

In order to ensure that the web-based questionnaires help in collecting relevant data, the questions were designed to ensure a quality outcome. Ambiguity was avoided. As strongly recommended by Bryman (2012:255), terms such as 'often' and 'regularly' must be avoided. The researcher ensured that alternative terms were used in place of these terms.

The researcher avoided long-worded statements. The statements were kept short. As double-barreled statements can confuse respondents, such statements were avoided. Double-barreled statements are associated with statements that ask about two statements (Grant Levy 2019; Menold 2020). These types of statements can make respondents unsure about how they should answer a statement. The researcher posed statements that focus on a single specific item (Grant Levy 2019; Menold 2020).

It is important that quantitative researchers emphasise the credibility of their research. The concepts of reliability and validity are essential to adding quality to the conduct of quantitative research. The section below discusses how reliability and validity will be addressed in the online survey.

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6.2.6.2 Interview guide as a data-collection method

An interview guide was used to collect data for the semi-structured in-depth interviews. An interview guide is the instrument used to collect information or data from study participants. Bryman (2012:472) explains that an interview guide is a list that contains topical areas put together by the researcher to prompt the researcher in conducting an interview. The interview guide thus contains the thematic and relevant questions of the study and provides a structured approach for the interview. The structured approach does not need to be strictly adhered to and applied. The guide enables the collection of the same type of information from each study participant (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson & Kangasniem 2016:6).

It is important that questions in the interview guide reflect adequately the purpose and objectives of the research. In many ways, the quality of the interview guide can influence how the interview is conducted and the analysis of the data collected (Rabionet 2011; Cridland et al. 2015). The interview guide creates opportunities for dialogue during an interview (Cridland et al. 2015; Roberts 2020) and the opportunity to change the question order (Kallio et al. 2016:13; Roberts 2020:3192).

The interview guide for the study was designed to have well-formulated questions that are participant-oriented (Kallio et al. 2016:13) and specific largely to the elements conceptualised as a framework for the study. Furthermore, the questions were properly worded and not leading and single-faceted (Turner 2010; Cridland et al. 2009; Baumbusch 2010; Turner 2010; Chenail 2011; Roberts 2020).

It is important that the interview guide generates spontaneous, in-depth, unique and clear answers from participants (Krauss, Hamzah, Omar, Suandi, Ismail & Zahari 2009; Baumbusch 2010; Roberts 2020). The interview guide for this study was designed in the light of the above and it was ensured that the answers provided by participants reflected their own personal feelings and narratives (Rabionet 2011; Roberts 2020). The researcher sought to have an interview guide that fosters the emergence of new insights and concepts (Krauss et al. 2009; Roberts 2020). Some of the questions in the guide were worded to elicit descriptive answers

and, as such, some of the questions were preceded by words such as "what, who, where, when, how or why" (Turner 2010; Chenail 2011; Roberts 2020).

i. *Types of questions in the interview guide*

The guide was structured on two levels: the key themes and follow-up questions. The key themes covered included relevant crisis-communication concepts such as crisis-communication preparedness, dialogic communication, discourse of renewal and organisation-stakeholder relationship. All these are part of the proposed elements of the conceptual framework of the study. Participants were encouraged to freely offer their perspectives, views and experiences on the key themes.

The follow-up questions sought to clarify statements made by participants. Furthermore, follow-up questions were asked to increase the in-depth quality of the data collected from participants.

● *Steps followed for the semi-structured in-depth interviews*

Several steps were followed for the semi-structured in-depth interviews. The researcher first placed phone calls to the public-relations practitioners to invite them to participate in the qualitative study. When confirmation was established with the practitioners, the researcher sent letters to the organisations where the public-relations practitioners are employed. All the interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform, a cloud-based video communication application, in accordance with the requirement of Unisa with respect to the conduct of empirical research during a global pandemic and also Covid-19 restrictions placed by some Ghanaian organisations on the movement of some staff. The interviews were audio recorded (thus without visuals) with permission and in accordance with Unisa's ethical clearance policy.

Before the start of each participant interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to each participant. Because the interviews were audio recorded, the researcher had the opportunity to do active listening and took notes so as to ask follow-up questions. These

approaches enabled the researcher to ask for more clarity on issues deemed vague per the response given by participants. The researcher had useful and relevant interactions with participants. Each participant was provided a consent form and they were required to read and agree to the terms set for the interview. Both the researcher and participants signed the consent forms.

Table 6.2 summarises the interview process that the researcher followed to ensure the credibility of the process.

Table 6.2: Interview process followed for this study

INTERVIEW PROCESS	
All participants were purposively selected based on the inclusion criteria	
Before the interview ● Invitation ● Participation information sheet	• The researcher called all the 11 participants to invite them to participate in the interviews. The researcher sent emails to participants who did not initially respond to the phone calls. • In abiding by the UNISA ethical requirement, the researcher sent to each participant the consent form to fill out before the conduct of each interview.
During the start of the interview ● Recording of interviews ● Taking notes	• Before the interview commenced, participants emailed the signed consent forms to the researcher. This meant that the researcher had permission to record the interview session with participants. • The researcher first expressed his appreciation to each participant for accepting to take part in the study. • After thanking participants, the researcher proceeded to ask participants a number of introductory questions. • Participants were asked **20 questions** and these questions were based on all the proposed elements of the conceptual framework.
Concluding the interview	• In order to ensure that all the relevant issues have been dealt with, the researcher asked participants if they would like to provide additional information with regard to all the elements.
Debriefing of participants	• At the end of the interview, the researcher debriefed the participants. • The researcher thanked all participants for the time and information provided.
Transcribing recordings and data analysis	• The transcribed data was analysed according to the themes contained in the interview guide.
Reporting findings	• The findings are reported in Chapter 8

6.3 RELIABILITY, VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE FINDINGS

Researchers are expected to display rigour in their research. Two criteria for good measurement in quantitative research are reliability and validity, which are discussed first.

6.3.1 Reliability and validity of the findings of the online survey

Reliability refers to how stable a research finding is and validity is concerned with the truthfulness of findings (Mohajan 2017:1; Sürücü & Maslakci 2020:2695-2696). Researchers are required to work towards enhancing the quality of their research. The characteristics of a quality research study include validity and reliability (Heale & Twycross 2015:66; Sürücü & Maslakci 2020:2695-2696). Validity refers to the degree to which a measure substantially reflects the meaning of the concept being investigated (Babbie & Mouton 2011:22; Leavy 2017:113; Sürücü & Maslakci 2020:2695-2696), while reliability refers to the consistency of a measure (Heale & Tycross 2015:66; Bryman 2012:169; Taherdoost 2016:33; Sürücü & Maslakci 2020:2695-2696).

Of importance to the questionnaire is internal and construct validity. To ensure the internal validity of the questionnaire, the researcher used existing statements from previously validated studies, as advised by the statistician, but which had to address the sub-questions of this study.

For construct validity, the supervisor also carefully scrutinised the Likert scale statements to ensure they are aligned with the research questions and the proposed elements of the conceptual framework. The question items are thus based on the literature, validated scales and constructs. The questionnaire was also piloted among 11 IPR members. These public-relations practitioners were asked to identify confusing, ambiguous, or double-barrel statements. They were also asked to identify what the approximate time for completing the questionnaire was and, based on their responses, the questionnaire was revised to avoid any confounding variables. Furthermore, the pilot has helped to properly define the inclusion and

exclusion criteria for the study. Practitioners who took part in the pilot were excluded from the main study.

The questionnaire was also tested for reliability. Since the questionnaire is a validated one used in different cultural settings, it was important to test the questionnaire on Ghanaian respondents to see if it would be applicable in this setting. Hence the researcher sent the questionnaire to three public-relations consultants who are familiar with social-media crisis communication. The purpose of the pre-test was to enable the researcher establish whether the statements were sensible and meaningful to the issue of social-media crisis communication. The responses received were largely consistent with those of the validated studies. The researcher had to only make a few changes in the wording of some of the statements.

6.3.2 Cronbach's alpha coefficient

A survey instrument must foster consistency in terms of measurement. When conducting a quantitative study, consistency of the measuring instrument, such as a questionnaire, is essential for reliability purposes (Heale & Tycross 2015; Leavy 2017). Cronbach's alpha is used by researchers to prove that tests and scales used for a study are well suited for the study (Taber 2018). In research, if the researcher wants to determine reliability, Cronbach's alpha is an appropriate test for assessing the internal consistency of the measurement items included in a scale (Adeniran 2019). Internal consistency refers to the level to which all of the items in a scale measure the various pieces of the same attribute (Adeniran 2019). A Cronbach alpha coefficient that is closer to 1.0 indicates a greater internal consistency of the items in the scale (Olaniyi 2019). The range that is acceptable is between 0.70 and 0.90 (Temilade 2015; Adeniran 2019).

- **Cronbach alpha coefficient for crisis preparedness (fundamentals of crisis preparedness)**

In determining the internal reliability of the crisis preparedness scale, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to measure items in the sub-components: present crisis preparedness and prospective preparedness. For present crisis preparedness, items 1 to 4, as captured in the questionnaire, were measured. A value of 0.90 was obtained. The alpha score for the present crisis preparedness items is very good and shows that the set items are internally consistent and therefore reliable. In essence, there is a statistical justification for using these items together for present crisis preparedness.

For items 5 to 8 of the prospective crisis preparedness in the questionnaire, a coefficient alpha of 0.90 was obtained. The alpha score obtained for prospective crisis preparedness is excellent and statistically good. It means that the items in the prospective crisis preparedness are internally consistent and therefore reliable.

For all the items (1 to 8) in section A, a composite coefficient alpha of 0.94 was obtained. It is evident that, as all the items are internally consistent, there is statistical evidence that the items for crisis preparedness were correctly identified. See Table 6.3 below:

Table 6.3: Cronbach Alpha coefficient of crisis preparedness

Section A	Cronbach Alpha Coefficient
Crisis preparedness	0.94

- **Cronbach alpha coefficient for dialogic communication (managing crises on social media with interactions)**

In determining the internal reliability of the dialogic communication scale, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to measure items in the sub-components: collaboration, grounding, empathy, equality, responsiveness, accessibility, genuineness and transparency.

For items 9 to 11 of the collaboration construct, the alpha score was 0.82. The alpha score obtained for collaboration is acceptable and statistically good. It means that the items in the collaboration construct are internally consistent and therefore reliable.

For items 12 to 14 of the grounding construct, the alpha score was 0.82. The alpha score obtained for grounding is acceptable and statistically good. It means that the items in grounding are internally consistent and therefore reliable.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient value for items 15 to 17 of the empathy construct was 0.89. The alpha score obtained for empathy is excellent and statistically good. It means that the items in the empathy construct are internally consistent and therefore reliable.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient value for items 18 to 20 of the equality construct was 0.37. The alpha score obtained for equality is poor and not acceptable. It means that the items in the equality construct were not internally consistent and therefore unreliable. This could be a result of a lack of clarity in the items. It can be inferred that the majority of respondents found the items vague and this affected their responses. These items should be rephrased or removed for future studies. The equality construct was therefore dropped in the questionnaire.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient value for items 21 to 23 of the responsiveness construct was 0.86. The alpha score obtained for responsiveness is excellent and statistically good. It means that the items in the responsiveness construct are internally consistent and therefore reliable.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient score for items 24 to 27 of the accessibility construct was 0.83. The alpha score obtained for accessibility is excellent and statistically good. It means that the items in the accessibility construct are internally consistent and therefore reliable.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient value for items 28 to 30 of the genuineness construct was 0.81. The alpha score obtained for genuineness is acceptable and statistically good. It means that the items in the responsiveness construct were correctly identified and internally consistent and therefore reliable.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient value for items 31 to 33 of the transparency construct was 0.81. The alpha score obtained for transparency is acceptable and statistically good. It means

that the items in the transparency construct were correctly identified and internally consistent and therefore reliable.

The Cronbach alpha composite coefficient value for items 9 to 33 in section B, with the exception of items 18 to 20, was 0.94. It is evident that, as all the items are internally consistent, there is statistical evidence that the items for dialogic communication except for the equality construct (items 18 to 20) were correctly identified.

See Table 6.4 below:

Table 6.4: Cronbach alpha coefficient of dialogic communication

Section B	Cronbach Alpha Coefficient
Dialogic Communication	0.94

● **Cronbach alpha coefficient for discourse of renewal scale (mending stakeholder relations after a social-media crisis)**

The Cronbach alpha coefficient value for items 34 to 36 of the communication efficiency construct was 0.71. The alpha score obtained for communication efficiency is acceptable and statistically good. It means that the items in the communication efficiency construct were correctly grouped and internally consistent and therefore reliable.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient value for items 37 to 39 of the prospective vision was 0.71. The alpha score obtained for prospective vision is acceptable and statistically good. It means that the items in the prospective vision construct were correctly grouped and internally consistent and therefore reliable.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient score for items 40 to 42 of the culture and value construct was 0.76. The alpha score obtained for culture and value is acceptable and statistically good. It means that the items in the culture and value construct were correctly identified and internally consistent and therefore reliable.

The Cronbach alpha composite coefficient value for all the items (34 to 42) in Section C was 0.86. It is evident that, as all the items are internally consistent, there is statistical evidence that the items for discourse of renewal were correctly identified. See Table 6.5 below:

Table 6.5: Cronbach Alpha coefficient of discourse of renewal

Section C	Cronbach Alpha Coefficient
Discourse of renewal	0.86

● **Cronbach alpha coefficient for organisation-stakeholder relationship scale (enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationship with social-media crisis communication)**

The Cronbach alpha coefficient value for items 43 to 46 of the trust construct was 0.85. The alpha score obtained for trust is excellent and statistically good. It means that the items in the trust construct were correctly identified and internally consistent and therefore reliable.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient score for items 47 to 49 of the control mutuality construct was 0.81. The alpha score obtained for control mutuality is acceptable and statistically good. It means that the items in the control mutuality construct were appropriately grouped and internally consistent and therefore reliable.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient value for items 50 to 52 of the commitment construct was 0.87. The alpha score obtained for commitment is excellent and statistically good. It means that the items in the control mutuality construct were correctly defined and internally consistent and therefore reliable.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient for items 53 to 55 of the satisfaction construct was 0.81. The alpha score obtained for satisfaction is acceptable and statistically good. It means that the items in the satisfaction construct were appropriately grouped and internally consistent and therefore reliable.

The Cronbach alpha composite coefficient for all the items (43 to 55) in section D was 0.87. It is evident that, as all the items are internally consistent, there is statistical evidence that the items for discourse of renewal were appropriately defined, as shown in Table 6.6:

Table 6.6: Cronbach Alpha coefficient of organisation-stakeholder relationships

Section D	Cronbach Alpha Coefficient
Organisation-stakeholder relationship	0.87

The findings can only be generalised to the public-relations practitioners who were registered at the Institute of Public Relations, Ghana in 2020 and not at any other time.

The validity and reliability measures applied have ensured that the constructs are specific in answering the research questions and the elements specified in the conceptual framework.

When researchers incorporate reliability and validity measures into their research, transparency can be enhanced and researcher bias can potentially be minimised (Sürücü & Maslakci 2020).

6.3.3 The trustworthiness of the findings of the semi-structured in-depth interviews

The trustworthiness of the findings of the semi-structured in-depth interviews are now discussed. For the interviews, the trustworthiness of the questions in the interview guide was important and was strengthened by the four criteria of credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Andriopoulos & Slater 2013; Johnson & Parry 2015; Nyathi 2018). Additionally, in order to ensure the credibility of the study, the interview guide was pretested and methodological triangulation was applied.

1. Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research is the confidence the researcher has in the truth of the research outcomes in respect of study participants and the context where the study was done (Johnson & Rasulova 2017:266). In this study, specific statements in the questionnaire were considered for the interview guide for further exploration. The credibility of the interview process was supported by the scope, setting, population, sample, selection criteria and elements of the proposed conceptual framework of the study.

2. Transferability

Transferability refers to when the research descriptions and outcomes are adequate in enabling similarities to be drawn with other contexts (Johnson & Rasulova 2017:266). In this current study, the questions for the interview were designed to elicit detailed and relevant responses from participants. Since the survey results will be generalised to IPR members in good standing as of 2020, exploring some of the survey questions in the interview provided more in-depth information on the social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships, which is the focus of the study. The interview findings yielded rich insight into the social-media crisis communication phenomenon, particularly in the building of stakeholder relationships.

3. *Dependability*

Dependability is focused on ensuring the consistent collection of data by avoiding needless variations, so as to guarantee repeatability of the research process (Johnson & Rasulova 2017:266). For this study, the interview process for each participant was the same. The researcher ensured that the participants answered the questions on their own terms. Questions that appear confusing to participants were clarified or reworded by the researcher. The researcher avoided asking biased questions. The research questions were in line with the interview questions. The interviews were audio recorded and this allowed the researcher to listen attentively to the responses of participants. The researcher also carefully documented the entire process.

4. Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with how the researcher ensures that the process and findings of the research are not biased (Johnson & Rasulova 2017:266). The issue of bias was carefully addressed. The researcher was informed by self-reflection in ensuring an open and honest narrative that will be appreciated by readers (Creswell & Creswell 2018). The researcher's interpretation of the findings was largely shaped by the views and experiences expressed by participants, as well as the background of the researcher (Bryman 2012:392).

In order to establish rigour for the interview on the basis of credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability, the question items were examined by the supervisor to help determine the clarity, soundness, depth and the unbiased nature of the questions.

In addition to the four criteria, pre-testing of interview questions was also carried out to ensure the trustworthiness of the interview findings.

5. Pre-testing of interview questions

The researcher pilot-tested the questions in the interview guide and conducted interviews with four of the participants who took part in the pilot for the survey. The purpose was for the participants (who are public-relations practitioners) to assist in identifying confusing questions. Also, the responses they provided assisted the researcher to know if the research questions had been properly addressed and whether the depth of responses could yield useful information for the proposed conceptual framework. Practitioners who participated in the pilot were excluded from the main study.

The researcher applied methodological triangulation to further strengthen the findings of the study.

6. *Methodological triangulation*

It is important that a research study is as accurate as possible. The use of multiple data sources, theories and research methods is vital in adding validity and accuracy to a study (Foster 2012; Patton 2015; Tonkin-Crine 2016). Triangulation has been used as a research

method to help validate and ensure the accuracy of a study. Applying triangulation in qualitative research helps to legitimise and make a study credible. In quantitative studies, triangulation can enhance reliability and validity (Foster 2012; Patton 2015; Tonkin-Crine 2016).

Triangulation refers to using more than one method of data collection in studying a phenomenon (Bryman 2012:717). There are four types of triangulation, namely, data triangulation, theoretical triangulation, investigator triangulation and methodical triangulation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011:51; Daymon & Holloway 2011:92; Renz, Carrington & Badger 2018:824-831). Data triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources (for example, interview and observational data) to examine an assertion (Daymon & Holloway 2011:92; Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011:51; Patton 2015:661). Theoretical triangulation involves examining data through more than one theory in order to interpret data. Investigator triangulation refers to a research situation where two or more researchers study the same topic and compare their results. This is done to minimise bias. The last, methodical triangulation, refers to when the researcher uses more than one method to study a phenomenon by using both qualitative and quantitative methods (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011:51; Daymon & Holloway 2011:92; Renz, Carrington & Badger 2018:824-831).

For the purpose of this study, methodical triangulation was adopted so as to capitalise on the strengths and minimise the weaknesses of both research approaches (Wiggins 2011; Daymon & Holloway 2011; Renz, Carrington & Badger 2018).

6.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis of both the online survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews are now discussed respectively.

6.4.1 Data analysis of the findings of the online survey

Any interpretation of data must be preceded by the analysis of the raw data. For this study the most appropriate tests were considered in the data analysis. Parametric and non-parametric tests are considered to be the two types of tests used to analyse quantitative data (Fagerland 2012:1; Dzikiti & Girdler-Brown 2017:40; Grech & Calleja 2018:48–49).

Parametric tests involve statistical tests that are based on assumptions concerning a dataset's distribution. Some assumptions must exist in the data before using the parametric test approach. The assumptions are that data must have a normal distribution; data collected from multiple groups must have the same variance; data should have a linear relationship and data must be independent (ie, responses given by respondents must not be influenced by other respondents (Grech & Calleja 2018:48–49; Fagerland 2012:1; Dzikiti, Girdler-Brown 2017:40). Per the assumptions of parametric tests, this study satisfies the assumptions and therefore using parametric tests proved useful in the analysis of the data.

The data analysis process for the survey data involved a statistical presentation of the data which covered both descriptive and inferential statistics, such as frequencies, means, standard deviations, etc (Leavy 2017:111; Creswell & Creswell 2018:290). Descriptive statistics were used to summarise data observed within a sample in order to interpret and explain the observed data (Babbie 2013; Fallon 2016; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021). For this study, the descriptive statistics data of the survey are presented in Chapter 7 and are presented in frequencies, means, median and standard deviations. On the other hand, inferential statistics tests are used to make inferences regarding the population of a study from which a sample is selected (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021). The inferences used in this study involved conducting correlation and regression tests in order to know the direction of relationships (Leavy 2017) between variables. An approach to inferential statistics is statistical significance tests (Leavy 2017). In Chapter 7, inferential data involving the proposed elements are presented, discussed and explained.

In analysing the survey data, the following tests were used to analyse the data collected from respondents:

6.4.1.1 Pearson correlation coefficient

Pearson's correlation test was used to measure at the interval or ratio level whether two variables are related (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:262).

In using Pearson's correlation test, the correlation coefficient is expressed with a lowercase r. The strength of two variables that are correlated is determined by the correlation coefficient, which varies between -1 and +1. The direction of the correlation can either be positive or negative. When the correlation is negative, it signifies that, as the values of one variable rise, the values of the other fall. In the instance where the correlation is positive, it means that, as the values of one variable rise, the values of the other variable also rise too (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:263). For this study, in order to measure the relationship or association between two continuous variables, Pearson's correlation test was determined to be the most appropriate. It was necessary for this study to determine the strength of the relationship between the dependent variable (organisation-stakeholder relationship) and the independent variables (crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal).

6.4.1.2 One-way Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

In conducting research, some research designs require that the researcher looks for the differences in means or distribution (Bougie & Sekaran 2019). The analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to assess whether or not there exists a difference between at least three means in a dataset which requires the computation of three or more means (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021). In essence, ANOVA establishes if there are any statistical differences between the means of three independent groups (Babbie 2013). The ANOVA test yields an F statistic also referred to as the F ratio which is calculated on the basis of the difference between the variability between the groups and the variability within groups (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021). This test was used to compare the independent variables: crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal and the

dependent variable: organisation-stakeholder relationship. In Chapter 7, the ANOVA tests are presented and explained.

6.4.1.3 Regression analysis

Mooi (2014:194) describes regression analysis as methods used in statistical analysis for the appraisal of relationships between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. Regression analysis examines the relationship between two or more variables with the assistance of a mathematical model (Kafle 2019:129). In other words, regression analysis can be used to explain how much of the dependent variable variation is as a result of the variation of one or more independent variables (Skiera et al. 2018:2; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:266).

Mooi (2014:194) asserts that regression analysis offers the following benefits:

- Specifies if independent variables have a significant relationship with a dependent variable
- Estimates the strength of relationship between variables

This study used a regression test to appraise the relationship between the dependent variable (organisation-stakeholder relationship) and the independent variables (crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal).

The quantitative data of this study was analysed with the assistance of Statistical Analysis System (SAS) JMP version 14 and R version 4.02. The service of a qualified statistician was used to assist with reliability tests and the analysis.

Table 6.7 below outlines the process used to design and conduct the online survey.

Table 6.7: The design and implementation of the online survey

ONLINE SURVEY PROCESS
Design and pilot the questionnaire ● Using the selection criteria, the researcher identified and removed from the IPR members list of 2020, public-relations practitioners who did not meet the selection criteria. ● The next activity carried out was to randomly select practitioners or respondents from the list.
Steps taken before the online survey was conducted ● Obtained the contact information (i.e. mobile phone numbers and email addresses) of members selected to be part of the sample ● Made calls to every practitioner selected to confirm if they satisfy the criteria for inclusion ● After obtaining information from each practitioner, email was sent to those randomly selected and on the basis of the inclusion criteria inviting them to take part in the survey
Implementation of web-based questionnaire ● Email invitation was completed and the link to the online survey was sent to practitioners included in the sample ● Email reminders and mobile phone calls were made to all selected practitioners to encourage them to complete the questionnaire in good time. ● Monitor the feedback on the Google Form platform
Steps taken after completion of data gathering ● Survey data downloaded and exported to Microsoft Excel format ● Held statistical meetings with statistician ● Used Statistical Analysis System (SAS) JMP version 14 and R version 4.02 for statistical analysis of collected data ● Present findings ● Interpret and make inferences from the findings. ● Draw conclusions which are presented in Chapter 7

6.4.2 Data analysis of the semi-structured interviews

In qualitative research, data analysis refers to analysing data through the activity of fragmentation so as to merge the data into various categories. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007:564) describe data analysis as a step-by-step activity applied in the mining for meaning from gathered data. They add further that the process involves organising and interrogating data in order to unravel patterns, themes, relationships, explanations, interpretations, critiques or the generation of theories. Trent and Cho (2014:652) define analysis as "summarising and organising data". Data analysis in qualitative research is a recursive process (Leavy 2017:150).

As already explained, the interviews were recorded with the permission of all participants. The researcher transcribed the interviews himself. This enabled the researcher to read, look at and think about the data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011). Transcribing also made it possible for the researcher to understand gathered data before the onset of analysis (Leavy 2017:150).

The analysis of data for this study were based on the interviews conducted. The analysis approach involved the use of a deductive thematic analysis. A deductive thematic analysis involves the use of theoretical propositions derived from literature and these propositions inform how a study's themes are analysed (Pearse 2019). In other words, deductive thematic analysis is a systematic approach to extracting meanings and concepts from a dataset by examining and recording patterns, builds on codes identified in the transcripts, involves interpreting and constructing themes on the basis of identified patterns and relationships (Bryman 2012:580; Maguire & Delahunt 2017; 3353; Kiger & Varpio 2020:2).

In using deductive thematic analysis in analysing the data, the researcher adopted Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive approach, as depicted in Table 6.8 below. The reflexive approach refers to how the researcher reflects and thinks about the research data and the researcher's spontaneous and thoughtful engagement with the process of analysing the data. This process involves developing, constructing and generating and the essence is to enrich and make the data more meaningful (Braun, Clarke & Weate 2016; Braun et al. 2018; Braun & Clark 2019). The Nvivo version 11 software was used to help in generating codes and is qualitative data analysis software that helps in sorting, organising and analysing qualitative data (Dalkin, Forster, Hodgson, Lhussier & Carr 2021; Dhakal 2022).

Table 6.8: A summary of the different phases of the deductive thematic analysis followed for this study

Phase	Description of process
Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data	• Listen to each interview recording. • Transcribe the data • Interact and familiarise oneself with the data which will involve scanning, reading, rereading and providing initial interpretations. Notes made on early impressions regarding the initial interpretations.
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	• Reducing and classifying the data by coding the entire dataset with the NVivo software programme. • Data items that were helpful in addressing the research questions were coded.
Phase 3: Search for themes	• Identify themes on the basis of the proposed elements as contained in the interview guide. The use of the interview guide helped to keep within the research questions scope and focus on theoretical aspects that were investigated in the survey. • Topics that recurred were correctly categorised. • Data relevant to repetition of topics identified and marked. Such data were noted. • Themes that were not helpful in the overall analysis were dropped.
Phase 4: Reviewing of themes	• Themes reviewed to ensure that they were relevant to the dataset. • Themes reviewed on the basis of how they correctly provide the most appropriate meaning of the proposed elements and theoretical aspects.
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	• Themes analysed thoroughly. Data items specific to each theme were analysed. • Data items to use as extracts in the findings were identified. • Identified extracts were analysed carefully in relation to themes and research questions.
Phase 6: Production of report	• Determine the order for reporting the themes. • Put together a narrative plan that ensured that themes and accompanying extracts were reported in a meaningful and logical manner with regard to the research questions. • Write research report

Source: Braun & Clarke (2019:590).

6.5 SUMMARY

The research methodology and operationalisation adopted for the study were discussed in detail in this chapter. The choice of the mixed-method research approach was justified.

The adoption of the pragmatist research paradigm was explained and justified. The researcher pointed out that using the pragmatist design will help to identify actions Ghanaian organisations can use in social-media crisis communication that can help build relationships with stakeholders. It was argued that the pragmatic approach provided the most realistic way for understanding the application of a social-media crisis-communication strategy by Ghanaian organisations.

The necessary research processes used in conducting research were discussed. For example, sample frame and size, sampling method, sampling process, online survey, semi-structured interviews and research quality considerations were thoroughly explained and discussed.

Data analysis for both the online survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews was explained and justified. These are presented in chapters 7 and 8 respectively.

The findings of the online survey are presented first in the next chapter, Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE ONLINE SURVEY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the methodology and operationalisation of the study were explained and discussed in detail. This chapter now outlines the findings and interpretation of the online survey data and addresses research question 3 and 4.

The purpose of this chapter is thus to provide interpretations to the survey findings involving the realised sample of 83 IPR members.

The findings are presented as follows: First, the demographic data as outlined in the questionnaire are presented. Second, the descriptive statistics (frequency distribution) based on the responses of the respondents per each questionnaire item are presented. Third, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation and median) are stated and interpreted. Fourth, inferential statistics were used to interpret the data so as to determine the correlations between variables so as to determine the strength of associations among the variables. Last, the data is interpreted by means of inferential statistics, that is, regression in order to determine how the independent variables predict the dependent variable.

The quantitative data of this study was analysed with the assistance of SAS JMP version 14 and R version 4.02.

The online survey covered the elements proposed for the conceptual framework and the elements are presented in four sections: Section A: Fundamentals of crisis preparedness; Section B: Managing crisis on social media with interactions; Section C: Mending stakeholder relations after a social-media crisis; and Section D: Enhancing stakeholder relationship with social-media crisis communication. The demographic data are presented and discussed in Section E.

The demographic data, as captured in Section E of the questionnaire, is discussed first.

7.2 SECTION E: Demographic Information

The demographic data collected for this study was to enable the researcher gather insight on the following:

- public relations and communication positions occupied by people trained in communication or public relations.

- years of work experience of public-relations practitioners surveyed for the study.

- education background and the highest level of education of practitioners.

- sectors (whether public or private) practitioners are affiliated with.

The demographic information consisted of six question items (items 56-61).

The first question (Q56) in the demographic section required of respondents to indicate their current position in their organisation. Since the population of the study was PR practitioners, the positions specified were closely linked with public-relations practice. The options available for respondents to choose from included Public Relations Officer/Manager, Communications Manager/Corporate Communication Manager, Marketing Officer/Manager and Communications Consultant. The 'Other' option was to enable respondents occupying positions other than the ones listed to specify those positions. The total number of respondents who indicated their current positions was 82. The majority of respondents indicated their current position to be public-relations and communications related. This finding is positive, as it indicated that the majority of the positions are related to public relations and communications. This also means that the communication and public-relations roles are largely performed by people designated as public-relations or communication personnel. Their organisations recognise them as practitioners in the field of communication and public relations.

Table 7.1: Respondents' current position

Current position	Frequency	Percentage
Public Relations Officer/Manager	32	39
Communications Manager/Corporate Communication Manager	16	19.5
Marketing Officer/Manager	3	3.7
Communication Consultant	5	6.1
Other	26	31.7
Total	**82**	**100**

Item 57 sought to find out the highest educational qualification of respondents. It was necessary to establish whether practitioners had the requisite academic credentials to carry out their roles. The majority of the respondents (77%) indicated that they held a masters degree, followed by respondents with a bachelors degree (15.7%), doctoral degree (4.8%), others (2.5%) and diploma (1%). This finding shows that the majority of organisations that employ these public relations/communications professionals have preferences for professionals with postgraduate qualification. It also means that people with postgraduate qualification have a better opportunity of being offered a position in public relations/communication areas if they have a postgraduate qualification. Table 7.2 below depicts the list of responses.

Table 7.2: Highest educational qualification of respondents

Highest educational qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Masters	63	77
Bachelors	12	15.7
Doctoral	4	4.8
Diploma	1	1.0
Other	2	2.5
Total	**82**	**100**

Respondents were asked to indicate their educational background in item 58 to establish whether they were trained in public relations and communications. The data revealed that the

majority of respondents have a public relations and communications background. Respondents who opted for the "other" option indicated an educational background in finance, public administration, or management information systems, among others. The implication of this finding is that the majority of organisations of these respondents hire people with a background in public relations and communication to fill roles in public relations and communications.

Table 7.3 below depicts the educational background information of respondents.

Table 7.3: Educational background of respondents

Educational background	Frequency	Percentage
Public relations	35	44
Communication	26	31
Marketing	7	8.3
Journalism	3	3.6
Other	11	13.1
Total	**82**	**100**

It was important to establish from respondents their years of experience working in public relations. Item 59 demanded of respondents to indicate the number of years they have worked in public relations. An overwhelming majority have worked in public relations for more than five years.

Table 7.4: Respondents' experience in public relations

Experience in Public relations	Frequency	Percentage
More than 5 years	57	69
3 to 5 years	18	22
2 years and below	7	9
Total	**82**	**100**

Item 60 asked respondents to indicate the industry their organisations are affiliated with. The purpose of this question was to know particular industries employing the services of public relations. The industries with the majority of respondents working in are government institutions and education. The "other" option elicited responses from 22 respondents working in oil and gas, waste management, automobile, manufacturing and the media. The responses provided by respondents are presented below in Table 7.5.

Table 7.5: Industry that respondents' organisations are affiliated with

Educational background	Frequency	Percentage
Government institutions	16	19
Education	16	19
Banking and Finance	10	11.9
Utility services	7	8.3
Non-governmental organisation	4	4.8
Insurance	4	4.8
Health	2	2.4
Hospitality	2	2.4
Other	22	27.4
Total	**83**	**100**

Respondents were asked in item 61 to indicate whether their organisations are in the public or private sector. The majority of respondents work for organisations in the public sector. The public sector in Ghana refers to institutions that design and implement programmes and policies on behalf of the government in order to help the government achieve both economic and social objectives (IDEG 2018). Figure 7.1 depicts the responses provided by respondents in terms of the sector their organisations belong to.

Figure 7.1: Sector respondents' organisation belongs to
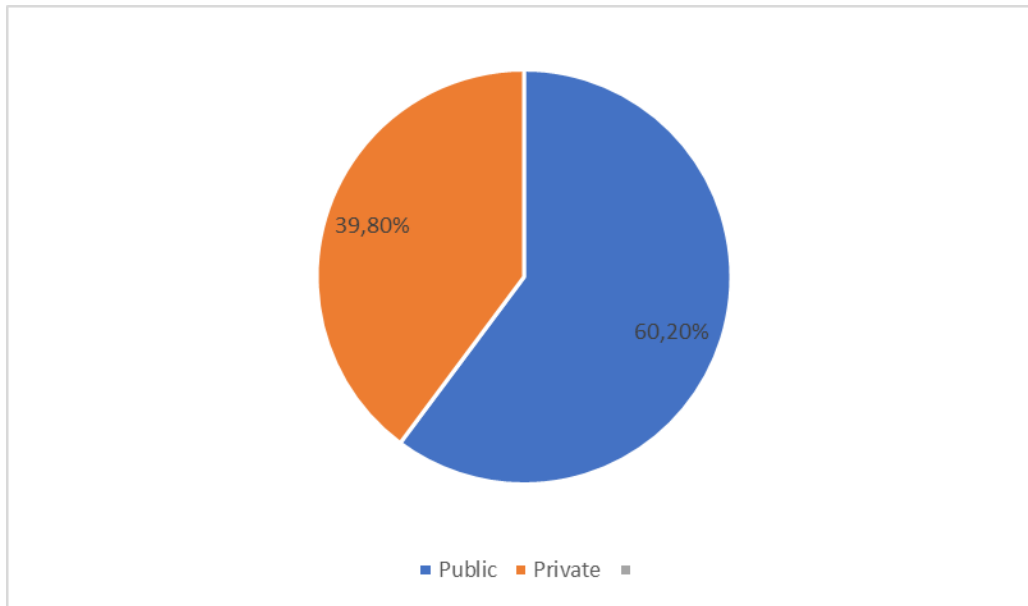
Next, the findings with regard to the different sections in the questionnaire are now explained.

7.3 FINDINGS OF SECTION A: FUNDAMENTALS FOR CRISIS PREPAREDNESS

In examining the fundamentals of crisis preparedness, the study focused on two key constructs, namely, present crisis preparedness and prospective crisis preparedness.

As highlighted in Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1, effective crisis management must include planning. Any attempt at reducing the risk of a crisis must involve crisis preparedness (Selart & Johansen 2013; Coombs 2019; Ulmer et al. 2019). This study argues that a crisis preparedness approach is core to strategic communication. This is because, as strategic communication is planned, targeted and designed to be a formal communication process (Falkheimer & Heide 2014b; Holtzhausen & Zerfass 2015), the organisation's crisis preparedness stance can help the organisation manage a crisis, since it involves planning and is targeted at mitigating the impact of a crisis. Furthermore, engaging in a crisis preparedness task allows the organisation to carry out environmental scanning, which will enable the organisation to identify potential crisis situations and ways of mitigating such situations

(Greyser 2009; Comunello et al. 2016; Derani & Naidu 2016; Tampere et al. 2016; Duchek 2020). All these crisis preparation activities are essential to strategic communication, as the implementation of strategic communication during a crisis is directed at ensuring that the organisation achieves its goals (Zerfass et al. 2018).

Present crisis preparedness refers to the ability of the organisation to manage a crisis situation that has just hit the organisation (Carmeli & Schaubroeck 2008:184; Martin & Hatzidimitriadou 2022:2153). Being able to manage a crisis, including a social-media crisis, means that the organisation knows what to do. The organisation, for example, would have a presence on social media (Getchell & Sellnow 2016; Al-Ma'aitah 2020) and it would have provided stakeholders information on where to look for crisis information (Guo 2017; Spence, Lachlan, Sellnow, Rice & Seeger 2017). Furthermore, the organisation's social-media presence will demonstrate to stakeholders that the organisation is prepared to provide information, interact and listen to them (Getchell & Sellnow 2016; Maben & Gearhart 2018; Al-Ma'aitah 2020).

Though it is important for the organisation to know and be prepared to manage an immediate crisis, equally important is knowing what to do and how to manage a crisis that will occur in the future. The other dimension of crisis preparedness, *prospective crisis preparedness*, refers to having the ability to deal with a crisis situation in the distant future (Carmeli & Schaubroeck 2008:184). A prospective crisis preparedness approach that includes social media will enable the organisation to prevent or lessen the emergence of "grapevine" sources during future crises, as the organisation would have prepared information and education materials way ahead of time before a crisis hits. Such a preparation will be to the advantage of the organisation, as it will be able to forestall the spread of rumours on social media (Crook et al. 2016). A prospective approach will also allow the organisation to allocate in advance resources and time for crisis management (Rutsaert et al. 2014; Tampere et al. 2016).

7.3.1 Section A: Descriptive statistics

As already pointed out, this section presents and discusses the descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation and median) of the data. Table 7.6 below presents the fundamentals of crisis preparedness.

Table 7.6 Fundamentals of crisis preparedness

Section A (element 1): Fundamentals of crisis preparedness	Items
● Present crisis preparedness ● Prospective crisis preparedness	1–4 5–8

In order to determine present crisis preparedness, four items (1–4) were presented to respondents to answer. Item 1 required respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree that their organisation is prepared for different types of crisis, including a social-media crisis. The data findings show that the majority of respondents indicated that their organisations are prepared for different crises, as 35.4% indicated strongly agree and 32.9% agreement. Thus, 68.3% of respondents agreed with the statement. Even though the finding is positive for crisis management, it is quite worrying that 20.7% of respondents indicated a neutral position regarding their organisation's crisis preparedness. This means that they could not indicate whether their organisation is prepared or not prepared for different crises, including a social-media crisis. Less than a tenth (6.1%) and a fifth (4.9%) respectively provided "disagree" and "strongly disagree" responses to the statement.

In item 2, 67.07% of respondents affirmed that their organisation's scope to cope with a crisis was good. This constituted 28.05% and 39.02%, who indicated "strongly agree" and "agree" respectively. The data finding also revealed that quite a significant number of respondents (24.4%) could not point out whether they "agree" or "disagree" with their organisation's scope to cope with the crisis. This finding is quite worrisome, as it shows that this group of practitioners appears unsure of the crisis readiness of its organisations. The position of a minority of respondents (7.32% and 1.21%) was that they disagree and strongly disagree

respectively in describing the organisation's scope to cope with the crisis as good. The minority view is quite unfortunate, as it shows that these organisations will find it challenging in dealing with a crisis.

The responses to item 3 show that 34.2% and 30.5% of respondents "agree" and "strongly agree" respectively with the statement that their organisation has good knowledge regarding the different phases of crises. Other respondents, representing 20.7%, declared a neutral position. There were quite a significant number of respondents, 12.2% and 2.4%, who "disagree" and "strongly disagree" respectively with the statement. Even though the majority of respondents indicated good knowledge in the different phases of the crisis, it is revealing that some respondents declared a neutral position and others affirmed that they had no good knowledge of the different phases of a crisis.

The majority of respondents, 36.6% and 28%, indicated "agree" and "strongly agree" in item 4, that their organisation knows what to do at every possible phase of a crisis, including a social-media crisis. Of concern to this finding is 24.4% of respondents who could not indicate whether they "agree" or "disagree" with the statement. A combined total of 11% "disagree" and "strongly disagree" with the statement. With a combined total of 64.64%, the majority of respondents affirmed that their organisation is knowledgeable in every possible phase of a crisis, including social media. Knowing what to do in the event of a crisis can enable the organisation to mitigate incidents of false information and the spread of rumours (Comunello, Parisi, Lauciani, Magnoni & Casarotti 2016; Derani & Naidu 2016; Tampere, Tampere & Luoma-Aho 2016). Table 7.7 below presents the responses of respondents to present crisis preparedness.

Table 7.7: Responses to present crisis preparedness

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation is prepared for different types of crisis including social-media crisis	35.4%	32.9%	20.7%	6.1%	4.9%	82
My organisation's scope to cope with a crisis is good	28.05%	39.02%	24.4%	7.32%	1.21%	82
My organisation has a good knowledge regarding the different phases of crises	34.2%	30.5%	20.7%	12.2%	2.4%	82
My organisation knows what to do at every possible phase of a crisis including social-media crisis	36.6	28	24.4	9.8	1.2	82

The prospective crisis preparedness construct was measured with items 5 to 8 in the questionnaire. Responses to item 5 show that a combined total of 67.1%, that is a little over two-thirds, of respondents indicated that their organisation knows how to diagnose crisis causes. The number of respondents who could not give a positive or negative response to the statement stood at 23.2% and this outcome is quite worrying, as it suggests that these respondents could not offer a supporting or opposing view with regard to the statement. Other respondents, 8.5% and 1.2%, indicated "disagree" and "strongly disagree" respectively to the statement.

The majority of respondents, 29.3% and 28.04%, indicated "strongly agree" and "agree" in item 6 to the statement that their organisation knows what resources and quantities to allocate in the management of the crisis. Other respondents, representing 25.6%, adopted a neutral stance to the statement. A combined total of 17.06% provided a negative response to the statement by indicating "disagree" and "strongly disagree" respectively. Organisations that are minded to allocate resources and time in advance are better placed in managing any future crisis (Rutsaert et al. 2014; Tampere, Tampere & Luoma-Aho 2016).

Item 7 required respondents to indicate whether their organisation knows how to detect and manage the needs and expectations of stakeholders. The responses indicate that the respondents "strongly agree" (29.3%) and "agree" (42.7%) that their organisations know how to detect and manage the needs and expectations of stakeholders. A little over a tenth (13.4%)

of respondents could not provide a positive or negative response to the statement. A few other respondents, 12.2% and 2.4%, indicated "disagree" and "strongly disagree" responses respectively to the statement. The majority outcome is useful, as it shows that the organisations of the majority of respondents are interested in addressing the needs of stakeholders in any future crisis situation.

In item 8, an overwhelming majority, 68.3%, representing respondents who indicated "strongly agree" and "agree", affirmed that their organisation knows how to identify changes in the needs of stakeholders. Other respondents (23.2%) could not provide a positive or negative response to the statement. Only 7.3% and 1.2% of respondents provided a negative response by indicating "disagree" and "strongly disagree" to the statement.

Table 7.8: Responses to prospective crisis preparedness

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation knows how to diagnose the causes of a crisis.	29.3%	37.8%	23.2%	8.5%	1.2%	82
My organisation knows what resources and quantities to allocate in order to manage a crisis successfully.	29.3%	28.04%	25.6%	14.63	2.43%	82
My organisation knows how to detect and manage the needs and expectations of stakeholders in the crisis.	29.3%	42.7	13.4%	12.2%	2.4%	82
My organisation knows how to identify changes in the needs of stakeholders	26.8%	41.5%	23.2%	7.3%	1.2%	82

7.3.2 Mean scores for Section A responses (crisis preparedness)

In descriptive statistics, providing the average scores of responses provided by respondents is important to explaining data. This section centres on the average scores obtained for responses to crisis preparedness.

In the table below, the frequency, mean, standard deviation, 25th percentile, 50th percentile (the median) and 75th percentile of the present crisis preparedness and prospective crisis preparedness variables are presented. Frequency refers to the number of times a response

was given. The mean on the other hand is the average of the sum of all values in a specific distribution divided by the number of values. In a dataset, the standard deviation is essentially used to determine the average amount of variation from the mean. The median on the other hand is the middle score in a distribution of values. A percentile (or a centile) is a measure used in statistics to indicate the value below which a percentage of data falls. It divides data into divisions of 25%. It indicates where a score stands relative to other scores. The 25th percentile in the crisis preparedness data means that 25% of respondents had a particular score (for example, x score), and 75% of respondents had more than 'x' score. The 50th percentile in respect of the data is the average score of 50% of respondents. The 75th percentile refers to 75% of respondents who had a particular score (for example, z score), and 25% of respondents had more than 'z' score.

Table 7.9 below outlines the descriptive statistics for the present crisis preparedness and prospective crisis preparedness constructs.

Table 7. 9 Typical scores for Section A

Variable	N	Mean	Std. deviation	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile
Present crisis preparedness	82	3.85	0.94	3.25	4	4.75
Prospective crisis preparedness	82	3.80	0.91	3.25	3.75	4.56

*Strongly agree=5; agree=4; neutral=3; disagree=2; strongly disagree=1

The above table depicts the results of the descriptive statistics of section A in terms of the mean, standard deviation and percentiles. The average mean score of present crisis preparedness is 3.85 and the standard deviation, which is the average deviation, is 0.94. The 25th percentile, which is 3.25, means that 25% of all the values or respondents in the dataset are less than or equal to 3.25, which is closer "neutral". A total of 75% of respondents scored

more than 3.25, which is more towards "agree". The 50th percentile meant that 50% of respondents had 4 or less and 50% scored 4 or more. The 75% percentile, which is 4.75, showed that 75% of all the values or respondents in the dataset scored less than 4.75 and 25% scored 4.75 or more. The standard deviation value of 0.94 indicates that the values of the response on present crisis preparedness are on average 0.94 from the mean of 3.85. With the mean value of 3.85 closer to 4, which means "agree", it is valid to conclude that the organisations of respondents are prepared in dealing with any crisis situation.

The average mean for prospective crisis preparedness was 3.80, with an accompanying standard deviation of 0.91. Respondents representing 25% scored 3.25 or less and 75% of respondents scored more than 3.25. Other respondents representing 50% scored 3.75 or less and 50% scored 3.75 or more. With the 75th percentile, 75% of respondents had less than 4.56 and 25% scored 4.56 or more. Since the mean score of 3.80 is between 3 and 4 but closer to 4, which means "agree", it is justified to conclude that the organisations of respondents know how to manage crises successfully in attending to the needs of stakeholders. Thus, these organisations are prepared when handling crisis situations and stakeholder expectations.

7.4 FINDINGS OF SECTION B: MANAGING CRISES ON SOCIAL MEDIA WITH INTERACTIONS

In this section, the concept of dialogic communication and its relevance to social-media crisis communication are explored. Dialogic communication was examined within the scope of two major constructs, namely, mutuality and openness. Collaboration, grounding, empathy, equality and responsiveness were explored within the mutuality construct. For openness, the three aspects explored were accessibility, genuineness and transparency.

In Chapter 5 (Section 5.2.2), it was highlighted that dialogic communication can prove useful for an organisation's crisis-communication strategy if it is geared towards relationship-building between organisations and stakeholders. As pointed out in the literature, the study puts

forward that the approach to an orientation of mutuality enables the organisation to recognise the mutual dependence between organisations and stakeholders. The idea that both the organisation and stakeholders must value each other's views or opinions is worthy of consideration and important for the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Additionally, the climate of openness can foster open and honest communication necessary for building organisation-stakeholder relationships (Broom & Sha 2012; Yang et al. 2015; Carpenter, Takahashi, Lertpratchya & Cunningham 2016; Song & Tao 2022). As discussed in Chapter 5, the study adopted the position that managing a social-media crisis with interactions can prove effective in an organisation's relationship with stakeholders if done along collaboration, grounding, empathy, equality, responsiveness, accessibility, genuineness and transparency perspectives. Thus, in this aspect of the study, collaboration, grounding, empathy, equality, responsiveness, accessibility, genuineness and transparency attributes were investigated.

7.4.1 Section B: Descriptive statistics

This section presents and discusses the descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation and median) of the data. Table 7.10 below covers the constructs for orientation of mutuality and climate of openness.

Table 7.10: Managing social-media crisis with interactions

Section B (element 2): Managing social-media crisis with interactions	Items
● Collaboration	9–11
● Grounding	12–14
● Empathy	15–17
● Equality	18–20
● Responsiveness	21–23
● Accessibility	24–27
● Genuineness	28–30
● Transparency	31–33

The collaboration attribute of orientation of mutuality was assessed by means of three items. These items are basically about interactions on social media. According to the majority of the

respondents, representing a combined total of 69.52% (32.52% and 36.6%), their organisations interact on social media with stakeholders in order to ensure mutual benefits from the interactions. This outcome is a good one, as it shows that a considerable number of organisations in Ghana welcome the use of social media for interacting with stakeholders. Other respondents, representing a combined total of 14.6% (9.7% and 4.9%), indicated that their organisations do not interact on social media with stakeholders in order to ensure that the interactions are mutually beneficial. Some significant others (15.9%), however, could not indicate a positive or negative response. This uncertainty could mean that there are organisations in Ghana that are caught in the dilemma of the use of social media for interacting with stakeholders.

In item 10, more than half of respondents, representing a combined total of 53.66%, indicated that their organisations allow stakeholders to use social media in expressing diverse opinions or views on a crisis. The attitude of these Ghanaian organisations is commendable, as the adoption of social media avails organisations opportunities in quick dissemination of information and crisis communication messages to stakeholders (Veil et al. 2011; Wang 2016). Furthermore, it is important that organisations react to social media comments during a crisis as a failure to respond to stakeholder views may lead some stakeholders to post negative comments about the organisation (Park et al. 2012; Oh et al. 2013; Gruber et al. 2015; Cheng 2020). However, very alarming is the neutral stance of more than a quarter (25.61%) of the respondents. One possible explanation could be that their organisations will likely allow the use of social media in dealing with stakeholders' views in the event of a crisis. Another possible explanation could be that their organisations will likely not tolerate social media use by stakeholders in expressing their views when there is a crisis. The response of other respondents, representing a combined total of 20.73%, is that their organisations will not use social media in dealing with respondents' diverse perspectives on a crisis. Allowing stakeholders to use social media to express their views on a crisis will enable organisations to access large amounts of information concerning the thoughts, feedback and behaviour of stakeholders in a timely manner (Murray et al. 2010; Ndlela 2019; Sng et al. 2021).

Organisations that do not entertain the views of stakeholders expressed on social media during a crisis will miss out on intelligence-gathering opportunities (Rollins et al. 2011; Kietzmann et al. 2011; Eriksson & Olsson 2016; Ghani et al. 2019).

An overwhelming majority of respondents, representing a combined total of 59.29%, indicated that their organisations treat views expressed by stakeholders on social media about a crisis as worthy of consideration. Being receptive to the views of stakeholders is crucial as engaging and interacting with stakeholders on social media will position such an organisation to positively influence the perceptions of stakeholders towards the organisation (Utz 2013; Cheng 2020). Respondents representing a combined total of 13.4% held a contrary position, as they indicated that their organisations do not consider stakeholders' views expressed about a crisis on social media as worthy of consideration. Even though this contrary position can be justified due to fears organisations have concerning the ability of social media in facilitating negative secondary crisis communication (Tripp & Gregoire 2011; Schultz, Utz & Goritz 2011; Boholm 2019), it must be stated that a focus on open, engaging and reciprocal communication can be valuable to the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Husain et al. 2014; Ghazinejad et al. 2018). Other respondents, 18.3%, expressed a neutral position.

Table 7.11: Responses to collaboration

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation often communicates with stakeholders on social media to mutually benefit from these interactions	32.92%	36.6%	15.9%	9.7%	4.9%	82
My organisation uses social media to deal with stakeholders' diverse perspectives on a crisis effectively	25.61%	28.05%	25.61%	14.63%	6.1%	82
Stakeholders' views about a crisis expressed on social media are accepted as worthy of consideration.	39.02%	29.27%	18.3%	10.97%	2.43%	82

The grounding attribute was addressed by means of three items. The responses to items 12–14 are presented in the table below: Respondents were to indicate in item 12 their organisations' use of social media to invite stakeholders to comment on a crisis. Responses given by 16.04% and 13.58% of respondents indicated that their organisations are comfortable in using social media to invite comments on a crisis from respondents. This view, even though good for dialogic communication, is not comforting, as it is the view of a minority of respondents. An overwhelming majority of respondents (33.3%) took a neutral stand. This is surprising, as it suggests that these organisations are unsure of whether the use of social media to invite comments from stakeholders is a positive or negative approach to engaging with stakeholders. More surprising is the 37.08% of respondents (representing respondents who disagreed and strongly disagreed) whose organisations do not use social media to invite stakeholders' comments on a crisis.

In item 13, a combined total of 40.8% of respondents affirmed that their organisation uses social media to confirm that stakeholders understood correctly the organisation's crisis communication. This particular approach to the use of social media by these organisations is quite commendable. On the contrary, other respondents, representing a combined total of 27.1%, indicated that their organisation does not use social media as a means of finding out if stakeholders understood correctly the organisation's crisis communication. This position shows that these organisations are indifferent to understanding the crisis-communication needs of stakeholders. As already highlighted, the characteristic nature of social media provides users (stakeholders) the opportunity to be heard and understood. If the organisation is not willing to use social media in this way, the quest for the strengthening of the organisation-stakeholder relationship will be hampered. The organisation should not be seen as only interested in getting stakeholders to understand its position on a crisis. Other respondents', 32.1%, view on item 13 was either positive or negative. This finding makes it difficult to know if these organisations are committed or not committed to the use of social media in establishing that stakeholders correctly understood the organisation's crisis messages. It is important that

the organisation is able to establish on social media if stakeholders were able to encode and decode its messages during the crisis.

The finding in item 14 shows that the majority of respondents, 29.62% and 38.3%, indicated positively that social media use by their organisation creates opportunities in sharing common ground of communication with stakeholders. This means that these organisations are receptive to communication from stakeholders. This also suggests that they are interested in understanding the communication needs of stakeholders. This approach to communication engagement on social media can enhance the credibility of the organisation (Siah, Bansal & Pang 2010; Romenti & Murtarelli 2014). Other respondents, 16.04%, disagreed with the statement in item 14. The implication is that stakeholders who rely on social media in engaging with an organisation on a matter such as a crisis will be denied the opportunity. Also, the organisation will be perceived as not interested in engaging with stakeholders on a platform such as a social media platform. A little over a tenth (16.04%) took a neutral position on item 14. Even though only a minority of respondents expressed a neutral view, this finding is worthy of consideration. Organisations must have a clear strategy on the use of social media in engaging with stakeholders during a crisis. It is either they are for social media use in this way or not. A neutral position may not augur well for the organisation's reputation. Table 7.12 below represents responses to the grounding construct.

Table 7.12: Responses to grounding

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation uses social media to invite stakeholders to comment on a crisis	16.04%	13.58%	33.3%	23.5%	13.58%	81
My organisation uses social media to establish that stakeholders correctly understood what has been communicated during a crisis	21%	19.8%	32.1%	21%	6.1%	81
My organisation's use of social media enables it to share common ground of communication with stakeholders	29.62%	38.3%	16.04%	16.04%	0%	81

As already emphasised, empathy is a key attribute of mutuality and it was addressed in the study by items 15 to 17. In item 15, a significant majority of respondents, 25.9% and 27.2% responded that their organisations use social media to empathise with stakeholders in the event of a crisis. Other respondents, representing a combined total of 17.3% (13.6% and 3.7%), however, indicated that their organisations do not use social media to empathise with stakeholders in times of crisis. A worrying finding in this aspect of the study was the neutral position of close to a third of respondents (29.6%). This is because these respondents were unsure of their organisation's position on an important issue, such as the expression of empathy on social media. The use of crisis messages that are empathetic can positively influence stakeholder attitudes towards the organisation (Kim & Cameron 2011; Claeys, Cauberghe & Leysen 2013; Schoofs et al. 2022). Furthermore, organisations that are committed to dialogic communication must know that organisation-stakeholder relationships can be strengthened through "meaning-making, understanding, and sympathetic/ empathetic reactions" (Taylor & Kent 2014:389; Dolamore, Lovell, Collins & Kline 2021:370).

In item 16, respondents representing a combined total of 37.5% affirmed, in order to understand the crisis from stakeholders' perspective, their organisation uses social media. Even though respondents who expressed this position are less than a half, their position is good for dialogic communication. As mentioned before in Chapter 4 (Section 4.7.5), a strategic approach to social media use in crisis situations is social listening. Social listening allows the

organisation to attend to, observe, interpret and respond to stakeholders (Stewart & Arnold 2017:86). Also, social listening enables the organisation to have an engaging presence on social media. The vast majority of respondents (40%), however, were neutral. This outcome makes it difficult to know the exact position of respondents. Other respondents (17.5%) and (5%) respectively were emphatic in their response that their organisation does not use social media to try to understand a crisis from the perspective of stakeholders. This could be because these organisations do not have a good understanding of how to communicate on social media during a crisis (Veil et al. 2011; Eriksson 2012; Floreddu et al. 2014; Jin et al. 2014; Ki & Nekmat 2014; Roy, Hasan, Sadri & Cebrian 2020).

It is expected of organisations to have an intense involvement with stakeholders (Newsom et al. 2013:88). Thus, in item 17 the study set out to find out the use of social media by organisations in estimating how stakeholders feel about a crisis. Stakeholders representing 26% and 22.2% affirmed their organisation's use of social media to estimate how stakeholders feel about a crisis. These respondents are close to a half of the total number of respondents. This finding shows that a stakeholder-centric approach is good, as the opinions of stakeholders, no matter how irrational these opinions are, can help in resolving the crisis and lessen the threat of social media (Pfeffer et al. 2014; Diers-Lawson 2020). A combined total of 18.5% (14.8% and 3.7%) of respondents indicated the non-use of social media by their organisations in estimating how stakeholders feel about a crisis. Even though these organisations may have cogent reasons for not using social media in this way, it is important to emphasise that organisations must make good use of the interactivity of social media by incorporating stakeholder-desired strategies on social media (Choi & Lin 2009; Veil & Yang 2012b; Kent & Taylor 2021). A little over a third (33.3%) of respondents could not provide a response with regard to the use or non-use of social media by their organisations in estimating the feelings of stakeholders about a crisis. Table 7.13 below outlines responses to empathy.

Table 7.13: Responses to empathy

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation uses social media to empathise with affected stakeholders	25.9%	27.2%	29.6%	13.6%	3.7%	81
My organisation uses social media to try to understand a crisis from the perspectives of stakeholders.	20%	17.5%	40%	17.5%	5%	80
The use of social media allows my organisation to estimate how stakeholders feel at the moment about a crisis	26%	22.2%	33.3%	14.8%	3.7%	81

The attribute equality was assessed by means of items 18 to 20. The items focused on organisations not being authoritative in communicating on social media with stakeholders, not seeking to control views of stakeholders expressed on social media and organisations not arrogant in communicating on social media with stakeholders. Almost half of respondents, representing a combined total of 47.5% (18.75% and 28.75%), confirmed in item 18 that their organisation is not authoritative on social media when communicating with stakeholders. This outcome is positive for the organisation's reputation. Organisations that communicate in a defensive manner may be perceived in a negative way (Xia 2013; Hearit & Roberson 2020). It is important that, when communicating on social media, organisations should not use messages that stakeholders will interpret as disrespectful to them. Other respondents, 17.5% and 13.75%, gave responses that indicated that their organisation was authoritative in communicating on social media with stakeholders. A substantial percentage of stakeholders (21.25%) indicated a response that either supports the non-authoritative use of social media in communicating with stakeholders or the authoritative use of social media in communicating with stakeholders. The neutral position, as already stated in the previous findings, is not helpful. This suggests that these neutral respondents do not know the definitive position of their organisation on item 18.

In item 19, the majority of respondents, 26.5% and 37.5%, confirmed that their organisation does not seek to control views of stakeholders expressed on social media. It is a progressive

approach to dialogic communication. Surrendering some level of control to stakeholders can make the organisation enjoy the support of stakeholders (Ott & Theunissen 2014:101). The response of a combined total of 12.5% (10% and 2.5%) of respondents, however, indicates that their organisation seeks to control the views of stakeholders expressed on social media. This approach by the organisation can suggest that the organisation wants to censor the views of stakeholders (Ott & Theunissen 2014; Coombs 2015). If the organisation's intent is to protect its reputation, it will rather lose the trust of stakeholders and cause stakeholders to be angry (Ott & Theunissen 2014:101). Other respondents, 23.75%, expressed a neutral position. Respondents representing a combined total of 87.64% (59.25% and 28.39%) indicated in item 20 that their organisation is not arrogant when communicating on social media with stakeholders. Crisis situations are trying moments for crisis victims and it is important that the organisation is not seen as arrogant in its dealings with stakeholders. It is imperative for organisations to welcome the concerns of stakeholders and provide explanations on how those concerns will be addressed (Coombs 2015:24). This particular finding is very positive as it is supported by a significant majority of respondents. It means that most of these organisations do not want to be seen as arrogant when they communicate on social media with stakeholders. The response of 2.46% of respondents that they disagree with the statement is not much of a concern. In essence, only two respondents disagreed with the statement. But it must be emphasised that organisations must avoid the tendency to be arrogant and use a moderate tone in their communication towards stakeholders (Wang et al. 2021). Less than a tenth (9.9%) provided a neutral response to the statement. Table 7.14 below presents the responses to equality.

Table 7.14: Responses to equality

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation is not authoritative in communicating on social media with stakeholders.	18.75%	28.75%	21.25%	17.5%	13.75%	80
My organisation does not seek to control views of stakeholders expressed on social media	26.25%	37.5%	23.75%	10%	2.5%	80
My organisation is not arrogant in communicating on social media with stakeholders	59.25%	28.39%	9.9%	2.46%	0%	81

The study investigated responsiveness by means of three items (21 to 23). The majority of respondents, representing a combined total of 67.9% (32.1% and 35.8%), indicated in item 21 that the concerns of stakeholders in times of crisis are responded to on social media by their organisation. The successful management of a crisis depends to a larger extent on the response of the organisation to stakeholders (Arvidsson & Holmström 2013). Additionally, when the organisation provides a satisfying response on social media to stakeholders' complaints, the organisation's reputation can be enhanced (Einwiller & Steilen 2015). Other respondents, 11.2% and 1.2%, differed from the response of the majority. Their organisations probably belong to the school of thought that believes that publicly dealing with stakeholder concerns could be damaging to their reputation (Einwiller & Steilen 2015). It is important to emphasise that, if an organisation is responsive to stakeholders, it can win their trust (Kao et al. 2017). Over a quarter (19.8%) of respondents provided a neutral response to the statement.

In item 22, an overwhelming majority, 50.6% and 23.5%, affirmed that their organisation is attentive to crisis issues raised on social media by stakeholders. By being responsive to stakeholders on social media, organisations can establish continuous dialogue with stakeholders during a crisis (Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton 2012). This outcome is positive as it shows that there are quite a significant number of Ghanaian organisations committed to the concerns of stakeholders about a crisis posted on social media. Respondents who expressed

a dissenting opinion to the statement in item 22 were 4.9% (3.7% and 1.2%). Even though this is a minority view, it shows that there are a few organisations which do not appreciate the use of social media in paying attention to the needs of stakeholders. Other respondents who could not provide a positive or negative response to the statement were 21%.

The majority of respondents, representing a combined total of 79% (48.1% and 30.9%), asserted in item 23 that their organisation is sensitive to the needs of stakeholders posted on social media. Only 3.7% of respondents disagreed with the statement. Other respondents, 17.3%, were neutral in expressing their view on item 23. It is evident that the view expressed by the majority of respondents is that there are many organisations in Ghana that are interested in appreciating the feelings of stakeholders expressed on social media. Table 7.15 below contains the responses to responsiveness.

Table 7.15: Responses to responsiveness

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation responds promptly to stakeholder concerns posted on social media.	32.1%	35.8%	19.8%	11.1%	1.2%	81
My organisation pays attention to crisis issues raised on social media by stakeholders.	50.6%	23.5%	21%	3.7%	1.2%	81
My organisation is sensitive to stakeholders' needs as posted on social media	48.1%	30.9%	17.3%	3.7%	0%	81

Accessibility, an attribute of the openness construct, was addressed by means of items 24 to 27. The findings in item 24 were quite revealing. The responses show that the majority of respondents, 27.2% and 35.8% respectively, indicated that their organisation shares open access to information on social media to stakeholders. Respondents who disagreed were 8.6% and 1.2% respectively. Other respondents 27.2% could not provide an opinion. Organisations exist to provide or satisfy a need with the intention to satisfy stakeholders (Gibbs et al. 2013:108). Creating access to stakeholders to access information can thus enhance the

organisation-stakeholder relationship (Gibbs et al. 2013:108). In times of crisis organisations that commit to open communication on social media recover faster from a crisis (Water et al. 2009; Veil et al. 2011). Organisations are aware that crisis situations generate discussions and hence they must not only observe but proactively participate in stakeholders' conversations (Romenti & Murtarelli 2014). It is thus gratifying that the majority of respondents expressed an opinion that is positive in terms of communication openness on social media during a crisis.

In item 25, a combined total of 69.1% (40.7% and 28.4%) of respondents stressed that their organisations allow stakeholders to freely share their opinions on social media about a crisis. A minority of respondents, 9.9% and 1.2% respectively, however, disagreed with the statement. Other respondents, 19.8%, could not provide a supporting or opposing view on item 25.

The majority of respondents, 41.8% and 20.3%, concurred with the statement in item 26 that their organisation interacts easily on social media with stakeholders about a crisis. The social-media environment is designed for interactivity (Kietzmann et al. 2011; Roshan et al. 2016). This study advocates that interactive exchanges can boost understanding between organisations and stakeholders on crisis-related issues. Stakeholders can be of help to organisations in letting organisations be aware on social media of crisis signs and they can help minimise the negative effects of a crisis. When they become aware of crisis signs, stakeholders can warn the organisation and other stakeholders, especially in cases involving physical danger or financial loss (Lee 2020:804). Organisations must not ignore also the role social media can play in organisational reputation (Ott & Theunissen 2015). Other respondents, 12.7% and 2.5% respectively, differed with the statement. Even though these respondents are in the minority, their opinion is a bit worrying. When organisations fail to interact with stakeholders, they can suffer reputational damage (Panagiotopoulos, Barnett & Brooks 2013; Schoofs et al. 2019). Respondents representing 22.8% could not provide an opinion on the statement. This outcome is not ideal, as it shows that these respondents do not

know what their organisations should do on the issue of interacting with stakeholders on social media during a crisis.

Social media can help in the timely dissemination of messages in times of crisis (Hasan, Mesa-Arango & Ukkusuri 2013; González-Padilla & Tortolero-Blanco 2020). In item 27, respondents representing a combined total of 52.6% (21.3% and 31.3%) opined that their organisation is timely with information on social media to stakeholders. A significant percentage of respondents, 13.8% and 3.8% respectively, indicated their disagreement with the statement. The danger in this position, however, is that organisations that do not use social media speedily in disseminating crisis information may experience reputational damage and negative behavioural intentions of stakeholders, as some stakeholders could post negative content on social media (Park et al. 2012; Xia 2013; Oh et al. 2013). Respondents who could not provide a supporting or opposing view to the statement were 30%. The issue of timely dissemination of information on social media is a double-edge sword. There is both high-risk and high-reward in the speedy dissemination of messages on social media (Lachlan et al. 2014a; Spence et al. 2014). Social media users tend to perceive messages disseminated in a timely manner as relevant (Westerman et al. 2014). To be considered effective in crisis communication, organisations must keep up with the rapidity of social media (Spence, Lachlan, Lin & Del Greco 2015; Andrews et al. 2016; Wang & Zhuang 2017). When the organisation is up-to-date with information it can be perceived as credible while slow updates on the crisis can decrease credibility (Spence, Lachlan, Edwards & Edwards 2016). However, if the message that is timely disseminated on social media is inaccurate or misleading, the organisation can suffer damage to its image (Lachlan et al. 2014c). Even though crisis situations can be challenging to crisis communication practitioners and organisations, this study argues that messages should be speedily disseminated. However, practitioners must ensure that these messages are accurate and will benefit both the organisation and stakeholders. Table 7.16 below indicates responses to accessibility.

Table 7.16: Responses to accessibility

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation shares open access to information on social media to stakeholders	27.2%	35.8%	27.2%	8.6%	1.2%	81
My organisation allows stakeholders to share their opinions freely on social media about the crisis	40.7%	28.4%	19.8%	9.9%	1.2%	81
My organisation easily interacts on social media with stakeholders.	41.8%	20.3%	22.8%	12.7%	2.5%	79
My organisation is timely on social media with messages about the crisis.	21.3%	31.3%	30%	13.8%	3.8%	80

In this aspect of the study, genuineness as an attribute of openness was addressed by means of items 28 to 30 in the questionnaire. A considerable majority of respondents, 38.3% and 28.4% respectively, concurred that their organisation is honest in communicating on social media about a crisis. In crisis situations, the credibility of the organisation is at stake. If the organisation wants to be seen as honest and credible, it then must be proactive in providing stakeholders with seemingly negative information (Claeys 2017). Furthermore, the self-revelation of negative information is an indication to stakeholders that the organisation is capable of handling the crisis (Lee 2016). Only 7.4% and 1.2% of respondents did not agree with the statement in item 28. Other respondents 24.7% could not state whether they agree or disagree with the statement. The interactivity that social media provides has created opportunities for organisations to improve how their corporate communications are perceived by stakeholders (Park & Cameron 2014). The majority view confirms the position that organisations that seek a favourable reputation must be confident in using the social media space in being honest in their communication (Kim et al. 2014). Providing stakeholders with honest and truthful information about the crisis in a timely manner can help reduce rumours and narratives that are unfavourable to the image of the organisation (Lee 2020:804).

In item 29, an overwhelming majority of respondents, 85.1% (43.8% and 41.3%), indicated that messages of their organisation posted on social media are believable. A fundamental

attribute for information acceptance and interpretation is source credibility (Spence et al. 2013). In crisis times, providing stakeholders with believable information can be a critical persuasive attribute for the organisation as it can enhance the trust stakeholders have in the organisation (Lin, Spence, Sellnow & Lachlan 2016). Only 2.5% of respondents differed in their opinion of the statement. Respondents who could not indicate a supporting or opposing stance to the statement were a little over a tenth (12.5%). The majority finding is positive, as it sheds light on the commitment to credibility by organisations.

On the issue of commitment to genuine interaction on social media with stakeholders by organisations in item 30, 42% and 35.8% of respondents respectively were in accord with regard to the statement. Other respondents who opposed the statement were 2.5%. Respondents who did not have an opinion on the statement were 19.8%. The organisation's focus on interaction on social media with stakeholders about the crisis is a positive orientation. This is because it provides the organisation an opportunity to provide stakeholders with genuine content concerning the crisis. This approach will enable the organisation to avoid speculation or misinformation (Du Plessis 2018:837). By using social media to interact with stakeholders, the organisation will enhance its credibility and get legitimacy for its social media content (Du Plessis 2018:837). The majority finding supports the outcome of the Roshan et al. (2016:359) study, that organisations must be genuine on social media when responding to messages stakeholders post about a crisis. Table 7.17 below outlines responses to genuineness.

Table 7.17: Responses to genuineness

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation is honest in communicating on social media with stakeholders about the crisis.	38.3%	28.4%	24.7%	7.4%	1.2%	81
My organisation's messages on social media are believable	43.8%	41.3%	12.5%	2.5%	0%	80
My organisation is committed to genuine interaction on social media with stakeholders	42%	35.8%	19.8%	2.5%	0%	81

The transparency attribute was attended to by means of three items (31 to 33). In item 31, a combined total of 71.3% (32.5% and 38.8%) of respondents indicated that their organisation does not hide information from stakeholders when using social media to communicate about the crisis. Respondents representing 6.3% and 1.3% respectively opposed the statement. Other respondents who could not provide a supporting or opposing view to the statement were 21.3%. Organisations must ensure that their interactions on social media with stakeholders about a crisis are transparent (Du Plessis 2018:837). If the organisation does not want to experience reputation damage, it must not hide crisis information from stakeholders (Cheung & Leung 2016). Furthermore, it is good for the reputation of the organisation to provide stakeholders with both positive and negative information about the crisis. Providing both can impact positive behavioural intentions more than only providing stakeholders with only positive information, as argued by Kim and Sung (2014). By making crisis information available publicly to stakeholders, stakeholders see the actions of the organisation (Kim, Hong & Cameron 2014). The majority finding supports the position that transparency can enhance organisational credibility and reduce stakeholder anger (Holland et al. 2021).

The majority of respondents, 40.7% and 29.6% respectively, were in agreement that their organisation ensures that crisis response messages posted on social media are clear to stakeholders. Respondents who differed from the view of the majority were 7.4% and 1.2% respectively. Other respondents who could not provide an opinion with regard to the statement

were 21%. Clarity in crisis messaging on social media by the organisation can have a positive impact on the organisation's reputation (Jacquette 2011; Pawlowski 2011; MacKay, Colangeli, Gillis, McWhirter & Papadopoulos 2021). When there is clarity on how to use social media for organisational communication, the organisation will gain reputational benefits (Ryschka et al. 2016). The majority finding corroborates the assertion by Ryschka et al. (2016) that providing clear and appropriate information through social media is good for the organisation's reputation.

A combined total of 72.6% (43.8% and 28.8%) of respondents indicated that their organisation is not deceptive in interpreting crisis opinions expressed on social media by stakeholders. Only 2.5% differed with the statement in item 33. A quarter (25%) of respondents, however, were neutral.

Overall, the findings in items 31 to 33 show that a commitment to transparency was supported by the majority of respondents. It is clear that being transparent on social media during a crisis can benefit the organisation. However, the organisation must also have a view of legal obligations and legal entanglements (Holland et al. 2021). Being transparent in crisis situations should be the desire of every organisation and it is in the strategic interest of the organisation, as it can enhance its credibility among stakeholders (Holland et al. 2021).

Table 7.18 below presents the responses of respondents to the transparency construct.

Table 7.18: Responses to transparency

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation does not hide information from stakeholders when using social media to communicate about the crisis.	32.5%	38.8%	21.3%	6.3%	1.3%	80
My organisation ensures that crisis response messages posted on social media are clear to stakeholders	40.7%	29.6%	21%	7.4%	1.2%	81
My organisation is not deceptive in interpreting crisis opinions expressed on social media by stakeholders.	43.8%	28.8%	25%	2.5%	0%	80

7.4.2 Mean scores for Section B responses (dialogic communication)

In the table below, the frequency, mean, standard deviation, 25th percentile, 50th percentile (the median) and 75th percentile of variables used to measure dialogic communication are presented. Table 7.19 below outlines the descriptive statistics scores for dialogic communication.

Table 7. 19: Typical scores for Section B (dialogic communication)

Variable	N	Mean	Std. deviation	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile
Collaboration	82	3.75	0.98	3	3.83	4.66
Grounding	81	3.35	1.00	2.66	3.33	4
Empathy	81	3.46	1.02	3	3.33	4.33
Responsiveness	81	4.09	0.85	3.5	4.33	5
Accessibility	81	3.78	0.87	3	3.75	4.5
Genuineness	81	4.12	0.75	3.66	4	4.83
Transparency	81	4.03	0.81	3.58	4	4.66

*Strongly agree=5; agree=4; neutral=3; disagree=2; strongly disagree=1

The average mean score of collaboration indicated 3.75, with a standard deviation of 0.98. The 25th percentile, which is 3, means that 25% of all the values or respondents in the dataset are less than or equal to 3. A total of 75% of respondents scored more than 3. The 50th percentile meant that 50% of respondents had 3.83 or less, and 50% scored 3.83 or more. The 75% percentile, which is 4.66, showed that 75% of all the values or respondents in the dataset scored less than or equal to 4.66 and 25% scored 4.66 or more. The standard deviation value of 0.98 indicates that the values of the response on collaboration are on average 0.94 from the mean of 3.75. Since the average mean score of 3.75 was between 3 and 4, but closer to 4 and 4 is "agree", it is justifiable to conclude that the organisations of respondents have a positive disposition towards the use of social media to collaborate with stakeholders in times of crisis.

For the grounding construct, the average mean was 3.34, with an accompanying standard deviation of 1.00. The deviation of 1.00 means that the values of grounding were to the mean. Respondents representing 25% scored 2.66 or less and 75% of respondents scored more than 2.66. Other respondents, representing 50%, scored 2.66 or less and the 50th percentile (median) scored 3.33 or more. With the 75th percentile, 75% of respondents had less than or equal to 4.00 and 25% scored 4.00 or more. The mean value of 3.35 was between 3 and 4, but nearer to 3 and 3 is "neutral". It is thus reasonable to say that organisations of respondents were unsure of the use of social media in the management of crisis communication on the basis of grounding. In essence, the organisations of respondents seem not to know if social media are the appropriate platform for inviting comments from stakeholders about and for assessing if stakeholders correctly understood the crisis messages of the organisation.

The average mean score for empathy was 3.46, with a standard deviation of 1.02. The 25th percentile of 3 suggests that 25% of all the values or respondents in the dataset are less than or equal to 3. A total of 75% of respondents scored more than 3. The 50th percentile (median) meant that 50% of respondents had 3.33 or less, and 50% scored 3.33 or more. The 75th percentile (a third), which is 4.33, showed that 75% of all the values or respondents in the dataset scored less than or equal to 4.33 and 25% scored 4.33 or more. Since the average

mean score of 3.46 was between 3 and 4, but closer to 3 and 3 is "neutral", it is justifiable to conclude that the organisations of respondents seem not to have either a positive or negative opinion on the use of social media in empathising with stakeholders in times of crisis.

With regard to responsiveness, the average mean score was 4.09 and the standard deviation was 0.85. The 25th percentile of 3.5 means that 25% of all the values or respondents in the dataset are less than or equal to 3.5, which is closer to "agree". A total of 75% of respondents had more than 3.5, which is closer to "agree". The 50th percentile indicated that 50% of respondents had 4.33 or less, and 50% had a score of 4.33 or more. The 75th percentile was 5, indicating that 75% of all the values in the dataset scored less than or equal to 5 and 25% scored 5 or more. Since the average mean score of 3.5 was between 3 and 4, but closer to 4 and 4 is "agree", the outcome suggests that organisations of respondents use social media to respond to stakeholders when there is a crisis.

The average mean score for accessibility was 3.78, with a standard deviation of 0.87. The 25th percentile of 3 means that 25% of all the values or respondents in the dataset is less than or equal to 3. A total of 75% of respondents scored more than 3.5. The 50th percentile indicated that 50% of respondents had 3.75 or less, and 50% had a score of 3.75 or more. The 75th percentile was 4.5, indicating that 75% of all the values in the dataset scored less than or equal to 4.5 and 25% scored 4.5 or more. Since the average mean score of 3.78 was between 3 and 4 but closer to 4 and 4 is "agree", this outcome suggests that organisations of respondents are committed to stakeholders accessing information about a crisis through social media.

The descriptive calculation for genuineness provided a mean score of 4.12 and the standard deviation 0.75. Of all the scores, the 25th percentile was 3.66, which means that 25% of all the values or respondents in the dataset are less than or equal to 3.66. A total of 75% of respondents scored more than 3.58. The 50th percentile indicated that 50% of respondents had 4 or less, and 50% had a value of 4 or more. The 75th percentile score was 4.83, which suggests that 75% of all the values in the dataset scored less than or equal to 4.66 and 25% scored 4.83 or more. Since the average mean score of 4.12 was between 4 and 5 but closer

to 4 and 4 is "agree", this means that organisations of respondents have a positive disposition towards genuine interaction on social media with stakeholders when there is a crisis.

The average mean score of transparency was 4.03, with a standard deviation of 0.81. The 25th percentile, which is 3.58, means that 25% of all the values or respondents in the dataset are less than or equal to 3.58. A total of 75% of respondents scored more than 3.58. The 50th percentile meant that 50% of respondents had 4 or less, and 50% scored 4 or more. The 75% percentile, which is 4.66, showed that 75% of all the values or respondents in the dataset scored less than or equal to 4.66 and 25% scored 4.66 or more. The standard deviation value of 0.98 indicates that the values of the response on collaboration are on average 0.94 from the mean of 3.75. Since the average mean score of 4.03 was between 4 and 5 but closer to 4 and 4 is "agree", it is justifiable to conclude that the organisations of respondents are transparent with stakeholders when using social media to communicate about the crisis.

7.5 FINDINGS OF SECTION C: MENDING STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS AFTER A SOCIAL-MEDIA CRISIS

In Chapter 4 (see 4.4), the study advanced the argument that, in crisis situations, organisations must look for opportunities to build relationships with stakeholders after a crisis. Many organisations are focused on engaging or promoting messages that seek to enhance their image or reputation. Even though crises can damage the organisation-stakeholder relationship, organisations must explore opportunities to mend the relationship when the crisis wanes.

The Discourse of Renewal theory, which was comprehensively discussed in chapters 4 and 5, provides ways organisations can use to mend and grow the organisation-stakeholder relationship. For this study, the principles of renewal, as espoused by Xu (2018), were adopted to examine the element of mending relationships after a crisis. These principles, namely, communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value, were the main constructs

of the discourse of renewal scale validated in the study of Xu (2018) that were investigated in this study.

For the organisation to move forward after a crisis and mend relationships, it must prioritise stakeholder needs and properly align them in ways that will rebuild the relationship between the organisation and stakeholders. The process of renewal requires the organisation to be efficient in communication (Xu 2018). The first construct, communication efficiency, is important for the renewal of the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Organisations during crisis times sometimes want to approach communication in a calculated manner (Ulmer et al. 2007). If the organisational communication appears rigid, the organisation might be perceived to be interested only in its image (Xu (2018:110). This approach, though strategic, may not be appropriate in a tragic situation such as a crisis. In times of crisis, the organisation's engagement with stakeholders must be genuine, natural and transparent (Du Plessis 2018; Guo 2017). It is prudent for the organisation to adopt a communication approach that stakeholders will perceive as thoughtful and sincere. It must be committed to using social media during a crisis to provide unbiased and clear information to stakeholders (Ulmer et al. 2019).

In the pursuit of improving the organisation-stakeholder relationship, it is imperative that the organisation lets stakeholders become aware that lessons have been learnt from the crisis incident. The organisation must inspire optimism in stakeholders and, as highlighted in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.2.3.2) prospective vision will ensure that the organisation-stakeholder relationship is mended. The organisation must commit to using social media to share lessons learnt from the crisis with stakeholders and corrective steps must be taken to prevent a future crisis. The construct concerned with prospective vision positions a crisis as not only a bad situation, but also an avenue for the organisation to rebuild trust with stakeholders and improve its operations (Xu 2018:117).

The last renewal construct measured in the study involved the culture and value construct. Culture and value, as espoused in the renewal theory, is concerned with ethical communication (Ulmer et al. 2010). Ethical communication, as described in Chapter 5 (see

5.2.3), is focused on the organisation making a reference to its core values and organisational culture in its communication with stakeholders. The organisation's approach to ethical communication must be influenced by social values. A crisis situation provides the organisation with an opportunity to communicate its values and culture and show a commitment to stakeholders (Seeger & Griffin Padgett 2010; Kaul, Shah & El-Serag 2020). The organisation must use the social media space in communicating its values and commitment in renewing the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

The renewal process that considers communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value can offer organisations a positive outlook and enable crisis recovery as a result of the mending of the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Ulmer et al. 2007; Xu 2018). It is evident from the literature that the discourse of renewal approach to communication is germane to crisis recovery (Manzie 2018; Ulmer et al. 2007; Wombacher et al. 2018).

7.5.1 Section C: Descriptive statistics of the data

This section presents and discusses the descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation and median) of the data. Table 7.20 below covers the constructs for measuring the discourse of renewal.

Table 7.20: Mending stakeholder relations after a social-media crisis

Section C (element 3): Mending stakeholder relations after a social-media crisis	Items
● Communication efficiency ● Prospective vision ● Culture and value	34–36 37–39 40–42

The communication efficiency construct was addressed by means of three items (34–36) in the questionnaire. The majority of respondents, representing a combined total of 65.5% (34.6 and 30.9%), affirmed the statement in item 34 that their organisation is thoughtful in sharing crisis information on social media with stakeholders. Other respondents, 7.4% and 1.2%

respectively, opposed the statement. Respondents who could not offer a supporting or an opposing view to the statement were 25.9%. If the organisation seeks to gain the support of stakeholders in times of crisis, the communication must be in the interests of stakeholders (Sellnow et al. 2015). The majority finding is positive. It shows that these organisations are minded to communicate in ways that will satisfy stakeholders. As already pointed out in this section, the organisation must not be seen to be rigid in its communication. It must be natural and genuine. At the post-crisis phase, the organisation must try to avoid centring its communication on image and reputation enhancement.

In item 35, respondents who make up a combined total of 76.6% (38.3 and 38.3%) concurred with the statement that their organisation is sincere with stakeholders when sharing information on social media about the crisis. Only 4.9% disagreed with the statement. Respondents who could not offer an opinion were 18.5%. The response of the majority of respondents is good and an important outcome in this part of the study. It shows that these organisations are not afraid to provide stakeholders with honest information at the post-crisis phase. As previously highlighted in the discussion about genuineness, when organisations are willing to provide information about a crisis to stakeholders, it gives stakeholders an indication that the organisation is capable of handling the crisis (Lee 2016). It is important for organisations to also see a crisis as an opportunity to renew their relationships with stakeholders (Narverud 2016:13; Sellnow & Seeger 2013:96). As such, it is imperative for organisations not to shy away from being sincere in their communication on social media with stakeholders about the crisis (Kim et al. 2014).

The findings in item 36 are quite intriguing. Unlike the outcomes in items 34 and 35, the majority of respondents, 37%, could not offer an opinion that their organisation interacts in a spontaneous manner on social media with stakeholders about a crisis. Organisations want to be calculating and strategic in their crisis responses (Xu 2018:110). The spontaneous approach means that the organisation must be natural in its response to the crisis. The organisation does not have control of posts made on social media by stakeholders. This can be problematic for many organisations (Effing & Spil 2016; Pang et al. 2014). Thus, for these

respondents not providing a firm response could be that they are not sure about positive or negative outcomes of using social media in a spontaneous manner in interacting with stakeholders about a crisis. Respondents who supported the statement were 12.3% and 32.1% respectively. The positive affirmation by these respondents represents an overall total of 44.4% Even though these respondents are less than a half of the total number of respondents, their positive response is encouraging to the issue of organisation-stakeholder relationship. For these organisations, they consider spontaneity in social-media interaction with stakeholders about a crisis as good and in the interest of the organisation. It is important that organisations use social media for crisis communication in ways that win stakeholder support and improve stakeholder relationships (Du Plessis 2018:2). The dissenting respondents were 18.5%. For these respondents, the spontaneous communication approach on social media with stakeholders regarding a situation such as a crisis could be challenging. The reasoning behind their response could be because of the difficulty of controlling stakeholders' posts or negative viral communication by stakeholders, which can have dire consequences on organisational reputation. However, from the perspective of renewal and particularly communication efficiency, stakeholders will have confidence in the organisation (Xu 2018:117), which will likely impact positively the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Table 7.21 outlines responses to communication efficiency.

Table 7.21: Responses to communication efficiency

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation is always thoughtful in sharing information on social media with stakeholders about why the crisis happened.	34.6%	30.9%	25.9%	7.4%	1.2%	81
My organisation is sincere with stakeholders when sharing information on social media about the crisis.	38.3%	38.3%	18.5%	4.9%	0%	81
My organisation interacts in a spontaneous manner on social media with stakeholders about the crisis.	12.3%	32.1%	37%	18.5%	0%	81

It is important for the organisation at the post-crisis phase to demonstrate optimism if it wants to improve the organisation-stakeholder relationship. In this aspect of the study, prospective vision was addressed by means of items 37 to 39 in the questionnaire. With a combined total of 67.9% (34.6% and 33.3%), the majority of respondents indicated the use of social media by their organisation in sharing information regarding its commitment to corrective action. Respondents who opposed the statement were 7.4% and 1.2% respectively. Others who could not offer an opinion were 23.5%. It is positive that the majority of organisations share with stakeholders their commitment to corrective actions. Stakeholders expect hope from organisations in devastating situations, such as crises (Ulmer et al. 2007; Herovic & Veil 2016; Du Plessis 2018). In the post-crisis phase, organisations must inspire optimism in stakeholders. Sharing information on social media with stakeholders about corrective actions potentially can mend the relationship between the organisation and stakeholders. As pointed out in Chapter 4 (see 4.4.4), messages posted on social media must seek to get stakeholders to support the rebuilding efforts of the organisation. Providing stakeholders with information about the corrective measures taken by the organisation will be appreciated by stakeholders (Du Plessis 2018). The opposing view expressed by the minority of respondents is not surprising, as many organisations fear the negative consequences of a crisis (Durand & Vergne 2014; Roulet 2015). However, if the organisation is concerned about its relationship with stakeholders, then sharing information through an avenue such as social media is progressive. As aptly opined by Mazer et al. (2017), an organisation must be honest with stakeholders about the crisis, demonstrate its readiness to resolve the crisis and improve after the crisis.

In item 38, respondents whose organisations share information on social media with stakeholders about the crisis as a learning opportunity were 49.4% (24.7% and 24.7%). Others who could not indicate a supporting or opposing view were 37%. Respondents who opposed the statement were 12.3% and 1.2% respectively. The organisation's desire must be to improve after the crisis. The communication approach on social media at this phase must seek to inspire and motivate stakeholders (Mazer et al. 2017:126). That is why the majority

agreement to the statement is progressive for the mending of relationships between organisations and stakeholders. When organisations learn from a crisis and share the information with stakeholders, they will likely recover from the crisis (Ulmer et al. 2019). The opposing view expressed by a minority of respondents could be because of the threat of reputation loss. These organisations must include the opportunity perspective that a crisis situation also presents. Their understanding of a crisis must not be limited to seeing it as a threat. Organisations must be seen as constantly adapting and learning (Fuller et al. 2019:274). Ulmer and Pyle (2021:10) put it rightly when they intimated that, when organisations engage in a communication agenda focused on shifting blame because they seek to protect their image, the crisis situation can become even worse. Organisations must make use of the opportunities that a crisis brings and not leave these opportunities dormant (Ulmer & Pyle 2021:11). For this study, the majority finding aligns with the position expressed by Fuller et al. (2019:275), that, after a crisis, for the organisation to move forward, it must show a commitment to solving the crisis and learning and this will likely mend its relationship with stakeholders. Also, the organisation's dialogic interaction with stakeholders about a crisis being a learning opportunity will help the organisation to find the right solutions and forestall future crisis situations (Romenti & Murtarelli 2014:21).

The responses of respondents to the statement in item 39 that their organisation always shares information with stakeholders on lessons learnt which can also be accessed on social media were quite revealing. Respondents who concurred with the statement were 16.3% and 20% respectively; 41.3% took a neutral position and a combined total of 22.6% (18.8 & 3.8%) dissented. This study, while supporting the sharing of information on social media on lessons learnt with stakeholders, is, however, concerned with stakeholders who disagreed. The organisation must take steps after the crisis to use social media to communicate change (Zhao et al. 2020:4). Organisations must demonstrate the desire to improve and deal with the problems of the crisis. The organisation will likely inspire optimism and positive feelings in stakeholders through its transparent communication on social media about lessons learnt (Zhao et al. 2020:4). Also, the neutral position of the majority of respondents does not help in

knowing how such organisations view the organisation-stakeholder relationship after a crisis. The organisation can share information on social media with stakeholders that the crisis is in the past and it is committed to re-evaluating and improving its operations (Anderson & Guo 2020:219). Sharing information on social media with stakeholders about crisis failures is an important way of repairing the relationship between the organisation and stakeholders (Mazer et al. 2017:126). The objective of the organisation in the post-crisis phase is to rebuild its relationship with stakeholders and it must therefore communicate in ways that address the needs of stakeholders (Mazer et al. 2017:126). Responses to the prospective vision construct are indicated in Table 7.22 below.

Table 7.22: Responses to prospective vision

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation shares information on social media of its commitment to corrective actions to improve the organisation.	34.6%	33.3%	23.5%	7.4%	1.2%	81
My organisation always shares information on social media with stakeholders about the crisis been an opportunity to learn and grow from the crisis situation	24.7%	24.7%	37%	12.3%	1.2%	81
My organisation always shares information with stakeholders on lessons learnt which can also be accessed on social media.	16.3%	20%	41.3%	18.8%	3.8%	80

The culture and value construct was addressed by means of three items (40 to 42) in the questionnaire. The majority of respondents, 26.3% and 33.8% respectively, supported the statement in item 40, that the communication from leadership to stakeholders about the crisis shared on social media revolves around the organisation's core values. Respondents who opposed the statement were 6.3% and 2.5% respectively. Others who could not proffer an opinion were 31.3% It is imperative that the organisation's communication about the crisis reflects its values and culture (Ulmer et al. 2010). The organisation must be prepared to deal

with behavioural changes (Wombacher et al. 2018:165) and stakeholders will likely refer to the values and culture of the organisation. Thus, having the majority of respondents indicate that the communication from leadership about the crisis shared on social media reflects the core values of the organisation is a positive finding. The responses given by the leadership of the organisation after the crisis must be honest and be about the values of the organisation (Ulmer et al. 2015). As highlighted in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.3.7), when the leadership gives appropriate responses in crisis situations, stakeholders' perception of the organisation is largely positive (Coldwell et al. 2012; Bourne 2015; Adıgüzel 2019). Conversely, the organisation will be perceived negatively if the response is negative (Coldwell et al. 2012; Bourne 2015; Adıgüzel 2019). The renewal or mending of the organisation-stakeholder relationship will be perceived positively if it also revolves around the core values and culture of the organisation (Xu 2018:118).

In item 41, 66.7% (28.4% and 38.3%) concurred with the statement in item 41 that the organisation shows commitment to its values when the leadership uses social media to communicate with stakeholders about the crisis. Only 4.9% of respondents were not supportive of the statement. Other respondents, 28.4%, could not indicate a supporting or opposing view to the statement. As already emphasised, a crisis situation provides opportunities to the organisation, and the organisation must use that opportunity to highlight its values (Kaul, Shah & El-Serag 2020:809). The values of the organisation must be meaningful to stakeholders. If the values are weak, stakeholders will deem it irrelevant to their interests (Liu, Shi, Lim, Islam, Edwards & Seeger 2022). It is important that organisational leaders at the post-crisis phase communicate the organisational values so as to inspire stakeholders (Kaul et al. 2020:809). When leaders communicate the issues regarding the crisis in a transparent manner and are honest in admitting that they do not have all the solutions, stakeholders will be reassured and the organisation can be supported in its optimistic vision (Kaul et al. 2020:809).

Responses to the statement in item 42 show that a combined total of 61.3% (30% and 31.3%) of respondents indicated that the communication from leadership to stakeholders about the

crisis shared on social media reflects the culture of the organisation. Respondents who could not offer an opinion were 31.3%. Other respondents who dissented were 6.3% and 1.3% respectively. The culture of an organisation plays an important role in how the organisation reacts to a crisis either positively or negatively (Bhaduri 2019:535). The organisational culture is usually well integrated in every function of the organisation and it gives character to the input, process and output of its crisis management (Bhaduri 2019:536). A leadership that understands the organisational culture is well-positioned to know the outcome of decisions regarding crisis situations (Madu 2012:2). Leaders whose leadership styles are aligned with the culture of the organisation can provide direction for the effective handling of a crisis (Bowers et al. 2017). It is thus gratifying for this study that the majority of respondents declared that, when using crisis communication on social media, leadership reflects the culture of the organisation. Culture and leadership are important in the crisis-management process and crisis responses provided to stakeholders (Bhaduri 2019:542). One of the top priorities of leaders in engaging with stakeholders in crisis situations is the use of communication. Leadership is a communication-centred activity (Hackman & Johnson 2013:21). In mending and renewing the organisation-stakeholder relationship, a communicative leader is the one who interacts with stakeholders, shares information, anticipates feedback and is seen as open and involved (Johansson, Miller & Hamrin 2011). The minority view shows that these organisations do not appreciate the role leadership and organisational culture can play in renewing and mending the relationship between the organisation and stakeholders. However, such organisations must note that stakeholders can use social media to post messages that can disparage the leadership and culture of the organisation. Table 7.23 below outlines the responses to culture and value.

Table 7.23: Culture and value

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
The communication from leadership to stakeholders about the crisis shared on social media reflects the core values of the organisation	26.3%	33.8%	31.3%	6.3%	2.5%	80
The communication from leadership to stakeholders about the crisis shared on social media shows the commitment of the organisation to its values	28.4%	38.3%	28.4%	4.9%	0%	81
The communication from leadership to stakeholders about the crisis shared on social media reflects the organisational culture of my organisation	31.3%	30%	31.3%	6.3%	1.3%	80

7.5.2 Mean scores for Section C responses (discourse of renewal)

The scores for the various constructs of discourse of renewal are provided below and they include the frequency, mean, standard deviation, 25th percentile, 50th percentile (the median) and 75th percentile. Table 7.24 below covers the descriptive statistics for discourse of renewal.

Table 7.24: Typical scores for Section C (discourse of renewal)

Variable	N	Mean	Std. deviation	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile
Communication efficiency	81	3.79	0.74	3.16	4	4.33
Prospective vision	81	3.59	0.84	3	3.66	4.33
Culture and value	81	3.83	0.88	3	4	4.66

The average mean score indicated 3.79, with a standard deviation of 0.74 for communication efficiency. The 25th percentile was equal to or less than 3.16 and 75% of the values had a value of more than 3.16. The 50th percentile indicated that 50% of the values in the dataset were less than 4 and 50% had a score of more than 4. The 75th percentile suggested that 75%

of respondents scored 4.33 or less, and 25% had scores of more than 4.33. Since the average mean score was 3.79, which is between 3 and 4 but closer to 4 and 4 is agree, it means that organisations of respondents are thoughtful, sincere and spontaneous in sharing crisis information on social media with stakeholders. In essence, the organisations communicate in ways to satisfy stakeholders.

The typical scores for prospective vision showed that the average mean was 3.59, with a standard deviation of 0.84. The 25th percentile, which is 3, means that 25% of all the values or respondents in the dataset are less than or equal to 3. A total of 75% of respondents scored more than 3. The 50th percentile meant that 50% of respondents had 3.66 or less, and 50% scored 3.66 or more. The 75% percentile, which is 4.33, showed that 75% of all the values or respondents in the dataset scored less than or equal to 4.33 and 25% scored 4.33 or more. Since the average mean score of 3.59 was between 3 and 4 but closer to 4 and 4 is "agree", it is justifiable to conclude that the organisations respondents work for have a prospective vision approach towards stakeholders when using social media to communicate about a crisis. Prospective vision includes a commitment to corrective actions, learning and growing from the crisis and sharing information with stakeholders on lessons learnt.

The average mean score for culture and values was 3.83, with a standard deviation 0.88. A 25th percentile of 3 indicated that 25% of respondents scored 3 or less, while 75% had scores of 3 or more. The media of 4 indicated that 50% had scores of 4 or less and 50% had scores of 4 or more. The 75th percentile was 4.66 which implied that 75% scored 4.66 or less and 25% had scores of 4.66 or more. As the average mean score was 3.83, which is between 3 and 4 but closer to 4, it is reasonable to conclude that the core values and culture of the organisation are integrated into the crisis communication disseminated on social media to respondents.

7.6 FINDINGS OF SECTION D: ENHANCING ORGANISATION-STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL-MEDIA CRISIS COMMUNICATION

As highlighted in Chapter 5 (see 5.2.4), the objective of this element was to propose organisation-stakeholder relationship strategies that are relevant in managing crisis communication on social media. This study explores the relevance of social media to organisation-stakeholder relationships in times of crisis.

In the previous sections of this chapter, it was stated that social media enable organisations to have dialogic interactions with stakeholders. The strategic use of social media, especially in crisis situations, must be focused on relationship-building. Organisations must be seen as committed to collaborating on social media with stakeholders in times of crisis.

The organisation-stakeholder framework adopted for this study was derived from the relationship-management theory. In public relations, the term *relationship-management theory* describes how to ensure a positive mutually beneficial relationship between organisations and stakeholders (Park & Rhee 2010:2; Smith 2012:838). The key attributes of the relationship-management theory, namely, trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction (Hon & Grunig 1999; Grunig & Huang 2000; Le Roux 2014; Cheng 2018; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019) were adopted in measuring the element. It must be stated that these attributes are validated constructs of relationship management (Hon & Grunig 1999; Grunig & Huang 2000; Xu 2018).

The trust construct has integrity, competence and dependability as its attributes (Hon & Grunig 1999; Grunig & Huang 2000; Le Roux 2014; Yang, Kang & Cha 2015; Yue et al. 2019). In Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2, it was stated that trust is integral to the organisation and stakeholder relationship (Cheng 2018). When stakeholders trust the organisation during a crisis, it suggests that they have confidence in the ability of the organisation to handle the crisis (Cheng & Shen 2020). The issue of trust is important to stakeholders. When stakeholders do not trust the actions of the organisation during a crisis, their approach to communication on social media is largely threatening and mobilising (Romenti et al. 2014). For the purpose of this study, trust encompassed the honest disclosure of information on social media, crisis decisions that

concern stakeholders communicated on social media, using social media to inform stakeholders about promises made concerning the crisis and social media as a trustworthy platform for letting stakeholders know about the organisation's ability to manage a crisis.

The relationship-management construct of control mutuality, as already emphasised in Chapter 5, refers to the understanding that power held by two parties must be balanced in acceptable ways and should be cognitively judged (Ki & Hon 2007; Le Roux 2014; Çelebi & Bilir 2019). The control mutuality aspect of relationship management seeks to ensure that both parties (for example, the organisation and stakeholders) have a stable and interdependent relationship. If the organisation is serious about building and enhancing its relationship with stakeholders, then it must be willing to share power with its stakeholders (Pressly 2016; Celebi 2020). This is particularly more important in crisis situations, as stakeholders want to be heard and they expect the organisation to pay attention to their opinions. For the purpose of this study, control mutuality referred to the usefulness of social media in listening to the views of stakeholders about a crisis, attention given to stakeholder opinions expressed on social media and stakeholders' ability in having a say on social media regarding the social-media crisis communication decision-making process of the organisation.

Commitment as an attribute of relationship management means that a party to a relationship believes that the relationship with the other party is valuable. As a result, there is a strong will to build and strengthen the relationship (Hon & Grunig 1999:20). The organisation and stakeholders must commit to devoting time and resources in building and strengthening their relationship (Le Roux 2014; Dhanesh & Duthler 2019). For the purpose of this study, commitment embraces social media use by organisations in attending to crisis concerns of stakeholders, using social media for crisis communication in order to maintain a relationship with stakeholders and organisational commitment to the use of social media for crisis communication in order to have a long-lasting bond with stakeholders.

Satisfaction is explained as the level of fulfilment a party feels towards the other. The fulfilment is supposed to be mutual (Hon & Grunig 1999:14). Waters (2011:460) adds that, when a party

sees that the relationship is maintained, the relationship fosters satisfaction and genuine interaction. For the purpose of this study, satisfaction referred to the delight of organisations in using social media for crisis engagement with stakeholders, the fulfilment social media use for crisis communication provides to both the organisation and stakeholders and how the organisation-stakeholder relationship is enhanced as a result of the use of social media for crisis communication.

7.6.1 Section D: Descriptive statistics

This section presents and discusses the descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation and median) of the data. The organisation-stakeholder constructs are presented in Table 7.25 below.

Table 7.25: Enhancing the organisation-stakeholder relationship

Section D (element 4): Enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationship	Items
● Trust	43–46
● Control mutuality	47–49
● Commitment	50–52
● Satisfaction	53–55

In the study, trust was addressed by means of four items (43–46) in the questionnaire. In item 43, respondents representing a combined total of 61.7% (32.1% and 29.6%) affirmed that their organisation discloses honest information on social media about the crisis to stakeholders. Respondents who could not provide a supporting or opposing view were 32.1%. Only 4.9% and 1.2% respectively opposed the statement. The majority finding is consistent with Roshan et al. (2016:359), who report that organisations must be honest in providing responses to messages posted on social media by stakeholders. Additionally, Clementson and Page (2021:19) found that an organisation cannot be seen to have an honest character if its crisis messaging is judged to be dishonest by stakeholders. For the organisation to be trusted, it

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must avoid evasive and smokescreen communication strategies in its engagement with stakeholders. For respondents who disagreed with the statement, it is important to refer to the findings on trust conducted by the Edelman Trust Barometer. The 2011 Edelman Trust Barometer (Edelman 2011:7) reports that negative information about organisations will be believed by 25% of people who trust those organisations compared to 57% of people who will accept as believable negative information about organisations they do not trust. This means that the organisation must show commitment to honest and reliable communication with stakeholders in order to position itself positively in the minds of the majority of stakeholders (Edelman 2012:1; Edelman 2021:39).

The majority of respondents, representing 21.3% and 23.8% respectively, concurred with the statement in item 44 that important decisions about the crisis that concern stakeholders are made available on social media. Of significance is the 33.8% of respondents who could not provide an opinion. Other respondents representing a combined total of 21.3% (18.8% and 7.5%) provided a dissenting view to the statement. The majority finding is a positive outlook for crisis-communication management. This is because one of the key objectives of crisis communication is to disseminate important information about a crisis to stakeholders. Such information usually will include what the organisation is doing about the crisis and actions required of stakeholders (Regan, Raats, Shan, Wall & McConnon 2016:124). It is a proactive way of engaging with stakeholders. Using social media in crisis communication brings the organisation closer to stakeholders and provides the organisation with a certain control of feelings over the crisis (Hsu et al. 2007; Marken 2007; Shklovski, Burke, Kiesler & Kraut 2010; Eriksson 2018; Gambura & Apuke 2018). In situations where the organisation does not have information readily available, its acknowledgement of views expressed by stakeholders on social media can create a positive feeling and regain trust for the organisation (Jiang, Luo & Kulemeka 2016:688).

In item 45, the majority of respondents, 30.9% and 29.6% respectively, indicated that their organisation can be relied on in the use of social media to inform stakeholders about its

promises concerning the crisis. Other respondents, 25.9%, indicated a neutral position to the statement. A combined total of 13.5% (12.3% and 1.2%) of respondents were not in support of the statement. Organisations must through their social-media crisis communication be seen to be projecting their dependability by communicating promises related to the crisis. For instance, the findings of Romenti and Murtarelli's (2013:20-21) study of the crisis-communication strategies of eight multinational companies revealed that organisations such as Toyota and Domino Pizza used social media to inform stakeholders about promises to change corporate policies, practices and behaviours. These changes were largely influenced by the comments posted on the social-media accounts of these organisations by stakeholders.

Respondents were asked in item 46 to indicate the trustworthiness of social media as a platform for letting stakeholders know the organisation's ability to manage a crisis. A combined total of 59.3% concurred; 28.4% could not provide an opinion and a combined total of 12.3% opposed the statement. The way the organisation uses social media to respond to the concerns of stakeholders will enable the organisation to understand the needs of stakeholders (Van den Hurk 2013). The use of social media by the organisation to communicate what it is doing about a crisis can improve the stakeholders' perception about the organisation (OECD 2013:22). This in a way could make stakeholders identify social media use by the organisation as trustworthy. Social media can help build trust for the organisation. Organisations are not easily trusted in crisis situations. When organisations use social media to provide stakeholders with reliable information concerning the crisis, the organisation will be seen as transparent and earn for itself the trust of stakeholders. The constant engagement with stakeholders online can improve the trust stakeholders have in organisations (OECD 2013:25). It is apparent from the majority finding and the literature that, if the organisation wants to be seen as transparent with crisis information, then social media is an effective trustworthy platform for the organisation. Table 7.26 below outlines responses to trust.

Table 7.26: Responses to trust

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation always discloses honest information to stakeholders on social media about the crisis	32.1%	29.6%	32.1%	4.9%	1.2%	81
Important decisions about the crisis that concern stakeholders are made available on social media.	21.3%	23.8%	33.8%	13.8%	7.5%	80
My organisation can be relied on in using social media to inform stakeholders about its promises concerning the crisis.	30.9%	29.6%	25.9%	12.3%	1.2%	81
Social media is a trustworthy platform for letting stakeholders know my organisation's ability to manage a crisis	28.4%	30.9%	28.4%	11.1%	1.2%	81

Control mutuality was addressed by three items (47–49) in the questionnaire. In item 47, an overwhelming majority of respondents, 49.4% and 24.7% respectively, were of the same opinion that social media is useful for listening to stakeholders' views about a crisis. Other respondents, 6.2% and 1.2% respectively, had varied opinions. Respondents who could not provide a supporting or opposing opinion were 18.5%. This majority position indeed shows that these organisations have a strategic approach towards strengthening the organisation-stakeholder relationship. In Chapter 4 (see Section 4.7.5), it was stated that, if the organisation wants to enhance its relationship with stakeholders, then it must practice social listening on social media. Social listening must be a top priority for organisations that have social-media accounts. It enables the organisation to know the dynamics of stakeholders (Jackson 2017). Through listening, the organisation can share useful and valuable information about the crisis with stakeholders (Jackson 2017). Furthermore, social media can be useful for listening to hidden insights or topics of controversy harboured by stakeholders (Sobkowicz, Kaschesky & Bouchard 2012). Additionally, social listening provides the organisation the opportunity to see what stakeholders are talking about, their perceptions, needs and attitudes (Bengston et al. 2009; Chou, Hunt, Folkers & Augustson 2011; Sng et al. 2021). It also makes it possible for the organisation to have an engaging presence on social media, which can serve the

organisation well in its relationship with stakeholders (Stewart & Arnold 2017). It is clear that the minority view closes the door to the organisation to know what stakeholders are thinking and planning in times of crisis.

The majority of respondents, representing a combined total 81.5% (58% and 23.5%), affirmed in item 48 that their organisation considers it important in paying attention to the crisis opinions of stakeholders posted on social media. Only 1.2% of respondents disagreed with the statement. Other respondents, 17.3%, could not offer an opinion. Organisations can benefit from engaging with stakeholders during a crisis. By engaging with stakeholders on issues connected to the crisis, the organisation will be perceived as willing to give attention to the needs of stakeholders and involve them in its decisions (Romenti & Murtarelli 2013:27). Allowing stakeholders to express opinions and ideas on social media about a crisis can help the organisation identify solutions and enable the organisation to send a message of mutuality in its relationship with stakeholders (Romenti & Murtarelli 2013:22).

In item 49, the majority of respondents, 37.5% and 33.8% respectively, concurred that it is important that stakeholders have a say in the social-media crisis communication decision-making process of the organisation. Other respondents, 7.5% and 2.5% respectively, opposed the statement. Respondents who took the neutral position were 18.8%. It is important that the organisation partners with stakeholders in the crisis communication effort (Coombs 2014; Ulmer et al. 2015). Organisations must work together with stakeholders in finding solutions to the crisis (Ulmer et al. 2014). The crisis communication on social media by the organisation must be stakeholder-centred (Ly-Le 2019:209). The control mutuality approach will certainly improve the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Table 7.27 presents responses on control mutuality.

Table 7.27: Responses to control mutuality

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Social media is useful for listening to what stakeholders have to say about the crisis.	49.4%	24.7%	18.5%	6.2%	1.2%	81
It is important that my organisation pays attention to the crisis opinions of stakeholders posted on social media	58%	23.5%	17.3%	0%	1.2%	81
It is important that stakeholders are given a say in the social-media crisis communication decision-making process of my organisation	37.5%	33.8%	18.8%	7.5%	2.5%	80

The commitment attribute was addressed by means of three items (50–52) in the questionnaire. A combined total of 58.8% (31.3% and 27.5%) of respondents agreed with the statement in item 50 that their organisation uses social media to attend to the crisis concerns of stakeholders in order to maintain its long-term commitment to stakeholders. Of concern to this aspect of the study is the 31.3% of respondents who could not provide an opinion. Only 8.8% and 1.3% of respondents disagreed with the statement. The majority finding is consistent with the findings of Du Plessis (2018:836) on GitLab. According to Du Plessis (2018), organisations must be open to stakeholder participation and suggestions in the crisis narrative on social media. She adds that social-media crisis communication must be a collaborative effort between the organisation and stakeholders. Any attempt by the organisation towards a long-term commitment to stakeholders must involve stakeholders.

In item 51, the majority of respondents, 32.5% and 31.3% respectively, indicated that their organisation uses social media for crisis communication in order to maintain a relationship with stakeholders. Other respondents, 8.8% and 1.3% respectively, did not support the statement. The neutral 26.3% of respondents is not encouraging. Social-media communication can facilitate organisation-stakeholder support and relationship-building with stakeholders during and after a crisis (Du Plessis 2018). Furthermore, the use of social media for crisis communication can enable the organisation to engage with stakeholders for a long-term relationship (Obembe, Kolade, Obembe, Owoseni & Mafimisebi 2021:3). It is quite

evident that the majority finding is positive and good for the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

Respondents were to indicate in item 52 the commitment of their organisation to the use of social media for crisis communication for a long-lasting bond with stakeholders. The majority of respondents, 33.8% and 28.8% concurred, 27.5% could not offer an opinion and 10% dissented. As rightly pointed out by Kelleher (2009), if the organisation wants to show commitment to stakeholders, then the organisation must focus on building and maintaining the relationship with stakeholders. The organisation must harness the social-media space to encourage stakeholders to voice concerns regarding the organisation (Buhmann, Maltseva, Fieseler & Fleck 2021:4). It must be noted that the organisation's proactive approach to crisis-communication management will afford stakeholders through the means of social media to be informed, interact and form opinions about the organisation (Schultz et al. 2011). It is thus evident that social media can offer organisations a way to bond with stakeholders during a crisis. Responses to commitment are presented in Table 7.28 below.

Table 7.28: Responses to commitment

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation uses social media to attend to crisis concerns of stakeholders in order to maintain its long-term commitment to stakeholders	31.3%	27.5%	31.3%	8.8%	1.3%	80
My organisation uses social media for crisis communication in order to maintain a relationship with stakeholders	32.5%	31.3%	26.3%	8.8%	1.3%	80
My organisation is committed to using social media for crisis communication in order to have a long-lasting bond with stakeholders	33.8%	28.8%	27.5%	10%	0%	80

Satisfaction was addressed by means of three items (53–55) in the questionnaire. A combined total of 53.1% (24.7% and 28.4%) affirmed in item 53 that their organisation is pleased with

how it uses social media for crisis engagement with stakeholders. Other respondents, 7.4% and 2.5%, disagreed with the statement. Of significance is the 37% of respondents who neither supported or opposed the statement. It is good that the majority of respondents are pleased with how their organisation uses social media to engage with stakeholders in times of crisis. Crises can be frustrating for organisational leadership and spokespersons (Garcia 2017). Leonard (2018:249) recommends that the organisation must show a willingness to engage with stakeholders (Leonard 2018:249). Through the use of social media, the organisation's crisis communication can fulfil the information needs of stakeholders (Jiang et al. 2016:688).

The majority of respondents, 41.5% and 29.3% respectively, indicated in item 54 that their organisation and stakeholders benefit when using social media for crisis communication. The responses of 23.2% of respondents were neither a supporting or opposing view. Respondents who did not support the statement were 4.9% and 1.2% respectively. The position of this study is that the social-media crisis management by the organisation must benefit both the organisation and stakeholders. This study supports the view of Ferguson (2018:71), that relationship satisfaction must be approached along the spectrum of organisation satisfaction and stakeholder satisfaction, which without a doubt will improve the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

Respondents representing a combined total of 70.4% (38.3% and 32.1%) affirmed in item 55 that the use of social media for crisis communication has enhanced the relationship between the organisation and stakeholders. Only 2.5% disagreed with the statement. Other respondents, 27.2%, did not offer an opinion. If social media is used strategically for crisis communication, it is possible for the organisation-stakeholder relationship to be enhanced. As noted in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.5.1), social media can provide organisations with intelligence-gathering opportunities (Eriksson & Olsson 2016; Ghani et al. 2019) and large amounts of information regarding the thoughts and behaviour of stakeholders (Chen et al. 2012; Hong & Kim 2019). These opportunities can help the organisation to be targeted in its crisis-response messages on social media. It will also mean that the organisation's crisis

information management will be stakeholder-focused and show the organisation is committed to improving its relationship with stakeholders (Mahon & Mitnick 2010; Jenkins et al. 2013; Prabhakar & Strakova 2019). Table 7.29 outlines the responses to satisfaction.

Table 7.29: Responses to satisfaction

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
My organisation is pleased with how it uses social media for crisis engagement with stakeholders	24.7%	28.4%	37%	7.4%	2.5%	81
Both my organisation and stakeholders benefit when using social media for crisis communication	41.5%	29.3%	23.2%	4.9%	1.2%	82
The use of social media for crisis communication has enhanced the relationship between my organisation and stakeholders.	38.3%	32.1%	27.2%	2.5%	0%	81

7.6.2 Mean scores for Section D responses (organisation-stakeholder relationship)

The scores for the various constructs of organisation-stakeholder relationship are provided below and they include the frequency, mean, standard deviation, 25th percentile, 50th percentile (the median) and 75th percentile. The descriptive statistics for organisation-stakeholder relationship are presented in Table 7.62 below.

Table 7.30: Typical scores for Section D (organisation-stakeholder relationship)

Variable	N	Mean	Std. deviation	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile
Trust	81	3.68	0.88	3	3.75	4.25
Control mutuality	81	4.16	0.82	3.67	4.33	5
Commitment	81	3.81	0.91	3	4	4.67
Satisfaction	81	3.93	0.82	3	4	4.67

A mean score of 3.68 was obtained for the trust construct, with a standard deviation of 0.88. According to the 25th percentile, 25% of respondents had values of 3 or less and 75% scored 3 or more. The 50th percentile score of 3.75 revealed that 50% of respondents scored 3.75 or less and 50% had values of 3.75 or more. With the 75th percentile score of 4.25, 75% of respondents scored 4.25 or less and 25% scored 4.25 or more. As the average mean was 3.68, which is between 3 and 4 but closer to 4 and 4 means "agree", it is valid to conclude that organisations of respondents welcome the use of social media in providing honest and trustworthy information about a crisis to stakeholders.

With regard to the control mutuality construct, the mean score was 4.16 and 0.82 for the standard deviation. The 25th percentile value of 3.67 indicated that 25% of respondents scored 3.67 or less, while 75% scored 3.67 or more. The 50th percentile of 4.33 showed that 50% of respondents had 4.33 or less and 50% scored 4.33 or more. The 75th percentile score of 5 indicated that 75% of respondents scored 5 or less and 25% scored 5 or more. With the average mean of 4.16, which means "agree", it can be concluded that organisations of respondents consider social media as useful for listening and paying attention to the views of stakeholders about a crisis. Furthermore, these respondents consider social media a useful platform for letting stakeholders have a say about a crisis.

A mean score of 3.81 and a standard deviation of 0.91 was achieved for the commitment construct. The 25th percentile value was 3 and it indicated that 25% of respondents scored 3 or less and 75% scored 3 or more. The 50th percentile score was 4 and this showed that 50% of respondents had 4 or less and 50% achieved a score of 4 or more. The 75th percentile value of 4.67 meant that 75% of respondents scored 4.67 or less and 25% scored 4.67 or more. Since the mean score of 3.81 is between 3 and 4 but closer to 4, which means "agree", it is reasonable to deduce that organisations of respondents are committed to the use of social media in attending to the crisis concerns of stakeholders. Additionally, these organisations have a positive view of the use of social media for crisis communication in ensuring that organisation-stakeholder relationships are strengthened.

With regard to satisfaction, the average mean score was 3.93, with a standard deviation of 0.82. The 25th percentile of 3 meant that 25% of all the values or respondents in the dataset were less than or equal to 3, while 75% of respondents had 3 or more than 3. The 50th percentile of 4 indicated that 50% of respondents had 4 or less, and 50% had a score of 4 or more. The 75th percentile was 4.67, indicating that 75% of all the values in the dataset scored less than or equal to 4.67 and 25% scored 4.67 or more. Since the average mean score of 3.93 was closer to 4 and 4 is "agree", the outcome suggests that organisations of respondents are satisfied with how they use social media to engage with stakeholders on crisis issues. It can further be concluded that these organisations and their stakeholders benefit from the use of social media for crisis communication, thereby enhancing the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

7.7 KEY FINDINGS OF THE DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND INTERNAL RELIABILITY TESTS WITH REGARD TO THE PROPOSED ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL-MEDIA CRISIS COMMUNICATION TO BUILD STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS

In the introduction to this chapter, the point was made that the findings of the online survey were to address research questions 3 and 4. Thus, based on the individual responses, the various sections on the elements revealed the following key findings:

● **Fundamentals of crisis preparedness** – It is clear that the majority of respondents work towards understanding and appreciate the need for crisis preparedness. These organisations are aware of the importance of crisis-communication planning, which must include social-media crisis communication. They also understand the need to plan for a present-crisis situation and a future-crisis situation. In addition, these organisations know what to do in the event of a crisis and the expectations of stakeholders. In spite of the minority view and others who could not express a positive or negative stance, in general, the items in the fundamentals of crisis preparedness were supported.

● **Managing crises on social media with interactions** – This particular element was central to the gathering of insights from respondents regarding the communication approaches they use when managing a crisis on social media. The approaches involve collaboration, grounding, empathy, responsiveness, accessibility and transparency. Data from a significant majority of respondents indicate that the crisis communication on social media approach used by their organisations is to ensure mutual benefits from the interactions with stakeholders. Additionally, these allow stakeholders to express diverse views on social media about the crisis. Such an approach to crisis communication will enable such organisations to know what are the thoughts of stakeholders regarding the crisis. Another important finding about the approaches is how these respondents pointed out that their organisations accept views expressed by stakeholders as worthy of consideration. These organisations are also interested in using social media to invite comments from stakeholders and also to find out if stakeholders understand what is being communicated about the crisis. The use of empathy as a crisis communication approach on social media was supported by the majority of respondents. Evidence from the respondents shows that social media is used by their organisations to empathise with stakeholders affected by a crisis. Furthermore, these organisations through social media try to understand the perspectives of stakeholders and how they feel about the crisis. The finding regarding authoritative communication and the control of the views of stakeholders expressed on social media suggests that quite a significant number of organisations want to censor the views of stakeholders. This could be because they want to protect the image of the organisation. Another positive finding regarding the communication approach is the position of the majority of respondents who intimated that their organisations respond promptly on social media to the concerns of stakeholders. Additionally, these organisations share open access to crisis information on social media to stakeholders and also are timely on social media with messages about the crisis. Evidence from the majority of respondents concerning communication approaches indicate that their organisations provide honest and believable crisis information on social media to stakeholders. Also, these organisations are not interested in hiding and providing deceptive crisis information on social

media to stakeholders. Overall, the finding suggests that these organisations are in favour of managing crises on social media with interactions.

● **Mending stakeholder relations after a social-media crisis** – The responses provided by the majority of respondents show that many organisations are committed to a thoughtful communication approach in the sharing of crisis information on social media to stakeholders. The essence is to mend relationships with stakeholders. These organisations also want to be sincere with stakeholders when sharing information on social media about a crisis. These communication approaches can win stakeholder support and improve stakeholder relationships. The finding regarding sharing information on social media of commitment to corrective actions in order to improve the organisation was supported by the majority of respondents. More so, their organisations share on social media with stakeholders information regarding the crisis being an opportunity to learn and grow. This finding shows that these organisations want a renewal of relationship with stakeholders. It is evident that, after a crisis situation, these organisations use social media to engage with stakeholders so as to mend relationships.

● **Enhancing stakeholder relationship with social-media crisis communication** – The importance of disclosing honest information on social media about the crisis was supported by the majority of stakeholders. However, the finding regarding the reliance on the organisation in using social media to inform stakeholders about promises concerning the crisis was not affirmed or opposed by a significant number of respondents. Another significant finding relates to the majority of respondents, who indicated that social media is a trustworthy platform for letting stakeholders know the ability of the organisation to manage a crisis. There was quite an overwhelming support for the use of social media in listening to the views of stakeholders about a crisis. In general, evidence gathered from the data on this element shows that trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction are necessary in social-media crisis communication for the organisation-stakeholder relationship to be enhanced.

7.8 PARAMETRIC TESTS BETWEEN ORGANISATION-STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP AND CRISIS PREPAREDNESS, DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION AND THE DISCOURSE OF RENEWAL

This part of the findings is focused on inferential statistics. In Chapter 6, it was pointed out that the study will use parametric tests to determine relationships or associations between variables. Conducting these tests was necessary to help answer research question 4 and propose a framework for social-media crisis communication necessary for building organisation-stakeholder relationships.

The pragmatist paradigm approach adopted by this study enabled the researcher to investigate the ways in which Ghanaian organisations use social media for crisis communications. Furthermore, the researcher was able to gain insight into some actions these organisations take to ensure that their social-media crisis satisfies the interests of both organisations and stakeholders. For this study, the pragmatic approach provided the most realistic way of understanding the application of a social-media crisis-communication strategy by Ghanaian organisations.

One key assumption of parametric tests is for the distribution of the variables or scores to be normally distributed (Kwak & Park 2019:5). It is important to know if the sampled data is from a normally distributed population (Hernandez 2021:1). Normality is important as it helps in drawing accurate and reliable conclusions about reality (Goss-Sampson 2019:26;). In order to satisfy the normality requirement for the data, a test of normality was conducted.

It was important to gain insight from public relations in Ghana on how the proposed elements in terms of crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal can help predict organisation-stakeholder relationships. The extensive literature review highlights that these elements were important in determining the relationship-management criteria necessary for effective stakeholder relationships when managing a crisis on social media. Thus, in order to draw conclusions on this assumption, the researcher used correlation and regression tests to determine the following:

- Association between organisation-stakeholder relationship and crisis preparedness

- Association between organisation-stakeholder relationship and dialogic communication

- Association between organisation-stakeholder relationship and the discourse of renewal.

The conclusions and interpretations on the above-listed provide valuable insights and contributions to the formulation of a framework on crisis communication on social media to build relationships with stakeholders.

In the section below, the normality tests conducted are presented in a histogram and probability-probability (P-P) plot.

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7.8.1. Normality of the distribution

One key assumption of parametric tests is for the distribution of the variables or scores to be normally distributed (Kwak & Park 2019:5). It is important to know if the sampled data is from a normally distributed population (Hernandez 2021:1). In order to satisfy the normality requirement for the data, it is important that a test of normality is conducted. The histogram is one of the ways of identifying the normality of the data (Hernandez 2021:3; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:214) In using a histogram to determine normally distributed data, the bars should look like a symmetric bell (Hernandez 2021:3; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:214). A distribution plot of the data is another important way of determining the normality of the data (Kwak & Park 2019:6). The probability-probability (P-P) plot helps in checking for normality (Mishra et al. 2019:70; Hernandez 2021:6). Based on the histogram (Figure 7.2) of the residual, the residuals are normally distributed. With regard to the P-P plot (Figure 7.3), most of the plot lines lie on a straight line, which is an indication that the residuals are normally distributed.
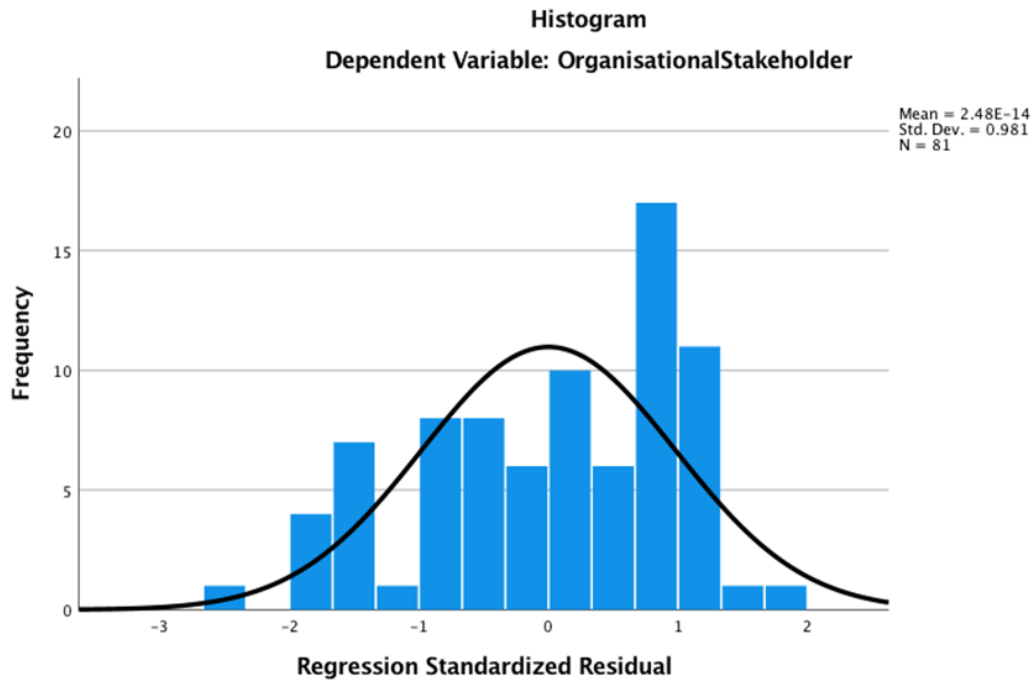
Figure 7.2: Histogram of organisation-stakeholder relationship
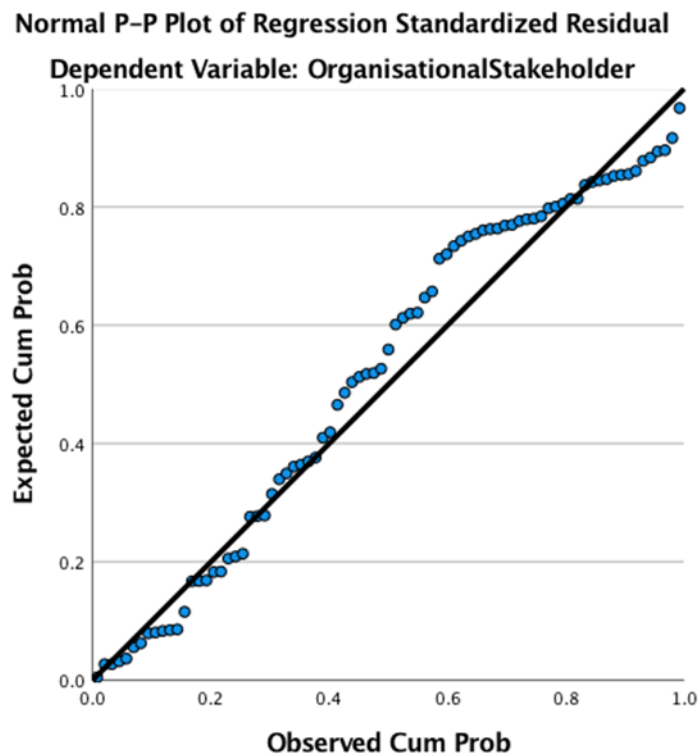
Figure 7.3: P-P plot of regression standardised residual dependent variable: organisation- stakeholder relationship.

In the section below, the correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship and crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal are presented and discussed.

7.8.2 Pearson Correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship, crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal

Correlational analyses were conducted to establish the association between the validated scales organisation-stakeholder relationship (the dependent variable), crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal (independent variables). Correlation is used to measure whether two variables are related (Bryman 2012:339; Bhattacherjee 2012:122; Schober et al. 2018:1763). In other words, if two variables are found to relate to one another they are correlated (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:262).

For this study, in order to measure the relationship or association between two continuous variables, the Pearson's correlation test was determined to be the most appropriate. Pearson's correlation test is used to measure at the interval or ratio level whether two variables are related (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2020:262).

In using Pearson's correlation test, the correlation coefficient is expressed with a lowercase *r.* The strength of two variables that are correlated is determined by the correlation coefficient, which varies between -1 and +1. The direction of the correlation can either be positive or negative. When the correlation is negative, it signifies that, as the values of one variable rise, the values of the other fall. In the instance where the correlation is positive, it means that, as the values of one variable rise, the values of the other variable also rise too (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:263).

The coefficient value denotes the strength of the relationship. The nearer the coefficient is to 0, the weaker the relationship between the two variables. On the other hand, if the coefficient is nearer to either -1 or +1, it signifies that the relationship between the variables is stronger. Additionally, correlations are determined to be statistically significant if p is <0.05.

First, Pearson's correlation coefficient values between organisation-stakeholder relationship and preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal are presented. As already stated, the dependent variable is organisation-stakeholder relationship. The correlation coefficient values for the dependent variable and the constructs for preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal are also presented.

From the table below, the *organisation-stakeholder relationship* scale is positively correlated with *crisis preparedness*, *dialogic communication* and *discourse of renewal* scales. At 0.647 and a *p* value of 0.000, organisation-stakeholder relationship is positively correlated with crisis preparedness. The correlation was strong in strength which means that, when crisis preparedness increases, organisation-stakeholder relationship also increases. The assumptions of the analysis were satisfied. With a correlation coefficient of 0.872 and a *p* value of 0.000, organisation-stakeholder relationship is positively correlated with dialogic communication. This means that, when dialogic communication increases, organisation stakeholder relationship increases. This means that the assumptions of the analysis were satisfied. The correlation between organisation-stakeholder relationship and discourse of renewal is positive insert, as the coefficient and *p* value were 0.818 and 0.000 respectively. In essence, when discourse of renewal is high, organisation-stakeholder relationships will also be high. This means that the assumptions of the analysis were satisfied. The independent variables crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal are all positively correlated. Crisis preparedness is positively correlated with dialogic communication as the correlation coefficient is 0.743 and the *p* value is 0.000. The correlation between crisis preparedness and discourse of renewal is also positive as the coefficient and *p* value are 0.658 and 0.000 respectively. With a correlation coefficient of 0.858 and a *p* value of 0.000, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal are positively correlated. This means that all scales adopted (organisation-stakeholder relationship, crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal) are positively associated and statistically significant. All the assumptions of the analysis were satisfied. In essence, the use of social media for crisis

communication by organisations to build relationships with stakeholders must take into account the use of crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal constructs.

Table 7.31 below outlines the Pearson correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship, crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal.

Table 7.31: Pearson correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship, crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal

		Organisation-stakeholder relationship	Preparedness	Dialogic communication	Discourse of renewal
Multivariate correlation analysis	Organisation-stakeholder relationship	1.000	.647	.872	.818
	Preparedness	.647	1.000	.743	.658
	Dialogic communication	.872	.743	1.000	.858
	Discourse of renewal	.818	.658	.858	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Organisation-stakeholder relationship		.000	.000	.000
	Preparedness	.000		.000	.000
	Dialogic communication	.000	.000		.000
	Discourse of renewal	.000	.000	.000	
N	Organisation-stakeholder relationship	81	81	81	81
	Preparedness	81	81	81	81
	Dialogic communication	81	81	81	81
	Discourse of renewal	81	81	81	81

7.8.2.1 Pearson correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship, present crisis preparedness and prospective crisis preparedness

In this aspect of the study, it was important to establish the association between organisation-stakeholder relationship and the constructs of preparedness, namely, present crisis preparedness and prospective crisis preparedness. The correlation coefficient for organisation-stakeholder relationship and present crisis preparedness was 0.6440 with a *p-*

value of 0.001. This means that organisation-stakeholder relationship and present crisis preparedness were correlated.

The correlation coefficient for organisation-stakeholder relationship and prospective crisis preparedness was 0.5968 with a *p*-value of 0.001. In essence, organisation-stakeholder relationship and prospective preparedness were correlated.

Present crisis preparedness and prospective crisis preparedness are also positively correlated, as the correlation coefficient is 0.7982 and the *p* value is 0.001. This means that the crisis preparedness constructs of present crisis preparedness and prospective crisis preparedness are positively associated and statistically significant. This means that, in assessing crisis preparedness of organisations on social media, present crisis preparedness and prospective crisis preparedness statements must be considered. The correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship and the constructs for crisis preparedness are presented in Table 7.32 below.

Table 7.32: Correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship and constructs of preparedness

		Organisation-stakeholder relationship	Present crisis Preparedness	Prospective crisis preparedness
Multivariate correlations analysis	Organisation-stakeholder relationship	1.000	0.6440	0.5968
	Present crisis Preparedness	0.6440	1.000	0.7982
	Prospective crisis preparedness	0.5968	0.7982	1.000
Significance probability	Organisation-stakeholder relationship	0.001	0.001	0.001
	Present preparedness	0.001	0.001	0.001
	Prospective preparedness	0.001	0.001	0.001
N	Organisation-stakeholder relationship	82	82	82
	Present preparedness	82	82	82
	Prospective preparedness	82	82	82

7.8.2.2 Pearson correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship and constructs of dialogic communication

In this part of the study, assessing the association between organisation-stakeholder relationship and dialogic communication constructs was considered important. Correlation coefficient analyses between organisation-stakeholder relationship and the constructs, namely, collaboration, grounding, empathy, responsiveness, accessibility, genuineness and transparency were conducted. The p value for all the constructs and organisation-stakeholder relationship was 0.001 and the total observations were 81.

All the constructs of dialogic communication are positively correlated with organisation-stakeholder relationship and statistically significant. However, the construct that has the highest positive correlation with organisation-stakeholder relationship was empathy. The correlation coefficient was 0.7926. Even though genuineness is positively correlated with organisation-stakeholder relationship, its correlation coefficient of 0.6839 was the lowest.

Additionally, all the dialogic communication constructs were positively correlated to each other. The constructs with the strongest correlation were grounding and empathy, with a correlation coefficient of 0.8207. Though grounding and genuineness were positively correlated, the association between them was moderate and least among all the constructs as the coefficient was 0.5733.

The correlation matrix for organisation-stakeholder relationship and dialogic communication constructs are presented below. The constructs (collaboration, grounding, empathy, responsiveness, accessibility, genuineness and transparency) and organisation-stakeholder relationship have been abbreviated.

Table 7.33 below outlines the correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship and constructs of dialogic communication.

Table 7.33: **Pearson correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship and constructs of dialogic communication**

		Org. Stk. r'ship	Collab.	Ground.	Emp.	Resp.	Access.	Genuine.	Transp.
Multivariate correlations analysis	Org. Stk. r'ship	1.000	0.7362	0.7821	0.7926	0.7102	0.7485	0.6839	0.7530
	Collab.	0.7362	1.000	0.5832	0.7836	0.5963	0.7421	0.5821	0.6368
	Ground.	0.7821	0.5832	1.000	0.8207	0.6140	0.7258	0.5733	0.6327
	Emp.	0.7926	0.7836	0.8207	1.000	0.6292	0.7357	0.6075	0.6880
	Resp.	0.7102	0.5963	0.6140	0.6292	1.000	0.7092	0.5928	0.7154
	Access.	0.7485	0.7421	0.7258	0.7357	0.7092	1.000	0.7078	0.7079
	Genuine.	0.6839	0.5821	0.5733	0.6075	0.5928	0.7078	1.000	0.7514
	Transp.	0.7530	0.6368	0.6327	0.6880	0.7154	0.7079	0.7514	1.000

7.8.2.3 Pearson correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship and constructs of discourse of renewal

As one of the proposed elements for this study, it was vital to find out the relationships between discourse of renewal constructs and organisation-stakeholder relationship. Communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value were the constructs that were assessed against organisation-stakeholder relationship. The correlation's coefficient values between organisation-stakeholder relationship and each of the constructs were positive and statistically significant. The p value was 0.001. The relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and prospective vision was the strongest, as the coefficient was 0.7728.

Variable-by-variable correlations of the discourse of renewal constructs were also positive and statistically significant with a p value of 0.001. However, communication efficiency and culture and value had the strongest relationship with a coefficient of 0.6960.

The correlation matrix between organisation-stakeholder relationship and discourse of renewal is presented in Table 7.34 below. The constructs (communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value) and organisation-stakeholder relationship have been abbreviated.

Table 7.34: Pearson correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship and constructs of discourse of renewal

		Org. Stk. r'ship	Comm. Eff.	Prosp.Vis.	Cul. Val.
Multivariate correlations	Org. Stk. r'ship	1.000	0.7142	0.7728	0.6874
	Communication efficiency	0.7142	1.000	0.6322	0.6960
	Prospective vision	0.7728	0.6322	1.000	0.6935
	Culture and Value	0.6874	0.6960	0.6935	1.000

7.8.2.4 Pearson correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship and constructs of organisation-stakeholder relationship

In this aspect of the study, correlation analyses were done on the constructs that make the organisation-stakeholder relationship scale. It was important to assess if positive relationships exist between organisation-stakeholder relationship and trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction. All the constructs (variables) had a positive relationship with organisation-stakeholder relationship and the relationship was statistically significant. The *p* value was 0.001. The correlation between organisation-stakeholder relationship and commitment had the highest coefficient, 0.9335, which indicates almost a perfect relationship (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2020:265). Variable-by-variable correlations of the constructs were positive and statistically significant. Among the constructs, the correlation between trust and control mutuality had the lowest coefficient, which was 0.4714. If the coefficient is between 0.4 to 0.6, the relationship between the variables is considered moderate (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:265). The correlation between commitment and satisfaction had the highest coefficient, 0.8535, and therefore the strongest relationship among the constructs.

The correlation matrix between organisation-stakeholder relationship and the constructs of organisation-stakeholder relationship are presented below. The constructs (trust, control mutuality, control mutuality and satisfaction) and organisation-stakeholder relationship have been abbreviated. Table 7.35 outlines the correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship and constructs of organisation-stakeholder relationship.

Table 7.35: Pearson correlations between organisation-stakeholder relationship and constructs of organisation-stakeholder relationship

		Organisation-stakeholder relationship	Trust	Control mutuality	Commitment	Satisfaction
Multivariate correlations	Organisation-stakeholder relationship	1.000	0.8376	0.7519	0.9335	0.8857
	Trust	0.8376	1.000	0.4714	0.7142	0.6542
	Control mutuality	0.7519	0.4714	1.000	0.6032	0.5053
	Commitment	0.9335	0.7142	0.6032	1.000	0.8535
	Satisfaction	0.8857	0.6542	0.5053	0.8535	1.000

7.8.3 Regression analysis between organisation-stakeholder relationship and crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal

In order to determine the strength in terms of predictability between the dependent variable organisation-stakeholder relationship and independent variables preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal, a regression analysis was conducted. This in effect required the use of regression analysis. Regression analysis refers to a process of looking for a mathematical model that is best suited to the research data (Mendenhall 2011:80). Sarstedt and Mooi (2014:194) describe regression analysis as methods used in statistical analysis for the appraisal of relationships between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. In other words, regression analysis can be used to explain how much of the dependent variable variation is a result of the variation of one or more independent variables (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:266). Sarstedt and Mooi (2014:194) assert that regression analysis offers the following benefits:

● Specify if independent variables have a significant relationship with a dependent variable

● Estimate the strength of the relationship between variables

For this part of the study, using regression to establish if the independent variables (preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal) have a significant relationship with the dependent variable was necessary. Assessing the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable can help direct the social-media crisis-management process if it can be established that preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal significantly influence the organisation-stakeholder relationship. These assessments were necessary in order to propose elements for social-media crisis communication by public-relations practitioners in Ghana to build relationships with stakeholders.

Using regression to estimate the strength of relationship between the dependent and independent variables of this study was important, as it can help public-relations practitioners in Ghana answer questions on whether the organisation-stakeholder relationship depends more on preparedness, dialogic communication or discourse of renewal.

A simple linear regression was used, though a multiple linear regression would have enabled the study to know how many independent variables predict the dependent variable (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian 2021:266). Multiple regression was abandoned as only dialogic communication and discourse of renewal produced significance. It was realised that, if each independent variable was included separately against the dependent variable, the result showed significance.

7.8.3.1 Regression analysis of the relationship between crisis preparedness and organisation-stakeholder relationship

From Table 7.38, 43% of the variability in organisation-stakeholder relationship is explained by crisis preparedness. Based on the ANOVA presented in Table 7.39, the p value of <.0001 shows that the relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and crisis preparedness is statistically significant, as the p value is less than 0.05. On the parameter estimate as presented in Table 7.40, when x (crisis preparedness) is 0, the value of y

(organisation-stakeholder relationship) will be 1.7997216. On the other hand, when crisis preparedness is increased by 1 unit, the organisation-stakeholder relationship will increase by 0.5506693.

Thus, in the management of a crisis on social media, crisis preparedness has a significant part to play in organisation-stakeholder relationships. Table 7.36 provides the model summary of the relationship between crisis preparedness and organisation-stakeholder relationship.

Table 7.36: Model summary of the relationship between crisis preparedness and organisation-stakeholder relationship

	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Root Mean Square Error	Mean of Response	Observations
	0.428596	0.421454	0.562167	3.910061	82

Table 7.37 Analysis of variance

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio
Model	1	18.963849	18.9638	60.0061
Error	80	25.282573	0.3160	**Prob > F**
C. Total	81	44.246422		<.0001*

Table 7.38 Parameter estimates

Term	Estimate	Std Error	t Ratio	Prob>|t|	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Intercept	1.7997216	0.279414	6.44	<.0001*	1.2436704	2.3557728
Preparedness	0.5506693	0.071088	7.75	<.0001*	0.4092007	0.6921379

Figure 7.4 now shows a moderately positive relationship as the data points are not closely clustered. This means that the relationship between organisation-stakeholder and crisis preparedness is less positive when compared to the organisation-stakeholder relationship and dialogic communication and organisation-stakeholder relationship and discourse of renewal respectively.
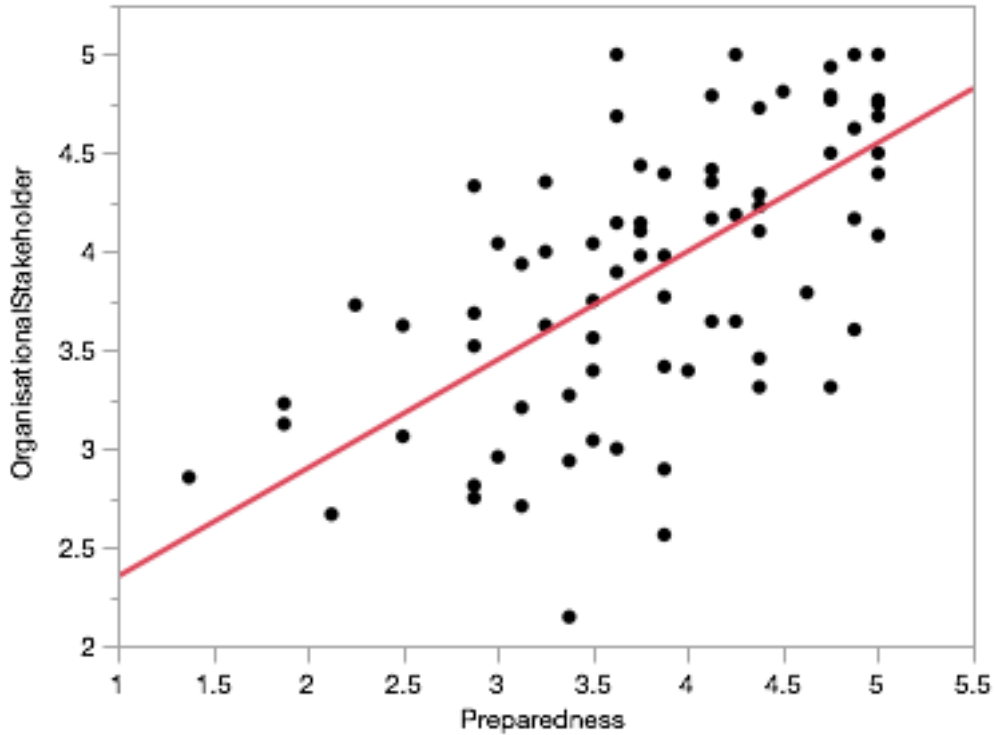
Figure 7.4: Scatterplot for organisation-stakeholder relationship by crisis preparedness

7.8.3.2 Regression analysis of the relationship between dialogic communication and organisation-stakeholder relationship

As depicted in Table 7.39 below, dialogic communication accounted for 78% of the variance in organisation-stakeholder relationship. It is evident in the ANOVA presented in Table 7.40 that the relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and dialogic communication is statistically significant, as the p value is <.0001, which is less than 0.05. In Table 7.41, the parameter estimate shows that, when x (dialogic communication) is 0, the value of the organisation-stakeholder relationship will be 0.7257795. When dialogic communication is increased by 1 unit, the organisation-stakeholder relationship would increase by 0.8347922.

This result indicates that there is a significant relationship between dialogic communication and organisation-stakeholder relationship. Thus, in the management of a crisis on social media, dialogic communication contributes significantly to playing a role in organisation-

stakeholder relationships. The model summary between dialogic communication and organisation-stakeholder relationship is presented in Table 7.39 below.

Table 7.39: Model summary of the relationship between dialogic communication and organisation-stakeholder relationship

	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Root Mean Square Error	Mean of Response	Observations
	0.779653	0.771068	0.358812	3.910061	82

Table 7.40: Analysis of variance

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio
Model	1	33.946723	33.9467	263.6716
Error	80	10.299699	0.1287	**Prob > F**
C. Total	81	44.246422		<.0001*

Table 7.41: Parameter estimates

Term	Estimate	Std Error	t Ratio	Prob>|t|	Upper 95%
Intercept	0.7257795	0.200064	3.63	0.0005*	1.1239199
Dialogic communication	0.8347922	0.05141	16.24	<.0001*	0.9371012

Figure 7.5 shows a stronger and positive relationship as the scatter plot produced a tighter clustering of data points. This means that the relationship between dialogic communication and stakeholder relationship is much stronger and positive than the organisation-stakeholder relationship and crisis preparedness and organisation-stakeholder relationship and discourse of renewal respectively.
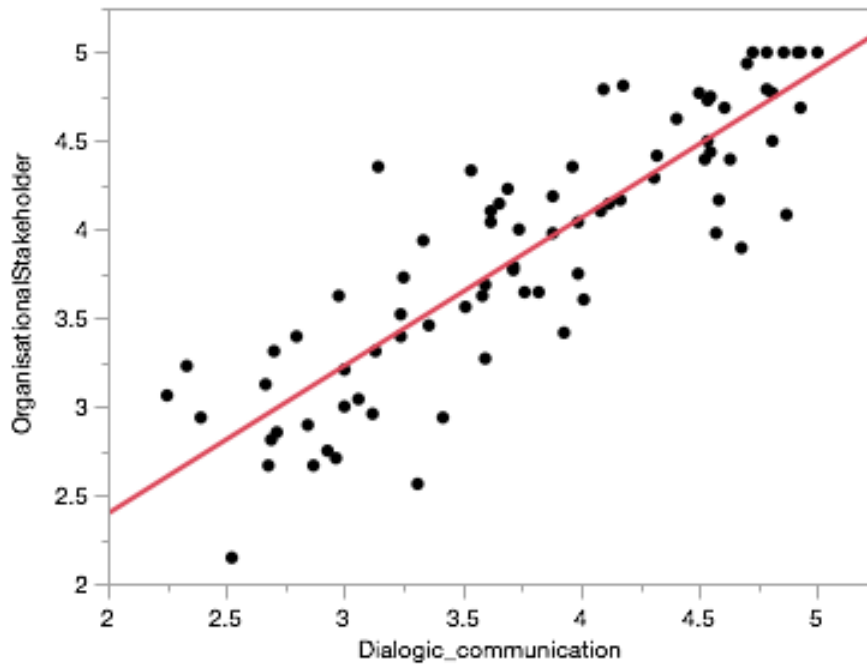
Figure 7.5: Scatterplot for organisation-stakeholder relationship by dialogic communication

7.8.3.3 Regression analysis of the relationship between discourse of renewal and organisation-stakeholder relationship

Table 7.42 below shows that the discourse of renewal accounted for 67% of the variance in organisation-stakeholder relationship. As can be seen in the ANOVA presented in Table 7.43, the relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and discourse of renewal is statistically significant, as the *p* value is <.0001, which is less than 0.05. On the parameter estimate as presented in Table 7.44, when x (discourse of renewal) is 0, the value of y (organisation-stakeholder relationship) will be 0.8384178. However, when discourse of renewal is increased by 1 unit, the organisation stakeholder relationship would increase by 0.8178351.

This result indicates that there is a significant relationship between discourse of renewal and organisation-stakeholder relationship. Thus, in the management of a crisis on social media, discourse of renewal plays an important role in organisation-stakeholder relationships.

Table 7.42: Model summary of the relationship between discourse of renewal and organisation-stakeholder relationship

R Square	Adjusted R Square	Root Mean Square Error	Mean of Response	Observations
0.669578	0.665396	0.424303	3.896605	81

Table 7.43: Analysis of variance

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Ratio
Model	1	28.821184	28.8212	160.0884
Error	79	14.222604	0.1800	**Prob > F**
C. Total	80	43.043789		<.0001*

Table: 7.44: Parameter estimates

Term	Estimate	Std Error	t Ratio	Prob>|t|	Upper 95%
Intercept	0.8384178	0.246259	3.40	0.0010*	1.3285843
Discourse renewal	0.8178351	0.064638	12.65	<.0001*	0.9464932

Figure 7.6 shows a positive and strong relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and discourse of renewal. This in essence means that, whereas the relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and dialogic communication is stronger as the data points are better clustered, the relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and discourse of renewal is stronger than crisis preparedness.
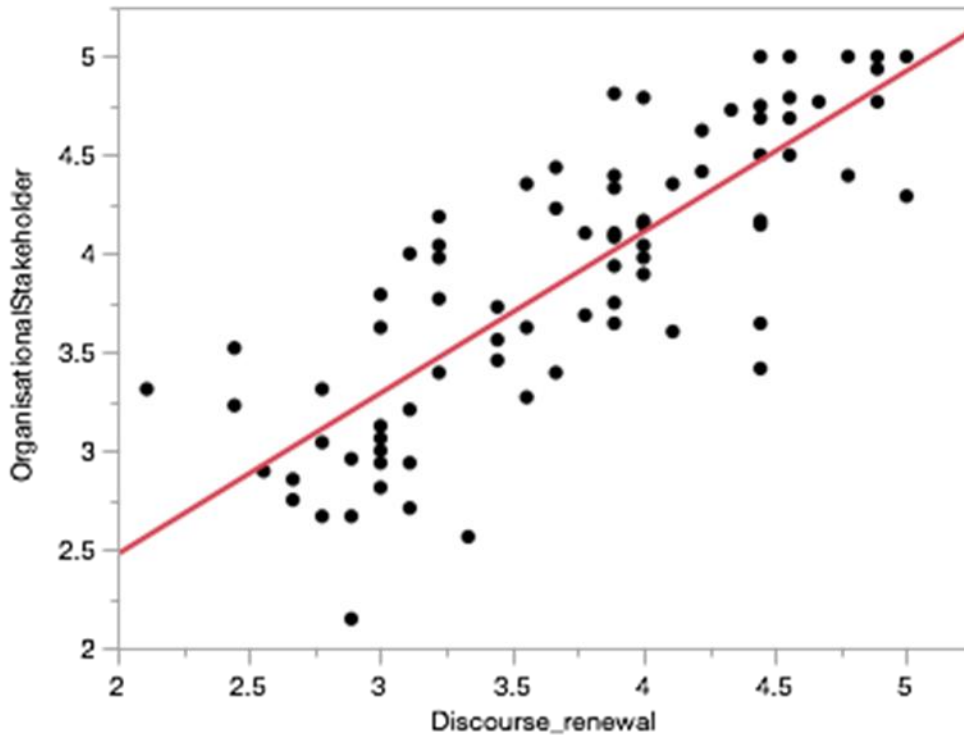
Figure 7.6: Scatterplot for organisation-stakeholder relationship by discourse of renewal

From the above regression analysis, the results show that the relationship between crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal (the independent variables) and organisation-stakeholder relationship (the dependent variable) is statistically significant. However, dialogic communication has the strongest relationship with organisation-stakeholder relationships. This means that, in proposing elements for social-media crisis-communication management to build relationships with stakeholders, public-relations practitioners in Ghana must consider dialogic communication first, as it has the most positive effect on the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Next in terms of statistical significance and variance is the variable discourse of renewal. This also means that public-relations practitioners in Ghana must consider the element of discourse of renewal in their social-media crisis-communication management to build relationships with stakeholders. Although crisis preparedness had the lowest in terms of variance to organisation-stakeholder relationship, it is by no means not significant. Public-relations practitioners must be prepared to deal with crises on social media.

7.9 KEY FINDINGS OF THE PARAMETRIC TESTS ON ORGANISATION-STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP AND CRISIS PREPAREDNESS, DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION AND DISCOURSE OF RENEWAL

This part of the study reports the findings more specific to research question 4, which is stated as: what relationship-management criteria are necessary for effective stakeholder relationships when managing a crisis on social media? As emphasised in Section 7.8, providing conclusions on the research question required determining the strength of the relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal. As a result, correlation-coefficient and regression tests were used to determine the associations or relationships.

The key findings based on research question 4 are presented in the following order:

- Relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and crisis preparedness
- Relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and dialogic communication
- Relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and discourse of renewal.

7.9.1. Relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and crisis preparedness.

In assessing the strength of the relationship between stakeholder relationship and crisis preparedness, a correlation coefficient value and regression were used. First, the correlation coefficient between organisation-stakeholder relationship and crisis preparedness was 0.647 and the p value was 0.000. In terms of the strength of the relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and crisis preparedness, it is strong and the p value is statistically relevant. This means crisis preparedness is important to organisation-stakeholder relationships in social-media crisis communication. This finding confirms the assertion that any attempt to reduce crisis risk must include crisis preparedness (Selart & Johansen 2013:100).

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Also, the organisation's established presence on social media creates a positive perception among stakeholders that the organisation is prepared to provide information, interact and listen to them in times of crisis (Getchell & Sellnow 2016).

Even though the correlation coefficient outcome was positive and indicated that crisis preparedness is an important criterion for the relationship management necessary for the stakeholder relationship, the researcher needed to confirm the level of predictability of crisis preparedness towards the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Thus, a simple regression test was performed to determine the variance in organisation-stakeholder relationship that is explained by crisis preparedness. The 'R Square' value of 0.428596 indicated that 43% of the variability in organisation-stakeholder relationship is explained by crisis preparedness and the p value was <.0001 which essentially means that the relationship is statistically significant. The predictive value of crisis preparedness, though significant, is not strong.

7.9.2. Relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and dialogic communication.

Correlation coefficient and regression tests were conducted to determine the relationship between organisation-stakeholder and dialogic communication. With a correlation coefficient value of 0.872 and a p value of 0.000, the association or relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and dialogic communication is strong and statistically significant. In fact, the dialogic communication correlation coefficient value was the highest among the independent variables. This finding indeed confirms the argument made in 5.2.2 of Chapter 5 that dialogic communication can prove useful for an organisation's crisis-communication strategy if it is geared towards relationship-building between organisations and stakeholders. It also points out that any crisis-communication strategy, especially on social media, that is directed at stakeholders will be pointless if it does not include dialogic communication.

It was necessary to also conduct a simple regression test to find out the predictability of dialogic communication towards the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Conducting this test also helped in gaining insights into how integral dialogic communication is as a criterion

for relationship management with regard to the organisation-stakeholder relationship. With an R Square value of 0.779653 and a *p* value of <.0001, dialogic communication accounted for 77% of the variance in the organisation-stakeholder relationship and the relationship is statistically significant. This means that, of all the independent variables, dialogic communication has the strongest predictive power towards the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Thus, this particular finding in this study can be interpreted to mean that dialogic communication is the most important criterion for relationship management necessary for the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

7.9.3 Relationship between organisation-stakeholder relationship and discourse of renewal.

Determining the relationship between the organisation-stakeholder relationship and the discourse of renewal was necessary. Again, just as was explained in 7.9.1. and 7.9.2, correlation-coefficient and regression tests were done to find out the relationship. The correlation between the organisation-stakeholder relationship and the discourse of renewal was 0.818 and the *p* value was 0.000. This shows that the relationship between the two is strong and positive. In terms of strength, the discourse of renewal is next after dialogic communication with regard to the positive association with the organisation-stakeholder relationship. This outcome highlights the importance of communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value to the organisation-stakeholder relationship after a crisis. Organisations must continue to engage with stakeholders about a crisis in the post-crisis phase.

In order to gain an insight into the predictability of the discourse of renewal towards organisation-stakeholder relationship, a simple regression test was performed. This test enabled the researcher also to know the relevance of discourse of renewal as a criterion for relationship management necessary for the organisation-stakeholder relationship. The test revealed that, with an R Square of 0.669578 and a *p* value of <.0001, discourse of renewal explained 67% of the variance in the organisation-stakeholder relationship. This finding shows

that the predictive power of discourse of renewal towards the organisation-stakeholder relationship is strong and relevant. It also means that, in terms of order of importance, discourse of renewal ranks second to dialogic communication in social-media crisis-communication management. This finding confirms what Xu (2018) said about organisations seeking renewal with stakeholders after a crisis. Xu (2018) points out that, for the organisation to move forward after a crisis and mend its relationship with stakeholders, it must prioritise the needs of stakeholders and align them in ways that are directed towards rebuilding organisation-stakeholder relationships.

7.10 SUMMARY

The findings of the quantitative part of the study were presented and discussed in this chapter. The quantitative data presentation and discussion were by means of descriptive and inferential statistics.

The reports of the findings were presented in the form of frequency, mean, standard deviation and median for descriptive statistics. The inferential statistics data findings were presented by means of normality tests, correlation matrix, ANOVA and scatter plots. The results of the inferential data were focused on the strength of associations and relationships between variables.

For the elements proposed for the conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders, the findings revealed all the items that constitute the elements—fundamentals of crisis preparedness, managing crises on social media with interactions, mending stakeholder relations after a social-media crisis and enhancing stakeholder relationships with social-media crisis communication—were supported and important in the development of a framework. The majority of PR practitioners in Ghana surveyed for this study approve of crisis preparedness. The managing crisis on social media with interactions element also had findings that indicate that the majority of practitioners in Ghana deem dialogic communication as integral to social-media crisis-communication management. Construct items such as collaboration, grounding, empathy, responsiveness,

accessibility, genuineness and transparency constitute important dialogic communication items that can ensure mutually beneficial interactions between organisations and stakeholders. The majority of respondents also reported that communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value are necessary for mending and growing relationships with stakeholders after a crisis. The results also revealed that the majority of respondents were in support of trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction as requirements for social-media crisis communication in order to enhance stakeholder relationships. It is evident from these results that the selection of these elements are justified and suited to the social-media crisis communication framework for building stakeholder relationships.

The inferential findings based on parametric tests conducted to determine relationships between variables and insight into the predictive power or strength of the independent variables towards the dependent variable (organisation-stakeholder relationship) were quite revealing. The correlation coefficients between organisation-stakeholder relationship (dependent variable) and crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal were strong and statistically significant. Furthermore, crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal were all positively correlated and statistically significant. Lastly, in terms of predictive power or strength, the regression findings revealed that dialogic communication has the most relevant predictive power, followed by discourse of renewal and, lastly, crisis preparedness.

In Chapter 8, the findings of the qualitative part of the study and overall findings are presented and discussed.

CHAPTER 8: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS, INTERPRETATION AND OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the findings of the online survey conducted among public-relations practitioners in Ghana were presented and discussed. In this chapter, the findings of the qualitative aspect of this study, which involved the use of semi-structured interviews, are presented and discussed. The qualitative part of the study addresses the following research questions:

Research question 1: In what way is building relationships with stakeholders important for managing crises on social media?

Research question 2: How do public-relations practitioners in Ghana manage crises on social media?

In this chapter, the findings of the interviews conducted with public-relations practitioners are now discussed and interpreted in accordance with emerging themes based on the interview guide in Annexure B. Lastly, the triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative data is also discussed and interpreted in accordance with the proposed elements of the conceptual framework in Section 5.2, Chapter 5.

8.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

In order to answer the above-listed research questions, the researcher interviewed 11 PR practitioners representing 11 organisations which were registered with the Institute of Public Relations (IPR), Ghana in 2020. These practitioners are high-ranking officials in charge of public relations and communication for their organisations. Additionally, these practitioners supervise the social-media accounts of their organisations.

The profiles of the participants are summarised in Table 8.1 below:

Table 8.1: Profiles of participants

Participant	Nature of business	Sector	Position	Number of years at current position	Gender
Participant 1	Financial Services	Private	Head, Public Relations/Communication	5 years	Female
Participant 2	Education	Public	Head, University Relations Office	3 years	Male
Participant 3	Education	Private	Principal Public Relations Officer	2 years	Male
Participant 4	Telecommunications	Private	Head, Public Relations/Communication	4 years	Male
Participant 5	Revenue mobilisation and Tax implementation	Public	Director of Communication and Public Affairs	2 years	Female
Participant 6	Conglomerate but majorly concentrated in the waste management business	Private	Chief Corporate Communications Officer	6 years	Female
Participant 7	Think Tank focused on policy advisory services to African countries	Private	Head, Communication	1 year	Male
Participant 8	Non-governmental organisation focused on water and the environment	Private	Head, Public Relations	1 year	Female
Participant 9	Utilities	Public	Regional Communications Manager	6 years	Female
Participant 10	Non-governmental organisation focused on children welfare	Private	Public Relations Specialist	3 years	Male
Participant 11	Public Relations consultancy services	Private	Senior Consultant	11 years	Female

As evident in Table 8.1, the majority of the participants were females, 6, and 5 males. Of the 11 participants, 8 work in the private sector and 3 in the public sector. All the participants are in senior positions and are the principal heads of public relations and communications departments. Participants work in sectors such as education, telecommunications, financial services, non-government organisations and waste management.

8.3 FINDINGS OF THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

In this section, the results of the semi-structured interviews are now explained in accordance with the interview guide in Annexure B.

First, the themes that emerged out of the findings of the semi-structured interviews with senior PR practitioners are highlighted in Table 8.2. The themes are based on all four proposed elements, namely, crisis preparedness, managing crises on social media with interactions, mending stakeholder relations after a social-media crisis and enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationship with social-media crisis communication.

Table 8.2: Themes that emerged from deductive thematic analysis

Proposed elements	Themes
Fundamentals for crisis preparedness	• Proactiveness; reputation enhancement; reach; trending news; holding statement; sharing of crisis information with stakeholders; social-media crisis communication restriction on employees; real-time engagement; timely dissemination of information; in-depth crisis information; quick and effective response rate; cost-effectiveness; the use of multimedia tools; social media team/officer; social media monitoring; and content management
Managing crisis on social media with interactions	• Implementing the holding statement; real-time interactions; one-way communication approach to social-media communication; direct messaging; constant update on the crisis; timely information dissemination; emotional needs; responsive; truthfulness; social-media live session; constant crisis information update; coordinated crisis team effort towards ensuring communication efficiency; consistent and integrative communication across all social media platforms; integrity; dependability; competence; engagement; accommodating diverse opinions; demonstration of care; expression of apology; legally-approved information; truth; promptness of response; civility on social media when responding to stakeholders; emotional intelligence
Mending stakeholder relations after a social-media crisis	• Positive rhetoric; rallying call; continuous engagement; sincerity; responsible organisation; privilege information; safeguarding organisational reputation; transparency; reputation implications; organisational values are integral to operations; leadership support for crisis communication strategy; leadership in the role of framing of perception
Enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationship with social-media crisis communication.	• Consistency in updates; continuous interaction; disclose information that serves the interest of the organisation and stakeholders; insight into the thinking of stakeholders; enabling the organisation to have an engaging presence; access to the right crisis information; protection of reputation.

8. 3.1 Findings of Section A: fundamentals of crisis preparedness

The aims of section A in the interview guide were to:

● explore the importance of crisis-communication planning;

- describe how social media is used in communicating to stakeholders about a crisis;

- identify the benefits associated with the use of social media in managing a crisis; and

- explore how the social-media presence of participants' organisations is managed.

All these aspects were determined in the literature to be important components of the fundamentals for crisis preparedness on social media.

Table 8.3: Theoretical aspects and topics covered in section A of the interview guide

Section A (Element 1): Fundamentals for crisis preparedness	
Theoretical Aspects	**Topics**
• Crisis communication preparedness • Social-media communication	• Crisis-communication planning • Social-media presence • Using social-media communication in managing a crisis • Benefits of using social media in communicating about a crisis • Management of social-media presence

The researcher used the interview questions to explore in-depth, the theoretical aspects of the proposed element 1 for the conceptual framework.

8.3.1.1. Crisis-communication planning

The results show that, even though a few of the participants indicated that their organisations do not have a crisis-communication plan, all the participants concurred that every organisation must have a crisis-communication plan. The key themes that participants highlighted with regard to the crisis-communication planning topic were *proactiveness* and *reputation enhancement*.

Theme 1: Proactiveness

This theme encompasses all responses that deal with being proactive when it comes to crisis communication in managing a crisis, especially on social media.

Many of the participants pointed out that having a crisis-communication plan places the organisation in a good position to know what to do in a crisis situation.

As one participant said: "I don't think anybody would want a situation where you have a crisis situation and you are going to go the knee-jerk way."

Another participant stated that: "Without the plan then anybody can get up when there is a crisis and say let's do this, let's do that. But once there is a plan it is tactically approached."

A participant also added that: "Planning is so important that it enables you to even anticipate various issues that are likely to degenerate into crisis". It is evidently clear that one key advantage of crisis-communication planning is that it enables the organisation to be proactive. Being proactive can be deemed strategic. As highlighted in Section 3.6.5 in Chapter 3, a strategic approach to crisis communication can help the organisation to reduce the damaging effects of a crisis (Coombs 2015; Bundy, Pfarrer, Short & Coombs 2017).

Theme 2: Reputation enhancement

This theme explains responses given by participants in connection with the relevance of crisis communication readiness in enabling organisations to implement communication actions that seek to project the organisation positively.

All the participants indicated that a crisis-communication plan, if effectively deployed, can enhance the reputation of the organisation. The value of crisis-communication planning to the reputation of the organisation cannot be underestimated. In this regard, a participant commented as follows: "Every organisation that is worthy at all must have a crisis-communication plan which is a standard reputation procedure for managing online reputation."

Another participant pointed out that: "Every crisis situation demands that you think on your feet. When you have a plan, you are thinking on your feet…and not a haphazard way of doing things which at the end of the day will not help you in your brand reputation issues."

A participant stated: "Important to the extent that crisis cannot be handled by one person. It is a collaborative effort and each unit in the organisation has a role to play and most importantly to protect the reputation of the brand."

In Chapter 3 (see Section 3.3.4), the importance of reputation to crisis-communication planning was addressed. It was pointed out that crisis communication must be curated in order to lessen the impact and negative outcomes associated with a crisis (Patashnick 2016:15-16). Crisis communication that is well thought out and planned can keep the organisation's reputation intact and fulfil the expectations of stakeholders.

8.3.1.2. Social-media presence

The key focus of this study is the use of social media for crisis communication. It was thus imperative for the research to establish the use of social media by participants' organisations in managing a crisis. As was discussed in the literature, Chapter 3, Section 3.6.4, social media has transformed the work of public-relations practitioners. Again, it was emphasised in Chapter 3, Section 3.4 that the social media environment has become popular with organisations as it is deemed relevant for the creation and nurturing of dialogic processes. It also supports symmetrical communication opportunities for organisations and their stakeholders (Liu & Kim 2011; Kang & Sundar 2016; Zerfass, Moreno, Tench, Verčič & Verhoeven 2017; Camilleri 2018a; Capriotti, Zeler & Camilleri 2021).

All the participants confirmed that their organisations have active social-media accounts. Even though the survey component of the study did not ask respondents to respond to the most popular social-media platforms for social-media crisis communication, the findings of the interviews indicate that Facebook is the most popular for social-media crisis communication. Twitter is also popular with these organisations. This finding aligns with what was pointed out in the literature (Chapter 3; Section 3.5), that Facebook and Twitter are the platforms that organisations use most for crisis communication (Eriksson & Olsson 2016:4; Einwiller &

Steilen 2015:196; Wright & Hinson 2017). Other platforms used by these organisations for social-media communication are WhatsApp, Telegram and Instagram. In terms of a strategic communication approach to social-media crisis communication argued in Chapter 3, sections 3.5 and 3.6.5 respectively, Ghanaian organisations must critically assess social-media platforms and determine which ones will enable the organisation to achieve social-media crisis communication objectives. Determining specific uses of social-media platforms for social-media crisis communication will prove useful for the strategic communication agenda of the organisation as it will aid in reducing negative stakeholder communication towards the organisation during a crisis (Chewning 2015; Triantafillidou & Yannas 2020).

The key themes pointed out by participants in terms of Facebook and Twitter use for crisis communication are *reach* and *trending news*.

Theme 1: Reach

The reach theme refers to the responses of participants regarding the adoption of social media because stakeholders are able to have widespread access to information through social media.

A number of participants indicated that their organisations use Facebook for crisis communication largely because of its reach potential. That is, more stakeholders can be reached with information through Facebook. One participant stated: "So, yes we have a high presence on social media; as I speak now, we have over 161 000 followers on Facebook".

Another participant said: "Facebook because it is usually the platform that has the largest followership for the organisation."

A participant opined that: "We are able to reach more people on Facebook than maybe on Twitter."

This finding shows that public-relations practitioners interviewed for this study are knowledgeable in the potential of social media, particularly Facebook, in terms of allowing access or reach.

Theme 2: Trending News

This theme covers the responses given by participants on the usefulness of social media in the spread of current information.

The view of other participants is that their organisations use Twitter because of its trending feature. To them, if it is about breaking news, it is on Twitter. Some of the comments made by participants were, "Twitter, because it is very easy for things to trend on Twitter"; "Twitter normally gets more content in terms of the crisis. For example, news breaks on Twitter more than on Facebook"; "When we talk about activity, when you tweet it goes everywhere and it is easy for people to tweet and then retweet the engagement [sic] on Twitter" and; "In our particular case, our activity is seen more on Twitter". This finding confirms that it is appropriate to use Twitter when the objective is to disseminate crisis messages and 'breaking news' to an extensive network of users (Eriksson 2012; Bruns & Burgess 2014; Xu 2020).

8.3.1.3. Using social-media communication in managing a crisis

Participants' views on the use of social-media communication in managing a crisis revolved around three themes, namely, holding statement, sharing of crisis information and social-media crisis communication restriction on employees.

Theme 1: Holding statement

This theme includes the responses of participants in respect of the position of their organisations regarding a crisis situation.

One dominant theme that emerged out of the interviews with participants is the issuance of a holding statement on social-media platforms. Some participants intimated that it is important

that the official position of the organisation is stated so that stakeholders are aware that the organisation knows about the crisis. A participant stated: "So the first thing you put out is the holding statement."

Another participant said: "We inform the customers by posting an announcement that there is an outage [sic]…"

A participant pointed out that: "Our first set of calls will be to put a longer version of a holding statement".

With the holding statement, participants said that it should be the first act the organisation must carry out on social media when there is a crisis. This, according to them, enables the organisation to provide stakeholders with information regarding the crisis. The holding statement approach can enhance the understanding and knowledge of stakeholders about the crisis-management efforts of the organisation (Van den Hurk 2013; Pinter 2018).

Theme 2: Sharing of crisis information with stakeholders

This theme covers the responses of participants on the inclusion of social media in their crisis-communication planning so as to use social media as a channel for distributing information about a crisis.

All the participants stated that it is important that the organisation shares crisis information on social media with stakeholders about the crisis. A participant commented: "We use social media when it involves the general public that we feel [sic] need to be aware".

Another stated: "So we use social media particularly to appeal to all stakeholders in terms of crisis".

A participant also intimated: "We are able to quickly prepare responses and then share it on social media either to educate people, to clarify issues…"; "It is important to share with your social media audience what happened, what are the facts…".

However, some were of the opinion that not all crisis situations call for sharing everything about the crisis with stakeholders. One participant's view was that: "Sometimes it depends. When it is true, we don't go on our platform and say it is true. We reach out to the person personally and see if we can resolve it."

Even though these organisations are interested in sharing crisis information with stakeholders, the monological approach is not supportive of the social media environment, as this approach is not flexible and is static (Al-Youbi, Al-Hayani, Bardesi, Basheri, Lytras & Aljohani 2020).

Theme 3: Social-media crisis communication restriction on employees

This theme includes the responses offered by participants on the need to centralise crisis communication, by restricting some employees from using social media, to communicate or disseminate crisis information that could contradict the organisation's position on the crisis.

It emerged from the interviews with participants that restrictions are placed on employees who are not part of the crisis team not to engage in any crisis communication on social media. This is to prevent situations where some employees will go on social media and defend the organisation. One participant stated: "Sometimes they go on social media to defend the organisation… that is something they need to desist from because, once they start defending, they are actually making the crisis worse." In Chapter 3, Section 3.3.5, the researcher touched on the involvement of employees in crisis communication by pointing out that the opportunities and threats presented by social media can lead employees to rely on social media in interacting and exchanging information on the crisis. This finding is important as it provides a social-media crisis communication perspective that can prove useful in social-media crisis-communication management (Van den Berg & Verhoeven 2017).

8.3.1.4. Social media benefits

Participants elaborated on the benefits gained by their organisations when social media are used in managing a crisis. The key themes gleaned from participants in respect of social media

benefits are real-time engagement, timely dissemination of information, in-depth crisis information, quick and effective response rate, cost-effectiveness and the use of multimedia tools.

Theme 1: Real-time engagement

This theme incorporates the responses of participants concerning the benefit of including social media in the crisis-communication planning of the organisation, as it provides the organisation with instantaneous communication opportunities with stakeholders in times of crisis.

The importance of social media in enabling real-time engagement with stakeholders in times of crisis was a theme many participants identified. To these participants, in crisis periods, the use of social media makes it possible to have real-time engagement with stakeholders. A participant commented: "You realise that during a crisis the engagement levels have gone up and we are also collecting information from people".

Another stated: "You are able to tell the public what's going on."

A participant said: "People are likely to get information on what is happening quickly and so that helps".

This real-time engagement on social media can enable organisations to engage and relate well with stakeholders/online communities and attend to the needs of stakeholders (Burson-Marsteller 2012; Chui et al. 2012; Castriotta et al. 2013; Floreddu et al. 2014; Camilleri 2021).

Theme 2: Timely dissemination of information

This theme includes all responses by participants concerning including social media in their crisis-communication planning, as it is useful for providing stakeholders with crisis information speedily.

All the participants supported the view that social media allow for the timely dissemination of information. One participant stated: "It is a quick way of reaching out to our audiences".

Another said: "The benefit of social media is that we are timely; we are able to quickly engage". A participant also pointed out: "We are able to reach our stakeholders in a particularly short time." It is important that during a crisis organisations are able to disseminate accurate information in a timely manner on social media to stakeholders (Eriksson & Olsson 2016; Wang 2016).

Theme 3: In-depth crisis information

This theme highlights participants' view on the value of having social media in the crisis-communication plan as it allows the organisation to provide detailed information during a crisis.

One theme that participants were enthusiastic about is the ability of social media in creating an opportunity for organisations to provide in-depth information regarding a crisis. Before the advent of social media, the traditional media were the main platforms organisations relied on in providing crisis information. A participant commented: "It has helped us explain ourselves better. Imagine you have to go on radio [sic] to speak."

One participant commented: "It has helped us in drafting messages that are persuasive". Another said: "Social media gives you the opportunity to tell a bit of your story."

Theme 4: Quick and effective response rate

This theme includes responses of participants regarding the advantage of social media in enabling organisations to provide and receive crisis information from stakeholders.

Participants mentioned that in times of crisis social media are a good platform for ensuring quick dissemination of information and also in getting feedback from stakeholders. One participant pointed out that: "Faster in the sense that you own the platform, so you develop quickly [sic] your content and post it." Another participant stated: "Honestly speaking, we have been able to reach people promptly. And very quick." Comments from other participants were: "Feedback comes in all the time about things that you have put there"; "Effective response rate". All these comments give credence to the usefulness of social media in fostering

information exchanges between organisations and stakeholders in a fast-paced manner (Wang 2016; Veil et al. 2011; Smith et al. 2018).

Theme 5: Cost-effectiveness

This theme encapsulates participants' position on having social media in the crisis-communication plans of organisations, as they can help organisations reduce the cost of organisational communication.

All the participants indicated that social media provide an effective way of reducing the cost of managing a crisis situation with communication (Parveen, Jaafar & Ainin 2015). One participant commented: "It is cost-effective".

This view was shared by another participant who also remarked: "It is less expensive compared to traditional media."

Theme 6: The use of multimedia tools

This theme includes the responses of participants on the benefit of social media as a multimedia platform that organisations can use during a crisis.

Participants pointed out that social media provide organisations with multimedia tools that can help in managing crises. One participant stated: "Social media lends itself to things like videos you can use to tell a story and so that is also very helpful." In that sense, it will be approached proactively and the use of multimedia tools will be integrated into the entire communication strategy and deployed on social media for better engagement with stakeholders. Organisations can use such tools to engage with stakeholders and encourage stakeholders to support the organisation in its crisis-management efforts (Camilleri 2021).

8.3.1.5. Social-media platform management

As already emphasised in Chapter 5 (Section 5.2), having a presence on social media is important in the crisis management and strategic communication efforts of organisations. Having someone or a team manage the social-media platforms of an organisation can lead to effective crisis management on social media. Interviews with participants revealed three themes, namely, social-media team/officer, social-media monitoring and content management.

Theme 1: Social-media team/officer

This theme covers the responses of participants with regard to crisis preparedness within the context of a crisis team charged with the responsibility of managing a crisis.

Apart from one participant, participants confirmed to have person(s) in charge of social-media platforms. Some commented thus: "A colleague manages it in-house"; "So we have specialised people who are trained and are tasked to manage social media"; "We have a team, an internal team and we work with an external person as well" and "We have a unit at the Communication Department that deals with our social-media platforms." Having someone in charge of the social-media environment of an organisation is a strategic approach to the social-media management of a crisis. It means that the organisation will have a structured approach in deploying communication strategies through its social-media platforms in order to inform, interact and engage with stakeholders (Hughes & Chauhan 2015; Plotnick, Hiltz, Kushma & Tapia 2015).

Theme 2: Social-media monitoring

The theme embraces the responses of participants in respect of a monitoring strategy for social media as part of their crisis-communication planning.

One other theme participants talked about is social-media monitoring as an important component of social-media platform management. A participant stated, "We monitor

comments, trends, the activities of our followers and stakeholders." Another participant commented, "Ok, we do have a full-time staff whose eyes are always on the various platforms." Monitoring is a strategic function that can enable organisations to access large amounts of information regarding the thoughts, feedback and behaviour of stakeholders in a timely manner (Murray et al. 2010; Chen et al. 2012; Hong & Kim 2019). As pointed out in Chapter 3, Section 3.5.1), such an approach to social media management will enable the organisation to be more targeted in its crisis messaging towards stakeholders (Mahon & Mitnick's 2010; Graham, Avery & Park 2013; Nisar, Prabhakar & Strakova 2019).

Theme 3: Content management

This theme encompasses the comments of participants on the need to have social media content management in the crisis-communication plan, as such crisis preparedness will help the organisation in managing crisis communication effectively.

Participants also raised the issue of content management of their social-media platforms. Most of the participants explained that content management is a critical part of the crisis-management process. One of the participants commented: "Social media content should be managed by a communication person who understands the full range of communication activities."

One participant remarked: "The manager is the one who looks at all information picked for the day and then does his recommendations and presents them to me".

A participant also stated: "We filter comments, certain words we would not want people to use on our platforms, we filter those ones."

These approaches to content management, as pointed out by participants, show that organisations must not only have someone who oversees their platforms, but competent and experienced employees who must handle the communication task effectively. This crisis preparation activity can help the organisation reduce the effects of rumours peddled on social media (Crook et al. 2016).

The aforementioned topics that highlight crisis preparedness are necessary for the pre-crisis phase of crisis communication on social-media planning. The organisation must have a plan, understand the use of social media for crisis-communication management, social-media benefits, the advantages inherent in specific social-media platforms, team, and competence in monitoring and content management.

In the next section, a discussion on managing crises on social media with interactions is discussed.

8.3.2. Findings of Section B: Managing crises on social media with interactions

The aim of Section B in the interview guide was to gather insights from participants in respect of the following:

- social-media interaction with stakeholders during a crisis;

- issues stakeholders regard as important when organisations interact with them about a crisis;

- using social media to communicate the organisation's ability to meet stakeholder expectation;

- the role of trust when interacting on social media with stakeholders during a crisis;

- exchanging of ideas and collaborating on social media with stakeholders during a crisis;

- responding to stakeholder comments on social media during a crisis;

- using social media to express empathy to stakeholders during a crisis;

- transparency when interacting with stakeholders on social media during a crisis;

- being genuine with stakeholders on social media during a crisis;

- responsiveness to concerns of stakeholders expressed on social media during a crisis; and

- ensuring that the organisation is not perceived as authoritative in dealing with the views of stakeholders. Table 8.4 below outlines the theoretical aspects and topics covered in Section B of the interview guide.

Table 8.4: Theoretical aspects and topics covered in Section B of the interview guide

Section B (Element 2): **Managing crisis on social media with interactions**	
Theoretical Aspect	**Topics**
• Dialogic communication	• Social-media interaction with stakeholders during a crisis. • Issues stakeholders regard as important when organisations interact with them about a crisis. • Using social media to communicate the organisation's ability to meet stakeholder expectations. • The role of trust when interacting on social media with stakeholders during a crisis. • Exchanging of ideas and collaborating on social media with stakeholders during the crisis. • Responding to stakeholder comments on social media during a crisis. • Using social media to express empathy to stakeholders during a crisis. • Transparency when interacting with stakeholders on social media during a crisis. • Being genuine with stakeholders on social media during a crisis. • Responsiveness to concerns of stakeholders expressed on social media during a crisis. • Ensuring that the organisation is not perceived as authoritative in dealing views of stakeholders.

The key theoretical aspect of dialogic communication, which was explored in the online survey, was also explored in the interviews. In this part of the research, the key focus was to gather insight into how participants used social media in interacting with stakeholders during a crisis.

8.3.2.1. Social-media interaction with stakeholder during a crisis

The participants provided various perspectives on how their organisations interact on social media with stakeholders during a crisis. The key themes identified in the interviews with participants were implementing the holding statement, real-time interaction, a one-way

communication approach to social-media communication, direct messaging and constant update on the crisis.

Theme 1: Implementing the holding statement

This theme includes all the responses of participants regarding the issuance of a brief statement that summarises the occurrence and general background of the crisis. It signifies the commitment of the organisation to cooperate and conduct its communication to stakeholders in a climate of openness (IAAPA 2012; Pinter 2018).

In Section 8.3.1.3, the participants referred to using a holding statement in managing communication on social media during a crisis. Similarly, many participants pointed out that they use a holding statement in the first instance when a crisis hits. According to one participant: "We first and foremost use social media to communicate our side of the issues to stakeholders."

Another participant intimated: "We put out a holding statement on all our social media platforms".

Regarding the use of a holding statement, the position of many participants was that it enables the organisation to let stakeholders know what is happening and what it is doing to deal with the crisis. In a sense, this approach can assure stakeholders that the organisation is at work in dealing with a crisis and improve the understanding of the stakeholders concerning the crisis (Van den Hurk 2013; Pinter 2018).

Theme 2: Real-time interactions

This theme contains all the responses of participants with regard to social media allowing access for real-time interactions with stakeholders during a crisis.

Some participants are interested in real-time interactions. However, they will only interact on social media based on the crisis situation. One participant said: "For us to interact on social media during a crisis will depend on the crisis situation and the comments of stakeholders. If

the comment demands an interaction, we interact to clarify. If the comments are political statements and insinuations, we ignore them."

Another participant stated: "If people are asking questions we will respond to the questions." Stakeholders expect organisations to communicate and engage with them to provide real-time updates as crisis events unfold (Shahid & Elbanna 2015; Roshan et al. 2016; Potter 2016). Thus, for some of the participants to state that they engage in real-time interaction with stakeholders is positive for social-media crisis-communication management.

Theme 3: One-way communication approach to social-media communication

This theme comprises the responses of participants on the issue of using social media for crisis communication in a one-way approach.

One interesting theme spoken about by a few of the participants is the use of a one-way communication approach to social-media communication during a crisis. This approach, according to these participants, is used by their organisations in order to control the crisis communication narrative. These participants passed comments such as, "We do not allow much interactions with our stakeholders. We just communicate our position"; "We use social media to state our position and we direct them to a coded line where they can get feedback to issues raised with the organisation"; and "we don't allow them to have a live feed communication when there is a crisis". Even though this approach could in a way enable such organisations to control communication with stakeholders (Go & You 2016), it can also work against the strengthening of the organisation-stakeholder relationship because organisations will miss the opportunity to engage with stakeholders (Pang et al. 2018).

Theme 4: Direct messaging

This theme dealt with the responses of participants with respect to personal communication by the organisation with specific individuals who raise issues on the social-media platforms of these organisations regarding a crisis event. This is done to protect the reputation of the

organisation. According to a participant: "So, what we do is that usually if it is a closed (e.g. WhatsApp) platform we will have a personal conversation with those agitating on the platform. The idea is to avoid any form of banter between the institution and those agitating." One other participant stated: "Taking the discussion offline is also important, although it is happening on social media. So, it is getting [sic] in touch with the person offline is important." As some stakeholders have influence and can get the support of other stakeholders to aggravate the crisis situation, this direct messaging approach can be strategic if it is done in an honest manner to meet the expectations of stakeholders. Kent and Taylor (2016) support this position by stating that sometimes organisations need to interact with some stakeholders on a one-to-one basis and the dialogic approach will also mean that organisations respond to comments from stakeholders privately.

Theme 5: Constant update on the crisis

This theme includes responses by participants concerning using social media in providing crisis updates to stakeholders.

Many participants agreed that providing constant crisis updates to stakeholders can be positive for social-media interactions with stakeholders. One participant stated: "On social media people would ask questions. You don't have to respond to every little thing but any major concern you would have to address."

Another participant further stressed: "We also give them information about the status of work. We give them update".

In the words of one participant: "We use social media to explain further especially [sic] to give more depth to whatever the issues are being raised".

By updating stakeholders about the crisis, organisations will be seen as proactive and improve the understanding of stakeholders regarding the crisis (Roshan, Warren & Carr 2016).

8.3.2.2. Actions stakeholders consider important when interacting on social media with the organisation during a crisis

In this part of the study, the researcher sought to know from participants, organisation-led actions, stakeholders consider important when the organisation is interacting on social media with them during a crisis. The dominant themes that emerged were timely information dissemination, emotional needs, responsiveness and truthfulness.

Theme 1: Timely information dissemination

This theme encompasses participants' responses to the ability of social media in facilitating the timely dissemination of information.

Many participants emphasised that timely dissemination of information is of prime importance to stakeholders. One participant stated: "Timely information because, if you don't, you leave room for speculation."

Another participant intimated: "We share some information and people start commenting. It tells you the feeling and how people think about what you put on your platform."

A participant also said: "Stakeholders most of the time want information."

The participants also mentioned that by disseminating information in a timely manner, the organisation can set the agenda for others to follow. This outcome was expected as pointed out in the literature, as discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.4) and emphasised by Wang (2016), Roshan et al. (2016) and Lovari and Bowen (2020).

Theme 2: Emotional needs

Crisis situations can lead to uncertainties and stakeholders expect the organisation to provide some support. According to a participant: "We communicate with a lot of sensitivity so that their emotions, their issues and the thing they consider as a source of worry to them concerning the unfolding crisis, could be calmed down." This finding is supported in the literature (Chapter 3, Section 3.3.3.1.2), as stakeholders expect the organisation to address their emotional needs (Holladay 2009; Coombs 2015:142).

Theme 3: Responsive

This theme includes all responses of participants with regard to social media enabling the organisation to provide responses to stakeholders during a crisis.

A number of participants mentioned that stakeholders expect the organisation to provide responses and feedback regarding a crisis. One participant commented: "I think it is responsiveness and relevant content".

Another participant pointed out that: "They need to see us as very responsive to them". Being responsive to stakeholders on social media can enable the organisation to establish continuous dialogue with stakeholders during a crisis (Lovejoy et al. 2012; Lin et al. 2016).

Theme 4: Truthfulness

This theme refers to the responses of participants regarding interacting with stakeholders truthfully on social media during a crisis.

All participants agreed that stakeholders expect honest and truthful information about the crisis from the organisation. One participant said: "You must be honest with your stakeholders in a crisis situation."

Another participant stated: "Consumers prefer the truth".

Other comments from the participants included: "Nobody wants to feel they are being lied to. It is important to tell them the truth" and "Really truthfulness is the information that we give them".

In spite of this stance of the participants regarding truthfulness, other participants in the same vein said that the issue of truth is dicey. A participant commented: "truth can be said in many ways".

One participant stated: "I think that in our job the issue of truth is rather the fact. Truth can only be proven in court but fact is fact." It can be inferred from these statements that the participants have different views about truth. To them, the focus should be factual information and not

truth. Genuine and truthful interaction with stakeholders is good for the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Kent & Taylor 2016).

8.3.2.3. How social media is used in communicating the organisation's ability to meet stakeholder expectations

One of the key topical issues this study focused on is how participants manage communication on social media during a crisis. As a result, the researcher set out to know from participants how they use social media in communicating their organisation's ability in meeting stakeholder expectations. Participants pointed to the following themes as central to meeting stakeholder expectations: using infographics to present key crisis information, social-media live session, constant crisis information update, coordinated crisis team effort towards ensuring communication efficiency and consistent and integrative communication across all social-media platforms.

Some participants affirmed strongly the usefulness of infographics in highlighting crisis information. One participant said that: "We do a quick infographic with the key highlights and share". The participant, however, added that the use of infographics will have an impact if the organisation in its pre-crisis planning had it as part of the crisis-communication strategy. However, the use of infographics does not work well on all social-media platforms. Instagram is thought of as the most effective social-media platform for the use of infographics as it is essentially an image-based platform (Guidry, Jin, Orr, Messner & Meganck 2017:484; Malik, Khan, Quan-Haase 2021:7). This means that practitioners must ensure that all social-media platforms are considered in crisis-information dissemination to stakeholders.

Theme 2: Social media live video sessions

This theme embraces the responses of participants on the use of live video sessions as a means of engagement with stakeholders. The use of social-media live sessions during a crisis was mentioned by a participant. The participant opined: "A Facebook live session is the way

to go. The reason is that you can explain yourself at length, you can answer all questions satisfactorily." The participant added further that social-media live sessions should be done at intervals that are appropriate. It must be stated, however, that this should be done with caution and must have been planned at the pre-crisis stage. It is like the traditional media version of a press conference. Social media interactive features such as live video sessions provide organisations with the opportunity of drawing significant involvement from stakeholders (Hagen, Scharf, Neely & Keller 2018).

Theme 3: Constant crisis information update

This theme comprises the responses of participants on providing stakeholders information about the crisis constantly on social media.

Many participants commented that, during the crisis, they make sure that stakeholders are provided regular updates on social media regarding the crisis. Some comments from participants were: "Give information as frequently as possible when we think that there should be some communication. If you leave a vacuum, it might create challenges"; and "Telling stakeholders the status of what you are doing to resolve the issue. So constant flow of information and intermittent updates is important." According to a participant, when you are also constantly updating your stakeholders, you are also allaying the fears of your stakeholders. Stakeholders expect information during a crisis and it is positive that these participants are conscious of providing constant updates to stakeholders and this orientation can enhance the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Maresh-Fuehrer & Smith 2016).

Theme 4: Coordinated crisis team effort towards ensuring communication efficiency

This theme embraces the responses of participants concerning the importance of a team-work approach in ensuring the efficient management of crisis communication on social media.

Though most of the participants stated that they have a team/person in charge of their social-media platforms, the point about other key company persons providing support in the crisis communication effort on social media was emphasised. One participant remarked: "The

organisation is expected not to leave the crisis communication on the social media manager. The team must get together and determine who is supporting with which [sic] information and discussing [sic] with the team what kind of information should go out."

Another participant said: "If you attempt to do it alone you will be in trouble and so getting that team together to feed you information is very important."

Basically, the crux of this position is that crisis situations can be overwhelming for one individual managing all communication concerns on social media. The crisis team must be the first and only official mouthpiece of the organisation regarding the crisis (Moerschell & Novak 2020).

Theme 5: Consistent and integrative communication across all social-media platforms
This theme includes responses of participants concerning effective crisis-communication management on social media by ensuring that the organisation's communication is consistent and integrated across social-media platforms.

The point has been made about the need for organisations to use multiple platforms to communicate during a crisis. It is also important that the organisation is consistent with its crisis communication across all platforms. In the words of one participant: "Be consistent in your communication. Don't say one thing on Twitter and say another thing on Facebook. Yes, the audiences are different, but the messaging should be consistent." This is important to prevent situations where some stakeholders will refer to the organisation for providing different messages regarding the crisis on different platforms. This is because, in crisis situations, both the crisis-management efforts and communication of the organisation is up for scrutiny and assessment. Consistency across all social-media platforms is necessary (Malecki, Keating & Safdar 2021).

8.3.2.4. The role of trust when interacting on social media with stakeholders during a crisis

Most participants commented that trust between the organisation and stakeholders must already be in place before the crisis hits. Trust was discussed around the themes of integrity, dependability and competence. All participants agreed that trust is critical to effectively using social media in managing a crisis. That is why it is imperative that organisations have active social-media platforms that they use in regularly interacting with stakeholders and updating them with information about the products, services and activities of the organisation. When the organisation is trustworthy in the management of a crisis, then the organisation-stakeholder relationship can be strengthened.

Theme 1: Integrity

This theme embraces the responses of participants on the issue of the organisation demonstrating through its interaction on social media with stakeholders that it is honest.

Almost all the participants said that integrity must already exist and be practised and demonstrated by the organisation in its dealings with stakeholders. One participant opined that: "You must have done it over time and so people know when they turn to you it is right."

Another participant stated: "Integrity begins from the kind of reputation you build over time. Of course, a good reputation doesn't just come on social media. It's not just about what you put on social media but it is also about what you operationalise on the ground." It is quite clear that prior to a crisis situation, the demonstration of integrity must be seen in how the organisation handles its affairs and treats its stakeholders. According to a participant, in the event of a crisis, the organisation can then refer to instances where it exhibited integrity in the past and state on social media that the crisis situation is an unfortunate situation. There is a possibility that some stakeholders will appreciate the stance of the organisation in such a situation. It is important that the organisation is seen by stakeholders as honest, particularly when interacting on social media with stakeholders (Clementson & Page 2021).

Theme 2: Dependability

This theme refers to the responses of participants with regard to the organisation showing proof that it can be relied upon to take decisions in the interests of both the organisation and stakeholders.

A core component of trust is dependability. Again, according to participants, the organisation should already have demonstrated to stakeholders that it is dependable. In respect of social-media crisis communication, a participant commented: "You can invite other customers who have given testimonials regarding your dependability. You can reference how you adhere to regulatory issues. Let the regulator also put in a word for you." Prior to the crisis, the organisation should have been responding to stakeholders regarding its relationship with them. This will make it easier for the organisation to be seen as dependable when it is reacting on social media to stakeholder comments when there is a crisis. One participant articulated that: "When people have been sharing or commenting on social media and you don't mind them, there is no interactivity. If you have not built that dependability with your stakeholders and so when there is a crisis and you come back it is difficult for them to connect with you." Organisations must take a serious note of building dependability in their operations and communication. For example, the use of social media to respond to the concerns of stakeholders will make the organisation understand the needs of stakeholders, and this can improve how stakeholders perceive the organisation (Xu & Saxton 2019).

Theme 3: Competence

Competence refers to the responses of participants concerning the ability of the organisation in managing a crisis situation.

Participants similarly said that competence must not only be demonstrated on social media during a crisis. The organisation should have before a crisis situation shown competence in its activities. Some comments made by participants were: "Competence begins before social media. If you are good at what you are doing in your business and it spills over onto social

media, then when there is a crisis on social media you are still going to use that competence perception people have about you to deal with the crisis"; and "You can fall back on your past history in the way you handled the crisis situation. Being truthful will be very important in demonstrating your competence." By demonstrating competence in its handling of the crisis, the organisation can reduce the negative perceptions of stakeholders and can regain credibility (Lee, Hutton & Shu 2015). In furtherance of trust, the organisation must properly curate its messages, particularly holding statements. In the words of a participant: "We have designed a special style of communicating our information. We don't just channel raw information on social media. It is packaged and so anybody who sees that knows that it is coming from us."

8.3.2.5. Exchanging of ideas and collaborating on social media with stakeholders during the crisis

It was emphasised in the literature (Chapter 3; Section 3.6.5) that the deployment of social media in the management of crisis communication must be strategic and must have a dialogic communication focus. Participants provided interesting insights on how ideas about the crisis expressed on social media by stakeholders are handled. In strategic terms, social media can be used in crisis times to support collaborative and participatory activities between organisations and stakeholders (Wendling et al. 2013; Du Plessis 2018). The key themes that emerged were engagement and accommodating diverse opinions.

Theme 1: Engagement

This theme comprises responses given by participants concerning the importance of engagement with stakeholders during a crisis.

Most of the participants mentioned engagement as key to dialogic communication with stakeholders. To these participants, stakeholders must not feel that the communication is one-way and you should expect them to take everything from you as the truth. Some of the

comments were: "Engaging with them is the best way to go. They need to feel that they are being heard. They can even come to a certain plan with you on how to proceed forward" and "We engage with stakeholders and even in situations where there is no crisis, we have people coming to us and giving us solutions all the time" and "We are welcoming of suggestions. It doesn't mean that we have taken everything on board" and "Exchanging ideas with them have [sic] improved how we do things." These remarks show that, when the organisation opens up to engage with stakeholders, the crisis-communication management process can be improved. The focus on open, engaging and reciprocal communication can be valuable to the organisation-stakeholder relationship and enhance the reputation of the organisation (Husain et al. 2014; Yang, Kang & Cha 2015; Ghazinejad et al. 2018).

Theme 2: Accommodating diverse opinions

The theme encompasses the views participants expressed about allowing and creating an avenue for stakeholders to express their views regarding the crisis.

As stakeholders are becoming empowered on social media, accommodating the different opinions of stakeholders expressed on social media about the crisis is necessary for enhancing the organisation-stakeholder relationship. One participant said: "Now in the event of a crisis, it is important for the organisation to open up more to stakeholders."

Another stated: "You need to open up so things like deleting people's comments must not happen. It has a repulsive effect on people. If you are sharing your story and other people are commenting, it is not up to you to delete the comments."

A participant also added: "Sometimes crises may happen that you have not handled before and so you may not have the background knowledge. Someone may have it so diverse opinions are always welcome." Social-media platforms have enabled stakeholders to produce and contribute to the decision-making processes of organisations (Pang et al. 2018:69). Therefore, the social media audience collectively can use social media to influence an

organisation. The interest of the organisation should be in how these diverse opinions benefit both the organisation and stakeholders.

8.3.2.6. Using social media to express empathy to stakeholders during a crisis

When organisations show empathy in their interactions with stakeholders during a crisis, the organisation-stakeholder relationship can be positively influenced (Kim & Cameron 2011; Claeys et al. 2013; Schoofs et al. 2019). All the participants agreed that expressing empathy on social media in crisis times is a common feature in their interactions with stakeholders. The following themes emerged from the interviews with participants, namely, demonstration of care and expression of apology.

Theme 1: Demonstration of care

This theme includes all the responses of participants regarding empathy towards stakeholders during a crisis.

Some participants expressed the view that, in crisis times, when the organisation demonstrates care towards the predicament of stakeholders, it yields positive outcomes for the organisation. One participant pointed out that: "People like you when they feel like you care about them and then you post things that they care about." Some other comments from participants were: "Even when we know that sometimes their feeling is misplaced, we still make sure that we do not sound abusive but rather we empathise with them" and "Empathy can be a trump card to win back your customers." There are customers out there who want you to show that you care. A commitment to dialogic communication on social media by organisations can strengthen the organisation-stakeholder relationship as both the organisation and stakeholders make meaning of the crisis, understand the need to empathise and sympathise (Taylor & Kent 2014:389).

Theme 2: Expression of apology

This theme includes the views of participants regarding demonstrating empathy towards stakeholders during a crisis.

The subject of apology was approached with caution by some participants. In the words of a participant: "We do apologise if there is the need for an apology because it is not all the issues that require an apology."

Another participant commented: "If you are not careful, apologising might be seen as admittance." It must be pointed out that any decision on the expression of apology by the organisation must be assessed against the likely communication behaviour of stakeholders (Schoofs, Fannes & Claeys 2022).

8.3.2.7. Being transparent when interacting with stakeholders on social media during a crisis

One thing that can damage the reputation of an organisation is hiding crisis information from stakeholders (Cheung & Leung 2016). All participants agreed that providing stakeholders crisis information on social media is necessary. The key theme that most of the participants touched on is legally approved information.

Theme 1: Legally approved information

This theme encompasses the responses given by participants regarding the aspect of transparency on social media during a crisis.

Though participants indicated the value of transparent crisis communication for the organisation-stakeholder relationship, they raised the point that their organisation is careful when providing such information. According to them, any crisis information provided to stakeholders must be legally approved.

One participant stated: "So we share information that we are legally allowed to share." Another avowed: "Before we release any information on media platforms, our legal department goes

through before we release it. This is because of prior experience where some stakeholders took us to court for information credited to my organisation."

These organisations take legal precautions largely because of legal suits that can be instituted by some stakeholders. It is important that organisations have a view of the legal obligations and legal entanglements (Holland et al. 2021). However, being transparent in crisis situations must be the goal of organisations, since it is in the strategic interest of the organisation, since it can position the organisation as credible and interested in the well-being of stakeholders (Holland et al. 2021).

8.3.2.8. Being genuine with stakeholders on social media during a crisis

Making believable information available to stakeholders during a crisis is a persuasive way for the organisation to win the trust of stakeholders (Lin et al. 2016). Some participants opined that a genuine interaction with stakeholders is important. The dominant theme participants spoke about is truth.

Theme 1: Truth

This theme encompasses all responses in connection with the element of genuineness on social media during a crisis.

Participants who expressed their opinion on this theme stated that social media has made it possible for stakeholders to have access to information through other sources. Thus, hiding the truth from them can be detrimental to the organisation. Some comments made by participants were: "So for us, if it is not something we can back up with facts, we do not say release it" and "Yes, it is important to be truthful because it helps. You gain your stakeholders' understanding of what the issues really are." Even though they admitted that truth is necessary, just like some of the opinions expressed on transparency, a participant said that

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reference must be made to the law, rules and regulations governing the organisation's operations. In this regard, Lee (2020) argues that providing stakeholders with honest and truthful information about a crisis is good for an organisation's reputation.

8.3.2.9. Responsiveness to concerns of stakeholders expressed on social media during a crisis

The successful management of a crisis also depends on how successfully the organisation responds to stakeholders (Arvidsson & Holmstrom 2013; Marsen 2020). The question of providing responses on social media to stakeholders during a crisis is fundamental to the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Many participants indicated that they respond to the concerns of stakeholders expressed on social media when it is deemed necessary. Two key themes identified in the responses of participants were promptness of response and civility on social media when responding to stakeholders.

Theme 1: Promptness of response

This theme includes all responses on the element of responsiveness when organisations interact with stakeholders on social media during a crisis.

Participants opined that their organisation is prompt when responding on social media to stakeholders during a crisis. However, participants added that it is important to have facts connected to a crisis ready before responding. Some of the comments passed by participants were: "We respond promptly" and "When something happens there is a tendency to rush and give responses but it is irrational to do that. Get all the facts" and "We are responsive inasmuch as people post questions and they demand certain answers". Responding to the crisis concerns of stakeholders expressed on social media means that interaction is taking place between the organisation and stakeholders. But as pointed out by some participants, the pertinent crisis facts must be ready before any responses are provided to stakeholders. If the

responses from the organisation are not factual, the management of the crisis situation might worsen and this can impact negatively the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Largely, the response must be satisfying to stakeholders (Einwiller & Steilen 2015).

Theme 2: Civility on social media when responding to stakeholders

This theme encompasses responses to the element of responsiveness on social media by organisations to stakeholders' concern about a crisis.

The organisation must pay close attention to the nature of responses it gives to stakeholders. It must guard against being sentimental. Some participants stated that it is in the interest of the organisation to be civil when responding to stakeholders' concerns expressed on social media.

One participant mentioned that: "Our response is always measured reading in between the lines the tone of the person who made the post."

Another stated: "When we respond we try to be very civil on social media."

Even though comments made on social-media platforms by stakeholders can have a harsh tone, organisations must, for the sake of reputation and organisation-stakeholder relationship, be civil. The organisation must seek to use social media in providing responses deemed satisfying by stakeholders (Einwiller & Steilen 2015).

8.3.2.10. Ensuring that the organisation is not perceived as authoritative in dealing with the views of stakeholders

A crisis can be challenging to many organisations and it can affect the way they communicate with stakeholders. Participants indicated that they pay attention to how their interactions with stakeholders are interpreted by stakeholders. Most of the participants indicated that they are very careful in how they interact on social media with stakeholders when there is a crisis.

Emotional intelligence was mentioned by participants as critical in helping the organisation not to be perceived as authoritative and arrogant.

Theme 1: Emotional intelligence

This theme encompasses all responses pertaining to equality when organisations are interacting on social media with stakeholders during a crisis.

As a crisis can create a tension between the organisation and stakeholders, participants opined that the organisation must show maturity in how it expresses itself on social media during a crisis.

One participant stated: "You must show maturity and emotional intelligence. If you are not careful, you might want to speak your mind and be all over the place."

Another participant said: "We won't come at the person with a tone of arrogance. It would not be back and forth between us and somebody on social media."

On the contrary a participant stated that some instances demand that the organisation must be authoritative. According to this participant: "There are instances where we have taken that posture. We took that posture when we realised that it was absolutely necessary to do so."

It must be said that, while a crisis can be dire, the organisation must apply tact and maturity on social media when engaging with stakeholders. The organisation must keep its sanity in ensuring that the organisation-stakeholder relationship is enhanced and guard against being perceived as arrogant in its communication with stakeholders in times of crisis (Garcia 2017).

The discussion on managing crises on social media with interactions provides clarity on the use of social media during crises to interact with stakeholders. The relevance of interaction, collaboration, empathy, and transparency, among others, to stakeholders from the organisation's standpoint has been highlighted in-depth.

The next section considers mending relationships with stakeholders after a social-media crisis.

8.3.3. Findings of Section C: Mending relationships with stakeholders after a social-media crisis

Having investigated the crisis preparedness and the use of social media in interacting with stakeholders during a crisis in Sections A and B of the interview guide respectively, this section now explores how social media are used to mend relationships with stakeholders after a crisis. The purpose was to obtain insights from the participants on the following:

- using social media to repair relationships with stakeholders after a crisis;

- using social media to share information with stakeholders on why the crisis happened;

- sharing information to stakeholders on lessons learnt from the crisis and how it improves relationships with stakeholders;

- embracing crisis failure as a learning opportunity and sharing it on social media;

- using organisational values to support relationships with stakeholders in spite of the crisis; and

- leadership involvement in crisis communication on social media.

Table 8.5 below presents the theoretical aspects and topics in section C of the interview guide.

Table 8.5: Theoretical aspects and topics in Section C of the interview guide

Section C (Element 3): **Mending relationships with stakeholders after a social-media crisis**	
Theoretical Aspect	**Topics**
• Discourse of renewal	• Using social media to repair relationship with stakeholders after a crisis • Using social media to share information with stakeholders on why the crisis happened • Sharing information to stakeholders on lessons learnt from the crisis and how it improves relationship with stakeholders • Embracing crisis failure as a learning opportunity and sharing it on social media • Using organisational values to support relationship with stakeholders in spite of the crisis • Leadership involvement in crisis communication on social media

While the discourse of renewal theory was explored in the online survey, there was the need to explore further by conducting interviews in order to have a holistic view of the proposed element in question.

8.3.3.1. Using social media to repair relationships with stakeholders after a crisis

In Chapter 4 (see Section 4.41.), the researcher emphasised the importance of organisations, stricken with a crisis, leveraging on the crisis to create renewal, growth and new opportunities with stakeholders after the crisis (Sellnow & Seeger 2013:96; Narverud 2016:13; Xu 2018:109). The literature on crisis communication engagement advocates the need for organisation-stakeholder engagement even after the crisis. The organisation should be interested in mending its relationship with stakeholders. The participants provided useful details on how their organisations use social media to repair the relationship with stakeholders after a crisis. All the participants agreed that the interaction taking place between the organisation and stakeholders on social media must continue at the post-crisis phase. The dominant themes highlighted by participants were positive rhetoric, rallying call and continuous engagement.

Theme 1: Positive rhetoric

This theme encompasses the responses of participants on the element of a prospective vision approach of organisations in shaping the reality of stakeholders to have a prospective vision about the organisation.

The participants provided interesting insights on positive rhetoric used on social media to repair relationships with stakeholders after a crisis.

One participant stated: "After the crisis, we go back to assure all our stakeholders the lessons learnt from the crisis – the operational, procedural things we have put in place to make sure that such occurrence does not occur."

Other comments participants made were: "We apologise. Give more information as much as possible" and "I mean we thank them for the patience they have had even though we know they were not patient. They insulted us. We still thank them for having the patience with us and assure them of our continuous services" and "After the crisis, we tell them measures put in place to ensure that whatever has happened will not happen again."

From these statements, participants are committed in seeing that the relationship between the organisation and stakeholders is mended. The organisation's communication on social media must be thoughtful and sincere. The interaction on social media with stakeholders must be unbiased (Ulmer et al. 2019).

Theme 2: Rallying call

This theme emerged out of the discussion on renewing the organisation-stakeholder relationship after a crisis.

Some of the participants mentioned that they appeal to stakeholders to support the organisation.

A participant stated: "We talk more about the work we do, the impact and how collaboration with stakeholders has been an important part of what we do."

Another participant intimated: "After the crisis, we use our loyal customers who can vouch for our organisation. We use the industry regulator to make comments about the organisation. We tag our partners so that people will see that these partners are dealing with us."

A rallying call to stakeholders to support and collaborate with the organisation can augur well for the organisation and provide the organisation with a prospective stance for the future. As highlighted in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.4.2), a prospective stance refers to an optimistic stance for the future which can encourage stakeholders to contribute towards the rebuilding of the organisation.

Theme 3: Continuous engagement

This theme includes the responses of participants concerning the element of prospective vision and highlights the need to involve stakeholders in the social-media crisis communication process for the purpose of rebuilding after a crisis.

Some of the participants pointed to a continuous engagement on social media with stakeholders to mend the relationship after the crisis. Some of the comments participants made were: "You need to become even more interactive, share current stories of things that

you are doing. Telling your story is where the empathy will come from your social media followers" and "Checking up on consumers to give feedback on time. Empathise by apologising when the issue has been resolved."

It is important that the organisation approaches post-crisis communication on social media seriously with a view to communicating in ways that will mend and rebuild the relationship with stakeholders. The organisation's approach to using social media to communicate after the crisis must seek to inspire and motivate stakeholders (Mazer et al. 2017).

8.3.3.2. Using social media to share information with stakeholders on why the crisis happened

A number of participants stated that, after the crisis, their organisation provides information on social media to stakeholders regarding the reason for the crisis. One participant, on the contrary, said that his organisation does not share information on social media to stakeholders. *Sincerity* was the theme identified as informing participants to share information.

Theme 1: Sincerity

Theme 1 includes the discussions that surround the element of communication efficiency and how, by engaging in provisional communication, the organisation can repair the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

In order to allow stakeholders to appreciate the organisation's efforts in mending the relationship, the participants who stated that they shared information on social media after the crisis pointed to sincerity as the motivation.

One participant indicated that the use of infographics helps the organisation to engage with stakeholders regarding the reason for the crisis. Another mentioned that information shared with stakeholders is provided in the form of "short posts, fliers and sometimes live videos".

By using these means to share information on why the crisis happened, the organisation is able to demonstrate that it is sincere about the needs of stakeholders.

One participant summed up this view by stating that: "Being very clear about the crisis is very important. It is important to put out the truth as it is. Tell stakeholders actions taken to deal with the cause of the crisis."

Sharing information on social media about why the crisis happened is not something every organisation has the courage to execute. However, organisations can use the advantages social media offer by using well-curated infographics, videos, and images to provide persuasive narratives that will seek to improve the understanding of stakeholders regarding the crisis. Organisations must be sincere in their communication on social media with stakeholders about the crisis (Kim et al. 2014).

8.3.3.3. Sharing information with stakeholders on lessons learnt from the crisis and how it improves the relationship with stakeholders

Responses given by participants revealed that there are participants who welcome the sharing of information on social media to stakeholders on lessons learnt. Other participants would rather not share such information on social media. The theme that emerged from the views of participants who share information of lessons learnt was *responsible organisation*. For those who oppose such an approach, their organisation will not take that course of action simply because of privileged information and safeguarding organisational reputation.

Theme 1: Responsible organisation

This theme encompasses the responses of participants regarding the readiness of organisations to use social media in interacting with stakeholders about corrective actions and the commitment to renewal at the post-crisis phase.

Participants agreed that, by sharing information on social media with stakeholders on lessons learnt from the crisis, their organisations are perceived as responsible.

One participant commented: "Not everybody owns up to mistakes and not everybody is mature enough to pick what they learnt from the situation. You are not just concerned about a business [sic] success. It shows that you are responsible."

Another participant further remarked: "It shows that you are a good corporate citizen."

A participant stated: "It is helpful and it helps your social media followers to forgive you easily."

These participants further added: "It helps stakeholders feel that they have a say in what you do and helps repair the relationship" and "It builds trust".

It is evident from these various submissions by participants that the reputation of the organisation is enhanced, as it is seen as humane and not solely minded by business interests. Organisations that share crisis lessons will likely recover from the crisis (Ulmer et al. 2019).

Theme 2: Privileged information

Theme 2 comprises the responses of participants concerning using social media to share information about lessons learnt.

Some participants stated that such information is treated as privileged information and just sharing lessons learnt from the crisis on social media is strategically wrong. Rather, the organisation should focus on communicating the remedial measures implemented by the organisation. According to them, if you communicate to stakeholders that you have learnt your lessons and you are going to amend your ways and you fail to amend your ways, it will further damage the relationship.

One participant opined: "Sometimes you are better off not communicating. Rather communicate what you have done." Other comments were: "So you do whatever lessons you have learnt, apply it and then you can communicate what you have done in terms of how you have dealt with the issue" and "The lessons are put into the report and honestly putting a report on social media some people may not understand" and "We call it privileged information. It is not every information that we want to share on social media with our stakeholders." These arguments have a logical basis. This is because communicating those remedial measures have been implemented rather than focusing strictly on the lessons can also be beneficial to the organisation-stakeholder relationship. It must be noted that these participants are not

saying that they do not support the sharing of information on social media about the crisis. Rather, the focus should be on the measures implemented by the organisation after the crisis to communicate change (Zhao et al. 2020).

Theme 3: Safeguarding organisational reputation through lessons learnt

This theme includes the discussion around the sharing of social media lessons learnt from the crisis to stakeholders.

Other participants who opposed the sharing of information on social media of lessons learnt from the crisis intimated that they do not because of the need to safeguard the reputation of the organisation. In their words: "We usually don't do it the direct way. We think that with the kind of environment we are in, certain people can take advantage of that, edit your post and put the information back in the space which in the end will affect us" and "We don't go to war with all our secret strategies at the disposal of your opponent."

For these participants, there is a certain fear they have regarding the sharing of such information. It can be inferred that there is a sense that some stakeholders might manipulate the information and use it to cause disaffection for the organisation, which can damage its reputation. In spite of the position held by some participants regarding not sharing lessons learnt, organisations must be seen as constantly adapting and learning (Fuller et al. 2019:274).

8.3.3.4. Embracing crisis failure as a learning opportunity and sharing it on social media

Most of the participants indicated that embracing crisis failure as a learning opportunity and sharing it on social media is something their organisation is committed to do. Others, however, stated that their organisation is not interested in going in that direction. The themes that emerged in discussing this topic were transparency and reputational implications.

Theme 1: Transparency regarding information on lessons learnt

This theme includes the discussion that surrounds sharing on social media lessons learnt from the crisis to stakeholders.

The participants who indicated that their organisations embrace crisis failure as a learning opportunity, and share it on social media, do so because they want to be transparent towards stakeholders.

Some comments made were, "Yes, definitely we do that. We do communicate on social media some of the lessons learnt from the crisis. We want to communicate that we are sincere"; "It is important as a brand to win some of the detractors. So being transparent will not will [sic] all the detractors but you can win some"; "We try to be open". It is fair to say that, for transparent considerations, organisations must be willing to share such information. But, as cautioned by one participant, "But like I said, in the way of transparency, you are careful of the impact of what you are communicating to the public."

Organisations must be transparent and tactful when communicating the crisis failure as something that they embrace. It is important that organisations are seen as adapting and learning (Fuller et al. 2019:274).

Theme 2: Reputational implications

This theme includes responses participants provided for not supporting the idea of sharing on social media lessons learnt from the crisis, as such an action can impact negatively on the image of the organisation.

The participants who differed in their view concerning the topic pointed to reputational implications of such a disclosure.

According to a participant: "I am not sure we will do that. Normally we apologise and empathise".

Other comments were: "What are the implications on your business?"; "We will still need to be careful as to the reaction of the people when the post is made so that it doesn't become a problem for the organisation to try to solve again."

The cautious stance expressed by these participants is because of the fear of negative consequences of a crisis (Durand & Vergne 2014; Roulet 2015). Though protecting the image of the organisation is important, for the purpose of mending the relationship with stakeholders, it is imperative that organisations are transparent with stakeholders regarding embracing crisis failure. The organisation must be seen to be committed to mending the relationship with stakeholders and hence must be honest with stakeholders about the crisis (Mazer et al. 2017).

8.3.3.5. Using organisational values to support relationships with stakeholders in spite of the crisis

As rightly asserted by Ulmer et al. (2010), an organisation's communication about a crisis must reflect its values and culture. All participants agreed that the values of their organisations enable them to manage crises in ways that are meant to mend the relationship with stakeholders. Participants pointed to individual organisational values and how these values impact their crisis-communication management efforts on social media. The key theme that emerged was organisational values are integral to operations.

Theme 1: Organisational values are integral to operations

This theme encompasses the discussion around culture and value as an element necessary for influencing the organisational interaction on social media with stakeholders after a crisis, with the view to mending the relationship.

Participants indicated that the values of their organisations run through every aspect of operations, including communication. Some comments made were: "Everything we do is guided by our core values and our stakeholders measure our success through adherence to our core values" and "The values of the organisation are the drivers of all our engagement with stakeholders. They are considered in our communication to ensure that whatever we are communicating within and outside the crisis situation is aligned with these values" and "We

link our responses in times of crisis to our core values." Organisational values are critical to the crisis-communication process. Stakeholders' assessment of the management of the crisis by the organisation will be influenced by the core values of the organisation. Therefore, organisations must not only have core values that are meaningless; but the core values must be integral and applied in a situation such as a crisis and in the communication management of the crisis. The values of the organisation must be meaningful to stakeholders (Shi 2017:34).

8.3.3.6. Leadership involvement in crisis communication on social media

Leadership communication in crisis situations can help shape stakeholder perception, which ultimately can impact the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Coldwell et al. 2012). All the participants mentioned the important role of organisational leadership required for crisis communication on social media. Leadership support for a crisis-communication strategy and leadership in the role of the framing of perception were the themes discovered in the views espoused by participants.

Theme 1: Leadership support for a crisis-communication strategy

This theme encompasses responses regarding the role of organisational leadership in ensuring the successful implementation of the crisis-communication strategy.

With regard to this theme, the participants pointed to the support given by the top hierarchy of their organisations to ensure that the crisis-communication strategy used on social media is successful.

One participant opined: "When it comes to the crisis-communication strategy, top management is part of the crisis communication team. When the messages are crafted, they are sanctioned by management that they are good. Sometimes they make input."

The following comments were also made by other participants: "Extremely supportive"; "You are the person handling it. You are the one leading but, because we understand the value of

collaboration, leadership does not only approve but provide suggestions so that the communication is better."

As was provided for in the literature (Chapter 3, Section 3.3.7.1), the leadership of organisations must support a crisis-communication strategy that is designed to ensure collaboration and the participation of stakeholders for the purpose of mending the relationship with stakeholders. The leaders in the organisation must show a commitment to open and transparent communication in times of crisis (Zerfass et al. 2014). It is important that the communication approach of the leaders of the organisation in the post-crisis phase is driven by the organisational values, so as to inspire stakeholders (Kaul et al. 2020).

Theme 2: Leadership in the role of the framing of perception

This theme encompasses the discussion around the active role of leadership in the rebuilding effort in the post-crisis phase.

Leadership has a responsibility in the framing of perceptions. The role of leadership in determining a proactive approach to a crisis is crucial for effective crisis management. Participants provided insights into how their leaders played important roles in framing perceptions about the crisis-communication efforts of their organisations.

Some comments made in this direction were: "Leadership shows concern about whatever is happening with regard to the crisis. They are active on social media and are able to lead the conversation" and "The CEO is the face of the business and, when the CEO is leading the crisis, people trust the messages better. They must be seen that they [sic] care."

When the top hierarchy is involved in the crisis messaging on social media and are transparent in admitting that they do not possess all the solutions, stakeholders will be reassured and the organisation can win the support of stakeholders (Kaul et al. 2020:809). This proactive stance can contribute to mending the relationship with stakeholders.

The discussion makes clear that the after-crisis efforts towards rebuilding of the organisation-stakeholder relationship are as important as the interactions on social media that take place

with stakeholders during a crisis. In essence, the organisation's attention to the use of social media in interacting with stakeholders about a crisis must be serious across all phases of a crisis.

In the next section, the researcher discusses how the organisation-stakeholder relationship can be enhanced with social-media crisis communication.

8.3.4. Results of section D: Enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationship with relationship with social-media crisis communication

It was important to explore the views of participants on the use of social-media crisis communication in enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationships. This section focused on discussing the views of participants on the following:

- using social media to improve relationships with stakeholders during a crisis;

- building a better stakeholder relationship by revealing information on social media about a crisis;

- building stakeholder relationships by using social media to inform stakeholders about promises to assist stakeholders;

- building stakeholder relationship by allowing stakeholders to express their views on social media about a crisis;

- the benefits of organisation-stakeholder engagement on social media during a crisis.

The theoretical aspects and topics covered in section D of the interview guide are presented in Table 8.6 below:

Table 8.6: Theoretical aspects and topics covered in Section D of the interview guide

Section D (Element 4): Enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationship with social-media crisis communication	
Theoretical Aspect	**Topics**
• Organisation-stakeholder relationship	• Using social media to improve relationship with stakeholders during a crisis. • Building better stakeholder relationship by revealing information on social media about a crisis. • Building stakeholder relationship by using social media to inform stakeholders about promise to assist stakeholders. • Building stakeholder relationship by allowing stakeholders express their views on social media about a crisis. • The benefits of organisation-stakeholder engagement on social media during crisis.

The topics on the organisation-stakeholder theoretical aspect were explored in the interviews in order to gain detailed insights into the organisation-stakeholder element proposed for the study.

8.3.4.1. Using social media to improve relationships with stakeholders during a crisis

For an improved organisation-stakeholder relationship during and after a crisis, there must be trust, interdependence, commitment of time and resources and the willingness to engage with stakeholders (Waters 2011:460; Le Roux 2014:310; Leonard 2018:249; Clementson & Page 2021:19). Participants had a positive disposition towards improving relationships with stakeholders throughout the crisis period. Most of the participants stated that, during a crisis, social media can be used to improve relationships with stakeholders through consistency in updates and continuous interaction. These two themes were referenced by participants as essential in improving the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

Theme 1: Consistency in updates

This theme encapsulates the responses of participants on social-media communication actions the organisation must take in enhancing its relationship with stakeholders.

The participants were quite emphatic in stating their positions on the need for consistency in updating stakeholders with information in connection with the crisis.

One participant opined: "We were able to go by the schedule that we communicated. We were giving them updates. We had some encouragement and positive feedback from customers. We saw that customers came alive."

Another stated: "The essence of communication is to improve relationship [sic] where people get facts, correct information and at the end of the day it improves relationship."

A participant said: "We tag them with certain posts just to let them feel that we still have them in mind."

The essence of communicating during a crisis is to give a sense of assurance to stakeholders that the organisation is attending to the crisis. Even when the organisation does not have information readily available, its acknowledgement of views stakeholders express can create a positive feeling and trust for the organisation (Jiang et al. 2016:688).

Theme 2: Continuous social-media interactions

This theme embraces the discussion on the importance of continuous social-media interactions with stakeholders, as it can enhance the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

With regard to this theme, the participants indicated that continuous interactions on social media with stakeholders during the crisis can improve the organisation-stakeholder relationship. As addressed in the literature (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3.4), engagement on social media with stakeholders can have a positive effect in terms of the credibility and transparency of organisational actions (Siah et al. 2010; Romenti & Murtarelli 2014; Jin & Liu 2010; Coombs & Holladay 2012; Chen et al. 2020; Kent & Taylor 2021). Organisations must be guided by the description of a stakeholder as a concept that suggests interactive communication and intense involvement (Newsom et al. 2013).

Some comments from participants were: "Being consistent and not stopping to post" and "Invite stakeholders to co-create the solutions with us by sharing information with us things we

could have done" and "During the crisis we improve the relationship by not alienating our stakeholders on the issue. Sharing of information is one of the ways for improving the relationship." It is clear that continuous interaction with stakeholders on social media can create a feeling in stakeholders that they are partners in the management of the crisis. The use of social media for crisis communication can enable the organisation to engage with stakeholders for a long-term relationship (Obembe et al. 2021).

8.3.4.2. Building better stakeholder relationships by revealing information on social media about a crisis

One important component of trust is the discharge of honest information to stakeholders. An organisation cannot be seen to have an honest character if its communication is deemed to be dishonest (Clementson & Page 2021:19). The participants gave views that show that the subject of revealing information on social media about a crisis is risky and sometimes difficult to implement. One key theme that emerged from the interaction with participants was to disclose information that serves the interest of the organisation and stakeholders.

Theme 1: Disclose information that serves the interest of the organisation and stakeholders

This theme includes the responses of participants regarding the transparency of crisis information made available on social media to stakeholders.

Some of the participants held the position that any information that will be disclosed on social media about a crisis must serve the interests of both the organisation and stakeholders. They intimated that revealing any type of crisis information on social media must be well thought through. To these participants, not all information is meant for social media.

One participant said: "So, if it is not information that will be too damaging going into the future. I mean there is just so much you can show but be careful not to hold too much to create the impression that you are being dishonest."

Another participant pointed out that: "Not all information has to go onto social media. You really need to weigh things."

This is what a participant also opined: "It depends on what you want to reveal. The things we have to share with stakeholders are the things we share but not to go blanket and naked on social media."

These views show that participants are not wholly in favour of disclosing all kinds of information about a crisis on social media. Some said only information that is relevant to the needs of stakeholders will be shared. In essence, what participants point out is that, though honest information is important for building stakeholder relationships, it must be done to serve the interests of both the organisation and stakeholders. As emphasised by Clementson and Page (2021), an organisation's character cannot be deemed to be honest if its crisis messaging is perceived to be dishonest by stakeholders.

8.3.4.3. Building stakeholder relationships by using social media to inform stakeholders about promises to assist stakeholders

It is important that organisations inform stakeholders through avenues such as social media about promises to change policies, practices and behaviour regarding a crisis situation (Romenti & Murtarelli 2013:20-21). No particular theme emerged from this issue of promise. A number of participants stated that they have not used social media in this manner and hence cannot provide how it can enhance stakeholder relationships. Others who offered an opinion, provided the following comments: "If you delivered on those promises, it will improve your relationship with them" and "I have not really done measurement on that before but on top of my mind it has helped." An interesting view given by one participant is that: "I'm not giving you a promise that I would do this. I am actually doing it so that you would see. Those are the

ways that make people believe the organisation." There is not a clear-cut position regarding how using social media to inform stakeholders about promises to assist them can build a relationship.

8.3.4.4. Building stakeholder relationships by allowing stakeholders to express their views on social media about a crisis

In the literature discussion on social-media crisis communication (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6.5), the imperative nature of social listening and its impact on organisation-stakeholder relationship was highlighted. Social listening enables the organisation to attend to, observe, interpret, and respond to a variety of stimuli through mediated electronic media (Stewart & Arnold 2017:86). By allowing stakeholders to express their views on social media about a crisis, the organisation is engaged in the process of social listening. Participants' views on this issue revealed two themes, namely, insight into the thinking of stakeholders and enabling the organisation to have an engaging presence.

Theme 1: Insight into the thinking of stakeholders

Theme 1 encompasses a discussion around social listening and how it enables organisations to gather intelligence concerning the position of stakeholders regarding a crisis.

Most of the participants agreed that it is important for the organisation to allow and welcome the views of stakeholders expressed on social media about a crisis. Some of the comments made by participants were: "It enables you to know what the customer is thinking and what their expectations are"; "It is very useful because you get to understand how your social media followers think of you or what they think of what is happening" and "It is very critical. I will be happy for stakeholders even if I do not support the views they are posting I will [sic] welcome it" and "There is a learning in listening to what stakeholders have shared and we do that actively both offline and online." Organisations that are willing to learn from the crisis can benefit from the views of stakeholders expressed on social media. Through listening, the

organisation can share useful and valuable information about the crisis with stakeholders (Jackson 2017).

Theme 2: Enabling the organisation to have an engaging presence

This theme includes all discussions around how organisations can enhance organisation-stakeholder relationships by having an engaging presence on social media.

It is important for the organisation to be seen by stakeholders as having an engaging presence on social media during a crisis.

One participant intimated: "If people have the opportunity to interact, ask questions and get feedback, they clear their misconception. It can lead to better relationships."

Another stated: "An organisation that welcomes diverse opinions will go a long way in building trust and then enhancing its relationship with stakeholders. It shows that your stakeholders also care about you in terms of giving honest feedback that you could act on."

Furthermore, some participants noted that the organisation's pursuit of enabling an engaging presence on social media must be devoid of actions that do not allow stakeholders to express their views on social media during a crisis. Some participants reacted thus to such actions: "It is not proper to put up a holding statement and then deactivate the comment portion. It is improper" and "Why should you delete people's comments or prevent them from sharing what they think."

From all the comments made by participants on this issue, organisations must recognise that social media are built to foster interactions. Hence, they must be prepared to allow stakeholders to be expressive on social media, as it can help the organisation to improve its structures, processes and communication. An engaging presence on social media can serve the organisation well in its relationship with stakeholders (Stewart & Arnold 2017).

8.3.4.5 The benefits of organisation-stakeholder engagement on social media during a crisis

As emphasised in the literature (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3.4), the pursuit of enhancing the organisation-stakeholder relationship must be conceived along the lines of organisation satisfied, stakeholder satisfied. Thus, any engagement on social media regarding a crisis must benefit both the organisation and stakeholders. When stakeholders use social media to post comments as a result of an organisational crisis that impacts them, they want answers. For the organisation, the overriding goal in its business operation is to be successful. Based on the interviews with participants, the dominant themes deduced from participants were access to the right crisis information and protection of reputation.

Theme 1: Access to the right crisis information

This theme embraces the responses of participants concerning how providing stakeholders with accurate information about a crisis can enhance the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

Based on the views expressed by participants, they agreed that, when stakeholders have access to the right crisis information, it is a key benefit, as it enhances the understanding of stakeholders about the crisis.

One participant stated:

> "So, you are telling your audience what the situation is. You are giving them what the true picture is. Some of them would have held a wrong notion. Probably, they got the information from second or third parties. So they come to your platform and you engage them and you tell them what the real situation is. They walk away with the truth."

Another participant pointed out that:

> "It helps to develop the right communication. There is nothing like getting feedback or understanding the minds of people. It is useful in directing the communication and even in resolving the issues and knowing in which direction to resolve the issues. Now engagement with your stakeholders on social media also helps them to listen to your side of the story. As to whether they would want to believe what you are saying or not is another thing. For them what is crucial is that you are engaging with them."

It can be summed up that the willingness of organisations to engage on social media with stakeholders about the crisis is potentially beneficial. When the organisation is in crisis and it makes engagement a priority, the organisation-stakeholder relationship can function effectively (Kent 2014:384).

Theme 2: Protection of reputation

This theme includes all discussions around leveraging social media to enhance the reputation of the organisation by engaging with stakeholders.

As the organisation has the ultimate goal of ensuring a successful business, it is very protective of its reputation. As pointed out in the reputation management literature (Chapter 2, Section 2.8.3), stakeholders have a strong role in determining organisational reputation. Organisations can through strategic means shape stakeholders' perception of the reputation of an organisation. One strategic approach is how it handles its crisis communication on social media.

A participant stated: "Using social media and being proactive, you are protecting the brand. Your reputation is at stake so you better protect it. For the consumer, it shows a brand that cares."

Another participant intimated:

> "You gain more than just followers on social media. You gain partners and
> you gain collaborators and in such situation [sic] it is the organisation that
> benefits because there are those who will become loyal to you. They are
> those whose interests are genuinely peaked by how you handle crises so
> you gain followers and the relationship is solidified. Their impression of you
> is positive."

It is evident that it is in the interest of the organisation to engage on social media with stakeholders. The views of participants are quite clear that stakeholders like organisations that engage on social media about a crisis. As is in the views expressed, the outcome of such engagements is that stakeholders will care about the organisation, which ultimately will enhance the reputation of the organisation. This will make the relationship between the organisation and stakeholders mutually beneficial.

It is evident from the above discussion that, in order to improve the organisation-stakeholder relationship, the interaction on social media about the crisis must be in the interest of both the organisation and stakeholders. Social media must be used interactively so that both stakeholders and the organisation will be afforded opportunities to engage. Organisations that are interactive on social media are positioned well to have a positive relationship with stakeholders (Xu & Saxton 2019).

The key findings of the qualitative part of the study are now interpreted.

8.4. INTERPRETING THE KEY FINDINGS OF THE QUALITATIVE ASPECT OF THE STUDY

The purpose of conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews was to investigate in-depth the theoretical aspects of the proposed elements of the conceptual framework, as the online survey could not address in-depth these aspects of the elements.

The following findings were obtained from the interviews and these findings provide important insights for this study:

● **Fundamentals Crisis preparedness**. This finding revealed that participants know the requirements for crisis preparedness. The public-relations practitioners are aware of the crisis readiness expected of their organisations in terms of a crisis-communication plan, crisis team, social-media presence, using social media in managing a crisis, crisis content management and monitoring. Additionally, participants expressed the need to have mechanisms that ensure that crisis communication on social media is centralised. For instance, the need for placing restrictions on employees in the use of social media during a crisis was emphasised. These findings point to the need for Ghanaian organisations to be proactive in preparing to deal with a crisis. A proactive orientation is a strategic approach to crisis-communication management and it can help the organisation reduce the damaging effects of a crisis (Claeys et al. 2010; Park & Reber 2011). The position of this study is that Ghanaian organisations that have a crisis-communication plan, crisis team, social-media presence, crisis content management, monitoring mechanisms, and how to use social media to manage crisis communication are crisis prepared. Additionally, based on the evidence from this study (see sections 8.3.1.2; 8.3.1.3; 8.3.1.4 and 8.3.1.5), crisis preparedness, especially in the use of social media, also means that public-relations practitioners in Ghana must have a good knowledge and understanding of using social media for crisis communication. PR practitioners must plan to undertake the following actions on social media: issuance of holding statements, timely dissemination of information, real-time engagement, quick and effective response and the use of multimedia tools. All these preparations will mean practitioners have a crisis-management capability, which in effect can potentially strengthen the trust of stakeholders in the organisation, and enhance the reputation of the organisation (Petkeviciene 2014; Motarjemi 2014).

● **Managing a crisis on social media with interactions.** This aspect of the study's findings point to an appreciation of the use of social media in interacting with stakeholders during crises. The views expressed by participants indicate that social media are a relevant communication platform for engaging with stakeholders in times of crisis. Based on the understanding that social media are critical to the crisis preparedness of organisations, as

expressed by participants, then its role in enabling interactions with stakeholders during a crisis was firmly established by participants. For example, the findings revealed that, for successful crisis-communication management on social media, the interactions with stakeholders must be truthful, address the emotional needs of stakeholders, accommodate diverse opinions, be civil and built on emotional intelligence. Furthermore, Ghanaian organisations must be responsive to stakeholders, display integrity, competence, dependence, be consistent in communicating across all social-media platforms and provide constant crisis information to stakeholders. Most of the participants are in support of these approaches to managing crises on social media with interactions (sections 8.3.2.1; 8.3.2.2; 8.3.2.3; 8.3.2.4; 8.3.2.5; 8.3.2.6; 8.3.2.7; 8.3.2.8; 8.3.2.9; 8.3.2.10). In essence, collaboration, grounding, empathy, responsiveness, accessibility, genuineness and transparency offer organisations positive ways of interacting with stakeholders when managing crises on social media. This finding shows that participants support dialogic communication approaches on social media and, as Pang et al. (2018) emphasised, when dialogic communication is encouraged and supported, it can foster satisfying relationships between organisations and stakeholders.

● **Mending relationships with stakeholders after a social-media crisis.** It was evident from the findings that Ghanaian organisations welcome the use of social media to repair relationships with stakeholders after a crisis. Participants acknowledge the importance of continuous engagement, transparency and willingness to share crisis lessons on social media as necessary for renewing relationships with stakeholders after a crisis (sections 8.3.3.1; 8.3.3.2; 8.3.3.3; 8.3.3.4; 8.3.3.5; 8.3.3.6). The need to consider some crisis information as privileged information for the purpose of safeguarding the reputation of the organisation was highlighted by participants. Even though they recognise the importance of social media in serving as a channel for the renewal of relationships with stakeholders, some participants did not agree to actions such as communicating a crisis failure on social media. They intimated that the pursuit of relationship renewal must not mean that the organisation's reputation should be compromised. Furthermore, participants indicated that their

organisations value the role of organisational leaders in framing perceptions about the crisis in a positive way. According to the participants, the leaders of the organisation have an important role to play in the crisis-communication strategy, particularly on social media. This is because leaders whose leadership styles are aligned with the culture of the organisation can provide direction for the effective handling of a crisis (Bowers et al. 2017). The conclusion thereof is that the process of relationship renewal with stakeholders in the post-crisis phase must involve communication efficiency, the support of stakeholders in the renewal process and a reliance on the culture and values of the organisation to dictate the social-media communications actions of the organisation. Thus, Ghanaian organisations realise the need to renew relationships with stakeholders. On the basis of this finding, it is in the interest of Ghanaian organisations to show commitment to engaging continuously with stakeholders, show transparency; leaders must help to frame crisis communication and be guided by organisational culture and value. These communicative actions on social media by Ghanaian organisations will likely attract the interest and support of stakeholders in the renewal process after a crisis. This is because the organisation conveys the impression that it is committed to sharing information, anticipates feedback and is ethical.

● **Enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationship with social-media crisis communication.** This aspect of the study provided insights into communication actions Ghanaian organisations take on social media to enhance the organisation-stakeholder relationship during a crisis. Participants mentioned that consistent crisis updates, keeping stakeholders informed about promises made and having an engaging presence are necessary for the organisation-stakeholder relationship (sections 8.3.4.1.; 8.3.4.2; 8.3.4.3; 8.3.4.4 and 8.3.4.5) Additionally, organisations must use social media to gather intelligence about stakeholders so as to know what they are thinking and ensure that stakeholders access the right information about the crisis. The likely outcomes for these actions taken by these organisations will be a positive organisation-stakeholder relationship and reputation gain. As rightly asserted by Ledingham (2015), the organisation-stakeholder relationship will be

effective if public relations are used to ensure that the interests of the organisation and stakeholders are balanced for the benefit of both the organisation and stakeholders.

Next, the triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative results is discussed.

8.5 OVERALL FINDINGS FROM BOTH THE ONLINE SURVEY AND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROPOSED ELEMENTS OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The use of the mixed-method approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the use of social media for crisis-communication management. The data from both the online survey and semi-structured interviews provided useful insights on how public-relations practitioners in Ghana can build stakeholder relationships in the management of crisis communication on social media for their organisations. The online survey and interview findings were reported in detail in chapters 7 and 8 respectively. Both findings are regarded as harmonious and simultaneously outlined in a combined way. The purpose of this section is to focus on the key insights into the overall study findings.

8.5.1. Element 1: Fundamentals of crisis preparedness

This particular element focused on the crisis readiness of an organisation to manage a crisis, particularly on social media. For any successful management of a crisis, it is fundamental that the organisation is crisis-prepared. The essential preparedness required of organisations is to have a crisis-communication plan that also incorporates a social-media-presence strategy, team and requisite knowledge in managing crisis communication on social media. The ability of the organisation to use communication to manage a crisis, including on social media, also depends on having a presence on social media (Getchell & Sellnow 2016). Since stakeholders are also on social media, the organisation with a social-media presence would be expected to

provide stakeholders with information on where to look for information about a crisis (Guo 2017; Spence et al. 2017). As emphasised by Crook et al. (2016), being crisis prepared is in the interest of the organisation, as it will be able to forestall the spread of rumours on social media. If the organisation seeks to build a relationship with stakeholders throughout the crisis life cycle and beyond, then it is fundamental that the organisation must be crisis-prepared.

As seen in the study findings, the majority of public-relations practitioners (IPR members) in Ghana recognise the importance of crisis-communication planning, which must include social-media crisis communication. They also understand the need to plan for a present crisis situation and a future crisis situation. In addition, these organisations know what to do in the event of a crisis and the expectations of stakeholders. The aspect of this study on the relationship between crisis preparedness and organisation-stakeholder relationship revealed that there is a correlation between crisis preparedness and the organisation-stakeholder relationship. In essence, any effort directed at minimising the risk of a crisis must include crisis preparedness (Selart & Johansen 2013:100). Furthermore, the established presence on social media of the organisation creates a positive perception among stakeholders, as the organisation is seen as prepared to provide information, interact and listen to them in times of crisis (Getchell & Sellnow 2016).

Even though most public-relations practitioners surveyed indicated the importance of crisis-communication planning as a prerequisite for crisis preparedness, the subject was explored further in the interviews in order to have a rounded position on crisis preparedness and its relevance to the organisation-stakeholder relationship. The participants emphasised that being crisis prepared enables the organisation to be proactive and also enhances its reputation. They mostly intimated that, by having a plan in place, the organisation is able to anticipate various issues that are likely to degenerate into crisis. Additionally, as having the plan will make the organisation proactive, the organisation will be in a good position to know what to do in a crisis situation. On the issue of reputation, the participants mentioned that the value of crisis-communication planning to the reputation of the organisation cannot be

underestimated. As well articulated by Huang-Horowitz (2014:347) and Verčič and Ćorić (2018:445), the management of reputation is a function of public relations that can determine the success of an organisation. More so, the experiences of stakeholders can trigger their reputational opinions of organisations (Schoofs et al. 2019; Camilleri 2021). Therefore, organisations that are crisis-prepared can fulfil the expectations of stakeholders.

On the subject of crisis preparedness, participants in the interview pointed out the social-media presence of the organisation must be managed by a team whose role and function would have been pre-determined before a crisis hits. They mentioned that monitoring and content management are the functions the team performs. Having a team that monitors and provides content is critical in enabling the organisation to be crisis-prepared. Evidence from the regression analysis of the relationship between crisis preparedness and organisation-stakeholder relationship revealed that 43% of the variability in organisation-stakeholder relationship is explained by crisis preparedness. Thus, in the management of a crisis, crisis preparedness has a significant role to pay in the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

8.5.2 Element 2: Managing crises on social media with interactions

The aim of the second element was to gather insights from the public-relations practitioners regarding the dialogic communication approaches they use when managing a crisis on social media. The approaches or theoretical aspects include collaboration, grounding, empathy, responsiveness, accessibility, genuineness and transparency. Generally, the findings from both the online survey and the interviews revealed that the organisations that these practitioners work for use these approaches or theoretical aspects in interacting on social media with stakeholders during a crisis. The collaboration approach indicated that Ghanaian organisations see the interaction on social media with stakeholders about a crisis as mutually beneficial and welcome the diverse opinions expressed by stakeholders about the crisis. On grounding, these organisations use social media to invite stakeholders to comment about the crisis and confirm that stakeholders correctly understood the organisation's crisis

communication. Interacting on social media with stakeholders about the crisis allows these organisations to empathise with stakeholders, understand the crisis from the perspectives of stakeholders and in estimating how stakeholders feel about the crisis. The findings of this element also revealed that the organisations are committed to responding, attending and sensitive to stakeholder concerns about the crisis expressed on social media. As articulated by Lovejoy et al. (2012), organisations can establish continuous dialogue with stakeholders by being responsive to stakeholders. The affirmation by practitioners that their organisations support open access to crisis information on social media by stakeholders is progressive for building a relationship with stakeholders. They further intimated that their organisations allow stakeholders to freely share their opinions on social media about the crisis. Even though some participants were not in support of open access opportunities to stakeholders, it is important to note that, by creating access to stakeholders, organisations can enhance the organisation-stakeholder relationship (Gibbs et al. 2013:108). The findings also indicate that being genuine on social media about a crisis is an approach practitioners hold a positive position on, as it enables the organisation to get stakeholders to believe in their crisis information. It is a worthy principle, as providing stakeholders with honest and truthful information about the crisis can help reduce rumours and narratives that are unfavourable to the image of the organisation (Lee 2020:804). Practitioners pointed out that their organisation does not hide information from stakeholders when interacting with them on social media about a crisis. As highlighted by Du Plessis (2018:837), organisations must be transparent with stakeholders when interacting on social media about a crisis.

The findings of this element showed that social-media interactions with stakeholders about a crisis are critical for building a relationship with stakeholders. As was reported in this study (see Chapter 7; Section 7.9.2), the correlation between dialogic communication and organisation-stakeholder relationship is very strong. This means that dialogic communication is useful for the crisis-communication strategy of any organisation, if the objective is to build a relationship with stakeholders.

The semi-structured in-depth interviews further provided convincing grounds regarding the relevance of dialogic communication to organisation-stakeholder relationships. The findings indicate that, because social media are popular with stakeholders, organisations that have a social-media presence can use the opportunities social media provide in having interactions that will seek to build a relationship with stakeholders. The participants pointed out that real-time interaction on social media affords their organisation the opportunity to respond to stakeholders on crisis matters. Stakeholders expect organisations to engage with them in real time and provide updates as the crisis unfolds (Roshan et al. 2016). Participants further intimated that social media enable them to tell their side about a crisis using a holding statement. Doing so through social media assures stakeholders that the organisation is dealing with the crisis (Anthonissen 2009:71-72; Pinter 2018:114). A significant finding of this element that further points to the importance of dialogic communication to the stakeholder relationship is seen in the arguments advanced by the participants. According to the participants, when interacting on social media with stakeholders during a crisis, stakeholders value the timely dissemination of information (Wang 2016; Eriksson & Olsson 2016; Smith et al. 2018), truthfulness and attention to the emotional needs of stakeholders (Coombs 2015; Kent & Taylor 2016). Participants articulated that by disseminating information timeously, the organisation closes the door to speculation (Roshan et al. 2016; Lovari & Bowen 2020). The participants stated that by being truthful and emotional towards stakeholders, the organisation is able to demonstrate to stakeholders that it is interested in their needs in spite of the crisis (Kent & Taylor 2016; Schoofs et al. 2022).

Another insightful aspect of the findings that participants highlighted is the management of communication on social media during a crisis (Shahid & Elbanna 2015; Roshan et al. 2016). According to the participants, when communicating on social media with stakeholders regarding stakeholder expectations about the crisis, their organisation finds the use of social-media live sessions, infographics, constant crisis update and integrative communication across all social-media platforms very useful and enables the organisation to provide in-depth information about the crisis (Hagen et al. 2018). By constantly updating stakeholders, the

organisation is able to allay the fears and uncertainties of stakeholders (Maresh-Fuehrer & Smith 2016).

The interview findings also provide the study with a deeper understanding of the relevance of trust, collaboration, transparency, responsiveness and genuineness (Lin et al. 2016; Cheung & Leung 2016; Clementson & Page 2021). The participants mentioned that trust must already be in place before a crisis hits and the organisation must already be actively engaging with stakeholders on social media (Xu & Saxton 2019; Clementson & Page 2021). In the event of a crisis, stakeholders can refer to instances where the organisation demonstrated integrity, competence and dependability. Furthermore, the participants said that engagement with stakeholders on social media is a useful way of collaborating with stakeholders (Wendling et al. 2013; Du Plessis 2018). They intimated that stakeholders must not feel that the communication is monological and that they are expected to take everything from the organisation as the truth (Ott & Theunissen 2014; Coombs 2015; Pang et al. 2018). By allowing stakeholders to express diverse opinions on social media about a crisis, the organisation-stakeholder relationship can be enhanced (Roshan et al. 2016). They pointed out that the deletion of comments or not allowing stakeholders to post comments are inimical to the organisation-stakeholder relationship. As emphasised by Husain et al. (2014:224), a focus on engaging and reciprocal communication can be valuable to organisation-stakeholder relationships.

Even though transparency was endorsed by the majority of public-relations practitioners in the online survey, the interview participants, while pointing out the value of being transparent, were cautious in stating that the organisation must consider legal obligations.

The findings of the element highlight the need for the organisation to be tactful when responding to stakeholders. The participants opined that the organisation must be prompt and civil when responding on social media to stakeholder comments and posts about a crisis. The successful handling of a crisis also hinges on how the organisation responds to stakeholders (Arvidsson & Holmstrom 2013). According to the participants, it is imperative that the organisation is not seen or perceived to be arrogant when interacting on social media with

stakeholders about a crisis. It must show respect and maturity when expressing itself on social media about a crisis.

Collectively, the online survey and interview findings provide strong evidence that dialogic communication is important for organisation-stakeholder relationships. The regression analysis of the relationship between dialogic communication and organisation-stakeholder relationship indicate that dialogic communication accounted for 78% of the variance in organisation-stakeholder relationships. Thus, in the management of a crisis on social media, organisations must note that dialogic communication contributes significantly to organisation-stakeholder relationships. It can, therefore, be confidently inferred that the impact of any crisis-communication strategy deployed on social media that is directed at stakeholders will be minimal if it does not include dialogic communication.

8.5.3 Element 3: Mending relationships with stakeholders after a social-media crisis

It was imperative that the study investigated practitioners' position on the renewal of relationships with stakeholders after a crisis. Thus, for this particular element, the purpose was to discover insights into how organisations can use social media to rebuild relationships with stakeholders. The researcher focused on key theoretical aspects of the discourse of renewal, namely, communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value.

For this element, the general findings from both the online survey and semi-structured interviews revealed that, Ghanaian organisations whose public relations representatives were surveyed and interviewed are committed to using social media to engage with stakeholders in mending the organisation-stakeholder relationship. The findings for communication efficiency indicated that these organisations commit to sharing information on social media with stakeholders regarding reasons for the crisis. They are also mindful of the interests of stakeholders by ensuring that they are sincere when sharing such crisis information to stakeholders. The participants in the interviews provided more clarity on sincerity. To these participants, their organisations use tools available on social media to communicate efficiently

in ways that make stakeholders interpret the actions as sincere. According to these participants, the use of infographics, short posts and live videos assures stakeholders that the organisation wants to come clear about the crisis. This particular finding also revealed that not all organisations are interested in sharing on social media reasons for the crisis. The survey results showed some practitioners are not in support of sharing such information. One participant in the interviews confirmed that his organisation does not share such information. Since the interest of the organisation is to mend its relationship with stakeholders, it must engage in communication that is targeted at getting the support of stakeholders. Such communication must also be in the interest of stakeholders (Sellnow et al. 2015). As well articulated by Kim et al. (2014), organisations should not shy away from being sincere in their communication on social media with stakeholders. If the organisation wants to renew the relationship, then its communication must be geared towards efficiency so that stakeholders will have confidence in the organisation (Xu 2018:117). Such an approach could impact positively the rebuilding of relationships with stakeholders.

The prospective vision overall findings indicated that the organisations were committed to sharing on social media with stakeholders, lessons learnt, corrective actions and the crisis being an opportunity to grow. They will share because they want to improve the organisation. The interview participants opined that, by undertaking these sharing of information activities, their organisations will be perceived as responsible. They intimated further that the organisation must act in mature ways for stakeholders to see the organisation as not only interested in the business. The responses from the survey showed that not all organisations agree to carrying out such actions on social media. This finding was further corroborated in the interviews as participants emphasised that, for privileged information and safeguarding of reputation reasons, they do not implement such actions on social media, as it is strategically wrong. Instead of the organisation sharing lessons learnt, it should rather communicate with stakeholders when the remedial measures have been put together and are ready to be implemented. Their argument was that not every item of information must be shared. The information that is to be shared must be done also in the interest of the organisation. To these

participants, protecting the reputation of the organisation must be considered in such situations. They further articulated that being transparent is a positive approach but the organisation must be tactful and strategic when it wants to share lessons, corrective actions and the failure associated with the crisis. But the point must be made that at the core of dealing with the crisis is the need to build relationships with stakeholders. As such, the organisation must be seen as adapting and learning (Fuller et al. 2019:276). It is critical that the organisation is seen as taking steps to communicate change (Zhao et al. 2020:4). One important step to take in prospective vision is to inspire optimism in stakeholders about the organisation. Hence, it must inspire optimism and positive feelings in stakeholders by being transparent on social media about lessons learnt (Zhao et al. 2020:4). Mazer et al. (2017:126) make a good argument that, when organisations share on social media with stakeholders about crisis failures, the relationship between stakeholders and the organisation can be repaired.

In the findings on the aspect of culture and value, there is a clear indication that the organisations attach importance to the organisational culture and values when interacting on social media about a crisis. The role of the leaders of the organisation featured prominently in the crisis-management efforts towards rebuilding relationships with stakeholders. The interview participants intimated that the values of the organisation inform the decisions they make regarding the crisis communication that is implemented on social media. If the values of the organisation, for example, includes integrity and transparency, they will deal with crisis communication with integrity and in a transparent manner. According to the participants, the culture and values are assessed closely by stakeholders and, therefore, it is imperative that they are guided by their own culture and value in dealing with the crisis. Shi (2017:34) points out that the values of the organisation must be meaningful to stakeholders. The interview participants further emphasised that the leadership of the organisation lends support to the crisis-communication strategy and in the framing of perception. At every step of the crisis-communication strategy process, leadership is involved and provides guidance. The leadership also ensures that stakeholders see them as involved in solving the crisis, as their

involvement can frame perception. Stakeholders will be reassured and they can support the organisation (Kaul et al. 2020:809).

It is clear from all the aspects of the discourse of renewal discussed that this theory can positively influence organisation-stakeholder relationships. Evidence from correlation tests conducted showed that discourse of renewal and organisation-stakeholder relationships are positively correlated. The regression analysis of the relationship between the discourse of renewal and organisation-stakeholder relationship revealed that 67% of the variance in organisation-stakeholder relationship is explained by the discourse of renewal. This means that, in the management of a crisis on social media, the discourse of renewal is integral to organisation-stakeholder relationships. Thus, communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value are important to organisation-stakeholder relationships when communicating on social media after a crisis.

8.5.4 Element 4: Enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationship with social-media crisis communication

The main aim of this element was to gain insight into organisation-stakeholder relationship theoretical aspects that are relevant in managing crisis communication on social media. The key aspects that were discussed and investigated in this study as critical components of the organisation-stakeholder relationship were trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction. The overall findings indicate that public-relations practitioners who responded to the study stated that their organisations consider trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction as vital in social-media crisis communication for the organisation-stakeholder relationship to be enhanced.

The specific finding on trust revealed that the organisations disclose honest information on social media concerning a crisis. Also, decisions that are in the interest of stakeholders are

made available on social media. Practitioners also confirmed that promises made to stakeholders concerning a crisis are disseminated on social media. They also consider social media as a trustworthy platform for letting stakeholders know about the organisation's ability to manage a crisis. It is clear from this finding that any attempt to use social media in managing a crisis to the exclusion of trust will not yield any gains for the organisation-stakeholder relationship. The interviews further revealed interesting insights on the relevance of trust. The participants made the point that using social media to inform stakeholders about promises made concerning the crisis can improve the relationship with stakeholders. Participants also mentioned that constantly updating and having continuous interaction about the crisis with stakeholders can let stakeholders trust the organisation. In fact, the participants made it clear that they get positive feedback from stakeholders when they update constantly and interact continuously with stakeholders. The findings in both the survey and interviews also highlighted the concern regarding the disclosure of honest information on social media. Responses and views collected indicate that some of the organisations are either undecided or do not support the disclosure of such information on social media. Some of the participants emphasised that any information that has to be shared on social media must be thought through well and should be in the interest of both stakeholders and the organisation. Being trustworthy on social media is good for the reputation of the organisation. Organisations must be guided by the Edelman Trust Barometer. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (Edelman 2011:7), negative information about organisations will be believed by 25% of people who trust those organisations compared to 57% of people who will accept as believable negative information about organisations they do not trust.

Based on the responses and views expressed about the control mutually aspect, the organisations support the use of social media in listening, attending and letting stakeholders have a say in matters concerning the crisis. As rightly emphasised by Ulmer et al. (2014), organisations must work together with stakeholders in finding solutions to a crisis. The interviews revealed new insights with regard to allowing stakeholders to be expressive on

social media about a crisis. According to the participants, by allowing stakeholders to be expressive, the organisation is able to gain insight into the thoughts of stakeholders and also create for itself an engaging presence on social media. Such insights, according to the participants, can prove useful, as the organisation will also learn something about stakeholders. The participants further added that, by allowing stakeholders to be expressive, the organisation will be seen as having an engaging presence on social media and this can prove useful to the organisation. They opined that, when stakeholders are given the opportunity to ask questions, interact and get feedback, misconceptions and wrong crisis narratives can be corrected. As correctly articulated by Romenti and Murtarelli (2013:22), allowing stakeholders to express opinions and ideas on social media about the crisis can help the organisation identify solutions and enable the organisation to send a message of mutuality in its relationship with stakeholders.

The findings on commitment indicated to a large measure that the organisations value the use of social media in letting stakeholders know that it will attend to the crisis concerns of stakeholders and sees social media as an avenue for maintaining the organisation-stakeholder relationship. The interviews did not enable the researcher to explore this aspect thoroughly. But the online survey findings give assurance that social media is seen as an essential platform that is an enabler of organisation-stakeholder relationships in times of crisis. It can also be inferred from the various views expressed on social media by the interview participants that organisations largely welcome the use of social media in communicating about a crisis. There is a commitment from organisations to use social media for crisis-communication management. The use of social media for crisis communication can enable the organisation to engage with stakeholders for a long-term relationship (Obembe et al. 2021:3). The assertion by Du Plessis (2018) that social-media communication can stimulate organisation stakeholder support and relationship-building with stakeholders during and after a crisis is indicative of the important role of social media.

The overall findings on satisfaction revealed that the organisations are committed to using social media in satisfying the information needs of stakeholders in times of crisis. As evident in the responses and views from the survey and interviews, there is an agreement that both the organisation and stakeholders benefit when they engage on social media in times of crisis. Some interesting perspectives were expressed by the participants regarding the benefits. The participants pointed to access to the right crisis information and protection of reputation as benefits stakeholders and organisations get respectively when they engage on social media. According to the participants, when stakeholders have access to the right crisis information, it enhances the understanding of stakeholders about the crisis. It also means that the organisation is in control of the crisis narrative and attracts the attention of stakeholders to its side of the crisis story. With regard to protection of reputation, the participants articulated that the organisation must engage with stakeholders on social media as it is a proactive way of protecting its brand. They further stated that the way the organisation engages with stakeholders will determine if the reputation of the organisation is protected.

In terms of the strength of the theoretical aspects with regard to the relationship with organisation-stakeholder relationship, the correlation tests conducted showed that trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction have positive relationships and are statistically significant. In the light of this, when organisations are using social media to interact with stakeholders about a crisis, organisations must be guided by the recommendation given by Ferguson (2018:71) that relationship satisfaction must be approached along the spectrum of organisation satisfied, stakeholder satisfied. This approach without a doubt will improve the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

Table 8.7: Proposed elements of the conceptual framework as was measured by an online survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews

PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
Element 1: **Fundamentals of crisis preparedness** ● **Present crisis preparedness** ● **Prospective crisis preparedness**
Element 2: Managing crisis on social media with interactions ● Collaboration ● Grounding ● Empathy ● Confirmed equality ● Responsiveness ● Accessibility ● Genuineness ● Transparency
Element 3: Mending relationships with stakeholders after a social-media crisis ● Communication efficiency ● Prospective Vision ● Culture and Value
Element 4: Enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationship with social-media crisis communication ● Trust ● Control mutuality ● Commitment ● Satisfaction

8.6 SUMMARY

The purpose of Chapter 8 was to report the data and provide an interpretation of the findings of the semi-structured interviews with senior PR practitioners in the public and private sectors of Ghana. The main focus of the discussions in this chapter was on gaining in-depth insights into relevant issues that were also addressed in the questionnaire and that were connected to the proposed elements for a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships.

The interview findings were thus analysed and interpreted in accordance with each of the four elements for a conceptual framework. The chapter concluded with a detailed discussion of the study's overall findings based on triangulation.

The final chapter, Chapter 9, focuses on the conclusions of the study and recommendations.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the conclusions of and recommendations for the study. In particular, the chapter focuses on the revised elements of the framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders before, during and after a crisis after empirical verification.

The first part of this chapter provides details on how the study's research questions were answered. The modification of the proposed elements of the conceptual framework after the empirical verification is presented next. Recommendations for the practical application of the proposed conceptual framework by public-relations practitioners in Ghana are provided. The chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research on the topic.

How the research questions were addressed are now presented in Section 9.2 below.

9.2 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In furtherance of the main objective of this study which was to propose elements for a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication practice by Ghanaian public-relations practitioners to build stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis and to empirically verify them, the research activities were directed at achieving this outcome. The findings of the study, including the research objectives and research questions, were addressed. The next subsection outlines a summary of these findings and the insights gained.

9.2.1 Research question 1

Research question 1, "In what way is building relationships with stakeholders important for managing crises on social media?", was addressed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 in the literature review. In order to explain the theoretical criteria for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders, it was imperative to investigate the concepts of dialogic

communication, relationship management, crisis communication and social media as the foundations of the study. A comprehensive literature review revealed that the philosophy essential for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders shows that organisation-stakeholder relationships must be examined on the basis of pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis phases. The literature further revealed that organisations must have a crisis-communication plan, social-media presence, and social-media platform-management competence in order to be crisis-prepared, particularly on social media. Clear definitions of crisis-communication planning, social-media crisis communication, dialogic communication and relationship management were formulated and discussed to delineate these concepts in context. These key thrusts were constructive in the data and well-aligned with the key concepts. In the empirical findings, study respondents for the online survey and participants for the semi-structured in-depth interviews articulated firmly the importance of crisis-communication planning, social-media presence, social-media crisis communication and social-media platform management. These findings were relevant to the building of relationships with stakeholders as they establish the crisis readiness on social media of Ghanaian organisations.

9.2.2 Research Question 2

Research question 2, "How do public-relations practitioners in Ghana manage crises on social media?", addressed the principal focus of this study, which is strategic and dialogic communication as bases for social-media crisis communication. The research question was addressed in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 6. In Chapter 2, strategic communication was emphasised as relevant to public-relations objectives. First, after a literature review of existing definitions on strategic communication, a strategic-communication definition was framed for this study and it revolved around the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Furthermore, the argument was made that, because of the opportunities social media afford stakeholders, it is imperative that public relations use strategic communication in their social-media crisis communication if

the organisation is desirous of enhancing the organisation-stakeholder relationship. The place of stakeholders in strategic communication was discussed and it was articulated that the strategic communication approach of the organisation must be participative. Also, it was highlighted that, in managing a crisis, strategic communication must be a top priority and hence public-relations practitioners must use strategic communication in shaping crisis communication to be relevant to stakeholders.

The concept of dialogic communications was introduced and discussed as important to strategic communication in Chapter 3 and explored in-depth in Chapter 4. It was evident in the literature that dialogic communication has emerged strongly as critical to changing the narrative about the public-relations discipline and profession. Dialogic communication is regarded as a communication endeavour that adds value to the practice of public relations. The use of computer-mediated channels, such as social media, by organisations for dialogic communication was highlighted as necessary for interactional communication with stakeholders. In order to have a holistic view of how dialogic communication can be used for social-media crises, validated communication dialogic constructs, such as collaboration, grounding, empathy, responsiveness, transparency, genuineness and accessibility, were explored and investigated.

In Chapter 3, with regard to the strategic communication component of how public-relations practitioners manage crises on social media, the study explored and investigated concepts such as a crisis communication messaging strategy and a social-media strategy. For dialogic communication, organisational response using dialogic communication principles and the use of social media as an avenue for dialogic communication with stakeholders were explored and investigated. The research question was addressed with both the online survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The empirical findings from both the online survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews revealed that strategic communication and dialogic communication influence public-relations practitioners' approach to managing crises on social media.

9.2.3 Research question 3

Research question 3 was formulated as follows: what are the communication approaches public-relations practitioners in Ghana should use in managing a crisis on social media? Having established the relevance of dialogic communication to social-media crisis communication, it was important to identify key dialogic communication approaches that will constitute key aspects of the conceptual framework and be necessary in answering the research problem. The research question was addressed in chapters 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8. In Chapter 3, dialogic communication concepts such as interaction, openness, engagement and responsiveness were discussed and analysed in line with their association with dialogic communication. The literature on dialogic communication was further explored in Chapter 5 in order to discover validated constructs for dialogic communication that could be investigated in the online survey so as to come up with elements that will form a part of the framework. The dialogic communication constructs—orientation of mutuality (collaboration, grounding, empathy, equality and responsiveness) and climate of openness (accessibility, genuineness and transparency)—were explained and conceptualised for possible inclusion as elements in the conceptual framework. Furthermore, in Chapter 5, the study explored other relevant communication approaches that could be integral in the crisis-management process, especially after the crisis. Renewal concepts such as communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value were identified as possible elements for inclusion in the framework. These concepts have been validated as constructs for the discourse of renewal theory. They were explained and analysed within the scope of social-media crisis communication. As far as the research question is concerned, the constructs that were considered for inclusion were the dialogic communication and discourse of renewal constructs identified above.

The findings and interpretations in chapters 7 and 8 yielded insights into the communication approaches that are suitable as proposed elements of the conceptual framework. Both online survey and semi-structured interview findings provided useful insights into strategic and

dialogic communication approaches that public-relations practitioners should adopt and use in communicating on social media during and after a crisis.

9.2.4 Research Question 4

Research question 4, what relationship-management criteria are necessary for effective stakeholder relationships when managing a crisis on social media?, addressed the relationship component of the proposed elements of the conceptual framework. The research question was addressed in chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. Relationship-management constructs such as trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction were explored and discussed in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, the literature on relationship management was explored in order to gain insight into concepts that could be adapted as elements of the conceptual framework. Findings from the literature indicated that relationship management has become core to the practice of public relations. A focus on relationship-management outcome will enable public-relations practitioners to look beyond only attaining communication objectives. The argument was made that a focus on relationships is imperative, especially in crisis situations. The organisation must seek for an organisation-stakeholder relationship that is mutually beneficial to both the organisation and stakeholders. In order to properly situate relationship management within the context of crisis communication on social media, the literature was further explored to identify relationship-management dimensions relevant for organisation-stakeholder relationship outcomes during and after a crisis situation. Trust, commitment, control mutuality and exchange relationship (satisfaction) were identified as relationship-management criteria that are important for stakeholder relationships when managing crises on social media. The criteria are validated constructs on organisation-stakeholder relationships.

In Chapter 7, the online survey findings revealed that public-relations practitioners largely endorse these criteria as important organisation-stakeholder relationship outcomes when the dialogic communication and discourse of renewal communication approaches are used to

manage crisis communication on social media. The statistical analysis also confirmed that trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction are all correlated and statistically significant.

The outcome of the semi-structured indepth interviews, as explained in Chapter 8, provided deeper insights into the criteria for relationship management. Participants were in agreement that the management of crisis communication on social media by their organisations must be driven by trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction. They confirmed that these criteria will enhance the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

The proposed elements for a social-media crisis communication practice by Ghanaian public-relations practitioners to build stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis were integrated into a conceptual framework for the purpose of filling the social-media crisis-communication management gap in Ghana.

The revised elements of the conceptual framework after empirical verification are presented next. This part of the chapter is augmented with the identification of relevant considerations for social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships in Ghana before, during and after a crisis.

9.3 THE REFINED ELEMENTS FOR A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL-MEDIA CRISIS COMMUNICATION PRACTICE TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER A CRISIS

This empirical research set out to propose elements for a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis. In order to come to the point of formulating the framework, the researcher had to undertake a synthesis of the literature review and empirical research to support the proposed framework. Based on the insight gained from the literature review and the evidence of the empirical research findings, it is necessary to report on the refined elements of the proposed elements of the conceptual framework.

It was imperative after an examination of the pragmatic paradigm philosophy of the study to refine the proposed conceptual framework. This is because public-relations practitioners in Ghana must have the requisite knowledge in solving practical problems of social-media crisis communication in the real world. More so, as the pragmatic approach promotes actions, public-relations practitioners must establish for their organisations specific actions that their organisations can apply in ensuring that the social-media crisis-communication strategy satisfies stakeholders and enhances the organisation-stakeholder relationship. It is the expectation of the researcher that the practitioners will encourage and persuade their organisations to adopt and implement the framework specific to each organisation's needs when dealing with a crisis.

The changes made to the initial framework were necessary in order to provide a specific focus on social-media crisis-communication management different from a general crisis-communication management strategy. Thus, highlighting the action point about the fundamentals of social-media crisis communication preparedness as distinct from the initial proposed fundamentals of crisis preparedness was important. The rest of the changes run through elements 2 to 4. The changes reflect the need to ensure that the framework provides specific and actionable guidelines that enable public-relations practitioners to plan for social-media crisis communication, be dialogic in managing crises, focus on a renewal approach in dealing with a crisis and strengthen organisation-stakeholder relationship at the end of the crisis cycle.

Evidence from the empirical research shows that public-relations practitioners are committed to using social media for crisis communication. They also appreciate the role social-media crisis communication can play in strengthening organisation-stakeholder relationships. Practitioners from both public and private sectors are prepared to accommodate social-media crisis communication into the communication strategy of their organisations. The framework offers organisations opportunities for strengthening of the organisation-stakeholder relationship and reputation enhancement. The refined elements are now discussed below:

Element 1: The focus of the study revolved around social-media crisis communication. It thus was imperative that any consideration for crisis communication preparedness in terms of strategic communication had to be founded on social-media crisis communication preparedness and this was underscored in the overall findings of the study in Chapter 8, Section 8.4.1. Through empirical findings of the study and in line with a strategic communication focus, social-media crisis communication preparedness must have a *social-media presence, social-media crisis-communication strategy, and social-media crisis communication tactical approaches* as its components. Thus, the refined framework has these components constituting the fundamentals of social-media crisis communication preparedness. Element 1 was renamed "*Fundamentals of social-media crisis communication preparedness*". The details of the components are discussed in Section 9.4.

Element 2: With the exception of the theoretical aspect of *confirmed equality,* which was not internally consistent and hence not reliable, the rest of the theoretical aspects, namely, *collaboration*, *grounding*, *empathy*, *responsiveness*, *accessibility*, *genuineness* and *transparency,* were statistically supported. Furthermore, the respondents of the survey and interview participants of the study identified these theoretical aspects as relevant constructs for dialogic communication on social media during a crisis. Thus, all the theoretical aspects with the exception of *confirmed equality* are included in the refined framework. Element 2 was renamed "*Dialogic communication strategies for social media interaction with stakeholders during a crisis".* The details of the aspects are discussed in Section 9.4.

Element 3: This element was renamed "*Renewal strategies for mending relationships with stakeholders after a crisis".* Based on the empirical findings of the study and the pragmatic approach adopted by the study, it was necessary to reconceptualise the element in the form of a strategy. The theoretical aspects of communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value were statistically significant and retained in the refined framework.

Element 4: The last and final element was renamed "*Strengthening organisation-stakeholder relationships with social-media crisis communication".* This was done to provide a sense of

direction and purpose to public-relations practitioners in Ghana in ensuring that any implementation of social-media crisis communication for managing a crisis will be geared towards strengthening organisation-stakeholder relationships.

The proposed and refined framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships are presented below in Figure 9.1 and Figure 9.2 respectively.

Proposed elements for the conceptual framework

Element 1: Fundamentals of crisis preparedness
- Present crisis preparedness
- Prospective crisis preparedness

Element 2: Managing crisis on social media with interactions
- Collaboration
- Grounding
- Empathy
- Confirmed equality
- Responsiveness
- Accessibility
- Genuineness
- Transparency

Element 3: Mending relationships with stakeholders after a social media crisis
- Communication efficiency
- Prospective Vision
- Culture and Value

Element 4: Enhancing organisation-stakeholder relationship with social media crisis communication
- Trust
- Control mutuality
- Commitment
- Satisfaction

Refined conceptual framework

Element 1: Fundamentals of social media crisis communication preparedness

- **Social media presence** (active social media accounts especially on Facebook and Twitter; social media content team; content management and monitoring)

- Social media crisis communication strategy (centralised approach to communication; and restriction on employee social media communication about the crisis)

- Social media crisis communication tactical approaches (issuance of holding statements, timely dissemination of information, real-time engagement, effective response and the use of multimedia tools to enrich interaction with stakeholders).

Element 2: Dialogic communication strategies for social media interaction with stakeholders during crisis

- **Collaboration** (readiness to interact with stakeholders about the crisis; allow stakeholders diverse views about the crisis)
- **Grounding** (invite comments from stakeholders; ensure stakeholders understanding of the crisis is correct)
- **Empathy** (demonstrate care; address the emotional needs of stakeholders)
- **Responsiveness** (respond to comments of stakeholders; pay attention to crisis issues raised by stakeholders)
- **Accessibility** (provide crisis information to stakeholders; timely dissemination of crisis information on social media).
- **Genuineness** (honest interaction with stakeholders)
- **Transparency** (crisis information disclosure; avoid misinterpreting crisis opinions of stakeholders

Element 3: Renewal strategies for mending relationship with stakeholders after a crisis

- **Communication efficiency** (Engagement with stakeholders must be continuous and sincere)
- **Prospective vision** (share crisis lessons and corrective actions; emphasise on the crisis as a renewal opportunity)
- **Culture and value** (leverage on organisational culture and values in the engagement with stakeholders; leadership should lead in framing crisis perception in a positive way)

Element 4: Strengthening organisation-stakeholder relationship with social media crisis communication

- **Trust** (crisis decisions that concern stakeholders must be disclosed; keep stakeholders updated on promises made, demonstrate ability to manage crisis)
- **Control mutuality** (social listening and intelligence gathering on stakeholders' views concerning the crisis)
- **Commitment** (attend to stakeholder views concerning the crisis; provide consistent crisis updates.
- **Satisfaction** (the use of social media for crisis communication must satisfy the interests of both the organisation and stakeholders

9.4 GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE REFINED ELEMENTS OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The graphical representation of the refined elements of the conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships is presented in Figure 9.3.

GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE REFINED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL MEDIA CRISIS COMMUNICATION TO BUILD STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS

SOCIAL MEDIA CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

FUNDAMENTALS
- Social media presence
- Social media crisis communication strategy
- Social media crisis communication tactical approaches

DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
- Collaboration
- Grounding
- Empathy
- Responsiveness
- Accessibility
- Genuineness
- Transparency

RENEWAL STRATEGIES
- Communication efficiency
- Prospective vision
- Culture and Value

ORGANISATION-STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP STRENGTHENED

STAKEHOLDERS

Figure 9.3: Graphical representation of the refined conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships

9.5 OUTLINE OF A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL-MEDIA CRISIS COMMUNICATION TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

The components of the elements of the conceptual framework are explained in detail in this section. The components are to serve as a guide to public-relations practitioners in Ghana in the management of social-media crisis communication on behalf of their organisations. The following elements, namely, fundamentals of social-media crisis communication preparedness, dialogic communication strategies for social-media interactions with stakeholders during a crisis, renewal strategies for mending the relationship with stakeholders

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after a crisis and strengthen organisation-stakeholder relationship with social-media crisis communication, are discussed below:

9.5.1 Fundamentals of social-media crisis communication preparedness

This element is necessary for any social-media crisis communication action plan. It sets out the required crisis-management readiness organisations must have in place in dealing with a crisis on social media. The action points in this element are social-media presence, social-media crisis-communication strategy and social-media crisis communication tactical approaches.

9.5.1.1 Social-media presence

As corroborated by the empirical findings, an organisation that is crisis-prepared can manage a crisis successfully (Coombs 2019). A social-media presence is an important prerequisite for any organisation that wants to manage crises successfully (Crook et al. 2016; Camilleri 2018a; Capriotti et al. 2021). Ghanaian organisations must have social-media presence which will allow them to communicate with stakeholders. Although there are numerous social media networks, in the context of this study, Facebook and Twitter are the social-media platforms that can provide Ghanaian organisations effective messaging means in engaging with stakeholders. For intelligence gathering and monitoring, Facebook offers the advantage of keeping posts, comments and other communication activities (Adebayo 2017). Twitter, on the other hand, is useful for providing instant updates and for stakeholders to express their views easily (Kim 2013). Ghanaian organisations should consider adopting Facebook and Twitter as their main social-media platforms for social-media crisis communication.

The social-media presence also requires of Ghanaian organisations to have a social-media team whose responsibility largely will be to manage all crisis communication on social media. The team will be required to ensure that any content to be posted by the organisation or

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responses to stakeholder comments are in line with building organisation-stakeholder relationships. The team essentially will be the content managers of social-media crisis communication of the organisation. All issues regarding activation of privacy controls, information management and evaluation will be the responsibility of the team. The social-media team should be staff of the public-relations department and have academic qualifications and experience in communication or public relations.

Ghanaian organisations should actively support the content management of the social-media platforms of the organisations. For efficiency and effectiveness of the task of social-media crisis-communication management, Ghanaian organisations in both public and private sectors should support and sponsor the team members to undergo periodic capacity-enhancement training in the content management of the social-media accounts of the organisation. It is imperative that the social-media team is competent and skilled in managing information and interactions involving the organisation and stakeholders. How the team manages the social-media communication of the organisation can be a benefit or drawback to Ghanaian organisations attempt at making good use of social media.

The social-media presence of the organisation provides Ghanaian organisations with intelligence-gathering and monitoring opportunities (Eriksson & Olsson 2016; Ghani et al. 2019). They would be able to monitor comments stakeholders post and this will make the organisations know the position of stakeholders on crisis issues. By gathering intelligence, the organisation will position itself in deciding the appropriate crisis responses and messaging it provides stakeholders.

The various components of the social-media presence should enable Ghanaian organisations to be crisis ready in managing communication on social media.

9.5.1.2 Social-media crisis-communication strategy

The social-media crisis-communication strategy provides the direction upon which the social-media team will manage crisis content on social media. It is important that the team works with

a strategy. Based on the empirical findings, the strategy should revolve around a centralised approach to communication and restriction on employee social-media communication. A centralised approach to communication means that all communication concerning the crisis will come from one source – the social-media team or any officially assigned individual. In crisis times, these organisations should speak with one voice. They should avoid situations where sources of crisis communication on social media are many and varied. Though employees might be on social media, it is necessary as a strategy to prevent employees from posting on their social-media accounts any issue related to the crisis. Crisis situations can be tense; the tense situation should not be further aggravated as a result of comments made by employees. As they may lack competence in social-media crisis communication, it is prudent that Ghanaian organisations restrict employees from posting comments regarding the crisis.

9.5.1.3 Social-media crisis communication tactical approaches

The element also provides for social-media crisis communication tactical approaches. Ghanaian organisations should know the appropriate tactics to deploy on social media in the event of a crisis. Issuing a holding statement as a tactical approach is an important first step in engaging with stakeholders. Ghanaian organisations should consider issuing a holding statement to offer some initial explanation and clarity with regard to the crisis. This step will reassure stakeholders that the organisation is concerned about their welfare. Timely dissemination of information is another tactical approach to social-media crisis communication that can position the organisation as committed to ensuring that stakeholders are informed about the crisis without any delay. However, any information that would be disseminated should be accurate. Ghanaian organisations should also as a matter of tactics prepare to have real-time engagement with stakeholders. The social-media ecosystem is built to be interactive and therefore Ghanaian organisations in their crisis readiness should prepare to have real-time engagement with stakeholders. The capacity training that the social-media team will undergo periodically should equip them effectively in having real-time engagement with

stakeholders. If Ghanaian organisations fail to plan for real-time engagement, stakeholders can take the crisis conversation elsewhere and this will mean that the organisation will be denied the opportunity to know what stakeholders are saying about the organisation in connection with the crisis. Providing effective response is a tactical approach, Ghanaian organisations should consider, for social-media crisis communication preparedness. Responses that the organisation will give stakeholders must satisfy the information needs of stakeholders in respect of the crisis. The last tactical approach is the use of multimedia tools such as infographics and videos, that could be integrated into the content-management process for social-media crisis communication. The videos can be live or recorded and could feature representatives of the organisation answering questions about the crisis or updating stakeholders with information. This tactical way will depict the organisation as transparent and open. The use of infographics should also be considered as it can increase the understanding of stakeholders about the crisis.

From the aforementioned explanation on the fundamentals of social-media crisis preparedness, it is imperative that public-relations practitioners encourage their organisations to consider and adopt the first element as a first step in social-media crisis communication that will potentially impact positively the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

9.5.2 Dialogic communication strategies for social-media interactions with stakeholders during a crisis

The key thrust of this element is to point PR practitioners to dialogic communication strategies that enable interaction on social media with stakeholders during a crisis. The strategies conceptualised in the framework for use by practitioners are collaboration, grounding, empathy, accessibility, genuineness and transparency.

9.5.2.1 Collaboration

Ghanaian organisations should be willing to interact with stakeholders on their platforms. Public-relations practitioners must encourage their organisations to not only focus on informational messages to stakeholders. As stakeholders have become empowered on social media, the strategic action to take is for the organisation to be seen as collaborative by committing to interaction. This will mean that these organisations should value reciprocal communication on social media during a crisis. So, in instances where the organisation needs to apologise or communicate corrective actions, it should do so collaboratively by interacting.

Ghanaian organisations should allow for the diverse opinions of stakeholders to be expressed on their platforms. They must be seen to be tolerant of the opinion or views of stakeholders, even in crisis situations. No matter how combustive the comments of stakeholders are, Ghanaian organisations should focus on the long-term view of building organisation-stakeholder relationships. By allowing stakeholders to be expressive on their platform, Ghanaian organisations will gain insight into the mental state of stakeholders. Stakeholders must have the impression that they are contributing to the decision-making process involved in resolving the crisis.

9.5.2.2 Grounding

Ghanaian organisations should take the difficult but proactive step of inviting stakeholders to post comments about the crisis. The organisations should be seen as encouraging stakeholders to speak up and ask questions. It is important that the organisation takes charge of the crisis narrative and inviting stakeholders to engage with the organisation is a positive way of building organisation-stakeholder relationships.

It is also important that organisations ensure that stakeholders' understanding of the crisis is correct. This is to prevent misinterpretation of the organisation's crisis intentions. This will only be possible if the organisation is interactive on social media with stakeholders.

9.5.2.3 Empathy

As emphasised in the findings (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2.4; Chapter 8, Section 8.3.2.6), empathy is a useful strategy in improving organisation-stakeholder relationships. In disseminating information and interacting, Ghanaian organisations must demonstrate care and address the emotional needs of stakeholders. Crisis situations are sometimes dire and can have a psychological impact on stakeholders. It is therefore important that Ghanaian organisations show care and take steps in reassuring stakeholders that the organisation will not renege on its responsibilities.

9.5.2.4 Responsiveness

Public-relations practitioners should encourage their organisations to respond to stakeholder comments. Feedback from the organisation is necessary, as it assures stakeholders that the organisation is committed to dialogue. These organisations should have in mind that a one-way communication approach is not progressive and could be inimical to attempts at building organisation-stakeholder relationships. Being responsive should also include paying attention to crisis issues raised by stakeholders. When stakeholders point to issues connected to the crisis, organisations should critically assess these issues and engage stakeholders in explaining or addressing the issues.

9.5.2.5 Accessibility

It is in the interest of Ghanaian organisations to provide crisis information to stakeholders. They should not attempt to restrict access to crisis information relevant to the interests of stakeholders. Timely dissemination of crisis information should be a top priority of these organisations. Stakeholders perceive information disseminated in a timely manner as relevant (Westerman et al. 2014).

9.5.2.6 Genuineness

Ghanaian organisations should endeavour to have honest interactions with stakeholders. They should be bold in engaging stakeholders on both positive and negative information. These organisations must be seen as truthful in their engagement with stakeholders. The honest approach to crisis communication by the organisation will enable the organisation to be ahead of stakeholders in the framing of crisis communication on social media. Being honest can earn the organisation credibility.

9.5.2.7 Transparency

The organisation should not hide information concerning the crisis from stakeholders. Rather it must demonstrate in its social-media interaction with stakeholders that it is transparent. Stakeholders will have confidence in the organisation's ability in managing the crisis. As transparency has a positive correlation with organisation-stakeholder relationship (see Table 7.3.3), it is in the interest of the organisation to be transparent. The organisation should, however, ensure that crisis information deemed to require legal approval is given such an approval before it is shared with stakeholders.

9.5.3 Renewal strategies for mending relationships with stakeholders after a crisis

One task Ghanaian organisations will have to deal with is to rebuild the relationship with stakeholders after a crisis. The strategic approach in rebuilding relationships with stakeholders will revolve around renewal (Sellnow & Seeger 2013:96; Narverud 2016:13; Xu 2018:109). The purpose of this element is to mend the relationship through the use of communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value strategies. The strategies are explained below.

9.5.3.1 Communication efficiency

It is imperative that Ghanaian organisations should continue to engage with stakeholders. The engagement with stakeholders must not terminate when the crisis appears to have been resolved. They should continue to interact with stakeholders and the interaction must be sincere. The organisation's social-media interactions should not be rigid. Since the purpose is to mend the relationship, the focus of the engagement should be on the organisation-stakeholder relationship. The organisation through this communication-efficiency approach can win the support of stakeholders, which potentially will influence stakeholder perception about the organisation. On the other hand, if the engagement is interpreted by stakeholders as organisation-centred, stakeholders may not be committed to support the organisation in the mending of relationship process.

9.5.3.2 Prospective vision

The prospective vision strategy provides Ghanaian organisations renewal opportunities with stakeholders. The renewal opportunities involve communicating lessons learnt and corrective actions. Evidence from the overall findings (see Section 8.4.3 in Chapter 8) indicates not all organisations support such actions, as implementing these actions may affect their reputations. In view of this, and in pursuit of the organisation-stakeholder relationship, Ghanaian organisations should share information only when the remedial measures (lessons learnt and corrective actions) have been put together and ready to be implemented. This approach will make stakeholders have confidence in the organisation's attempt at mending the relationship. The organisation should demonstrate in its engagement with stakeholders that the crisis was also an opportunity for the renewing of its relationship with stakeholders.

9.5.3.3 Culture and Value

Ghanaian organisations have relationship-renewal opportunities through the use of organisational culture and core values. It is necessary that the renewal narrative of Ghanaian organisations is also founded on the culture and value of these organisations. They should highlight their ethical standards by assuring stakeholders that their core values and organisational culture support the mending of relationships with stakeholders.

The leader of the organisation should play an important role in the renewal process of mending relationships with stakeholders. The leader should lead in framing the crisis perception in a positive way. For example, the leader must engage stakeholders to see the crisis as an opportunity to rebuild and improve the way the organisation runs its operations. This engagement can be tactically deployed on social media in the form of recorded video, live sessions or question-and-answer conferences. The involvement of leadership in the social-media crisis communication process can attract the support of stakeholders. It is possible that, through this strategy, Ghanaian organisations can succeed in mending relationships with stakeholders. As the evidence of the empirical study shows, there is statistical proof that culture and value is positively correlated with the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

9.5.4 Strengthening the organisation-stakeholder relationship with social-media crisis communication

The outcome of the social-media crisis communication engagement between Ghanaian organisations and stakeholders is a strengthened relationship. This element is the purpose of the study. Ghanaian organisations should approach the concept of relationship management when managing crisis communication on social media from the strategic points of trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction. As pointed out in the literature, the organisation-stakeholder relationship is usually measured by the dimensions of trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction (Cheng 2018:120; Ferguson 2018:171; Dhanesh & Duthler

2019:5; Celebi 2020:774). These components are statistically significant as confirmed in the empirical study and therefore suitable for enabling Ghanaian organisations to strengthen their relationship with stakeholders.

9.5.4.1 Trust

Ghanaian organisations should demonstrate to stakeholders that they are capable of managing the crisis. Through interactions on social media with stakeholders, these organisations should be honest in the disclosure of crisis information. Ghanaian organisations should not hide crisis decisions that affect stakeholders. It will be bad for the reputation of these organisations if such information is accessed by stakeholders from social-media sources other than that of the organisations. Furthermore, Ghanaian organisations should be proactive in updating stakeholders with information on promises made to them.

9.5.4.2 Control mutuality

It is important that Ghanaian organisations take social-listening and intelligence-gathering into account. They should be receptive and interested in the views expressed on social media by stakeholders in times of crisis. The social-media presence of the organisation is necessary as it enables these organisations to gather intelligence on the comments and views expressed by stakeholders. The intelligence will allow these organisations to know the perception of stakeholders regarding the organisation's management of the crisis. They should see intelligence-gathering as a useful exercise, which provides the organisation with information relevant for improving the relationship with stakeholders.

9.5.4.3 Commitment

In seeking to maintain the relationship with stakeholders, Ghanaian organisations should attend to the crisis concerns of stakeholders. This will demonstrate to stakeholders that the

organisation is committed to the organisation-stakeholder relationship. It should be a top priority of the organisation to be consistent with crisis updates on social media. These organisations should note that the verdict of stakeholders on the commitment of the organisation to the organisation-stakeholder relationship will be determined by the actions of the organisations on social media.

9.5.4.4 Satisfaction

The interaction and engagement these organisations will have with stakeholders regarding the crisis must stimulate satisfaction for both the organisation and stakeholders. Thus, the organisations must ensure that all its social media engagement with stakeholders about the crisis must result in 'organisation satisfaction', 'stakeholder satisfaction'. The organisation should avoid pursuing a course of action in its social-media crisis-communication management that only leads to organisation satisfaction. It should follow the relationship-management principles of trust, control mutuality and commitment and the likely outcome will benefit both the organisation and stakeholders. The organisation's pursuit of reputation will be achieved if stakeholders are satisfied with the social-media crisis communication process deployed by the organisation.

9.6 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

In Chapter 1, it was pointed out that the main contribution of this study would be in the field of communication science in general and the fields of public relations and social-media crisis-communication management to be precise.

The primary contribution of this study is that it is the first study in a Ghanaian context that considers building relationships before, during and after a crisis. Additionally, the formulation of elements for a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders, not only during, but also before and after a crisis, could serve

as a heuristic to Ghanaian public-relations practitioners. Furthermore, the study incorporates aspects of various areas into an exhaustive framework, namely, corporate communication, public relations, relationship management and social media. With regard to the communication science field, public relations was the subject of interest.

The next sections now highlight specific theoretical and practical contributions.

9.6.1 Theoretical contributions

The study's theoretical contributions are as follows:

- The study successfully combined dialogic communication concepts (orientation of mutuality and climate of openness) and discourse renewal concepts (communication efficiency, prospective vision and culture and value) with relationship-management concepts (trust, control mutuality, commitment and satisfaction). This integration has led to the formulation of relevant and distinctive elements for a conceptual framework that add a novel perspective to the existing body of literature.

- Insight was gained into the possibilities of social-media crisis communication influenced by dialogic communication and discourse of renewal enabling the building of stakeholder relationships. Furthermore, the study makes relevant contributions in a realistic sense as it examines the communication approaches public-relations practitioners in Ghana use in managing a crisis on social media and recommends ways in which Ghanaian organisations could apply the elements in the conceptual framework in practice. The study thus provides specific theoretical action points for the practice of social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships during various phases of a crisis.

- The motivation for this study was the dearth of research and literature in Ghana focused on the use of social media for crisis communication by public-relations practitioners to build stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis. In

essence, the study provides novel insights into how to use social media in managing a crisis with the view to building stakeholder relationships.

- The in-depth knowledge gained from public-relations practitioners is beneficial, as it highlights the value of dialogic communication and discourse of renewal to crisis communication on social media. This knowledge, if applied by Ghanaian organisations, will strengthen organisation-stakeholder relationships, thereby enhancing the reputation of organisations. Also, not many studies have adopted the discourse of renewal theory for social-media crisis communication and to which this study makes a contribution.

- Significantly, the study's findings and refined elements of the conceptual framework can be tested in other African settings because the use of social media is not limited to only Ghana.

- The study's findings revealed that organisation-stakeholder relationships can be predicted individually by crisis preparedness, dialogic communication and discourse of renewal. More importantly, dialogic communication has the strongest predictive power in predicting organisation-stakeholder relationships. The knowledge is useful, as it highlights the importance of dialogic communication to building relationships with stakeholders.

- The paucity of research in Ghana on the use of social media for crisis communication by organisations required detailed attention devoted to various existing theoretical viewpoints in order to reveal theoretical viewpoints to serve as the theoretical basis of the study. This study identified certain theoretical viewpoints and theories that provided guidance in setting the theoretical underpinnings of the study relevant for this study.

- Several working definitions were proposed from the perspective of dialogic communication, namely, public relations, crisis communication, social media and social-media crisis communication, which also add to the existing body of knowledge.

- The findings of this study will stimulate further academic discussions on the topic and encourage more testing and refinement of the elements in the conceptual framework by other scholars.

9.6.2 Practical contributions

- The refined elements of the conceptual framework contribute to public-relations practices in both private and public sectors in Ghana as it provides guidelines on how to use social media to communicate before, during and after crises to build stakeholder relationships.
- The study also provides insight into the requisite social-media crisis communication preparedness that organisations must have in place for dealing with a crisis.
- The study further provides insight into the appropriate dialogic communication and renewal strategies suited for social-media crisis communication.
- The study equips public-relations practitioners in Ghana with knowledge on how to strengthen organisation-stakeholder relationships through the adoption and application of dialogic communication and renewal strategies.
- The study offers public-relations practitioners clarity on relationship management criteria that can be used to strengthen organisation-stakeholder relationships.
- The study offers policy ideas that could be adopted by the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) Ghana to enrich the practice of public relaitons in Ghana.
- The refined elements of the conceptual framework can be used by other professionals who are not public-relations practitioners but perform some communication functions, such as social-media management.

9.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Even though the study makes both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of social-media crisis communication, certain limitations must be considered.

The study has the following limitations:

- A larger sample size from the population of public-relations practitioners registered with IPR-Ghana would have allowed for additional statistical analysis which would have enriched the study. The selection criteria also limited the study in some ways as only public-relations practitioners registered with IPR-Ghana in 2020 were included in the study. This meant that other public-relations practitioners who have experience in social media and crisis communication could not be included.
- The findings of the study can only be generalised to the public-relations practitioners who were registered with IPR-Ghana in 2020.

9.8 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following are recommendations for future research:

- Future studies can look into specific applications of social-media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter in managing crisis communication focusing on the building of stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis.
- The refined elements in the conceptual framework can be examined and further tested in future studies with different methodologies and sample sizes.
- More stakeholder views regarding social-media crisis communication to build relationships are necessary in future studies.

A qualitative content analysis approach can be adopted in future studies to examine social-media interactions between organisations and stakeholders and whether these interactions are focused on building relationships.

9.9 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to develop a framework for social-media crisis communication that will assist Ghanaian organisations to build relationships with stakeholders. The adoption of such a framework will enable organisations, conduct their social-media crisis communications in prepared, dialogic and renewal ways targeted at ensuring a good public relations practice and the attainment of organisational goals.

For a strengthened organisation-stakeholder relationship, organisations in their social-media crisis communication activities must interact and engage with stakeholders. By showing interest and attending to the views of stakeholders, organisations will demonstrate to stakeholders that they are commited to the organisation-stakeholder relationship. This proactive approach will enable organisations win the trust of stakeholders, and ultimately, satisfy the interests of organisations and stakeholders in times of crisis.

Finally, it is important that organisational leaders support the integration of a social-media crisis communication framework into the relationship-building strategies of their organisations. The involvement of leadership can help in the rebuilding of relationship with stakeholders.

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EMAIL INVITATION

Dear prospective respondent

My name is Mr. Fortune Tella. I am conducting a web-based survey which is part of my PhD research on using social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders before, during and after a social-media crisis. I am a Faculty member of the Department of Language and Communication Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi in Ghana.

You are part of other public-relations practitioners who have received my invitation to respond to statements that revolve around the use of social-media crisis communication in building stakeholder relationships before, during and after a crisis. Your responses are relevant to this research and will contribute to the development of a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication as a heuristic for Ghanaian organisations with which to build stakeholder relationships. Your participation will help me understand how public-relations practitioners in Ghana manage crisis communication on social media and your responses will thus contribute immensely in the conceptualisation of this framework.

Your responses will remain anonymous and all data collected will be treated as confidential. Your participation in the survey is also voluntary and you can exit at any time. Providing a response to all the statements will be appreciated. However, you are under no obligation to answer a statement that you find inappropriate. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers and that only your opinion is required. In the case of publication of the results, your responses will remain anonymous.

You may contact me on 0240217878 or via email: ftella@knust.edu.gh if you have any questions regarding this questionnaire.

For you to access the web-based survey, please click the link below. Completing the survey will take approximately 30 minutes of your time.

Clicking on the "Agree" button indicates that:
□ You have read the information in the email invitation
□ You have read the above information
□ You voluntarily agree to participate
□ You understand that anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured
□ You understand that you can exit the survey at any time.
□ You understand that the data gathered in this survey will be used for the research of Mr. Tella (including all subsequent publications)

INSTRUCTIONS:

This questionnaire is divided into five sections. The sections together are focused on establishing how Ghanaian public-relations practitioners manage a crisis on social media to enhance relationships with stakeholders before, during and after a crisis.

Section A: Crisis preparedness
Section B: Managing a social-media crisis with interactions
Section C: Mending stakeholder relationships after a crisis
Section D: Enhancing stakeholder relationships with social-media crisis communication
Section E: Biographical and Demographic data

The questionnaire contains several statements on social media communication for crisis communication. Please assess the statements and how they apply to your work as a public-relations practitioner and select the best applicable option. The response format will be in five Point Likert-scales (**Strongly Agree = 5, Agree =4, Neutral=3, Disagree=4 and Strongly Disagree=1**).

SECTION A: CRISIS PREPAREDNESS

This section measures crisis preparedness by Ghanaian organisations with public relations departments.

Statements	1 SD	2 D	3 N	4 A	5 SA
1. My organisation is prepared for different types of crisis including social media crisis.					
2. My organisation's scope to cope with a crisis is good.					
3. My organisation has a good knowledge regarding the different phases of crises.					
4. My organisation knows what to do at every possible phase of a crisis including social media crisis.					
5. My organisation knows how to diagnose the causes of a crisis.					
6. My organisation knows what resources and quantities to allocate in order to manage a crisis successfully.					
7. My organisation knows how to detect and manage the needs and expectations of stakeholders in the crisis.					
8. My organisation knows how to identify changes in the needs of stakeholders.					

Reference: (Carmeli & Schaubroeck 2008)

SECTION B: MANAGING A SOCIAL MEDIA CRISIS WITH INTERACTIONS

Statements	1 SD	2 D	3 N	4 A	5 SA
9. My organisation often communicates with stakeholders on social media to mutually benefit from these interactions.					
10. My organisation uses social media to deal with stakeholders' diverse perspectives on a crisis effectively.					

11. Stakeholders' views about a crisis expressed on social media are accepted as worthy of consideration.					
12. My organisation uses social media to invite stakeholders to comment on a crisis.					
13. My organisation uses social media to establish that stakeholders correctly understood what has been communicated during a crisis.					
14. My organisation's use of social media enables it to share common ground of communication with stakeholders.					
15. My organisation uses social media to empathise with affected stakeholders.					
16. My organisation uses social media to try to understand a crisis from the perspectives of stakeholders.					
17. The use of social media allows my organisation to estimate how stakeholders feel at the moment about a crisis.					
18. My organisation is not authoritative in communicating on social media with stakeholders.					
19. My organisation does not seek to control views of stakeholders expressed on social media.					
20. My organisation is not arrogant in communicating on social media with stakeholders.					
21. My organisation responds promptly to stakeholder concerns posted on social media.					
22. My organisation pays attention to crisis issues raised on social media by stakeholders.					
23. My organisation is sensitive to stakeholders' needs as posted on social media.					
24. My organisation shares open access to information on social media to stakeholders.					
25. My organisation allows stakeholders to share their opinions freely on social media about the crisis.					
26. My organisation easily interacts on social media with stakeholders.					
27. My organisation is timely on social media with messages about the crisis.					
28. My organisation is honest in communicating on social media with stakeholders about the crisis.					
29. My organisation's messages on social media are believable.					
30. My organisation is committed to genuine interaction on social media with stakeholders.					
31. My organisation does not hide information from stakeholders when using social media to communicate about the crisis.					
32. My organisation ensures that crisis response messages posted on social media are clear to stakeholders.					
33. My organisation is not deceptive in interpreting crisis opinions expressed on social media by stakeholders.					

Reference: (Yang, Kang & Cha 2015)

SECTION C: MENDING STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS AFTER A SOCIAL MEDIA CRISIS

Statements					
	1 SD	2 D	3 N	4 A	5 SA
34. My organisation is always thoughtful in sharing information on social media with stakeholders about why the crisis happened.					
35. My organisation is sincere with stakeholders when sharing information on social media about the crisis.					
36. My organisation interacts in a spontaneous manner on social media with stakeholders about the crisis.					
37. My organisation shares information on social media of its commitment to corrective actions to improve the organisation.					
38. My organisation always shares information on social media with stakeholders about the crisis been an opportunity to learn and grow from the crisis situation.					
39. My organisation always shares information with stakeholders on lessons learnt which can also be accessed on social media.					
40. The communication from leadership to stakeholders about the crisis shared on social media reflects the core values of the organisation.					
41. The communication from leadership to stakeholders about the crisis shared on social media shows the commitment of the organisation to its values.					
42. The communication from leadership to stakeholders about the crisis shared on social media reflects the organisational culture of my organisation.					

Reference: (Xu 2018)

SECTION D: ENHANCING STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS WITH SOCIAL-MEDIA CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Statements					
	1 SD	2 D	3 N	4 A	5 SA
43. My organisation always discloses honest information to stakeholders on social media about the crisis.					
44. Important decisions about the crisis that concern stakeholders are made available on social media.					
45. My organisation can be relied on in using social media to inform stakeholders about its promises concerning the crisis.					
46. Social media is a trustworthy platform for letting stakeholders know my organisation's ability to manage a crisis.					
47. Social media is useful for listening to what stakeholders have to say about the crisis.					
48. It is important that my organisation pays attention to the crisis opinions of stakeholders posted on social media.					
49. It is important that stakeholders are given a say in the social-media crisis communication decision-making process of my organisation.					

50. My organisation uses social media to attend to crisis concerns of stakeholders in order to maintain its long-term commitment to stakeholders.				
51. My organisation uses social media for crisis communication in order to maintain a relationship with stakeholders.				
52. My organisation is committed to using social media for crisis communication in order to have a long-lasting bond with stakeholders.				
53. My organisation is pleased with how it uses social media for crisis engagement with stakeholders.				
54. Both my organisation and stakeholders benefit when using social media for crisis communication.				
55. The use of social media for crisis communication has enhanced the relationship between my organisation and stakeholders.				

Reference: (Grunig & Huang 2000; Hon & Grunig 1999)

SECTION E: BIOGRAPHICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

This information will only be used to classify your responses.

56. Please indicate your current position in the organisation.
   [ ] Public relations Officer/Manager
   [ ] Communications Manager/ Corporate Communications Manager
   [ ] Marketing Officer/Manager
   [ ] Communication Consultant
   [ ] Other_____ (*please specify*)

57. Please indicate your highest educational qualification.
   [ ] Doctoral degree
   [ ] Master's degree
   [ ] Bachelor's degree
   [ ] Diploma
   [ ] Other (*please specify*)

58. Please indicate your educational background.
   [ ] Public relations
   [ ] Marketing
   [ ] Journalism/Media studies
   [ ] Communication
   [ ] Other _____ (*please specify*)

59. Please indicate your experience in public relations.
   [ ] 2 years and below
   [ ] 3-5 years
   [ ] More than 5 years

60. Please indicate the industry your organisation is affiliated with.
   [ ] Telecommunications

[ ] Banking and Financial services
[ ] Education
[ ] Health
[ ] Hospitality/Food services
[ ] Insurance
[ ] Non-governmental organisation
[ ] Governmental institution
[ ] Security services
[ ] Utility services
[ ] Consumer goods
[ ] Other_____ (*please specify*)

61.   Please indicate if your organisation belongs to the public or private sector.
        [ ] Public sector
        [ ] Private sector

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. The interview will last **between 45-60 minutes** and it will be recorded digitally with your permission. The interview is part of my PhD research on a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships in Ghana. The purpose is to propose a conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships in Ghana. You have been purposively selected to participate in this study because of your position as a public relations manager. Additionally, your experience in public relations management will yield useful data for answering questions set for the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you will be able to withdraw at any time.

Be assured that your confidentiality is guaranteed and that your name or the name of the organisation will not be revealed. The results of this study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in a research journal. However, your identity and that of your organisation will not be revealed even for purposes of publishing the results.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on +233 24021 7878 or fortunekendra@gmail.com about the study or any questions you have regarding the study.

Thanking you for having signed and sent me the consent form via email before we conducted this interview.

SECTION A: Crisis communication preparedness

1. How important is crisis communication planning to your organisation?
2. Describe how your organisation uses social media communication with stakeholders in managing a crisis.
3. Describe the benefits your organisation has gained in using social-media crisis communication to manage a crisis.
4. How do you ensure that your social media presence on social networking sites is well managed?

SECTION B: Using social media to interact with stakeholders during crisis

5. How does your organisation use social media to interact with stakeholders during a crisis?
6. What do you regard as important to stakeholders when interacting with them on social media during a crisis?
7. How should social media be used during a crisis to communicate your organisation's ability to meet the expectations of stakeholders?
8. How critical is trust when interacting on social media with stakeholders during a crisis?
9. In what ways are aspects of exchanging ideas and opinions (i.e. collaboration, empathy, grounding, equality, responsiveness, transparency, accessibility, openness and genuineness – each concept will be explained to the participants) important for your organisation when interacting on social media with stakeholders during a crisis?

10. Explain how your organisation responds to stakeholders' posts/comments in social media during a crisis?

SECTION C: Mending relationships with stakeholders after a social media crisis

11. Describe how your organisation uses social media to repair its relationship with stakeholders after a crisis. If not, why not?
12. Explain how you use social media to share information with stakeholders on why the crisis happened. If not, why not?
13. Describe why the sharing of information to stakeholders on lessons learnt from the crisis can improve your relationship with stakeholders. If not, why not?
14. Explain why it is necessary for your organisation to share on social media that you embrace the crisis failure and it is a learning opportunity for your organisation. If not, why not?
15. In what ways are the values of your organisation supportive of your relationship with stakeholders inspite of the crisis?

SECTION D: Enhancing stakeholder relationships with social-media crisis communication

16. How has your organisation used social media during a crisis to improve its relationship with stakeholders?

17. How important do you regard revealing information about a crisis on social media to build better stakeholder relationships?

18. Describe how using social media to inform stakeholders of your promise to support and assist them has proved useful in building stakeholder relationships.
19. In what way is allowing stakeholders expressing their views on social media about the crisis useful relationship-building with stakeholders?
20. How can engagement with stakeholders on social media during a crisis benefit both your organisation and its stakeholders?

Closing question:

Is there perhaps a response to any question you now wish to provide more details on?

Do you want to provide any additional information on using social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships with before, during and after a crisis?

DEBRIEFING

Participants will be debriefed after the interview.

CLOSING

Thank you for your time and for sharing your knowledge on using social-media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR SURVEY

April 29, 2021

Title: **A conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders in Ghana**

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Fortune Tella and I am doing research with Prof. Charmaine Du Plessis, a professor in the Department of Communication Science towards a Doctoral degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: **A conceptual framework for social-media crisis communication to build relationships with stakeholders in Ghana**

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

I am conducting this research to establish out how the use of social media for crisis communication can help Ghanaian organisations to enhance the relationship they have with stakeholders. As this study will collect data from public-relations practitioners in Ghana, the insight that will be provided by these practitioners will help in understanding the status quo in respect of social-media crisis communication management before, during and after a crisis. Additionally, the data generated will ultimately lead to proposing a conceptual framework for building organisation-stakeholder relationships through effective social-media crisis communication management

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been chosen randomly to participate in this study on the basis of your professional background and knowledge in public relations and social-media crisis communication. Furthermore, the information that you will provide will assist with the conceptualisation of a framework that could become a heuristic for public relations practice in Ghana especially in the crisis communication sub-specialty.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Your role, should you decide to participate, will be to provide information based on the statements in the questionnaire.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are a number of benefits associated with your participation in this study. The information that you will provide will add to the body of knowledge on crisis communication particularly in the context of Ghana. Additionally, the information that will be collected from you will help public-relations practitioners to understand the role of the practitioner in using social-media crisis communication to enhance organisation-stakeholder relationship. Also, it is expected that the data gathered from you and other participants will help in the formulation of a framework that will improve public relations practice in Ghana.

ARE THEIR ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

Your responses will be strictly kept confidential. At no point in time will your name or that of your organisation be revealed. To ensure anonymity, a number will be assigned to your responses. This study does not pose any threat to you or your organisation.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting

methods such as conference proceedings. As a result, no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give.

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including my supervisor and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records of your responses will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

The findings of this study may be used for purposes such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. Please note that your name or your organisation will not be identified even in the event of publication.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Electronic copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in password-protected data security software known as HashiCorp Vault. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Hard copies will be shredded and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

As I indicated earlier, your participation is voluntary and no money will be paid to you. The researcher will make available to you report on the findings if a request is made for the findings.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the College of Research Ethics Review Committee (CREC) at Unisa (UNISA-CAES Health Research Ethics Committee, 2021). A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher on request.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Fortune Tella on 0240 21 7878 or fortunekendra@gmail.com.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Fortune Tella on 0240 217878 or fortunekendra@gmail.com.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof. Charmaine Du Plessis on telephone number: +27(012) 429 6525 or email: dplestc@unisa.ac.za.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study. Thank you.

Fortune Tella

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNISA | university of south africa

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

26 June 2021

Dear Mr. Fortune Tella

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 26 June 2021 to 26 June 2026

NHREC Registration # :
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference # :
57639485_CREC_CHS_2021

Researcher(s):	**Name: Mr. Fortune Tella** **Contact details:** 57639485@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Supervisor(s):	**Name: Prof. C. Du Plessis** **Contact details:** dplestc@unisa.ac.za

Title: *A conceptual framework for social media crisis communication to build stakeholder relationships in Ghana.*

Degree Purpose: PhD

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for five years.

The *Low risk application was reviewed by* College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the

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