

# SOCIAL MEDIA AS MEDIATOR IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT DURING MALAYSIA'S COVID-19 PANDEMIC

NORAZAN, S. S.<sup>1\*</sup> – SAAHAR@SAABAR, S.<sup>1</sup> – ADNAN, W. H.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Faculty of Mass Communication & Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Selangor, Malaysia.*

*\*Corresponding author  
e-mail: salbiazan[at]gmail.com*

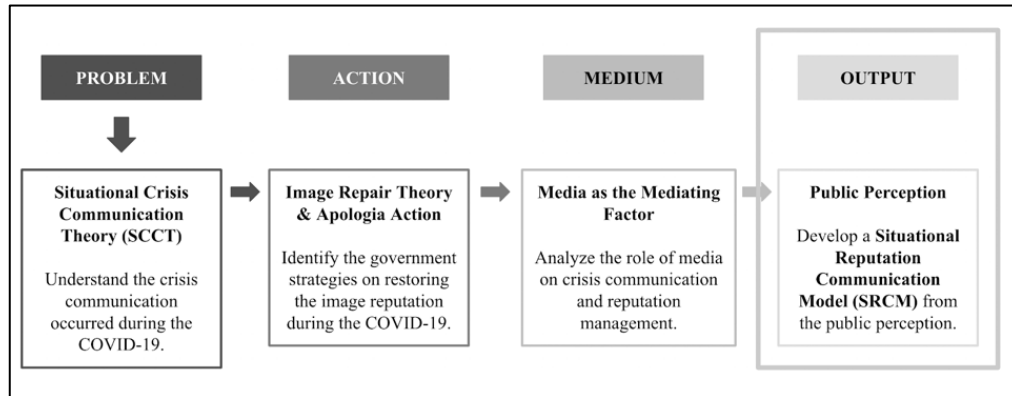
(Received 11<sup>th</sup> June 2024; revised 09<sup>th</sup> September 2024; accepted 15<sup>th</sup> September 2024)

**Abstract.** Crisis communication played a crucial role in Malaysia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, bridging public health and political discourse. Media competition intensified, shaping public perception through various social media strategies. This led to diverse political leanings and impacts on public understanding, sometimes causing pandemic-related misunderstandings. Despite this, the pandemic also fueled an "infodemic," spreading misinformation and overshadowing factual content. Thus, the study's main aims are to analyse the role of social media as the mediating factors on crises communication and reputation management. The quantitative method will be used to achieve the study's purpose by using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique and distributing the survey to 400 Malaysians. The mean analysis on social media is 3.35. The mediation analysis valuing  $p=0.92$ ,  $p=0.91$ ,  $p=0.89$ ,  $p=0.89$ ,  $p=0.87$ ,  $p=0.77$ ,  $p=0.77$ ,  $p=0.76$ ,  $p=0.73$ ,  $p=0.69$ ,  $p=0.44$ ,  $p=0.43$ ,  $p=0.30$ ,  $p=0.23$ ,  $p=0.09$ . These research findings indicate that the indirect effect hypotheses are not supported. In this critical situation, crisis communication strategies may have a more direct impact, not always relying on media. Social media's role in shaping public perception could be less important compared to government actions, personal experiences, and traditional media. The complexity of crises like COVID-19 involves many variables and stakeholders, which might lessen the impact of social media. The effectiveness of policies could be more influential than how they're communicated through social media. Varying levels of media literacy and how people consume information on social media could weaken the effects, leading to inconsistent results in studies.

**Keywords:** *social media, mediating factors, crisis communication, reputation management, Malaysia*

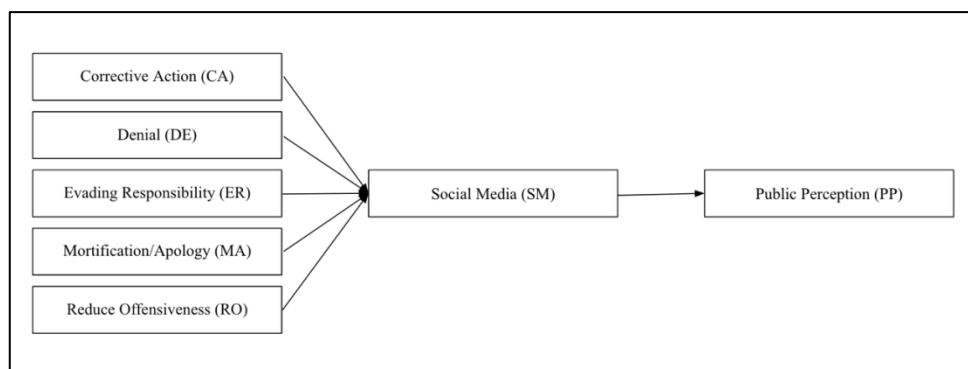
## Introduction

A lot of research has been done on crisis communication to lessen harm to a politician's or government's reputation after major occurrences like natural disasters. The efficiency of a government's internal crisis management procedures can be examined using theoretical frameworks like the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) and image repair theory. To avoid uncertainty and lessen the likelihood of crises, these frameworks prioritise saving human lives in addition to protecting credibility and image (Viererbl et al., 2024; Coombs, 2007; Benoit, 1997) (*Figure 1*). Crisis communication aims to clearly explain the present situation, analyze prospective effects, and provide harm-reduction information to affected groups through a direct, precise, and comprehensive approach. The public's ability to obtain information significantly aids in their judgment and decision-making processes regarding how to avoid or reduce publicity and handle threats. Thus, crisis communication serves as a supplementary tool for reducing, limiting, and monitoring public harm (Wong-Parodi et al., 2024).



**Figure 1.** Theoretical research framework.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) disseminated daily updates on cases, recoveries, and fatalities during the COVID-19 pandemic using a variety of channels, such as press conferences, government websites, and social media (*Figure 2*). By educating the public about preventive measures including social distancing, mask wearing, and immunization programs, this transparency helped reduce harm to the general public. In addition, the government preserved public trust and promoted adherence to health measures by debunking myths and incorrect information on social media. Restoring or maintaining credibility is the ultimate objective of crisis communication. Effective crisis communication requires an understanding of people's emotions and reactions to crises, as well as the responses of prominent characters. Public response will determine if these activities are successful (Gasana, 2024; Zheng, 2023). People are becoming more and more linked to the internet because to technological advancements, which is changing news coverage and worldwide media. Crisis communication techniques must adjust to reflect the new dynamics of news consumption brought about by real-time information access via mobile devices and internet connections. In order to help the public receive accurate information during the pandemic, this study attempts to investigate the media's function as a mediating force (Pang et al., 2023). Therefore, the present study aims to explore the objectives: To analyse the role of media as the mediating factors on crises communication and reputation management.



**Figure 2.** Conceptual framework.

***H1: There is a significant relationship for Corrective Action on Media***

This hypothesis posits that the implementation of corrective actions by an organization during a crisis is significantly related to how the media covers and perceives the organization's efforts. Corrective actions refer to the measures taken to

rectify the issues that led to the crisis, including transparent communication about the steps being taken to resolve the situation and prevent its recurrence. The hypothesis suggests that effective corrective actions can influence media coverage positively, thereby affecting public perception.

*H2: There is a significant relationship for Denial on Media*

This hypothesis examines the impact of denial strategies on media coverage. Denial involves the organization refusing to acknowledge the crisis or claiming that the crisis did not occur. The hypothesis proposes that the use of denial can significantly shape how the media reports on the crisis, potentially leading to either negative or skeptical media responses, depending on the context and evidence available.

*H3: There is a significant relationship for Evading Responsibility on Media*

This hypothesis explores the relationship between strategies aimed at evading responsibility and media coverage. Evading responsibility includes tactics such as shifting blame, minimizing the organization's role in the crisis, or justifying the actions that led to the crisis. The hypothesis suggests that such strategies can significantly influence media narratives, which in turn can affect public perception of the organization's accountability.

*H4: There is a significant relationship for Mortification/Apology on Media*

This hypothesis posits that issuing an apology or expressing mortification has a significant relationship with media coverage. Apologies involve the organization acknowledging the crisis, expressing remorse, and taking responsibility. The hypothesis suggests that sincere apologies can lead to more favorable media coverage, which can help in rebuilding trust and repairing the organization's reputation.

*H5: There is a significant relationship for Reduce Offensiveness on Media*

This hypothesis examines how strategies aimed at reducing the perceived offensiveness of the crisis affect media coverage. Reducing offensiveness can involve bolstering, minimizing the damage, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, or compensating those affected. The hypothesis suggests that such strategies can significantly influence media portrayals of the crisis, potentially mitigating negative coverage and public backlash.

## ***Literature review***

### ***Corrective action***

Effective crisis management begins with risk prevention and pre-crisis planning. This phase involves identifying, analysing and responding to potential threats, a process commonly referred to as risk assessment. (Pascarella et al., 2021) describe this as systematically scanning and evaluating the environment to discover, assess, and quantify threats based on their severity. Organisations rank various environmental hazards to estimate the likelihood of a crisis, its predicted frequency, and its impact on operations. This proactive approach aims to reduce identified risks that could potentially lead to a crisis. Despite preventative measures, the possibility of immediate damage necessitates entering "crisis mode", characterized by the need for swift decision-making amid complexity and ambiguity. The primary focus during this phase is to confine the

crisis and minimise damage, aiming to control the situation as quickly as possible. The importance of repeatedly observing, interpreting, choosing, and disseminating information to manage the crisis effectively been emphasise (Masngut and Mohamad, 2021). The first stage in crisis management involves assessing the situation by gathering as much accurate information as possible, as quickly as possible. This rapid acquisition of information is crucial for informed decision-making and effective crisis resolution. Given the potential for multinational implications, it is essential to determine whether the crisis is local, regional, or global. Multinationals often face problems that cross national borders, requiring coordinated cross-national cooperation to address the crisis comprehensively.

### ***Daniel***

Denial is one of the primary strategies identified in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) developed by Coombs and is effective when an organization is not responsible for the crisis. However, this strategy can backfire if the organization's involvement is evident, leading to a loss of credibility and trust (Coombs, 2007). A recent study by Kim and Liu (2020) highlights that denial can be effective in situations where there is no clear evidence of the organization's fault. For example, natural disasters or external attacks where the organization is a victim rather than a perpetrator can be appropriate contexts for denial (Kim and Liu, 2020). The effectiveness of denial in crisis communication is context dependent. Denial can mitigate immediate reputational damage if the public perceives the organization as a victim, it can lead to severe long-term repercussions if the truth emerges, causing a significant trust deficit. Additionally, Herkert et al. (2020) found that denial can exacerbate a crisis if stakeholders perceive the organization as dishonest or evasive. Their research indicates that transparency and honesty are increasingly valued by the public, and denial may be viewed negatively in today's media landscape (Herkert et al., 2020).

Denial can significantly influence media coverage and public perception. If the media uncovers evidence contradicting the organization's denial, the resulting coverage can be more damaging than if the organization had acknowledged the crisis initially. The study emphasizes the importance of consistency and truthfulness in communication, as media scrutiny can reveal discrepancies that harm an organization's reputation (Liao, 2023). Moreover, in the age of social media, denial is a high-risk strategy. Social media platforms enable rapid dissemination of information, and any perceived dishonesty can quickly escalate into a larger crisis. Given the potential pitfalls of denial, scholars recommend that organizations employ this strategy cautiously. If an organization decides to use denial, it must ensure that there is clear evidence supporting its stance. Otherwise, adopting more transparent and accountable strategies may be more beneficial in preserving long-term trust and credibility (Coombs and Laufer, 2018). Denial remains a controversial and context-dependent strategy in crisis communication. While it can be effective under specific circumstances, the risks associated with perceived dishonesty and lack of transparency often outweigh the short-term benefits. Organizations must carefully consider the implications of denial and strive for strategies that foster trust and credibility with their stakeholders.

### ***Evading responsibility***

When a crisis has passed, the organization transitions into the post-crisis phase. At this stage, the immediate risk is mitigated, allowing the organization to resume normal operations. Although the crisis is no longer the central focus of management, it still requires attention. Managing public opinion becomes crucial as the organization shifts its energy toward recovery, rebuilding confidence and credibility. Recovery involves both internal and external efforts to "learn from" and "manage" the crisis experience (Böcker, 2024). The post-crisis phase focuses on repairing any reputational damage incurred during the crisis and preparing for future emergencies. It involves fulfilling commitments made during the crisis and viewing the crisis as a learning opportunity. Organizations need to assess their crisis management measures to identify areas for improvement. Forming a crisis evaluation team, distinct from the crisis management team, can facilitate this process. This team analyzes the crisis response and recommends modifications to crisis protocols, ensuring lessons learned are integrated into the organization's strategy. Incorporating lessons learned into the organization's crisis management strategy is vital for reducing the recurrence and impact of future crises. This continuous improvement approach helps in enhancing prevention, preparedness, and response capabilities. Effective post-crisis management ensures that top management can better prevent and manage future crises through improved strategies and protocols.

### ***Mortification/apology***

In the realm of crisis communication, the Image Repair Theory (IRT) and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) frequently advocate for the use of apologies as a critical strategy. Benoit (1997) defines an apology as a "verbal statement of one's regret, remorse, or sorrow for a wrongdoing." This definition has been supported by recent scholars, including Roussin et al. (2022), who emphasize the role of apologies in managing public perception during crises. However, different scholars have nuanced definitions of apologies based on their research objectives. For example, Coombs and Holladay (2002), highlight various aspects such as taking responsibility, showing remorse, and promising non-repetition. Kim et al. (2022), further explore how apologies can restore trust and reputation. Studies have consistently shown that apologizing is one of the most effective techniques for handling crises. Wang et al. (2021) determined that apologies help mitigate damage and foster goodwill when executed correctly. Marwick and Boyd (2011) notes that people tend to view transgressors more favorably and assign them less blame when they offer sincere apologies. An effective apology involves several key elements: acknowledging the offense, expressing sincere remorse, and committing to prevent future occurrences. Suzuki and Jenkins (2022) emphasize that the sincerity of an apology is crucial. Apologies perceived as insincere or self-serving can backfire, exacerbating the crisis. Numerous studies have indicated that apologies are a vital component of organizational crisis management. Organizations that apologize sincerely are more likely to be forgiven by the public and can use the opportunity to provide guidance on preventing similar issues in the future. Companies such as Toyota during its 2010 recall, successfully used apologies to separate themselves from the negative aspects of the crisis, thus maintaining public trust.

Despite the benefits, organizations and individuals may hesitate to apologize due to legal implications. Accepting responsibility can lead to liability, which is a significant concern for businesses. However, public pressure often necessitates an apology, as stakeholders expect accountability and moral correctness. Yamamoto et al. (2021)

suggest that apologies can defuse anger and resentment, even if there are potential legal repercussions. The opposite of a genuine apology is a fake apology, which lacks remorse and can cause more harm. Statements such as "I'm sorry my statements were misinterpreted" are perceived as heartless and can damage the organization's or individual's reputation further (Yamamoto et al., 2021). Apologies are a powerful tool in crisis communication, helping to restore trust and mitigate damage when used sincerely. While there are risks associated with legal liability, the moral and reputational benefits often outweigh these concerns. Organizations must ensure that their apologies are genuine and accompanied by actions to prevent future crises, thereby maintaining public trust and safeguarding their reputation.

### ***Reduce offensiveness***

In crisis communication, accuracy is paramount. The public demands truthful information about what happened and its impact. The urgency of a crisis often increases the risk of disseminating erroneous information. If errors occur, they must be promptly corrected to avoid making the organization appear inconsistent or inept (Coombs, 2007). Accuracy helps maintain public trust and credibility, essential for effective crisis management. During a crisis, the strategy of speaking with one voice is critical to ensure consistent and accurate communication. This does not mean that only one individual represents the organization; rather, it implies that all communicators deliver the same key messages. Given the complexity of crises, multiple individuals may need to speak to the media, particularly specialists in operations or security. The public relations department plays a supporting role, preparing these spokespersons with consistent messaging and media relations skills (Seeger and Schwarz, 2024). The public relations department is crucial in preparing spokespersons for media interactions. Prior to any crisis, spokespersons should receive training and practice in media relations. During a crisis, the focus should be on delivering critical information accurately and swiftly. The public relations team ensures that all spokespersons are equipped with the necessary training and abilities to handle media inquiries effectively (Seeger and Schwarz, 2024; Coombs and Laufer, 2018). In crises affecting public safety, speed and precision are critical. The public needs timely and accurate information to protect themselves, such as instructions to avoid contaminated goods or seek shelter during a chemical release. A slow or inaccurate response can exacerbate harm, potentially leading to injuries or deaths. Quick and precise measures not only save lives but also protect the organization's reputation by demonstrating control and competence (Kim et al., 2022).

The crisis team must ensure that all spokespersons are well-informed and deliver the same message. This involves sharing the same facts and key points across all communication channels. Consistency in messaging helps maintain clarity and prevents confusion among the public. The preparation includes ensuring that all spokespersons have the necessary media relations training to deliver information accurately and confidently (Kim et al., 2022; Coombs and Laufer, 2018). Inaccurate information can worsen the crisis by increasing public risk and reducing trust in the organization. The dissemination of incorrect data can lead to inappropriate actions by the public, further complicating the crisis management efforts. Therefore, ensuring the accuracy of information is as crucial as the speed of its delivery. Accurate and timely information mitigates risks and helps maintain public trust and safety (Seeger and Schwarz, 2024; Kim et al., 2022).

## Materials and Methods

### *Research design*

To accomplish the goals of the current study, a random online survey was distributed to the Malaysian public as part of a quantitative research. The instrument was divided into six (6) sections inclusive Section A (Corrective Action), Section B (Denial), Section C (Evading Responsibility), Section D (Mortification/Apology), Section E (Reduce Offensiveness) and Section F (Social Media). Thus, this reflects on the objective of this study on the social media as the mediating factor towards public perception of government communication during the COVID-19 pandemic influences trust and effective crisis management. As stated in the introduction, the goal of the research is to address a research objective. To test hypotheses, three processes are needed: (1) data collection; (2) instrument building; and (3) sampling. Visual and communication scholars prefer to utilise quantitative methodologies and ways to analyze tangible sampling and data validity.

### *Research sampling*

The population selected for the study comprises 8,420,000 individuals from Klang Valley. To enhance the validity of public perception variables, a representative sample is essential. In this study, a sample size of 400 respondents was chosen. This sample size was determined based on several factors, including the population size, the need for precision, confidence levels, and the expected variability within the population. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is often used in complex multivariate analyses. The minimum sample size for PLS-SEM is determined by considering the model's complexity, the number of indicators per construct, and the desired statistical power (Memon et al., 2020).

### *Instrument development*

*Table 1* summarises the instrument development which was scale from 1-5 (1: Strongly Disagree-5: Strongly Agree). It involves the six (6) variables and items was taken based on previous literature which was later adapted for the present study to suit with Malaysian context. Variables includes (1) Corrective Action, (2) Denial, (3) Evading Responsibility (4) Mortification/Apology, (5) Reduce Offensiveness and (6) Social Media. *Table 2* shows the summary of Cronbach Alpha and Skewness and Kurtosis for each variable after computed. Pilot testing is an important step in ensuring the data collected for the present study for the actual 200 samples were fit and reliable. All the six (6) variables Cronbach alpha values are reliable ranging from 0.75-0.89 (moderate to good), meanwhile the normality of the data is within the normal range of +2 to -2 with majority are skewed positively to right. The values for all variables are above 0.7, indicating acceptable to excellent internal consistency. The highest reliability is observed for Corrective Action (0.955) and Reduce Offensiveness (0.972), suggesting that these items measure their respective constructs very consistently. Meanwhile the normality of the data is not within the acceptable range of -2 to +2, indicating that the data distribution for these variables is relatively not normal. This suggests that the data may be significantly skewed and/or exhibit heavy tails or peakedness, which could affect the assumptions of normality required for certain statistical analyses.

***Table 1.*** Summary of instrument development.

Variable	Code	Item	Source
Corrective Action (CA)	CA1:	The government adequately prepares me for the challenges I am likely to face	Hwang et al. (2021)
	CA2:	The government has consistently provided me with accurate information for me to navigate in this disease outbreak	
	CA3:	The government has consistently provided me with concise information for me to navigate in this disease outbreak	
	CA4:	The government has consistently provided me with timely information for me to navigate in this disease outbreak	
	CA5:	The government has been clear in explaining the necessary actions I need to take to stay safe	
	CA6:	The government have a clearly defined crisis management plan in place	
	CA7:	The government provided a written crisis management plan in place	
	CA8:	The government provided a written crisis management plan up to date and circulated	
	CA9:	The government provided a written crisis management plan accepted by all stakeholders	
	CA10:	The government has created a how-to-manual on developing & implementing a crisis communications plan	
	CA11:	The government has circulated the policy manual to all concerned	
	CA12:	The government has verified the understanding of the policy manual contents by the stakeholders	
Denial (DE)	DE1:	The information released by the government has been accurate	Ow Yong et al. (2020)
	DE2:	The information released by the government has been concise	
	DE3:	The information released by the government has been timely	
	DE4:	The information released by the government repeated enough to keep me safe	
	DE5:	The government has been able to provide explanations of the risks associated with the COVID-19 situation in a simple way	
	DE6:	The government has been able to provide explanations of the risks associated with the COVID-19 situation in a concise	
	DE7:	The government has been able to provide explanations of the risks associated with the COVID-19 situation in a direct manner	
Evading Responsibility (ER)	ER1:	The government is doing a clear action in response to the COVID-19 situation	Ow Yong et al. (2020)
	ER2:	The government has conducted a dry run of the preparedness of the crisis management plan	
	ER3:	The government has appointed spokespersons that will communicate with all stakeholders during the crisis	
	ER4:	The government clearly defined and identified the circumstances that deserve the label of disaster, emergency or catastrophe	
	ER5:	The government has assigned crisis designation decisions to a specific person or group of persons	
Mortification/ Apology (MA)	MA1:	The COVID-19 has been successfully controlled	Azlan et al. (2020)
	MA2:	The government has prepared alternate plans for the outbreak	
	MA3:	The government legally complied with all the necessary legislation that can impact the people in time of crisis	
	MA4:	The social media has been used to give meaning to the incident	
	MA5:	The government has added specifications plans for the outbreak	
Reduce Offensiveness (RO)	RO1:	The regular updates from the government on the COVID-19 situation are understandable	Ow Yong et al. (2020)
	RO2:	The regular updates from the government on the COVID-19 situation are actionable	
	RO3:	The government has been consistent in delivering their messages	
	RO4:	The government has been delivering accurate information	
	RO5:	The government has been apologizing about the situation in their messages	
Social Media (SM)	SM1:	The government social media platforms, such as emails, MKN Telegram, Facebook KKM and Twitter KKM provide useful avenues for sharing of information	Ow Yong et al. (2020)
	SM2:	The government social media platforms, such as emails, MKN Telegram, Facebook KKM and Twitter KKM provide useful avenues for sharing of feedback	
	SM3:	The social media websites are informative	
	SM4:	The social media websites are credible	
	SM5:	The social media has updated and useful information	
	SM6:	The social media does not provide relevant	
	SM7:	The social media does not provide up-to-date information	
	SM8:	I had used the crisis mapping based on crowdsourced social media data	



SM9:	The social media has been used in order to obtain information from citizens about the outbreak
SM10:	The social media platform have been used to inform citizens about the COVID-19 outbreak
SM11:	The citizens experienced the crisis communication is useful with the aid of social media
SM12:	The citizens received adequate information about the crisis via social media
SM13:	I follow a specific hashtags regarding the crisis occurred

**Table 2. Summary of Cronbach Alpha & Skewness-Kurtosis.**

Variable	Item	Cronbach Alpha	Skewness & Kurtosis (+2 to -2)
Corrective Action (CA)	12	0.955	(-2.029) & (4.234)
Denial (DE)	7	0.852	(-0.652) & (-1.377)
Evading Responsibility (ER)	5	0.714	(-0.602) & (-1.186)
Mortification/ Apology (MA)	5	0.878	(-0.473) & (-1.089)
Reduce Offensiveness (RO)	5	0.972	(-0.510) & (-1.343)
Social Media (SM)	13	0.755	(0.258) & (0.061)

## Results and Discussion

The results show that not a single hypothesis about the indirect effects of crisis communication techniques on political, social, or healthcare outcomes was validated (Table 3). This implies that the relationship between these crisis communication tactics and the measured outcomes was not significantly mediated by the media in the context of Malaysia's reaction to the COVID-19 outbreak. The findings might suggest that, as opposed to being mediated via the media, crisis communication tactics may have more direct effects on these consequences. During a crisis like COVID-19, other variables like policies, individual experiences, and traditional media might have a greater influence on how the public feels and reacts. Furthermore, social media's mediating power may be undermined by the complexity of crises and the variety of ways in which individuals choose to receive information.

**Table 3. Summary of hypothesis results.**

Indirect effect hypothesis	p-values	Mediating outcome
H1: Corrective Action -> Media -> Healthcare	0.43	Indirect effect hypotheses is not supported
H2: Denial -> Media -> Healthcare	0.09	
H3: Corrective Action -> Media -> Political	0.77	
H11: Mortification / Apology -> Media -> Healthcare	0.23	
H12: Corrective Action -> Media -> Social	0.92	
H17: Denial -> Media -> Political	0.69	
H18: Denial -> Media -> Social	0.87	
H22: Evading Responsibility -> Media -> Political	0.76	
H23: Reduce Offensiveness -> Media -> Social	0.91	
H25: Evading Responsibility -> Media -> Social	0.89	
H26: Reduce Offensiveness -> Media -> Political	0.77	
H28: Evading Responsibility -> Media -> Healthcare	0.3	
H31: Reduce Offensiveness -> Media -> Healthcare	0.44	
H33: Mortification / Apology -> Media -> Social	0.89	
H34: Mortification / Apology -> Media -> Political	0.73	

This study uses a quantitative research design, utilizing Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) for a more in-depth analysis and IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) for preliminary data analysis. Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.7 are generally considered acceptable, indicating good

internal consistency for the items within each variable. The values for CA (0.955) and RO (0.972) are particularly high, indicating excellent reliability. This suggests that the items measuring these constructs are highly correlated and provide consistent results. The analysis of indirect effects in the hypotheses reveals that Social Media (SM) generally does not serve as a significant mediator between the independent variables (Corrective Action, Denial, Evading Responsibility, Mortification/Apology, Reduce Offensiveness) and the dependent variables (Public Perception). The results indicate that most indirect effect hypotheses are not supported. These results indicate that the role of Social Media as a mediator is not consistently supported. This suggests that other factors might be more influential in determining the impact of crisis communication strategies on public perception.

Important insights into the media's function as a mediating component in crisis communication and reputation management are provided by the analysis of the indirect effect theories. The hypotheses' p-values indicate differing levels of support for the media's mediating role between various crisis communication tactics and results. A commentary based on the data is given: (1) Several hypotheses regarding the indirect effect of media on various outcomes were not supported, as indicated by their p-values being greater than 0.05. The absence of evidence to support these theories implies that, in these particular situations, the media's indirect role as a mediating factor is not important. This suggests that other variables may have a greater influence on healthcare, political, and social outcomes during crises, such as direct government interventions, individual experiences, or traditional media. (2) The results suggest that media may not always be a useful mediation instrument in crisis communication tactics. The intricate nature of crises, like the COVID-19 epidemic, encompasses numerous factors and stakeholders, which may diminish the media's impact. The influence of the media on public opinion may be outweighed by the efficacy of direct government communication and firsthand experiences. These findings highlight how crucial it is to take into account a variety of platforms and techniques when developing crisis communication plans. Although the media can have a big impact, it's important to understand its limitations as well as the possible bigger impact of direct activities and conventional communication techniques. (3) The data highlights that in critical situations like the COVID-19 pandemic, media may not serve as the strongest mediator for crisis communication and reputation management. This necessitates a multi-faceted approach to crisis communication, leveraging various strategies and channels to effectively manage public perception and response. By examining these hypotheses and their outcomes, policymakers and communication strategists can better understand the dynamics of media influence in crises and refine their approaches to enhance the efficacy of crisis communication efforts. This indicates the need for further research to explore other potential mediating factors in crisis communication and reputation management.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that social media's mediating role in crisis communication and reputation management during Malaysia's COVID-19 pandemic was less significant than initially hypothesized. The indirect effects of crisis communication strategies on healthcare, political, and social outcomes were not strongly supported, as demonstrated by the high p-values across the hypotheses. This suggests that direct actions by the government, individual experiences, and traditional

media may play more prominent roles in shaping public perception during crises. The findings align with (Coombs, 2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory, which emphasizes the importance of direct crisis response measures over mediated communication in certain contexts. Moreover, studies by Gasana (2024) as well as Wang et al. (2021) underscore that, while social media is a critical tool, it may not always serve as the most effective channel for influencing public perception during crises. As such, future crisis communication strategies should consider integrating multiple channels and approaches to enhance public trust and effective crisis management. Further research is recommended to explore alternative mediating factors, such as public trust in direct government interventions and the role of traditional media.

### **Acknowledgement**

The authors would like to thank the reviewers for their insightful feedback and suggestions, which significantly enhanced the quality of this paper. Special thanks to the research team for their diligent work and dedication in compiling and analysing the data.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

### **REFERENCES**

- [1] Azlan, A.A., Hamzah, M.R., Sern, T.J., Ayub, S.H., Mohamad, E. (2020): Public knowledge, attitudes and practices towards COVID-19: A cross-sectional study in Malaysia. – Plos One 15(5): 15p.
- [2] Benoit, W.L. (1997): Image repair discourse and crisis communication. – Public Relations Review 23(2): 177-186.
- [3] Böcker, J. (2024): An Ethical and Moral Approach: The Way of Apology. – In Reappraising Legal, Political and Ethical Questions Concerning the Herero and Nama Genocide, Brill Nijhoff 11p.
- [4] Coombs, W.T. (2007): Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. – Corporate Reputation Review 10: 163-176.
- [5] Coombs, W.T., Holladay, S.J. (2008): Comparing apology to equivalent crisis response strategies: Clarifying apology's role and value in crisis communication. – Public Relations Review 34(3): 252-257.
- [6] Coombs, W.T., Laufer, D. (2018): Global crisis management—current research and future directions. – Journal of International Management 24(3): 199-203.
- [7] Gasana, K. (2024): Crisis Communication and Reputation Management in the Age of Fake News. – Journal of Public Relations 3(1): 28-39.
- [8] Herkert, J., Borenstein, J., Miller, K. (2020): The Boeing 737 MAX: Lessons for engineering ethics. – Science and Engineering Ethics 26: 2957-2974.
- [9] Hwang, I., Park, K., Kim, T.E., Kwon, Y., Lee, Y.K. (2021): COVID-19 vaccine safety monitoring in Republic of Korea from February 26, 2021 to October 31, 2021. – Osong Public Health and Research Perspectives 12(6): 7p.

- [10] Kim, S., Austin, L., Liu, B.F., Jin, Y. (2022): Exploring differences in crisis literacy and efficacy on behavioral responses during infectious disease outbreaks. – *Public Relations Review* 48(3): 13p.
- [11] Kim, S., Liu, B.F. (2012): Are all crises opportunities? A comparison of how corporate and government organizations responded to the 2009 flu pandemic. – *Journal of Public Relations Research* 24(1): 69-85.
- [12] Liao, C.H. (2023): Exploring the Influence of Public Perception of Mass Media Usage and Attitudes towards Mass Media News on Altruistic Behavior. – *Behavioral Sciences* 13(8): 22p.
- [13] Marwick, A.E., Boyd, D. (2011): I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. – *New Media & Society* 13(1): 114-133.
- [14] Masngut, N., Mohamad, E. (2021): Association between public opinion and Malaysian government communication strategies about the COVID-19 crisis: content analysis of image repair strategies in social media. – *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 23(8): 9p.
- [15] Memon, M.A., Ting, H., Cheah, J.H., Thurasamy, R., Chuah, F., Cham, T.H. (2020): Sample size for survey research: Review and recommendations. – *Journal of Applied Structural Equation Modeling* 4(2): 1-20.
- [16] Ow Yong, L.M., Xin, X., Wee, J.M.L., Poopalalingam, R., Kwek, K.Y.C., Thumboo, J. (2020): Perception survey of crisis and emergency risk communication in an acute hospital in the management of COVID-19 pandemic in Singapore. – *BMC Public Health* 20: 1-12.
- [17] Pang, A., Jin, Y., Cameron, G.T. (2023): The contingency theory of strategic conflict management: Review from three decades of theory development, extension, and application. – *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 25(2): 193-214.
- [18] Pascarella, G., Rossi, M., Montella, E., Capasso, A., De Feo, G., Botti, G., Nardone, A., Montuori, P., Triassi, M., D'Auria, S., Morabito, A. (2021): Risk analysis in healthcare organizations: Methodological framework and critical variables. – *Risk Management and Healthcare Policy* 15p.
- [19] Roussin, A., Frederick, E., Pegoraro, A. (2022): Social media, crisis, and college sport: An analysis of three crises. – *Journal of Sports Media* 17(2): 25-54.
- [20] Seeger, M.W., Schwarz, A. (2024): *DISASTER COMMUNICATION*. – *Routledge Handbook of Risk, Crisis, and Disaster Communication* 424p.
- [21] Suzuki, M., Jenkins, T. (2022): The role of (self-) forgiveness in restorative justice: Linking restorative justice to desistance. – *European Journal of Criminology* 19(2): 202-219.
- [22] Viererbl, B., Denner, N., Holzer, S. (2024): So Close, Yet So Far? Effects of Privatisation and Communicative Strategy on the Perceptions of Stakeholders in Corporate Crises. – In *Communication in Uncertain Times*, Emerald Publishing Limited 7: 127-144.
- [23] Wang, Y., Cheng, Y., Sun, J. (2021): When public relations meets social media: A systematic review of social media related public relations research from 2006 to 2020. – *Public Relations Review* 47(4): 25p.
- [24] Wong-Parodi, G., Relihan, D.P., Garfin, D.R. (2024): A longitudinal investigation of risk perceptions and adaptation behavior in the US Gulf Coast. – *PNAS Nexus* 3(4): 12p.
- [25] Yamamoto, K., Kimura, M., Osaka, M. (2021): Sorry, not sorry: Effects of different types of apologies and self-monitoring on non-verbal behaviors. – *Frontiers in Psychology* 12: 10p.
- [26] Zheng, Q. (2023): Restoring trust through transparency: Examining the effects of transparency strategies on police crisis communication in Mainland China. – *Public Relations Review* 49(2): 14p.