AN EXAMINATION OF THE SITUATIONAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION THEORY (SCCT) ON ESWATINI'S CIVIL CONFLICT

BY

NOZIPHO THANDEKA PRIDE MAMBA

217011810

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE:

MASTER OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

IN THE FACULTY OF INFORMATICS AND DESIGN

AT THE CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

SUPERVISOR: DR BLESSING MAKWAMBENI

CO-SUPERVISOR: DR TRUST MATSILELE

CAPE TOWN

December 2024

DECLARATION

I, **Nozipho Thandeka Pride Mamba**, declare that the contents of this thesis represent my unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it expresses my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Signed   **Date** 07 December 2024

ABSTRACT

This exploratory case study positions the civil conflict of 2021 in Eswatini as a crisis, and conducts an assessment of the crisis response strategy used by Government to manage the crisis. The study employed the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) to analyse the Eswatini government's crisis response strategies, and evaluate the extent to which these strategies aligned with the recommendations of the SCCT.

A qualitative methodology consisting of qualitative content analysis of visual and textual artefacts embedded in media statements, news reports, news briefings, televised and written statements from Eswatini Government between June and July of 2021 was used to make sense of the Eswatini government's response to the crisis. The study findings show that that the Eswatini government's crisis response strategy frequently employed the deny posture, suggesting that Eswatini government disassociated itself from the crisis and accused protesters for causing anarchy and the censure of foreign mercenaries for the conflict.

The study finds that the motives behind the government's defensive communication approach were aimed at deflecting criticism and aimed at protecting reputation by shifting blame to external factors. Other themes identified in the study include instructing-adjusting information, diminishing, rebuilding, and bolstering strategies. Outside of the SCCT, the study observes that the government employed propaganda to frame narratives to influence public opinion and shift blame during the conflict. In this bid, the study finds Eswatini government's crisis response strategy sought to enhance the country's image and reputation, distract government from any negative sentiments associated with the civil conflict and control the narrative surrounding the protests and the damage caused.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis would not have possible without the contributions of my supervisor Dr. Blessing Makwambeni and co-supervisor, Dr. Trust Matsilele, whose passion for this project has been infectious. My sincere gratitude and appreciation for the invaluable guidance, support, and constructive criticism which has not only improved the quality of my work but also shaped my thinking and approach to research as a whole. You truly are excellent academic advisors and inspiring mentors.

NGIYABONGA!

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate the completion of this mini dissertation to my beloved parents. My father, the late John Mathendele Mamba whose grit and buoyancy is evident in this piece of work. To my mother Ruth Ntombana Mamba, from whom I drew strength and has been a bountiful source of motivation. Finally, to my siblings and friends for being a phenomenal stress-reducing support system throughout the process. Without your prayers and encouragement, this work would not have been possible.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Ethics Approval Certificate.

Appendix B: Proof Reading Certificate

Appendix C: Acting Prime Ministerial Statement – 29 June 2021.

Appendix D: Acting Prime Ministerial Statement – 01 July 2021.

Appendix E: Link to the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade, Manqoba Khumalo's Interview with Newzroom Afrika – 06 July 2021.

Appendix F: Acting Prime Ministerial Statement – 24 June 2021.

Appendix G: Link to Finance Minister, Neal Rijkenberg's Interview with the SABC, 06 July 2021.

Appendix H: Statement issued by Government Spokesperson – 18 July 2021.

Appendix I: Link to the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade, Manqoba Khumalo's Interview with Newzroom Afrika - 22 July 2021.

Appendix J: Prime Minister Cleopas Dlamini's Speech in Parliament – 28 July 2021.

Appendix K: Link to ICT Minister, Princess Sikhanyiso's Interview with BBC Africa News – 03 July 2021.

Appendix L: Acting Prime Ministerial Statement – 05 July 2021.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Civil Conflict	A contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year" (Soler, 2015).
Crisis	The presence of a difficult problem, that it is going through a period of anomaly and abnormal or they are in a critical phase (Nteka, 2021).
Crisis Communication	The exchange of information that occurs within and between authorities, organisations, media and interested individuals, and groups, before, during and after a crisis (Jupiter, 2008)
Government Communication	A government's non-partisan strategic communication and relationship management efforts to inform, interact with, influence, and protect diverse domestic and international publics in order to advance democracy, serve public goods, defend human rights, and ethically gain public trust and support under normal and extreme circumstances (Dong, et al., 2023).
Monarchical Democracy	A system of governance that infuses the principles of a participatory democracy with the traditional governance values demanded by a Monarchy (King Mswati III, 2023).
Nation Branding	Concerted efforts aimed at generating a viable representation of a geographical-political-economic-social entity (Viktorin, et al., 2018).
Public Diplomacy	The communication between state and non-state actors and the foreign public, and the process of informing, influencing, establishing long-term relations and realizing foreign policy goals (Saliu, 2020).
Reputation Management	An overarching communication strategy adopted by the organization for adapting, combining, targeting and evaluating individual activities within the organization in terms of their potential impact on the organization's reputation (Dacko-Pikiewicz, 2022).
emaSwati	People inhabiting the sovereign Kingdom of Eswatini
Tinkhundla	An administrative structure for service delivery, a political philosophy and system of government, to facilitate the achievement of development goals (Eswatini Government , 2005).

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1   Introduction

Crises are pervasive in political environments. As Auer (2016) suggests, crisis present blind spots. Often governments are caught in myriad of crises linked to their political environments, giving reason for government communication to be a central feature in political life. While crises are common within organisations, crisis within governments or government agencies have the potential to dramatically result in colossal damage. A crisis such as a civil unrest has the potential to damage the democratic health and stability of any country (Liu & Horsley, 2007).

Political crises are unpredictable. When left unaddressed, they grow increasingly complex. For governments and their communication personnel, conflicts present stakes that become relatively high due to the integral responsibility of ensuring public health and safety (Liu & Levenshus, 2012), as a result, governments are often held to higher standards of ethics and transparency. According to Liu & Horsley (2007), it is important for government's crisis communication to be efficacious, efficient and impactful. Much of the success in containing a crisis is determined by how far the public trusts their government (OECD, 2013). Government communicators become suddenly thrust with the responsibility of providing coordinated and timely responses to crises.

Microscoping the field of government communication reveals it as an emancipated field, incorporating a variety of communication practices, however, there is fear that it remains a neglected area of scholarly interest (Canel and Sanders, 2013). Garland (2021) suggests that government communication involves an interplay between associates of the civil service, political strategists, the opposition, and the press (Garland, 2021). As an embryonic discipline, coalescing multiple facets of a country's governance, government communication strategies, and practices vary widely across the globe. Governments around the world are skillfully incorporating the use of multiple modes of mediated communication to bolster their engagement in the political process. Endearing this

potential, many developed countries have sought to use government communication within their democratic processes and allow citizens to participate in decision-making. The Government of the United Kingdom, for example, uses its Government Communication Services (GCS) to explain the policies of the government and provide clarity in times of crisis (UK Government, 2023). More recently, as the world grappled with the COVID-19 crisis, Nordic governments are hailed for effectively communicating the pandemic, notwithstanding serious communication snags experienced by many other governments. (Johansson, et al., 2023). The Nordic model received honors for governance and government communication.

Government communication is a function that is inherently political and vital for democracy. It forms a fundamental prerequisite to achieving good governance outcomes. Its central role within the democratic continuum and effective governance asserts its value in communication studies. As an element that occupies a very decisive space within government, the main characteristic of government communication is for it to be transparent and open to all publics. Borgebund (2019) infers that the "*idea of a vibrant and legitimate democracy vests upon the assumption that its citizens should have access to different points of view and have the ability to express and participate in public debate*". His view suggests that to achieve good governance outcomes, it remains paramount that the function of government communication employs strategic two-way communication with citizens in a meaningful and ongoing manner and in ways that resonate with their needs. This cements the significance of the role of government communication as a facilitator for democratic accountability.

While the principal goals of government communication are to make government action more transparent and to generate interaction with the outside world (Glenny, 2008), questions regarding the level of government transparency and access to information present key challenges to government communication in Africa. There are notable differences and similarities between government communication strategies and practices globally and in Africa. African governments overlook critical elements in the success of democratic governments, presenting pathetic efforts at ensuring that the public is exposed to the right information in a timely manner, all in a bid to prevent the public from

gaining information and being equipped well enough to make appropriate decisions regarding democratic processes of their countries.

1.2   An Overview of Eswatini's Civil Conflict

The June/July 2021 civil conflict in Eswatini marked a significant chapter in the country's history, as it is not the first instance of public turmoil the country has experienced. Eswatini has grappled with various forms of social and political upheaval, driven by factors such as economic hardship, political repression, and calls for democratic reforms. However, the current conflict stands apart in terms of its unprecedented severity and scale, with at least 245 people being shot in just two days according to a report released by the Commission on Human Rights (United States Department of State, 2021).

What began as a series of protests systematised by the country's youth appealing to the government to address several concerns pertaining to the country's governance, quickly escalated into widespread demonstrations that mobilised many across the country. In response, the government of Eswatini released an official statement suspending the delivery of petitions to various *Tinkhundla* centres across the country. This two-pronged statement issued by the government through the acting Prime Minister had definitive implications; the immediate banning of the delivery of petitions to *Tinkhundla* centres, citing that the exercise was a breeding ground for anarchy and the discontinuation of gatherings and meetings in lieu of COVID-19 restrictions and that any persons supposed to have convened a meeting, is to be prosecuted for contravening the COVID-19 restrictions (Eswatini Government, 2021).

The intensity of the response from law enforcement also contributed to a cycle of violence and discord that shocked both local and international observers. Unlike previous episodes of conflicts in the country, which were often contained swiftly, this uprising drew a diverse coalition of citizens from various backgrounds, uniting them in a collective outcry for change in the manner *emaSwati* were governed. The impact of this civil conflict has been compounded by negative media coverage from international outlets, which have reported extensively on the violence, human rights violations, and the government's heavy-handed tactics (US State Department , 2011).

Such portrayals of Eswatini have not only intensified domestic criticisms but have also dented the nation's brand and image on the global stage, raising questions about Eswatini's commitment to human rights. As the world watched closely, the repercussions of this conflict highlighted Eswatini's democratic anathema. This case study is a distinctive example of a government crisis communication scenario that saw extensive media coverage and drew public attention, exerting pressure on the role assumed by government communicators, whose responsibilities extended to crisis communication and reputation management. There exists a need for a clear articulation of how government communication professionals can manage government reputation and safeguard a nation's brand when confronted by a political crisis. Eswatini's political crisis fortified the urgency of a political dialogue. Powerful discourses that address grievances between the state and society must be undertaken by governments. Scholars in government communication emphesize the importance of deploying approaches and techniques for two-way communication with citizens on matters of public importance (House of Lords, 2008).

1.3   Statement of the Problem

Despite the extensive body of research on crisis communication, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding the responses of semi-authoritarian regimes to crises. While many scholars (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002) have explored the dynamics of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, the complexities, and nuances presented by semi-authoritarian systems, such as Eswatini's system of governance which is characterised by a blend of authoritarian rule and limited democratic elements, have not been sufficiently addressed. This lack of focus on the semi-authoritarian framework particularly undermines the understanding of how these regimes adapt and evolve in response to crises.

Eswatini, as a regime that displays semi-authoritarian tendencies, has encountered numerous crises emanating from its socio-political issues and political demands. Existing research often overlooks how such regimes navigate these challenges. The response strategies of semi-authoritarian governments can vary drastically from their democratic

counterparts, as they may rely on selective suppression, co-optation of opposition, and manipulation of political narratives to maintain stability and legitimacy. In light of this background, this study seeks to examine the specific mechanisms and strategies employed by semi-authoritarian states like Eswatini to manage conflicts within their body politic.

Countries like Eswatini, just like any organisation are brands. In the face of a civil conflict or other catastrophes, government communication becomes confronted by scrutiny and the demand for speedy and precise communication (Liu & Horsley, 2007). In an era where countries function similarly to brands, the importance of effective communication during conflicts cannot be overstated. Just as organisations must navigate crises to maintain their reputation and public trust, National Governments face the challenge of managing their image and ensuring the safety and stability of their citizens. The necessity for rapid and precise communication becomes paramount to mitigate the effects of civil conflicts and to uphold national coherence. However, there exists a significant paucity of scholarly research focused on how governments in Africa, in particular, manage crises and communicate with their citizens during such tumultuous times.

1.4   Objectives of the Research

The objectives of the study are as follows:

i.   To evaluate the effectiveness of the Government of Eswatini's crisis communication strategies during the June 2021 civil conflict, using the framework of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT).
ii.   To examine how the government of Eswatini managed the civil conflict in June 2021.
iii.   To understand the crisis response strategies used by the Government of Eswatini to manage the June 2021 civil conflict.

1.5   Research Questions

i.   How did the government of Eswatini manage the civil conflict in June 2021?

ii.   What crisis response strategies we employed by the government of Eswatini to manage the June 2021 civil conflict?

1.6   Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the development of literature on government crisis communication. One of the reasons the study considered the civil conflict as an event to be worthy of studying is owing to its substantial contribution to both the applied and theoretical impact of the SCCT. At the heart of this research is the crisis communication component. Over and above addressing these gaps, the study seeks to also make a significant contribution to research in government communication and the SCCT. Undertaking the present study from the context of the civil conflict in a country where values of democracy and accountability manifest differently compared to those countries in the West, opens a new window to contribute to knowledge and revise the status quo by bridging the gap in the literature in government communication.

This study also contributes to the application of SCCT in government communication. Government crisis communication in Africa is a rather under-explored area. The study therefore contributes towards government crisis response strategies in Africa through the lenses of the 2021 Eswatini crisis.

1.7   Chapter Outline

- **Chapter One: Introduction and Background to the Study**
  This chapter provides an introduction and background to the study. It provides an overview of the Eswatini's civil conflict. The chapter also discussed the research problem, study objectives, and questions as well as the significance of the study.

- **Chapter Two: A Literature Review**

The second chapter reviews relevant literature on government communication. It explores the interdisciplinary field of government communication and government crisis communication, expounding on concepts of nation branding, public diplomacy, and reputation management.

- **Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework**

    Chapter three provides a discussion of the conceptual framework of the study. It discusses Combs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory and how it provides a framework for examining crisis communication strategies that institutions can employ to manage crises.

- **Chapter Four: Research Methodology and Methods**

    Chapter four outlines and discusses the research methodology employed in the study. The chapter discusses the qualitative methodology as well as its philosophical underpinnings; the research design and the specific methods used in the study. The chapter further discusses the sampling procedures followed in the study, the data analysis process, and the ethical considerations made in the study.

- **Chapter Five: Presentation and Discussion of Findings**

    This chapter presents analyses and discusses the empirical findings on the Eswatini government's crisis communication response during the civil conflict of 2021. It critically examines communication used by the Eswatini government during the conflict and accords the corresponding crisis response strategy used to present the crisis.

- **Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations**

    This chapter provides a conclusion to the study. It provides a summary of the key findings relating to how the government of Eswatini responded to the crisis. The chapter further provides useful insights and makes recommendations on how government can best respond to future crises.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This chapter reviews literature at the intersection of government communication, in particular, government crisis communication, reputation management, and public diplomacy, and incorporates the concept of nation branding, which is a relatively new concept within public relations. Mukhudwana (2015) emphasises that the study of government communication requires a multifaceted theoretical approach, this chapter, therefore, provides a review of the extant literature on the concept, discussing interrelated concepts to the study. The first section of this chapter sets out to provide a contexualisation of the concept of government communication, exploring it from Canel and Sanders' (2012) three-pronged view of government communication, touching on its political communicative outlook, its participatory democratic standpoint, and its relationship-building aspect, offering relevant information as to how the government communication landscape is. The literature further explicates government communication from other cognate fields in communication, providing a distinction of the concept against the backdrop of interrelated fields. The concepts of nation branding and public diplomacy are examined, exploring the nuances of public diplomacy and unpacking the strategic role of government communication in nation branding. Lastly, the chapter unpacks the concept of crisis communication in the public sector and provides a summary of the chapter.

2.2   Government Communication in Context

The term government communication is defined by Glenny (2008) to refer to non-partisan communication activities of the executive arm of government concerning policy and operatives. Pasquier's (2012:1) definition of government communication in broad communication terms, presents government communication as the sum of all *"activities of public sector institutions and organisations that are aimed at conveying and sharing information, primarily for the purpose of presenting and explaining government decisions*

and actions, promoting the legitimacy of these interventions, defending recognized values and helping to maintain social bonds". The study uses the term government communication in its broadest sense to refer to government public relations synonymously.

Contemporary studies of government communication loosely locate its primary function being to convey governmental messages to society. Accumulating research indicates that effective government communication can shape public opinion, build trust in institutions, and ultimately influence political outcomes. This is according to Hyland-Wood, et al. (2021) who assert communication strategies when impeccably applied, can facilitate public trust, confidence, and compliance from individuals, communities, organisations, and nations. Government communication has attracted attention from scholars due to escalating crises experienced by governments. The principal goal of government communication is to make government action more transparent and to generate interaction with the outside world (Vos & Westerhoudt, 2008). As government communication extends to political action, governments across the world have necessitated the need for clear holistic approaches to communication as they cannot achieve their policy goals without effective communication. For instance, Hannson (2017) suggests government communication may be conceptualised in four competing viewpoints: as a policy instrument, as a commodity, as manipulation, or as a factor in doing and undoing democracy.

Government communication is quite pervasive and in undertaking to understand the principle, the study will not deviate from the communication mandate which is the basis of the approach. Currently, government communication is viewed as a core lever for governments to achieve good governance outcomes and according to (Gaber, 2007), it takes a neutral approach in the interest of the people. Canel & Sanders (2012) laments government communication finds itself in a theoretical nexus between political communication, public relations, and organisational communication research. This nexus portrays government communication as an understudied field which according to Fairbanks, et al., (2007) is due to its controversy over the role of public relations within the federal environment.

While Liu, et al., (2010) suggest that the concept of government communication is generally studied within the scope of corporate communication theory and practice, there are clear differences between these two concepts. Different authors have different conceptualizations of the government communication phenomena, offering varying characterizations according to the specific action within which it would be applied. Howlett (2009) advances the definition of government communication varies dramatically from author to author, with capricious delineations of the concept to apply to certain perspectives. Glenny (2008) intimate that government communication should be tolerable to persuasion and spin as government communication professionals operate within politically driven environments. Government communication as an emergent field in political communication research is equally defined as the process where governments and public institutions exchange information, messages, and ideas with citizens, suggesting that government communication operates in multilayered and organisationally diverse environments (Canel & Sanders, 2012).

These phenomena, according to Arceneaux (2021) are historicized in other contexts under the umbrella term as propaganda. Berridge (2015) positions propaganda as the manipulation of public matters through mass media for political ends. There exists a fundamental relationship at the nexus of propaganda and government communication. Propaganda is a part of contemporary reality that includes a strong correlation between the propaganda concept and government communication. As a result, government communication is fraught with the potential for misuse. The fear is the ability of propaganda to stir up and guide political opposition, creating mobility that goes beyond control, which has led many states to invest in sophisticated technology to filter political content and access to communication tools out of the internet (Berridge, 2015).

Propaganda has played quite a role in the recent dramatic developments to reinforce existing attitudes and stimulate action. To illustrate, in the Middle East, after the Arab Spring uprising, sophisticated technology was used to filter political content, drawing controversy (Berridge, 2015). Oppressive governments imposed new orders on their citizens to avoid any movement against them. In Africa, there was also an upsurge of restrictions. Seeing as government communication requires a multi-faceted theoretical

approach to its explication, its nature exists within a complicated environment comprising a complex web of stakeholders (Aertsen & Gelders, 2011). Lee (2021) explains that public relations within public administration has been underutilized by practitioners because it has often been criticized by politicians as propaganda. The general perception is that government communication is a tool made up of odious propaganda used to manipulate and mould public opinion, affecting behavioral change (Malhan & Dewani, 2020). Arceneaux (2021) argues the birth of government communication in the 20th century was viewed under the portents of propaganda by governments who practiced a one-way communication process when selling their messages.

Arceneaux's (2021) observation of the government communication concept acknowledges the "*manipulative*" oddity as identified by Hannson (2017) who further shares that viewing government communication from its manipulative façade depicts it as top-down manipulation of public perceptions and behaviour through the self-serving ruling elite (Hannson, 2017). There is strong evidence to suggest government communication was rather manipulative at inception, acquiring a bad reputation. Oddo (2023) acknowledges that propaganda first reared its head and was identified as a public crisis after the First World War when citizens decried their own government's deception and emotional manipulation. His view is supported by Berridge (2015) who writes government communication in the hands of totalitarian regimes was particularly slippery, strident, and mendacious. Additionally, Fairbanks, Plowman & Rawlins (2007) observe that in and around the 1970s, there was a decline in public trust in government across the Western world due to poor government communications.

To unravel the nuances of government communication, the approach would be to employ Sanders and Canel's (2013) view of government communication from its political communicative perspective, public relations perspective, and participatory democratic perspective to inform the study's inference of government communication. Pfetsch (1999) concludes that the environment of government communication varies according to political systems, the makeup and role of the executive, and the formal and informal institutions of government communication. Although many definitions in different contexts exist as deliberated above, government communication, for this study and in the context of a *Monarchical Democratic* political system, will adopt the most prominent and accepted

definition put forward by Canel & Sanders (2013:5) who outlines government communication to refer to:

> "The aims, role, and practice of communication implemented by executive politicians and officials of public institutions in the service of a political rationale, and that are themselves constituted based on the people's indirect or direct consent and are charged to enact their will".

This all-encompassing definition of the concept of government communication is suitable for this study as it embraces a varying range of political regimes including the study's semi-authoritarian setting, broadening the scope and reach of government communication. These government communication definitions are within the confines of strategic communication, which more recent research has begun to consider. Specifically, Arceneaux (2021) proposes that government communication needs to be recontextualised, offering an interventionism paradigm where he proposes a typology of governmental communication behaviors to suggest a characterization of how governments intervene in society in the 21st century. While a basic assumption, pertinent to the study of public diplomacy is that its conventional use is to exert direct influence on foreign governments (Berridge, 2015), practitioners of public diplomacy often dealt with the frenetic activity of distributing publicity material, which includes working with the media for favourable accounts.

2.3 The Political Communicative Aspect of Government Communication

The political communicative aspect of communication by governments refers to how governments use communication strategies and techniques to convey their political messages to the public. Hanson (2017) was more detailed and explicit in explaining that the political communicative facet of government communication involved the dissemination of information, policies, and messages to the public. How these messages are crafted and delivered can have a significant impact on public opinion and ultimately influence the political landscape. Scholars note the existence of an inseparable

relationship between government communication and political communicative orientation in the political landscape.

Liu and Horsely (2017) underscore politics as a distinguishing factor for communication in government. They argue the political communicative aspect pinpoints how government communication presents governments in a favorable light and builds trust with the public. The leading exponent of government communication is its inherent political communicative aspect which involves the crafting and dissemination of political messages to advance the government's interests. Liu and Horsely's (2017) work on the political communicative feature of government communication is complemented by Johansson & Raunio (2019) who believe that government communication entails the practices for communication purposes that are exercised through the political executive authorities of a country. An important challenge in government communication is striking a balance between promoting government agendas and providing unbiased information to the public. While Canel and Sanders (2012) explain government communication to be a specific type of communication that is carried out by executive politicians and officials in public institutions in the service of a political rationale, Liu & Horsley, 2007 lament how political leaders and government officials often use communication as a tool to shape public opinion.

The political communicative aspect of government communication according to Garland (2021), necessitates an interplay between associates of the civil service, political strategists, the opposition, and the press, where governments use communication to mobilize public support, encourage citizen participation, and foster engagement in political processes. Rice & Somerville (2018) acknowledge that government communication may be influenced by a litany of factors such as a country's political dispensation, the landscape of the media, technology, and public trust, weighing the effectiveness and impact of government communication strategies. Howlett (2009) characterizes government communication actions as involving the use of information-based policy tools.

The principles articulated in Jürgen Habermas' democratic theory accentuate the communicative power of government communication in shaping and influencing public

opinion as well as in decision-making processes. In his book, *Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas, 1998), he introduces a deliberative democratic theory in which he suggests that government communication should foster and facilitate open and transparent dialogue between citizens and the state. He argues that governments, through embracing this political communicative aspect, can foster a more inclusive and participatory democratic system. Resultantly, governments across the globe deliberately use communication such as speeches, press conferences, social media, and public relations campaigns, to shape public opinion, maintain support, and promote their policies and agendas.

While the overarching idea is for government communication to be an effort to build a good relationship with the citizens rather than merely its political communication perspective, Piotrowski & Van Ryzin (2007) emphasize the government's proverbial and statutory responsibility to communicate with society, informing and consulting them on operations and services at the disposal of citizens, to improve their socio-economic status. This mandate highlights the political communicative component of government communication being to use communication to promote development. Viewed from the political communicative perspective, the nature of government communication underscores a major role in informing key public audiences about government decisions. Resultantly, Hannson's contextualization of the government communication concept as a catalyst in doing and undoing democracy, Fairbanks, et al. (2007) uphold that a healthy democracy requires an informed public and demands that governments provide information to the public about policies, decisions, and actions.

2.4 Government Communication in a Participatory Democratic Continuum

In a participatory democratic gamut, government communication serves as a vehicle to apprise the citizenry for example, on national budgets, and international agreements and provide knowledge on government programmes. Hannson (2017) examined the conceptualisation of government communication and concluded it could, among other designations, be used as a policy instrument. His assertion that government

communication is a policy instrument manifests in instances where the government uses communications to exert authority and maintain control, contributing to the delivery of its policy priorities, based on its strategic plans and other commitments. Equally, Howlett (2009) surmises that governments use communication as a means to give effect to policy goals. Within governments, communication is positioned at the front end of the public policy and production processes related to agenda-setting (Howlett, 2009) wherein governments use communication to set and shape political agendas by highlighting specific issues, topics, or actions that they consider important and want to focus public attention on. The emphasis is on having all segments of society actively engage in meaningful discussions, exchange diverse perspectives, and work towards common goals for the betterment of the nation.

Drawing on Jürgen Habermas' democratic theory whose concept of communicative power presents that communication transforms into political power in actual decision-making, serving as a means of popular sovereignty (Flynn, 2004), Habermas' theory places great emphasis on communication, in which he theorizes that a functioning democratic society relies on a specific form of communication characterized by the principles of rationality, truthfulness, and fairness. The role of government communication in a participatory democratic continuum is crucial for maintaining transparency, accountability, and trust between the government and its citizens. Government communication in a participatory democratic continuum underscores the importance of open and inclusive conversations at a national level to address critical social issues and drive positive transformation. Liu & Levenshus (2010) put forward that government communication strives towards attaining democratic value. In other words, for a democracy to operate effectively, the government must communicate with the citizens.

Habermas believes to some extent that in order to achieve a legitimate and inclusive democracy, citizens must have equal opportunities to engage in open and unrestricted communication (Habermas, 1998). Lee (2021) suggests government communication can work to promote the democratic accountability of a government agency to the citizenry, an activity unique to public administration. Government communication in a participatory democratic perspective advocates for transparency and accountability from the

government, where a healthy democracy is facilitated by a communicative infrastructure that enables citizens to engage in open, rational, and inclusive dialogue. The argument is that citizens reserve fundamental rights to be in the know about the functions and performances of their governments (Piotrowski & Van Ryzin, 2007).

Equally, Andriichuk (2019) suggests government communication as the means to foster an environment conducive to effective political participation emphasising the necessity of facilitating communication between governing bodies and various stakeholders within the system. This interaction is crucial for upholding the legitimacy of a democratic political framework. In Andriichuk's view, government communication must not be viewed as just peddling political communication for the benefit of the ruling government, but rather be seen as an effort to build a good relationship with the citizens. The literature on deliberative democracy inspired by Habermas argues that in any deliberative and participatory procedure, the only force that should matter is the "*best argument*" put forward by an engaged, rational, and well-informed citizenry (Habermas, 1998). This is to say that the importance of government communication lies in its quest to shape the democratic fabric of a nation, continuously serving as a bridge between the government and its citizens, and fostering transparency, accountability, and participation in the decision-making process.

One of the positive effects of effective government communication from a participatory democratic perspective is to provide accurate and accessible information for governments to ensure that citizens are well-informed about policies, initiatives, and actions taken by the government. Heinze, et al. (2013) argue that the act of governance involves constant exchange of information and communication between the governors and the governed.

2.5 Government Communication from a Public Relations and Relationship-Building Perspective

Government communications should not be seen merely in its political communication perspective or as the facilitator for democratic inclusion but more than, it should be seen as concerted government efforts aimed at building good relationships with the citizens. It has been suggested that the relationship aspect in government communication entails a process of striving to achieve goodwill and a favorable opinion about the government, its

policies, products, and its brand by means of carefully structured communication sent via various forms of media (Fourie & Cant, 2017). Given the key intermediary role of government communication as the "*golden thread*" in facilitating relationships between governments and stakeholders, communication plays a central role in building relations with stakeholders which has been seen through the two-way-communication model as effective in resolving issues and averting crises.

Scholars continue to accredit the two-way symmetrical model of public relations as enhancing relationship-building. The two-way symmetric model is credited for creating a meaningful dialogue and balanced two-way symmetrical communication, a model essential in communication departments who intend to balance the organisation interests with those of their publics. To its proponents Grunig and Hunt (1984), this model advocates for a two-way information dissemination manner that facilitates dialogue between an organisation and its publics. Unlike the press agentry, public information, and two-way asymmetrical models, which in retrospect intent are the same, to manipulate stakeholders for the benefit of the organisation, the relationship-building aspect of government communication exploits the two-way symmetrical model as a fitting model to advocate for balanced communication (Huang, 2004).

Acknowledging the potential that public relations activity in the public sector is more multi-faceted compared to its practice in the private sector, public relations from the government perspective is thus laden with the responsibility to improve both the efficiency of the institutions and the satisfaction of the public (Sezgül, 2019). There is general unanimity that communication in the public environment tends to be more complicated and unstable with additional legal and formal restrictions more rigid procedures, and more diverse products and objectives (Gelders, et al., 2007). The public relations perspective of government communication offers a focus on communication for the purpose nation nation-building relationships, given that government communication is characterised by a relationship-building attribute that contributes to shaping the collective consciousness of individuals, communities, and the nation (Taylor & Kent, 2006). The relationship building aspect of government communication, according to Fourie & Cant (2017) highlights the fundamental role in building and maintaining accord with stakeholders. Defined as a

government's non-partisan strategic communication and relationship management efforts to inform, interact with, influence, and protect diverse domestic and international publics to advance democracy, serve public goods, defend human rights, and ethically gain public trust and support under normal and extreme circumstances (Dong, et al., 2023), government communication from a relationship building perspective underscores the function to foster effective two-way communication between government and the public.

As this study systematically develops grounding for the relationship building feature of government communication, it aims to provide an understanding of the responsibility of communication practitioners in the public sector. Although descriptive and country-specific (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010), there has not been extensive literature and research on government public relations (GPR) despite its importance within a national government (Lui & Horsely, 2007). Dong, et al. (2023) draw our attention to distinctive practices of public relations in the public sector which sets it apart from other public relations practices. Those governments who apply the two-way symmetrical communication model of communication according to Huang (2004), ultimately contribute to positive performance measures including successful conflict resolution and crisis management, attaining a favorable corporate reputation, impeccable relationship management, and garnering positive media coverage. The focus of studies in public relations lays emphasis on it being absorbed in processes that build mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (PRISA, 2023). Creeds of the Excellence Theory suggest principles that an organisation can incorporate to achieve organisational effectiveness. Grunig (1992) adds, that for an organisation to be effective, the Excellence Theory presents a roadmap for how the organisation must behave in ways that solve the problems and satisfy the goals of stakeholders as well as of management.

2.6 Exploring the Interplay between Government Communication, Nation Branding, and Public Diplomacy

The concept of nation branding has emerged as a pivotal strategy for countries seeking to enhance their international standing and influence. At its core, nation branding encompasses a range of efforts aimed at establishing a distinctive image for a country and promoting that image to the rest of the world (Lee, 2009; Schatz & Levine, 2010).

Just as corporations manage their brands to appeal to consumers, nations are increasingly viewed as brands that require careful image management to foster positive perceptions among foreign audiences.

Miño & Austin (2022) present an argument that public relations activities become more valuable in nation branding from the constructivist approach, suggesting that these activities can best serve as a means for establishing relationships between the government and citizens for governments through generating dialogue to reconstruct national identities. Similarly, Kotler & Gertner (2002) put forward nation branding as a policy makers' strategy that seeks to actively build and manage the image of a country. Through leveraging effective messaging and branding strategies, government communication achieves its mandate of conveying a country's identity, values, and aspirations to its citizens, as well as to the international community through a litany of public relations activities. The strategic role of government communication in nation branding is paramount to shaping a country's image, fostering national unity, and influencing international perceptions.

This parallels the principles of public diplomacy, which underscores the importance of engaging with international stakeholders to promote national interests and values. Saliu (2020) proposes that the ultimate aim of public diplomacy is to gather international support for a nation's foreign policy, almost similar to PR which aims to manage perceptions on behalf of an organisation. Leanard, Stead & Smewing (2002) suggest public diplomacy ascribes a communication and relationship building function, correcting misperceptions and communicating viewpoints. It is an indispensable component aimed at affecting public opinion for the benefit of a government. Public diplomacy is used to pursue a wide variety of objectives in the field of political dialogue, advocacy, and relationship management; hence scholars argue it converges with the field of public relations.

The intersection of nation branding, public diplomacy, and government public relations is the applicability of public relations models to both the concepts of nation branding and public diplomacy through the concepts of relationship building, image, and reputation management. Szondi (2008) explains that relationship building is acknowledged as the

central paradigm of both public diplomacy and nation branding, serving as the central concept upon which the two areas could be further integrated.

The stability of a nation is intrinsically linked to its brand image; a strong, positive perception can enhance national unity and bolster resilience in times of crisis. The alignment of nation branding public diplomacy, and the government communication spectrum ensures that these activities have a meaningful role that enables countries to project a cohesive and compelling narrative of a country to the global stage. Effective nation branding and public diplomacy are essential for ensuring that a country not only stands out but also navigates the complexities of international relations with confidence and stability.

There is an increased need to use public relations strategies and a heavy reliance on the media to achieve admirable national branding accolades (Badr, 2021). Despite the concept of nation branding receiving limited attention from scholars (Steenkamp, 2021), government communicators have a substantial and critical role to play in positively branding and portraying nations. According to Anholt (2006), governments are positioned at the forefront of national branding activities. By approaching government communication with a public diplomatic mindset, government communication can work to build trust, facilitate dialogue, and foster positive relationships with other countries and international organizations, as public diplomacy involves a strategic communication process, thereby serving governments the purpose of engaging strategically with its stakeholders, based on interpersonal relationship building, underlining that public diplomacy functions are deeply rooted within the PR discipline.

2.7   Crisis Communication in the Public Sector

Governments are troublesome institutions that get impacted by the incidence of crises, necessitating essential exigency for crisis communication. Pustjens (2020) attributes crisis communication elements as collecting, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis, while Jupiter (2008) is of the idea that crisis communication involves the exchange of information by and between public authorities, organisations, the media and affected individuals before, during and after a crisis. A crisis

according to Hagan (2007) is a predicament, emergency, calamity, disaster, or catastrophe. While Hagan's definition of a crisis details it as a tragedy, Fearn-Banks (2007) attaches the connotation that its occurrence potentially impacts organisations negatively. Heath & O'Hair (2015) point out that crisis communication involves a multi-layered process that includes a cutthroat process of responding to various rhetorical problems in a manner that can be evaluated by standards of empirical success, value, and ethics, however, crisis communication in the public sector presents a myriad of challenges.

Communicating a crisis presents a classic problem for public institutions, particularly since they encompass a wide range of entities including national governments. Alcántara, García & Rojano (2023) express that public institutions have the duty of always protecting and informing citizens at risk. As such, crisis communication within government communication places a significant strain as governments seek to respond judiciously and effectively. The first serious discussions and analyses of crisis communication emerged around 1995 through theorists William L. Benoit and Timothy W. Coombs who pioneered crisis communication research (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020). Their extensive work on the image repair theory and the situational crisis communication theory respectively, provided scholars an opportunity to further explore differences of crisis communication in public and private settings.

Over the past two decades, a number of researchers have sought to provide a succinct definition and determine what crisis communication is, placing great emphasis on factors that distinguish public sector crisis communication from that of the private sector. Given the recent trends in crisis communication which have led to a proliferation of studies that illuminate differences between public-sector crisis communications from private sector crisis communication, Olsson (2014) presents that crisis communication from the perspective of public institutions has substantial responsibilities for preparing, communicating and managing large-scale crisis events, through choosing to invoke either a reputation-oriented dimension of crisis communication against a resilience-oriented dimension of crisis communication or a strategic as opposed to an operational dimension of crisis communication. Likewise, Kim & Liu (2012) discuss the unique crisis

communication challenges presented by the public sector, highlighting the impact of politics legal constraints, federalism, and other influences encompassed in the government communication decision wheel.

Other studies have considered the relationship between crisis communication and the public sector and discovered factors thought to be influencing the expediency of crisis communication including bureaucratic red tape. Pandey & Garnett (2006:44) contend that communication performance is compromised by communication and information systems red tape, averring that "*public managers' efforts are impeded by structural forces that are beyond their control*". Correspondingly, Ly-Le (2015) is for the idea that government crisis communication differs from corporate crisis communication in both nature and scope.

While crisis communication is in essence characterised by an entity's communication efforts focused on preventing damage to that entity's reputation and restoring its image, central to the entire concept within the public sector, is the need to satiate the information thirst of the public, even though Liu & Horsley (2007) complain government communicators in times of crises are more restricted in the creativity of their message development. When a crisis arises, the way an organisation handles it is what determines the severity of the long-term effects (Le Roux, 2013). *"Crisis managers are encouraged to be quick, consistent, open, sympathetic, and informative*" (Coombs & Holladay, 2010).

2.8   Crisis Management in the Public Sector

Lemonakis & Zairis (2020) underscore crisis management as the capacity to foresee and anticipate a risk that may pose a threat to an organisation, as well as the capability to successfully manage crises to minimize uncertainty and take precautions. Despite having in place a system to "*quench the fire*" (Mehr & Jahanian, 2016), investigating crisis management in the public sector presents a complex and multi-faceted undertaking that is deeply influenced by socio-political factors (Horrocks, 2001). The abstract nature of crisis management in the public sector is attributed to the interplay between various societal and political dynamics, including one of which is sociopolitical factors. Crisis management in the public sector has received considerable critical attention attributable to bureaucratic red tape and hierarchical decision-making processes that can hinder the

timely and effective response to crises. In many cases, public sector organizations are bogged down by rigid protocols and procedures that can impede the ability to quickly address and resolve crises. Additionally, the political nature of public sector organizations can lead to power struggles and conflicting agendas, which further complicates crisis management efforts. It is in that regard that Korolchuk (2020) put forward that "*authorities of public administration use different approaches in crisis management*".

Meintjies (2014) suggests that a crisis communication plan should form part of the crisis management strategy to circumvent reputational damage and maintain stakeholder relationships. Jupiter (2008) adds, that handling communication effectively during a crisis requires a good ability to communicate before, during, and after the crisis. Nowadays, the proliferation of new communication technologies brings about a new avenue for crisis managers to effectively communicate with a variety of internal and external audiences. According to Farazmand (2014), the effective management of a crisis is reliant upon the crisis response, surmising crisis managers ought to be conversant of the dynamics of a crisis to be successful in its management. Crisis communication efficacy provides organisations with a strategic resource that can contribute to the success of the crisis response. How a crisis is portrayed in the media and public discourse can have lasting effects on the response and resolution efforts. Politicians and government officials are often keenly aware of the impact that public opinion can have on their careers and the success of their organizations, which can lead to a focus on managing perceptions rather than addressing the underlying issues at hand. Moreover, the allocation of resources and funding within the public sector is heavily influenced by sociopolitical factors, and this can have a direct impact on crisis management efforts.

In an investigation into the role played by the media in managing a crisis, Valackiene (2010) suggests mass media is a very important external agency acting as an intermediary after a crisis has taken place, inferring that public perception and media influence plays a significant role in shaping the abstract nature of crisis management in the public sector. Since the abstract nature of crisis management in the public sector is intricately tied to sociopolitical factors that influence decision-making and public perception, public sector entities must work to navigate the complex web of sociopolitical

dynamics and prioritize effective crisis management strategies that serve the best interests of the public.

2.9   Reputation Management in Government Communication

Carpenter (2010) contends that reputation shapes the power and behavior of government agencies, however, government communication continues to face many challenges, among which include the management of reputation. Christensen, Lægreid & Rykkja (2018) uphold that the main challenge for governments in unsettled and turbulent situations such as crises is the responsibility to maintain and restore trust in the capacity of government. An important challenge, somewhat ironically, is the problem government communication is supposed to solve: public distrust. Christensen, et al. (2018) add, "*without citizens' trust in government bodies there is no legitimacy, and the implementation of societal security policies is likely to fail*". According to Liu, et al. (2012), one of the greatest challenges that government communicators face is a highly cynical public.

While the analogous school of thought views reputation as tantamount to corporate image, the differentiated school of thought argues the latter to be different, wherein the supposition is that reputation is different from image (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Fombrun and Shanley's (1990) hypothesis that reputation is the "*representation of the cumulative judgments of a constituency group over time, based upon socially constructed perceptions of an organisation's substantive and symbolic actions*", echoes the analogous school of thought's exploration of reputation which supposes the connectedness of reputation and identity. The differentiated school of thought's argument juxtaposes through an argument that reputation and identity are not mutually exclusive, based on the differential schools definition to reputation which according to Gotsi & Wilson (2001) is "*largely influenced by the corporate images that stakeholders form every day for the organisation*". This in essence means that "*corporate reputations are largely dependent on the everyday images that people form of an organisation* (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001)." Reputation remains an integral component of an organisation's provenance as it safeguards its public image. Determined by the overall esteem to which an organisation

is held, including its brand, identity, and image, it is, therefore, important to consider the perceptions of stakeholders in reputation management as "*organisational reputation is largely influenced by the images that stakeholders form every day for the organisation*" (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001).

Based on the discussion on the approaches above, the best school of thought to contribute to organisational effectiveness in the twenty-first century is approaching reputation management from the differential school of thought which approaches reputation, identity, and image as different. Cognizant of the fluidity of reputation and how reputation adds value to the actual worth of a company, it is prudent that government communicators treat the management of reputation holistically. In this way, government communication departments are able manage the reputation exclusively from managing the specific and unique qualities of an organisation that pertain to the identity or from managing the specific configuration of perceptions that take root in the minds of observers that relate to image.

The collective management of how people perceive an organisation through the stories around the brand and image constitutes reputation management. Gotsi & Wilson (2001) add that corporate reputation denotes "*the reflection of an organisation over time as seen through the eyes of its stakeholders and expressed through their thoughts and words*. It is important to consider the perceptions of stakeholders in corporate reputation management since "*corporate reputation is largely influenced by the corporate images that stakeholders form every day for the organisation*" (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001) and this statement thrusts responsibility on government communicators to manage the reputation of government, which largely influence and is influenced by the manner at which government has positioned its communication collateral, image, and symbolism.

2.10 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has offered a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the study, offering valuable insights to position the present study. Through an analysis of diverse scholarly works and empirical studies, a comprehensive understanding of government

communication has been achieved. The convergence and divergence of viewpoints have illuminated the complexities and nuances inherent in government communication, including the exploration of cognate fields presented in government communication. This chapter further drew attention to the intersection of nation branding and public diplomacy and its rapport in government communication. The synthesis of the literature in this chapter not only contributes to the existing body of knowledge but also sets the stage for subsequent chapters in this dissertation, laying a solid foundation for the exploration and analysis that will follow. The next chapter will present the conceptual framework of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1   Introduction

This chapter outlines and discusses the theoretical framework of the study. It presents discussions of crisis communication strategies and considers the synthesis between government crisis communication and a political event. This current chapter begins by contextualizing the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), a dominant theory in crisis communication research (Avery, et al., 2010), providing the theoretical framework to advance the understanding of the theory and provide a lens through which the study can examine government crisis response strategies. By discussing the SCCT, whose premise is that crises are negative events impelling stakeholders to make attributions about crisis responsibility, affecting how stakeholders interact with the organisation confronted by the crisis (Coombs & Holladay , 2010), the study presents a rationale behind the value of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory as a framework through which the Eswatini government's crisis communication strategies are explored, providing a better understanding of the dynamics of the civil conflict in Eswatini.

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is seen as befitting to forge a practical path for research and provide a theoretical framework for the Eswatini Government's crisis response strategy when dealing with a civil conflict as it is audience-oriented and concerned with informing audiences and protecting organisational reputation during a crisis. Coombs and Holladay (2001) posit every crisis response should begin with instructing and adjusting information. It is designed to help crisis managers evaluate a crisis and craft an effective response strategy.

3.2   The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

The theory resulted from Timothy Coombs' attempts to understand how management responded to a crisis. Coombs (2020) describes his Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) as a "*cognitive-based, prescriptive theory designed specifically to explain*

the use of optimal and sub-optimal crisis responses during organisational crises", implying, in essence, that the theory provides an evidence-based framework for crisis managers to use as crisis response strategies, salvaging organisations from reputation damage. According to Sisco, Collins & Zuch, (2010), crises are better resolved if organisations adopt specific crisis response strategies. Coombs' theory suggests that when communicating during a crisis, the responses ought to match the level of crisis responsibility and reputational threat faced.

The SCCT in its trichotomous element, attempts to derive an integrated framework for crisis communication by entwining the crisis, the response to the crisis, and developing a system for matching the crisis and crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2007). It argues that an important consideration for crisis managers when dealing with a crisis is developing whether people know about that organisation's past crises. The underlying assumption of the SCCT is that it draws upon the attribution theory as it attempts to make a connection between the crisis response strategies with the crisis type.

3.3   The Attribution Theory Connection

A considerable amount of literature has been published on how the attribution theory informs many of the different aspects used in Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Weiner (1985) asserts the attribution theory assumes the causes individuals attribute to events have an impact on the way they cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally respond on future occasions. In Weiner's explanation of the basic premise for the attribution theory, he holds that people are constantly searching for reasons to explain why an event turned out the way it did. The attribution theory is relevant to a wide array of domains including government / political communication. The current study espouses a civil conflict crisis whose major characteristic is that it has negative outcomes/impacts. The attribution theory, serving as the guide for linking crises to crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2007) provides a base for explaining the crisis response strategies adopted by government crisis communicators.

For Swanson and Kelley (2001), the attribution theory may be used to understand, organise, and form meaningful perspectives about outcomes and to predict and control

them. In this regard and view of the current study, this theory arguably provides the link to pair crisis response strategies with a crisis, confirming the aspects used in situational crisis communication theory to fit the Eswatini case study, as *emaSwati* who are stakeholders in the country, needed to attribute blame or cause for the civil conflict crisis.

3.4 The Current SCCT Framework

Coombs (2020) stresses that a social science theory should not be stagnant, suggesting there ought to be new ideas and new research entering a field. Accordingly, Coombs and his colleagues worked to develop and refine the SCCT over the years, adapting it to accommodate change to hold value in the crisis communication field. The current SCCT framework has evolved to reflect changes and additional variables created by new findings in crisis communication research, however, Coombs (2020) affirms that the core of SCCT remains the same, being crisis responsibility. Crisis responsibility is a lynchpin of the SCCT as it serves as a factor in determining the kind of threat that the crisis might pose to an organisation. Coombs (2004) contributes that "*attributions of crisis responsibility are directly related to the reputational threat posed by a crisis*". The original idea of the SCCT was to "*articulate a theory-based system for matching crisis response strategies to the crisis situation to best preserve the organizational reputation* (Coombs, 2004)", a strategy that involves a two-step process for assessing reputational threat during a crisis which includes:

- Identifying the type of the crisis;
- Assessing the threat posed by the crisis.

What follows is a brief discussion of the crisis type and crisis threat.

3.4.1 Identifying the Crisis Type

Different crises require different approaches for crisis communicators to effectively manage and communicate during the jolted period. In this regard, Björck (2016) suggests a crisis communicator begins by identifying the type of crisis the organisation is confronted with and how this said crisis affects the various stakeholders, before selecting a communication strategy. A crisis type can be defined as a frame used to guide interpretations of a situation. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory specifies a

master list of crisis types that are classified according to the responsibility attributed, which according to (Utz, et al., 2013) are positioned on a high-low responsibility continuum, as presented in the table below:

Cluster	Crisis Type	Description
Victim Cluster	Natural disaster	Low responsibility attributed, organizations and stakeholders are both victims, and the crisis is perceived as not preventable (Björck, 2016).
	Rumor	
	Workplace Violence	
	Product tampering/malevolence	
Accidental	Challenges	Higher responsibly attributed, the organization is confronted with a crisis because of unintentional mistakes, not preventable because of unconscious (Björck, 2016).
	Technical error accidents	
	Technical error recalls	
Preventable/ Intentional	Human error accidents	The highest responsibility is attributed, because of intended mistakes and thus preventable in the eyes of the public (Björck, 2016).
	Human error recalls	
	Organizational misdeed	

Master list of Crisis Types Classified according to the responsibility attributed

Björck (2016) surmises the victim cluster attributes the lowest responsibility and has a minimal reputational threat to an organisation. The accidental cluster is understood to induce minimal responsibility attributions and moderate reputational threat to an organisation while the intentional cluster which according to Coombs & Holladay (2001) has strong attributions of responsibility and severe reputational threat. Expounding further on the preventable cluster's categorization, (Mitroff & Anagnos, 2001) holds that it is deemed intentional. Context to the current study, against the backdrop of the SCCT applied to pair government responses to petition delivery and protest marches during the civil conflict crisis, it can be argued that protests/petition delivery marches are examined as preventable crises fitting the organization misdeed crisis type under the intentional cluster, presenting a strong attribution that causes a severe reputational threat to Eswatini government.

3.4.2 Assessing the Crisis Threat

Assessing the crisis threat is the second step towards understanding the potential damage to an organisation's reputation during a crisis, shortly after determining the crisis type. To assess the threat of the crisis, Coombs (2004) suggests crisis managers need to consider crisis intensifiers. In particular, crisis managers must assess the viability of past crises bearing an impact on the intensity of the crisis. Coombs (2004 highlights that an organisation's past crises are a potential indicator of stability because they suggest a particular pattern of behavior. Reflecting on this assertion, Coombs & Holladay (2006) perceive that the absence of previous crises has favorable effects, which protects the organisation in the event of a crisis. When assessing the crisis threat, crisis managers need to take into consideration, the stakeholder-relationship history and the severity of the damage done by the incident, the theory posits.

3.5 Crisis Response Strategies

The SCCT suggests a set of crisis response strategies for every crisis type once the reputational threat has been assessed. Unpacking crisis response strategies, Kriyantono & McKenna (2019) define a crisis response strategy as what a company says and does after a crisis.

3.5.1 Initial Strategies for Informing and Adjusting Information

The instructing information and adjusting information are the foundation for any crisis response. According to Coombs (2007), the issuance of adjusting information is crucial to the crisis response strategy because of its characteristic of providing crucial time-sensitive appropriate information for the safety of stakeholders. The SCCT is audience-oriented as it is concerned with informing audiences and protecting organisational reputation during a crisis. Coombs and Holladay (2006) posit "*every crisis response should begin with instructing and adjusting information*". Under the *instructing information* posture, Sturges (1994) reveals that the instructing information cluster satisfies a public need for "*immediate responses*" while the adjusting information cluster helps stakeholders to cope psychologically with the crisis by reducing uncertainties and stress.

3.5.2 Primary Crisis Response Strategies

Primary crisis response strategies include denial, diminish, and rebuild crisis response strategies. The deny posture, whose subcategories include "*attack-the-accuser*", "*denial*" and "*scapegoat*" strategies is used by an organisation in an attempt to remove the organization from having any connection with the crisis. According to Coombs (2014), if an organisation is found to have an association with a crisis, even the slightest crisis responsibility, the reputational damage is intensified should a denial strategy be used. The diminish response strategy is sub-categorized by the "*excuse*" and "*justification*" crisis response strategies which an organisation uses organization to lessen crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007). The third cluster under primary crisis response strategies is the rebuild strategy which includes an "*apology*" and "*compensation*". For Benoit & Drew (1997), "*an apology is marked by the organisation accepting responsibility for the crisis and asking for forgiveness*", while Coombs (2007) is for the idea that the compensation strategy may be used on preventable crises.

3.5.3 Secondary Crisis Response Strategies

The SCCT suggests the use of secondary strategies is meant to counterbalance any negative attitude towards an organisation in a crisis by offering positive information about the organization (Coombs, 2007). The secondary strategies in their trichotomy - *reminder*, *ingratiation,* and *victimage*, Coombs (2004) suggests should not be used in isolation, rather they are best effective when paired with initial and primary strategies.

	Crisis Response	Strategy	Description
Initial Strategies	Instructing Information	Protection	What stakeholders need to do to physically protect themselves from harm
	Adjusting Information	Crisis Basics	The basic information about what happened in a crisis event—what, when, where, why, and, how
		Corrective Action	What is being done to protect stakeholders from future crises
Primary Strategies	Deny	Attack the Accuser	The crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization
		Denial	The crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis

		Scapegoat	A crisis manager blames some person or group outside of the organization for the crisis
	Diminish	Excuse	Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.
		Justification	A crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis
	Rebuild	Compensation	Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims.
		Apology	A crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.
Secondary Strategies	Bolstering	Reminder	Tell stakeholders about the past good works of the organization
		Ingratiation	Crisis manager praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization
		Victimage	Crisis managers remind stakeholders that the organization is a victim of the crisis too.

Adapted from Coombs (2007) explaining the various Crisis Response Strategies

3.6   Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has offered a comprehensive overview of the theoretical approach grounding this study. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory was incorporated to position the present study by exploring the classification of crisis communication strategies that can be used to manage government reputation and safeguard a nation's brand during a civil conflict. At the centre of this study lies the concept of crisis communication. This study has extended the theoretical framework to better fit within a political crisis context. This is where the crisis communication efficacy of government communication professionals is significant.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1   Introduction

This chapter outlines and discusses the research design and methodology employed in the study to understand government crisis communications during a volatile environment. In this chapter, the researcher discusses the research methodology used, identifying the study as an exploratory case study, and positioning a civil conflict as a crisis. The chapter also discusses the qualitative research methodology, utilising a case study approach to investigate a civil conflict that occurred between June and July 2021.

The focus of the study is on the government's communication, with a particular emphasis on government communication embedded in oral, written, and televised statements and press conferences, and social media posts. A dual methodological approach is employed to enhance our understanding of the civil conflict in Eswatini. The Qualitative Content Analysis lays a foundation for the study to identify themes and narratives of what government communication was during the civil conflict. The chapter subsequently details the researcher's decision to combine Qualitative Content Analysis with David Altheide's Ethnographic Content Analysis, which not only relies on the principles of qualitative data but also the context in which these communications occur.

The chapter also provides the research design, and the specific methods used, identifies a case study to draw inferences, and then details data analysis methods and procedures. Lastly, the chapter discusses ethical considerations made, conducting the study following official ethical guidelines established by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

4.2   Qualitative Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, using qualitative content analysis to draw on the qualitative methodological perspectives, gain understanding, then further interrogate the response strategies used during a civil conflict. The qualitative

methodology has been identified as suitable because it seeks to acquire depths of understanding and richness of detail. Rensburg & Cant (2009) assert qualitative research is instrumental in obtaining in-depth responses pertaining to a particular subject.

The reason for not considering a quantitative approach is that the quantitative method in contrast to this qualitative one, views reality as consisting of phenomena that can be observed and measured. According to Leung (2015:324), quantitative research "*deals primarily with numerical data and their statistical interpretations under a reductionist, logical and strictly objective paradigm*" and seeing how the quantitative research's approach places a great premium on objectivity and the reliability thereof, of the findings, then it is not appropriate for the kind of research this study with undergo.

Importantly, as the research also employs a case study research design, Schell (1992) accords the value of a case study as an appropriate research strategy that vests on its ability to provide explicit accounts for more than one case, as well as how case studies can also be used in an intellectually rigorous manner to explicate a single or complex research question within an environment rich with contextual variables. In essence, this means that case studies include the intensive investigation of the factors that contribute to the characteristics of the case under investigation. Through the adoption of this research methodology, the aim is to assess government strategic crisis responses to the level of crisis responsibility and the reputational threat posed by the civil conflict.

4.2.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative Content Analysis provides means to obtain data to measure the frequency and variety of messages (Altheide, 1987). This qualitative study adopts a rigorous methodological framework that delves deep into government communications during a significant period of a civil unrest and employs qualitative content analysis to illuminate the complexities of governmental responses and their impact on public perception. Preiser, et al. (2021) suggests that qualitative content analysis endeavors to draw and examine patterns of sense making and meaning creation in communicative patterns sourced from language, then focuses on the content, and themes, embedded in written or spoken artefacts. Specifically, Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) in the study is

employed to provide foundational analysis that allows the study to identify themes and narratives drawn from government communication then pair it against themes of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Altheide (1996) suggests qualitative content analysis allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner. Through this methodological lens, the interpretive orientation in the research will present findings that often have greater validity and less artificiality. This interpretive method will suffice in this research owing to the qualitative methodological perspective enabled by the constructive approach that will enable a quantitative approach to address the research questions.

4.2.2 Ethnographic Content Analysis

The Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) is employed to further enrich the study's findings. According to Altheide (1987), the ethnographic perspective helps to delineate patterns of human action therefore allowing the study to reflectively examine the context in which the communication occurred. This ethnographic approach offers a perspective that acknowledges both the textual and contextual dimensions of communication within the civil conflict.

In this study, Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) is applied only to specific types of data to probe deeper the cultural context around government's communication, providing insights into the social dynamics and values that shape interactions within the *Monarchical Democracy.* According to Hansen (2013), ECA is mostly concerned with the discovery of meaning from activities and examining relevance and associations as well as definitions from social contexts. The ECA applies to the current study to provide a supportive methodological tool to the qualitative content analysis and examine both the textual and contextual dimensions of Eswatini government's communication, informing on the crisis response strategies employed during this erratic phase in Eswatini. The ECA, whose intent is to be systematic and analytic, yet not rigid (Altheide, 1996) will help to correctly reflect the government's common modes of communication, and as Addeo (2021) assert the ECA as a highly effective method for researching in person and online.

4.3   Research Design

Taken from Creswell's (2003:15) claim that the choice of research design is based on considering elements such as the research problem in the study, the personal experiences of the researcher, and the audiences for whom the research study will be written, this section presents the research design selected for this research. According to Rensburg & Cant (2009:71), the research design details the blueprint and provides the structure to follow in an attempt to unpack research objectives.

Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2016) advance a research design that provides the research with a specific research method that is coherent with the intended aims and has appropriately endeavoured to make full sense of the study findings, using a sensible method of data audit and analysis. The study is guided by its research questions and the overall aim of the research to categorise strategic crisis responses during the civil conflict and pair them with corresponding SCCT strategies. The arrangement for data collection leans heavily on qualitative research methods, therefore the study employed qualitative ethnographic content analysis to analyse government public relations tactics which include crisis communication, nation branding, public diplomacy, and reputation management, to fulfill the aims and objectives of the research.

4.4   Research Strategy: A Case Study

As this study focuses on the civil conflict as the original anchoring point in Eswatini, the research employs a case study research strategy as the most appropriate approach for analysing specific instances of government communication during the civil conflict crisis. Yin (2003) suggests that a case study conducts an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon, this study being the civil conflict within its natural context, using multiple sources of evidence. Similarly, Hancock (2006:15) describes a case study research strategy as richly descriptive, because it is grounded in deep and varied sources of information. Schell (1992:5) confirms a case study as the most flexible of all research designs, allowing the researcher to retain the holistic characteristics of real-life events

while investigating empirical events. This is to say that the use of a case study as a research strategy sets the aim to create a rich, textured description of a social process.

Yin (2014:35) brings forward that a case study's ability to pose the questions 'how', 'what', and 'why' respectively, enables the researcher to focus on the case and retain a holistic and real work perspective. The case study strategy contrasts sharply with other research strategies in that an attempt is made to study a multitude of factors by limiting the number of cases observed (Saunders, et al., 2016).

This research employs a single case study which according to Gustafsson (2017), research produces extra and better theory as opposed to studying various phenomena in multiple case studies. The argument is that the more case studies being observed within research, the less observation time the writer has to study the case studies. Therefore, the embedded single case study within this research will enable the study to be more flexible and focus on getting a deeper understanding of the subject by investigating various aspects of the civil conflict.

4.5   Data Collection Process

This study takes into consideration all government communication in response to the June and July 2021 civil conflict in Eswatini. Drawing from the descriptive statistics, data collection involved gathering a diverse range of government communications released during the height of the conflict. These artefacts were sourced from the Eswatini government's communication in the form of official press statements, interviews, press conferences, and social media posts published in the government public domain between the 1st of June and the 31st of July of 2021 to cover the peak of the crisis, whose pivotal moments fell. During this crisis period, a total of eight Facebook posts were identified. The research also revealed that the Eswatini government conducted a press conference at the onset of the crisis and issued six press statements. Additionally, the researcher gathered six news interview clips featuring various political figures from the government that were conducted with international media through "call-in" interviews. The study exploited information that was already available on public domains. Below is a table summarising the specific communication artefacts that the study analysed.

Type of Communication Artefact	Description	Quantity
Press Statement	Official written statements released by the Eswatini government during the civil conflict.	6
Press Conference	A formal gathering where government officials addressed the media and public regarding the situation.	1
Social Media Posts	Posts made by the government of Eswatini's Facebook account, reflect the government's stance and updates during the unrest.	8
Live "call-in" interviews	Recorded interviews with Eswatini's Political Actors discussing the government's perspectives and responses to the civil conflict.	6

4.6   Sampling Technique

Sampling refers to the process of systematically selecting cases for inclusion in a research project (Pace, 2021). The current research uses the purposeful sampling method to select artefacts that were deemed particularly relevant to the context of the civil conflict. According to Ayhan, (2011), non-probability purposive sampling allows for participants in the research to be selected by the researcher subjectively. This technique allowed the study to intentionally select the type of communication artefact, representative of the civil conflict under study, leading to a more in-depth and insightful analysis. It proved a valuable technique as the study is grounded on ethnographic content analysis, whose focus is on gaining a deep understanding of meaning. The total sample consisted of 21 Government Communication artefacts, ensuring both breadth and depth in the analysis of government responses to the unfolding events.

Criterion	Type of Government Communication
Relevance to Study	Data was drawn from six press statements, a single press conference, eight social media posts, and six live (audio) interviews directly addressing the civil conflict, from 1st of June – 31st July 2021.
Timing	The data for this study was collected from June to July of 2021 to cover the peak of the crisis, whose pivotal moments fell.
Format Type	The data includes a variety of communication formats from the Eswatini government in the form of texts (press statements), visuals, videos, and audio to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the government's approach to crisis communication.

4.7 Data Analysis Process and Methods

To analyse the Eswatini government's crisis response strategies using the SCCT, the study retrieved the government's communication artefacts including press statements, press conferences, social media posts, and live "call-in" interviews. The data analysis process commenced with ethnographic content analysis to contextualize government communications within the broader socio-political landscape of the civil conflict. Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) is useful in a variety of disciplines including, media and communication studies and culture studies. According to Hansen (2013), ECA is mostly concerned with the discovery of meaning from activities and examining relevance and associations as well as definition from social contexts.

Twenty-one government communication artefacts were examined to ascertain the Eswatini government's crisis communication through the lens of SCCT. This process involved transcribing the primary sources, including one press conference and six live call-in interviews held with key political figures communicating the dynamics of the civil conflict, press statements, and social media posts.

Live call-in Interviews
Live "call-in" interviews were conducted with various political actors. Each interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed to extract relevant discourse pertaining to crisis communication strategies.

Date	Platform Conducting Interview	Political Actor Communicating on behalf of Government	Title of the Interview
29 June, 2021	BBC News	Minister of ICT, Hon. Princess Sikhanyiso	A King would not be fit to be King if he would leave for any reason
02 July, 2021	NewzRoom Afrika	Minister of Economic Industry and Trade – Hon. Manqoba Khumalo	Protests in Eswatini against the monarchy continue
06 July, 2021	Newzroom Afrika	Minister of Economic Industry and Trade – Hon. Manqoba Khumalo	The Eswatini government responds to pro-democracy protesters
06 July, 2021	SABC	Minister of Finance – Hon. Neal Rijkenberg	Unpacking eSwatini democracy challenges with Neal Rijkenberg
22 July, 2021	Newzroom Afrika	Minister of Economic Industry and Trade – Hon. Manqoba Khumalo	Eswatini has been rocked by a wave of pro-democracy demonstrations

06 July, 2021	eNCA	Minister of Economic Industry and Trade – Hon. Manqoba Khumalo	Eswatini Protests | Unfolding developments in the kingdom

4.7.1 Press Conference

A press conference was held on June 29, 2021, featuring the Acting Prime Minister where he addressed the ongoing political crisis, providing insights into the government's perspectives. Contents of the press conference were analysed using ethnographic content analysis to see if the Eswatini government adhered to the crisis response strategy guidelines offered by SCCT. The transcription of this press conference focused on key statements related to accountability, transparency, and the steps being taken to rectify the situation. Specific excerpts were extracted that illustrated the Eswatini government's approach to the crisis and were coded using the SCCT strategies.

4.7.2 Press Statements

The government of Eswatini issued six press statements during the period of the civil conflict, and these were collected and analysed to provide a comprehensive view of the government's communication strategies during the jolted period. An ethnographic content analysis was conducted to carefully code the language used, the narrative constructed by the government, and its impact on public perception using the SCCT strategies. The transcriptions from the press conference and the live call-in interviews were added to the press statements and social media posts, providing a rich dataset for analysis and allowing for a comprehensive examination of the discourse surrounding the political upheaval and the strategic communication approaches employed by Eswatini government. This analysis was framed within the context of SCCT, facilitating a deeper understanding of how these strategies align with theoretical frameworks in crisis communication.

Date	Political Actor	Topic
24 June, 2021	Acting Prime Ministerial Statement	Suspension of Petition Delivery Marches to *Tinkhundla* Centres
29 June, 2021	Acting Prime Ministerial Statement	Government passes sympathy to victims of violence
29 June, 2021	Acting Prime Ministerial Statement	King has not Fled
1 July, 2021	Acting Prime Ministerial Statement	Government tightens security measures
18 July, 2021	Government Spokesperson	Clarification of Misinformation on the SADC Troika Missions Visit in Eswatini
28 July, 2021	Prime Ministerial Statement	Statement by the Prime Minister in Parliament

4.7.3 Social Media Posts

Eight posts from the official Eswatini Government's Facebook page were collected and analysed. These posts are selected based on their relevance to civil conflict, including announcements, responses to public concerns, and updates regarding the situation.

4.8 Pairing Data with Recommended SCCT Strategies

Using the SCCT-specified master list of crisis types, the government of Eswatini's communication artefacts was first used to gauge the responsibility attributed to the crisis, assess the reputational threat, and allow analysis of the efficacy of Eswatini government's crisis communication strategies. This action was initiated by first identifying the specific crisis cluster relevant to the situation, followed by assessing the history of the crisis and previous reputations related to it. Secondly, excerpts from the transcripts, press statements, press conferences, and social media posts were examined carefully to identify categories of the communication artefacts according to the SCCT. The communication artefacts were evaluated to determine whether the government complied with the crisis response strategy guidelines outlined by SCCT.

	Crisis Response	Strategy	Source	Excerpt from Government Communication Continuum
Initial Cluster	Adjusting information	Protection Strategy	Press Statement	"*We request the Nation to cooperate with security forces as they are deployed to protect the lives of all emaSwati*" – Acting Prime Minister

| Primary Cluster | Deny | | Scapegoat | BBC Call-in Interview | "*I am saying to you, that foreign mercenaries have invaded the Kingdom, hired by these people with this agenda*" – HRH Princess Sikhanyiso |

Examples of Identified categories of the Eswatini government's communication paired according to the SCCT

4.9 Ethical Considerations

Bryman (2006) accords three critical ethical considerations to research being the cornerstone of research, these being informed consent, invasion of privacy, and the risk of deception. According to Drisko & Maschi (2015), research that addresses qualitative content analysis classifies publicly available data as open for research, therefore based on this assertion, consent for this research's material was not needed. This thesis relied on an ethnographic content analysis. Mindful that doing research in the area of civil conflict within Eswatini's context might somehow present as a politically sensitive and risky topic, owing to the country's authority prevalent system, the researcher endeavored not to encroach the ethical standards for research. While the study includes an ethnographic content analysis of data already in the public domain, where consent for the use of the materials was not needed as there was no involvement of human research participants, the study was still conducted with the strictest observance of ethics. The researcher finds ethical implications for this study are quite minimal because the data was already in the public domain.

4.10 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter outlined and discussed the research design and methodology used in the study. It discussed the choice of the methodology the methods used and the philosophical underpinnings. The study employed a qualitative methodological approach to understand what government crisis communication strategies were employed when reflecting on the civil conflict in Eswatini. Finally, using thematic analysis, the researcher then identified patterns relevant to the research. The following chapter presents the findings of the research, anchored on the research questions identified in the first chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the study findings related to the research questions. It unravels government communication strategies during an explosive environment and pairs the responses with corresponding Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) strategies. The chapter presents and discusses insights gleaned from the data corpus, appending quotes and excerpts drawn from the discourse of political actors' discourse within the government communication and from the Eswatini government's social media posts to provide literal accounts of the corresponding SCCT strategies and illustrate the responses of Eswatini Government.

The study sought to assess the crisis response strategy through the lens of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) model. The analyses reveal a twelve thematic landscape within government messaging, reflecting the complex interplay between government communication and public perception during a civil conflict. The themes identified include denial, instructing-adjusting information, diminish, rebuild, and bolstering strategies. The study also finds that the Eswatini government employed propaganda to frame narratives to influence public opinion and shift blame. In presenting the findings, the study has organised the discussion according to the prevalence of crisis response strategies, looking expansively at each strategy that was employed, beginning with the most ubiquitous strategy and proceeding to the least prevalent.

5.2 Eswatini Government's Crisis Management Strategy

The findings indicate that the most prevalent crisis response strategy employed by the Eswatini government was the denial posture, where sub-categories of "deny," "attack-the-accuser" and "scapegoat" were mostly employed by the political actors during this period, portraying the Eswatini government as the victim of the crisis. According to Benoit (1997), the denial crisis response strategy is when an organisation asserts that there is no crisis.

This approach is characterized by a conscious effort to deflect blame and discredit the legitimacy of the crisis. By adopting this strategy, the government of Eswatini's intent was to minimise the perceived severity of the civil conflict and rightly refute the complications associated. To visually represent the distribution of crisis response strategies identified in this study, the graph below illustrates the prevalent strategies.
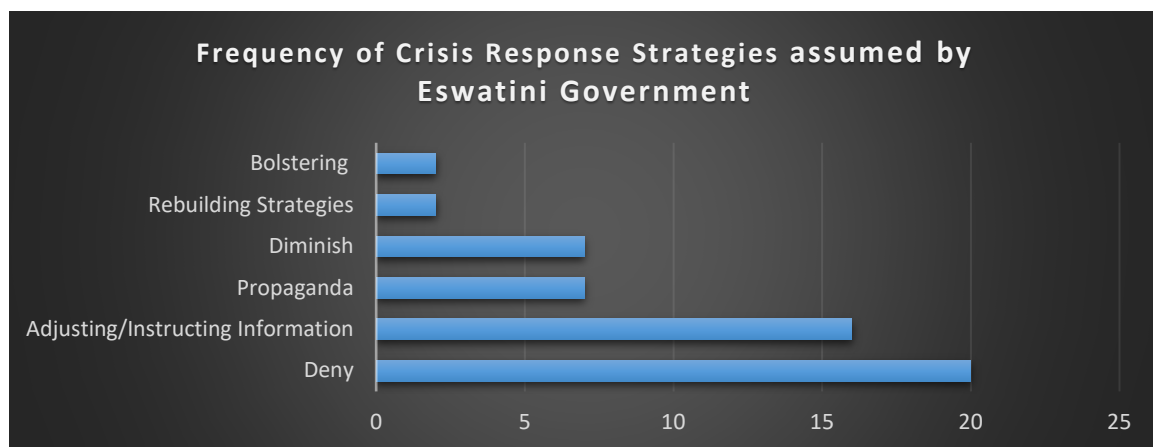
Exploring Deny Posture in Government's Crisis Communication Strategies

5.2.1 The Denial Strategy

Coombs (2007) presents the denial strategy as an organisation's attempt to distance itself and its reputation from a particular crisis. The study finds the denial strategy posture to be relatively high throughout the government's communication at the peak of the civil conflict crisis. Political actors within the government's communication did not view the incident as a crisis and upheld denying that there was a crisis. Resultantly, the denial strategy was mostly used by the government on matters pertaining to the heavy-handedness of security forces. Coombs (2012) further asserts that an organisation that uses denial as a strategy is either denying that the incident occurred or that the organisation somehow facilitated the incident, shifting the blame somewhere.

To illustrate the use of a denial strategy in the Eswatini government's crisis communication, a live video call-in interview with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) News, the government, through the Minister of Finance employed

the denial crisis response strategy when he categorically refuted accusations surrounding the heavy-handedness of security forces on unarmed civilians to quell the conflict.

In his response, he is quoted as:

> We understand that there is a criticism that has been out there, obviously, there has been a bit of a single voice giving that criticism. But at the same time, we on the ground, one has found that we are not actually used to this as a country, and hence these protests actually got quite out of hand. And one didn't actually have a handle on it. One shouldn't have had the amount of looting and burning taking place, had there been the heavy-handedness, one probably wouldn't have that kind of escalation, violence, and looting. So as you say, there are probably two sides to the story. - Neal Rijkenberg, 06 July 2021 (See Appendix G).

The Minister emphasized that security forces only were involved when property was being vandalized or when violence broke out, emphatically denying law enforcement's attempts to silence dissent, mentioning that police involvement was always with restraint and within the standards stipulated for law enforcement in such situations:

> The only time that law enforcement gets involved is when people's property is being damaged or when violence breaks out. So, there has been a long history of people demonstrating, people /strikes taking place and the only time that the police do disperse the protesters is actually when the violence starts. There has never been a history of Police breaking up a peaceful protest. It is a human right, and it is very much respected in the country. – Neal Rijkenberg, 06 July 2021 (See Appendix G).

Similarly, the denial strategy was also used on issues such as the infringement of rights. Taking from the Acting Prime Minister's statement issued on June 29, the government denied any means of infringing on the rights of *emaSwati*. The statement by the Acting Prime Minister was issued in response to the accusations that the government was silencing dissent. In his statement, the Acting Prime Minister explains,

> It should be clear that the Government respects the freedom of expression and the banning of delivery of petitions to Tinkhundla is by no means stifling emaSwati from raising grievances - Acting Eswatini Prime Minister, June 29, 2021 (See Appendix C).

Notably, the civil conflict crisis was accompanied by a wave of disinformation, giving the option for the government of Eswatini to correct factual inaccuracies published by the media and improve public understanding of the events of the civil conflict. The study finds that the Eswatini government employed the denial strategy to draw attention to the role

played by the media in amplifying distrust and concern among *emaSwati* by publishing unverified information, undermining the government's responses to the civil conflict. Eswatini government categorically issued rapid rebuttals of journalistic errors, and censured and criticized the media for intentionally constructing and presenting falsehoods about the civil conflict. The denial strategy is entailed in a press statement issued by the Eswatini's Acting Prime Minister on the 1st of July;

> The public and the media are also urged to be wary of unverified and inaccurate information that is fueled by forces that are determined to push through their agenda by all means necessary (See Appendix D).

5.2.2 Scapegoat Strategy

Obliging scrutiny is the finding that scapegoating was the Eswatini government's frequently employed response strategy during the crisis. Coombs (2007) asserts that the scapegoat crisis response strategy occurs when a person or group outside of the organisation is blamed for the crisis. In that regard, the study finds that the Eswatini government used the scapegoating response strategy to deny responsibility for the civil conflict and shift the blame to organisations and persons outside the government. Findings confirm that the Eswatini government employed the scapegoat strategy and shifted blame to other parties to lessen the burden of responsibility. For example, in an interview with BBC News on the 3rd of July 2021, the Minister of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) acting as one of the political actors in the government's communication continuum, shifted the focus away so that the international audience could entertain the idea that another party may be fully or partially responsible. In the interview, the Minister is quoted as saying:

> I am saying to you, that foreign mercenaries have invaded the Kingdom, hired by these people with this agenda, they are carrying out the most heinous of attacks and they set up roadblocks in Police Uniform and Army, Uniform infiltrating the citizens and sending videos of themselves attacking innocent citizens – Minister of ICT, HRH Princess Sikhanyiso (See Appendix K).

Another scapegoat strategy is a response from the Acting Prime Minister:

> I don't think that locals can embark on such reckless behaviour because this is their infrastructure that is being destroyed. We suspect some people have come from outside to mislead locals to commit these horrendous acts so that the economy can tumble down. – Eswatini Acting Prime Minister (See Appendix L).

Similarly to the previous example, Eswatini Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Trade, Minister Manqoba Khumalo, acting as one of the country's spokespersons during the civil conflict, in a live interview with *Newzroom Afrika*, maintained the Eswatini Government's stance that there were foreign elements who were responsible for the civil conflict, saying:

> Yes, some foreign agents were operating in the country last week that hijacked the peaceful delivery of petitions....It was around the 22nd, the 23rd of June that we realized that there had been hijacked by foreign agents and violent mobs that had crafted a strategy, funded it, and were using the internet and social media to mobilise. - Minister Manqoba Khumalo, 06 July 2021 (See Appendix E).

The government's discourse around the civil conflict was that there were foreign elements who had hijacked the peaceful delivery of petitions to minimize the public's attributions of the crisis' responsibility, controllability, and stability to the government and assign it to these foreign elements' government asserts responsibility. The study finds Eswatini government's use of the scapegoating strategy was meant to remove any connection between the government and the civil conflict crisis. Based on the three excerpts from the political actors with the Eswatini government's communication continuum, the frequent use of the words declaring "*mercenaries*", "*foreign agents*" and "*people who have come from outside*" suggest the government fingers them to be at fault of the crisis.

5.2.3   Attack the Accuser Strategy

According to Coombs (2007), attacking the accuser is when crisis managers oppose or confront the people or group who claim a crisis exists. In an attempt to sidetrack the negative attention that Eswatini had garnered from the international community, the study's findings reveal that there were elements of the "*attack the accuser*" response strategies in the government's communication. The study finds that political actors within the government's communication continuum accredited the chaos to certain groups and individuals in the country and accused them of orchestrating anarchy. The official rhetoric from government authorities assigned to respond on behalf of the Eswatini government was that there were foreign elements who had infiltrated the country as they defended the Eswatini government during the crisis.

Employing this strategy allowed the government to discredit the credibility and character of the protesters who were labelled as anarchists. This strategy, the study finds, was a

good way for the Eswatini government to distance itself from being seen as the cause of the violence and to shift the attention to foreign mercenaries. The attack-the-accuser crisis response strategy is unmistakable as embedded in a press release from the Acting Prime Minister, invalidating the accusations made by the protesters by framing them negatively. On the 24th day of June 2021, the Acting Prime Minister mentioned in a written statement, that:

> However, what we are seeing of late are elements who have hijacked these concerns to further their agenda, mainly to shake the foundations that define this country with an intention to achieve regime change – Acting Eswatini Prime Minister, 24 June 2021 (See Appendix F).

The Acting Prime Minister's statement presents Coombs' response strategy which is to "*attack the accuser*", as he goes on to blame protesters for the crisis, claiming the government was a victim of their unreasonable anger.

We have seen some protestors deliberately provoking the police who have continued to restrain themselves under serious provocation and attacks. This kind of unruly behavior is unacceptable and cannot be allowed to continue without consequence – Acting Eswatini Prime Minister, 24 June 2021. (See Appendix F)

APM: "These protests have degenerated into disorder & violent scenes in several instances, putting the lives of citizens, public & private property in danger. We have seen some protestors deliberately provoking the police. This kind of unruly behavior is unacceptable."

4:49 PM · Jun 24, 2021

Manipulations of Attacking the Accuser Strategy from Eswatini Government containing criticism of the protestors in the conflict.

In his statement, the Acting Prime Minister responded by publishing a lengthy rebuttal, attacking the protesters, accusing them of not respecting the laws of the country, mentioning:

> It is disheartening to observe the flagrant disregard of the rule of law, the result of which has been the breach of the Constitution, Public Order Act 2017, and the COVID-19 Regulations as variated from time to time. In light of the above, the Government has reached the decision to stop with immediate effect the delivery of petitions to Tinkhundla Centres. - Acting Eswatini Prime Minister, 24 June 2021 (See Appendix F).

5.3 Analysing Eswatini Government's Initial Response Strategy

Following the denial posture, the next most frequently observed strategy used in the Eswatini government's communication was the Initial Response Strategy. This strategy involves institutions offering modified or clarified information to address the crisis while attempting to restore credibility. It reflects an effort to balance the need for transparency to maintain stakeholder trust (Coombs, 2004).

5.3.1 Protection Strategy

During the civil conflict in Eswatini, the study finds the contents of the government's press statement to be apprehensive of the ethical responsibilities the government had during the crisis. Such an approach demonstrates a recognition of the importance of communication in crisis management and indicates a more nuanced understanding of the need to engage with stakeholders during tumultuous periods. Coombs (2007) asserts that the priority in any crisis is to protect stakeholders from harm, not to protect the reputation. In a statement issued by the Acting Prime Minister on June 29, the government expressed critical measures taken towards fulfilling its obligation to protect stakeholders from harm. According to Coombs, instructing information includes information on what stakeholders can do to protect from physical/emotional harm therefore in this regard, the below except from the Acting Prime Minister's press statement can be used as the matched response:

> We request the Nation to cooperate with security forces as they are deployed to protect the lives of all emaSwati & residents of this beautiful Kingdom, including private & public property. - Acting Prime Minister, June 29, 2021 (Appendix C).

Eswatini government recognized that safety is the binding force in the civil conflict crisis and they issued public safety responses to keep stakeholders safe. The study finds that the Eswatini Government did not take the crisis for granted as they incorporate the instructing information posture in its crisis response strategies. Other instructing information issued by the Eswatini Government included alternative channels to express their grievances since the physical delivery of petitions had been banned. The Acting Prime Minister in a Press Statement,

> We are a Nation that believes in dialogue, and it is with that in mind that we once again request all aggrieved emaSwati to use alternative channels to express their grievances. The government has opened an email address where emaSwati can

continue to direct their concerns and petitions. The email address is petitions@gov.sz. This has been done in the interest of protecting emaSwati from the dangers of COVID-19, which is already showing a steep upward trajectory. – Acting Prime Minister, 29 June, 2021 (See Appendix C).

Secondly, instructing information was used to help the publics to know about the security parameters of the country. In a press statement released on the 1st of July, 2021, the Acting Prime Minister informs citizens that;

> "Government has tightened security to reclaim the rule of law, and peace and to protect all emaSwati. We will continue not to tolerate looting, arson, violence, and all other forms of criminality that are directed at businesses and people's property. We have had to call in the army to protect critical national infrastructure and to enforce COVID-19 regulations. There has been no martial law that has been declared" – Eswatini Acting Prime Minister, 01 July 2021 (See Appendix D).

Social media has emerged as a powerful platform influencing public perception and communication strategies during crises. This study examined six social media posts from the Eswatini government's Facebook posts during the civil conflict, utilising the SCCT as a framework for analysis. By dissecting these posts, the study was able to comprehend the government's communication strategies and their effectiveness in managing the unfolding situation. Of the six Facebook posts, the study finds the government's statement of July 5th to fit the instructing information of the SCCT.

Date	Summary of Post Contents	Category	Rationale
5 July	The government through the Acting Prime Minister, announces the country has returned to normalcy	Instructing Strategies	Particularly relevant in crisis management, this includes providing information and guidance to help stakeholders understand actions being taken. This category can focus on assuring the public of safety and returning to stability, highlighting efforts taken to ensure peace and normalcy.

Adjusting Information Posture

Furthering the examination of the six social media posts published by the Eswatini government on its Facebook Page during the civil conflict, the study finds informative themes, that focus on transparency and the dissemination of essential information were issued.

Date	Summary of Post Contents	Category	Rationale
3 July	The government announces that the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence & Security (TROIKA)'s visit to Eswatini on a Fact Finding Mission	Initial Information/ Informative Communication	This response provides information about the government's proactive measures to understand the situation and could be seen as an attempt to manage the narrative by indicating concern and engagement.
4 July	Government announces that the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence & Security (Troika) has concluded preliminary engagements with Government & civil society representatives	Initial Information - Informative Communication	This response serves to inform the public that an assessment has been completed, which can be a step towards transparency and rebuilding trust after the conflict.

5.3.2 Crisis Basics Strategy

Results conducted through an ethnographic content analysis reveal that the government of Eswatini employed the adjusting information-crisis basics strategy to inform *emaSwati* of the basic information about the crisis. Sturges (1994) suggests that the adjusting information sets out to help stakeholders cope with the psychological effects of a crisis. The study finds that during the civil conflict crisis, there was an increased focus on adjusting information posture. Taking from the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade's interview on Newzroom Afrika, the Minister's choice to employ this strategy was meant to protect the reputation of the Nation's brand and also to reassure *emaSwati* that the situation was indeed under control. Below is an excerpt from the Minister's interview,

> First and foremost, we want to state that the situation in Eswatini is now under control. Normal operations have resumed, socially and in the business sector. We are still recovering from the supply chain, disruptions that has affected the business and availability of goods, services among others. – Minister Manqoba Khumalo, 06 July 2021 (See Appendix E).

The study locates the frequency of the adjusting crisis basics response strategy to be embedded in government's communication, and according to Coombs (2007b), the issuance of adjusting information is crucial to the crisis response strategy because of its characteristic of providing crucial time-sensitive appropriate information for the safety of stakeholders. Such can be seen in the case of Eswatini where the Acting Prime Minister, in setting out strictures of the crisis, issued a statement on the 24th of June 2021 giving an account of crisis-related general information, how the crisis started, where, and when,

clarifying also in his statement that the protests have degenerated into disorder and violent scenes, putting the lives of citizens, public and private property in danger.

> In light of the above, the Government has reached the decision to stop with immediate effect the delivery of petitions to Tinkhundla Centres – Acting Prime Minister, June 24, 2021 (See Appendix F).

At length, the Acting Prime Minister gives an account of how the petition delivery exercise became a breeding ground for anarchy and explains the misunderstandings involved in its continuation, citing how it has been intentionally hijacked to sow seeds of division among *emaSwati* in complete disregard for public safety, the rule of law and COVID-19 Regulations. The crisis basics strategy is also evident in the excerpt below extracted from SABC News' live interview with the Minister for Finance, Neal Rijkenberg, who explains the severity of the civil conflict crisis;

> Yes, our official numbers are still 27. We, at the moment, there have been many deaths often, a lot of those because of the rioting that has been taking place, but the number that we have is 27 people who have died with these riots.... I am not sure of the number that has been injured, but yes, the violence, the protests did become very violent and a lot of looting and fires taking place, and then the fires, you know, the explosion of gas bottles, now people inside the shops being burnt, sometimes the shop keepers actually shooting and killing the protesters. The riots were very violent and there were a lot of casualties in the process. – Neal Rijkenberg, 06 July 2021. (See Appendix G)

The study finds government's use of the adjusting information-crisis basics strategy helped *emaSwati* to cope with the crisis by reducing uncertainty about the conflict. Specifically, the Eswatini government, through constant updates on its social media page, kept *emaSwati* abreast about the crisis, regularly dispelling fake information published on social media about the civil conflict. For example, a statement issued by the Acting Prime Minister on the 29th of June 2021 dissipated rumors that the King had fled the country amid the civil conflict,

> Following the false media reports circulating, I would like to take this opportunity to assure emaSwati and the International Community that His Majesty King Mswati III is in the country and continues to lead in working with the Government to advance the Kingdom's goals – Eswatini Acting Prime Minister, 29 June 2021 (See Appendix C Part II).

Another example of the adjusting information crisis basics strategy is observed when the government started to provide clarity around intricate matters of the mission of the SADC Organ on Politics Defence and Security (Troika) to Eswatini;

> The government wishes to inform the public of activities attributed to a social media page "SADC Observatory Group" that circulates fake news and videos about the Kingdom of Eswatini. As a result, the activities of this page are misconstrued to represent those of the SADC Organ TROIKA Fact-Finding Mission to the Kingdom of Eswatini. – Issued by Eswatini Government Spokesperson, Sabelo Dlamini, 18 July, 20121 (See Appendix H).

5.3.3 Corrective Action Strategy

In its exploration of the crisis response strategies employed by the Eswatini government, findings of the study reveal that the corrective action strategy was employed during the civil conflict. While corrective action can be taken by an organization even in cases where the organization is not viewed as responsible for a crisis (Sellnow, et al., 1998), the Eswatini government denied responsibility for the civil conflict, however, the government ensured the law was upheld against all those who perpetuated anarchy. Corrective actions give assurance to stakeholders that they are safe thereby reducing their psychological stress (Sellnow, et al., 1998). The ethnographic content analysis conducted reveals that the Government of Eswatini, whose dominant tone of messages announced and implemented corrective measures as quickly as possible, primarily demonstrated the corrective action response strategy.

The use of the corrective action response strategy by the Eswatini government proved a paramount strategy for the country's image restoration. Eswatini government's decision to dispatch security forces on the ground to maintain law and order represents its first significant step in corrective action. Microscoping the contents of the Eswatini Government's Press Conference held on the 29th of June 2021, the Acting Prime Minister's statement fits the SCCT's corrective action crisis strategy response definition. The contents of the press conference revealed the government's concerted efforts to reassure the public and stakeholders to feel safe and announced efforts aimed at repressing the situation. The below excerpt from the press conference matches the SCCT's corrective action crisis strategy response observed by the Eswatini government:

> The law will be upheld against all those who perpetuate anarchy and threaten the lives and livelihoods of emaSwati. Our security forces are on the ground to maintain law and order. We request the Nation to cooperate with security forces as they are deployed to protect the lives of all emaSwati and residents of this beautiful Kingdom, including private and public property - Acting Eswatini Prime Minister, 29 June 2021 (See Appendix C).

This statement underscores the use of the corrective action crisis communication strategy by stating that the government is publicly pledging to uphold the law and stop violence and those perpetrating anarchy. The Acting Prime Minister's statement provided some sort of assurance to residents in the country the international community and those forming part of the diplomatic corps that the situation would be normalized, such as the excerpt below presented in a press statement issued on the 29th of June 2021 where he is quoted,

> The government would like to assure all emaSwati, residents of Eswatini, the international community, and diplomatic partners that we are working around the clock to ensure that the situation is normalized – Acting Eswatini Prime Minister, 29 June 2021 (See Appendix C).

Furthering the ethnographic content analysis conducted in this study, the researcher combed through news media digital platforms' coverage of the crisis and found that the corrective action strategy was the primary crisis response strategy for political actors within Eswatini's political continuum. The study further examined the assumption that, for an organization facing a crisis, taking some degree of responsibility for the crisis during critical periods and providing corrective action can expedite the organization's effort to rebuild its legitimacy.

An excerpt from the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade, Manqoba Khumalo's live interview with Newzroom Afrika on the 22nd of July alludes to how corrective action would be taken against armed forces found in dereliction. In the interview, he is quoted saying,

> Specifically on the riots, the Human Rights Commission is working on the allegations of Police brutality and if there are any actions that were taken that are not justified by the situation that was being addressed, that would be dealt with appropriately (See Appendix I).

In this instance, the Minister was referring to allegations that the police were heavy-handed when dealing with protesters during the civil conflict. Likewise, the Prime Minister,

as another political actor during the civil conflict crisis is quoted employing the corrective action strategy in his address to parliament:

> I am aware of allegations of police brutality which have been raised in several instances recently. As Minister responsible for police I want to assure the nation that these will be investigated and dealt with appropriately - Prime Minister, Cleopas Dlamini, 28 July, 2021 (See Appendix J).

Additionally, the Prime Minister reiterated that:

> The rule of law should be upheld at all times and Government will not hesitate to bring to book anyone who instigates violence under the guise of freedom of expression. – Prime Minister, Cleopas Dlamini, 28 July, 2021 (See Appendix J).

5.4   Primary Crisis Response Strategies

5.4.1   Diminish Crisis Response Strategies

5.4.1.1 Excuse

The excuse strategy was often used following criticism levelled against the Eswatini government for shutting down the internet. To contextualize, the Eswatini government sought to shut down internet services to quell protests, imperiling the enjoyment of numerous rights, raising crucial questions around the freedom of expression concept, and spawning a set of ambivalent political consequences. Criticism against Eswatini mounted as the internet was shut for two days. For the Eswatini government, the fear was that social or digital media in general created mobility that went beyond control during the country's civil conflict. The excuse strategy manifested during the Minister for Commerce, Industry and Trade's call-in interview with Newzroom Afrika's Thabo Mdluli, who when asked why Eswatini became very active in controlling people via social media platforms, responded as,

> We had to put the lives of our people first, the protection of infrastructure first, and the preservation of our utilities first. It was a conscious decision to say, figure out a way to isolate the agents of this particular anarchy and destruction. But as our technicians were doing that, they couldn't get a consistency in internet uptime and social media platforms couldn't be separated on time. This is not ideal, I would agree with you if this was a matter of policy in Eswatini or a matter of tendency in Eswatini, it is not! We were dealing with a specific situation. You will appreciate Thabo that

other countries do the same when they face a severe threat. - Minister Manqoba Khumalo - 06 July 2021 (See Appendix E).

Examining Khumalo's response against the framework of SCCT indicates an example of the excuse crisis response strategy, by referring to how the internet shutdown is neither a matter of policy nor a matter of tendency in Eswatini, implying that the Eswatini government did not intend for the crisis to occur.

> Without context, those concerns are justified, but here is the context. We then discovered, just before the 24th of June that the peaceful protests, 51 of them that had happened up until that point, had been hijacked, and there were mercenaries that were coming from neighboring countries, that were bringing in firearms, and bringing in money and resources and strategies that are foreign to this country to hijack these protests and start a campaign of violence and destruction which they ultimately carried out last week. We discovered that this was all planned on social media platforms and internet websites that were undercover. So, in trying to isolate the threat to the security and protection of our people, we then had to go through a series of elimination which affected internet availability. But I am glad to say we are very close to isolating those sites and restoring everything fully because it has been a gradual restoration of various platforms beginning with business platforms, and banking platforms, the internet was fully restored as of Friday last week, but right now there is still a bit of a struggle in isolating the social media platforms that are the hive of activity for the foreign agents that have infiltrated our security systems here and are causing the damage that you saw last week, where 3000 rand worth of properties, private businesses, infrastructure, utilities, was destroyed. – Minister Manqoba Khumalo, 06 July, 2021 (See Appendix E).

In both these excerpts, the Eswatini government attempts to minimize the government's responsibility and convince stakeholders that the internet blackout had no intentions of stifling the freedom of expression nor limiting the right to free speech and information. Instead, the official rhetoric from political actors within the communication continuum asserts the government's inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.

The excuse strategy was also employed to explain why the government unleashed law enforcement on citizens during the conflict. For example, during an interview with the Minister for Commerce, Trade, and Industry on NewzRoom Afrika, the excuse strategy manifests as:

> What is also unacceptable Thembekile is people going around torching schools, that's unacceptable! People going to newly built laboratories and just setting them alight, going to libraries in schools and setting them alight. So it keeps everything on the knife edge and when that happens, that environment will unfortunately have casualties that we don't need in the country. – Minister Manqoba Khumalo, 22 July, 2021 (See Appendix I).

5.4.1.2 Justification

Justification refers to measures taken by an organisation to minimise the perceived damage caused by the crisis by offering a logical explanation (Coombs, 2007). Two variables support this strategy: minimise the perceived damage and offer a logical explanation. The frequency of the Eswatini government's justification crisis response strategies was also evident as the government attempted to assure *emaSwati* that the civil conflict crisis was not as bad as it seemed.

> *Government is happy to note that the situation on the ground has stabilised over the past few days, as our security forces have resolutely ensured the maintenance of peace and order across the four regions of the country*. – Acting Prime Minister, 05 July 2021 (See Appendix K).

The second ordinance of the justification strategy offers a logical explanation. The excerpt below presents support for the justification strategy being used by the Eswatini government as a crisis communication strategy, explaining the measures the government undertook to quell the conflict:

> You cannot say, to answer your question, that we started unleashing martial law when people were delivering petitions, when 51 were delivered peacefully and it was at a point in which we realized that people were being beaten up just for receiving those petitions - Minister Manqoba Khumalo, 06 July 2021 (See Appendix E).

Based on the excerpt from this interview, the government, through the Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, generally used the justification strategy to demonstrate government credibility and minimise negative impressions by offering what seemed a logical explanation of the events that led to the government unleashing martial law. Justification tactics also include denying the seriousness of an injury or suggesting the victim deserved it. Another example of justification as a crisis response strategy employed by the Eswatini government during the civil conflict crisis can be identified in this excerpt below from the Commerce, Industry, and Trade Minister's interview with Newzroom Afrika

> So, the point is, you are speaking of that incident, a very unfortunate incident that you are quoting, and again I will say we are not proud of such incidents when we see them but they are a result of a culmination of a number of activities that have necessitated and precipitated by other activities where during the night, a school would be burnt and then our security forces would have information about intended activities that they are trying to prevent, and in so doing, there may be casualties that we may have to deal with as a country and some people, some innocent people in

certain cases may be caught in a cross-fire – Minister Manqoba Khumalo, 22 July 2021 (See Appendix I).

5.5   Secondary Response Strategies

5.5.1   Rebuilding Strategy

5.5.1.1 Apology

For the apology ordinance to fit as one of the crisis response strategies used by the Eswatini government, there has to be an indication that the Eswatini government takes full responsibility for the civil conflict crisis and that the government is asking for forgiveness from *emaSwati*. However, in the case of Eswatini, the study finds, after micro-scoping six press statements, a single press conference, eight social media posts, and six live (audio) interviews through employing an ethnographic content analysis, that political actors within the Eswatini government's communication utilized every strategy during the crisis except for offering a full apology. While they collectively expressed concern for the victims and regret for the loss of life, and property and the destruction of schools, nothing in their communication was near a full apology.

According to Benoit & Drew (1997), "*an apology is marked by the organisation accepting responsibility for the crisis and asking for forgiveness*". Yet such is not the case for Eswatini. Instead, the crisis communication strategy that was more salient in the government's communication was the denial posture because the government claimed that foreign mercenaries had invaded the Kingdom, that there were people who had come from outside to mislead locals to commit these horrendous acts or that there were foreign agents who were operating in the country, hijacking the peaceful delivery of petitions.

5.5.1.2 Regret

The civil conflict in Eswatini prompted a profusion of live interviews with the media, particularly with international media, and Eswatini authorities were duty-bound to respond. An qualitative content analysis conducted on the actual responses by the Eswatini government's political actors during the civil conflict crisis represented the

standpoint of the Eswatini government. In this regard, the response from the Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Manqoba Khumalo suffices to include the regret strategy as:

> We do want to say, we are not pleased at all, as the government of the Kingdom of Eswatini with the status quo. We are really regretful of the loss of lives, and the loss of property, and the destruction of schools and the education system in Eswatini and we are working together to forge a way forward and find a sustainable solution, that will ensure that inclusive dialogue is actually commenced sooner rather than later. – Minister Manqoba Khumalo, 22 July 2021 (See Appendix I).

The study finds that this response was not an apology, as the Minister mentioned that the government was a victim of the crisis.

5.5.1.3 Compensation

As Coombs (2007b) posits, the compensation strategy is one that may be used in preventable crises. The compensation strategy is usually when money or other gifts are offered to victims as compensation. Eswatini government's compensation strategy was more focused on specific stakeholders such as businesses that were affected by the massive scale of violence, looting, and arson propagated by criminal elements, to exclusively mention the amount of money Eswatini government had set aside to pay to victims of the civil conflict. The matched response had the Eswatini government offer compensation to victims of the violence. The Prime Minister's address to cabinet contains a valid reference to this crisis response strategy mentioning,

> We wish to express our gratitude to His Majesty King Mswati III for establishing a Reconstruction Fund with an initial amount of E500 million, which we believe will go a long way in assisting victims of the *recent violence.* – Eswatini Prime Minister, 28 July 2021. (See Appendix J)

5.5.2 Bolstering Strategy

This category emphasizes the importance of recognizing the pain and loss experienced by affected parties.

Date	Summary of Post Contents	Category	Rationale

8 July	The government through the Acting Prime Minister, issued a statement of condolences	Rebuilding Strategies	This involves actions aimed at repairing the Eswatini government's reputation and restoring relationships. Expressing condolences can be framed under a new category focused on empathy.

5.5.2.1 Expressing Concern for Victims

The bolstering strategy has a high concern for victims and attempts to attempts to add positive information about the organization. Within the bolstering posture are the concerned strategy, which primarily deals with how an organisation expresses compassion about a situation. In this instance, Eswatini government showed concern for its stakeholders and their property. In a statement issued by the Acting Prime Minister, the concern cluster is profound from the contents of the statement.

> The government is highly concerned with the events that have afflicted our country in the past few days. While we continue to advocate and promote the full expression of all constitutional and human rights, including the right to protest, we cannot condone the attacks on emaSwati and their property. – Acting Prime Minister, 01 July 2021. (See Appendix D)

5.6 Propaganda as a Tool: Eswatini Government's Response to Conflict

The study finds that outside the recommended strategies of the SCCT, the Eswatini government used propaganda, characterised by the dissemination of messages that were intended to serve the primary interests of the government of Eswatini in order to reinforce its leadership. Historically, governments have been known to incorporate propaganda into their political strategies. Defined by Jowett & O'Donnell (2015) as a form of communication that attempts to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist, propaganda was ubiquitous in government communication during the civil conflict crisis. L'Etang (2014) asserts the management of a public crisis involves a wider range of fields, including propaganda. This approach involves the strategic dissemination of information designed to shape public perception favorably, even in the face of adversity.

The study finds that the tool that helped the Eswatini government to reach its populace was social media, Facebook in particular. Mentioned in earlier chapters of the study that Eswatini presents a state whose principles fail the democratic tests and are incompatible with requirements pertaining to citizen autonomy, Taylor (2002) holds that non-democracies are all about coercion and force therefore Eswatini's denial about conducting propaganda would be self-defeating. The analysis reveals propagandist messages within the government's messaging, framing narratives to influence public opinion and shift blame. This study thus highlights the complex interplay between communication strategies and public perception during times of crisis, gaining insight into how the Eswatini government navigated the civil conflict crisis, addressed public concerns, and worked to shape the overall narrative amidst tumultuous events.

Date	Summary of Post Contents	Category	Rationale
3 July	Government publishes photos of Political Actors touring businesses that were burnt during the upheaval, government announcing 5000 Job losses and the financial implications	Propaganda/ Accusatory Communication	This response aims to shape public perception by emphasizing a narrative that frames the protesters negatively and distances the government from the conflict.
12 July	The government published photos of the Acting Prime Minister inspecting property damaged in the Northern Region of Eswatini during violent protests.	Propaganda	This response allows the government to control the narrative surrounding the protests and the damage caused, presenting a proactive and caring image.

Likewise, Bastian's (2006) definition of propaganda presents as "*the spreading of information to influence public opinion and to manipulate other people's beliefs*". Propaganda involves a blatant effort to persuade. As such, the study finds Eswatini government promoted the government agenda using an array of communicative techniques that principally manipulated the public, where regular notifications, updates, and government measures on the civil conflict were stressed, updating on information and intentionally omitting personal flaws and faults, such as the heavy-handedness of armed forces unleashed on citizens and exaggerated positive aspects of self – image.

5.7   Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has presented the key findings of government communication during a civil conflict crisis, focusing primarily on pairing the government's responses with corresponding Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) strategies. The first section of this chapter focused on unpacking how the Government responded to the civil conflict crisis by assessing the crisis response strategies and coding them according to the SCCT, where the findings reveal that the government's most predominant crisis response strategy was the denial posture which comprises response strategies such as scapegoating, denying and attacking the accuser. The research findings of the Eswatini government's predominant use of the deny posture demonstrate that the government removed any connection between itself and the civil conflict crisis.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1   Introduction

This final chapter presents a series of concluding remarks and recommendations on the study. The thesis explored a semi-authoritarian setting to investigate government communication by discussing the dynamics of government crisis communication during a civil conflict. By positioning a civil conflict as a case study, the study drew insights into the practical implications of government crisis communication. Research traced the communication strategies employed by political actors and found that the proper management of socio-political events such as civil conflicts by governments is crucial in setting the agenda for what citizens ought to think about and steering the direction in how the public should think about it.

The overarching aim of the study was to assess how government crisis communicators, particularly those from semi-authoritarian regimes, can respond to crises. To achieve this, the Situational Crisis Communications Theory was applied to delineate government crisis communication strategies, understand whether they aligned with or deviated from the principles of the SCCT, and offer a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of government communication strategies around the civil conflict.

The study also sought to discuss Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)'s utility in managing crises. This case study contributes to the literature on government crisis communication in Africa, an under-researched area.

6.2. Summary of the Findings: Government Crisis Communication Strategies

The study findings show that the Eswatini government used the following crisis response strategy to respond to the 2021 civic conflict:

6.2.1 Denial Strategy

Findings revealed that the Eswatini government's communication efforts were largely entrenched with a concerning reliance on denial tactics and propaganda-peddling which eroded public trust and hindered effective crisis management. The deny strategy indicates a pattern of communication that was riddled with strategies that were attacking the accusers, denying, and scapegoating. In its communication, the Eswatini government invalidated the accusations made by the protesters by framing them negatively and discrediting their credibility, labeling them as anarchists. The study finds that the Eswatini government's strategies, rather than nurturing trust and understanding in its communication, often alienated the stakeholders and failed to address their concerns and aspirations. The decision to veto the petition delivery exercise, in particular, was overly top-down, lacking the necessary engagement and responsiveness to the public's needs which in turn led to calamity and failure to earn public trust. This disconnect illustrated a significant gap between the government's intentions and the actual perceptions of its citizens.

If an organization is found to have an association with a crisis, even the slightest crisis responsibility and reputational damage is intensified should a denial strategy be used. While the researcher finds that the crisis responsibility in this context is rather ambiguous, where the Eswatini government is not completely irreproachable of the conflict, the study does highlight that the Eswatini government's use of the denial posture had negative repercussions on the reputation of Eswatini. The SCCT suggests that denial strategies should only be employed in instances of misinformation, yet findings in this study reveal that the denial posture surfaced with significance. As a result, the civil conflict in Eswatini confronted the country with a considerable reputational implosion. As the study touched upon concepts of Nation Branding, Reputation Management, and Public Diplomacy, the study finds that the government's communication strategies, rather than bolstering its national image, ended up tarnishing its reputation both domestically and internationally. Eswatini government's failure to engage with the citizenry not only hampered the government's efforts to brand itself positively but also diminished its ability to conduct effective public diplomacy. As a result, the study highlights the critical importance of adaptive and responsive communication strategies, especially in times of crisis.

6.3   The Initial Response Strategy

The study also finds the second most frequently observed strategy used by the government of Eswatini was the initial response strategy, with a combination of adjusting and instructing information. During this critical period, the study finds Eswatini government disseminated clear, authoritative messages to inform the public about the government's stance and actions. These findings indicate the government's attempts at improving institutional efficiency through communication during a critical moment, addressing public concerns about security. By employing these strategies, the study finds that the Eswatini government's attempts to strengthen relationships with the public deescalated the existing tensions.

6.3.1   Propaganda

The study found that propaganda emerged as the third critical response strategy employed by the Eswatini government during the civil conflict, aimed at influencing public opinion. While propaganda may be outside the recommended strategies of the SCCT, the study finds that the government of Eswatini employed propaganda strategically to highlight its achievements while systematically omitting any mention of its personal faults and flaws. By focusing on the positive aspects of governance, Eswatini's semi-authoritarian regime sought to construct an idealized image that would resonate with the populace and quell dissent while shaping public perception by emphasizing a narrative that frames the protesters negatively, vilifying certain groups to absolve the government of Eswatini the responsibility for the civil conflict.

The propaganda not only exaggerated the government of Eswatini's successes but also painted a picture of stability and progress. The narrative that was crafted through the Eswatini government's social media, emphasized the government's accomplishments in areas such as national security, an example being the Facebook post about the country returning to normalcy, effectively overshadowing any criticisms or shortcomings that might have undermined public confidence. This calculated approach served to reinforce the regime's legitimacy and maintain control over the narrative, illustrating how

propaganda can be wielded as a powerful tool in managing perceptions and navigating the complexities of public sentiment in politically volatile environments.

6.3.2 Diminish Strategy

Findings revealed that diminish strategies also dominated Eswatini government's communication around the civil conflict. The study finds Eswatini government's use of these strategies was aimed at downplaying the severity and implications of the national crisis confronting the country. The findings highlight how political actors in the Eswatini government communication continuum frequently relied on a set of excuses and justifications to mitigate public concern deflect responsibility and manipulate public perception through misleading narratives. These included excuses and efforts to convince stakeholders that the country's internet blackout was in no way stifling freedom of expression nor limiting the right to free speech, asserting that the situation was addressed through existing policies. Such justifications appeared to be an attempt to maintain public confidence and prevent panic. However, the study finds that the diminishing strategies proved to be less impactful in fostering trust and transparency among the *Emaswati*. The lack of transparency and accountability has further eroded public trust in government. *Emaswati* felt increasingly alienated and skeptical of official information, making it harder to coordinate an effective response and maintain social cohesion during this difficult period. To this end, the study uncovered the motives behind the government's defensive communication approach being to divert attention away from their accountability for the civil conflict, easing public pressure and maintaining public support.

6.4 Implications and Recommendations to Government Communication

An assessment into crisis communication strategies in *Monarchical Democratic* context reveals several critical insights that extend beyond mere theoretical frameworks. This study examines crisis communication strategies from the communication continuum of Eswatini government during a period of conflict, offering several critical insights that extend beyond the Situational Crisis Communication Theoretical framework. Insights obtained in this study could offer practical implications for the government's communication continuum.

First, the study reveals a predominant reliance on the denial strategy, where the government bluntly refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of the conflict or address the grievances of the protesters. Thus, findings in the study have revealed the need for improved government communication to facilitate governmental efficiency and satisfaction from a relationship-building perspective when confronted by crisis. Specifically, the findings of this research have demonstrated the obligation of communication strategies that are intertwined with cultural norms and resonate with the populace, considering country specific traditions, and socio-economic contexts. It suggests that crisis communication strategies should nurture relationships with the citizenry, provide clarity in times of crises, timely dissemination of governmental messages, and audience engagement.

Secondly, the findings of this research highlight that effective crisis communication is not only about the dissemination of information but also about building trust and ensuring community engagement during crises. It advances that understanding key dimensions and parameters of a civil conflict crisis provides a deeper understanding of the underlying causes, dynamics, and potential escalation of civil conflicts, to attain effective crisis communication. In a way, the findings suggest government communication can leverage the practical implications of the study to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of crisis communication during civil conflicts. This will ultimately contribute to a more robust and trustworthy government response, safeguarding the nation's reputation and the well-being of its citizens.

This study makes recommendations to suggest shifting towards a more proactive and transparent communication approach. This includes acknowledging the government's role, where appropriate, and demonstrating a genuine willingness to address the crisis and its root causes. Recommendations are to the effect that implementing effective stakeholder engagement strategies, which involve regular and open dialogues with citizens, media, and other relevant parties.

REFERENCES

Aertsen, T. & Gelders, D., 2011. Differences between the public and private communication of rumors. A pilot survey in Belgium. *Public Relations Review,* 37(3), pp. 281-291.

Adebayo, J. O & Makwambeni, B. 2020. I did not drown; I was the Water. A Discourse Analysis of Newspaper Reportage of Suicide in Nigeria, *Journal of African Rhetoric*. 12 , p 96-120.

Adebayo, J & Makwambeni, B. 2019. The Limits of Peace Journalism: Media Reportage of Kenya's 2017 General Elections. *Journal of African Elections,* 18 (1), p69-85

Alcántara, C. S., García, L. V. & Rojano, F. J., 2023. Communicating the volcanic eruption in La Palma from Spanish public institutions: communication strategies on Twitter. *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístic,* 29(2), pp. 357-368.

Altheide, D. L., 1987. Reflections: Ethnographic content analysis. *Qualitative Sociology,* Volume 10, pp. 65-77.

Altheide, D. L., 1996. *Qualitative media analysis.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Andriichuk, T., 2019. Communicative Support of Public Policy as a Component of Strategic Government Communications in Democratic Society. *Series Philos. Political Studies.,* Issue 27, pp. 55-61.

Anholt, S., 2006. Anholt Nation Brands Index: How Does the World See America?. *Journal of Advertising Research,* 45(3).

Arceneaux, P., 2021. Information Intervention: A Taxonomy & Typology for Government Communication. *Journal of Public Diplomacy,* 1(1), pp. 5-35.

Auer, C., 2016. Conceptualizing Political Crisis and the Role of Public Diplomacy in Crisis Communication Research. In: A. Schwartz, M. Seeger & A. Auer, eds. *The Handbook of International Crisis Communication Research.* s.l.:John Wiley & Sons, Inc., pp. 119-132.

Avery, A. J., Lariscy, R. W., Kim, S. & Hocke, T., 2010. A Quantitative Review of Crisis Communication Research in Public Relations from 1991 to 2009. *Public Relations Review,* 36(2), pp. 190-192.

Ayhan, O. H., 2011. Non-Probability Sampling Survey Methods. *International Encyclopedia of Statistical Science,* pp. 1-4.

Badr, H., 2021. Communicating Nation Branding through media and marketing strategies in the recent decade. *The Scientific Journal of Public Relations and Advertising Research ,* 1(22), pp. 37-69.

Barnes, C; Makwambeni, B and Adebayo, J O. 2022. The role of strategic communication in paradiplomacy: A South African case study. *Journal of African Foreign Affairs,* 9(1), 31-52.

Bastian , A., 2006. Public Relations VS. Propaganda. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences,* Volume 18, pp. 20-25.

Benoit, W. L. & Drew, S., 1997. Appropriateness and effectiveness of image repair strategies. *Communication Reports,* Volume 10, pp. 153-163.

Berridge, G. R., 2015. *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice.* 5th ed. New York : Palgrave Macmillan.

Björck, A., 2016. Crisis Typologies Revisited: An Interdisciplinary Approach. *Central European Business Review,* 5(3), pp. 25-37.

Borgebund, H., 2019. Political Communication and the Realities of Democracy. *Miguel Hernández Communication Journal,* 10(1), pp. 165-179.

Canel, M. J. & Sanders, K., 2012. Government Communication: An Emerging Field in Political Communication Research. In: H. A. Semetko & M. Scammell, eds. *THE SAGE HANDBOOK OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 85-96.

Canel, M. J. & Sanders, K., 2013. Introduction: Mapping the field of Government Communications. In: *GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION: CASES AND CHALLENGES.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 1-26.

Carpenter, D. P., 2010. *Reputation and Power: Organizational image and pharmaceutical regulation at the FDA.* 1st ed. New York: Princeton University Press.

Christensen, T., Lægreid, P. & Rykkja, L. H., 2018. The Co-evolution of Reputation Management, Governance Capacity, Legitimacy and Accountability in Crisis Management. In: *The Routeledge Companion to Risk, Crisis and Emergency Management.* s.l.:Routledge, pp. 177-191.

Coombs, T., 1998. The Internet as Potential Equalizer: New Leverage for Confronting Social Irresponsibility. *Public Relations Review,* Volume 3, pp. 289 - 303.

Coombs, T. W., 2004. Impact of Past Crises on Current Crisis Communication: Insights from Situational Crisis Communication Theory. *Journal of Business Communication,* 41(3), pp. 265-289.

Coombs, T. W., 2007. Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. *Corporate Reputation Review,* 10(3), pp. 163-176.

Coombs, T. W., 2007. Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. *Corporate Reputation Review,* 10(3), p. 163–176.

Coombs, T. W., 2014. State of Crisis Communication: Evidence and the Bleeding Edge. *Research Journal of the Institute for Public Relations,* 1(1), pp. 1-12.

Coombs, T. W., 2018. Revising Situational Crisis Communication Theory: The Influence of Social Media on Crisis Communication Theory and Practice. In: Y. Jin & L. Austin , eds. *Social Media and Crisis Communication.* New York: Routledge: Taylor and Francis, pp. 21-38.

Coombs, T. W., 2020. Situational crisis communication theory: Influences, provenance, evolution, and prospects.. In: F. Frandsen & W. Johansen, eds. *Crisis Communication.* Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, pp. 121-140.

Coombs, T. W. & Holladay , S. J., 2010. *The Handbook of Crisis Communication.* 1st ed. Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Coombs, T. W. & Holladay, S. J., 2010. *The Handbook of Crisis Communication.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Creswell, J. W., 2003. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods.* s.l.:Sage Publications.

Dacko-Pikiewicz, Z., 2022. *Reputation Management and Family Business,* New York: Routledge.

Dong, C., Zheng, Q. & Morehouse, J., 2023. What do we know about government public relations (GPR)? A systematic review of GPR in public relations literature. *Public Relations Review,* 49(1).

Drisko, W. J. & Maschi, T., 2015. *Content analysis: Pocket Guides to Social Work Research..* London: Oxford University Press.

Eswatini Government , 2005. *Decentralisation Policy ,* Mbabane : Eswatini Government

Eswatini Government, 2021. *Eswatini Government.* [Online]
Available at: https://www.gov.sz/index.php/ministries-departments/
[Accessed 03 February 2021].

Fairbanks, J., Plowman, K. D. & Rawlins, B. L., 2007. Transparency in government communication. *Journal of Public Affairs,,* Volume 7, pp. 23-37.

Farazmand, A., 2014. Crisis and Emergency Management: Theory and Practice. In: *Global Crisis in Public Service and Administration.* New York: Routledge, pp. 35-54.

Fearn-Banks, K., 2007. *Crisis Communication: A Casebook Approach.* 3rd ed. New York : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Flynn, J., 2004. Communicative Power in Habermas's Theory of Democracy. *European Journal of Political Theory,* 3(4), pp. 433-454.

Fombrum, C. & Shanley, M., 1990. What's in a Name? Reputation Building and Corporate Strategy. *The Academy of Management Journal,* 33(2), pp. 233-258.

Fourie, L. & Cant, M. C., 2017. *Public Relations, Theory & Practice.* 2nd ed. Cape Town: Juta and Company.

Frandsen, F. & Johansen, W., 2020. A brief history of crisis management and crisis communication: From organizational practice to academic discipline. In: F. Frandsen & W. Johansen, eds. *Crisis Communication.* Boston: Walter de Gruyter Inc, pp. 17-58.

Gaber, I., 2007. Too much of a good thing: the 'problem' of political communications in a mass media democracy. *Journal of Public Affairs,* 7(3), pp. 219-234.

Garland, R., 2017. Between mediatisation and politicization: the changing role and position of Whitehall press officers in the age of political spin. *Public Relations Inquiry.*

Garland, R., 2021. *Government communications and the Crisis of trust: From political spin to post-Truth.* London: Palgrave .

Gelders, D., Bouckaert, G. & van Ruler, B., 2007. Communication management in the public sector: Consequences for public communication about policy intentions. *Government Information Quarterly,* 24(2), pp. 326-337.

Gelders, D. & Ihlen, Ø., 2010. Government communication about potential policies: Public relations, propaganda or both?. *Public Relations Review,* 36(1), pp. 59-62.

Glenny, L., 2008. Journal of Communication Management. *Perspectives of communication in the Australian public sector,* 12(2), pp. 152-168.

Gotsi, M. & Wilson, A. M., 2001. Corporate reputation: seeking a definition. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal,* 6(1), pp. 24-30.

Grawe, M; Nkoala, S and Makwambeni, B. 2023. The use of social media for internal communication by local government employees in South Africa, *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 12 (4). pp203-213.

Grunig, J. E., 1984. *Managing Public Relations.* New York: CBS Publishing.

Grunig, J. E., 1992. *Excellence in public relations and communication management..* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Gustafsson, J., 2017. Single case studies vs. multiple case studies: A comparative study. *Sociology,* pp. 1-15.

Habermas, J., 1998. *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy.* 1st ed. s.l.:The MIT Press.

Hagan, L. M., 2007. For reputation's sake: managing crisis communication. In: E. L. Toth, ed. *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management: challenges for the next generation..* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hancock, D. R. & Algozzine, B., 2006. *Doing Case Study Research.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Hannson, S., 2017. Government Communication. In: R. Wodak & B. Forchtner, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Politics.* London: Taylor and Francis Group, pp. 326-341.

Hansen, B., 2013. *Grounding Ethnographic Content Analysis, Etic As Well As Emic Strategies; A Study Of Context For Instructional Designers.* Berlin, Digital Repository of Technische Universität Berlin.

Heath, R. L. & O'Hair, H. D., 2015. *HANDBOOK OF RISK AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION.* 1st ed. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Heinze, J., Schneider, H. & Ferié, F., 2013. Mapping the consumption of Government Communication: A qualitative study in Germany. *Journal of Public Affairs,* 13(4), pp. 370-383.

Horrocks, I., 2001. Public Sector Management. *Security Journal,* 14(2), pp. 91-92.

House of Lords, 2008. *House of Lords Report on Government Communications,* London: Government of the United Kingdom.

Howlett, M., 2009. Government Communication as a Policy Tool: A Framework for Analysis. *The Canadian Political Science Review,* 3(2), pp. 23-37.

Huang, Y. H., 2004. Is Symmetrical Communication Ethical and Effective?. *Journal of Business Ethics,* 53(4), pp. 333-352.

Hyland-Wood, B., Gardner, J., Leask, J. & Ecker, U. K. H., 2021. Toward effective government communication strategies in the era of COVID-19. *Humanities and Social Science Communication,* 8(30).

Johansson, B., Ihlen, Ø., Lindholm, J. & Blach-Ørsten, M., 2023. *Communicating a Pandemic: Crisis Management and Covid-19 in the Nordic Countries.* Göteborg: University of Gothenburg.

Johansson, K. M. & Raunio, C., 2019. Government communication in a comparative perspective. In: K. M. Johansson & G. Nygren, eds. *Close and distant: Political executive–media relations in four countries.* London: Göteborg: Nordicom, pp. 127-148.

Jowett, G. S. & O'Donnell, V., 2015. *Propaganda & Persuasion.* 6th ed. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

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), pp. 69-85.

King Mswati III, 2023. *National Statement by His Majesty King Mswati III During the 78th Session of The United Nations General Assembly, New York, USA..* New York, The United Nations General Assembly.

Korolchuk, O. L., 2020. Organization of Crisis Management in Public Administration. *International Journal of Management ,* 11(6), pp. 496-507.

Kotler, P. & Gertner, D., 2002. Country as brand, product, and beyond: a place marketing and brand management perspective. *Journal of Brand Management,* 9(4), pp. 249-261.

Kriyantono, R. & McKenna, B., 2019. Crisis Response vs Crisis Cluster: A Test of Situational Crisis Communication Theory on Two Crisis Clusters in Indonesian Public Relations. *Malaysian Journal of Communication,* 35(1), pp. 222-236.

L'Etang, J., 2014. Public relations, activism and social movements: critical perspectives. *Public Relations Inquiry,,* 3(3), pp. 399-413.

Lee, K., 2009. *Nation Branding and Sustainable Competitiveness of Nations,* Twente: University of Twente, the Netherlands.

Lee, M., 2021. Government Public Relations. In: M. Lee, G. Neeley & K. Stewart, eds. *The Practice of Government Public Relations.* New York: Routeldge, pp. 9-27.

Lemonakis, C. & Zairis , A., 2020. *Crisis Management and the Public Sector: Key Trends and Perspectives. Public Sector Crisis Management.* s.l.:IntechOpen.

Leonard, M., Stead, C. & Smewing, C., 2002. *Public Diplomacy.* London: The Foreign Policy Centre.

Leung, L., 2015. Validity, reliability, and generalizability in qualitative research. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care,* 4(3), pp. 324-327.

Liu, B. F. & Horsley, S., 2007. The Government Communication Decision Wheel: Toward a Public Relations Model for the Public Sector. *Journal of Public Research Research,* 19(4), pp. 377-393.

Liu, B. F., Horsley, S. & Levenshus, A. B., 2010. Government and Corporate Communication Practices: Do the differences Matter?. *Journal of Applied Communication Research,* 38(2), pp. 189 - 213.

Liu, B. F., Horsley, S. & Levenshus, A. B., 2010. Government and Corporate Communication Practices: Do the Differences Matter?. *Journal of Applied Communication Research,* 38(2), pp. 198-213.

Liu, B. F., Horsley, S. & Yang, K., 2012. Overcoming Negative Media Coverage: Does Government Communication Matter?. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory,* p. 597–621.

Liu, B. F. & Levenshus, A. B., 2012. Crisis Public Relations for Government Communicators. In: E. M. Berman, ed. *The Practice of Government Public Relations.* New York: Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 101 - 123.

Ly-Le, T. M., 2015. Government crisis assessment and reputation management. A case study of the Vietnam Health Minister's crises in 2013-2014. *An International Journal of Pure Communication Inquiry,* 3(1), pp. 32-46.

Makwambeni B, & Matsika, B. 2022. Towards symmetry: An assessment of stockholder communication practice in South Africa. *Sage Open, 1-13.*

Makwambeni, B, Matsilele T, and Bulani JG. 2023. *Between Utopia and Dystopia: Investigating Journalistic Perceptions of AI Deployment in Community Media Newsrooms in South Africa.* In Digitisation, AI and Algorithms in African Journalism and Media Contexts. Edited by Carol Azungi Dralega. Emerald Publishing Limited.

Makwambeni, B., Matsilele, T. and Msimanga, M.J., 2023. Through the Lenses of the Sociology of News Production: An Assessment of Social Media Applications and Changing Newsroom Cultures in Lesotho. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, p.00219096231179661.

Makwambeni, B., Matsilele, T. and Msimanga, M.J., 2023. Through the Lenses of the Sociology of News Production: An Assessment of Social Media Applications and Changing Newsroom Cultures in Lesotho. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, p.00219096231179661.

Malhan, M. & Dewani, P., 2020. Propaganda as Communication Strategy: Historic and Contemporary Perspective. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal,* 24(4), pp. 1-15.

Masullo, G. & Coppola, M., 2022. Potential and limitations of digital ethnographic research: A case study on a web community. *Frontiers in Sociology,* Volume 7.

Matsilele, T; Makwambeni, B and Mugari, S. 2023. Social media applications and the changing newsroom cultures in Africa: a case study of Lesotho. In Matsilele, T., Mpofu, S & Moyo, D. (eds.), *New Journalism Ecologies in East and Southern Africa: Innoovations, Participatory and Newsmaking Cultures.* Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, pp 59-76

Matsilele T; Makwambeni B; Nkoala S; and Bulani G, J. 2023. Youth audiences and Social Media Integration in Community Radio Stations in South Africa: A case study of Zibonele FM and Bush Radio. In Tsarwe, S., Chiumbu, S. (eds.) *Converged Radio, Youth and Urbanity in Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, pp123-153

Mehr, M. K. & Jahanian, R., 2016. Crisis Management and Its Process in Organization. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences ,* 7(5), pp. 143-148.

Meintjes, C. & Grobler, A. F., 2014. Do public relations professionals understand corporate governance issues well enough to advise companies on stakeholder relationship management?. *Public Relations Review,* Volume 40, p. 161–170.

Miño, P. & Austin, L., 2022. A cocreational approach to nation branding: The case of Chile. *Public Relations Inquiry,* 11(2), p. 293–313.

Mitroff, I. I. & Anagnos, G., 2001. *Managing crises before they happen: What every executive and manager needs to know about crisis management..* Chicago: AMACOM.

Mukhudwana, R. F., 2015. *Investigating communication management by government communication departments in the Kwazulu Natal Province in South Africa,* Pretoria: University of Pretoria.

Nkoala, S; Magoda, Z; Makwambeni, B; Mshayisa, V and Mugobo, V. 2023. Use of digital tools for social engagement in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: a case study of a South African university, *International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology (IJEDICT)*, 19(1), pp 61-79.

Nteka, N., 2021. Crises and Analysis Management. *Entrepreneurship,* IX(1), pp. 64-77.

Oddo, J., 2023. Propaganda and Rhetoric. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication.*

OECD, 2013. Trust in government, policy effectiveness and the governance agenda. In: *Government at a Glance 2013.* Paris: OECD Publishing, pp. 1-37.

Olsson, E., 2014. Crisis Communication in Public Organisations: Dimensions of Crisis Communication Revisited. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis,* 22(2), pp. 113-125.

Pace, D. S., 2021. Probability and Non-Probability Sampling - An Entry Point For Undergraduate Researchers. *International Journal of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods,* 9(2), pp. 1-15.

Pandey, S. K. & Garnett, J. L., 2006. Exploring Public Sector Communication Performance: Testing a Model and Drawing Implications. *Public Administration Review,* 66(1), pp. 37-51.

Pasquier, M., 2012. Government communication. In: L. Côté & J. Savard, eds. *Encyclopedic dictionary of public administration .* s.l.:s.n., pp. 1-13.

Pfetsch, B., 1999. *Government news management - Strategic communication in comparative perspective.* Berlin, WZB Discussion Paper, No. FS III 99-101.

Piotrowski, S. J. & Van Ryzin, G. G., 2007. Citizen Attitudes Toward Transparency in Local Government. *The American Review of Public Administration,* 37(3), pp. 306-323.

Preiser, R., García, M. M., Hill, L. & Klein, L., 2021. Qualitative content analysis. In: R. Biggs, et al. eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods for Social-Ecological Systems.* Maryland: Routledge, pp. 270-281.

PRISA, 2023. *THE PUBLIC RELATIONS INSTITUTE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA.*
[Online]
Available at: https://www.prisa.co.za/
[Accessed 18 April 2023].

Pustjens, C., 2020. *A practical toolkit for politicians during the COVID 19 Pandemic,* s.l.: The National Democratic Institute of.

Rensburg, R. & Cant, M., 2009. *Public Relations: African Perspective.* 2nd ed. Sandton: Heinemann.

Rice, C. & Somerville, I., 2018. Dialogue, Democracy and Government Communication: Consociationalism in Northern Ireland. In: M. Jakala, M. J. Durukan & K. M. Qvortrup, eds. *Consociationalism and Power-Sharing in Europe.* London: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 1-28.

Saliu, H., 2020. Public Diplomacy and Related Concepts from the Perspective of Lasswell's Communication Model. *JAHR,* 11(2), pp. 357-376.

Saliu, H., 2020. The Evolution of the Concept of Public Diplomacy from the Perspective of Communication Stakeholders. *Medij. istraž,* 26(1), pp. 69-86.

Sanders, K., 2019. Government Communication and Political Public Relations. In: J. Strömbäck & S. Kiousis, eds. *Political Public Relations: Concepts, Principles and Application.* New York: Routledge, pp. 165-186.

Sanders, K. & Canel , M. J., 2013. Government communication in 15 countries: Themes and challenges. In: *GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION: CASES AND CHALLENGES.* s.l.:Bloomsbury academic, pp. 276-312.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A., 2016. *Research Methods for Business Students.* England: Pearson Education Limited.

Schatz, E. & Levine, R., 2010. Framing, Public Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism In Central Asia.. *International Studies Quarterly,* 54(3), pp. 855-869.

Schell, C., 1992. *The Value of the Case Study as a Research Strategy,* Manchester: Manchester Business School.

Sellnow, T. L., Ulmer, R. R. & Snider, M., 1998. The compatibility of corrective action in organizational crisis communication. *Communication Quarterly,* Volume 46, pp. 60-74.

Sezgül, I., 2019. *Public Relations in Public Sector,* Ankara: Ankara Haci Bayram Veli (AHBV) University.

Sisco, H. F., Collins, E. L. & Zoch, L. M., 2010. Through the looking glass: A decade of Red Cross crisis response and situational crisis communication theory. *Public Relations Review,* 36(1), pp. 21-27.

Small, M. L., 2022. Ethnography Upgraded. *Qualitative Sociology,* Volume 45, p. 477–482.

Soler, S., 2015. *Civil Conflict and Education: How Does Exposure to Civil Conflict Affect Human Capital Accumulation? Evidence from Standardized Exit Exams in Colombia,* Maastricht: Maastricht University.

Steenkamp, J., 2021. Building strong nation brands. *International Marketing Review,* 38(1), pp. 6-18.

Sturges, D. L., 1994. Communicating through crisis: A Strategy for Organizational Survival. *Management Communication Quarterly,* 7(3), pp. 297-316.

Swanson, S. R. & Kelly, S. W., 2001. Attributions and Outcomes of the Service Recovery Process. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice,* 9(4).

Szondi, G., 2008. *Public Diplomacy and nation Branding: Conceptual Similarities and Difference,* s.l.: Clingendael Institute.

Taylor, M. & Kent, M. L., 2006. Public Relations Theory II. In: C. Botan & V. Hazleton, eds. *Public Relations Theory and Practice in Nation Building.* London: Lawrence Earlbaun Associates Publishers, pp. 341-359.

Taylor, P. M., 2002. Strategic Communications or Democratic Propaganda?. *Journalism Studies,* 3(3), pp. 437-441.

UK Government, 2023. *UK GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION PLAN 2023 - 2024,* London: UK Government.

United States Department of State, 2021. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Eswatini,* Mbabane: United States Department of State; Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

US State Department , 2011. *Human rights report: Swaziland, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.,* Mbabane : US State Department .

Utz, S., Schultz, F. & Glocka, S., 2013. Crisis communication online: How medium, crisis type and emotions affected public reactions in the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. *Public Relations Review,* 39(1), pp. 40-46.

Viktorin, C., Gienow-Hecht, J., Estner, A. & Will , M., 2018. Beyond Marketing and Diplomacy Exploring the Historical Origins of Nation Branding. In: *Nation Branding in Modern History.* New York: s.n., p. 126.

Vos, M. & Westerhoudt, E., 2008. Trends in government communication in The Netherlands. *Journal of Communication Management,* 12(1), pp. 18-29.

Weiner, B., 1985. An Attributional Theory of Achievement Motivation and Emotion. *Psychological Review,* 92(4), pp. 548-573.

Yin, R. K., 2003. *Case study research: Design and methods.* 3rd ed. Carlifonia: Thousand Oaks.

Yin, R. K., 2014. *Case Study Research Design and Method.* 5th ed. London: Sahe Publishers.