Strategizing in Turmoil: Unveiling Effective Internal Crisis Communication Practices amidst Contemporary Disruptions

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the theoretical development of literature on "internal crisis communication strategies" particularly during and post COVID-19 pandemic. The study underlines the importance of internal communication management, particularly during the crisis and post-crisis, as crisis affects internal communication initially and external communication subsequently. Also, the field of internal crisis communication has become more relevant post-pandemic. Through Scopus database analysis, literature review, and news analysis, it identifies that "crisis response" is an emerging area of research that highlights the importance of crisis response in the internal communication strategies for the managers and leaders. Some identified themes such as "employee communication behavior" and "employee engagement" and, some unhighlighted themes such as "digital transformation", "employee welfare or safety", "management of human capital at the digital workplace", "Emotional Artificial Intelligence", "corporate travel management" and "cyberthreats and cyber-attacks" amidst crisis are yet to be extensively explored more in future. There is also a significant need for regular conduct of corporate training sessions at the organizational level and professional courses to teach internal business communication at the collegiate level. Moreover, the existing literature on internal crisis communication still lacks rigorous research to highlight the strategic development of internal communication amidst crisis. There is a need for more debate over the types of internal communication tactics employed to foster employee engagement and trust in crisis.

INTRODUCTION

The term "Crisis" has been defined differently by academicians and experts as events that have negative impacts on people, organizations, and society that may occur due to natural disasters or any misdeeds (Ndlela, M. N., 2018). At the same time, many types of crisis events may be considered more severe than others. True crisis events like "Pandemics" and "natural disasters" are analogous to each other, where we have no earlier practice in handling the crisis event. It requires real-time decision-making to deal with such events. Such true crisis events are unprecedented situations that can impact the stakeholders' relationships positively or negatively as a result of internal pressures and external pressures in the organizational crisis that may further cause abrupt harm to the organizational reputation.

COVID-19 pandemic is a "true crisis event" that entirely differs from the "routine emergencies" or "routine crisis events" where there is always a precedent situation or case to be handled. So, routine crisis events create a playbook to perform in the future with repeated similar routine risk events (Leonard et al., 2020). In contrast, true crisis events create major challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic created a major challenge for organizations to shift their resources toward innovation and real-time problem-solving. At the same time, managers were forced to consistently respond honestly to all the stakeholders about the real-time crisis with coping strategies, and show affinity to them by standing up for them in this hard time. So, for every organization, the communication strategy should be based on truth and reality.

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Moreover, to develop a better communication strategy, effective communication skills are required. These communication skills can be more oral and interpersonal according to the employers' perspective to deliver effective business communication (Coffelt et al., 2016). In addition to skills, crisis managers must be capable of implementing some effective communication strategies or techniques. One such major technique is the "Stockdale paradox" (Collins, 2014) which is used to deal with real-time crises such as COVID-19 pandemic. The technique is based on two principles, i.e., to have faith and to confront reality but not to compromise each other (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2020). The crisis manager has to be bluntly honest about what is happening in the real situation (i.e., confront reality) and offer faith or hope on a rational or logical basis to deal with the situation by not just being optimistic (Harvard Business School, 2020). Organizations may customize the "Stockdale Paradox" (Collins, 2014) according to their organizational purpose and try to deal with such a true crisis event.

During the occurrence of a true crisis event unlike routine crises or emergencies, consistent innovative techniques and real-time problem-solving are to be done and simultaneously responding to the customers and stakeholders is necessary(Leonard et al., 2020). There are different crisis communication strategies like "suppression strategies", "control strategies", and "digital communication" through "information and communication technologies" which are often applied by crisis managers. The crisis leaders and communication managers must tailor the communication strategy according to the situation and take care of the vulnerable population to avoid misinformation and to address the "infodemic" if any. As the Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) suggests, every organization must customize its communication strategies according to the type of crisis it is facing. The SCCT further provides that the reputation of the organization can be protected from the harms of the crisis by assessing the crisis and implementing an appropriate crisis response strategy (Coombs, 2007).

The key constituents of organizational crisis that impact stakeholder relationships are "time" and "uncertainty". The internal pressures created by management impacts positively the relationship with the stakeholders due to timely and accurate communication of information. On the other hand, external pressures are created by the government, customers, and the News/media that may cause reputational damage to the organization by communicating negative information about the organizational crises (Meer et al., 2017). Thus, the organizations have been ensuring timely internal and external communication by learning lessons from the COVID-19 crisis.

Internal communication during such true crisis events is also very crucial to keep the employees informed and motivated. Frandsen & Johansen (2011) gave an integrative framework to be adopted for effective internal crisis communication. Their approach involved staging the internal crisis communication into, the "precrisis" stage, "during the crisis" and "post-crisis" stages, to manage the crisis communication effectively with internal stakeholders. Mazzei et al. (2022) highlighted that transparent internal communication is very important during crises as employees are very valuable assets for an organization. Along with transparent communication, employee engagement is also crucial for managing effectively the internal crisis through communication (Haavisto & Linge, 2022). Corporations are ensuring transparent communication by reporting their stakeholder engagement processes in their sustainability reports with extensive use of visuals and narratives (Arora & Rathore, 2022).

The pandemic has also forced organizations to adopt remote working with the help of "workplace analytics" and "Artificial intelligence (AI)". It has also asked organizations to transform organizations into digital workplaces to better communicate with employees and customers. AI tools will mediate oral and written business communication in the workplace in the future (Getchell et al., 2022). However, AI tools must be critically implemented in the workplace. In addition to the implementation of corporate training practices in the workplace to teach the use of AI technologies, two-way communication must be instigated. In this age of disruption, the need of the hour is to shift the role of internal communication from a "top-bottom" approach to a two-way communication approach. Therefore, the employees must transparently collaborate in the decision-making so that they feel involved, well-informed, and motivated. Also, organizations must focus on the emotional intelligence aspect of the employees to deal with their emotions and their well-being during crises. Thus, time demands to build a resilient and engaged workforce to deal with uncertainties and true crisis events.

A dearth of studies is being published on the COVID-19 pandemic in different fields. This study focuses on what existing literature says on strategic development and evolution of "internal crisis communication" during the pandemic and "post-pandemic", particularly in the Business, Management, and Accounting (BMA) field.
So, the following research questions have been considered:
- How has the field of crisis communication evolved to incorporate "internal crisis communication" with the emergence of the COVID-19 crisis?
- What internal crisis communication strategies have been explored in the crisis communication literature concerning internal stakeholders during the pandemic and post-pandemic era?

Literature Review
The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the organizations and employees as a result of public health guidelines, requiring

them to shift their workplaces to their homes. So, the organizations started rethinking their communication strategies for their online operations. Consequently, organizations started facing challenges in choosing right communication strategies to engage with the employees. Thus, there is a strong need to choose the communication strategy wisely as there is no universal communication strategy to deliver information during a prolonged and unprecedented crisis. An effective communication strategy involves delivering clear messages through the right communication medium or channel customized according to the requirement of an audience (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021; Clark-Ginsberg & Petrun Sayers, 2020). Collins et al. (2020) also recommend a focus on crisis communication strategies to address the chaos created by the crisis.

An effective internal communication plays a major role in improving overall organizational performance and establishing interpersonal relationships among employees. A creative organization strategy used by company can make positive contribution to the employees' organizational performance (Coelho & Rua, 2023). Further, the company's internal communication strategies became more effective as a result of introduction of remote working to make employees feel more integrated (Coelho & Rua, 2023). Moreover, due to employees' greater involvement in preserving an organization's viability during the COVID-19 pandemic, internal communication became the most valuable component of enhancing the relationship between an organization and its employees (Santoso et al., 2023). But the larger picture must have emerged from the debate over the types of internal communication tactics employed during crisis to foster employee engagement and trust. Walden & Zeng (2024) also suggested communication managers to communicate effectively with the home-based employees to avoid any interrupting communication and to foster job engagement during COVID-19 pandemic. Aloisi & De Stefano (2022) also emphasized how crucial it is for organizations to support employees' agency and trust to successfully adjust to this new environment. Comfort et al. (2020) suggested that during times of crisis, "collective cognition" is supported by efficient as well a valid communication which is backed by effective planning, training, and use of the right kind of technology, and "bold leadership" can help to combat the pressures of crisis. "Collective sensemaking" and "sense giving" should be implemented during the pandemic situation to initiate effective crisis communication through shared experiences of people (Stephens et al., 2020). Sugianto et al. (2023) revealed the privacy, trust and information redundancy concerns related to use of newer technologies such as Enterprise Social Media (ESM) developed by the organizations during the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic impacted employees by shifting them from the workplaces to their homes.

In the post-pandemic era, business leaders are facing various challenges in every aspect. Employees psychological and emotional health has been affected badly due to COVID-19 (Arora & Sharma, 2021). It also further impacted the employees' perception of organization. Adamu et al. (2024) inspired from SCCT, indicated that effective internal crisis communication promotes employee behaviour by improving their task performance, boosting employee well-being, and mitigating crisis. Most of the authors based their studies on the SCCT and Contingency theory of Conflict management. Mazzei et al. (2022) proposed the "contingency theory of internal crisis communication" on the basis of Contingency theory of Conflict management and identified three internal communication strategies as "to foster a sense of security, to maintain a sense of belonging, and to mobilise employees as the organization's supporters". Moreover, the pandemic has revealed shifts in internal communication strategies, which have led to important adjustments in how we employ technological solutions that best suit the workforce and their nature of work (Stawicka et al., 2024). Kim et al. (2024) informed with the help of SCCT that during the COVID-19 pandemic, employees preferred specific information related to the organizational procedures and preparation for safely performing daily tasks, which positively influenced their perceptions of internal communication quality. Thus, the situational crisis communication model has been proved in the pandemic era as the information strategies were being framed according to the situation and the information requirement of employees. However, an in-depth and longitudinal perspective might examine the evolution of such internal crisis communication strategies over time in response to changing organizational dynamics and external pressures.

Organizations are now implementing different crisis communication strategies and preparing themselves for future challenges. Due to COVID-19, organizations are now well-equipped with digital tools and are proficient in using AI. Furthermore, companies now adopt different "internal CSR initiatives" for the employees' welfare such as "workplace analytics" and "Emotional Artificial Intelligence (EAI)". During a crisis, some companies responded immediately by providing remote access infrastructure by moving workplaces to the employees' residences to enable work from home. Corporations have also now learned to manage corporate travel effectively. Corporate travel management has been done by prioritizing the health, and safety of the employees and substituting face-to-face communication with remote working. "Remote work" often involves using video conferencing as a cost-effective alternative to in-person meetings.

Furthermore, the post-pandemic strategies for internal crisis communication include various CSR initiatives that have been implemented internally by corporations.

Eng et al., 2024 also examined the well-being initiatives such as "mental health assistance programs and flexible working hours" offered to communication professionals by the companies during the peak of COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting the positive organizational attitude towards the mental health of employees. Some real-life examples include different big giants like Tata Steel, Reliance Industries Ltd., Infosys, Wipro, Tata Consultancy Services, Adani group, Tech Mahindra Ltd., Hindustan Unilever Ltd. Infosys launched "Infosys Employee Assistance Programme (IEAP)" to provide support and counseling to the employees and their families. TCS launched "TCS's iON Digital Learning hub" which is open for employees as well as students for online certificate courses. The company is also providing training programs for learning the use of AI and Blockchain technology. The company furthermore ensures employee engagement to improve employee retention in the new world of uncertainties (Honigmann et al., 2020). Further employees during remote work face various challenges due to the risk of various cyberattacks like malware infections, ransomware attacks, and various phishing scams, etc. These cyber-threats posed a great challenge for the organizations. Wipro, Infosys, and TCS like major IT giants are contributing to cyber security in a digital workplace by introducing various initiatives. Wipro has adopted cybersecurity resilience in the post-pandemic era (Dann, 2021), Infosys launched the "CyberNext Platform" (Infosys, 2020), and Tata Consultancy Services launched the "Secure Borderless Workspaces Framework" (Tata Consultancy Services, 2022) to provide cybersecurity solutions in the post-pandemic era. Furthermore, some Internal CSR initiatives are very important to be taken by the companies to deal with the post-pandemic era and to be prepared for future challenges. These may include management of the human capital in the post-pandemic workplace by embracing a digital workplace, succession planning, internal talent management, and crisis management. Also, internal communication can be effective only with the help of employee engagement in the workplace (Honigmann et al., 2020).

Besides, Aloisi & De Stefano (2022) discussed the long-term consequences of the technological shifts in post-pandemic era. As AI and algorithms become more prevalent in managerial positions, there is requirement of people-centered organizational strategies and structural solutions such as "collective bargaining agreements and improved training" that guarantee fair procedures and safeguard employees' rights throughout the transitions.

Also, more investigation of the efficacy of digitalization of all internal communication channels is required (Verčič et al., 2024). The usefulness of such channels that facilitate remote work, the impact of platforms and tools for collaboration, the importance of gamification, and the use of interactive communication techniques is yet to be thoroughly researched. From a social standpoint, digitalization of internal communication should also receive more attention to highlight the effects of digitalization on employee satisfaction and the privacy and control issues arising from easy access to data. Lastly, studies on the digitalization of internal communication as a process of organizational change are needed (Verčič et al., 2024).

Table 1 shows the key internal CSR initiatives being implemented globally in this age of turmoil. These CSR initiatives reflect the internal crisis communication strategies being adopted by the organizations to deal with uncertainties. The table shows the initiatives of the companies being taken worldwide to deal with post-pandemic challenges and to be prepared for future uncertain events. These key initiatives have been identified and churned from different news releases, magazine articles, and reports of big corporations like McKinsey & Company, KPMG, Deloitte, Harvard Business Review, and Forbes.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, authors have applied qualitative research tools such as content analysis, thematic analysis, keyword analysis, and literature review. This study is focused on identifying different themes targeting the strategies related to internal crisis communication during and post-pandemic. The authors have also used quantitative techniques like bibliometric analysis through co-occurrence analysis of keywords to mitigate the bias from qualitative techniques (Donthu et al., 2021). The choice of "co-word" analysis depends on the purpose of the bibliometric study which is to give implications and directions for the future (Donthu et al., 2021). Co-word analysis is used as a content analysis technique to find out a pattern of co-occurrence of a pair of items and the strength of linkages between the items (QIN HE, 1999). The keyword analysis is performed on the words collected from the titles or the abstracts (Lozano et al., 2019).

Data Collection

To identify, the conceptual development of literature on internal crisis communication in the pandemic era, the authors put the search query with keywords *TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Crisis communication" AND "Internal CSR Initiatives" OR "Internal Communication" OR "Covid 19" OR "COVID-19" OR "Pandemic" OR "Post pandemic")* in the "Scopus" search engine. There were 866 document results with the first query, but after the search filter in the Subject area selected only "BMA", Source type as "journal" and the language as "English", the document results were limited to 179. The documents were not limited by year.

Additionally, to analyse content and to conduct literature review of the existing literature, the authors put the search query with keywords *TITLE-ABS-KEY ("internal*

Table 1: Internal CSR initiatives to deal with post-pandemic world

1. Managing human capital in post-pandemic workplace
   - Embracing Digital workplace (Deloitte, 2021; Hatfield and Jones, 2021)
   - Succession planning for business continuity
   - Crisis management
   - Harness the IoT Analytics to provide real time support to the employees
   - Internal Talent management to manage employees' capabilities (Frankiewicz and Chamorro-Premuzic, 2020; Hancock and Schaninger, 2020)
   - Ensuring employee engagement at workplace (Chitre and Buss, 2023)
   - Workforce analytics and employee engagement in a data-driven culture (DiClaudio, no date)
   - Provide supportive environment for employees
   - Prioritize work life balance
   - "Future proofing" work force (Lund *et al.*, 2021; Mankins, Garton and Schwartz, 2021)

2. Effective Artificial Intelligence (AI) implementation post covid-19 (Elnaj, 2021)
   - Employee productivity and Experience with the help of virtual assistants
   - Facilitate HR operations with the help of "Workplace Analytics" and Emotional AI
   - Smooth streamlining of business operations
   - Mental health of employees in post-pandemic world (Molko, 2022)
   - Employees health maintenance with the help of visual quality checks

3. Cyber security to secure from new threats (Brewer, 2021)
   - Optimization of corporate travel through effective travel policies (Morris, 2021)
   - Remote working management with right balance of travel management
   - Post pandemic counselling to employees or workforce related strategies (Deloitte, 2020)
   - Local energization of employees for immediate digital transformation (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2021)

Source: Authors' compilation of the key Internal CSR initiatives discussed in different reports and publications as cited above.

crisis communication" OR "Internal communication") AND (pandemic OR "COVID-19" OR "post-pandemic") AND (strategies OR practices OR approaches OR initiatives) in the Scopus search engine. There were 88 document results with the first query, but after the search filter in the Subject area selected only "BMA", the time period from 2020-2024 and the language as "English", 49 articles remained finally. These articles were subsequently analyzed to study the literature and the highly cited articles on internal crisis communication in the pandemic era. Further, the study is based only on the Scopus database which is known as the largest citation, abstract and indexing database of the scientific literature (Schotten et al., 2017; Burnham, 2006) comprising different subject areas like social sciences, BMA, Economics, econometrics and finance, environmental sciences. Besides, this study is based only on Scopus data due to which some relevant articles might have been missed which limits our analysis. Moreover, this study is limited to the field of BMA because most of the relevant articles to the scope of study were covered by this subject field only.

Software and Tools

In this study, we have conducted a citation analysis to identify the top highly cited documents in the Scopus database. On the other hand, bibliometric approaches, i.e., co-occurrence analysis has been used to evaluate the co-occurrences of bibliographic data such as overall keywords co-occurrence with the help of "VOSviewer" software. "VOSviewer" was developed for constructing and viewing bibliometric maps or to show graphical visualization of bibliometric data(van Eck & Waltman, 2010). The focus of this paper is on keyword analysis where the unit of analysis is "words" and where the actual content is examined and analyzed assuming a thematic relationship among the frequently co-occurring words (Donthu et al., 2021).

On the other hand, "Bibliometrix R-package" (https://www.bibliometrix.org) has been used to identify the evolution of "internal crisis communication" management during and post-pandemic. Thus, Thematic mapping analysis has been conducted in this study with "Biblioshiny" software to identify the development of the conceptual structure of the literature on internal crisis communication or internal CSR initiatives during and post-pandemic.

Results and Discussion:

Citation Analysis

To identify the main publications in a given area and their development over time, citation analysis shall be applied (Pilkington & Meredith, 2009). The most significant impact can be found in articles or documents with a higher number of citations. The citation study deals with documents, authors of such documents, sources for publications,

Table 2: Rank-wise list of most influential works related to Internal crisis communication in the pandemic era

Rank	Document title	Authors	Source	Year	Citations
1	Enhancing employees' knowledge sharing through diversity-oriented leadership and strategic internal communication during the COVID-19 outbreak	Lee, Y., Tao, W., Li, J.-Y.Q., Sun, R.	Journal of Knowledge Management	2020	80
2	Achieving employee support during the COVID-19 pandemic – the role of relational and informational crisis communication in Austrian organizations	Einwiller, S., Ruppel, C., Stranzl, J.	Journal of Communication Management	2021	50
3	What was that all about? On internal crisis communication and communicative coworkership during a pandemic	Heide, M., Simonsson, C.	Journal of Communication Management	2021	46
4	Enhancing Employee Engagement via Leaders' Motivational Language in times of crisis: Perspectives from the COVID-19 outbreak	Tao, W., Lee, Y., Sun, R., Li, J.-Y., He, M.	Public Relations Review	2022	41
5	Ethical listening to employees during a pandemic: new approaches, barriers and lessons	Neill, M.S., Bowen, S.A.	Journal of Communication Management	2021	35
6	COVID-19-related job insecurity and employees' behavioral outcomes: mediating role of emotional exhaustion and moderating role of symmetrical internal communication	Khan, A.K., Khalid, M., Abbas, N., Khalid, S.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	2022	32
7	A question of quality: perceptions of internal communication during the Covid-19 pandemic in Germany	Ecklebe, S., Löffler, N.	Journal of Communication Management	2021	29
8	Mapping intrapreneurship through the dimensions of happiness at work and internal communication	Ravina-Ripoll, R., Galvan-Vela, E., Sorzano-Rodríguez, D.M., Ruíz-Corrales, M.	Corporate Communications:An International Journal	2023	25
9	Internal crisis communication and the social construction of emotion: university leaders' sensegiving discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic	Yeomans, L., Bowman, S.	Journal of Communication Management	2021	20
10	How empathetic leadership communication mitigates employees' turnover intention during COVID-19-related organizational change	Yue, C.A., Thelen, P.D., Walden, J.	Management Decision	2023	18

Source: The above information was extracted from the Scopus database as on 24-07-24

organizations and countries (Osareh, 1996). Citation analysis shows the number of times a document or an author has been referred to by different journals that are part of the citation index (Leone et al., 2012). Table 2 shows the list of the top most cited documents in the pandemic era. The top cited document among these is entitled *"Enhancing Employees' knowledge sharing through diversity-oriented leadership and strategic internal communication during the COVID-19 Outbreak"* which suggests that during the pandemic, it is only diversity-oriented leadership that can provide satisfaction to employees by ensuring transparent internal crisis communication. It ensures the employees' engagement within the internal crisis communication framework. The document has earned 80 citations in recent years, since its publication in the year 2020.

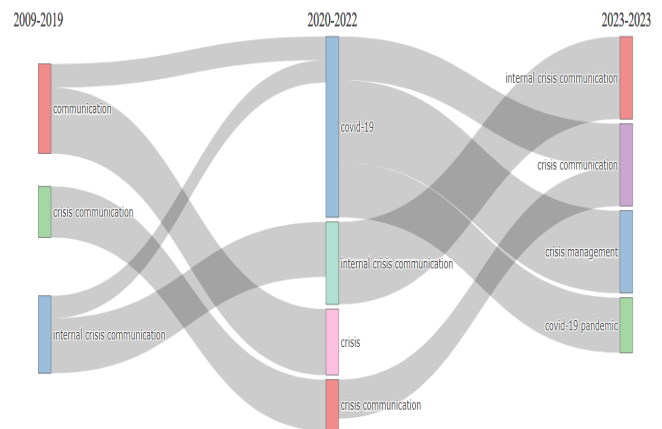The articles mentioned in Table 2generally discuss the role of effective crisis communication during the COVID-19

Figure 1: Thematic evolution of the conceptual structure of internal crisis communication from pre- pandemic era to the post-pandemic era

crisis in dealing with employee exhaustion and negative emotions of the employees. The studies are related to the effects of internal communication on employer branding in case of any external crisis. Furthermore, the authors discussed the importance of transparency in internal communication to enhance employee engagement in times of crisis.

Thematic evolution and thematic mapping:

The thematic evolution of internal crisis communication in the pandemic era as given in Figure 1 confirms the shift of the role of internal communication. Before the occurrence of COVID-19, the focus of the studies was only on crisis communication and internal crisis communication. After the occurrence of COVID-19 or during pandemic the COVID-19 became a major concern in addition to internal crisis communication. If we look at the post-pandemic era, the shift is towards crisis management due to the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2 shows the map of the conceptual structure of the "internal crisis communication" in the era of COVID-19 turmoil. The thematic map shows the highly relevant, developed, emerging, or disappearing themes and the basic or transversal themes (Cobo et al., 2011). In the above thematic map, "internal communication", "employee communication" and "transparency" are highly developed themes but show medium relevance. On the other hand, "coping strategies", "internal crisis communication", "employee communication behavior" and "employee engagement" are the niche themes as depicted in the upper left quadrant. However, these themes are well-developed but relevant only within the organization. The most emerging theme is "COVID-19 pandemic". The basic themes such as "crisis communication", "COVID-19" and "social media" have been depicted through this map as the most relevant. However, "Crisis management", "situational crisis communication theory" and "crisis response" themes have started to reach the development stage in the existing literature. This thematic analysis also confirms no

Figure 2: Thematic mapping of the crisis communication in the era of disruption extracted from bibliometrix: R studio software

discussion on the Internal CSR initiatives post-pandemic as discussed in Table 1. It is high time to incorporate hidden but quite relevant themes like "digital transformation", "employee welfare or safety", "management of human capital at the digital workplace", "remote working", "Emotional Artificial Intelligence", "corporate travel management" and "cyberthreats and cyber-attacks" that are part of "Internal crisis communication management" and Internal CSR efforts necessary to be implemented in this post-pandemic world.

Co-occurrence analysis

Co-occurrence analysis is a method that can be used to identify the network or conceptual relationships among different keywords that frequently occur together in a given text corpus, as provided by authors or indexers. The Figure 3 shows the overlay visualization of the top keywords that are highly connected among the authors' keywords. The below given overlay visualization of the co-occurrence analysis shows four clusters of the keywords. During 2018, as depicted through the blue cluster, "internal communication" and, "employee communication" were the most concurrent discussed topics which is quite logical also as majorly "internal communication" affects or concerns internal communication decisions as well as dynamics. Since 2019, a predominant trend among researchers has been the concurrent usage of terms such as "internal crisis communication" and "crisis management". It highlights that as COVID-19 struck the world, a stronger need for internal communication arose thereby becoming a thrust area of the researchers for researching on the communication. During a pandemic, the green cluster represents the focus of the research on "crisis communication" which became the major topic or the keyword frequently used together with other keywords like "social media" and, "crisis management". The yellow cluster shows the post-pandemic conceptual structure of the "internal communication in the era of turmoil". COVID-19 has become the most developed and highly co-occurring keyword with other keywords like "Situational crisis communication theory", and "crisis response". The clusters highlight the shift of research from just communication dynamics of the organization to crisis communication and its importance especially during and amidst crises. It is very important to focus on the internal management dynamics in the period of crises, therefore crisis communication affects internal communication at first and external communication at later stages. These clusters also provide a direction for the managerial practitioners to incorporate in their strategies various aspects of communicating during crises, response towards crises, the role of social media and how leadership aspects assume greater significance in such a time. The overlay visualization also highlights that after 2021, "situational crises communication theory" has gained relevance and "crises response" is an emerging area of research which
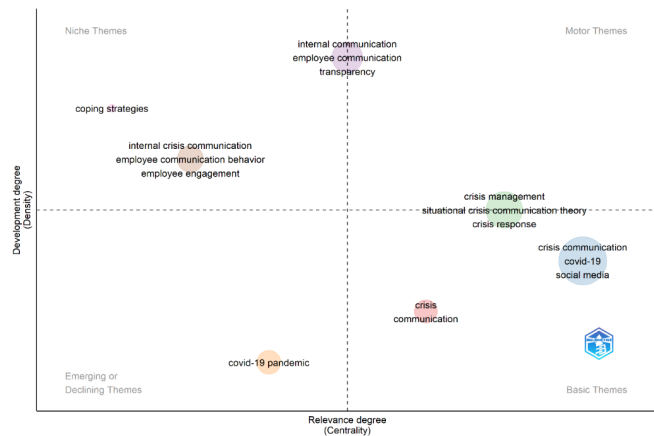
Figure 3: Overlay visualization of the co-occurrence of the frequently occurring and most connected keywords

highlights the importance of crisis response in the internal communication strategies for the managers and leaders.

The visualization network shows the most studied topics in the internal crisis communication literature that drive various policy implications for crisis managers. Crisis managers can learn from the existing conceptual structure of internal crisis communication and strategic development so that any unforeseen event can be handled effectively in future. Further, the academicians must consider "health communication", "crisis response", "crisis management" and "employee communication" as important sub-aspects of crisis communication.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

This study provides different implications and valuable insights for crisis managers, communication managers, academicians, and organizations. The COVID-19 pandemic created a very tough and scary situation for communication and crisis leaders. This crisis led them to do some strategic planning to deal with upcoming challenges and issues and try to promptly and empathetically respond to all the stakeholders. Internal crisis communication has become very important post-pandemic. Corporations have now learned the need for transparent and empathetic communication with the internal stakeholders especially employees, during a crisis. This involves the proper training, counseling, and collaboration of the employees to make them capable of dealing with future challenges. So, corporations must communicate their actions during the crisis and how they are managing it and delivering trustworthy information at the right time and with the help of the right communication media as per the audience's requirement. Thus, business communication scholars and academicians must attempt to address the social media communication challenges in the academic curriculum (Young & Hinsley, 2014). Business leaders must promote effective crisis response strategies for effective internal communication.

Further, this development of literature on crisis management and internal crisis communication will help

in educating fresh graduate students about the importance of crisis management, internal crisis communication, social media communication, digital communication, and the usage of AI tools. So, that they can handle any crises proactively and proficiently. From an organizational point of view, teaching business communication to employees is essential for crisis management as employees have to be engaged during a crisis. Also as discussed above, the corporate training sessions can be conducted related to AI technologies, crisis management, use of social media, "corporate travel management" and cybersecurity. Moreover, educational institutions can also provide professional courses connected to business communication. Therefore, to prepare the staff for any unexpected incident, business communication courses and regular corporate training sessions might be given regarding the application of AI technologies. Additionally, the study emphasizes how important empathy and transparency in leadership are to build a resilient organizational culture. By implementing these insights into their crisis communication plans, management practitioners may improve organizational readiness and reduce the possible detrimental effects of internal crises on employees' morale and organizational performance.

Policy Implications

Internal communication has a great potential to act as a tool to inculcate and develop organizational commitment. Therefore, managerial decision-making should involve internal communication decisions to be of strategic importance. Better internal communication strategies increase the trust level of employees therefore, corporate-level strategies, business-level strategies, and functional-level strategies should encompass a strong thrust on internal communication. On the other hand, they should be flexible enough to deal effectively in a crisis further taking care of the ill effects of informal communication. It is a very challenging task but internal communication has to be taken care of to deal with the challenges which may arise during crises. Policymakers must create policies that require organizations to consider the importance of employee engagement and employee belongingness with the organization. Effective internal communication strategies can promote and support employee well-being and mental health. So, the government must promote flexible policies by the organizations.

Moreover, frequent workshops and training for internal communication can make internal communication a resilience or coping strategy amidst crises. The proper identification and coordination of "crisis response activities", "team members" as well as resources should be properly defined and identified to accelerate the response timing in times of crises. Internal communication should support the communication role of the employees and there should be clarity among the employees about their

roles.

Policymakers can invest more in information and communication technologies (ICT) for a better digital workplace and immediate digital transformation. The thematic analysis also provides a roadmap to the policymakers to make policies and training programs to promote employee engagement and leadership. Policymakers can encourage organizations to invest in training and counseling employees for effective communication strategies. Further governments or policymakers can ensure effective use of social media platforms with a proper code of ethics can help in effective internal crisis communication.

Conclusion and future research directions

Businesses should listen to the stakeholders by continuously involving and engaging them during a crisis. Timely, positive, and accurate crisis communication also helps in refuting rumors and dealing with "infodemic". Regular responses by businesses to their stakeholders during a crisis help to build "trust" and "faith" and avoid any chaos and panic among the public. So, during the crisis, strategic planning and coordination should be there to empathetically communicate clear and consistent information. Also, the communication channel should be appropriate according to the respective audience and their information requirement. The study found that the "situation crisis communication theory" has been continuously explored by researchers in the pandemic era. Due to the pandemic, it became the demand of the time, that crisis managers and communication managers must co-ordinate their efforts and have overlapping functions. Further, "crisis communication", "COVID-19" and "social media" have been the most relevant themes although less studied. Future academicians must focus on these relevant themes most importantly. It will introduce relevant literature that can be useful in teaching internal crisis communication in institutions to make them proficient in handling any crisis proactively. In addition, future academicians can explore more the themes such as "internal crisis communication", "employee communication behavior" and "employee engagement". Further, it is important to discuss that the companies are consistently putting efforts towards internal CSR initiatives like digital transformation, employee safety, remote working, future-proofing the workforce, workforce collaboration, and training of the employees to make them well-versed with the information technologies like AI and Emotional AI and also dealing with the cyberattacks and cyber threats. But the literature is still silent on these Internal CSR initiatives as discussed in Table 1. Thus, the role of these internal CSR initiatives in internal business communication specifically in times of crises, must be further explored by the researchers. So that, it can become

part of professional courses on business communication for the students also who will be future employees.

Besides, this study provided the conceptual development of the existing literature on internal crisis communication and internal CSR initiatives post-pandemic available on the Scopus database only. Other databases like "dimensions", "Google Scholar" and "Web of Science" can be used for further bibliometric analyses or systematic literature reviews. Also, bibliometric analysis including bibliographic coupling or co-citation analysis can be performed by future researchers to identify the intellectual structure of the "internal crisis communication strategies" post-pandemic.

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