Crisis communication in Romania, concepts & models. A literature review and bibliometric analysis

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Abstract: This paper aims to identify current crisis communication themes for Romanian organisations facing a crisis and if they could use a domestic, tailored, crisis communication management model. Hundreds of articles have been published worldwide, but few related to Romania. The literature review and bibliometric analysis are used to identify the interest in Romanian literature for crisis communication. Twelve articles were selected on Scopus database using PRISMA methodology, on criterions like publication's rating, cite score, maxim percentile, SNIP and SJR. They were used for a qualitative text analysis and coding using software like Atlas and Bibliometrix. The theoretical framework offers solutions for crisis scenarios, considering that reputation, emotional engagement and a dedicated workflow for social media crisis are success factors. There is a knowledge gap about how Romanian organisations are reacting in crisis scenarios. This is an opportunity to develop future studies and tailored crisis communication strategies, adapted for Romania.

Keywords: crisis communication, Romania, bibliometric analysis

Introduction

The public perception or reputation of an organisation directly influences the purchasing decision of current or prospective customers and other stakeholders to initiate, to develop or to cancel business relationships. It is difficult to quantify the financial value of a company's reputation, but in a crisis, its reputation becomes a success factor for its' resilience. The organisation that communicates first in a crisis usually sets the tone, pace and key messaging.

Companies like Volkswagen have effectively managed the diesel gate scandal (Hotten, 2015), while Danone lost market share in Romania (Stoica, 2008) following suspicions that several batches of fruit yoghurt had higher amounts of dioxin than limits (European Food Safety Authority, 2025), leading to an 8% market share drop of the Romanian yoghurt market between August - September 2007 (Stoica, 2008).

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In the wood processing industry, Holzindustrie Schweighofer Romania has been repeatedly accused of illegal logging by associations like Agent Green (Peter, 2015), World Wide Fund for Nature and the Environmental Investigation Agency (Environmental Investigation Agency, 2015), that determined the Forest Stewardship Council to withdraw the company's FSC certification (For the nature, 2016). Holzindustrie Schweighofer went through a rebranding process becoming HS Timber but finally, the company decided to sell its Romanian operations after suffering financial losses (Profit, 2023).

Although some organisations have been seriously affected by crises in Romania, there are few studies or articles published in peer-reviewed journals covering crisis communication topics. Probably the biggest private companies work with communication & public relations agencies and have developed crisis communication scenarios but is almost impossible to know if they are developed based on experience, competences or theoretical concepts.

The main research objective is to identify if a theoretical crisis communication model was developed for this country's private sector and if the topic has been already studied in the academic literature. It starts with a literature review on crisis communication theories, concepts and models to define the theoretical framework, continues with a content analysis of a list of 12 articles selected using PRISMA methodology and makes a qualitative analysis. In the methodology section are described the coding schemes and thematic categories; followed by the results and the conclusions.

1. Literature review

The process of communication is fascinating and has been described in various but similar terms; to communicate means to exchange information, ideas or send a message. The Oxford English Dictionary describes communication with 16 meanings in fields like telecommunications, liturgical, rhetoric, literature, military or freemasonry. One definition that cover most fields presents communication as „the transmission or exchange of information, knowledge, or ideas through speech, writing, mechanical means, or electronic means" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). The National Communication Association in the US has a dual perspective about communication. It is „the way people use messages to generate meaning within and across contexts, and it is the discipline that studies all forms, modes, media, and consequences of communication through humanistic, social scientific, and aesthetic research" (National Communication Association, 2024). Over the years, 126 definitions of the concept of communication have been published (Webb & Thompson-Hayes, 2002), they are similar and reflect the same concept, that communication is an exchange of words, ideas, symbols, messages, opinion or emotions and that involves at least two communication partners; the exchange happening in both ways. Looking the definitions one can easily notice that the

communication process involves also understanding the information transmitted/received.

One of the well-known communication processes is the Shannon-Weaver model (Shannon & Weaver, 1998). The process begins with the source, where the encoded message originates in the form of a „signal" that may be distorted by noise, passes through a communication channel and is decoded to reach the receiver. This model has become the main definition used in communication sciences. To analyse a communication process, it needs to be placed within a context: social or business interaction, political, economic, military and so on otherwise, the results will not be relevant. Crisis communication intervenes when something has happened, an event that changed the normal, daily activities of the organisation.

Crises are often described as complex situations that disrupt stability and create important uncertainty levels (Lerbinger, 1997). Crises emerge unexpectedly and require immediate reaction due to their endangering attributes (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2010). During crisis, the organisation's reputation is at risk (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). The Romanian Language Dictionary defines crisis as a phase in the life of a society or organisation, marked by major difficulties (economic, political, social, etc.); a period of tension and challenges. There are several ways to examine a crisis based on the type of it or sectors affected. It can impact business organisations, communities, individuals or different groups. Authors have published various concepts and models for crisis communications.

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) provides a framework for understanding how crisis communication can be used to protect the reputation (Institute for PR, 2007). It states that primarily, the threat towards the organisation increases if stakeholders are attributing the crisis responsibility to the organisation. In the second stage the crisis history and company's reputation are factors that could increase or reduce the impact. The crisis response strategy must be tailored specifically, being aware that the organisational reputation influences the perceived level of crisis responsibility. The type of emotions, positive/negative, recorded by the stakeholders will determine their attitude and behaviour towards the organisation.

A new vision of crisis communication is proposed via the Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model, that analyses the role of emotions in crisis responses (Jin et al., 2012); counting on a public-base, emotion-driven perspective and using various crises that are mapped on two continua, „the organisation's engagement in the crisis and primary public's coping strategy". Testing revealed that organisations and stakeholders have similar reactions, rational and emotional ones. The high level of engagement of an organisation with its stakeholders during a crisis could be a solution to connect with a public that may experience a variety of emotions, including anger or anxiety. The ICM matrix proposes to consider the primary publics' emotional reaction as a key element to be used for crisis communication.

Information is available almost instantaneously and can reach millions of people at any time. Technology has influenced the communication and has offered

new platforms and channels, available on smart, mobile devices. This has led to a new concept for managing crisis communication, in an online environment. The model of Socially Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) (Liu et al., 2012), is the first theoretical framework describing the relationships between organisations, online and offline audiences, social media, traditional media, and word-of-mouth communication before, during, and after a crisis (Austin et al., 2012).

Nowadays, the main focus is social media communication most probably also because the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has forced organisation to invest their communications efforts in online news outlets and social media channels. Interesting is that a few years before this pandemic Möller et al. (2018) introduced the Social Media Disaster Resilience (SMDR) model, a theoretical framework that explores how social media can be leveraged to enhance community resilience during and after disasters. It integrates concepts from disaster management and resilience literature, emphasizing the role of social media in improving communication, information dissemination, and stakeholder engagement during crises. SMDR model is based on the revised 3Rs resilience framework (Robustness, Rapidity, Redundancy) and highlights the critical role of social media for information dissemination, stakeholder engagement and resource allocation. Looking backwards at the pandemic, it seems that SMDR model has been used by state authorities and private organisation to communicate during the lockdowns. The same pattern for crisis communication can be identified in the way Romanian authorities and some companies have communicated in that period. A study inspired by social media communication during COVID-19 pandemic investigates its role in crisis communication and its impact on public resilience (Bukar et al., 2021). The study builds on several theoretical frameworks, including the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, the Social-Mediated Crisis Communication model, that emphasizes the importance of crisis response strategies, stakeholder emotions, and social interaction in crisis management. The authors reference the Social Media Disaster Resilience model, which highlights social media's role in improving community resilience through robustness, rapidity, and redundancy in information dissemination.

All theories presented could be implemented by organisations operating in Romanian, in a crisis context. Are they preparing in advance using theoretical models or they just react to a situation? At this point, the academic literature does not provide answers for this question.

2. Content analysis

Research was necessary to identify current trends and themes for crisis communication in Romania. Scopus database was used for basic search and PRISMA methodology (Haddaway et al., 2022) for narrowing and obtain relevant results. Articles published after 2019 were filtered initially, considering that COVID-19 pandemic has redefined crisis communication management worldwide. The

initial aim was to select only articles published for Romania organisational crisis communication topics but had to be expanded due to lack of valid results. Because most articles published covered this pandemic and were not relevant, the search interval was extended, and several keywords were used. Several filters were applied to identify articles in English and/or Romanian language, published in European states; the new results offered papers published between 2005-2024.The final list included 12 articles that met all criterions; being selected after reading the abstracts and considering publication's rating, cite score, covering a knowledge gap or were accessible without additional costs. The selection procedure is described in the Methodology chapter.

Crisis communication strategies recommend avoiding publishing negative information about itself, to protect brand reputation. A different perspective is presented in the „stealing thunder" strategy: the company should disclosure proactively negative information about itself, before being revealed by other sources (Arpan et al., 2005). This approach has been tested in an experiment and results showed that when the organisation has disclosed the information first, it reduced perceptions of crisis severity and have led to higher credibility ratings and positive perceptions. The theory has been tested with specific stakeholders, who knew the company and its products and their previous experience with the organisation was used as a key predictor. This strategy, applied for well-known stakeholders, could help organisations manage crises effectively by controlling the narrative and reducing negative media coverage.

Stakeholders' reaction to communication strategies has been tested in an experiment with 162 students; using SMCC model components (Liu et al., 2011). The aim was to explore how the interplay of information forms (traditional media, social media, word-of-mouth) and source (third party, organisation) affects publics' acceptance of crisis response strategies and crisis emotions. Findings indicated an organisation should coordinate crisis information form and source to achieve desired communication outcomes.

A new concept in crisis management focuses on the reputational threat. Paracrisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2012) is defined as a publicly visible crisis threat characterised by charges of irresponsible or unethical organisational behaviour. Paracrisis is visible during prevention stage, when stakeholders petition the organisation by presenting requests or expectations to change its attitude or behaviour. Paracrisis is considered unique due to their public nature caused by the petitioning. Especially on social media, other stakeholders may observe the petition, third parties who can monitor the situation, focus on results or ignore it. The authors propose three primary communication response strategies for managing paracrisis: refute (management reacts and fights the challenge/petition defending the organisation), reform (make necessary organisational changes to reflect the demands), and refuse (management ignores the petition and does not respond public to it, but it is focusing on messages to boost its reputation). The choice of strategy

should be guided by an evaluation of the organisation's core values, strategic objectives, and the trajectory of stakeholder opinions.

It is difficult to analyse large volumes of digital information available online during crises. A study explores the integration of automated content analysis into crisis communication research. The paper provides an overview of automated tools that researchers can use to analyse crisis communication and large-scale datasets (van der Meer, 2016). There are three main tools for classifying texts and identifying frames: the dictionary method, supervised and unsupervised method. Automated content analysis represents a valuable tool for crisis communication research but one must be aware that no single method is universally superior; selecting one depends on research objectives and data availability. The selection should be made after the researcher considers the input data to be used.

A study applies the SCCT investigating how large Australian organisations use social media for crisis communication (Roshan et al., 2016). Analysing 15,650 Facebook and Twitter messages across 17 organisations from banking, retail, telecommunications, and transport, the research highlights a tendency among organisations to not respond to stakeholder messages, choosing response strategies that could elevate reputational risks. Results showed that most organisations failed to fully engage with stakeholders on social media, often providing only one-way communication rather than responding to concerns. Contrary to SCCT recommendations, organisations frequently used apologies and compensation strategies, even where they had limited responsibility. The organisations overlook the social media potential for crisis communication, do not provide crisis or status updates, or do not interact with stakeholders. When dealing with stakeholders on social media, seven types of messages have been gathered: questions, information-sharing, suggestions, humorous messages, objections, appreciations, comparisons with others or competitors. Many organisations used repetitive, automated responses rather than personalized engagement, leading to stakeholder dissatisfaction. Companies are using social media just to publish status updates, instead of responding to stakeholder messaging. The paper concludes that organisations are not aware of social media's potential for crisis communication.

Trust is an asset the organisation may lose during or after a crisis and rebuilding or regaining trust could be a long and difficult journey. A study tested how different organisational responses - apology, excuse, and refusal - influence stakeholders' perceptions of trust, investigating how organisations can repair trust through communication after an integrity-based trust violation (Brühl et al., 2018). The experiment developed on the attribution theory shows how responsibility and credibility may be used for rebuilding trust. The study used a randomized experimental design with three treatment groups (apology, excuse, refusal): participants read a corporate integrity scandal scenario and had to analyse the corporate statement corresponding to one of the three trust repair strategies. They rated their trust in the organisation considering judgments of responsibility and

credibility. The conclusion: apologies are the most effective strategy for long-term trust repair and credibility plays an essential role. Organisations should integrate transparency, corrective actions, and stakeholder engagement into their apology strategies to maximize credibility and trust recovery.

Crisis communication within a community was studied in students' campus, investigating how the community responds to crises (Xu, 2018). The research used a mixed-method approach, combining insights from chaos theory (Seeger, 2002), uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) and sensemaking theory (Heverin & Zach, 2012), to examine the role of a campus community in dealing with various campus crises. It identifies a crisis-induced community-building model and provides instruments to measure crisis and community functionalities. This encourages members to exchange information, share experiences, developing a shared understanding of the crisis, which leads to a bonding community.

Understanding and managing crises in online environments could be possible using social media listening (SML) tools and methods. Research involving two Romanian private healthcare organisations during COVID-19 pandemic, explores the relationship between stakeholder expectations, brand promise and crisis communication strategies, analysing social media conversations and sentiments (Buzoianu & Bîră, 2021). The findings highlight the usefulness of social media listening tools in identifying crisis timelines, understanding communication networks, and predicting potential brand controversies. It enhances SML potential to identify triggers for brand controversy and anticipate stakeholder engagement in online conversations, ultimately contributing to more effective crisis communication and management strategies. The paper concludes there is a literature gap regarding predictive models in online crisis communication.

Reputational risk of Romania's financial institutions and link between reputational risk management and public disclosure of a company's social and environmental impact were analysed in a paper that examined how they conceptualize and manage this type of risk. The survey has included five Romanian banks that together owned over 60% of the total assets (Tăchiciu et al., 2020). The survey conducted on Romanian financial institutions has revealed that 71% of them perceive reputational risk as being an independent one and 64% include this type or risk into their inventory. The findings suggest that Romanian financial institutions had difficulties understanding reputational risk, and that their corporate policies regarding environmental impact were not aligned with the business models.

Social media crisis management is an emerging research theme. The conceptual model of Social Media Crisis Communication was used to investigate the role of social media in crisis communication and its impact on building public resilience (Bukar et al., 2021). The study aims to develop a preliminary model that integrates crisis communication, stakeholder responses, and resilience-building strategies. One key topic is understanding how social media facilitates crisis communication and how the social interaction may lead to resilience. The new

concept proposes a model where crisis response and social media are mediating the relationship between crisis events and public resilience; confirming that crisis response and social media interaction play a crucial role in enhancing public resilience during crises. By integrating crisis response and social media interaction, organisations can build stronger, more resilient communities.

Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model could be an important asset for managing social media crises, to build relationships and trust between organisations and the public (Hamid et al., 2023). The search for crisis-related information through social media on mobile platforms is high during the crisis due to the speed, convenience, ease of access, compared to traditional media. Social media plays an important role when a crisis occurs due to its interactive nature and organisations need to be prepared with strategies or action plans. By leveraging social media influencers, engagement strategies, and rapid response mechanisms, organisations can enhance their crisis communication efforts and mitigate reputational damage.

Another study focused on corporate reputation and crisis communication during COVID-19 pandemic, analyses how interactive marketing may shape stakeholder perceptions (Nuortimo et al., 2024). The authors combine a literature review with opinion mining and classification analysis of media communication from companies listed on the NASDAQ Helsinki stock exchange. The research identifies critical components of crisis communication - monitoring, responding, and response management - and synthesizes linkages between them, crisis communication theories, and corporate reputation. The study recorded minimal reputation damage for proactive companies, who have implemented rapid crisis response strategies, such as flexible operations and digital transformation. Social media played a crucial role in shaping public perception, with companies leveraging it for transparency and engagement. Corporate reputation, crisis communication and interactive marketing are interconnected, while interactive marketing plays a vital role by enabling transparent and timely communication, fostering stakeholder engagement, and helping to restore trust.

Social media crisis could lead to financial losses. Six out of ten companies active in Romania registered financial losses caused by crises amplified on Facebook: loosing up to 30% of market value (Business Forum, 2024). A crisis could have a different source from social media, but is quickly amplified on this type of channels, information spreads in real-time, having the power to prolong the crisis up to 90 days or more.

New research examines the evaluation of crisis statement essentials by Gen Z stakeholders and crisis communication practitioners (Karinshak et al., 2024), analysing which statements resonate with Gen Z stakeholders and how these preferences align with the views of communication professionals. The research identified three key functions: informing stakeholders, taking a stance, and assuring stakeholders and propose 11 elements that practitioners should consider for crisis statements. They are statement of the crisis, expert quote, timeline, parties involved,

crisis history, further Information, attribution, apology, leadership, mission statement and organisational values, action steps. While transparency, empathy and corrective actions remain essential for crisis statements, practitioners must tailor their messaging to resonate with Gen Z's digital fluency and values. Results show that current practices are generally meeting Gen Z expectations.

Table 1. Crisis communication models identified in literature review

Crisis communication models	Concept	Author
Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)	*The threat towards the organisation increases if the stakeholders are attributing the crisis responsibility to the organisation*	*Coombs W., 2007*
Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model	*Analyses the role of emotions in crisis responses*	Jin et al., 2012
Socially Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC)	*The first theoretical framework to describe the relationships between organisations, online and offline audiences, social media, traditional media, and word-of-mouth communication before, during, and after a crisis*	Liu et al., 2011
The Social Media Disaster Resilience (SMDR)	*Theoretical framework that explores how social media can be leveraged to enhance community resilience during and after disasters*	Möller et al., 2018
Social Media Crisis Communication	*Investigates the role of social media in crisis communication and its impact on public resilience and demonstrates that crisis, crisis response, and social media interaction significantly impact resilience.*	Bukar et al., 2021

Source: author's representation

Social media plays an important role during crises due to its interactive nature compared to traditional media and organisations should be prepared. U.S. companies are not prepared for crisis communications, according to Capterra 2023 Crisis Communications Survey. Only 49% of companies surveyed have a formal crisis communications plan while 28% have an informal, undocumented crisis communications plan, and nearly a quarter (23%) have no plan at all - or are not sure they have one. Findings show that 98% of business leaders who used their crisis communications plan say it was effective and 77% say it was very effective (Capers, 2023).

Any user of a smartphone and a social media account can broadcast live during a crisis on social media channels, acting like a reporter on site. Social media and instant messaging applications are the most downloaded mobile apps worldwide in 2024, TikTok ranks first (825.48 million downloads) followed by Facebook (817.49 million downloads) and Instagram (597.87 million downloads) (Statista, 2024 a; b). Globally, 6 out of 10 people are using social media channels (62.2% worldwide average). There are 5.17 billion people active on social media worldwide and on average, each user has accounts on 6.7 social media platforms (Backlinko, 2025).

An article from 2021 talks about the importance of „listening" social media channels for crisis communication management and proposes new methods and practices for crisis observation, analysing the situation when Romanian healthcare companies (Sanador & Medlife) have faced crises (Buzoianu & Bîră, 2021). Specific online monitoring tools were used to collect and analyse data from online media, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Results show social media listening tools are useful in exploring attitudes, emotions and conversations as they relate to stakeholders' brand expectations, especially when these expectations are close to brand promises.

Online crisis management has become a key capability for managing major reputational issues and organisations need to identify and prepare for communication during a crisis. Few Romanian authors have studied crisis communication in Romania organisations, except COVID-19 related topics. According to a recent study, there are seven industries in Romania exposed to reputational crises: energy, oil and gas, finance and banking, technology and communications, insurance, labour market services and real estate (Rogalski Damaschin, 2025). Other economic sectors could also be affected by the crisis due to interconnectivity with the industries at risk. If the organisation is unable to manage and control crisis communication, could face major financial and material losses, including its brand reputation.

3. Methodology

The focus is on finding research articles on crisis communication topic in general and papers valid for Romania's organisations. The literature review section mentioned basic processes of communication and three distinctive models to be used for crisis communication. An organisation could apply the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, Integrated Crisis Mapping model or the Socially Mediated Crisis Communication. These models could be used together or in pairs, depending on the context, the experience of communication and PR professionals, and in correlation with management' decisions.

A qualitative analysis is necessary to identify most cited and relevant academic articles on communication topics and to analyse text data. The content

analysis was chosen on the presumption that in communication, wording is an asset, and a simple analysis of the word-frequency would reveal a communication trend and a link between theoretical concepts and some of the greatest concerns in this field. Other types of qualitative research methods are using ethnography, grounded theory, narrative or phenomenological research. The aim of a content analysis is „to offer knowledge and understanding of the studied phenomenon" (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314). Qualitative analysis is used to examine the language and wording of scientific articles written on communication and crisis communication topics to categorize similar text data and to identify related content, additional connections or analytics approaches.

The content analysis presented below is focused on 12 scientific articles that have been identified using Scopus data base after applying several filters and PRISMA methodology.

**Figure 1. Scopus initial results after database interrogation for „crisis communication"**
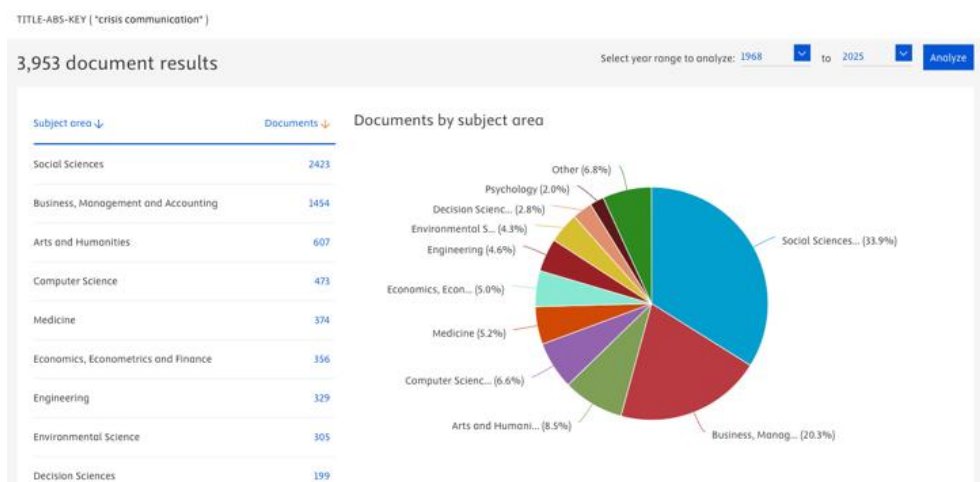
Source: author's representation based on data extracted from Scopus

The research was made on Scopus database. Initially, the keywords used were „crisis communication*", which generated a result of 3,953 documents published between 1968 and 2025. A classification of documents by subject area shows that 33.9% are for Social Sciences and 20.3% for Business, Management and Accounting areas. PRISMA methodology has been used to narrow the research results and to obtain relevant articles and studies for crisis communication topics. The new keywords used were *crisis communication, crisis management, public*
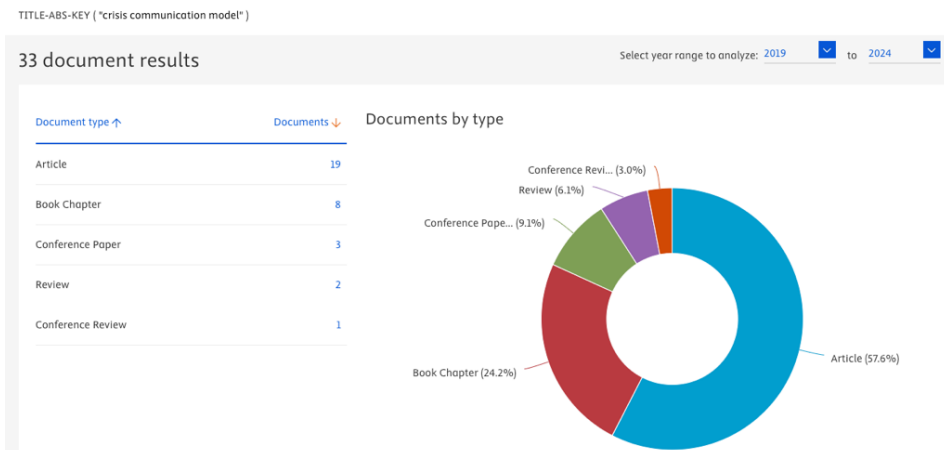
relations, social media, social media crisis, perception, crisis communication model, mass media, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Romania.

Figure 2. PRISMA diagram
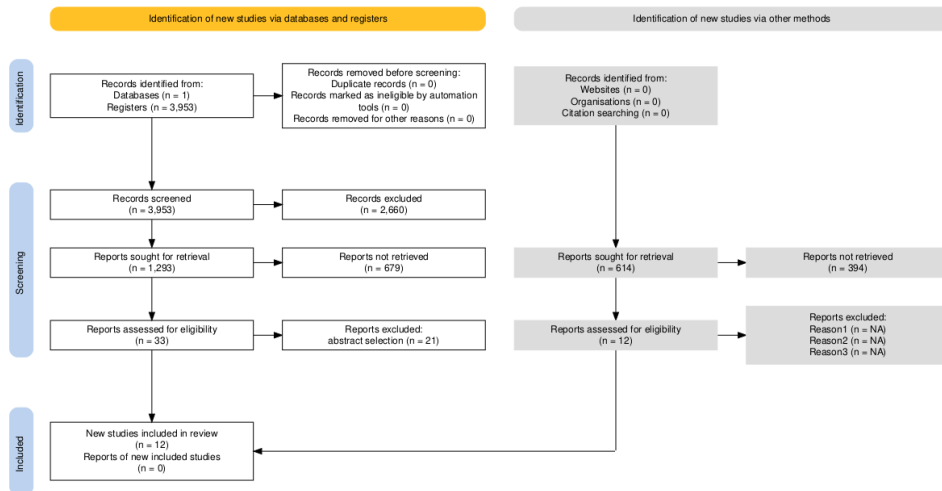
Source: author's representation based on PRISMA workflow diagram

Figure 3. Types of documents selected for the short list to be analysed

Source: author's representation extracted from Scopus

Table 2. Publication's rating in alphabetical order

Source title	CiteScore	Highest percentile	% Cited	SNIP	SJR	Publisher
Accounting and Business Research	4,3	61.0%	80	1,212	0,852	Taylor & Francis
AIP Conference Proceedings	0,5	10.0%	23	0,204	0,153	American Institute of Physics
Amfiteatru Economic	4	79.0%	74	0,551	0,399	Bucharest University of Economic Studies Publishing House
European Management Journal	14	92.0%	93	2,458	1,913	Elsevier
International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction	8,5	95.0%	81	1,57	1,194	Elsevier
Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management	4,1	58.0%	60	1,187	0,658	John Wiley & Sons
Marketing Intelligence and Planning	8,7	78.0%	79	1,41	1,245	Emerald Publishing
Public Relations Review	7,7	93.0%	84	1,701	1,352	Elsevier
Social Media and Society	9,2	99.0%	75	2,622	2,169	SAGE
Sustainability (Switzerland)	7,7	90.0%	84	1,113	0,688	Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute (MDPI)

Source: author's representation based on data extracted from Scopus

Additional filters were applied to find scientific articles, conference papers, books or chapters, published between 2019 – 2025, in Romanian/English language, published in European states with and marked with „Open Access". These filters have reduced results from 3,953 to 1,293 documents and narrowed down to 614 results, then to 220 documents obtaining a final list of 54 documents.

A new filter was applied, for materials published between 2019 - 2024 for the keywords „crisis communication model", reaching 33 results. The final list of 12 articles has been selected by reading abstracts and on criteria like publication's rating, cite score, maxim percentile, SNIP and SJR using Scopus.

CiteScore metrics was launched by Elsevier aiming to „provide comprehensive, transparent, current insights into journal impact" (Zijlstra & McCullough, 2016) and are used to „measure the citation impact for journals, book series, conference proceedings and trade journals". Elsevier defines Source Normalized Impact per Paper (SNIP) as a metric that measures „contextual citation impact and enables direct comparison of journals in different subject fields, since the value of a single citation is greater for journals in fields where citations are less likely, and vice versa" (Elsevier, n.d.).

The other metric, SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) is designed with similar concept to Google PageRank algorithm. „SJR weights each incoming citation to a journal by the SJR of the citing journal, with a citation from a high-SJR source counting for more than a citation from a low-SJR source" (Elsevier, n.d.).

The aim was to select the most relevant materials and newest articles available that provide updates on crisis communication models and theories, including possible studies specific for Romania.

The 12 articles have been centralised in a table with references about the publication year, title, author, name of the journal and its editor. They were used to create a theoretical frame in a qualitative text analysis and to identify the current themes and topics for crisis communication.

4. Results

The literature review is essential to identity the key wording and concepts used in scientific articles to describe various approaches, theories or models related to crisis communication, social media and company's reputation. Several qualitative data analysis software like Atlas.ti or Bibliometrix were used to make the text analysis for the 12 article and to identify the relevant topics in communication and crisis management. The final list included 14 documents published in the last 19 years (2005 – 2024), in 10 different sources like journals or conference papers. The annual growth rate shows the average annual interest for the topic and means that yearly, the number of articles has grown with 5.95% and that on average, a document has been cited 62.71 times.
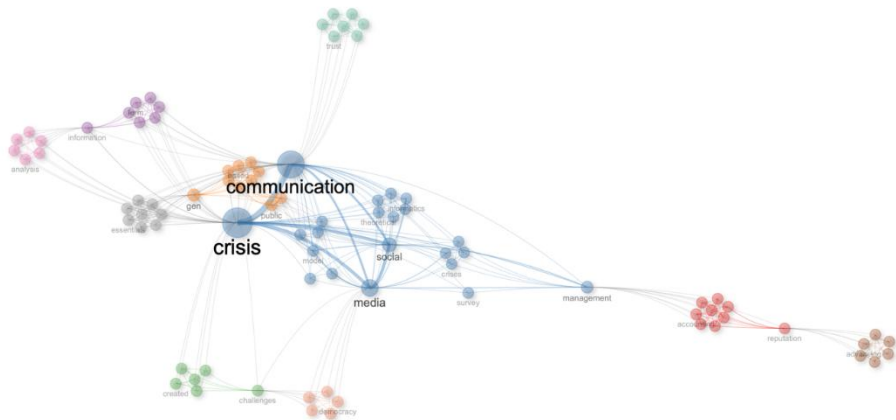
Figure 4. Bibliometric summary for the 12 articles

Source: author's representation

A Thematic map was used to highlight the connections of authors' keywords, article titles and abstracts. Clusters for specific key words have been analysed to show the relationship between topics.

Figure 5. Thematic network regarding articles' titles
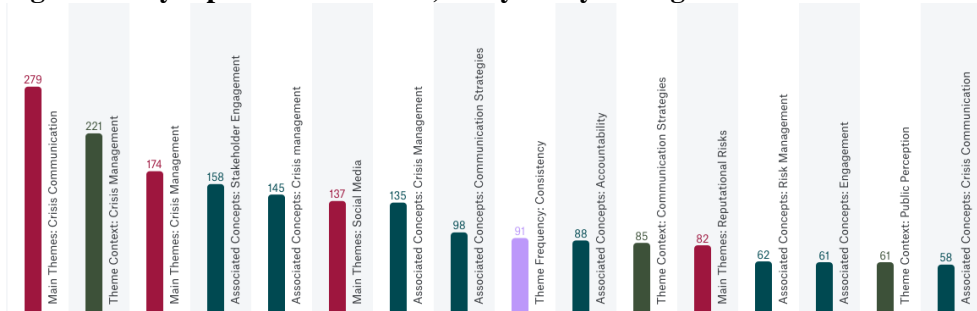

Source: author's representation

The thematic network has been generated considering the titles of the articles analysed. Communication is the main node hub of this network, being connected with other two dominant nodes like crisis and media, all coloured in blue. These are core concepts used to link a variety of topics like social and theoretical aspects, different analysis and information or reputation management. The thickness of the connection lines represents a solid or a weak relationship between concepts. The map shows an overview on the complexity or crisis communication elements used in this

field and how public trust; media relations and media strategies have their own role in managing a crisis.

AI automated coding was used in Atlas.ti software to ensure impartiality from eventual biases of the researcher. The aim was to analyse the frequency of themes or concepts presented in the articles. The red columns of the graph show that crisis communication, crisis management, social media, reputational risks and risk management are the main themes; being central research areas. The green columns show the main themes included in literature, particularly in crisis management in communication contexts. Stakeholder engagement, crisis management, communication strategies and accountability are the associated concepts underlined by the blue columns.

Figure 6. Key topics of the articles, analysed by coding them in Atlas software
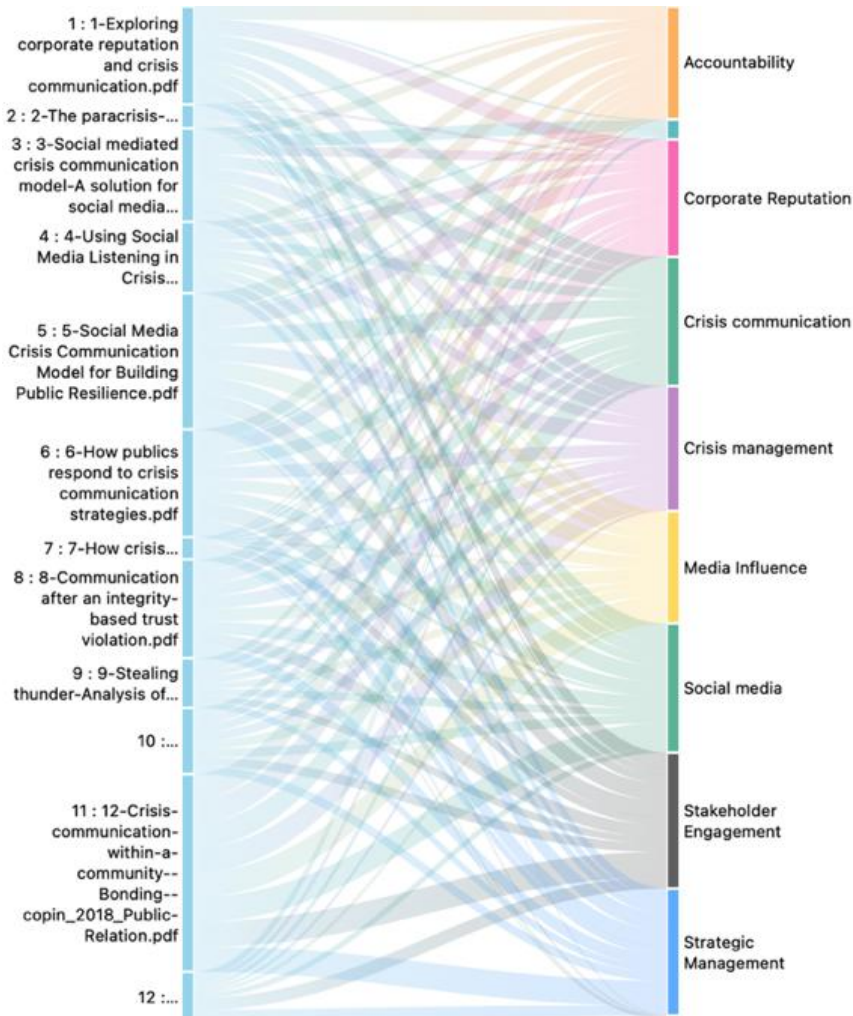

Source: author's representation

Figure 7. Word cloud

Source: author's representation

Figure 8. The Sankey diagram shows the flow of information between articles and topics covered

Source: author's representation

Another option to analyse the importance of frequency of wording referring to a specific theme or topic is making a word cloud graph. Using this visual representation of text data, a result is generated focusing on the size of terms. The bigger the words are, the higher is their relevance in the texts.

Crisis communication dominates the word cloud, being associated with social media themes and crisis management. These form the central thematic

cluster, while words in similar colours are part of similar clusters; allowing to identify most frequent topics used in literature and the correlations between them.

A Sankey diagram generated in Atlas.ti was selected to underline a connection between articles and specific topics of interest. The connection lines of the 2 columns show the contribution of an article towards a theme, while the width of the flow underlines a powerful connection with that topic. Some of the documents are overlapping, meaning that they are contributing to multiple categories. For example, an article that links both crisis communication and social media most probably is emphasizing the role of social media in crisis communication management.

5. Discussion

Crisis communication is a topic covered extensively in international literature but is a theme almost invisible for papers studying organisations operating in Romania. It could be a lack of interest or a superficiality of Romanian organisations in preparing for crises, in general. Studied about the motives behind this literature gap are also missing, being hard to tell if having a crisis communication and PR strategy is not part of business or domestic companies are not interested in preparing for crisis management.

In this context, companies operating in Romania could enter a crisis scenario at any time, seven industries presenting higher risks. Additionally, the number of working accidents and their regional distribution has increased with almost 50% between 2014 - 2024 according to data published by Romanian Work Inspection Agency (Duca, 2025) while the National Employment Agency estimated that in the first five months of 2025, in Romania 3.072 employees will be fired in collective layoffs (Crăciun, 2025) and almost 2,800 firms have declared insolvency (Roșca, 2025). A study about current Romanian business environment analysed the answers of 1,450 respondents from different sectors and estimates that 160,000 companies, who employ a total of over 650,000 persons, are dealing with major problems (Sierra Quadrant, 2025) and some of their vulnerabilities include weak financial reserves and the lack of liquidities for medium and long term.

Conclusions

The theoretical framework offers solutions for the common crisis scenarios, considering that reputation, emotional engagement and a dedicated workflow for social media crisis are success factors. Most articles do not cover topics valid for the Romanian organisations and only one of them explores a relevant crisis situation.

The literature review conducted established an international theoretical framework that organisations operating in Romania could use for crisis management. There are three main concepts that can be used and adapted for the Romanian market:

- The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) could be used for anticipating stakeholders behaviour during crisis and could predict the way people will react to the crisis response strategies. The response must be tailored specifically, being aware that organisational reputation has the power to influence the perceived level of crisis responsibility of the company. The type of emotions, positive/negative, recorded by the stakeholders will determine their attitude and behaviour towards the organisation. This theory could be used by organisations with an excellent reputation and without a crisis history as a first reaction to a crisis; and with preparations in advance. Crisis simulations and scenarios are highly recommended to be practiced a priori.
- An Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model can be used to analyse the role of emotions in crisis responses. Testing revealed that organisations and stakeholders have similar reactions, rational and emotional ones. The ICM model would be useful in a crisis with a high emotional impact on stakeholders, with human or animal victims, or specific communities that are affected. The sincere empathy could be a good start in this case.
- The Socially Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model is the first theoretical framework used to describe the relationships between organisations, online and offline audiences, social media, traditional media, and word-of-mouth communication before, during, and after a crisis. Researchers have explored how the form, factors, type of crisis, and history of crisis information might influence audiences' crisis responses (e.g., influential social media content creators, followers and inactive users); as well as how types of organisations (e.g., corporations and governments) can effectively respond to audiences by adopting different crisis communication strategies. Online crisis management need special attention because the organisation is highly exposed, and the number of reactions or stakeholders involved in discussions is higher than the resources organisations usual have. It is recommend using online content monitoring tools and to collaborate with a specialised and experienced agency in this case.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework covers and offers solutions for the most common crisis scenario, considering in essence that reputation is a key factor. Together, emotional engagement and a dedicated workflow for social media crisis, are success factors in crisis management. The crisis communication literature offers excellent resources for practitioners, who might not be aware of the recent theories or models; missing a good chance to transform a crisis into an opportunity.

Social media plays an important role when a crisis occurs due to its interactive nature compared to traditional media, and organisations need to be prepared for crises with strategies or action plans to deal with crises. Romanian organisations will benefit of the future papers covering crisis communication topics for his market and will probably notice the need of having a PR and crisis communication strategy that will guide them in business turbulences.

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