

GOVERNMENT'S CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A NARRATIVE REVIEW

ESTRATÉGIA DE COMUNICAÇÃO DO GOVERNO EM SITUAÇÕES DE CRISE DURANTE A PANDEMIA DE COVID-19: UMA REVISÃO NARRATIVA

Article received on: 12/10/2025

Article accepted on: 2/9/2026

Youna Chatrine Bachtiar*

*Department of Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia
gs60039@student.upm.edu.my

Zulhamri Abdullah*

*Department of Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia
zulhamri@upm.edu.my

Syafila Kamarudin*

*Department of Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia
syafila@upm.edu.my

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

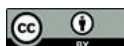
Abstract

This research is a narrative review of 20 articles that discuss the government's crisis communication strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic in the period from 2020 to 2024. The goal is to inventory the strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of research in this field. The studies reviewed used many key theories such as Risk and Crisis Communication Theory, CERC, Framing Theory, SCCT, and RCCE. Key findings show that successful communication is characterized by transparency, consistency of messages, evidence-based communication (involving experts), and effective use of digital multi-channels. These strategies have proven crucial in building public trust. In contrast, the dominant communication weaknesses include inconsistencies, lack of full transparency, communication that tends to be one-way (top-down), slow response at the beginning of a crisis, and failure to manage disinformation. The limitations of the research found are the focus which tends to be only on the early phases of the pandemic and the lack of measurement of the impact of communication on changes in actual behavior of the community. As an implication, future government crisis communication should be more adaptive, integrative between the CERC principles and empathetic and science-based messaging, and shift to a two-way communication model to achieve sustainable public compliance and trust.

Keywords: Communication. Crisis. Government. COVID-19. Narrative Review.

Resumo

Esta pesquisa é uma revisão narrativa de 20 artigos que discutem a estratégia de comunicação de crise do governo durante a pandemia da COVID-19 no período de 2020 a 2024. O objetivo é fazer um levantamento dos pontos fortes, pontos fracos e limitações das pesquisas nessa área. Os estudos analisados utilizaram diversas teorias fundamentais, tais como a Teoria da Comunicação de Risco e Crise, o CERC, a Teoria do Enquadramento, a SCCT e o RCCE. As principais conclusões mostram que uma comunicação bem-sucedida é caracterizada pela transparência, consistência das mensagens, comunicação baseada em evidências (envolvendo especialistas) e uso eficaz de canais digitais múltiplos. Essas estratégias se mostraram cruciais para construir a confiança do público. Em contrapartida, os pontos fracos predominantes na comunicação incluem inconsistências, falta de transparência total, comunicação que tende a ser unidirecional (de cima para baixo), resposta lenta no início de uma crise e falha no gerenciamento da desinformação. As limitações da pesquisa identificadas são o foco, que tende a se concentrar apenas nas fases iniciais da pandemia, e a falta de medição do impacto da comunicação nas mudanças no comportamento real da comunidade. Como implicação, a futura comunicação governamental em situações de crise deve ser mais adaptativa, integrando os princípios do CERC com mensagens empáticas e baseadas na ciência, e mudar para um modelo



de comunicação bidirecional para alcançar a adesão e a confiança sustentáveis do público.

Palavras-chave: *Comunicação. Crise. Governo. COVID-19. Revisão Narrativa.*

1 INTRODUCTION

The world's Coronavirus Disease-19 (Covid-19) pandemic has ended in 2022, but research From the perspective of communication science, especially government communication to the public, it will continue until 2023 (such as research Bernard et al., 2021; Sørensen & Evensen, 2023; Svenbro & Wester, 2023; Wiese & Westhuizen, 2025). There is even research in 2024 (such as Hayek, 2024; Okuhara et al., 2024).

One of the themes of government communication that has been widely studied by researchers is about the government's crisis communication strategy during the covid-19 pandemic, which has been done a lot of research, including research conducted from the perspective of communication science, especially government communication to the public. Research by Kim & Kreps (2020), concluded that on average governments around the world did not communicate effectively with the public during the Covid-19 pandemic. Ineffective government communication has confused the public and led to misunderstandings and serious errors in responding to growing health threats and developing countries such as the United States are no exception.

Research gap between the results of previous articles on The government's crisis communication strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic is that most research is only conducted on one country. For example, the research is only in the United States (Kim & Kreps, 2020; Wang et al., 2021)English (Jr & Matthews, 2021)Japan(Okuhara et al., 2024), Australia ((Bernard et al., 2021; Hyland-Wood et al., 2021); Italy (Viola et al., 2021)Spain (Rojano et al., 2020), Sweden (Svenbro & Wester, 2023)Norway (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2020), Egypt (Baradei et al., 2021), the United Arab Emirates (Radwan & Mousa, 2020), Malaysia (Mangut & Mohamad, 2021), the Philippines (Flores & Asuncion, 2020), and South Africa (Wiese & Van Der Westhuizen (2023). Few researchers with multi-country or global locations, such as the Sorensen & Evensen (2023) study in Denmark and Sweden; multi-country Europe (Australia, Germany,

France, Spain, UK) by Hayek (2024), a web-based study of 29 countries with a predominance of Swedish & Danish respondents (Glasdam & Stjernsward, 2020); cross-country studies of the United States, Hong Kong, Australia (Ngai et al., 2020); and a global review that explicitly mentions the United States, China, Europe and Africa (Senegal) (Su et al., 2022).

The study by Su et al. (2022) generally has similarities in method with this article, namely using the literature review/narrative review method. The difference is that Su et al (2022) limit communication strategies during the crisis to health officials, while this article is on government communication strategies in general (not just health officials). Specifically, the method of the article Su etl (2022) is a literature review, while this article is a narrative review.

Therefore, the research objective of this article is to make a narrative review of various articles that research the government's crisis communication strategy during the covid-19 pandemic, with the period 2020-2024.

2 CHARACTERISTICS OF SELECTED ARTICLES

The collection of articles is determined to discuss the government's crisis communication strategy during the covid-19 pandemic, the 2020-2024 publication period, journals including Quartile 1-4 in the Scimago Journal Rank (SJR), and articles on the Google Scholar search engine. Through the keyword "government's crisis communication strategy during the covid-19 pandemic" which was entered into Google Scholar; So 20 article titles were obtained.

The results of the search through Google Scholar yielded 20 article titles. The classification of the year of publication includes 7 publication articles in 2020 (Christensen & Laegreid, 2020; Diaz et al., 2020; Flores & Asuncion, 2020; Glasdam & Stjernward, 2020; Kim & Kreps, 2020; Ngai et al., 2020; Radwan & Mousa, 2020). There are 6 articles for the year of publication 2021 (El Baradei et al., 2021; Hyland-Wood et al., 2021; London & Matthews, 2021; Masngut & Mohamad, 2021; Viola et al., 2021; and Wang et al., 2021). Then 1 publication article in 2022 (Su et al., 2022). Furthermore, 4 publication articles in 2023 (Bernard et al., 2023; Sorensen & Evensen, 2023; Svenbro

& Wester, 2023; Wiese & Van der Westhuizen, 2023); and 2 publication articles in 2024 (Hayek, 2024; Okuhara et al., 2024).

The 20 articles are spread across 20 journals, which means that each article is published by a different journal. The 20 journals are in the following categories: (1) Communication/Media/PR as many as 7 journals for 7 articles: *RLCS* (Diaz et al., 2020), *JCOM* (Flores & Asuncion, 2020), *Media & Communication* (Hayek, 2024), *Media International Australia* (London & Matthews, 2021), *Public Relations Review* (Ngai et al., 2020), *International Journal of Strategic Communication* (Svenbro & Wester, 2023), *Corporate Communication: An International Journal* (Wiese & Van Der Westhuizen, 2023). (2) Public Administration/Policy/Crisis as many as 4 journals for 4 articles: *International Public Management Journal* (Christensen & Lægreid, 2020), *International Journal of Public Administration* (El Baradei et al., 2021), *Journal of Contingencies & Crisis Management* (Sorensen & Evensen, 2023), and *Journal of Health Management* (Radwan & Mousa, 2020). (3) Health/Public/Health Communication/Health Informatics as many as 4 journals for 4 articles: *World Medical & Health Policy* (Kim & Kreps, 2020), *JMIR* (Masngut & Mohamad, 2021), *Journal of Health Communication* (Okuhara et al., 2024), *Frontiers in Public Health* (Su et al., 2022). (4) Multidisciplinary social sciences as many as 2 journals for 2 articles: *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* (Glasdam & Stjernswärd (2020), *HSSC* (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021). (5) Safety/risk/disaster as many as 1 journal for 1 article, namely the *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* (Bernard et al., 2023). (6) Management/innovation as many as one journal for one article: *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* (Viola et al., 20w21). (7) Psychology/HCI as many as 1 journal for 1 article: *Computer in Human Behavior* (Wang et al., 2021).

The positions of each of the 20 articles in the SJR are: There are 11 article titles including Q1 (Bernard et al., 2023; Christensen & Laegreid, 2020; Hayek, 2024; Hyland-Wood et al., 2021; London & Matthews, 2021; Masngut & Mohamad, 2021; Ngai et al., 2020; Svenbro & Wester, 2023; Viola et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Wiese & Van der Westhuizen, 2023). Then 8 article titles include Q2 (Diaz et al., 2020; El Baradei et al., 2021; Flores & Asuncion, 2020; Glasdam & Stjernswärd, 2020; Kim & Kreps, 2020; Okuhara et al., 2024; Sorensen & Evensen, 2023; Su et al., 2022) and 1 article title including Q4 (Radwan & Mousa, 2020).

The similarity of perspectives or angles between the 20 articles is that on average focusing on government communication during the Covid-19 pandemic, by discussing strategies, effectiveness or impacts. On average, many of the 20 articles use content analysis (briefs, speeches, tweets) and/or framing frameworks, reputation, and legitimacy. A number of studies have focused on online platforms (specifically Twitter/social media). The differences between the 20 articles are in the object or level of research, namely some choose national leaders (such as Australian PMs), government agencies, health officials, or cross-border comparatively.

Another difference is in terms of analysis angles, namely there are those that emphasize strategy/effectiveness, framing/meaning-making/legitimacy, public emotions and responses, mis/disinformation, and social media networks. Another difference between the 20 articles is the geographical scope, namely the study of the country in a single multi-country/global versus. Reviewed from the perspective used by these 20 researchers, the most or 7 articles used the perspective of strategy, communication effectiveness, and lesson-learned (Bernard et al., 2023; Flores & Asuncion, 2020; Hyland-Wood et al., 2021; Kim & Kreps, 2020; Radwan & Mousa, 2020; Su et al., 2022; Viola et al., 2022). A total of 4 articles used social media (Twitter) as the main channel (London & Matthews, 2021; Ngai, 2020; Wang et al., 2021). There are 4 article titles with a framing/meaning making perspective (Christensen & Laegreid, 2020; Hayek, 2024; Sorensen & Evensen, 2023; Svenbro & Wester, 2023).

3 THEORIES USED

Among the theories used in the 20 articles, there are 5 theories with the most frequent occurrences. The five theories are Risk and Crisis Communication Theory, which is used in 4 articles (Flores & Asuncion, 2020; Hyland-Wood et al., 2021; London & Matthews, 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Risk and Crisis Communication Theory (Seeger, 2003; Slovic & Burns, 2012; Reynolds & Seeger, 2020) generally explains how emotions mediate public risk perceptions of a crisis. This theory emphasizes the importance of consistent, timely, and sufficient communication during a health crisis. Why this theory is used in crisis conditions, because it is fundamental to explain how the government delivers accurate, timely, transparent, and trustworthy information. This theory

emphasizes that transparency and public trust are at the core of successful crisis communication (Siegrist & Zingg, 2014). This is in line with the Covid-19 pandemic situation which is a global health crisis that requires a framework that emphasizes public trust and the credibility of government messages.

Then the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) theory used in 4 articles (Bernard et al., 2023; Ngai et al., 2020; Okuhara et al., 2024; Radwan & Mousa, 2020). The CERC theory focuses on the phases of crisis communication, namely pre-crisis, initial event, maintenance, resolution, and evaluation—very suitable for the pandemic. The CERC details five types of messages in crisis communication: risk messages, warnings, instructional, empathy/support, reassurance (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). Why is this theory used in crisis conditions, because CERC was developed by the CDC/WHO for the context of a health emergency. The CERC is particularly relevant for testing the principles of transparency, empathy, consistency, and accountability of government communications. The CERC theory is the standard framework for assessing official communication in a pandemic situation.

Another theory is Framing Theory (Entman, 1993; Chong & Druckman, 2007) used 3 articles (Bernard et al., 2023; London & Matthews, 2021; Sorensen & Evensen, 2023). Framing Theory describes how political leaders select and emphasize certain information to influence public perception. Among framing theories, Crisis Communication & Media Framing can explain the framing of crisis narratives by the media and governments (Coombs & Holladay, 2022). The theory is used in crisis situations as well, because in crisis situations governments tend to frame messages, by emphasizing danger, emphasizing solidarity, or emphasizing government control. This theory is important for understanding public perception, especially when there is a narrative competition between the government, the media, and the opposition.

The next theory is Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The SCCT theory explains the relationship between crisis responsibility attribution and public emotional responses (Coombs, 2004, 2007). This theory directly connects government communication with public emotional perception, which is the core of the effectiveness of Covid-19 crisis communication. This theory is used by 3 articles (Diaz et al., 2020; Ngai et al., 2020; Su et al., 2022). Why SCCT is used in crisis situations, given that this theory may explain the relationship between the attribution of responsibility and public

reaction. The use of SCCT is suitable for the Covid-19 pandemic crisis because the public can be positive (appreciating transparency) or blame the government (such as the government being slow in responding). This direction of public reaction can affect legitimacy.

Lastly, the theory of Risk Communication & Community Engagement (RCCE) (WHO, 2020). RCCE theory emphasizes communication that builds trust, reduces panic, combats infodemi, and encourages healthy behaviors during the pandemic (El Baradei et al., 2021). This theory was used in 3 articles (El Baradei et al., 2021; Radwan & Mousa, 2020; and Viola et al., 2021). The reason why this RCCE is often used in crisis situations is because WHO encourages RCCE as a global best practice, as a basis for effective crisis communication. RCCE focuses on public participation, community engagement, and citizen empowerment, making it particularly relevant during a pandemic when public compliance is key.

In general, the five theories are used, because the theories are "generalizable" in nature, can be used across countries, across levels (local, national, international). The five theories emphasize the fundamental aspects of government crisis communication, namely: (i) Message content (framing, transparency, consistency), (ii) channels and strategies (CERC, RCCE, SCCT, Risk/Crisis Communication). (iii) Relationship with the public (trust, involvement, legitimacy). Because the Covid-19 pandemic is a high-risk, uncertain, and global crisis, these theories are the most relevant, comprehensive, and easy to apply as an analytical framework.

4 RESEARCH METHODS

The research approach of the 20 articles is the most, namely 10 articles using a qualitative approach (Bernard et al., 2023; Christensen & Laegreid, 2020; Glasdam & Stjernsward, 2020; Hyland-Wood et al., 2021; Kim & Kreps, 2020; London & Matthews, 2021; Masngut & Mohamad, 2021; Radwan & Mousa, 2020; Sorensen & Evensen, 2023; and Viola et al., 2021). 5 articles use a quantitative approach (Diaz et al., 2020; Ngai et al., 2020; Okuhara et al., 2024; Svenbro & Wester, 2023; Wang et al., 2021). The next 4 articles use a mixed-methods approach (El Baradei et al., 2021; Flores & Asuncion, 2020;

Hayek, 2024; Wiese & Van der Westhuizen, 2023). Then only 1 article used narrative review (Su et al., 2022).

Judging from the periodization of the research, some articles carried out research in the early phase (first wave) of the Covid-19 pandemic, namely between December 2019 and mid-2020), and in the advanced phase (second wave and so on, 2020-2021). Of the 20 articles, 16 articles conducted research in the early phase (Bernard et al., 2023; Christensen & Laegreid, 2020; Diaz et al., 2020; El Baradei et al., 2021; Flores & Asuncion, 2020; Glasdam & Stjernsward, 2020; Hayek, 2024; Hyland-Wood et al., 2021; Kim & Kreps, 2020; London Matthews, 2021; Masngut & Mohamad, 2021; Ngai et al., 2020; Radwan & Mousa, 2020; Svenbro & Wester, 2023; Viola et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Then 4 articles conducted research in the advanced phase (Okuhara et al., 2024; Sorensen & Evensen, 2023; Wiese & Van Der Westhuizen, 2023; Su et al., 2022).

If classified from data collection techniques, the artillery that uses data collection techniques through documentation or analysis of official documents and media is the most, covering 12 articles. The 12 articles are Bernard et al (2023), Christensen & Laegreid (2020), Hayek (2024), Hyland-Wood et al (2021), Kim & Kreps (2020), London & Matthews (2021), Masngut & Mohamad (2021), Ngai et al (2020), Radwan & Mousa (2020), Sorensen & Evensen (2023), and Viola et al (2021). There are 6 articles that use quantitative surveys, namely Diaz et al. (2020), Flores & Asuncion (2020), Glasdam & Stjernsward (2020), and Wiese & Van Der Westhuizen (2023). Furthermore, 6 articles use social media (Twitter/Facebook/Instagram) via API/scraping, namely El Baradei et al. (2021), Flores & Asuncion (2020), London & Matthews (2021), Radwan & Mousa (2020), Svenbro & wester (2023), and Wang et al. (2021). Only 1 article uses literature review as an analysis technique, namely Hu et al. (2022). Among the 20 articles is Flores & Asuncion (2020) which uses quantitative survey data collection techniques using social media.

Judging from the analysis technique, most of the articles, namely 15 articles, use content analysis (qualitatively, quantitatively and comparatively). The 15 articles are Bernard et al. (2023), Christensen & Laegreid (2020), El Baradei et al. (2021), Hayek (2024), Kim & Kreps (2020), London & Matthews (2021), Masngut & Mohamad (2021), Ngai et al. (2020), Okuhara et al. (2024). Radwan & Mousa (2020), Sørensen & Evensen (2023), Svenbro & Wester (2023), Viola et al. (2021), Wang et al. (2021), Wiese & Van

Der Westhuizen (2023). The content analysis technique is used in the majority of articles, because this analysis method is flexible for analyzing official communication messages, social media, and government documents, and is suitable for comparing communication strategies across time and countries. Then three articles used statistical descriptive analysis techniques, SEM, namely Diaz et al (2020) chose descriptive; Flores & Asuncion (2020) chose descriptive, crosstab, and SEM; and Wiese & Van Der Westhuizen (2023) choose descriptive and inferential. The reason for using descriptive/SEM/inferential analysis techniques is because the researcher wants to map public perception in a measurable way, testing the relationship between variables (e.g. the variable of public trust versus protective behavior).

The literature synthesis/review analysis technique was used in 2 articles. Hyland-Wood et al (2021) use multidisciplinary synthetics. Su et al. (2022) selected literature review, and thematic synthesis. The reason for the use of multidisciplinary review is related to conceptual, not descriptive, research objectives, so theory is used as an interpretive framework. The thematic analysis technique was used in one article, namely Glasdam & Stjernsward (2020). This analysis technique was chosen because it focuses on people's perceptions and experiences (respondents' comments), so that latent themes can be revealed.

5 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Advantages of government communication strategy

The study of the 20 articles can inventory a number of advantages of the government's communication strategy. Here is the description:

1. Transparency, clarity, and consistency of the message. A total of 15 articles found the advantages of the government's communication strategy that is transparent **in conveying information** and consistent with the main message received higher trust from the public. The 15 articles are Bernard et al. (2023); Christensen & Lægreid (2020); Díaz et al. (2020); Flores & Asuncion (2020); Hayek (2024); Hyland-Wood et al. (2021); London & Matthews (2021); Masngut & Mohamad (2021); Ngai et al. (2020); Okuhara et al. (2024); Radwan & Mousa (2020);

- Sørensen & Evensen (2023); Viola et al. (2021); Wang et al. (2021); Su et al. (2022).
2. Based on science, facts, and health experts. Seven articles, namely Bernard et al. (2023); Glasdam & Stjernswärd (2020); Hyland-Wood et al. (2021); Ngai et al. (2020); Sørensen & Evensen (2023); Svenbro & Wester (2023); Wang et al. (2021) found the advantages of government communication strategies in using **evidence-based communication** and involving medical experts as spokespersons increasing legitimacy and credibility.
 3. Empathy, emotional support, and solidarity. Six articles, namely Díaz et al. (2020); Christensen & Lægreid (2020); Flores & Asuncion (2020); Radwan & Mousa (2020); Su et al. (2022); Wiese & Van Der Westhuizen (2023) found the advantages of government communication strategies in Empathetic, **humanistic, and emotionally supportive** Communication helped reduce public anxiety and improve compliance.
 4. The effectiveness of communication channels (multi-channel, social media, and digital). Eleven articles found the advantages of a government's communication strategy that quickly utilizes **social media, official websites, digital applications, and TV** more effectively to reach a wide public. The 11 articles are El Baradei et al. (2021); Flores & Asuncion (2020); Hayek (2024); London & Matthews (2021); Masngut & Mohamad (2021); Ngai et al. (2020); Okuhara et al. (2024); Radwan & Mousa (2020); Viola et al. (2021); Wang et al. (2021); Wiese & Van der Westhuizen (2023).
 5. Public mobilization and social participation. Six articles, namely Christensen & Lægreid (2020); Flores & Asuncion (2020); Hyland-Wood et al. (2021); Masngut & Mohamad (2021); Radwan & Mousa (2020); Su et al. (2022) found that the government's advantages in strategies that involve the public through **invitations for donations, role models, and solidarity narratives** succeeded in building collective compliance.
 6. Adaptive and situational awareness. Three articles, namely Bernard et al. (2023); Radwan & Mousa (2020); Wang et al. (2021) found that the government's communication strategy regarding Communication that adjusts to the pandemic phase and the local situation shows the **dynamic response of the government**.

7. **National branding and identity narrative.** Three articles, namely Christensen & Læg Reid (2020); London & Matthews (2021); Ngai et al. (2020) found the advantages of government communication strategies regarding the use of **national slogans, hashtags, and symbols** to strengthen the recall of public messages.
8. Empowering the public. Only one article (Wiese & Der Westthuisen, 2023) found the advantages of government communication strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, namely strategies that provide a sense of self-control and information sharing space to increase **adaptive coping** skills.

5.2 Weaknesses of the government's communication strategy

The study of the 20 articles can inventory a number of weaknesses of the government's communication strategy. Here is the description:

1. Lack of transparency, consistency, and credibility. A total of 17 articles found weaknesses in the government's communication strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, namely a lack of transparency, consistency, and credibility. The 17 articles are Bernard et al. (2023); Christensen & Læg Reid (2020); Díaz et al. (2020); El Baradei et al. (2021); Glasdam & Stjernswärd (2020); Hayek (2024); Hyland-Wood et al. (2021); Kim & Kreps (2020); London & Matthews (2021); Masngut & Mohamad (2021); Ngai et al. (2020); Okuhara et al. (2024); Radwan & Mousa (2020); Sørensen & Evensen (2023); Su et al. (2022); Viola et al. (2021); Wang et al. (2021).
2. One-way communication & minimal interactivity. A total of 7 articles (El Baradei et al., 2021; Flores & Asuncion, 2020; London & Matthews, 2021; Ngai et al. (2020); Okuhara et al., 2024; Kim & Kreps, 2020; Wiese & Van der Westhuisen, 2023); found weaknesses in the government's communication strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, namely that communication tends to be top-down (only conveying, without dialogue). Another weakness of government communication is that the public is not involved in the conversation, resulting in alienation and negative word of mouth.
3. Lack of empathy, humanization, and psychosocial attention. Five articles, namely Bernard et al. (2023); Díaz et al. (2020); Okuhara et al. (2024); Svenbro & Wester

(2023); Wiese & Van Der Westhuizen (2023) found weaknesses in the government's communication strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, namely official messages were often dry, technocratic, and lacked personal stories. Another disadvantage is the lack of emotional support, especially for vulnerable groups.

4. Slow and non-adaptive initial response. Six articles, namely Christensen & Lægreid (2020); Flores & Asuncion (2020); Hyland-Wood et al. (2021); Radwan & Mousa (2020); Sørensen & Evensen (2023); Wang et al. (2021) found weaknesses in the government's communication strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, namely delays in responding to the early phases of the pandemic causing public confusion and delays in compliance. Another weakness is that sudden policy changes without explanation also undermine legitimacy.
5. Inability to deal with hoaxes and disinformation. Seven articles, namely Díaz et al. (2020); El Baradei et al. (2021); Flores & Asuncion (2020); Kim & Kreps (2020); London & Matthews (2021); Masngut & Mohamad (2021); Viola et al. (2021) found weaknesses in the government's communication strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, namely high levels of noise and rumors because the government does not have a strong anti-disinformation strategy. Another drawback is that the lack of clarification directly exacerbates the situation.
6. Inequality of access and exclusion of vulnerable groups. Three articles, namely Hyland-Wood et al. (2021); London & Matthews (2021); Okuhara et al. (2024) found a weakness in the government's communication strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, namely that communication is often not tailored to minority audiences, low literacy, or local communities. As a result, the message does not reach all walks of life.
7. Politicization and domination of the official narrative. Three articles, namely Glasdam & Stjernswärd (2020); Kim & Kreps (2020); Masngut & Mohamad (2021) found weaknesses in the government's communication strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, namely that politics is often more prominent than science, causing public resistance. Another drawback is that the government's narrative is dominated by formal claims & promotions, ignoring alternative perspectives.

8. Information overload and mixed messaging. Four articles, namely Christensen & Lægheid (2020); Su et al. (2022); Viola et al. (2021); Wang et al. (2021), found weaknesses in government communication strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, namely mixed, overlapping, or contradictory messages that confuse the public. Another disadvantage is that too much information without quality indicators triggers fatigue and distrust.
9. Lack of cross-level & cross-country coordination. Four articles, namely Flores & Asuncion (2020); Hayek (2024); Kim & Kreps (2020); Su et al. (2022), found a weakness in the government's communication strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, namely that policies differ between regions/countries causing public confusion. Another weakness is that global and domestic coordination is weak in the early stages.

5.3 Research limitations

A review of the 20 articles can inventory a number of research limitations. Here is the description:

1. Pandemic time/phase limitations. Most of the studies, 13 out of 20 articles, only examined the **early phase of the pandemic** (March–July 2020), so the results do not reflect long-term dynamics or subsequent waves. The 13 articles are Bernard et al. (2023); Christensen & Lægheid (2020); Díaz et al. (2020); El Baradei et al. (2021); Flores & Asuncion (2020); Hayek (2024); Masngut & Mohamad (2021); Ngai et al. (2020); Okuhara et al. (2024); Sørensen & Evensen (2023); Viola et al. (2021); Wang et al. (2021); Wiese & Van der Westhuizen (2023).
2. Geographical and contextual limitations. Many studies focus on just **one country or city**, with no cross-country/regional comparisons, so results cannot be generalized globally. A total of 11 studies that have geographical and contextual limitations are the articles Bernard et al. (2023); Christensen & Lægheid (2020); El Baradei et al. (2021); Flores & Asuncion (2020); Glasdam & Stjernswärd (2020); Hayek (2024); Kim & Kreps (2020); Masngut & Mohamad (2021); Okuhara et al. (2024); Radwan & Mousa (2020); Sørensen & Evensen (2023).

3. Limited data and media platforms. Most studies focus on **only one platform (e.g. Facebook or Twitter)**, thus ignoring the broader media ecosystem (Instagram, YouTube, TV, radio). The articles that conducted such studies are El Baradei et al. (2021); Masngut & Mohamad (2021); Ngai et al. (2020); Okuhara et al. (2024); Radwan & Mousa (2020); Wang et al. (2021).
4. Limitations of methodology and samples. Many studies use **small samples, convenience sampling, or non-probability, so they have** generalization limitations. Some studies are only **qualitative descriptive**, without quantitative validation. Articles that have one or both of these limitations are Díaz et al. (2020); Flores & Asuncion (2020); Glasdam & Stjernswärd (2020); Radwan & Mousa (2020); Wiese & Van der Westhuizen (2023).
5. Limitations of effectiveness & impact analysis. Many studies do not measure **the impact of communication on people's actual behaviors** (only perception, engagement, or framing). Studies that have such a character are El Baradei et al. (2021); Flores & Asuncion (2020); Glasdam & Stjernswärd (2020); Hayek (2024); Hyland-Wood et al. (2021); London & Matthews (2021); Ngai et al. (2020); Okuhara et al. (2024); Radwan & Mousa (2020); Sørensen & Evensen (2023); Svenbro & Wester (2023); Viola et al. (2021); Wang et al. (2021).
6. Limited public perspective. Some studies focus more on government or media communication, **not enough to analyze public perception or response in depth**. Studies that have such a character are Christensen & Lægreid (2020); London & Matthews (2021); Okuhara et al. (2024); Sørensen & Evensen (2023); Svenbro & Wester (2023).
7. Conceptual limitations. Some articles are in the form of **conceptual or normative analysis**, not empirical studies, making it difficult to measure their effectiveness. Studies that fall into this category are the article Hyland-Wood et al. (2021); Kim & Kreps (2020); Su et al. (2022).
8. Limitations of language and context bias. Literature studies are sometimes based only **on English** or a specific context (e.g. Australian democracy), so there is a risk of geographical and cultural bias. Studies that fall into this category are the article Hyland-Wood et al. (2021); Su et al. (2022).

In general, it can be summarized that the majority of research limitations come from: (i) **Temporal coverage** (initial phase only), (ii) **Spatial coverage** (one country/platform), (iii) **Methodological limitations** (small sample, non-probability, descriptive), (iii) **Not measuring real behavioral impacts.** (iv) **Lack of** a comprehensive public perspective. (v) Geographical and normative common.

5.4 Recommendations to the government

The 20th study of the article can inventory a number of recommendations for the government related to communication strategies in dealing with crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Here is the description:

1. Transparency, honesty, and consistency. It is recommended that the government emphasize the importance of information disclosure, even in conditions full of uncertainty. It is recommended that the government avoid inconsistencies between central and regional institutions/governments. Articles that make such recommendations are Christensen & Lægreid (2020); Díaz et al. (2020); El Baradei et al. (2021); Glasdam & Stjernswärd (2020); Hayek (2024); Hyland-Wood et al. (2021); Kim & Kreps (2020); Radwan & Mousa (2020); Su et al. (2022); Wang et al. (2021).
2. Empathy, emotional support, and solidarity. It is recommended that the government in communicating in the crisis needs to convey empathy, emotional narratives, and recognition of uncertainty. Social solidarity needs to be maintained so that the public feels emotionally recognized. Articles that convey such recommendations are Bernard et al. (2023); Christensen & Lægreid (2020); Díaz et al. (2020); El Baradei et al. (2021); Hyland-Wood et al. (2021); Ngai et al. (2020); Okuhara et al. (2024); Svenbro & Wester (2023); Wiese & Van der Westhuizen (2023).
3. Two-way communication and public engagement. It is recommended that the government needs to be more interactive through digital dialogue, live chat, polls, and feedback loop mechanisms. Local community participation (barangay, citizen participation) strengthens the legitimacy of the message. Articles that present such recommendations are El Baradei et al. (2021); Flores & Asuncion (2020); Hyland-

Wood et al. (2021); Kim & Kreps (2020); London & Matthews (2021); Ngai et al. (2020); Okuhara et al. (2024); Radwan & Mousa (2020); Wiese & Van der Westhuizen (2023).

4. **Multichannel & adaptation of local contexts.** It is recommended that the government use various channels: social media, local TV, radio, SMS blast, hotline. It is suggested that the government promote local language, infographics, and visual storytelling, because it is more effective in reaching various groups. Articles that make such recommendations are Flores & Asuncion (2020); Ngai et al. (2020); Kim & Kreps (2020); Wang et al. (2021).
5. **Anti-misinformation and public literacy.** It is recommended that the government place emphasis on counter-terrorism strategies hoaxes, digital literacy, and collaboration with the media/health workers. It is hoped that the government can control the spread of infodemics on social media. Articles that convey such recommendations are Díaz et al. (2020); Glasdam & Stjernsw (2020); Hyland-Wood et al., (2021); London & Matthews (2021); Radwan & Mousa (2020); Su et al (2022); Viola et al. (2021).
6. **Cross-level government coordination.** It is recommended that the government emphasize the importance of integrated communication between the central-regional governments, and between ministries. The government should also avoid overlapping messages or public confusion. Articles that make such recommendations are Christensen & Læg Reid (2020); Hayek (2024); Kim & Kreps (2020); Wang et al. (2021).
7. **Public empowerment and inclusivity.** It is recommended to the government that the message he conveys is not only instructive/coercive, but empowering and building a sense of agency. The government's message should involve minority, vulnerable, or rural areas. Articles that make such recommendations are Hyland-Wood et al. (2021); Kim & Kreps (2020); Flores & Asuncion (2020); Wiese & Van der Westhuizen (2023).
8. **Communication evaluation framework.** It is recommended to the government to use an adaptive framework (CERC with a new frame, integration of crisis communication phases). The government should build formal indicators to assess the effectiveness of communication. The government should use the SCCT

(denial, corrective action, reducing offensiveness) strategy systematically. Articles that convey such recommendations are Bernard et al. (2023); Okuhara et al. (2024); Masngut & Mohamad (2021); Viola et al. (2021).

9. Collaboration and credibility of sources. It is recommended to the government to collaborate with the media, health workers, influencers, and even other countries. The government should balance scientific credibility with moral legitimacy. Articles that make such recommendations are Christensen & Lægreid (2020); Glasdam & Stjernswärd (2020); Kim & Kreps (2020); Su et al. (2022); Svenbro & Wester (2023); Viola et al. (2021).

Based on the description above, it can be summarized that the research recommendations on government communication strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic can be mapped into **9 major themes**: transparency, empathy, two-way communication, multichannel, anti-hoax, cross-level coordination, empowerment, evaluative framework, and collaboration. The dominant pattern is the **need for transparent, empathic, participatory, and adaptive communication across channels and across actors**.

5.5 Recommendations for further researchers

The 20th study of the article can inventory a number of recommendations for future researchers related to communication strategies in dealing with crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Here is the description:

1. Longitudinal studies (changes over time). It is recommended to the next researcher to focus on on the dynamics of public perception, communication effectiveness, and strategy changes throughout the crisis phase. Articles that convey such recommendations are Masngut & Mohamad (2021); Sing et al (2020). (2020); Viola et al. (2021); Wiese & Van der Westhuizen (2023).
2. Cross-platform analysis of social media. It is recommended to the next researcher to expand the analysis to various platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc.) to compare communication patterns and public sentiment. Articles that make such recommendations are London & Matthews (2021); Masngut & Mohamad (2021); Wang et al. (2021).

3. Cross-country/cross-cultural comparative studies. It is recommended to the next researcher to compare communication strategies between countries or between government systems by, among other things, looking at cultural, political, and institutional factors. Articles that present such recommendations are Ngai et al. (2020); Viola et al. (2021); Wang et al. (2021).
4. Analysis of the impact on political behavior. It is recommended to the next researcher to measure the effects of communication on compliance, behavior change, and quality of life (QoL). Articles that make such recommendations are London & Matthews (2021); Masngut & Mohamad (2021); Ngai et al. (2020); Su et al. (2022); Wang et al. (2021); Wiese & Van der Westhuizen (2023).
5. Exploration of authoritative figures and legitimacy. It is recommended to researchers to research the influence of public figures (official spokespersons, political leaders, scientific authorities) on the level of public trust. It is also recommended that the next researcher provide a balanced analysis between scientific legitimacy and political legitimacy. Articles that convey such recommendations are Masngut & Mohamad (2021); Sørensen & Evensen (2023).
6. Framing effects and narrative analysis. It is recommended to the next researcher to conduct a qualitative analysis of media narratives and framing by conveying how government messages affect public understanding and compliance. Articles that convey such recommendations are Hayek (2024); Sørensen & Evensen (2023).
7. Integration of quantitative and qualitative data. It is recommended that researchers combine social media data (big data) with surveys, interviews, or experiments to understand public perception more deeply. Articles that present such recommendations are Ngai et al. (2020); London & Matthews (2021).
8. Systematic and multilingual review. It is recommended to the next researcher to conduct a systematic review with the coverage of the literature in various languages to be more representative globally. The only article that provides such advice is Su et al. (2022).

Based on the description above, it can be summarized regarding the direction of future research that is recommended to emphasize more on **Longitudinal time dynamics, cross-platform & country comparisons, real impact on behavior, and exploration of**

legitimacy & framing factors. In addition, there is a methodological push to **mixed methods** and **Systematic Multilingual Review** to make the results more comprehensive.

6 CONCLUSION

This article presents Narrative Review 20 articles that examined the government's crisis communication strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic in the period 2020 to 2024. The goal is to inventory the strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of research in this field.

In general, the findings show that government crisis communication in different countries during the COVID-19 pandemic is a complex spectrum, having significant points of success and failure. The five most frequently used theories in these studies are Risk and Crisis Communication Theory, Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC), Framing Theory, Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), and Risk Communication & Community Engagement (RCCE), all of which emphasize the importance of transparency, consistency, trust, and public engagement in crisis situations.

Regarding the main advantages identified in government crisis communication, especially in the early phases of the pandemic, include: (i) **Transparency and Consistency of Messages:** The majority of articles (15 studies) found that transparent, clear, and consistent communication strategies gain higher public trust. (ii) **Science Base and Expert Credibility:** Governments that use evidence-based communication and involve medical experts as spokespersons have succeeded in increasing legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the public (7 studies). (iii) **Effective Use of Digital Channels:** The rapid use of social media, official *websites*, and multi-digital channels is considered effective in reaching the public at large (11 studies). (iii) **Empathy and Solidarity:** Empathetic, humanistic, and emotional support communication helps reduce public anxiety and increase compliance (6 studies).

However, weaknesses in government crisis communication were found to be more dominant and widespread, namely: (i) **Lack of Transparency, Consistency, and Credibility:** These weaknesses were found in the highest number of studies (17 articles), indicating inconsistencies, lack of full openness, and public doubts about the credibility of official information. (ii) **One-Way Communication:** Communication tends to be top-

down (only conveying without dialogue) and minimal two-way interaction on social media, which triggers public alienation and the emergence of *negative word of mouth* (7 articles). (iii) Slow Response and Early Unadaptability: Delays in responding to the early phases of the pandemic led to public confusion and compliance delays. (iv) Inability to Manage Disinformation: Governments often do not have a strong anti-disinformation strategy, so hoaxes and rumors remain high due to lack of direct clarification (7 articles). (v) Weakness of Coordination: The existence of policy differences between regions or between countries indicates weak domestic and global coordination in the early stages of the crisis (4 articles).

This review also found significant limitations in existing research, namely: (i) Most studies (13 articles) only examined the early phases of the pandemic (March–July 2020), so they do not reflect long-term dynamics or impacts. (ii) Many studies focus on a single country or specific context (11 articles), limiting the generalization of results. (iii) There are limitations in the analysis of effectiveness and impact (13 articles) because many studies do not measure the impact of communication on people's actual behavior, only on perception or *framing*.

As a recommendation, governments in times of crisis need to strictly integrate the principles of the CERC with empathetic and science-based messages. The strategy should shift from simply instructive to two-way communication and public empowerment (providing a sense of self-control and sharing space) to build continued collective trust and compliance. In addition, the government must prepare an adaptive, multi-lingual, and inclusive strategy for vulnerable groups, as well as strengthen digital literacy to combat hoaxes from an early age.

REFERENCES

- Baradei, L. El, Kadry, M., & Ahmed, G. (2021). Governmental Social Media Communication Strategies during the COVID-19 Pandemic : The Case of Egypt Governmental Social Media Communication Strategies during the COVID-19 Pandemic : The Case of Egypt. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 44(11–12), 907–919. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2021.1915729>
- Bernard, N. R., Basit, A., Sofija, E., Phung, H., Lee, J., Rutherford, S., Sebar, B., Harris, N., Phung, D., & Wiseman, N. (2021). Analysis of Crisis Communication by the Prime Minister of Australia during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal*

of Disaster Risk Reduction, 102375. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2021.102375>

- Christensen, T., & Læg Reid, P. (2020). The coronavirus crisis — crisis communication , meaning-making , and reputation management. *International Public Management Journal*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2020.1812455>
- Flores, R., & Asuncion, X. V. (2020). Toward an improved risk/crisis communication in this time of COVID-19 pandemic: a baseline study for Philippine local government units. *Journal Of Science Communication*, 19(07), 1–16.
- Glasdam, S., & Stjernsw, S. (2020). Social Sciences & Humanities Open Information about the COVID-19 pandemic – A thematic analysis of different ways of perceiving true and untrue information. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 2(November). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2020.100090>
- Hayek, L. (2024). Media Framing of Government Crisis Communication During Covid - 19. *Media and Communication*, 12, 1–17.
- 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 Sciences Communications*, 8(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00701-w>
- Jr, J. L., & Matthews, K. (2021). Crisis communication on social media - lessons from Covid-19. *Journal of Decision Systems*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12460125.2021.1926612>
- Kim, D. K. D., & Kreps, G. L. (2020). An Analysis of Government Communication in the United States During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Recommendations for Effective Government Health Risk Communication. *World Medical and Health Policy*, 12(4), 398–412. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wmh3.363>
- Okuhara, T., Terada, M., Okada, H., & Kiuchi, T. (2024). Experiences of Governments and Public Health Agencies Regarding Crisis Communication During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Digital Age : Protocol for a Systematic Review of Qualitative Studies. *JMIR Research Protocols*, 13, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.2196/58040>
- Radwan, A. F., & Mousa, S. A. (2020). Government Communication Strategies during Coronavirus Pandemic: United Arab Emirates Lessons. *Journal of Health Management*, 22(4), 516–527. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972063420983091>
- Rojano, P., Díaz, J. C. L., & Fernández, L. R. (2020). Government communication and emotions in the Covid-19 crisis in Spain. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 23–39.
- Sing, C., Ngai, B., Singh, R. G., Lu, W., & Chun, A. (2020). Grappling With the COVID-19 Health Crisis : Content Analysis of Communication Strategies and Their Effects on Public Engagement on Social Media. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 22(8). <https://doi.org/10.2196/21360>

- Sørensen, M., & Evensen, D. (2023). Framing the Covid - 19 pandemic : A comparative analysis of Swedish and Danish crisis communication. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, June, 960–967. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12486>
- Su, Z., Zhang, H., McDonnell, D., Ahmad, J., Cheshmehzangi, A., & Yuan, C. (2022). Crisis communication strategies for health officials. *Frontiers in Public Health*.
- Svenbro, M., & Wester, M. (2023). Examining Legitimacy in Government Agencies ' Crisis Communication Examining Legitimacy in Government Agencies ' Crisis. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 17(1), 54–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2022.2127358>
- Viola, C., Toma, P., Manta, F., & Benvenuto, M. (2021). Technological Forecasting & Social Change The more you know , the better you act ? Institutional communication in Covid-19 crisis management. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, 170(May), 120929. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.120929>
- Wang, Y., Hao, H., & Sundahl, L. (2021). Computers in Human Behavior Examining risk and crisis communications of government agencies and stakeholders during early-stages of COVID-19 on Twitter. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 114(June 2020), 106568. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106568>
- Wiese, M., & Westhuizen, L.-M. Van Der. (2025). Public coping discourse in response to government health crisis communication. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 28(7), 44–67. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-07-2022-0089>

Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

How to cite this article (APA)

Bachtiar, Y. C., Abdullah, Z., & Kamarudin, S. (2026). GOVERNMENT'S CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A NARRATIVE REVIEW. *Veredas Do Direito*, 23(6), e235136. <https://doi.org/10.18623/rvd.v23.5136>