Antecedents of Internal Crisis Communication and its Consequences on Employee Performance

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ABSTRACT

This article is taking a conceptual approach to establish the relationship between organizational culture, leadership and social media content on internal crisis communication its consequences on employee performance. The concept of internal crisis communication is relatively new; therefore this article will explore the stage of development of the construct and its contrast with other related concepts. Moreover, complexity theory will underpin the study to understand the consequences of minor signals that trigger internal crisis communication. The paper finally offered a framework to guide public relations practitioners on the implications of internal crisis communication on employee performance.

Keywords: Employee Performance, Internal Crisis Communication, Leadership, Organizational Culture, Social Media
JEL Classification: M310

1. INTRODUCTION

Internal crisis communication has identified as a new area of study in crisis management research by postmodern tradition of crisis communication (Heide, 2013). Specifically, recent research trends has indicate that in the last three decades crisis communication researchers have fundamentally put attention on the external dimension of crisis communication (Johansen et al., 2012). Studies that investigate the external dimension of crisis communication highlighted in the literature includes, how organizations protected their reputation during crisis (Elliot, 2010; Coombs, 2007a; Coombs and Holladay, 2002), audience oriented approach from different cultural perspective (Littlefield et al., 2014; Elmasry and Chaudhri, 2010; Lee, 2004), medium and spokesperson impact on stakeholder response to crisis communications strategies (Lee et al., 2014; Brown et al., 2015; Holladay, 2010; Coombs and Holladay, 2009), crisis communication strategies and audience perceptions (Fediuk et al., 2010; Coombs, 2007b; Benoit, 1997), ethical standards in crisis communication (Austin and Jin, 2015; Kim, 2015), and leadership role in crisis event (Jamal and Bakar, 2015; Jaques, 2012; Wooten and James, 2008).

The internal dimension of crisis communication has long been ignored within the field of crisis communication research (Heide and Simonsson, 2015, 2013; Heide, 2013; Johansen et al., 2012; Frandsen and Johansen, 2011; Taylor, 2010). Similarly, Heide and Simonsson, (2015) further emphasis that there is need for more research with strong focus on communication.

Similarly, it has been highlighted that sense making of a crisis situation has been thoroughly investigated (Mazzei et al., 2012; Weick, 1988). Likewise, trust relationship as an antecedent to internal crisis communication has also been investigated (Mazzei and Ravazzani, 2014, 2011). Moreover, other studies have examined how crisis management plans impact on internal crisis communication (Heide and Simonsson, 2015). Other aspect of internal crisis management that has been studied includes perceptions of employee reactions (Johansen et al., 2012) and different paradoxical tension within organization (Heide and Simonsson, 2015). To date little is known on the influence of organizational culture, social media content, and leadership on internal crisis communication and its consequences on employee performance.

Therefore, this paper proposed a framework for investigating the antecedents (social media content, organization culture, and leadership) of internal crisis communication and its consequences on employee performance. In line with its objective the paper is divided into four sections with this section as an introduction. In the second part, we provide a relevant literature review on internal crisis communication in which conceptual framework and hypothesis where presented. The third part contains a brief discussion of the methodology while the last part entails the conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Internal Crisis Communication

Recent research trends in the field of crisis communication has shown that time has come to move beyond the nearsightedness focus on external communication to the media and organizations immediate problems, to other areas which include different stakeholders (Kent, 2010). More specifically, crisis does not happen as an isolated events, rather how and why they happen, as well as how they are managed is closely related to internal communication processes (Heide and Simonsson, 2015; Taylor, 2010). Internal communication is a pedal that helps to prevent crises, create positive reactions, minimizes damage and eventually produces positive results (Mazzei and Ravazzani, 2013; Mazzei et al., 2012). Previously, internal communication has not been viewed as a factor causing a crisis rather it is seen as a source of influencing employee than a source of engaging them in conversation for the attainment of understanding between management and employee (Kukule, 2013). In addition, In essence, it can be argued that scholars have basically neglect the notion that lack of internal crisis communication can spwan organizational crisis.

From a general perspective, Frandsen and Johansen (2011), explicate that practically internal crisis communication is seen as sender oriented focusing on how managers communicate with employees in crisis event. Moreover, earlier studies on internal crisis communication mainly pay attention on the psychological aspects of internal stakeholders. In particular, the study of Karl E. Weicks theory of retrospective sense making focusing on how organizational stakeholders understand and make sense about a crisis situation (Weick, 1988) has contribute immensely to the study of organizational internal dimension of crisis management, and crisis communication. Internal crisis communication involves strong need for sense making (Maitlis and Sonenshain, 2010).

Therefore, the communication aspect has been under-studied (Taylor, 2010). Similarly, Frandsen and Johansen (2011)

further expanded that theoretical orientation on internal crisis communication is lacking in extant literature. Moreover, Olsson (2014) offered that organizations strictly govern upward and downward communication, crisis management plans and centralized leadership, are basically are concerned with reputation protection and control information flow internally as well as externally. On the other hand, organizations that understand dialogue as a way of sharing experience with stakeholders, depend on discussion, decentralization leadership and improvisation are resilience oriented. Table 1 highlight the comparison between external and internal crisis communication style of this organizations.

Provide a clearer picture of the overall trends and paradigm shifts, traditional crisis communication research have put much attention on following procedures, predictions and detail crisis management plans. However, internal crisis communications engage in and promote improvisation during crisis event. Improvisation enables the employees as well as the management to make quick decision, therefore is perceived as the best approach in handling crisis situation (Heide and Simonsson, 2015; Falkheimer, 2014; Heide and Simonsson, 2014; Hiede, 2013; Hiede and Simonsson, 2011). In particular, Hiede and Simonsson (2015) argued that it is easy to get stuck in a detailed plans and standard procedures. In similar vein, Hiede and Simonsson (2014) assert that every crisis is unique therefore organizations should not put much attention on crisis management plan but to be able to improvise.

Although the stage approach has been given attention externally, in particular recent trends have shown criticize this approach of been linear and too simplistic (Frandsen and Johansen, 2011). Meanwhile, they maintain that it can be used as an ad hoc procedure for better understanding of internal crisis communication. During the pre-crisis stage employees scan for warning signals or trigger events within the organization. Meanwhile, during the crisis stage internal crisis communication emphasis on the organizations to engage in improvisation during crisis event (Hiede and Simonsso, 2015; Heide and Simonsson, 2014). In particular, Hiede and Simonsson (2015) argued that it is easy to get stuck in a detailed plans and standard procedures. In similar vein, Hiede and Simonsson (2014) assert that every crisis is unique therefore organizations should not put much attention on crisis management plan but to be able to improvise.

Despite the fact that improvisation can be seen to be flexible and accommodative it does not signify it is a haphazard and spontaneous process (Hiede and Simonsson, 2011), but rather a process that require experience and knowledge as well as flexibility

Table 1: Comparison between external crisis communication and internal crisis communication

Items	External crisis communication	Internal crisis communication
Crisis stages emphasis	Acute stage	All the three stages
Knowledge interest	Finding generalizable law-like results	Broadening the understanding of the intricacy of crisis
Perception of management	Managerialism, plans and checklist	Complexity and improvising
View of communication	Transmission-oriented	Sense making-oriented
Relationship with stakeholders	Asymmetrical	Symmetrical
Perception of crisis	Unattached situation with objective, self-evident meaning	Crisis is a social construction, a perceptual view

and trust among organizational members (Hiede and Simonsson, 2014; Weick, 1998). Thus knowledge and experience comes from the employee who can detect warning signs of crisis appearing at the pre-crisis stage. Moreover, Hiede and Simonsson concluded that post-crisis stage is concern with resilience and organization learning which involves finding out what went wrong and how to prevent similar crisis from occurring. Furthermore, Myer et al., (2007) offered that failure to collect information from internal stakeholders regarding the impact of a crisis may also lead to the disruption of crisis management plan. This as well can affect the speed of recovery from the impact of crisis on the organization. Externally, Falkheimer (2014) offered that we have to improvise as well, since all crisis plans were locked in the office or in the intranet system which we could not access. Everything we have to do have to be in our memory.

In addition, Mazzei and Ravazzani, (2013) develop a model for internal crisis communication strategies identify two important dimensions of internal crisis communication which are largely drawn from psychology literature which include objectives and contents. More specifically, the objective of ICC is seen to have divided into security, belonging and activating behaviors objectives (Myer et al., 1992; Myer et al., 2007). On the other hand, the contents dimension is categories into informative, identification and factual contents (Barrett, 2002; Balle, 2008; Aggerholm, 2008). The set of factors can be explained by the fact that employees have both fear, sadness, anger, sorrow and many other factors which resulted from a crisis.

2.2. Antecedents of Internal Crisis Communication
2.2.1. Organizational culture
Theory of organizational culture offered that culture is a context specific construct due to different norms and values among organizations (Allaire and Firsirotu, 1984). This evidence highlighted that each organization has its own culture which in essence could have influence on the ways organizations react to internal crisis communication. Related to this concern, several scholars have indicated organizational culture as one of the possible antecedent of internal crisis communication (Heide, 2013; Frandsen and Johansen, 2011). More specifically, organizational crisis culture is highlighted to have positive or negative impact in all the stages of organizational crisis life cycle (Frandsen and Johansen, 2011).

The organizational crisis culture entails the process an organization views, recall, make sense of crisis and accept mistakes (Frandsen and Johansen, 2011). In addition, Barney (1990) argued that while some organizations may gain increase employee performance from their organizational culture similar organizations on the other hand can imbibe and develop culture that will enhance performance. Barney (1990) position contradicts other earlier studies position that shows no relationship between organizational performance and organizational culture. In essence, organizational crisis can be prevented with an organizational culture that promote employee sense making. This in turn will affect the performance of employees within the organization Hence, the notion of organizational culture is crucial in getting insight on organizational operations scholars have often emphasis (O'Reilly et al., 1991).

Meanwhile, there is still a debate on what is the accepted definition of the concept, despite the disagreement some basic aspects of the construct scholars seems to agree on indicated that organizational culture involves organizational operational process and shared values, it represents the norms that shapes the attitudes as well as behavior of stakeholders within an organization (Tong et al., 2015; Baumgartner and Zielowski, 2007; Applegate et al., 1999).

Though, the influence of organizational culture has been investigated in relation to other constructs, e.g., organizational culture and performance (Mohamad, 2013; Marcoulides and Heck, 1993; Gordon and DiTomaso, 1992), organizational culture and corporate communication management (Mohamad, 2013; Jo Hatch and Schultz, 1997; Schall, 1983), crisis culture in private organizations (Johansen, et al., 2012). However, empirical evidence on the influence of organizational culture on internal crisis communication is lacking in extant literature. Thus, this study tends to cover this gap by providing empirical evidence of organizational culture as an antecedent to internal crisis communication. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed.
H1: Organizational culture has significant influence on internal crisis communication.

2.2.2. Social media content
The emergence social media and its complexities have brought a new line of research in all aspects of public relations. In particular, stakeholders have become very active participant during crisis due to the presence of social media, which in turn have put new pressure on organization during crisis event (Coombs and Holladay, 2010). The time dimension of crisis, emphasis the demand for quick dissemination of information from stakeholders (Caldiero et al., 2010). Despite the above challenge, social media has provided the opportunity for interaction which makes it realistic for organizations to actualize the ideal symmetric communication (Hiede and Simonsson, 2011). Social media has change crisis communication from traditional one way communication to two way interactions which provide the pathway to communicate with stakeholders directly (White, 2011).

By its nature, social media is a strictly online application that is derived from the technological foundations of Web 2.0, that facilitate the creation and transfer of user generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media comprise of various online applications which are described as social networks (White, 2011). The most popularly known social network sites include Facebook, blogs, twitter, podcast, YouTube which offered crisis communication scholars a new challenge of investigation its impact on stakeholders (Stephens and Malone, 2010). This information technology tools have create an easy channel for organizations to dialogue with their stakeholders at an inexpensive rate with a remarkable speed. By its nature, user generated content is refered to as all the ways individuals make use of social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In addition, such content includes messages, videos, pictures, wall postings, notification, news updates (White, 2011).

Moreover, recent studies have indicated that the use of social media in communication with internal stakeholders has been understudies

(Leonardi et al., 2013). Externally, social media have presented a new challenge for public relations practitioners particularly during crisis. For instance blogs are now seen to serve as source of news for the traditional media, policy makers and customer stakeholders (Anthonissen, 2008). Adding to this concern, Anthonissen (2008) argued that blogs impact stakeholders and government in the same proportion as traditional media. Similarly, Korn and Einwiller in their study find out that immediate reaction even when the news is out on the media, can help employees to feel informed and prepare to respond to external stakeholders and depend their organization. They maintain that internet and intranet can serve as a quick source of communication with employees during crisis.

However, Brown and Billings (2013) posited that social media has change stakeholders from been predominantly receiver seekers of information. The challenge facing crisis managers is how to handle issue raised on social media which has potential of reaching various stakeholders within a second (Coombs, 2008). Similarly, Coombs (2014) assert that there is a branch crisis communication research in information science that is dealing with data collection and analysis. Notably researcher in the field of information sciences is pioneering how to utilize data gathered from social media to help scan for crisis.

Meanwhile, Brown and Billings, (2013) argued that there is existence of division between Coombs and Benoits strategies on social media. Their study has done a significant breakthrough in modern crisis communication research by identifying a new category of active stakeholder that is audience who publicly comment about a crisis. Brown et al. emphasized on the need to explore the different between stakeholders groups. They also suggest for further division between social media components such as twitter, Facebook, Pinterest. Moreover, Schultz, et al. (2011) examine the impact of social media on crisis response strategies, they offered that the medium matters more than the message for instance communication via twitter minimize the negative crisis reaction than blogs.

Despite scholars growing interest in unveiling the impact of social media on crisis communication and crisis management, there is still no clear understanding of the its influence on internal crisis communication. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated.
H2: Social media content has significant influence on internal crisis communication.

2.2.3. Leadership
When it comes to the concept of leadership, it is very hard to dismiss the fact that leadership is a complex construct exposed to subjective interpretation (Bolden, 2004). For instance, some researcher of organizational leadership have put attention on internal element of a leader which include personality and physical traits; other have focused on the relationship between leaders and their subordinates (Hughes, 2006). In the same vein, other researcher have offered harsh critique that organizations success or failure are falsely attributed to a leader, scholars from this viewpoint dismiss the existence of leadership, and they maintain that situation determines the organization function not the leader (Hughes, 2006; Meindl and Ehrlich, 1987). Similarly, Hughes

(2006) offered that leadership is everyone business, this can be linked to postmodern school of thought stand point where the employee will scan for crisis related issues and also improvise when the unexpected has occur. In addition, most scholars readily agree that how the construct of leadership is conceptualized depends on our theoretical stance (Bolden, 2004).

One-way an organization can handle crisis in a logical manner is through effective leadership, organizational leadership is a mutual, collective process rather than a one man show (Hiede and Simonsson, 2011). Leadership is a process in which a group is influenced by an individual to achieve common target (Northouse, 2010). Traditional leadership theories relate to the notion rational processes, while on the other hand, theories of charismatic and transformational leadership stress on values and emotions (Yukl, 1999). The latter theory emphasis on how leaders influence their subordinates in achieving difficult objectives, making self–sacrifices and achieving desired goals (Yukl, 1999). Transformational leader's makes subordinates aware of the importance and value of work and also encourage them to think beyond self-interest as well (Yukl, 1989).

One important benefit of transformational leadership is that it embraces relationship, mutual stimulation and a model that converts followers into leaders and likely converts leaders into moral agents (Bolden, 2004; Burns, 1978). More specifically, transformational leadership style has shifted organizational responsibility from the top to the flat bottom (Bass, 1999). From a postmodern perspective in crisis communication leaders and employees are seen as the same implying they are all co-workers of the organization performing almost similar duty (Heide, 2013; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003). In essence, transformational leadership encourages sense making and sense-giving which are the most important concerns in handling crisis and the pre-crisis stage.

Meanwhile, leadership has been highlighted as one of the key antecedents of internal crisis communication is leadership (Hiede, 2013). Literature and practice in management has shown that successful organization is the outcome of good leadership and the capacity of leaders to make pragmatic decision in the time of chaos (Hiede, 2013). In similar vein, Wooten and James (2004) argued that the success of controlling organizational crisis is directly laying on the leadership attitude that motivates members to actively engage in organizational sense making.

Furthermore, managers in organizations performed different leadership responsibilities in all the crisis stages. For instance, during the pre-crisis stage involves the leader's ability to communicate and scan for warning signals is important because, understanding this abilities helps to predict how leaders will react during crisis (Ulmer, 2012). In a similar study it has been highlighted that leaders show their capabilities by engaging in sense making (Wooten and James, 2008). Similarly in the acute phase, that is when the unforeseen has occurred leaders are expected to mitigate the damage or lessen the severity of the damage using crisis response strategies (Coombs and Holladay, 2002). Moreover, in the post crisis stage plans should be made

for business continuity and organizational leaders should motivate internal stakeholders on organizational learning as well as lessons from the crisis (Wooten and James, 2008).

Another important concern for organizational leaders is crisis types, although Coombs and Holladay (2002) argued that the plethora of crisis types makes it difficult for managers to apply the appropriate crisis response. However they maintain that Situation Crisis Communication Theory offered crisis types and integrate them with appropriate crisis response. Meanwhile, Wooten and James (2008) added another crises category called employee centered crises, which develops as a result of inappropriate or faulty human resource management practice called employees centered crises. For example, employee centered crises include employee strikes, and discrimination lawsuit. Ulmer (2012) supported this position by suggested that several crises happen because they are been ignored, for instance Enron, Penn state university, Citi Bank and others, he argued that many people know about the critical problems in the organizations however, failed to manage the event efficiently.

Similarly, Jamal and Bakar, (2015) investigate the role of charismatic leadership in a crisis situation their findings suggested that in crisis situations a leader should always use both verbal and nonverbal communication strategies in communicating with internal stakeholders. One of the most important practical implications they offered is that leaders should immediately communication with employee during crisis. This in turn helps in mitigating the degree of fear and anger the crisis might have on employees.

Moreover, Ulmer (2001) argues that crisis manager should remember that pre-crisis communication has a significant impact on post crisis communication. He implied that all the communication and relationship building aspect of organization leaders with internal as well as external stakeholders can be perceive as part of crisis preparation which may serve as an important resource for post crisis communication. In addition, Ulmer (2001) noted that there is need to investigate how leaders engage crisis situations and how to produce more effective results. Though, the leadership as a construct has been examine in relation to organizational crisis (Jamal and Bakar, 2015; Foote, 2012; Jaques, 2012; Ulmer, 2001; Hwang and Cameron, 2009; Madera and Smith, 2009; Hwang and Cameron, 2008) however the influence of leadership on internal crisis communication has largely been neglected. Therefore, in line with above argument, the following hypothesis is developed.
H3: Leadership has significant influence on internal crisis communication.

2.3. Consequences of Internal Crisis Communication
Studies have indicated that employees are the pillars of organization and the stability and development of organizations rely on the employees' performance (Khaled and Helmy, 2015). In fact, it has been often argued that a happy employee is a productive employee (Vipul and Srivastava, 2011). More specifically, Griffin et al., (2011) identify the important benefit of understanding the antecedents of performance. Firstly technological transformation has brought about decrease productivity in many powerful

countries while opening window for small nations to perform better. Secondly, Griffin et al., (2011) maintain that further research is needed to discover the antecedents and consequences of employee performance, since recent research trend has shown that managers are interested in understanding the causes and consequences of employee performance. Therefore investigating the determinants of employee performance become significant.

The ability of an organization's top management to entice and improve its human resources as well as promoting culture of commitment will drastically increase employee performance at all level of it operations (Asimakopoulou, 1999). The concept of employee performance refers to what employee has achieved and what they have not achieved (Khaled and Helmy, 2015). Similarly, Salanova et al., (2005) established that the better service climate in a work unit, the better public appraisal of employee performance. Additionally, when employees are given autonomy and freedom to express their opinion and with a good relationship with their senior management, helps create a comfortable working environment which in turn promotes efficiency (Vipul and Srivastava, 2011).

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In addition, several studies have been conducted on the impact of work diversity, such as age, sex, education, social status on employee performance which indicate a contradictory findings (Joseph and Selvaraj, 2015; Zhang and Huai, 2015). Similarly, the main focus of internal crisis communication is on the relationship between employees and the managers. Despites many antecedents to internal crisis communication, literature highlighted that it can have consequences on other variables. One of such variables is employee performance. Asimakopoulou (1999) highlighted a possible link between crisis communication and employee performance. Most of the empirical literature on internal crisis communication relate to organizational performance (Olawale, 2014; Kukule, 2013), in essence it indicated the need for investigation on the extent to which internal crisis communication influence employee performance within an organizations.

Similarly, Meyer et al., (2015) highlight that organizational crisis can serve as an intensifier of the impact faultlines and sub groups on employees' performance. The findings of Meyer et al., (2015) emphasize the usefulness of contextual investigation of the impacts of diversity and subgroups on employee performance. other studies have investigate the relationship between organizational commitment and employee performance. For instance, Cheng and Francesco (2004) study suggested that organization that are less collective oriented should encourage individual organizational commitment in order to improve organizational performance,

while organizations with high collectivist employees collectivist employees should emphasize on raising group performance norms. In addition, several studies have been conducted on the impact of work diversity, such as age, sex, education, social status on employee performance which indicate a contradictory findings (Joseph and Selvaraj, 2015; Zhang and Huai, 2015).

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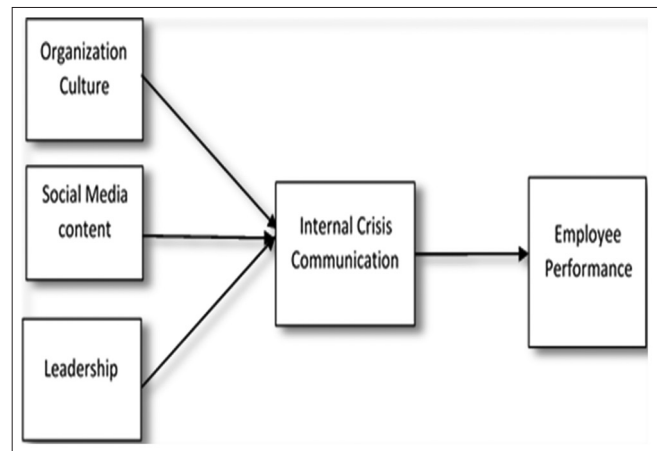H4: Internal crisis communication influence employee performance.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this section we first discuss on the underpinning theory for the study then we subsequently offer a diagram for the proposed framework (Figure 1).

From the above literature review on the antecedent and consequences of internal crisis communication, complexity theory will provide a clear picture of how different variable within organization impact on internal crisis communication complexity theory offers a framework dealing with more complicated view of crises with strong attention on crisis symptoms, scanning for trigger issues that are internal to the organization as well as the relationship with stakeholders in organizational operating environment (Gilpin and Murphy, 2010). In addition, the framework explain the basics to uproot poorly control crises that are common in the society such a corruption in government, management and religious institution. Complexity theory posited that complex systems are highly unpredictable; therefore small changes can produce large consequences. Complexity emphasizes on the genesis of the crisis within the organization, making internal stakeholders the most vital unit of investigation (Heide, 2013). In essence, transformational leadership style that permits bottom-up process of decision making will help in identification of the root cause before the trigger of the crisis.

Moreover, stakeholder theory will provide a clear picture of how different stakeholders within an organization relates with each other as well as how the construct. According to stakeholder theory, different stakeholders have different duty within an organization system, and the amount of attention needed to engage a particular stakeholder group will vary with the issue. Similarly, stakeholder theory identified two type of stakeholder group which include what Lippmann identifies as actors and spectators. The actor groups are problematic and have powerful regard to relevant issue. On

Figure 1: Proposed framework

the other hand, spectator provide supports for the active group, they are likely to have no strong interest to react on issue but will always support the active group. Lipmann identifies employees to be part of active stakeholders in an organization. Hence, this implies that organizations most put employee at the center of their crisis responses during crisis. Since employees have the potential to form active groups and probably get external spectators to support them.

Another theory of concern to this study is situation crisis communication theory which assumes that an organizations reputation, that is how the organization is perceived by its publics, is a valued resource that is threatened by crises (Coombs and Holladay, 2002). Although, many people think that crisis communication is mainly concern with reputational repair, however, it is as well an integral part of stakeholder safety. Stakeholders must know how to protect themselves physically as well as psychologically from crisis before managers consider reputational concerns (Schultz, et al. 2011; Coombs, 2007).

4. METHODOLOGY

The study proposed a survey methodology through employees in a public institutions to enable understanding of their views on antecedents of internal crises communication and how it eventually influences their performance

5. CONCLUSION

The paper proposed a framework for investigating the antecedents (crisis responsibility, social media content, and organization culture) of internal crisis communication and its consequences on employee performance. Therefore, if it is validated it will provide important implication to researchers, policymakers and practitioners, thus, the researcher intents to validate the proposed model.

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