

EXPLORING THE RELEVANCE OF COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN RESOLVING COMMUNICATION CRISES AMONG CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFICERS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: *This article explores the importance of communication management strategies when dealing with communication crises. Efficient communication management is crucial for achieving employee satisfaction. Organisations must employ communication management strategies to ensure that pertinent information is delivered to the correct individuals in a timely manner. The researcher explores the relevance of communication management strategies in resolving communication crises among customer service officers in Malaysia. This study tends to discover the value of communication management strategies during communication crises in Malaysia. Qualitative methods are employed by utilizing in-depth interviews with employees from various services industries in Malaysia. A total of three employees from the several services industries in Malaysia were chosen as the participants. The ATLAS.ti version 24 programme was used to facilitate data management, and Transcribe Application were used to transcribe data and then utilised to standardise communication management practises. The study's results are expected to establish a model for communication management strategies in the services industry's management of communication crises. Organisations can reduce the adverse impacts of communication crises, like staff stress, anxiety, and low morale, by implementing the Communication Management Strategies Model.*

Keywords: *communication, customer service officer, crisis communication, communication management strategies*

Introduction

The implementation of effective strategies for managing communication is of great importance for addressing communication crises in organisations, especially those operating within the financial service sectors (Huang et al., 2023). The financial service business in Malaysia plays a significant role in the country's economy, encompassing a multifaceted structure of diverse organisations and institutions (Bhardwaj et al., 2020). Wade (2019) posits that the occurrence of communication crisis among organisations in the financial service sector can have significant ramifications, potentially undermining the trust of clients and investors.

Generally, all services sectors in Malaysia are prone to experiencing communication crises, which can lead to negative repercussions for organizations and their stakeholders (Ndome, 2023). Nonetheless, despite the importance of effective communication management during crisis situations, there is a lack of understanding and assessment of the value of communication management strategies employed by financial service organizations in Malaysia to handle such communication crises (Hine & Bragias, 2021).

Furthermore, the implementation of efficient communication strategies empowers financial organisations to provide educational resources to their clientele regarding their offerings and services, elucidate alterations in policies, and proficiently handle inquiries and grievances. Additionally, it aids the management team in ensuring that employees are well-informed on the aims of the organisation, efforts related to change management and facilitates the provision of feedback that is essential for making improvements (Galli, 2021). Effective communication is of utmost importance in the contemporary corporate landscape, characterised by its rapid pace. This is particularly true for organisations operating within the financial service industry, as highlighted by Mahbob et al. (2019). In addition, the use of communication management methods is vital for financial institutions in order to effectively transmit pertinent information to appropriate recipients within designated timeframes (Li & Wang, 2018). In the context of a heavily regulated sector, inadequate communication might give rise to legal, financial, and reputational hazards (Kalogiannidis, 2020).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the applicability of a variety of communication management strategies in the context of communication crises that customer service officers in Malaysia may encounter. This study endeavors to offer valuable insights into the strategies that can mitigate the adverse effects of communication failures by examining the applicability of existing frameworks in the Malaysian context. Additionally, the research will assess the efficacy of these strategies in preserving the organization's reputation and improving consumer satisfaction.

The analysis of communication management strategies in this context is not only pertinent but also essential, as the Malaysian market is dynamic, and consumer interactions are becoming increasingly complex. This study will provide practical recommendations for customer service professionals and organizations that are striving to maintain excellence in their service delivery by contributing to a deeper understanding of how communication crises can be effectively managed through a comprehensive review of current practices and strategic approaches.

Literature Review

Introduction to Communication Management

Communication management encompasses all activities that involve planning, executing, monitoring, and controlling an organization's communication resources to achieve specific objectives (Liu et al., 2023). Effective communication management entails identifying key stakeholders and their communication needs, understanding the communication channels that are most effective, developing and implementing communication strategies, and evaluating the effectiveness of those strategies (Chmielecki, 2015). The communicative approach helps us understand the organisation as a social system, as communication is the main activity that ensures the organization's parts work together harmoniously (Volkova, 2019). Therefore, effective communication is the key to any organization's success in reaching its goals. Nonetheless, communication remains one of the most contentious management issues, and the processes underlying its effectiveness are not yet fully understood (Volkova, 2019).

Communication management is a concept that combines both management and communication. It encompasses crisis response regulation, which includes communication and coordination among the community, the government, donors, and non-governmental organisations (Susanto, 2021). The management process includes organising, planning, executing, and evaluating. According to Martineau et al. (2023), the management process consists of four phases: identifying public issues, planning and programming, acting and communicating, and evaluating the programme. These phases describe the measures a government agency will take to address emerging issues. First, the issue must be identified. At this juncture, all difficulties and problems that arise are identified. These specifics facilitate problem resolution.

The Importance of Communication Management Strategies

Every organisation has a unique approach to communication strategy depending on its circumstances and internal adjustments. Nevertheless, not all administrators and organisational leaders are adept at effective communication. It is supported by Ashkenas (2000) who emphasises the importance of effective communication methods within an organisation's structure to achieve its goals and objectives. Mustaffa et al. (2022) emphasised that the duty of public servants is to provide services to customers. Therefore, proficiency in the process of information exchange is evaluated as one factor. Information exchange necessitates the use of communication techniques. Communication strategies assist in identifying the most effective communication tools by presenting ideas and obstacles encountered while pursuing organisational objectives. According to Ophilia and Hidayat (2021), communication strategy is the direction of communication planning and management to achieve a company's specified goals. According to Koo et al. (2022), businesses employ communication methods to attain a predetermined objective.

In addition, organisational managers and leaders rely on communication techniques to improve communication skills, surmount barriers that frequently arise during organisational change, and assist subordinate employees in resolving work-related issues (Downs, 2004). Certain elements must be present, according to Mintzberg (1991), for a strategy to be effectively implemented. These include a clear objective and an understanding of how it will be implemented, the effort and commitment to act, worker concentration, flexible strategies, committed leaders, honest members of the organisation, and a peaceful organisational environment. It is essential for the entire organisation to collaborate to achieve the business's goals. In contrast, Ophilia and Hidayat (2021) emphasise that an organization's communication strategy should include

elements such as communication target identification, situational factors, channel selection, message purpose, the role of communicators in communication, resource attractiveness, and source credibility.

On the other hand, strategic communication contributes positively and directly to the successful completion of all operations, missions, and activities of an organisation by increasing public awareness and comprehension of organisational objectives and mechanisms and, consequently, increasing support among various audiences for specific activities carried out by the organisation (Brindusa, 2019).

Communication in a sense of crisis is a neglected topic in accounting studies (Andon & Free, 2014). Given the severe financial crisis that banks have been experiencing since 2007, this is especially startling. Numerous bank failures, including those of Lehman Brothers, UBS, Barclays, Northern Rock (NR), and Royal Scottish, have received extensive media coverage and demonstrate the need for management and regulators to stabilise crisis conditions. Nonetheless, crisis-related media communications by senior-level managers and financial regulators remain largely unexplored and underanalyzed. During an internal communication crisis, when stakeholders have lost trust in numbers, their perceptions of a particular bank as a "good bank" are questioned. As a result of the "politics of representation" (Liff & Wahlström, 2018), the meaning of communication can never be determined beforehand.

Strategic Employee Communication Model

The Barrett model is one of the most effective models for developing employee-centric strategic communication in a dynamic format. Stoyanova (2011) argues that Barrett's method emphasises communication changes in a few diagnostic areas. Consequently, businesses that employ change communication strategies are able to address the challenges that arise at each level, particularly during the change process and with the correct approach (Klein, 1996). In his methodology, Barrett advocates structured communication to impart fundamental objectives strategically. To assure the effectiveness of strategic communication, it is necessary to tailor the message to a specific audience. Barrett provides two comprehensive factors for effective communication as a result, namely the interaction between strategic objectives and employee-to-employee communication.

The importance of senior and intermediate management who are directly involved and accountable for communication up, down, and across the organisation is one of these factors. Second, the significance of communicating with specific audience information. Barret argues that different communication strategies should be employed for different audiences, that information should be adapted to the audience, and that alternative terms should be used. Assume, for example, that the wording for production and headquarters employees should differ from that of other departments' employees (Mahbob et al., 2019). In addition, Barrett emphasises the significance of selecting and utilising suitable communication instruments. Because not every communication technology is suitable for every employee. Barrett also envisions communication professionals participating in the change management process. This is because the communication staff must "sit at the table" with senior management and participate in decision-making. When lacking a dedicated internal communication manager, an organisation relies on change agents to perform the communication function. However, the present study does not investigate why this aspect of influencing the communication process is so difficult. Barrett concludes by recommending the introduction of formal ongoing evaluation of communication over time. Sustainable tourism as defined by The World Tourism

Organization (UNWTO) is tourism that takes full account of current and future economic, social and environmental impacts.

Methodology

The aim of this qualitative research is to investigate the effectiveness and importance of communication management strategies in addressing communication crises among customer service officers in Malaysia. The study utilizes a qualitative methodology to acquire a comprehensive comprehension of the practices, challenges, and perceptions associated with crisis communication in this particular context. The research design, data acquisition methods, and data analysis procedures employed in this study are delineated in the subsequent sections. As part of this research, the researcher implemented in-depth interviews in person. The research questions served as the framework for these interviews. The researcher devised a series of questions for the participants to respond to, each of which could potentially address the research questions and objectives of the study. In order to guarantee equivalent findings, it is common for each participant to be asked identically phrased questions during the majority of structured interviews (Rust et al., 2017). The interviewer's function is to collect data in a cheerful manner, which entails facilitating the relaxation of the interviewees to enable them to provide a comprehensive response to the predetermined series of questions (Rust et al., 2017). The researcher can also gain a more profound understanding by observing changes in vocabulary selection, body language, and nuances and conducting in-depth interviews. The participants in this research are exposed to the working environment in the financial services sector and are responsible for serving customers. Each participant has a distinctive upbringing, as evidenced by their work experience as customer service officers in the Malaysian financial services sector.

The research is directed at customer service personnel employed in a variety of sectors in Malaysia, such as retail, telecommunications, and financial services. A purposive sampling technique is employed to identify participants who have direct experience with communication crises and possess pertinent knowledge regarding communication management strategies. Selection criteria encompass on criterion-based of sample selection:

Participants Criteria	
1.	A minimum of three years of experience in customer service positions.
2.	Proven track record of managing at least one substantial communication crisis.
3.	A willingness to engage in in-depth interviews.

Diversification in terms of industry, organizational size, and geographic location within Malaysia is guaranteed by the final sample of 5 customer service officers.

The data collection process involves semi-structured interviews, which enable the exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives with greater flexibility and depth. The interview protocol is used to guide the interviews, which include open-ended inquiries that are intended to elicit detailed responses about:

- I. The types and nature of communication crises that are encountered.
- II. Strategies implemented to mitigate and resolve these crises.
- III. Perceptions regarding the efficacy of these strategies.
- IV. Obstacles and obstacles encountered during the execution of communication management strategies.
- V. Interviews are conducted either in person or through video conferencing platforms, contingent upon the availability and preferences of the participants. In order to

guarantee precise data acquisition, each interview is audio-recorded with the participants' assent and lasts between 45 and 60 minutes.

Discussion

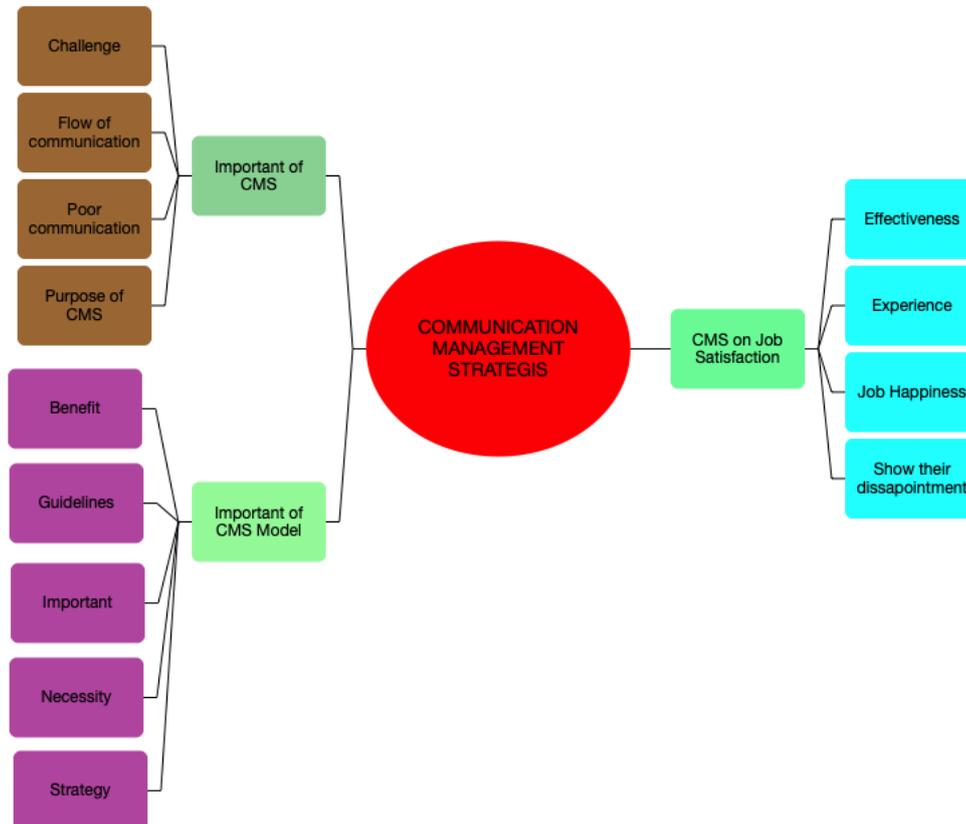


Figure 1.0: Findings of the Study

The analysis of the qualitative data reveals a number of key themes and insights that are relevant and effective in the context of the communication management strategies that customer service officers in Malaysia employ. The results are categorized into thirteen primary themes: challenges, communication flow, poor communication, purpose of communication management strategies, benefits, guidelines, importance, necessity, strategy, effectiveness, experience, job satisfaction, show disappointment.

The research question focuses on the analysis of communication management methods that develop among customer service officers in Malaysia. The results indicated that customer service officers who implement proactive communication strategies, such as anticipating potential issues and resolving them before they escalate, are more effective in resolving crises than those who follow a reactive approach (Mensah, 2024).

The results indicated that customer service officers who implement proactive communication strategies, such as anticipating potential issues and resolving them before they escalate, are more effective in resolving crises than those who follow a reactive approach (Sameera & Hussain, 2022). The study revealed significant gaps in the training offered to customer service personnel, including in domains such as crisis communication, cultural proficiency, and emotional intelligence (Dale, 2023). Furthermore, the results indicated that continuous

professional growth and enhancement of skills are essential for customer service officers to maintain their effectiveness in handling communication crises (Budhiraja & Rathi, 2023).

The research indicates that effective communication management strategies are essential for resolving communication crises among customer service officers in Malaysia. Successful crisis resolution necessitates proactive communication, well-defined crisis management strategies, and continuous training. Nevertheless, the efficacy of these strategies must be improved by addressing obstacles such as resource constraints, organizational culture, and inconsistent communication. Organizations can enhance their crisis management capabilities and provide superior customer service by incorporating best practices, such as standardized procedures, empathy, feedback mechanisms, and digital tools.

Conclusion

The critical significance of effective communication management strategies in resolving communication crises among customer service officers in Malaysia has been emphasized by this study. The research results indicate that customer service officers' capacity to effectively manage and resolve crises is considerably improved by the implementation of well-structured and culturally sensitive communication strategies. The research emphasizes that successful communication management necessitates the integration of technology, ongoing professional development, and an understanding of local cultural dynamics. Companies that prioritize these strategies are more capable of enhancing operational efficiency, reducing the impact of crises, and maintaining positive customer relations. Furthermore, the research recommends that organizations allocate resources to customized training programs that provide customer service teams with the requisite skills and resources to effectively address a variety of communication obstacles. This method not only benefits the organization by fostering client loyalty but also improves the professional capabilities of the customer service officers.

In conclusion, the research provides valuable insights into the role of communication management in the Malaysian customer service sector, providing practical recommendations for both practitioners and policymakers to enhance crisis resolution processes and, ultimately, customer satisfaction.

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Authors' Contribution

The main author and corresponding author was Nurbarirah Ahmad. Tengku Elena Tengku Mahamad was responsible for the revision of the most recent literature and past studies. In conjunction with Shereen Noranee, Muhammad Hakimi Tew Abdullah was responsible for data collection, data administration, and data analysis. Siti Rosnita Sakarji contributed critical feedback and assisted in the development of the research, analysis, and manuscript.

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