AN ANALYSIS OF SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT CRISIS COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Public security and safety remain a fundamental responsibility of governments across the globe. Government officials who work to serve their publics, such as law and policy makers, have a core duty to protect all stakeholders and citizens from various crises, natural or man-made. Consequently, this research has identified a need for a critical analysis of South African government crisis communication with a focus on two recent crises to determine its effectiveness as a key component in the principle of good governance. The research adopted a qualitative research design method using secondary data. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. Multiple documents such as official government documents, policies, reports and journal articles concerning the subject of government communication and crisis communication were analysed to examine the roles and responsibilities of government communication in South Africa, its policies and guidelines during a crisis and understand the implementation of the policies and guidelines during specific crisis situations. The research found that during a crisis, the South African government communication policies and guidelines play a crucial role in the provision of credible information to the public, however, there is cause for concern regarding the effectiveness of the implementation of government communication in response to the two specific crises analyzed in the research.

Keywords: Government Communication; Crisis Communication; Good Governance.

JEL Classification: D83; H12; M38

INTRODUCTION

The South African government identified communication as a cornerstone of the country's success and democracy and as a result, has developed policies and guidelines through its official documents to support it. This is established by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act of 108 of 1996) in terms of Section 16 and Section 32 which communicate the rights of freedom of expression, the press, and other media; and the right to receive and impart information, and the right to access to information held by the state (South Africa, Department of Justice and Constitutional Development 1996).

Furthermore, detailed consideration was assigned to communication through the Comtask Report which established pre-emptive solutions for effective communication and made recommendations for the new government communication system that led to the establishment of the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS).

John, Maama, Ojogiwa, and Mubangizi (2022) report that government communication is a crucial coordination vehicle in ensuring that citizens are kept informed and government decisions are explained. Moreover, government communication is considered a fundamental aspect of the country's success and democracy. The importance of the concept rationalises an

avenue for its analysis, especially during a crisis. Wasserman and Hyde-Clarke (2016, p.252) believe that the relationship between the government, the media, and the society in South Africa is in a crisis itself, as the public has lost trust in the government due to its inability to provide free-flowing reliable information, particularly in times of a crisis. According to the GCIS (2018, p.7), "government communication is driven by democratic principles of openness and participation and is guided by the basic principles of transparency, accountability, and consultation".

The GCIS moreover, articulates development communication which emphasizes the need for government to involve the public through communication in activities that impacts their lives to enable them to make sound judgments about their livelihoods. Subsequently, with regards to communication during a crisis, the policies encourage firstly, the avoidance of a crisis as a proactive approach and then secondly immediate, accurate, and continuous communication and availability of information if a crisis has occurred.

Ramluckan (2016, p.10) asserts that one of the government's key responsibilities is to maintain public safety and security. It is now the responsibility of legislators and policymakers in public administrations to safeguard stakeholders and residents against many kinds of disasters, whether they are natural or man-made. Consequently, this research has identified a need for a critical analysis of South African government communication during a crisis as the means of responding to its administrative responsibilities of accountability, transparency, consultation, and public participation.

Wasserman and Hyde-Clarke (2016, p.252) argue that the South African government's communication lacks sound policies that would steer the country through a crisis. The contextual perceptive of this research was therefore to analyze key documents as a benchmark of government communication particularly in a crisis, and furthermore scrutinise the implementation of the proposed policies, guidelines and procedures by analysing two specific crisis situations.

Crisis and Government Communication

Sanjeev, Neerja, and Santhosh (2021, p.2 cited in Argenti, 2013) explain that "a crisis is a major catastrophe that may occur either naturally or due to human error intervention or malicious intent". Coppola (2020, p.13) considers that a crisis is an event that significantly threatens the future and the functioning of a system, causing negative outcomes and requiring mindful attention from management. Both descriptions highlight the negative impact of a crisis in the form of a "major catastrophe" and "a significant threat" and acknowledge the fact that it requires instant intervention. Therefore, Britton (2023, p.35) maintains that "crisis communication refers to the technologies, systems, and protocols that enable an organisation to effectively communicate during a major threat to its business or reputation". In addition, Coppola (2020, p.13 cited in Coombs and Holladay 2012) acknowledges that while it is unpredictable, a crisis can be forecasted and that organisations should always anticipate these events in order to be prepared.

All countries need an administrative system that will oversee their operations and their governance. Government communication, therefore, form a critical constituent in this system. A notable idea in the description of government is it is referred to as a political unit or a system. This signifies its linkage to politics and systematic functions. Nevertheless, the systems and political units that govern countries differ in their design and strategic procedures. In this case, the South African governing system and political unit is that of a democracy.

Ramluckan (2016, p.10) explains that accountability, transparency, responsiveness, participation, effectiveness, efficiency, equity, and inclusivity are the essential elements of good governance, which encompasses interactions between government administrative domains and other sectors as well as the general public. These attributes apply to corporate, international, national, and local levels. This system of democracy and good governance, consequently, has its distinctive values (sometimes rooted in politics) and elements that drive the functioning and effective exercise of these values.

To indicate some of the core functions of government communication; John, Maama, Ojogiwa, and Mubangizi (2022, p.2) explain government communication as an important system used to keep citizens informed and explain government decisions. To emphasize the role of government communication between the government and the public, Pasquier (2012) indicates that government communication entails all actions taken by public sector institutions and organisations with the primary goal of disseminating information in order to present and justify government decisions and actions, support the legitimacy of these actions, uphold established values, and support social cohesion. Government communication thus also has a liability to build and maintain strong relationships with the governed. Coppola (2020, p.5) asserts that communication is essential in building any form of interpersonal relationships, whether private, economic, or political, and that relationships would not be possible in the absence of communication to mediate exchanges.

Government communication and trust are very crucial in democratic governance and for the purposes of crisis management. The proper implementation of policies and values guiding government communication can have an impact on the relationship between the government and the public and can determine the level of trust between the two. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)/Korea Development Institute (KDI) (2018, p.3) citizens' trust in public institutions is strongly influenced by how these institutions perform in terms of competence and values, and it is a vital public policy outcome".

This indicates the idea that the trust and the relationship between the government and its people are determined by the competence of the government in implementing its policies and doing justice to its values. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2018, p.137) revealed that "the growing body of public administration literature on governance makes it clear that to resolve complex 21st-century governance problems, government leaders need to build partnerships with citizens and communities and work collaboratively". The South African government should not operate in silos but collaborate and build partnerships with its citizens through communication which essentially forms the essence of government communication.

Key South African Communication Documents

This research focused on an analysis of three key documents namely: (i) The South African Constitution, (ii) The Comtask Report, and (iii) the Government Communication and Information Systems policies, and guidelines to understand the roles, and responsibilities of government communication in South Africa; examine the South African government's communication policies and guidelines during a crisis and analyze the implementation of communication policies and guidelines during specific crises situations.

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa No. 108 Of 1996

In its efforts to fix the injustices of the apartheid government, the advent of democracy in South Africa swore on a new dawn, that is a system and political unit of governance that was going to recognise every citizen in the country and afford them equal rights and opportunities including effective government communication through the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. According to the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (1996), the Constitution is "the supreme law of our country.

It provides the legal foundation for the existence of the Republic, sets out the rights and duties of its citizens, and defines the structure of the Government. It has been called the 'birth certificate' of a free and democratic South Africa". This ascertains the Constitution as the guiding principle of government and citizens' existence in the country. It is, therefore, essential to embrace the Constitution in all areas of human and institutional interactions plus government communication, and thereafter abide by it.

The specific rights concerning communication are found in section 16 of chapter 2 of the Constitution which features the freedom of expression. Among the rights conveyed in this section are "(a) freedom of the press and other media; (b) freedom to receive or impart information or ideas; (e) freedom of artistic creativity; and (d) academic freedom and freedom of scientific research," (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 1996, p.1249). These rights give grounds for citizens to express themselves and receive information which is more or less the basic concept of communication.

Nevertheless, these rights have their own responsibilities and those are that "the right does not extend to (a) propaganda for war; (b) incitement of imminent violence; or (c) advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender, or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm" (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development,1996, p.1249).

The responsibilities are guides intended to prevent the abuse of the rights which can eventually lead to negative outcomes. In the exchanges between the government and the public, there are chances of one party being disappointed by the other. Subsequently, the Constitution made provisions for the expression of disappointments in its Section 17 stating that "everyone has the right, peacefully and unarmed, to assemble, to demonstrate, to picket and to present petitions," (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development,1996, p.1249). In its provisions, the Department of Justice, and Constitutional Development (1996) clearly states that any demonstration should be peaceful, and demonstrators should be unarmed, this is to

avoid any damage that may occur because of the action. It is, therefore, the government's responsibility to ensure that the citizens are well aware not only of their rights but the responsibilities that come with them.

The government can only do that by practicing the constitutional values of accountability, responsiveness, and openness. In addition, section 32 of the Constitution made provisions for the access of information saying, "everyone has the right of access to (a) any information held by the state; and (b) any information that is held by another person and that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights" (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (1996, p.1257).

Apart from the government's responsibility to disclose information to the public, this section of the constitution also advocates for a two-way form of communication consistent with the values (accountability, responsiveness, and openness) of the Constitution. Government communication like any other aspect of any organisation sometimes face its biggest challenges and crises are usually the communications department's biggest challenge. The Constitution plays a vital role in the context of this research as it lays down the laws and rights as to what information the public is entitled to which extends to their responsibilities with those rights. It also narrates how the government should act in accordance with the values of accountability, responsiveness, and openness which extends to its conduct during a crisis.

Communication 2000: The Comtask Report

Considering the lack of progressive values and inclusive governance during the apartheid era, the South African government made efforts to improve the state of government communication and communication in its entirety in the country. These efforts were accustomed to the country's Constitution and its values of accountability, responsiveness, and openness.

According to the Government Communications Final Report also known as The Comtask report or Task Group report (GCIS, 2000), the country's leadership at the time, Deputy President Mr. Thabo Mbeki, formulated a task group to examine the state of South African government communication and make recommendations to improve its condition as the means of affording all its citizens equal rights and opportunities and a better understanding of the government's decisions that impacts the development of the country and their lives and livelihoods.

The GCIS (2000, p.5) described this proposal as "a new communication system (that) is an economic and political imperative for the "information age". Its purpose was to provide a network throughout the country which provides every citizen with the information required to live and to control their lives. The task group made several substantial recommendations, however, "the centre point of the task group's recommendations is the establishment of a Government Communication and Information System (GCIS)" (GCIS, 2000, p.7).

The task group acknowledged that the then (apartheid) state of government communication had no inclusivity and disregarded the public in the country's affairs and had no significant communication in case of a crisis and made recommendations to improve it by implementing

the Department of Government and Information System. The GCIS (2000, p. 47) maintains that "the ultimate goal of the Task Group's vision is the creation of a communication and information system tailored to meet the demands of the broader democratic human rights environment within the particular needs and constraints of the South African context".

Government Communication Policy Approved by Cabinet: 22 August 2018 (GCIS's Blueprint into Government Communication)

The Government Communication Policy document is one of many policies that have been produced by the GCIS on government communications over the years, however, this edition serves as the blueprint of their operations and entails detailed information on how government communicators and communications departments should function and handle crises. GCIS (2018, p.7) explains that "as the custodian of government communications, the GCIS has drafted this communication policy to strengthen government communications so as to deliver on its mandate. This is in line with a developmental communication approach adopted by the government."

The developmental communication approach is critical in advancing the lives of the citizens through the provision of socio-economic and developmental information. Giving the citizens such information makes them knowledgeable about the country's affairs and influences their decision-making. This communication policy strives for the advancement of the people and "is driven by democratic principles of openness and participation and is guided by the basic principles of transparency, accountability, consultation" (GCIS, 2018, p.7). The principles guiding this policy are consistent with those of the Constitution and, therefore are in line with the laws of the Republic. Their aim is to "provide the public with timely, accurate and clear information about government policies, programmes, plans, services and initiatives in a non-partisan way, thus making it accountable to the public it serves" (GCIS, 2018, p. 8).

Unlike the apartheid regime, the government communication function is now mapped and shaped to practice fairness and integrity, but having strict and specific policies does not always guarantee success. While South Africa has progressive and developmental policies for government communication and crisis communication management this does not necessarily mean that government communication is always effective, especially when handling a crisis situation. According to the GCIS (2018, p.38), "all government institutions must strive to avoid a crisis. This requires that political principals and accounting officers remain in touch with citizens, assess public mood, and conduct research/activities that might help to avert a crisis". The public's trust and confidence are crucial in times of crisis and therefore, an immediate intervention is needed during a crisis, one that shows leadership and the capacity to restore the public's trust and confidence in the government (GCIS, 2018, p.38). Following the pronouncement of a crisis, the government should then create a communication crisis committee, and formulate a crisis management plan and a communication strategy that is aligned to this. Precise planning will help the process to be seamless and avoid chaos in the distribution of information about the crisis.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a qualitative research design, using thematic analysis to interpret secondary data. Purposive sampling was used to collect data from databases, namely, Google Scholar, EBSCO, ResearchGate, South African Department of Justice and Constitutional Development and the South African Department of Government Communications and Information System. Data was collected within a timeframe of post-1996 to accommodate the South African Constitution and the Task Group Report and focused on crisis communication response and management within the South African context. Three major crises emerged from initial findings, however, this paper focused on an analysis of two of these crises (Covid-19 pandemic and the 2021 July Unrest) due to their recent occurrences (within the last five years).

Thematic analysis was used with the purpose of studying, interpreting, and analysing the rich data related to SA government communication during a crisis. Data analysis was conducted in an ongoing and exploratory design as this research aimed to uncover common themes by adopting the strategy outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87); (i) familiarisation with the data: transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, and noting down initial ideas; (ii) generating initial codes: coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code, (iii) searching for themes: collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme, (iv) reviewing themes: checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis, (v) defining and naming themes: ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme; (vi) producing the report: the final opportunity for analysis by selection of compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature and producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Authenticity is a critical element in secondary data analysis, specifically documentary research. Mogalakwe (2009, p.52) explains that authenticity refers to whether the evidence is authentic and comes from a trustworthy source. In any research project, the primary requirement is the authenticity of the data being analyzed. As a result, the researcher has an obligation to make sure the document they are consulting is authentic and trustworthy. This research fulfilled its responsibility of ensuring that the data used in the research is authentic by gathering the data from credible and verified sources.

RESULTS

Table 1 below outlines the coding system and the preliminary emergent themes from the thematic analysis.

Table 1: Preliminary Emergent Themes

Article Code	Document Title	Document Type	Codes	Code Extract	Theme
A1	Report of The Expert Panel into the July 2021 Civil Unrest	Government Report	Inconsistent response	"It is very clear that different government leaders had different interpretations of what was unfolding, and that this resulted in a poorly coordinated response, at various levels."	Contradictory leadership
			Confused Leadership	"Ministers differed with each other, and as we learned from the submissions, there were differences between some Ministers and the officials reporting to them. Some of this played out publicly and was reported in the media."	Failure to avoid a crisis
			Wilful Blindness	"NICOC constantly warned about the dangers posed to the security of the State by not attending to these challenges. Add to that the dangers posed by neglecting human security. However, it appeared that not many members of the Executive, at all levels of government, appreciated the meaning of the warnings raised in the different NICOC reports, and accordingly largely ignored them".	
A2	Marikana Commission of Inquiry: Report on Matters of Public, National and International Concern Arising out of the Tragic Incidents at the Lonmin Mine in Marikana, in the North West Province	Government Report	Deliberate Manipulation of information	"The statement issued to the public was materially misleading because it created the impression that there had been only one shooting incident, which led to the deaths of the strikers".	No credibility
				"Brigadier Calitz clearly did not want members of the media to record what he said. He instructed police officials to take a camera from a member of the media".	Political Interference
				"The report which had been prepared for the President and the Minister was deliberately amended when it was reformulated into a media statement in order to obscure the fact that there had been two shooting incidents, separate in time and space".	No credibility
A3	South Africa Covid-19 Country Report: June 2021	Government Report	Positive Communication effort	"A Crisis Communication Plan was developed, and the Department of Health was tasked with ensuring that the messaging from the government would be coherent, credible, and reliable".	Guided Response

				"The World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Pan American Health Organisation, and the International Federation of the Red Cross provided various guidelines for risk communication in the pandemic".	
A4	Update by President Cyril Ramaphosa on the security situation in the country	President's Address to the Nation, 16 July 2021.	Ill-advised communication	"It is clear now that the events of the past week were nothing less than a deliberate, coordinated, and well-planned attack on our democracy".	No credibility
A5	Evaluating South African and Namibian governments' use of digital media during Covid-19	Journal Article	One-way communication	"The daily updates of this information led to citizens experiencing a disconnect that these numbers were human beings and lost the human touch of empathy. This lack of human touch extended to the analysis of how governments shared information with limited engagement and developed regulations that left limited room for people to understand how to continue in human nature but limiting their potential exposure to the virus"	Lack of communication and interaction.
A6	The impact of Covid-19 on South Africa's Political Landscape	Online News Article	Situational response	"For years, South Africa has been a country of political disparities, the divide between the 'left' and the 'right' has been widely reported to highlight the divergent political views held by different political establishments. Somehow in the midst of this global pandemic, South Africans witnessed solidarity and collaboration across party and ideological lines. One may be tempted to speculate that this may be because there was no one to blame for COVID-19, and if there is no ANC to blame, working together with the ANC government became more tolerable".	Political interference
A7	Marikana has shown how poor communication can be a killer	Online News Article	Miscommunication	"One thing was abundantly clear to me when I looked at the tragedy of what is now being called "The Marikana Massacre" and that is everyone from the mine management to the police, government, and the miners themselves, failed hopelessly when it came to communicating with each other".	Lack of communication and interaction

Source: Own research

Discussion of Themes

Following the preliminary identification of themes, the themes were further reviewed and three final themes are identified: (i) Failure to avoid a crisis; (ii) No communication plan; (iii) Lack of communication. The discussion references government crisis communication policies and documents to examine their implementation through an analysis of two recent (within the last five years) major South African crises, specifically; the 2021 July Unrest and the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Failure to Avoid a Crisis

The very first step of action in crisis communication is the initial attempt by an organisation to avoid or prevent all possible crises from occurring. According to GCIS (2018, p.38) the goal of all government agencies must be to prevent a crisis. In order to do this, political leaders and accounting officers must stay in contact with the public, gauge their attitude, and carry out any research or crisis-averting initiatives.

(a) 2021 July Unrest

The 2021 July Unrest which resulted in the death of over 354 people, a lot of infrastructure destroyed, and some burnt down in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and Gauteng was one of the worst crises South Africa has seen post-apartheid (Africa, Sokupa, and Gumbi, 2021, p.35). As part of its fundamental duties, government had an obligation to anticipate, prevent, limit, and manage a crisis as per its democratic mandate. Considering the repercussions of the 2021 July Unrest, it is evident that government communication was not optimised to manage the crisis. This could be attributed to many factors notably, the availability of policies designed to guide the government in its crisis communication and the security intelligence that would alert relevant authorities including government communication of an imminent threat of a crisis. However, government communication policies for crisis communication exist and there were intelligence warnings prior to the unrest.

According to Africa, Sokupa, and Gumbi (2021, p.37), the National Intelligence Coordination Committee (NICOC) issued repeated alerts against the threats to state security caused by neglecting the challenges and dangers associated with human security. Nonetheless, it seemed that not many Executive officials, across all tiers of government, understood the significance of the warnings brought forward in the various NICOC reports, and as a result, they were mainly disregarded. The disregard of these warnings resulted in a failure to avoid the crisis and the subsequent un-optimised response to the situation. The NICOC report was given to various state security agencies and included information about the looming incarceration of the former President Jacob Zuma (which sparked the 2021 July Unrest) as a cause for concern for government.

(b) The Covid-19 Pandemic

The government communication response to the Covid-19 pandemic was different from the previous two crises discussed in that it was much better coordinated. This is largely because South Africa had already been informed prior to the crisis entering the country after the World

Health Organization (WHO) announced coronavirus a public health emergency of international concern on 30 January 2020 and instructed that all governments in the world prepare to deal with this crisis. According to Della, Garman, Adjin-Tettey, Diale, Hyera, Bukula, Halse, Petersen, Bombi, Kleyn, (2021, p. 178) guidelines for risk communication during the pandemic were provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Pan American Health Organization, and the International Federation of the Red Cross. These guidelines played a significant role in the South African government communication's preparedness in responding to the crisis. Subsequently, "a Crisis Communication Plan was developed, and the Department of Health was tasked with ensuring that the messaging from the government would be coherent, credible, and reliable" (Della et al, 2022, p 176).

No Communication Plan

Following the failure to anticipate, prevent, or limit a crisis there should be means to deal with or manage a crisis. The policy on government communication states that after the identification of a crisis, every institution is required to create a Communication Crisis Committee, develop a crisis management plan, and create a communication strategy that is in line with this plan (GCIS, 2018, p.38). This helps in constructing a coordinated effort in communicating a particular crisis.

(a) 2021 July Unrest

Africa, Sokupa, and Gumbi (2021, p.48) found that "different government leaders had different interpretations of what was unfolding, and that this resulted in a poorly coordinated response, at various levels". The poorly coordinated response could perhaps be attributed to the absence of a proper and strategic communication plan which resulted in the contradiction of messages from leadership given to the public and the media. Among the political interactions that caused the violence, Africa, Sokupa, and Gumbi (2021, p.38) pointed out that the submissions they received through the expert panel report from members of the executives and senior officials from security services cited the former President Jacob Zuma's rejection of the decisions made by the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture (Zondo Commission) as a major factor in the build-up to the unrest and his eventual arrest the biggest contributor to the crisis.

The government communication policies encourage coordination from the government in response to a crisis in national, provincial, and local government through the GCIS. Despite this, Africa, Sokupa, and Gumbi (2021) found that the government alerted the GCIS to form a crisis communication plan too late; when the damage was already done and this explains the lack of response from the police and lack of communication from government officials.

(b) The Covid-19 Pandemic

Government communication during the COVID-19 crisis was fairly positive due to the communication strategy or plan guided by WHO and other relevant organisations which ensured accountability and transparency. Nonetheless, it still lacked the principle of

consultation and engagement in its strategies, especially on social media platforms (Sitto et al, 2022). According to (GCIS, 2018, p.36) "each government entity is expected to respond to positive or negative engagement via their social media accounts". This, however, seems to have not been the case during Covid-19. In the findings of their research, Sitto, Lubinga, Chiumbu, Sobane, and Mpofu (2022) gathered that government communication was missing a human touch as their only disseminated statistics and number of people who have died from the virus and those who have been infected. Sitto, Lubinga, Chiumbu, Sobane, and Mpofu (2022, p.336) believe that the public lost the human touch of empathy as a result of the information's regular updates, making them forget that these figures were actual people. This response resulted in the analysis of how governments disseminated information with little interaction with the its citizens. Sitto, Lubinga, Chiumbu, Sobane, and Mpofu (2022, p.334) also state "that the governments simply copied what governments in other parts of the world did, without tailoring it for the local contexts". This prevented the much-needed comprehensive response that equally engages every South African individual regardless of social standing and geographic location.

Ineffective Communication

In relation to government communication the GCIS (2018, p.7) stresses in its policies that effective communication has a constructive contribution to government endeavours. The essence of the effectiveness includes "communicating facts quickly, accurately and be open and accessible to all audiences, although mindful of confidentiality, and legal and privacy considerations" (GCIS, 2018, p.7).

(a) 2021 July Unrest

In its policies concerning crisis communication GCIS (2018, p.38) mentions that "effective communication management in a time of crisis and/or emergency provides an opportunity for government to show leadership and for the institution to maintain or restore the public's confidence". According to Africa, Sokupa, and Gumbi (2021) communication by different strictures of government in the 2021 July Unrest was clouded by conflicting priorities and political interference which prohibited the exercise of the principles of transparency, accountability, and consultation which are the essence of effective communication.

(b) The Covid-19 Pandemic

The communications response to the Covid-19 pandemic was genuinely impactful and significant as various government structures made significant strides in the flow and availability of information, however, there were a few shortfalls that through a proper implementation of the GCIS's communication policies could have been improved. These shortfalls were a reactive response strategy and a lack of engagement with the public when giving out information, especially in the digital spaces, particularly social media and the internet (Sitto et al, 2022). The ineffectiveness regarding engagement was also prevalent during President Cyril Ramaphosa's frequent addresses to the nation where the President would address the nation by giving out directives without any opportunity for engagement disabling a two-way communication which is encouraged by GCIS's policies in a crisis.

Citizens began to lose the human touch of empathy as a result of the daily updates in the form of the President's addresses, making them forget that these statistics were human beings. The examination of how the government disseminated information with little participation and created laws that limited people's ability to comprehend how to live as human beings while lowering their risk of contracting the virus also demonstrated this lack of human touch (Sitto et al, 2022). The effectiveness of digital communication and its responsiveness is also questioned in the use of short mobile service (SMS) messages. The SMS line of communication also developed a lack of trust in government communication and encouraged infodemics. As a result, this fuelled the spread of misleading and harmful information and contributed to the public's resistance to government communication (Sitto et al, 2022)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research has revealed that the primary function of the South African government communication policies and guidelines during a crisis is to provide the free flow of credible information, timelessly and consistently in line with the principles of transparency, accountability, and consultation. Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Investment in solid intelligence and national security structures to gather Intel that would help anticipate a crisis.

2. Improvement of the implementation of government communications policies.

3. Improvement in the coordination between different structures of government including national, provincial, and local.

The South African government communication has all the tools to carry out its duties at a maximum capacity and ensure the practice of the principles of transparency, accountability, and consultation. However, there seems to be a lack of implementation of the government and crisis communication policies, and that prevents all government communications personnel including top government and political officials from providing prompt, accurate, and consistent responses to the country's affairs.

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