“INFLUENCES OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLANS ON STAKEHOLDERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATION’S PREPAREDNESS FOR TERROR CRISIS: A CASE STUDY OF DAYSTAR UNIVERSITY”

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Background of the study

Over the years, terrorism has been on the rise claiming thousands to millions of lives both locally and globally. For this study, terrorism is defined as the use of violence as a method of combat with political aims and motives designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target (Laqueur, 1999; Hoffman, 2006).

According to the Global Terrorism Index (2015), the year 2014 recorded the largest ever global year-on-year increase in deaths from terrorism; rising from 18,111 in 2013 to 32,685 in 2014.

500 terror related deaths had occurred in eleven countries in 2014 alone compared to 2013 where only five countries did. Eighty-seven countries experienced a terrorist incident in 2013; slightly up from eighty-one in 2012 (GTI, 2014).
Kenya has not been spared by terrorists in light of escalating number of fatalities and injuries resulting from terror attacks globally. While terrorist attacks in Kenya date as far back as the 70’s, some of the most traumatic terror attacks occurred in the 90’s and 2000’s.

According to a 2015 report by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), between 1970 and 2014 there were more than 440 terrorist attacks in Kenya.

These attacks killed more than 1,400 people and wounded more than 5,800 others. The study further suggests that more than half of the terrorist attacks in Kenya were concentrated in six cities: Nairobi (76 attacks), Garissa (53 attacks), Mandera (50 attacks), Mombasa (27 attacks), Wajir (23 attacks), and Dadaab (17 attacks).
On **August 7, 1998**, the U.S. embassy in Nairobi Kenya suffered its worst terror attack. In the aftermath of the attack, **218 people were declared dead, over 5000 injured** and property worth billions of Kenyan shillings destroyed (Lagat, 2014).

The Westgate shopping mall terror attack that occurred on **21 September 2013** was also considered one of the worst terror attacks in Kenya. The attack carried out by the Al- Shabaab militia led to the death of **72 people** and **over 201 others got injured** (GTI, 2014).

Terrorists have gradually changed their tactics from attacking organizations to schools, churches and the transport sector. On **Thursday April 2, 2015**, Garissa University College was under terror attack where **147 students were killed and 79 others injured** (START, 2015). According to a study by Eboi (2015), the GUC attack exposed gaps in the government security apparatus related to gaps in a clear communication strategy by the government.
Statement of the problem

- Previously, terror attacks were targeted at organizations that host international guests, investors and tourists. Such organizations include hotels, airports and shopping malls frequented by foreigners. In the recent past terrorists seem to have changed tact by targeting institutions of higher learning which have become soft targets for the terrorists. This is evidenced by the GUC terror attack in Aril 2015 which left 147 students dead and left over 79 others injured (CNN, 2015).

- Many institutions of higher learning have now been on red alert following the GUC terror attack. However, recent incidences of failed terror drills and unprecedented reaction to terror scare by students reveal that University students may be ill prepared for terror crisis. For instance in November 2015, Strathmore University terror drill went terribly wrong leaving one person dead and 30 more injured (Independent, 2015).
On April 12, 2015, one student from the University of Nairobi was killed and 141 injured during a stampede when students mistook explosions from a faulty electrical transformer for a terror attack (Khalimwa, 2015).

In March 2016, at least 20 students from Moi University were injured when they jumped off their hostel room windows following an explosion mistaken for a terror attack (Nairobi News, 2016). A terror scare at Kenyatta University led to similar results in March 2016. At least 38 students and staff suffered arm and leg fractures (Nairobi News, 2016). Such incidences indicate that students are not only ill prepared for terror crisis but also that there exists real fear among them of possible terror attacks on institutions of higher learning.
Review of literature indicates that most of the crisis communication studies tend to focus on communication strategies used to manage reputation after crisis. Such studies include the British petroleum crisis study by Wolf (2013). Wolf suggests that communication during the first hours of a crisis can have remarkable implications for the company image and brand adding that almost 80 per cent of a crisis management consists of communication and that much of a crisis lies not in its reality, but in its perception. A similar study is by Kyhn (2008) in the crisis facing the Scandinavian airlines’ where the company frequently used the bolstering crisis response strategy of reminder by reminding stakeholders of the past good works of the organization.

However, there exists a dearth of information on how crisis communication plans influenced stakeholders’ perceptions on their expected reactions during terror crisis and organizational preparedness to effectively handle the crisis. Coombs (2010) suggests that the perception of an unpredictable event threatens the expectations of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes. The proposed study hopes to fill this gap.
Objectives of the study

To achieve the purpose of this study, the study will set out to:

1. To determine students’ perceptions about Daystar University’s preparedness to effectively handle terror crisis communication.
2. To determine if Daystar University’s crisis communication plan had influences on perceived individual preparedness for terror crisis.
3. To establish if there exists a correlation between students’ perceived levels of awareness about the CCP and perceived individual preparedness for terror crisis.
4. To establish Daystar University Corporate Affairs office’s preparedness for terror crisis communication.
Research questions

1. What are the students perceptions regarding Daystar University’s preparedness to effectively handle terror crisis communication?

2. What influences did Daystar University’s crisis communication plan have on students’ perceptions of a terror crisis?

3. What is the correlation between students’ perceived levels of awareness about the CCP and perceived individual preparedness for terror crisis?

4. How well prepared is Daystar University corporate affairs office to communicate terror crisis?
Theoretical framework

The development and application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

- Theory building involves an understanding of how variables are interlinked in order to influence behavior. For crisis managers, it is important to understand how various elements in a crisis can affect people’s perceptions of a crisis and reactions to crisis communication efforts (Coombs & Holladay, 2011).

- The Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) was developed to offer insights to this paradigm. This framework was first reliant on Attribution Theory by Weiner (1986). Attribution theory suggests that stakeholders will draw their own judgments about a crisis based on the three dimensions: locus, stability and controllability (Coombs, 1995). Coombs (1995) categorized crises types by using a two dimensional crisis type matrix.

- The intentional and unintentional dimension represents the controllability factor in Attribution theory. Internal locus suggests that the cause of a crisis was done by the organization itself whereas external locus suggests that a crisis was caused by something or someone outside the organization. Intentional suggest that a crisis was caused by someone purposefully therefore the perception is that the crisis could have been avoided or controlled. The unintentional crisis situation/event was not committed purposefully (Coombs, 1995).
SCCT provides a mechanism for anticipating how stakeholders will react to a crisis in terms of the reputational threat posed by the crisis (Coombs, 2007). Coombs suggests that SCCT projects stakeholder reactions to crisis response strategies used in managing a crisis. Among the findings from the application of SCCT is the difference between perceptions of human error and technical error crises (Coombs and Holladay, 2011).

Coombs (2012) suggests an evaluation of the crisis type, crisis history, and prior reputational relationship in dealing with a crisis. These three factors aid the organization in shaping stakeholder perceptions and reactions (Coombs, 2007). By proper application of SCCT crisis response strategy, an organization is able to maintain a favorable perception and reputation in the minds of the stakeholders.
SCCT’S ROOTS IN ATTRIBUTION THEORY

- The attribution theory offers the rationale between variables in SCCT. When someone or an organization is considered responsible for a crisis situation, the stakeholder will exude emotions such as anger.
- However if a person is perceived not responsible for a crisis in the mind of the stakeholder, emotions such as sympathy will be shown (Weiner, 2006). Based on these tenets of the attribution theory, SCCT is able to predict the kind of threat likely to face the organization and therefore choose the right CRS.
- Stronger perceptions of crisis responsibility strengthen the negative affect which is anger while lower perceptions of crisis responsibility produce positive affect which is sympathy. One way CRS attempt to repair the damage from a crisis is by altering how publics perceive the attribution of crisis responsibility (Coombs, 1995).
Research methodology

- Descriptive research involves gathering data that describe events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collection (Glass & Hopkins, 1984). The proposed study will use a descriptive research design.

- Social science researchers have identified three major research approaches as qualitative research approach, quantitative and mixed methods (Creswell, 2003).

- Quantitative research methods attempt to maximize on objectivity, replication, and generalization of findings in order to predict (Michael, 2000). Qualitative research is aims, which to understanding certain aspects of social life and its methods which generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis (Michael & Michael, 2002). Mixed methods use a combination of both numerical and textural data. The proposed study will utilize a mixed methods approach as it will involve the use of a questionnaire and interview guide.
The case study is limited to Daystar University- Nairobi campus students and the corporate affairs office. This is supported by a study by Grabosky (1988) who posited that urbanism and terrorism are interlinked. The author suggested that urbanism facilitated terrorist anonymity, recruitment, communication and variety of targets.

The target population for this study will be Daystar University – Nairobi campus. This will include students and two members of the corporate affairs office. The students will include diploma, undergraduate and post graduate students.
Sampling techniques

- For the proposed study, the sampling techniques to be used will be simple random sampling and convenience sampling.

- Convenience sampling will be used for Daystar University Nairobi campus because of its geographical location. The university is located in the urban center unlike the Athi River campus which is further away and may therefore have a reduced terror threat.

- According to a report by bond analysts at Moody's Investors Service, private colleges, particularly some in urban areas, are likely to be hurt the most by the terrorist attacks (Werf, 2001).

- Simple random sampling will be used because the subset of the entire population has an equal probability of being chosen. The population to be studied is 2,583 students form Daystar University Nairobi campus.
Methods of data collection

- Methods of data collection include documents review, observation, questioning, measuring, or a combination of different methods (Abawi, 2013).

- For this study, the data collection tool to be used will be a questionnaire. Abawi (2013) defines a questionnaire as a data collection instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents.

- An interview guide will also be used in qualitative data collection.
Pre-testing

- Pretesting is one of the key stages of the survey questionnaire construction process which refers to the testing of a set of questions or a questionnaire on subjects from the target population (Babonea & Voicu, 2008).

- The pre-test will take place at Saint Paul’s university Nairobi campus so as to avoid reusing similar respondents. St. Paul University was chosen because like Daystar University, it is located within Nairobi and is also a private University.
Data analysis planning

► According to Kumar (2005), data analysis planning depends on how the data was collected and the purpose for which the findings will be used. Since this study is using a descriptive design, descriptive statistics derived from data collected will be analyzed.

► Descriptive statistics is the first step in analysis of quantitative data that involves frequencies, percentages, counts, averages, ranges and cross tabulations (Oladipo et. al., 2015).

► Quantitative and qualitative data analysis, data is analyzed by the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software (Kumar, 2005).
Ethical considerations

It is considered unethical for a researcher to ask questions that are intrusive such as sexual history and even age. The research will avoid causing any harm to participants or ensure risk is minimal. It is also important for a researcher to maintain the confidentiality of participants. Sharing their responses is considered unethical practice. The researcher hopes to meet these standards by avoiding questions that negatively provoke the participants as well as maintaining confidentiality of respondent.