ROLE OF ONLINE CRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGIES ON ORGANIZATIONAL REPUTATION AT KENYA POWER AND LIGHTING COMPANY

BY

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UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY-AFRICA

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ROLE OF ONLINE CRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGIES ON ORGANIZATIONAL REPUTATION AT KENYA POWER AND LIGHTING COMPANY

BY

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UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY-AFRICA

Spring, 2019
DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other college, institution or university other than the United States International University in Nairobi for academic credit.

Signed: ________________________  Date: ________________

Kelins Randiek (ID 648982)

Signed: ________________________  Date: ________________

Lucy Gichaga, (Ph.D), Supervisor

Signed: ________________________  Date: ________________

Dean, School of Communication, Cinematics & Creative Arts
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ABSTRACT

Social media is a platform where information and ideas are shared. It is in the same platforms where problems and discussion of issues affecting individuals, groups or communities are shared and feedback achieved immediately. Most organizations have been using social media to get feedback on their products. Service industries on the other hand have been using the platform to respond to complaints and to perhaps crises. In this regard, this study sought to assess the role of crisis response strategies on crisis responsibility and their subsequent contribution to organizational reputation at Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC). The study was guided by the following specific objectives: (1) To describe the crisis response strategies used by Kenya Power and Lighting Company during the 9th February 2018 national power interruption. (2) To find out the relationship between the crisis response strategy and the attribution of responsibility by the stakeholders during crisis. (3) To explain the relationship of crisis response strategies on the perceived reputation of Kenya Power and Lighting Company and (4) To describe the relationship between the crises history on the stakeholders’ perceived reputation of Kenya Power and Lighting Company. The study obtained secondary data from the customers’ posts on the Facebook platform. The data was collected from the Facebook account of KPLC where the text data was then coded based on the study objectives. The researcher used qualitative method as the main research approach for the study with the descriptive method as the research design. The result revealed that KPLC used both primary crisis response strategy and secondary crisis response strategy. In primary crisis response strategy, KPLC attacked the accusers that were making negative post on their Facebook account by reminding them that the power failure was an emergency and they were working on it to have it resolved. KPLC used denial strategy by denying through their Facebook post that there was no crisis as the situation was under control. KPLC also used an excuse strategy by denying the intention to cause a crisis where it explained the cause of the crisis to the stakeholders and assured them that the situation would soon be under control as the engineers were already working to bring it back to normalcy. Finally, KPLC apologized to the stakeholders for the inconvenience caused to them by the power failure making them feel appreciated by the company. KPLC used secondary response strategy by reminding the stakeholders’ abu the good work that it has undertaken in the past and how fast it has always respondent to similar crisis. Finally, KPLC indicated to the stakeholders that they were also victims of circumstances that the power failure was not their fault and they were working expeditiously to return the power supply to normalcy. The study therefore recommends for a continued use of the rebuild strategy in any crisis event and a further study on the use of other mass media such as print media and radio transmissions on crisis management by any organization with a national outlook.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanks to Almighty God for enabling me accomplish my academic goals to this far and for helping me carry out this research. Special thanks to my supervisors Dr. Lucy Gichaga, Dr. Stephen Kimotho and Dr. Geoffrey Serede, for their support during my research work. Thank you all and God bless you.
DEDICATION

This research thesis is dedicated to family for the opportunity, strength and knowledge and to my friends for their unwavering support in my studies and also wish to dedicate it to the School of Communication, Cinematics and Creative Arts for their continued support during this period.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

D: Disappointed

(DE): Denial Strategies

(RE): Rebuilding Strategies

(DI): Diminish strategies

KPLC: Kenya Power and Lighting Corporation

SCCT: Situational Crisis Communication Theory

SNS: Social Networking Sites

FP: Facebook pages
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

Crisis refers to sequence of unwanted events at the workplace, which lead to disturbances and major unrest amongst the individuals. Crisis generally arises on a short notice and triggers a feeling of threat and fear in the employees. In simpler words crisis leads to uncertainty and causes major harm to the organization and its employees. It is essential for the employees to sense the early signs of crisis and warn the employees against the negative consequences of the same (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015). Crisis not only affects the smooth functioning of the organization but also pose a threat to its brand name. Crisis Communication refers to a special wing, which deals with the reputation of the individuals as well as the organization. Crisis communication is an initiative, which aims at protecting the reputation of the organization and maintaining its public image (Dutta & Pullig, 2011).

An organizational crisis is an event perceived by managers and stakeholders as highly salient, unexpected, and potentially disruptive (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Coombs and Holladay further argue that organizational crisis can threaten an organization’s goals and have profound implications for its relationships with stakeholders. For example, British Petroleum’s (BP) Gulf oil spill harmed its financial performance and reputation, and redefined its relationship with customers, employees, local communities, and governments. Similarly, Target’s consumer data breach caused financial and reputational damage to the company, and the crisis spurred large-scale changes in the way electronic records are now processed and stored. Because of these implications, organizational research from a variety of disciplines has devoted considerable attention to crises and crisis management, working to understand how and why crises occur (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).
The crisis response includes the first public statements the communication team brings out about the crisis. This first statement typically is delivered through the mass media, hence the concern in crisis management with media relations (Barton, 2001). The focus on the initial response stems from the fact that first impressions form quickly and color the remainder of stakeholders’ reception of the crisis communication efforts (Sen & Egelhoff, 1991). In any crisis, stakeholder information needs to occur simultaneously with the crisis team’s information needs.

Company related adverse events may result in negative consequences affecting several aspects of the whole company and damaging the overall performance. In particular, as they are generally featured by intense media coverage, hence well-publicized (Siomkos & Kurzbard, 1994), an event crisis is very likely to result in negative publicity (Dean, 2004). Therefore, expected consequences area weakened company’s reputation (Coombs, 2007), poorer relationships with consumers (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015) and a reduced brand equity due to negative impacts on brand confidence and a reduced likelihood of brand consideration and choice (Dutta & Pullig, 2011), which would eventually harm financial performance (Dawar & Lei, 2009; Laufer & Coombs, 2006).

Post-crisis communication reactive measures may be employed by the entity in its effort to restore and value and image, and diminish the effect of reputational threat (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Hence, through the implementation of effective crisis management strategies, companies attempt to restore brand confidence, minimize consumers’ dissatisfaction and maximize the chance of repurchase intentions, customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth and forgiveness for the transgressions generated by crisis (Janssen, Sen, & Bhattacharya, 2015; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015).

Models and theories have already been conceptualized in order to guide crisis managers and practitioners in the selection of the most appropriate strategy to manage a specific crisis.
situation. Among them are the Image Restoration Discourse Theory (Benoit, 1997), the Corporate Communicative Response Model (Bradford & Garrett, 1995), and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 1995, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). They provide mechanisms to anticipate consumers’ evaluations and reactions to a determined crisis and propose a series of different approaches for a company to respond. As empirical evidence advocates, meeting consumers’ expectations is imperative for a corporate response strategy in order not to incur in negative fallouts.

A contingency-based view suggests that the effectiveness of a crisis response depends on contingent factors featuring every situation and mediating consumers’ post crisis evaluations (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000), namely reducing the negative impact on company and/or brand resulting from the involvement in a crisis event. Moderation is the ability of an independent variable to strengthen and/or change the direction of its relationship with the independent variable. Conversely, mediation focuses on how a treatment effect is produced (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005). For example, severity and relevance, as well as nature of a crisis have been proven to serve as mediators of consumers’ perceptions, whereas brand familiarity, awareness of a company’s CSR activities and brand identification play a role of moderators of the crisis effects (Dawar & Lei, 2009).

In a survey of small engineering firms in Bangladesh, Moyeen (2014) found the reasons for lack of formal crisis management strategy in the firms as follows: small business leaders are focused on a day-to-day operation as opposed to management models and strategic management systems. It also found out that small businesses have less money to spend on training; and their competitors generally operate the way they do without using crisis management models and implementing improvement systems. Moreover, the study established that entrepreneurs who develop small businesses usually have little desire to establish routine processes and procedures.
Menzel and Günther (2012) also observed lack of formal crisis management strategies in small enterprises in their second-year in-depth qualitative single-case study of 65 employees working in a medium-sized enterprise in Germany. They concurred that strategy making for crisis management in small firms is emergent, adaptive, and based on personal relationships. In another survey of 500 small- and medium-scale manufacturing concerns in the United States of America, Metts (2011) investigated the role of adaptive decision-making as a crisis management strategy and its potential significance in small- and medium-sized manufacturing companies and found that adaptive decision-making plays a significant role in the management of crisis in manufacturing SMEs. He proposes an adaptive decision-making where the managers try to avoid uncertainty by searching for reactive solutions to existing problems. However, the study was also conducted in the context of a developed country. Besides, the study did not compare whether the adaptive processes led to better performance than other informal modes of managing crisis.

On a slightly different vein, Sidaya (2006) carried out a study whose main purpose was to analyze what strategies small and medium businesses actually adopt when confronted with a major crisis such as a fire, flood, or similar catastrophe and determine what factors proved vital to the survival of the business in Australia. A qualitative approach was taken, which involved interviews and in-depth analysis of 12 case studies. To develop a model, many components of earlier models of strategic management were tested for relevance to the manager during a major crisis in the business. The study found that the owners and managers of small and medium businesses rated the development of a Crisis Management Model (CMM) as a crucial management tool to assist them to fight for the survival of their business following a crisis. Though the study findings were consistent with reactive strategies in the context of crisis management, it concentrated only on a one-off crisis management and not on the day-to-day management experience of small enterprises, which this study intends to reveal.
KenGen responded to a crisis of Garissa, Tana River floods on May 24th 2018 where the residents of Tanariver and Garissa blamed KenGen for releasing water from the seven folks dam. KenGen on their twitter account indicated that when the floods started hitting Tana River, the Masinga Dam was half-full and therefore could not be blamed for the menace. KenGen further clarified that they only alert residents of an imminent rise in water levels when it became apparent that the dam could spill over due to heavy rains. This response was necessary since the company had received several attacks country wide on the issue of flooding where most of the people blamed the company for incompetency thus damaging the reputation of the organization. The response was necessary since it redeemed the image of the company by clarifying the uncertainty that brought about the misunderstanding on the cause of flooding. Most residents of Tanariver and Garissa counties had a belief before the communication by KenGen that it was KenGen that opened for the excess water from Masinga dams thus causing water to overflow downstream.

According to Mbui (2016) organizations need to establish a good working relationship by working closely with the media in order to avoid media speculation and untruths. Organizations also need to provide customers with explanations and information during a crisis that go beyond the basic information provided by stories in the mass media.

In the recent past, crisis communication management plans as well as strategies have been adopted by both private and public sector organizations, as well as by institutions of higher learning in Kenya. For the last two decades, crisis communication has grown as a field of study (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow, 2007), and has been addressed from different scientific domains, making it difficult to oversee the bulk of research that has been conducted. Moreover, research on the effectiveness of communication strategies to restore reputations during crises, is still in its infancy (Hobbs, 1995). It is against this background that the study sought to establish role of crisis response strategies on crisis responsibility and their subsequent contribution to organizational reputation at KPLC.
1.1.1. **Background of Kenya Power and Lighting Company**

The KPLC Limited was incorporated in 1922 as the East African Power and Lighting Company Limited to serve Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Its name changed to the KPLC Limited in 1983 (KPLC Corporate plan, 2017). The head office is based at Stima Plaza on Kolobot Road in Nairobi’s Parklands area. Twelve divisions with a staff complement of over 7,000 employees conduct the Company’s main functions

KPLC distributes and sells electricity to over 6.7 million people and is owned 50.1% by the government while shareholders through private investors own 49.9%. Customers have grown tremendously over the years because of intensified connectivity programs undertaken by the Company, mainly the *Last Mile Connectivity Project* and electrification projects targeting informal settlements and low-income areas. The customer base now stands at over 6 million, having grown from 2.7 million in 2013, mainly driven by the ability to connect over one million customers annually. “With a growing customer base, the Company is challenged to seek ways of enhancing our service to increase customer confidence and satisfaction (Kenyoru, 2015). KPLC regularly conducts customer satisfaction surveys to establish their experiences with the brand and products. Feedback from the survey informs the choice of the communication tools the Company uses to engage customers. Because of improved communication with customers, in the year ending June 30, the Company registered an overall customer experience index of 67.8 per cent. This was also supported by enhanced banking hall experience and improved power restoration (Kenyoru, 2015).

On social media, KPLC exist on four platforms. These are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+. As seen in the table below, Facebook platform was chosen for the study having the majority of followers.
### Table 1.1 KPLC Social Media Platforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Followers</th>
<th>Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>@kenyapower_care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>5,956</td>
<td>Kenya Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>804</td>
<td>Kenya Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>576,713</td>
<td>@KenyaPowerLtd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although KPLC exists in other platforms, Facebook was used for the analysis of crisis response plan. Analysis of Facebook pages of KPLC reveals that majority of the posts are for planned interruptions. Additionally, KPLC’s strategy currently is just to inform their audiences on rationing events and alerts. They use this platform for posting and communicating only official information.

#### 1.1.2. 1.1.4 The National Blackout’ KPLC Crisis

This is part of communication put out by the main KPLC (KPLC) communication. Most parts of the country have been plunged into darkness following a system fault that has caused a massive blackout. Kenya Power has said the faulty section has been isolated and efforts to restore supply have commenced beginning with Mt. Kenya and Nairobi. “A power system disturbance has led to the loss of electricity supply in most parts of Nairobi and adjacent areas. We are sorry about that. It is a known issue and we hope to have it fixed as soon as possible,” General Manager in charge of networks Daniel Tare said in a statement.

Most parts of the country were plunged into darkness. This had been three years in a row where KPLC power blackout has been occurring within the same timelines in January 2016-2018 3 years 3 Januaries in darkness (*Ian omondi*, January 10th 2018, Citizen digital).
In 7th January 2016 case, the power surge was reported to be the fault on a single rouge monkey by KENGEN-KPLC supplier, while in 2017, the blackout was blamed on technical fault by Ndenderu substation that cut of power from Nairobi- coast and Mount Kenya regions.

The 2018 January blackout was one of the largest that affected the whole country even the neighboring country, Uganda (through infrastructure sharing) affecting almost 75% of the Kenyans. The period after the blackout, many media outlets took over the story and circulation of various opinions especially on social media linking the January blackout to prior blackouts. In line to SSCT, KPLC has a greater crisis responsibility. Organizations with negative prior reputations are attributed greater crisis responsibility for the same crisis than an organization that is unknown or has a positive prior reputation (Coombs & Holladay). KPLC enjoy the monopoly of being the only players in Kenya in the electric power supply sub sector.

1.1.3. 1.1.4 Kenya Power and Social Media

Social media are digital tools and applications that facilitate interactive communication and content exchange among and between audiences and organizations (Wright & Hinson, 2009). Social media has offered organizations a new channel and tool for building their image and improving it. KPLC customers are steadily adopting social media for engagement with the Company, shifting away from a tradition where they preferred calling or visiting the offices to get their issues addressed (Kamau, 2016). Internal analysis by the Company shows that over 40 per cent of customer engagements are through social media channels compared to a low of 10 per cent two years ago (Zhang & Mwangi, 2016).

This study looked at the most popular social media platform used by KPLC in communicating crisis. It took a closer look of social media networking platform, Facebook that is considered amongst the popular social media platform used by KPLC in reaching out
to their customers. “Social media is convenient for our customers as it is faster and cheaper compared to calling or having to physically visit our offices (Zhang & Mwangi, 2016). 

Table 1.2 KPLC Social Media Pages and Followers on Facebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FB PAGE</th>
<th>@</th>
<th>Followers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenya Power Care</td>
<td>@KenyaPowerLtd</td>
<td>576,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya power</td>
<td>@kenyaPower</td>
<td>3,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPLC</td>
<td>@kenyapower&amp;lightning company</td>
<td>3,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social media platforms such as Facebook can work either in favor or against organization during crisis’ depending how they shall manage the flow of information and their own communication efforts (Ki & Nekmat, 2014). Kenyans took to social media under the hashtags #KPLC Shutdown and #KenyaPower to react to the countrywide blackout.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Most scholars affirm that the crisis response strategies in most organizations are still misunderstood (Mwasi, 2014; Chue & Wang, 2015). In addition, there is no clear consensus regarding the link between the crisis response strategies and attribution of responsibility by the stakeholders. The existing studies do not give in-depth coverage on the relationship between the response strategies on the perceived reputation of an organization since most global studies focused on strategic responses with respect to a firm’s performance (Ofori & Atiogbe, 2015; Chue & Wang, 2015).

The unforeseen nature of crisis places a great demand on the need to respond - a need for information. Communication identified as a key component when responding to crisis (Coombs, 2009). Crisis communication, therefore, is “the collection, processing and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation” (Coombs 2010:20). The major focus of crisis communication is on how communication is used to manage information and meaning during a crisis (Coombs 2009). In other words, emphasis is placed
on what organizations involved in crisis can do and say in order to address a crisis situation, and “how it can be used to relationship public’s perception of the crisis and the organization involved in the crisis” (Coombs & Holladay, 2014:42). Crisis communication helps stakeholders to make some sense of the crisis. As Ray (1999) cited by Stephens et al (2005:395) noted, the focus of communication during a crisis is to “relate publics’ perception of the organization and to maintain a positive image or restore a damaged image among stakeholders”. That is, organizations can use communication to provide explanations about a crisis with a view to influencing stakeholders’ perceptions of the organization and crisis. Communicating before, during and after crisis may engender sympathy to the organization and further enable stakeholders to support the organization all through the crisis.

The findings obtained by Stephens et al (2005) on the organization reputation reveal that crisis communication can destroy an organization reputation that has been built over many years. The study also revealed that crisis management is one of the main elements for managing an organization reputation whereby if it is poorly handled in an event of occurrence, then it may lead to a distortion of a reputation of the organization.

The widespread use of social media platforms has created both opportunities and threats that organizations have to put into considerations when dealing with crisis (Jones et al., 2009). When there is no immediate response from the organization in case where a crisis happens, the organization will have to manage the crisis as per the stakeholders accepted ways (Coombs, 2007; Seeger, 2006). According to Huang (2008), a timely response to a crisis by an organization is one of the important factors in stakeholder trust and relational commitment.

According to Hale (2005), a crisis is well managed if information is accurately and quickly disseminated directly in a candid manner to the most critical organization stakeholders. Organizations can use social media platforms as a method of rapid information dissemination.
as well as providing a way for the stakeholders and the public to ask questions and engage with the organization, thereby relieving some of the uncertainty the crisis can cause.

KPLC has faced numerous challenges in communicating during an emergency or crisis especially when it comes to their programmed power interruptions or rationing, short interruptions due to breakdowns, power surges and voltage dips. On January 9 2018, parts of the country were plunged into darkness on Tuesday evening due to what was described as a “power system disturbance” by electricity distributor KPLC as published in the Standard newspaper on 10th January 2018. KPLC failed to provide enough information to the key stakeholders resulting to unfavorable publicity. To address any future happening it would be of great importance to consider the reactions from the social media platform including the Facebook. Review of literature indicates that there exists limited number of studies on crisis communication across multiple linked crisis events that affect multiple organizations. This gap offers a new theoretical opportunity for scholarship in crisis communication and public relations. Therefore, the study sought to fill the knowledge gaps of the existing little literature on the relationship of crisis response strategies on the attribution of responsibility by the stakeholders, perceived reputation of the organization and the relationship of crisis history on the perceived reputation at KPLC.

1.3. Purpose statement

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of crisis response strategies on attribution of responsibility, and organizational reputation during KPLC crisis - following a countrywide power outage in 2018.
1.3.1. Specific Research Objectives

The Specific Objectives were:

1. To describe the crisis response strategies used by Kenya Power and Lighting Company during the 9th February 2018 national power interruption.

2. To find out the relationship between the crisis response strategy and the attribution of responsibility by the stakeholders during crisis.


4. To describe the relationship between the crisis’s history on the stakeholders’ perceived reputation of Kenya Power and Lighting Company.

1.4. Rationale of the Study

According to Kimotho and Nyarango (2019), a rationale for research is a set of reasons offered by a researcher for conducting more research into a particular subject. The study would improve on the communication strategies adopted by corporate organizations in solving crisis management situations in the country. The study is developed to improve on the scholar’s knowledge on crisis management. The study is also meant to improve on other scholar’s ability to choose study topics and to guide their literature review development.

KPLC being an organization facing numerous challenges including; corruption, misappropriation of resources and funds, web hiking among other’s needs, a permanent solution to its problem is needed to aid in curbing the problem. Through the findings from this study, a solution will be achieved through the provision of enough information to the key stakeholders resulting to unfavorable publicity during crisis (Ministry of Energy, Technical and Financial Audit Committee, 2013). This research would be importance to KPLC since it would make the management understand the role of social media in crisis management and in building organizational reputation.
1.5. **Significance of the study**

This study may be of great benefit to the upcoming scholars that may use the findings as a reference material for future researchers on similar sectors of the communication industry and increase the literature and research on the topic. The study contributes to the knowledge in Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Study contributes to knowledge on use of social media in crisis communication expands crisis communication scope to include conversations on digital spaces expands the SCCT theory use to digital platforms strategies study. Through the findings from this study KPLC is in a position of restructuring its own strategy of managing the crisis and management is in a position of regulating their policies to accommodate the future crisis

1.6. **Scope of the study**

This study sought to investigate the role of crisis response strategies on crisis responsibility and their subsequent contribution to organizational reputation as the conceptual scope, the time scope is between January 2019 to July 2019 and the geographical scope is the online customers of KPLC, countrywide customers. The study focused on facebook communication as the main method used by KPLC during the crisis however, KPLC used various documents for communication such as emails, messages and phone calls to stakeholders. The study used descriptive research design and qualitative method as the research approach where text data was collected from the KPLC facebook post.

1.7. **Delimitations of the Study**

This study majorly focused on one social media platform despite KPLC being on four platforms linked to their main website, and more informally. This study focuses on Facebook and used the main Facebook page @ *KPLC care, which* had the highest number of followers and used as the main communication channel with its consumers. The study also lacks
enough literature to support the study since more study conducted does not linked to the study variables under this study

1.8. Definition of Terms

**Bolstering strategy:** Bolstering are best used as supplementary to the three primary strategies by adjusting information by praising consumers either for sympathy or to improve the current relationship with the organization (Coombs 2004). The bolstering strategy was used on recognizing the complains and users were given explanation of what causes the blackout and the organization felt sorry for the crisis

**Crisis:** A crisis is an unpredictable event with a potentially negative outcome on stakeholder’s expectancies and can impact organization performance negatively (Coombs, 2015) (the crisis was the blackout experience nationwide)

**Denial strategy:** Deny response option has three strategies (Coombs, 2012): attack the accuser (organization confronts the person or group claiming a fault of the organization), denial (organization denies a crisis), and scapegoat (crisis manager blames the supplier of the crisis).

**Diminish strategies:** The diminish strategies were believed to be used most often in accidental events and have a low level of impact on both stakeholders and victims that are involved (Coombs 2006).

**Facebook Pages:** is a social network used in sharing content and communicating, and the most popular worldwide (Mediefakta, 2010). It is where the users were posting their comments concerning KPLC blackout crisis and done on “Facebook corporate pages”

**Rebuild strategies:** is a technique used to change perceptions of an organization during a crisis by offering real or symbolic forms of aid to victims and asking their forgiveness. These strategies attempt to take the focus off the crisis by taking positive action.
**Situational Crisis communication SCCT:** Situational crisis communication theory holds that the way an organization is being perceived by its publics, is a valued resource that is threatened by crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2002) briefly connect to current study on the KPLC blackout crisis and Facebook

**Shares:** is an organic form of promotion generated by the public (Veil et al., 2011).

**Likes:** is the process where a user show their support for specific comments, pictures, wall posts, statuses, or fan page (Li, de Zubielqui, & O'Connor, 2015)

**Views:** Is the number of times a Page's profile has been viewed by people (Fomrun & Gardberg, 2000)

**Network Action Metrics:** is where users broadcast web content on a social network to their connections, groups, or specific individuals (Coombs, 2015).

**Perception:** It is the ability to become aware, see or hear something through the senses attached to the occurrence of the crisis (Chis & Talpos, 2011)

**Reputation:** Is the belief held about something that can either be positive or negative and in this context crisis either affect the organization positively leading to building of the organizational reputation or negatively leading to ruining of the organizational reputation (Ziek, 2015)

**Crisis Communication:** It is the identified unexpected and surprise element, a disruption of routine, an escalating flow of events together with a sense of losing control of the situation, heightened media attention, followed by scrutiny, inquiry, speculation, and eventually, the proliferation of negative publicity (Cooley & Cooley, 2011)
1.9. Chapter Summary

The chapter outlines the background of the study where it indicates various aspects of crisis communication strategies on organizational reputation; the problem statement on the other hand has given the gap to the study where it found out that; there has been no studies of crisis communication across multiple linked crisis events that affect multiple organizations. The lack of studies offers new theoretical opportunities for scholarship in crisis communication and public relations. The profile of KPLC is also discussed. Also highlighted in this chapter are the four objectives that guides the study, justification on the other hand directs the reader on who will benefit from the findings and scope of the study highlighting on area of discussion.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction
This chapter covers the theoretical framework highlighting the anchoring theory. It also carries the conceptual framework explaining the various variables and their relationships. This is followed by a review of variables, empirical review and a critique of the reviewed literature. It concludes with a research gap.

2.2 Theoretical Literature

2.2.1 Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)
This study adopted the Situational Crisis Communication theory (SCCT) since theory explains crisis communication response strategies that is matched to the type of crisis and the level of accountability burden on the organization and clearly indicates how organization can achieve a positive reputation even in the site of crisis. The SCCT was proposed by Coombs (1995) as a symbolic approach to crisis communication, but has during the last 13 years tested, refined, and developed it into a more coherent theory. According to Coombs, SCCT consists of three core elements: (1) the crisis situation, (2) crisis response strategies, and (3) a system for matching the crisis situation and crisis response strategies. The roots of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) can be found in attribution theory. Attribution Theory holds that people constantly look to find causes, or make attributions, for different events, especially if those events are particularly negative or unexpected.
Situational crisis communication theory suggests that the crisis managers should be able to match the organization strategic crisis responses to the level of crisis responsibility and the general reputation threat posed by a crisis (Coombs, 2007a). Organization stakeholders attribute greater crisis responsibility when past crises exist (Coombs, 2017). Prior reputation is how well or poorly an organization has treated stakeholders in the past the general state of its relationship with stakeholders. Organizations with negative prior reputations are attributed greater crisis responsibility for the same crisis than an organization that is unknown or has a positive prior reputation (Coombs & Holladay 2002, 2007).

Both the crisis history and prior reputation helps crisis managers to predict organization level of reputation threat and how the stakeholders view the crisis and those responsible (Coombs, 2007). Attributions of crisis responsibility and the level of reputation threat are greater if an organization has a poor history of dealing with its stakeholders. According to Baran and Davis (2011) Crisis managers have to first determine the type of crisis facing the organization before assessing the level of reputation threat that the organization is facing. According to SCCT, it’s how an organization communicates to the public that affects how
the public perceives the organization. Crisis managers have a greater responsibility in case of emergency of a crisis in an organization and thus have a positive or a negative bearing on the organization.

According to Coombs, (2007), SCCT has three response strategies (denial, diminish and rebuild). These three response strategies play an important role in helping an organization get its side of the story into the social media platforms. Coombs and Holladay (2010) argue that crisis response starts with instructing how the stakeholders protect themselves in the event a crisis occurs and adjusting information to help these stakeholders in coping with the crisis psychologically. Crisis managers have a role to play when it comes to selecting the best reputation repair crisis strategies based on the threat presented by the crisis. According to Coombs (2007), the type of crisis, the history of the crisis, and organization prior reputation relationship in dealing with a crisis helps an organization in shaping stakeholders perceptions and reactions.

SCCT is useful in this study since it deals with crisis communication as it helps to explain how to communicate from the corporate side, in the aftermath of a crisis in order to avert a negative backlash on the organization’s reputation. However, Coombs’ SCCT tends to focus more on organizational crises. It was primarily used to investigate how organizational crises affected stakeholder attitudes toward corporations (Brown, Brown, & Dickhaus, 2014). The theory has impacted on various studies as discussed in the Table 2.1
### Table 2.1 Growth of SSCT theory of Coombs Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>What they were studying</th>
<th>Constructs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W. Timothy Coombs</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Focused on Crisis communication</td>
<td>- Crisis managers should match strategic crisis responses to the level of crisis responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Coombs, W.T., Holladay, S.J. (2012) | 2012 | Developed the ways in which organization should communicate during a crisis. | - Communication structures (social structures, rules and resources)  
                              |                          |                                                                       | - Human perception and views of crisis                                      |
| White, C.M.              | 2012 | Social Media, Crisis Communication, and Emergency Management: Leveraging Web 2.0 Technologies. | - Human action  
                              |                          |                                                                       | - Technologies exist through human action                                   |
|                          |      |                                                              | - Technology as a medium of human action to accomplish their goals           |
| W. Timothy Coombs        | 2018 | Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis         | How people protect the reputation of the organization:                       |
|                          |      |                                                              | - Ethics                                                                    |
|                          |      |                                                              | - Social norms                                                              |
| Helene Stavem Kyhn      | 2008 | Understanding of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, the theory’s development, and to examine the theory in a new context with multiple actors | - Crisis related information  
                              |                          |                                                                       | - Multiple impact of Crisis                                                 |

#### 2.2.2 Theory constructs and growth

Crisis implicates an organization’s reputation in ways that can lead to both economic and reputational challenges to the organization. A sudden, unexpected crisis can damage or to great extent, lose the organization’s reputation if not managed carefully by the organization in
crisis. Regardless of the size, reputation or industry, there is always a possibility for every organization to face any type of crises. This paper positions Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) as the foundation of this study, particularly in regards to linking the crisis type and the application of crisis response strategies (CRS).

At a glance, SCCT suggests that an organization’s reputation is a valued resource that is threatened by crises. Moreover, SCCT functions to predict the reputational threat presented by a crisis and to prescribe CRS designed to protect reputational assets. One can predict reputational threat with two steps by assessing the initial crisis responsibility attached to a crisis (that is the crisis type) and then assessing the other two intensifying factors of reputational threat – crisis history and prior relationship reputation. These crisis types, increased by factors of crisis history and prior relationship reputation, allow the organization in crisis to indicate the crisis responsibility that is posed upon it and thus anticipate its stakeholders’ perception and reaction towards the crisis and the organization itself. Based on SCCT theory, they have 3 goals; changing perceptions of organizations in crisis, shape the attributions of crisis and reduce the negative effects generated by crisis. These strategies can be achieved through primary crisis strategy (Rebuild, denial, diminish) and one secondary response strategy (bolstering) (Coombs, 2007).

2.3 Empirical Literature

These sections looked at the different studies that have been carried out on studies relevant to roles of social media on managing crisis communication and to provide rationale about the study variables. However, various studies have been done on social media and crisis communication where none of the studies focused on the variables being measured.

2.3.1 Crisis Response Strategy

The crisis response strategies discussed in this section are; denial response strategies rebuild response strategies and diminish response strategy.
2.3.1.1 Denial Response Strategy

Benoit’s (1995) image repair strategies including denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification. Denial strategy involves denying the offense took place or denying that he or she performed the offensive action. The evading responsibility strategy involves four variants: scapegoat by claiming provocation, defeasibility by pleading lack of information, by claiming the offense as an accident, and by claiming the offense may be justifiable. Reducing offensiveness strategy tries to reduce the level of negative feelings experienced by the audience by bolstering, minimizing the offense, and by placing the offense in a different context. Corrective action strategy promises to correct the problem that may have caused the offense. Mortification strategy involves an outright apology, admitted responsibility, and a request for forgiveness (Benoit, 1995).

Image is usually determined by the stakeholders and publics’ perceptions of the organization or brand because of words or actions of that organization. An organization’s reputation is normally damaged or threatened when the organization is held accountable for an undesirable event. True or untrue, public perception is the only ingredient necessary to damage a reputation (Holtzhausen, 2007). Coombs and Holladay (1996) acknowledged the challenges crisis communication researchers faced in the previous several years, such as discovering the range of response strategies and finding the best response strategy for a given crisis type (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Credit goes to Caillouet et al (1994), for helping meet one of those challenges to find an appropriate range of crisis response strategies. Coombs and Holladay attempted to build on Benoit’s (1995) research and meet the other challenge of finding the best response for different situations. This is where attribution theory first comes into play for crisis communications research. “One consistent theme in communication research is that situations relationship the selection of communication strategies” (Coombs & Holladay, 1996, p. 279).
According to Coombs (2004), people will attribute the cause of a crisis to an individual involved in the crisis or to an external force. These attributions of responsibility indicate if an individual believes the cause of the crisis could have been prevented or controlled (Coombs, 2004). “If stakeholders believe an organization could control a crisis, they will also hold the organization responsible for the crisis,” stated Coombs (p. 265). Messages that people create explaining a crisis can shape attributions and feelings created by those attributions. According to Coombs (2004), crisis managers can use crisis response strategies to shape attributions of the crisis and perceptions of the organization itself (Coombs, 2004).

People naturally seek explications for why things happen (Rickard, 2014). Individuals weigh the contributions of various factors to a given outcome and then figure out the pattern with which such factors and effects relate to each other (Rickard, 2014). Stakeholders’ observations relationship how they determine the cause of a crisis, whether it’s from actions, or inactions, from an organization or someone outside the organization. “Causal attribution of a given event is based on two additional properties: (1) its controllability: the extent to which the cause is perceived to be under personal or situational control, and (2) its stability: the extent to which the cause is perceived to vary over time” (Rickard, 2014). According to a study by Rickard (2014), variations in attribution by risk perception, respondent attribute, and experience related variables are “instructive from a practical perspective in that they reinforce the adage that communication to publics should not be envisioned as ‘one-size-fits-all’.

Deny response option has three strategies (Coombs, 2012): attack the accuser (organization confronts the person or group claiming a fault of the organization), denial (organization denies a crisis), and scapegoat (crisis manager blames the supplier of the crisis). If KPLC could have employed the denial response strategy, this could have played a crucial role in achieving crisis communication but not all this has been done fully.
2.3.1.2 Rebuild Response Strategy

Facebook Rebuild response strategy being the best strategy leading to effective reputation restoration during the processes of managing crisis communication as was experienced in KPLC. Within the range of response strategies, several clusters have also been detected (Coombs, 2004, 2007; Huang, Lin, & Su, 2005). Deny strategies claim that no crisis exists (denial) or declare that the organization has no responsibility for it (scapegoat) (Coombs, 2007). Diminish strategies argue that a crisis is not as serious as people think (justification) or minimize organizational responsibility (excuse). Rebuild crisis strategies offer compensation for the crisis or apologize.

Research has shown that offering an apology a rebuild crisis response strategy—leads to more effective reputation restoration than the more defensive deny or diminish response strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). The reputational threat is determined by the crisis type, which is defined in terms of the perceived responsibility attributed to the organization (Coombs, 2004, 2007). This idea is based on attribution theory (Coombs, 2007). Crisis managers should select crisis response strategies that are appropriate for the potential extent of reputational damage a certain crisis may inflict (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). In an experimental study, Coombs and Holladay (1996) find that when crisis communication responses match the crisis type in terms of responsibility attribution, this leads to a more positive reputation perception than either no response or a mismatched response. Their research finds that organizational reputation benefits when diminish strategies are used in response to accidental crises and when rebuild strategies are matched with preventable crises. Previous research has examined the match between crisis type and a single crisis response strategy (Coombs & Holladay, 1996).

Benoit (1997) suggests that the use of a combination of strategies can increase the effectiveness of image restoration. The SCCT advises crisis managers to combine crisis response strategies from the same cluster (Coombs, 2007). Previous research has examined
the match between crisis type and a single crisis response strategy (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). However, Benoit (1997) suggests that the use of a combination of strategies can increase the effectiveness of image restoration. The SCCT advises crisis managers to combine crisis response strategies from the same cluster (Coombs, 2007). In line with the SCCT, the best option appears to be a combination of several strategies from the same response cluster into a crisis response, depending on the crisis type. Based on previous SCCT-related research, we expect deny strategies to match with victim crises, diminish strategies to match with accidental crises, and rebuild strategies to match with preventable crises (Coombs, 2007). Corporate reputation is least favorable when organizations are confronted with a preventable crisis. In this type of crisis, companies are considered responsible for the crisis (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). We find no significant difference in reputational perceptions between the accidental crisis and the victim crisis.

Second, there is a main effect of crisis response strategy on organizational reputation. Specifically, the reputations of organizations using rebuild crisis response strategies are more positive than the reputations of organizations using diminish strategies. The results also provide evidence for the relationship between the perceived severity of the crisis and organizational reputation, confirming Coombs and Holladay’s (2002) assumption. Specifically, the more severe people perceive a crisis to be, the more negative are there perceptions of the organization’s reputation.

Rebuild response options is comprised of these strategies: ingratiation (managers praise stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good work of the organization), concern (managers express concern for the victims), compassion (managers offer money and other gifts to victims), regret (organization feels bad about the crisis), and apology (organization takes full responsibility for the crisis) (Coombs, 2012). Most of the times, KPLC failed to establish a crisis frame and sever any perceived connection between the organization and the crisis.
SCCT suggests that organizations that are currently experiencing high attribution crises should use more accommodative than defensive crisis response methods on social media (Coombs, 2014). On the same note, Ki and Nekmat (2014) found out that justification and apology were the most commonly used strategies on social media among the fortune 500 companies. Companies can additionally improve their reputations by offering gifts or money to compensate their victims, which will intern have a positive action that may offset the reputation. While when a company or organization apologizes, there is an indication that the organization has taken full responsibility and is asking for forgiveness (Coombs, 2007).

2.3.1.3 Diminish Response Strategy
The diminish crisis response strategies argue that a crisis is not as bad as people think or that the organization lacked control over the crisis and the strategy was of great useful to the KPLC during the nationwide black out event that took place in 2018. Diminish response strategy stress that if crisis managers lessen an organization's connection to the crisis and/or have people view the crisis less negatively, the harmful effects of the crisis are reduced. Managers need solid evidence to support these claims and even then might fail. Failure occurs when the news media or, in the case of online-oriented crises, people posting messages reject the crisis manager's frame and continue using a different frame. Stakeholders be given competing frames and selects the frame provided by the source they find most credible. Diminish strategies are most effective when reinforcing existing crisis frames. Excuse strategies, lack of intent and/or volition are used to reaffirm a crisis as residing in the electricity black out disaster. The value in reinforcing such a frame is that an accidental crisis is much easier and less expensive to manage than an intentional crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2004).

The diminish response option reflects the attribution theory aspect of SCCT. A crisis manager accepts a crisis occurred and that his or her organization is involved but tries to change the attributions stakeholders make about a crisis in order to reduce the reputational damage from
the crisis (Coombs, 2012). KPLC has in most times failed in attempting to assure the publics that the crisis is not as bad as it seems or that the organization had nothing to do with the situation. These strategies help lessen the connection between the organization and the crisis and help the organization’s publics see the crisis in a less negative light. Accordingly, it was found relevant to use the strategies of justification and apology in the present research, as these strategies are embedded in the distinct postures of diminishment and rebuilding respectively. Is an organization lessens the connection; eventually the effects of the crisis would be reduced.

2.3.2 Crisis Response Strategies and Attribution of Responsibilities by the Stakeholders

In order to best protect its reputation during a crisis, an organization’s crisis response strategy must accept greater responsibility and provide more assistance to victims as stakeholders and the public place more blame on the company. An apologetic response can reinforce an organization’s image as a “good corporate citizen” (Lyon & Cameron, 2004, p. 231) and bring the company back into a more favorable light with stakeholders. Coombs (2007) found that organizations with reputational capital fare better during a crisis, and Huang (2008) associated trust to relational commitment, or the intent of the customer to repurchase after the crisis based on the highly valued relationship the two had before the crisis. He noted that organizations could minimize the potential reputational damage with timely, consistent, and active dissemination of information, ultimately resulting in greater trust by stakeholders and the public through the attribution of responsibilities during the crisis.

Because reputations are evaluative, some point of comparison is required. Stakeholders compare what they know about an organization to some standard to determine whether or not an organization meets their expectations for how an organization should behave when it comes to the attribution of responsibility during the crisis. A failure to meet expectations, an expectation gap, is problematic for organizations (Reichart, 2003). Reputations are based in
large part on how stakeholders evaluate an organization’s ability to meet their expectations for treating stakeholders.

### 2.3.3 Response Strategy on Perceived Reputation

A reputation develops through the information stakeholders receive about the organization response strategies (Fombrun and van Riel, 2004). Stakeholders receive information through interactions with an organization, mediated reports about an organization (including the news media and advertising) and second-hand information from other people (e.g., word of mouth and weblogs) that can distort the reputation of any organization if a clear response strategy is not given to counter the information received by the general public about the crisis. Most of the information stakeholders collect about organizations is derived from the news media. That is why media coverage is an important feature of reputation management (Carroll, 2004; Carroll and McCombs, 2003; Meijer, 2004). Second-hand information from social media on the internet, such as weblogs or blogs, is critical for some crises response strategies.

Reputation is considered the most vital value for the performance of the organization since of the date with its ability to be measured despite of its abstract nature. Positive reputation is the most fundamental perceived asset of any organization and if there is an attempt to ruin it organization must opt for other strategies and only powerful reputation can turn into a factual asset which can then be achieved through a good response to a strategy (Marsteller, 1998).

In this verge of change, it is mandatory that a strong and positive organizational reputation is the creator of the difference between long-term success and failure firm’s experiences. The reputation of organization is directly in a relationship with the crisis response strategies which is given by what organizations does and what they do not do for their target audience. The reason for the relationship between crisis response strategies and the perceived reputation of the organization is that of target audience with expectations about the organization. Without considering the scale, the organization establishes a reputation in accordance with
the level and method of satisfying target customers’ expectation. The reputation of a company is managed in an organized and planned manner in crisis response periods, which became easier to spread widely due to the technological developments and globalization as well as ordinary periods when companies execute their marketing activities routine (Fomburn, 1996).

Moving from the relationship between crisis response and the perceived reputation management, it is possible to state that crisis has a negative impact over managements; however, a successful crisis management leads to an increase in reputation. A duplex reputation is also influential on crisis management process. An institutional reputation managed with awareness is of critical importance during crisis times in sense of overcoming it with least loss possible and turning the crisis into an advantage through various marketing strategies (Kothe, 2001).

The concept of reputation that has become a matter of utmost importance for individuals, institutions and countries not only in sense of marketing applications but also in various fields of social sciences such as politics and economics. With a general definition, reputation is a concept that covers the ideas established in the minds of target audience about a company and that brings advantages when managed effectively, especially during crises that deeply relationship the management functions (Sherman, 1999).

According to Green (1996), who handled the concept in perception basis, “reputation is a perception of public, it is a value and it is very expensive” (Green, 1996, p. 21). On the other hand, reputation according to Sherman (1999) is “an outcome of the interaction between institutional values and social values” (Sherman, 1999, p. 11). Fomburn who underlines the relationship between image and reputation states, “There are many images. Reputation is the net evaluation of the entire images towards the various audience” (Fomburn, 2003). While stating that reputation covers past actions and future prospects, Fomburn (2003) brings the
roots of reputation to perception. According to him “reputation is a perpetual representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects that describes the firm’s overall appeal to its key constituents when compared to other leading rivals” (Fomburn, 1996, p. 2).

It is as important for institutions as it is for individuals to be the object of feelings such as being loved, being appreciated, having a say and being valued. Institutions loved, accepted, embraced and trusted by their target audiences would have a better capability in its actions and achieve a better success in its activities compared to the others. Reputation at this point means “the respect and courtesy devoted by the society to an individual or an entity” (Marconi, 2001). Loved and respected institutions hold a powerful reputation in consequence and they can establish emotional links to their target audiences, which will help them, gain competitive advantages.

Kothe (2001) who handles the reputation in financial point and explicates the financial value it adds to the companies defines reputation as “a value that accelerates the financial investments and organizational development” (Kothe, 2001, p. 572). As mentioned in Kothe’s definition, the concept of reputation, which may be considered an abstract value, provides concrete income to the institutions in financial means and helps them improve in global competitive markets with this concrete income. For this reason, institutions with a successfully managed and powerful reputation present a stronger and resistant institutional identity against crises in the market that they act in. According to Schultz who evaluates the concept of reputation in emotional basis and underlines the relationship between reputation and crisis along with the role of reputation in crisis, “reputation is a value and it has a major relationship over the organization. It acts as a barrier between the organization and its audiences during problematic periods” (Schultz, 2000, p.79).

As stated in this definition, the reputation of an organization strengthens the link between the organization and its shareholders, avoids the shareholders to move away from the
organization and keeps them loyal to the organization during the crisis times identified as problematic periods by Schultz. The loyalty established is the most vital point that keeps the organization sound during the crisis. One of the leading goals of communication activities to create a positive image in the minds of target audiences and the most important element in gaining a positive image is to have the support of the target audience whose sympathy and interest is gained in process through consistent and holistic behavior (Green, 1996, p. 21).

Persuading the target audiences in favor of the organization especially in atmospheres like crisis periods when extraordinary developments take place and the threats against the organization increase opening the way to destructive reactions is directly related to how the communication policies are constructed. There are many reasons to cause an organization to lose its reputation. These reasons have a wide range from missing of incorrect information to an inappropriate behavior, from various developments activated by third parties in the market to natural disasters. The loss of reputation reduces the respectability and credibility of an organization drastically (Marconi, 2001).

Communication policies and the reputation management studies they contain deal with managing the crisis and risks and protecting any kind of institutional assets. Reputation has a value as an asset that can be lost and damaged and it should be protected from risks. Institutional reputation is built upon many elements. Some of these elements are institutional image, perceptions of current and target audiences, marketing and production behaviors of institutions, reliability, consistency and accuracy. For this very reason, reputation is under significant risk due to its nature consisting of various elements, activities and target audiences (Green, 1996, p. 15).

2.3.4 The Relationship between the Crisis History on Perceived Reputation
The crisis history is the previous occurrences of the crisis and how the situations were handled by the organization can help improve on the organization reputation. Reputation is a
combination of the way an organization presents itself (its image), the way it is presented by
the media, advertising, and word of mouth, and the perceptions stakeholders and the public
have of the organization which is sometimes influenced by the crisis history (Coombs, 2007;
Gilpin, 2010; Lyon & Cameron, 2004). Crisis history is important because it can determine
favorable outcomes for organizations, including generating customers, sales and investments,
recruiting talent, and creating a competitive advantage based on the unique characteristics of
the company image (Chis & Talpos, 2011; Coombs, 2007; Coombs, 2006). The
organization’s reputation is what is being protected during a crisis. A crisis is a sudden,
unexpected threat to the organization and its distinctive brand qualities that can potentially do
financial and reputational damage (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Greyser,
2009). The way an organization responds to a crisis can determine whether it can recover and
succeed once the crisis has passed.

Aula, (2010) observed that because a crisis is an unforeseen event, an organization must
prepare for a crisis, plan an appropriate response, and choose the proper channels of
information dissemination to protect its stakeholders and its reputation by building a good
crisis history that can help restore an organization reputation in case of a re-occurrence.
Research (Gainey, 2010; Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008; Greyser, 2007; Huang, 2008;
Stephens & Malone, 2008) advocates for the integration of social media tools before a crisis
to build relationships, during a crisis to disseminate information and after a crisis to monitor
public opinion of the organization. The first stage of any crisis communication plan is
prevention: Preventing a crisis is the most desirable option for any organization (Gainey,
2010; Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith 2008; Hale, Dulek & Hale, 2005; Smaiziene &
Orzekauskas, 2009; Veil, Buehner & Palenchar, 2011). While it is impossible to prevent all
crises, an organization can put in place a system of monitoring emerging issues as they
happen in order to be proactive about a situation rather than wait until the crisis hits (Gainey,
Recent literature suggests that social media websites and blogs are well suited for organizations to track what is being said about them in real time (Khang, Ki, & Ye, 2012; Seeger, 2006; Veil, Buehner & Palenchar, 2011). Additionally, research has shown that organizations that have “reputational capital” (Coombs, 2007, p. 165) tend to do better during a crisis and will emerge with less damage than an organization with a poor pre-crisis reputation. According to Barton (2001) the internet has provided many platforms for organizations to engage with customers, stakeholders, and even the media to develop interactive relationships, build trust, and enhance reputation which was further stressed by (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008). Internet users seem to prefer communication from organizations that is “customer pull” (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009, p. 196) rather than company-driven, and companies who are embracing new media technologies appear to be better situated to manage their own messages and maintain their reputations in the event of a crisis.

### 2.4 Research Gap

As a whole, existing research in crisis communication serves the strong practical requirement of the discipline (Jaques, 2009; Seeger et al., 1998). Yet even the practical usefulness of this research is limited to communication decisions that are based on preserving stability or a gradual, moving equilibrium between single organisations and their environments (Grunig, 2000). By focusing on situational crisis events and single organisations, these approaches have largely overlooked what Seeger et al. (2005) call a —fundamental suspension or disruption of organizational stability and status quo (p. 80) across multiple organizations. There have been no studies of crisis communication across multiple and linked crisis events that affect multiple organizations. The lack of studies offers new theoretical opportunities for scholarship in crisis communication and public relations. Therefore, the study seeks to fill the knowledge gaps of the existing little literature on the role of crisis response strategies on the attribution of responsibility by the stakeholders, perceived reputation of the organization and
the relationship of crisis history on the perceived reputation. This paper also positions Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) as the foundation of this study, particularly in regards to linking the crisis type and the application of crisis response strategies (CRS). Despite the fact that the problem was experienced in the Sector Social media need to be factored in so that the consumers is made aware of what is happening and upon considering this researcher was prompted to examine the role of crisis response strategies on crisis responsibility and their subsequent contribution to Organizational reputation at KPLC.

2.5 Research Questions

**RQ1.** What were the crisis response strategies used by the organization during the nationwide KPLC power blackout?

**RQ2.** How the crisis response strategy attributes a responsibility to the stakeholders?

**RQ3.** How the crisis response strategies did relates to the perceived reputation of the organization?

**RQ4.** Did the crisis history have any relationship with the perceived reputation?

2.6 Conceptual framework

According to Mugenda and Mugenda, (2003), conceptual framework involves forming ideas about relationships between variables in the study and showing these relationships diagrammatically in the study. The purpose of this study was to investigate role of crisis response strategies on crisis responsibility and their subsequent contribution to Organizational reputation at KPLC (assessment of KPLC Facebook page posts).
Independent Variable                                                   Dependent Variable

Figure 2.3 Conceptual Framework

The framework draws its variables from SCCT theory, namely the communication strategies divided into three clusters, the Rebuild, denial, diminish to be independent variables. In addition, the organizational reputation (perception) used as an independent variable. Additionally, in this study the perception of the customers towards the KPLC strategies and engagement on the Facebook page response was the desired target.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter begins by introducing what it holds, then theoretical literature discusses theories which supports the study variables, that is situational crisis communication and theory constructs and growth. Empirical literature on the hand provides reviews of previous literature on each variable. From the review of the literature the gap was thus, found, conceptual framework was also drawn showing the interlinked between the independent variable and how they are connected to the depended variable and later the study formulated the questions that the study was to answer.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies the research methods and techniques used to collect collecting, research design, target population, sampling frame, sample and sampling techniques, data collection instruments, data collection procedures and data processing and analysis.

3.2 Research Design

The study used a descriptive research design. Cavanagh, (1997) observed that the term descriptive research refers to the type of research question, design, and data analysis that will be applied to a given topic to tell ‘what is’ a phenomenon as compared to inferential statistics that tries to determine the cause and effect of a phenomenon. Descriptive research design is therefore appropriate for this study since it gives what is the role of online crisis response strategies on organizational reputation at Kenya Power and Lighting Company.

3.3 Research Approach

The research approach used in the study is qualitative. According to Coombs, (2012), qualitative research methods are designed in a manner that they help reveal the behavior and perception of a target audience with reference to a particular topic. He further indicated that there are different types of research methods like an in-depth interview, focus groups, ethnographic research, content analysis and case study research that use a qualitative approach. The study in this case adopted a content analysis as the type of qualitative research suitable for this case since content analysis fromfacebook post by KPLC on the power failure provided an opportunity to reveal the behavior of KPLC customers with respect to the communication provided online on power failure.
3.4 Population and Sampling Design

The study population was the Facebook users that responded to the 9th February 2018 national power interruption Facebook post at the KPLC Facebook account. The total response that was collected during that period was 15,042 Facebook responses that were obtained for that particular crisis event. The study collected all the responses from the Facebook page of KPLC by the stakeholders as a reaction to the official communication on power failure. The researcher used simple random sampling in selecting the responses to analysis where negative responses that were abusive were reject as well as responses that were marketing a particular event or responses with irrelevant content. The researcher used judgmental sampling in selecting and identifying the best response for the study.

3.5 Measures- Operationalization of Variables

**Facebook user Metrics:** Are the information retrieved from the Facebook concerning the blackout crisis and analysis done on a mixed method basis where both the questions that were directed to the respondents and later supported by the content analysis

**Denial strategy:** Deny response option has three strategies (Coombs, 2012): attack the accuser (organization confronts the person or group claiming a fault of the organization), denial (organization denies a crisis), and scapegoat (crisis manager blames the supplier of the crisis). On the variables, the data was collected with the questionnaire and descriptively analyzed.

**Diminish strategies:** The diminish strategies were believed to be used most often in accidental events and have a low level of impact on both stakeholders and victims that are involved (Coombs 2006).

**Rebuild strategies:** is a technique used to change perceptions of an organization during a crisis by offering real or symbolic forms of aid to victims and asking their forgiveness. These strategies attempt to take the focus off the crisis by taking positive action. The researcher
gathered the information was gathered by the use of Questionnaire and analysis done descriptively

3.6 Ethics Approval
Before the commencement of the research, the researcher requested for introductory letter from USIU and from NACOSTI. The management at KPLC was given the letters of authority informing them of the research that was intended on their website.

3.7 Data collection Methods and Instruments
The researcher used data coding sheets as the main data collection instruments where the facebook page for KPLC was reviewed then the comments regarding the 9th February 2018 national power interruption was taken. The comments were coded against the set themes such as comments on attribution of responsibility, comments on perceived reputation of KPLC and comments on the crisis history on the perceived reputation of KPLC.

The study results under this section area of content analysis was tailored in establishing the crisis response strategies used by KPLC to inform their customers about the power crisis which was a national power blackout that occurred on 9th January, 2018. It covers the analysis of documents that was used by the KPLC during the crisis period. Using the coding sheet, the researcher coded all the data that was related to reputation of the organization then obtained information from the coded sheet for the purposes of the analysis after which the researcher used own judgement to obtain information from the text data on what the stakeholders. The text data on the study themes were grouped then, analyzed from the coding sheet by the researcher. According to Massey (2003), a data collection instrument or tool is a device used to collect the data. The type of instrument used by the researcher depends on the data collection method selected. He further states that the instrument must be reliable and valid as the reliability tests demonstrated.
3.8 Validity

The validity of the data collection instrument was achieved through the verification of the coding sheet by the supervisor. The student supervisor verified the used data collection sheet and the content of the collected text data to ensure that it is relevant and originates from the source data. The student supervisor varied the source data from the KPLC Facebook post against the coded data to ensure that the content is similar and objective to the study. For Credibility, Dependability, Transferability check, researcher familiarized with. Triangulation involves using multiple methods, data sources, observers, and the theories helped gain a more complete understanding of the phenomenon which is the Facebook comments post on the nationwide blackout by KPLC being studied used to make sure that the research findings are robust, rich, comprehensive, and well-developed according to the study questions.

3.9 Data Analysis Methods

Data processing and analysis was on qualitative as discussed below:

3.10 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis of the data was done through content analysis where, content analysis described by Kondracki and Wellman (2002) as qualitative research technique with three distinct approaches: conventional, directed and summative approaches, which are used to interpret meaning from the content of text data and adhere to the naturalistic paradigm. The major differences among the approaches are coding schemes, origins of codes, and threats to trust worthiness. In conventional content analysis, coding categories derived directly from the text data. With a directed approach, analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes. A summative content analysis involves counting and comparisons, usually of keywords or content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context. And for this study, a summative content analysis was adopted and views were purposively collected from Facebook platform that were based on managing crisis communication which is the base upon which this study stands, then the views were coded.
and connected to the subject under study, majorly on the Facebook customer perception as presented in chapter four.

3.11 Chapter Summary

The chapter focused on methodology employed and addressed the research problem and questions as was structured. This chapter has given the research design that was used in the study, the research approach and the data collection procedure that was followed in collecting the research data.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction
This chapter presents analyzed data together with discussions of the research findings. The purpose of the study was to examine Role of crisis response strategies on crisis responsibility and their subsequent contribution to Organizational reputation at KPLC (assessment of KPLC Facebook page posts). Data was gathered from people’s comments from Facebook page of Kenya Power and Lighting Company, recorded and interpreted according to the research questions and objectives. The data collected was qualitative in nature, which was analyzed using content analysis method where there was coding of the response from Facebook using a thematic method. The unit of analysis was Facebook where summative technique was used in the analysis and presentation of the textual data type from Facebook.

4.2 Crisis Response Strategies Used By the Organization
Kenya Power and Lighting Company own and operate most of the electricity transmissions systems in the country and sells electricity to over 2.6 million customers countrywide. Therefore, without efficient crisis response strategies, the company can ruin the positive image that has been built by the company for over a long period. The adoption of an effective crisis response strategy by the organization builds up the image of the organization and creates the positive customer perception.

KPLC adopted a crisis response strategy of deny response strategy in dealing with the emergency national power failure of 9th January 2018. The crisis communication manager from KPLC confronted the stakeholders who claimed that KPLC was incompetent and unable to deal with the situations of power failure. The crisis manager informed the stakeholders that the power failure was due to the natural calamity that could not have been prevented ordinarily by the organization. The crisis manager observed that the efforts that were in place
to restore power was extraordinary that would not have taken place in the normal business operation of the organization.

The Kenya Power and Lighting Company denied the existences of a crisis on power failure by informing their customers about the blackout that occurred on 9th January 2018 for the customers to organize for alternative power backups. KPLC denied the crisis and informed the stakeholders that it was a small emergency that shouldn’t worry any of their customers. Kenya Power and Lighting Company informed their customers on specific areas that were affected by the power blackout and assured them that their engineers were working on the hitch to restore normalcy as soon as possible. The crisis response strategy adopted at that time was meant to shun away the narrative of a crisis that was being spread by the critics of the organization that the organization management had failed in their mandate and that KPLC was no longer a reliable source of power supply.

The communication manager at KPLC informed the stakeholders that the organization was not able to inform them of the intended power at the appropriate time for the companies that highly depend on power service to plan for an alternative power supply since the situations was an emergency one. In addition the companies that heavily depend on electric power for their operations would prepare well so that their duties could not slug behind due to lack power supply. The crisis response strategy was satisfactory to many stakeholders as had been done by the earlier commutation for the arrangement of alternative power supply. The strategy used did not reach many heavy users of electricity and the domestic users of power since most customers are not online and do not follow KPLC either on twitter or on facebook. The decision of the KPLC to communicate the intended blackout using an online platform gave a negative reaction to the blackout as analyzed on the facebook by the respondents who expressed their displeasure with the manner in which the response was given by the respondents.
The strategy used by KPLC in exonerating themselves from the liability was the excuse as an element of denies communication response strategy where KPLC denied the intent to do harm to the stakeholders as given in their face book post. KPLC indicated that a monkey had short-circuited the main power line causing a national blackout, which was aimed at directing the stakeholders from taking the power failure as an intentional act to cause harm to them. KPLC also expressed an apology to their stakeholders through an online platform by indicating that the organization had taken into considerations the delay in power restoration that indeed affected the performance of many organizations, particularly the heavy users that relied much on power for production. That was a good indication that KPLC had the interest of the their stakeholders and they would not do anything that could cause harm to their customers. That strategy was good at rebuilding the image of the organization by to those customers that had changed their perception and attitude towards the company on the management of services to the stakeholders.

The response strategies adopted by the KPLC gave the effectiveness of different image restoration strategies that placed victim concerns over organizational concerns and demonstrated regret for the victims that created a higher organizational reputation as illustrated by the facebook comments on KPLC facebook account. Further, the study findings also showed that the provision of information to the stakeholders during the crisis positively improved the organizational reputation by changing the perception of the customers. KPLC expected that the rebuild, diminish and denial would lead to a higher reputation of the organization when the crisis communication was taken through the Facebook post.

KPLC adopted the bolstering crisis response strategy by reminding their customers of the good services they have always offered to them; KPLC also requested their customers not to use one event that was because of emergency where a monkey had jumped into the main power control room and interfered with the main power supply through short-circuiting. The organization further reminded their stakeholders that the delay in recovery was due to
maintenance and this would improve the services offered by the Kenya Power and Lighting Company to its customers. Due to this reason, the customers were informed on facebook and other online platforms that the services offered to them by the KPLC would be improved once power is restored.

The crisis communication manager at KPLC decided to adopt the ingratiation strategy by thanking their customers online for the customers for their patience using an online platform. This won the hearts of some stakeholders who were already disgusted by the sudden power failure that the organization was aware of the inconvenience caused by the power failure and that KPLC was making every effort to have the power supply return to normalcy. This step showed their perceived value to their many customers throughout the country who depend on their power service as low and in total disregard. The communication department at the KPLC adopted the right communication strategies for communication the crisis. The crisis response strategy was justifiable and was due to the preparedness and the awareness of the communication department on various response strategies for a crisis.

Finally, the crisis manager reminded the stakeholders that KPLC was also a victim of events that were beyond their control at the time though they were working on the situation to return it to normalcy. The strategy of victimage was adopted by the KPLC communication manager to redeem the guilt and turn the guilt to themselves by convincing the stakeholders that KPLC was also a victim of circumstances. The strategy worked as most of the responses from the online post turned from being harsh and abusive to being polite and inquisitive of when power would be restored.

4.3 How the Crisis Response Strategy Relationship the Attribution of Responsibility by the Stakeholders

The stakeholders tailored the question under this section area of content analysis in establishing how the crisis response strategies used by Kenya Power and Lighting Company
relationship the attribution of responsibility. This is evaluated through the Facebook responses when the Kenya Power and Lighting Company communicated the power blackout that occurred on 9th January, 2018 and recorded on a codebook as indicated below.

Some of the major stakeholders at KPLC such as Davis and Shritlif, Tononoka Steel and Uniliver expressed their disappointment with the manner in which power failure was handled by KPLC. Some organizations complained of experiences while some complained of the timing of the response. Most of the customers’ comments stated that the Kenya Power and Lighting Company are to blame for the national power blackout that happened on that day. Most of the customers suggested that the crisis was a sign of irresponsibility of the company since they were aware of the massive number of people that depend on their services. Despite Kenya Power and Lighting Company taking the initiative of informing their customers about the crisis that was to happen on that day a large number of the customers that commented on KPLC Facebook page still stated that the organization management were reckless and did not take into considerations about the interest of the customers.

The crisis communication was made late by the organization stakeholders since most of the customers responded in a way that indicated that the management of KPLC did not consider their interest despite an obligation of government institutions to provide a reasonable service to its citizens without discrimination to its citizens. The customers suggested that the organization should have provided them with an alternative power source instead of communicating the crisis online where some users still disputed the results from the Facebook post. The customers suggested that by providing an alternative source that could supply power in the whole country, businesses and companies would not incur loss since where some business owners do not have alternative power source like generator and solar panels, which makes them to fully depend on Kenya Power and Lighting Company for power.
Most of the customers blamed the organization management team for having communicated the crisis late where they stated that the management has poor communication strategy. They suggested that the stakeholders should have communicated the crisis earlier than the time when the communication was given since that would help they plan for an alternative power source. Although the communication team at KPLC made a good communication response on the power failure, the citizens of Kenya served by KPLC did not see the communication as effective and thus attributed the power failure to the KPLC rather than being regarded as an emergency.

However, there are those customers that suggested that the KPLC was not to blame for the crisis that occurred on that day. Their comments on facebook indicated that the organization stakeholders blamed the response team for the late response and that the communication they received from the KPLC did not make them relieve the KPLC from their responsibility of power failure. The communication received by the public on the crisis did not solve any problem of power failure as it was only intended to make the stakeholders aware of the crisis. The way the communication was done did not attribute the KPLC from the responsibility though it reduced the level of anxiety on the part of stakeholders as they got the answers to the many questions that were raised regarding power failure.

The stakeholders from their response they were happy with the communication given by the KPLC on the power failure however they did blamed the KPLC for the power failure indicating that the communication given did not relieve KPLC from the power failure. The conduct of the stakeholders on facebook was not that of happy customers however, the communication given on the crisis did improve on the reduction of anger and anxiety that was brought by the power failure to the stakeholders.

The communication team from KPLC through their facebook post explained to customers that power restoration involves specific steps since they have set priority for power
restoration. They steps involves checking the system and repairing damage to power plants, transmission lines and substations, restoring power to critical services such as hospitals, police, fire, water and communication systems, making repairs that will return service to the largest amount of customers in the least amount of time, such as high-density housing and large neighborhoods and restoring power to normalcy. The communication given by the KPLC on the process of power restoration was convincing to the public as some felt the empathy that KPLC displayed to their customers thus relieving the KPLC from the burden of power failure and considering it as an eventuality that could not be avoided.

The stakeholders took the response by the KPLC, which indicated that the organization was working to ensure that their customers could get the best services despite the crisis of power failure, positively as it showed concern on the part of the KPLC management towards power restoration. In their communication, they added that Kenya Power and Lighting Company were aware that the blackout was not going to be welcomed by majority of the customers because of the impact it would impose on their businesses, homes and companies but they had to communicate the crisis since that is how they operate within the organization and ineffective crisis response would indicate that they were irresponsible. He added that they were sorry for the blackout and that they would do all they could to restore power to normal operations. The organization encouraged the stakeholders to remain patient until the organization is able to achieve their aim of proper power supply to the country. The communication was effective as most of the respondents from facebook gave a positive reactions on the concerns of KPLC exonerated the company from the liability of power failure that had been accorded to them by the stakeholders.

Most of Kenya Power and Lighting Company stakeholders responded to the crisis response strategy made by the organization on their facebook page which was a sign of concern by the management of KPLC to their customers. Furthermore their comments were positive in that
they encouraged the customers to remain patient until they restore the power and they informed the customers that the blackout was meant for maintenance of the system. By responding to the post made by the organization they indicated their concern and responsibility to their customers.

Generally the crisis response strategy of Kenya Power and Lighting Company has strongly relationship d the attribution of responsibility of the stakeholders of the organization regarding the way the stakeholders responded about the crisis response strategy made by the company on KPLC Facebook page. The customers raised their suggestions where some of the customers blamed the stakeholders for being irresponsible. The stakeholders however indicated their responsibility through their response on KPLC.

The organization stakeholders’ responsibility is justified by explaining to the public why there was blackout that day. They responded positively to the customers’ comments on the platform since most of the customers raised their concerns about the crisis. They encouraged the customers to take the crisis positively as the company was working on the process of power restoration positively. In addition, they informed the customers that KPLC would restore the power as the maintenance process was over. The crisis response strategy was however not effective in the attribution of power failure to the organization by the KPLC.

### 4.4 Relationship of the Crisis Response Strategies on the Perceived Reputation of the Organization

The question under this section area of content analysis was tailored in establishing how the crisis response strategies used by Kenya Power and Lighting Company relationship the perceived reputation of the organization. This was evaluated through the facebook responses when the Kenya Power and Lighting Company communicated the power blackout that occurred on 9th January, 2018.
Major stakeholders such as Tuskys Supermarket and Sara Lee company limited indicated their satisfaction with the crisis response strategies adopted by KPLC during the crisis. They observed that however much they are disappointed in the power failure, they are satisfied with the way KPLC have responded to the problem and they are then made to believe that the problem is a minor one and would be resolved within a short period.

According to the response of the customers on the crisis response strategy of Kenya Power and Lighting Company, the perceived reputation of the company can be categorized as negative. Many customers were disappointed with the Kenya Power and Lighting Company despite addressing the power blackout on time. Most of the customers’ comments were negative and some did not believe that the blackout was due to maintenance and was meant to improve the services. Although the KPLC specified the areas that were affected by the blackout, some customers were complaining that their residential areas had blackout yet it was not mentioned by the company that they would have the blackout. This was an indication that the KPLC communication team is not reliable and the customers were not satisfied by their crisis response strategy.

Some of the customers also indicated their disappointment with Kenya Power and Lighting Company by stating that their daily activities would not continue without power. The customers include parents who complained that their children academics would be interfered with since they would not do their homework without light at home. Some complained that their refrigerated food would be spoiled in their refrigerator since they did not have alternative power source at home. Some complained that they would miss their favorite programs on television including news that most of the customers always watch on a daily basis. The customers added that they expected a quick reaction on the crisis since their important daily activities were being affected with.
Most of the customers indicated that the Kenya Power and Lighting Company was incompetent and suggested that they would resort to other alternative power sources like solar panels that would give them reliable power that is renewable and they would not be affected by the power blackout. They stated that even though solar panels are not powerful they would be assured of power daily at their companies and homes. In addition, they stated that power provided by the Kenya Power and Lighting Company is expensive and their tokens are finished up within few days.

The stakeholders form the companies that highly depend on power supply raised complain on how they were going to suffer a serious loss due to lack of alternative power supply. The alternative power would provide them with sufficient power to manage all their machines that require adequate power for the normal operation of the company. They stated that some their clients would not seek their service once they are informed that there is insufficient power supply since they knew that their services would be slow and of low quality.

Although most of the KPLC stakeholders reacted negatively concerning the crisis response strategy made by the company, some of the customers were satisfied by the strategy made by the company. They appreciated the company for early communication about the blackout and specifying the areas to be affected. Through this the customers indicated that the Kenya Power and Lighting Company are working to provide their customers with the best services on power supply. The communication strategy adopted by the KPLC gave the perceived reputation as negative and incompetent organization following the response from facebook post by the company on the power failure. The company should have used that opportunity to redeem itself from the negative publicity of previous frequent power failures that were given fast responses yet the communication team was not effective with the passage of communication to the stakeholders regarding the crisis.
The companies appreciated the crisis response strategy of Kenya Power and Lighting Company despite the loss that they would suffer on that day. They stated that they were given an opportunity to seek an alternative source of power as early as possible to use on that day so that they could not incur large loss. This is an indication that despite crisis, the stakeholders appreciated the response strategy made by the Kenya Power and Lighting Company.

The perceived reputation of the company was therefore negative as given by the high number of negative comments on the power failure crises as communicated by KPLC than the positive comments. Most of the customers responded negatively while the other responded positively to crisis response strategy made by Kenya Power and Lighting Company. The customers that reacted negatively indicated incompetency, negligence, unreliability and lack of trust to Kenya Power and Lighting Company and the services they offer. The customers were not satisfied with the crisis response strategy and did not believe that it was meant for maintenance resulting into improved services. Other customers indicated their dissatisfaction when the power took long to be restored and they began asking whether there was still maintenance. They became impatient with the company and the services they offer suggested that they did not trust Kenya Power and Lighting Company. The customers that responded positively indicated their appreciation and understanding to the response strategy made by the company. When Kenya Power and Lighting Company took long time to restore the power, they inquired politely the reason why they still had no power at their companies and homes.

The crisis response strategy therefore did not relationship the perceived reputation of the organization as it failed to obtain more positive comments from facebook based on its communication. The communication team should have used the crises in influencing the perceived negative reputation of the company, which was not achieved based on the comments of the stakeholders on the facebook post communicating the crisis. The manner in
which the communication was made and the timing of the communication was not good to improve the perceived reputation of the organization.

### 4.5 Crisis History Relationship on Perceived Reputation of the Organization

The question under this section area of content analysis was tailored in establishing whether the crisis history had relationship on reputation of the Kenya Power and Lighting Company. This is evaluated through the facebook responses when the Kenya Power and Lighting Company communicated the power blackout that occurred on 9th January, 2018 and recorded on a codebook as indicated below.

However much the KPLC is determined to provide their stakeholders with the best services, the crisis history has a relationship on the perceived reputation of the organization. The reputation of KPLC has been affected by the crisis history. Some of their customers have lost trust in the organization and they indicate that the services offered are not reliable. Some customers when setting up businesses installed an alternative power source, which is an indication of the belief of the unreliable supply of power offered by Kenya Power and Lighting Company in supporting their daily operations. The crisis history problem was given by the Barclays Bank communication department that expressed their concerns on the frequency of occurrence of the crisis.

The response by the stakeholders on the power failures indicate that the customers have a negative image and reputation of KPLC in solving power failures as most comments were referring to the earlier situations where there has been a frequent power failures in the country that has often made serious business interruptions. The negative reputations is also attributed to the frequency of power failures in the past and the duration it has always taken in its restoration where most of the Facebook responses were full with hunger from the consumers who were affected in the study.
The crisis responses team did not achieve much in establishing effective communication that could improve the reputation of the organization since after the power had been restored by the KPLC, most of the customers still posted comments about the blackout for around one week displaying their displeasure with the organization in dealing with the previous situations. They indicated the level of damage the blackout caused to their companies, businesses, large neighborhoods and ordinary homes. Some of the customers commented that they could not recover from the losses that they made during the black outs. They suggested that they wished the blackout did not have happened so that their income could not be interfered with. The customers urged the organization to ensure that the same instance does not happen in future and if it must happen they should inform the customers as early as a week before the situation arises for better planning that will involve finances.

The stakeholders indicated that the KPLC has had a very poor crisis history as most of the situations do go uncommunicated thus making the organizations and individuals affected to work with a lot of uncertainty in achieving the desired industry output. The lack of communication by the KPLC in the previous situations has made most stakeholders to have a poor image with regard to customer services to stakeholders by the KPLC. The lack of communication or the inappropriate communication by the KPLC has made its image go down following the previous history on power failures and communications.

The reputation of KPLC has been reduced by the inability of its communication team to effectively pass out information regarding power failures more so with regard to unplanned power interruptions that often is not covered by the scheduled maintenance. KPLC has failed in instances where they give timelines for the power restoration schedules, which are often not followed thus making their stakeholders to have a negative image of the organization as an incompetent and unreliable.
4.6 Chapter Summary

The chapter focuses on the content analysis of data that was collected from facebook page of Kenya Power and Lighting Company facebook specifically when the organization announced about the blackout that was going to happen on 9th January, 2018. It contains the crisis response strategy made by the organization that include when it was made, how it was made and whether it was a good step to respond the way they did. The chapter also contains how the crisis response strategy the attribution of responsibility by the stakeholders whereby the comments of both the stakeholders and customers are discussed in details. How the crisis response strategy relationship the perceived reputation of the organization is also included in the chapter whereby the comments of both the stakeholders of Kenya Power and Lighting Company is discussed in details and the customers response. Finally the chapter focuses on whether the crisis history had any relationship perceived reputation of the organization. The comments made by the both the stakeholders and the customers are focused.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary and conclusions of the findings and the recommendations of the research. The chapter further presents the study limitations and suggestion for further research.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study sought to examine Role of crisis response strategies on crisis responsibility and their subsequent contribution to Organizational reputation at KPLC (assessment of KPLC facebook page posts) in Kenya.

5.1.1 Crisis Response Strategies Used by the Kenya Power and Lighting Company during a Given Crisis

The study established that KPLC only used information as the communication strategy in the initial stages of the crisis after which it adopted the sympathy and apology strategy. The study findings is similar to a similar finding by Coombs & Holladay (2009), who established that different crisis response strategies affect important communication outcomes, including the organizational reputation and secondary crisis communication. This analysis has given the three crisis response strategies, apology, sympathy and information, based on the strategies as described in the situational crisis communication theory that was not effectively used by the KPLC in communicating the power blackout.

The study established that KPLC used the apology strategy by giving the feelings of pity and sorrow for the victims of power failure particularly to those that relies on power for their production. Schultz et al (2011) established that information refers to the strategy whereby the organization provides information about (the circumstances surrounding) the crisis which was fully and exhausted by the KPLC although some stakeholders felt that the timing of the communication was not appropriate. The study also established that the KPLC

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communication team made appropriate communication strategy of providing effective communication on the circumstances surrounding the crisis by informing their customers about the power blackout and giving the reasons for the crisis. KPLC crisis response strategy was made was used effectively though not on time in communicating the crisis which gave a good dedication by the KPLC in serving their customers and giving the best service.

The study had similar findings to Coombs & Holladay, (2007) which established that the effectiveness of different image restoration strategies showed that organizations that placed victim concerns over organizational concerns and demonstrated regret for the victims had a higher organizational reputation than organizations that did not as illustrated by the Facebook comments on the KPLC website. In contrast, the study findings also showed that providing information does not positively relationship the organizational reputation. KPLC expected that the apology and sympathy would lead to a higher reputation of the organization than information. However, study results analysed from its facebook post on the crisis did not find a main effect of crisis response strategy on the organizational reputation. In other words, there was no difference between apology, information and sympathy on the estimation of the organizational reputation. The strategy used by KPLC in expressing the sympathy to their customers through an online platform was good since an organization that takes the responsibility or expresses sympathy with the victims is regarded as more honorable and sympathetic.

5.1.2 Crisis Response Strategy Used Relationship the Attribution of Responsibility by Stakeholders

Schultz et al (2011) used the facebook response strategies in a similar study, to examine the perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via social and traditional media where it established that effective and efficient online communication is a great communicator and builds the organizations reputation by influencing the attribution of responsibility. The study established that the poor communication strategy adopted by the KPLC did not attribute it
from the responsibility of power failure as the comments from facebook stated that the Kenya Power and Lighting Company were to blame for the national power blackout that happened on that day. Most of the respondents suggested that the crisis was a sign of irresponsibility of the company since they were aware of the massive number of people that depend on their services. Despite KPLC taking the initiative of informing their customers about the crisis that was to happen on that day, a large number of the customers that commented on KPLC facebook page still indicated that the organization management were reckless and did not take into considerations the interest of the customers.

The study established that the crisis communication was made late by the organization stakeholders since most of the customers responded in a way that indicated that the management of KPLC did not consider their interest despite an obligation of government institutions to provide a reasonable service to its citizens without discrimination or favor. The customers suggested that the organization should have provided them with an alternative power source instead of communicating the crisis online where some users still disputed the results from the facebook post.

The study established that most of the customers blamed the organization management team for having communicated the crisis late where they stated that the management has poor communication strategy. They suggested that the stakeholders should have communicated the crisis earlier than the time when the communication was given since that would help they plan for an alternative power source. Although the communication team at KPLC made a good communication response on the power failure, the citizens of Kenya served by KPLC did not see the communication as effective and thus attributed the power failure to the KPLC rather than being regarded as an emergency.

Coombs & Schmidt (2000) argue that an organization that takes the responsibility or expresses sympathy with the victims is regarded as honorable and sympathetic. They
conducted an empirical study in order to test claims about the effectiveness of different image restoration strategies. The results showed that organizations that placed victim concerns over organizational concerns and demonstrated regret for the victims had a higher organizational reputation than organizations that did not (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). In contrast, recent research has shown that providing information does not positively relationship the organizational reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). According to this assumption, the researcher expects that an apology and sympathy will lead to a higher reputation of the organization than information. However, Schultz et al (2011) did not find a main effect of crisis response strategy on the organizational reputation. In other words, there was no difference between apology, information and sympathy on the estimation of the organizational reputation.

The study also established that the stakeholders from their response were happy with the communication given by the KPLC on the power failure however they did blamed the KPLC for the power failure indicating that the communication given did not relieve KPLC from the power failure. The conduct of the stakeholders on facebook was not that of happy customers however, the communication given on the crisis did improve on the reduction of anger and anxiety that was brought by the power failure to the stakeholders.

The study finding is similar to a study finding by Schultz et al (2011) who indicated that an organization reputation could be damaged by a poor response to the crisis. The study finally established that the stakeholders took the response by the KPLC, which indicated that the organization was working to ensure that their customers could get the best services despite the crisis of power failure, positively as it showed concern on the part of the KPLC management towards power restoration. In their communication, they added that Kenya Power and Lighting Company were aware that the blackout was not going to be welcomed by majority of the customers because of the impact it would impose on their businesses, homes
and companies but they had to communicate the crisis since that is how they operate within
the organization and ineffective crisis response would indicate that they were irresponsible.
He added that they were sorry for the blackout and that they would do all they could to
restore power to normal operations. The organization encouraged the stakeholders to remain
patient until the organization is able to achieve their aim of proper power supply to the
country. The commination was effective as most of the respondents from facebook gave a
positive reactions on the concerns of KPLC exonerated the company from the liability of
power failure that had been accorded to them by the stakeholders.

5.1.3 Crisis Response Strategies Relationship on the Perceived Reputation of the
Organization
According to the response of the customers on the crisis response strategy of Kenya Power
and Lighting Company, the perceived reputation of the company can be categorized as
negative. Many customers were disappointed with the Kenya Power and Lighting Company
despite addressing the power blackout on time. Most of the customers’ comments were
negative and some did not believe that the blackout was due to maintenance and was meant to
improve the services. The study findings is similar to the findings of Coombs & Schmidt
(2000) who observed that a crisis response strategies has a direct relationship to the
organization performance. Although KPLC specified the areas that were affected by the
blackout, some customers were complaining that their residential areas had blackout yet it
was not mentioned by the company that they would have the blackout. This was an indication
that the KPLC communication team is not reliable and the customers were not satisfied by
their crisis response strategy.

The study also indicated that some of the customers gave their disappointment with Kenya
Power and Lighting Company by stating that their daily activities would not continue without
power. The customers include parents who complained that their children academics would
be interfered with since they would not do their homework without light at home. Some
complained that their refrigerated food would be spoiled in their refrigerator since they did not have alternative power source at home. Some complained that they would miss their favorite programs on television including news that most of the customers always watch on a daily basis. The customers added that they expected a quick reaction on the crisis since their important daily activities were being affected with.

The study established that the communication strategy used by the KPLC made the company appear to be incompetent and suggested that they would resort to other alternative power sources like solar panels that would give them reliable power that is renewable and they would not be affected by the power blackout. They stated that even though solar panels are not powerful they would be assured of power daily at their companies and homes. In addition, they stated that power provided by the Kenya Power and Lighting Company is expensive and their tokens are finished up within few days.

Although most of the KPLC stakeholders reacted negatively concerning the crisis response strategy made by the company, some of the customers were satisfied by the strategy made by the company. They appreciated the company for early communication about the blackout and specifying the areas to be affected. Through this the customers indicated that the Kenya Power and Lighting Company are working to provide their customers with the best services on power supply. The communication strategy adopted by the KPLC gave the perceived reputation as negative and incompetent organization following the response from facebook post by the company on the power failure. The company should have used that opportunity to redeem itself from the negative publicity of previous frequent power failures that were given fast responses yet the communication team was not effective with the passage of communication to the stakeholders regarding the crisis.

The study finding is similar to a study that was conducted by Akram, (2017) who observed that a crisis can also affect stakeholders and relationship the way stakeholders perceive
organizational reputations. He further observed that there is need to minimize the reputational damages and stakeholder agitations, resulting from unexpected crises, organizations must adopt relevant crisis response strategies, as the choice of an appropriate strategy will, shape stakeholders perceptions of crisis and organizational reputation. A reputation is developed and built through the relationships, contact and communication between organizations and stakeholders in this study is respondents perspective of the company has been tainted due to the problems that consumers feel have not been addressed positively.

The companies appreciated the crisis response strategy of Kenya Power and Lighting Company despite the loss that they would suffer on that day. They stated that they were given an opportunity to seek an alternative source of power as early as possible to use on that day so that they could not incur large loss. This is an indication that despite crisis, the companies appreciated the response strategy made by the Kenya Power and Lighting Company.

The perceived reputation of the company was therefore negative as there were more negative comments on the power failure crises as communicated by KPLC that there was on the positive comments. Most of the customers responded negatively while the other responded positively to crisis response strategy made by Kenya Power and Lighting Company. The customers that reacted negatively indicated incompetency, negligence, unreliability and lack of trust to Kenya Power and Lighting Company and the services they offer. The customers were not satisfied with the crisis response strategy and did not believe that it was meant for maintenance resulting into improved services. Other customers indicated their dissatisfaction when the power took long to be restored and they began asking whether there was still maintenance. They became impatient with the company and the services they offer suggested that they did not trust Kenya Power and Lighting Company. The customers that responded positively indicated their appreciation and understanding to the response strategy made by the company. When Kenya Power and Lighting Company took long time to restore the power, they inquired politely the reason why they still had no power at their companies and homes.
Positive stakeholder relationships are capable of building favorable reputations while negative relationships can build negative reputations. High reputational relationships between organizations and stakeholders have been linked to significant outcomes, Crisis response strategies relationship the perceived reputation of the organization and in this study, respondents expressed their disappointments over the company and how they handle crisis. It is important to update the stakeholders on the situation of the crisis and the steps towards managing the crisis. Respondents in this study showed a positive relationship between the reputation of the organization and the crisis response strategies.

5.1.4 Crisis History and Any Relationship on Perceived Reputation
The study established that the crisis history has an relationship on the perceived reputation of the organization since the reputation of KPLC has been affected by the crisis history. Some of their customers have lost trust in the organization and they indicate that the services offered are not reliable. Some customers when setting up businesses installed an alternative power source which is an indication of the belief of the unreliable supply of power offered by Kenya Power and Lighting Company in supporting their daily operations. This finding is supported by a similar study by Covello, (2003) which observed that crisis history has a negative relationship on the reputation of the organization that in the event of poor crisis communication, then the negativity of the crisis history would increase as this situation would add on to the existing history another history.

The study also established that the response by the stakeholders on the power failures indicate that the customers have a negative image and reputation of KPLC in solving power failures as most comments were referring to the earlier situations where there has been a frequent power failures in the country that has often made serious business interruptions. The negative reputations is also attributed to the frequency of power failures in the past and the duration it has always taken in its restoration where most of the facebook responses were full with hunger from the consumers who were affected in the study. Wolf (2013) in his study on crisis
that happened to British petroleum (BP) oil spill suggested that the first hours when a crisis occurs is the best time for an organization to communicate. Which can intern bring remarkable implications to the image of the company in that most of the crisis does not necessarily lie on its reality but the overall perception. KPLC on the contrary has not been communicating power failures on the very moment they occur thus contributing to the perceived negative reputation to the organization.

The study established that KPLC has had a very poor crisis history as most of the situations do go uncommunicated thus making the organizations and individuals affected to work with a lot of uncertainty in achieving the desired industry output. The lack of communication by the KPLC in the previous situations has made most stakeholders to have a poor image with regard to customer services to stakeholders by the KPLC. The lack of communication or the inappropriate communication by the KPLC has made its image go down following the previous history on power failures and communications. This finding is supported by Brown & White (2011) who indicated that communication is of crucial importance to an organization in times of crisis. Some scholars suggest that the successful management of a crisis by organizations largely depends on what it does and says after the crisis hits. KPLC has in the past been in crises that keep recurring as mentioned by several respondents who had previously complained on issues such as tokens and these issues had not resolved. Such recurring issues make the organization to be perceived in bad reputation by its stakeholders.

5.2 Conclusions

5.2.1 The Crisis Response Strategies Used By the Organization during Power Shortage
The study concludes that KPLC uses the right strategy for communicating their crisis of power failure although it has often delayed and not delivered on time. KPLC uses the sympathy, apathy and the information strategy in communicating its response on the power failures crisis, which is good as online platform, is the best for crisis response.
Though KPLC maintain its ethical standards when responding to issues raised in there still exist gap where Facebook platform indicating that the company practice its ethics on any crisis. Although KPLC uses the Facebook platform for gathering information, which is helpful in addressing customers’ needs, it does not give effective and efficient communication to their online customers.

The crisis responses by the KPLC through Facebook however much was effective in reaching out to the stakeholders within a shorter period of time, it was not effective in relieving KPLC from the attribution of responsibility on the failure of power supply. The communication team by the KPLC did not use the platform effectively in relieving the company from the power failure responsibility. Most of the attacks on KPLC were towards the failure of the organization in proving a reliable power supply.

The response by KPLC on power failure through facebook post improved the image of the organization as a concerned organization that is always committed to service excellence however much there was a group of stakeholders that showed a lot of displeasure on the manner that the power failure was handled. This is an indication that the communication by facebook improved the reputation of KPLC.

The crisis history of KPLC has a negative relationship on the perceived history of the organization where most of the respondents through facebook gave comments indicating that KPLC has recorded several power failures where some of them go uncommunicated and some that are communicated don’t also align to the communication with respect to the actions. Some respondents faulted the communication teams to be communicating things that don’t always apply as they organization does not keep their communication. The history of KPLC communication contributed negatively to the perceived reputation thus the management of the organization needs to have proper communication that matches their actions for future reliability.
5.3 Recommendations

The study recommends for a review of the communication strategy adopted by KPLC and other organization using online platform such as facebook. The communication strategy adopted should be aimed at exonerating the company from the attribution of liability with respect to crisis and it should also be directed towards improving the company image.

The study also recommends that Kenya Power and Lighting Company should in future inform customers through other methods of communications such as short messages service (SMS) on their mobile phones.

5.4 Limitation of the study

This study majorly focused on one social media platform despite KPLC being on four platforms linked to their main website, and more informally. This study based its literature on the national blackout that took place 2018 and never focused on the frequent blackout crisis normally experienced by the KPLC customers. The study also lacks enough literature to support the study since most study conducted is not linked to the study variables under this review. The study did not focused on other organizations that normally experience crisis in their operation like Higher learning institutions prone to strikes among others.

5.5 Suggestion for Further Research

The study recommends for a further studies on the role of print media in managing positive reputation communication with the aim of improving the company image and exonerating the company from the liability caused to other organization due to the crisis.

5.6 Contribution of the study to Theory/existing knowledge

The study developed a theoretical framework with anchoring theory being Situational Crisis Communication theory (SCCT) since theory explains crisis response strategies matched to the type of crisis and the level of accountability burden on the organization and clearly indicates how organization can achieve a positive reputation even in the site of crisis. The study looks at crisis as a process deteriorating the organizational reputation, and contributes
to theory through recommending the adoption of all the crisis response strategies to aid in building a positive organizational reputation.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: IRB

20th July, 2018

Kellins Randiek
School of Communication, Cinematics & Creative Arts

Project Title: Role of Social Media in Managing Crisis Communication at Kenya Power & Lighting Company

Dear Randiek,

Thank you for submitting your application for exemption to the USIU-Africa Institutional Review Board (USIU-A IRB). The IRB appreciated your work in completing the proposal. Your proposal was evaluated in light of the policies that govern the protection of human subjects.

The IRB has determined that your proposed project employs surveys that pose no more than minimal risk to the participants. The information will be obtained in such a way that one’s responses will not be linked to one’s identity or identifying information. For these reasons, the USIU-A IRB has determined that your proposed study is exempt from further IRB review.

Even though your project is exempt from IRB review, the research must be conducted according to the proposal submitted to the USIU-A IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please be aware that changes to the research protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exempt review and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the USIU-A IRB.

Should you or study participants have any queries regarding IRB’s consideration of this project, please contact irb@usiu.ac.ke.

Sincerely,

Dr. Damaris Sikalihe
Chair | IRB | USIU-Africa
dikalihe@usiu.ac.ke
Office 0730 116 112

CC. Research Office
p.o.box 14634-00800 Nairobi, Kenya | tel:254-736-116-000 | info@usiu.ac.ke
APPENDIX II: NACOSTI

_This is to certify that:_

MS. KELINS AMONDI RANDIEK
_of UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY, 2004-155 NAIROBI, has been permitted to conduct research in Nairobi County on the topic: _ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN MANAGING CRISIS COMMUNICATION AT KENYA POWER COMPANY._

_for the period ending:_

6th August, 2019

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**Applicant’s Signature**

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**Permit No : NACOSTI/P/18/93842/24499**

Date Of Issue : 7th August, 2018

Fee Received : Ksh 1000

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**Director General**

National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation

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**CONDITIONS**

1. The Licence is valid for the proposed research, research site specified period.
2. Both the Licence and any rights thereunder are non-transferable.
3. Upon request of the Commission, the Licensee shall submit a progress report.
4. The Licencee shall report to the County Director of Education and County Governor in the area of research before commencement of the research.
5. Excavation, filming and collection of specimens are subject to further permissions from relevant Government agencies.
6. This Licence does not give authority to transfer research materials.
7. The Licencee shall submit two (2) hard copies and upload a soft copy of their final report.
8. The Commission reserves the right to modify the conditions of this Licence including its cancellation without prior notice.

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**Republic of Kenya**

National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation

RESEARCH CLEARANCE PERMIT

Serial No. A 19894

CONDITIONS: see back page
APPENDIX III: Introduction Letter

Dear participant,

My name is Kelins Randiek; I am a student pursuing master’s degree in communication studies at United States International University of Africa carrying out a research on the role of social media on organizational Reputation at KPLC. All the information retrieved from your organizational posts will be used for academic purposes and will be treated with utmost confidence.

KPLC organization have been selected for scrutiny of blackout crisis experience on 9th January 2018. This information can also be used by the government institutions to make informed moves concerning crisis communication management with regard on the use of social media.

Your cooperation will highly be appreciated

Thank you.

Sincerely

Kelins Randiek.