A literature review on communication strategies in crisis preparedness in Kenya: Case of tourism industry in Naivasha Sub-county

*Muriuki Robert G.M.; Dr Gertrude Musuruve Inimah and Dr Idah Muchunku-Mwenda.

PhD student in the Department of media technology and applied communications of Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology.
Lecturer in the Department of media technology and applied communication of Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology.
Lecturer in the department of Journalism of Mount Kenya University.
*Corresponding Author: *Muriuki Robert G.M*

ABSTRACT: This paper is a literature review on crises and preparedness in the tourism and hospitality industry in Naivasha Sub-County in Nakuru County of Kenya. The paper gives an overview background of crisis preparedness from a scholarly perspective. The perspectives range from global, national to local. The paper further looks at two pertinent theories that touch on crises preparedness. These are chaos theory and situational crisis communication theory (SCCT). The two theories give an elaboration in explaining how organizations can prepare for a crisis.

I. BACKGROUND

Scholarly Perspective on crises preparedness

Several scholars have extensively written on this area with a view to offering solutions and best practices on crisis preparedness. According to Coombs (2009), communication is the essence of crisis management and a crisis or threat of a crisis creates need for information. The reality of crises, he adds, leads to the need for preparation and readiness to respond. The critical component in crisis management is communication. Coombs continues to say that through communication, information is collected, processed into knowledge, and shared with others.

De Sausmarez (2007) says tourism is a major global economic sector and is increasingly making a contribution to national economies, particularly in developing countries, where it generates employment, stimulates national development and is a means of attracting foreign exchange. Faulkner (2001), Ritchie (2004), Santana (2004), in Pennington-Gray et al explain that the tourism industry has been one of many businesses affected by numerous crises and disasters around the globe in recent years. Researchers Blake and Sinclair (2003); Faulkner (2001); and Santana in Pennington-Gray et al (2011) argue that given the economic importance of tourism, the effects of a crisis can have devastating and sustained long term impacts for destinations, as well as the nation's economy. Ritchie (2004) explains that tourism organizations and destinations need to be prepared to assist tourists during catastrophic events, and tourism destination managers should have crisis and disaster management competency.

In December 2004, earthquakes with a magnitude of up to 9.0 on the Richter scale hit several parts of Asian coast triggering a tsunami (Reddy 2006). Tsunamis are one of the most destructive natural hazards that affect coastal areas, as their waves impact the coast with enormous energy capable of destroying objects on the coastal areas and can cause extensive damage and disruption to human lives, their livelihood, infrastructure and economic activities (Devi and Shenoi, 2012). The disaster had an immediate impact on the tourism industry and livelihood of tourism dependent community, due to a decline to tourist arrivals (Reddy 2006).

De Suazmarez (2013) intimates that crises and natural disasters jeopardize tourism development not only by the damage they inflict but also by their unpredictability. Rousaki and Alcott, (2006) add that the degree of readiness, both in psychological terms and in terms of decision capabilities, is an important determinant of the degree of stress resulting from surprise, and in the ability of an organization to cope with a crisis situation. Therefore as Pennington-Gray et al. (2011) observe, tourism organizations and destinations need to be prepared to assist tourists during catastrophic events, since the tourism industry has been one of many businesses affected

---

by crises and disasters around the globe in recent years (Faulkner, 2001; Ritchie, 2004; Santana, 2004). Crisis communication strategies and techniques are called for to develop plans and programmes, training and testing to ensure that when crises do occur, resources (personnel and equipment) can be mobilized and deployed to best effect to reduce the effects of the crisis and to facilitate the return of normal tourism operations (Albattat & Som, 2013).

Gitonga (2014) says that Naivasha town is steadily becoming not only one of the safest and fastest growing towns in Nakuru County, but an exciting holiday destination. These days, he continues, Naivasha Sub-County is the most visited in Kenya, mainly during holidays, as it has become an alternative to Mombasa and the coastal region where there are concerns over insecurity. The Sub-County is home to the fresh-water Lake Naivasha, has many tourist attractions like the Hell's gate National Park, Crescent Island Game Park and the Crater Lake Game Sanctuary. There are also several camping sites around the lake and a haven for bird watching and other game around the lake. Naivasha also boasts of a good number of world-class hotels and lodges such as Enashpai Resort and Spa; The Great Rift Valley Lodge Golf Resort; among others. Gitonga (2014) says that the lakeside area, with its cool climate, has become a retreat for local and international tourists seeking peace, quietness and fun.

Naivasha Sub-County has been peaceful devoid of any significant crisis which can lead to what is termed as a philosophy of "it can't happen to me" –and can lead to the illusion of invulnerability reducing the responsiveness to danger signals (Ford, 1981;Rousaki& Alcott, 2006). With the constant threat of all kinds of crises ranging from natural disasters, technological, workplace violence, industrial accidents, terrorism and others, everyorganization, no matter how large or small, needs both a risk assessmentand crisis communication plans (George 2012). Naivasha Sub-County tourism sector therefore needs to be prepared for crises as already argued by Coombs (2012) among other authors, that communication is a key component of crises preparedness.

However, since tourism is highly susceptible to shocks, and effects of crises in the industry can lead to several direct and indirect repercussions, Kovoor et al (2000) recommends that appropriate communication techniques and strategies can help to proactively overcome or prevent crises. Regular evaluation of such techniques is necessary to ensure effectiveness (Ritchie et al 2004). Santana (2004) states that, there are communication strategies in application for crises preparedness in the tourism and hospitality industry world over. However, in Kenya, assessment of the same is glaringly lacking (de Sausmarez 2013) and hence, the need for this study.

Theories relevant in crisis communication
Chaos Theory and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) are some of the frequently used theories in explaining the existence and management of crises.

II. CHAOS THEORY

The chaos theory is a derivative of the systems theory, and attempts to understand the behaviour of systems that follow an unconventional or irregular pattern (Speakman 2011). These systems display certain patterns over time, but as Speakman points out, the system's future direction is never predicted by past behavior.

The theory is a scientific principle describing the unpredictability of systems and its premise is that systems sometime reside in chaos, generating energy without any predictability or direction (Gale, 2009). Chaos theory points simultaneously to the inherent disorder, randomness, complexity, and unpredictability; and to the inherent order, pattern, and general predictability in an effort to understand the operation of large complex systems (Sellnow*et al*., 2002).

It is argued that the chaos theory provides a good framework for crises because the dynamic of a crisis is similar to a chaotic system as a crisis forms a series of events that gains momentum over time and develop into an eventual disordered state (Murphy, 1996).According to Speakman (2011), chaos theory was explored within the boundaries of physical science but is applicable to tourism crisis management.

The elements of chaos theory are: edge of chaos, bifurcation and cosmology, self-organization, strange attractors and lock-in-effect (Speakman, 2011) while tourism crisis ingredients include factors such as triggering effect, high threat, surprise, urgency, an inability to cope, a turning point, fluidity and instability (Faulkner, 2001). This being the case, Speakman (2011) suggests a synthesis of the tourism lifecycle with the elements of chaos theory. He proposes that the adoption of chaos theory can improve the planning and response framework for tourism crises since the approach potentially eradicates weaknesses common to crisis management models and offers alternative solutions to challenges caused by crisis.

Speakman (2011) explains the elements of chaos theory and shows how these elements can be utilized to counteract the challenges presented by crises. The first element is the 'edge of chaos'. Faulkner and Russell (2004) claim that an "edge of chaos" state exists where a system has reached a point of tenuous equilibrium. Since tourism organizations and businesses can be viewed as "open systems", a model which embraces chaos theory is useful to tourism business owners and managers (Speakman, 2011). The chaos model of tourism shows

managers that they should be aware that instability and change are inherent characteristics of the system, and that there exists the ever-present threat of disruption irrespective of the length of period of stability. The system is always on the 'edge of chaos', in a state of 'tenuous equilibrium' which a trigger event' can directly or indirectly induce a crisis. The theory therefore suggests that due to the sheer unpredictability of what will happen next, threats can be countered by conducting large scale scenario analysis and drawing detailed contingency plans to deal with every conceivable situation (Speakman).

The other element in the chaos theory is bifurcation and cosmology. Speakman (2011), explains that a crisis can be viewed as a 'bifurcation point'. Bifurcation according to Sellnow et al (2002) represents a flashpoint of change where a system's direction, character, and/or structure are fundamentally disrupted. The system is thrown into chaos and disequilibrium and the element of cosmology is usually evident (Speakman, 2011). He describes cosmology as a feeling of helplessness and confusion due to the 'high threat, short decision time, surprise and urgency' and includes the 'perception of inability to cope'. According to Weick (1993), a cosmology episode occurs when people suddenly and deeply feel that the universe is no longer a rational, orderly system. Managers are advised to mitigate the effects of cosmology episodes by means of clear communication by focusing on decisional, informational and the key activity of crisis containment and communication flows (Evans & Elphick, 2005).

Another of the elements is self-organization and strange attractors. Stewart (1989) asserts that self-organization is a natural process whereby order re-emerges out of a random chaotic state. McKercher (1999) putting this in a tourism context avers that, despite the unpredictable nature of crises, tourism systems manage to re-emerge in an even more competitive manner. This re-emergence demonstrates the resilience of tourism and how most destinations appear to recover extremely quickly after an event (Speakman, 2011). Sellnow et al. (2002) further explain 'through self-organization, new forms, structures, procedures, hierarchies, and understanding emerge, giving a new form to the system, often at a higher level of order and complexity'.

Sellnow et al. (2002) liken 'strange attractors' to the values, needs and assumptions that guide the social system towards relative stability following bifurcation. It is an air of stability in a chaotic situation as Thiertat and Forgues (1995) aver that by providing communication platforms and encouraging cooperative relationships, managers themselves can become 'strange attractors'. Zahra and Ryan (2007) further explain strange attractors as being a common vision, a sense of meaning, strategy or value system that drives people to achieve a common goal. Faulkner (2001) recommends open and clear communication through the media to restore the confidence and the viability of the destination. Managers and destinations should be aware of this so that they do not rush to advertise that things are 'back to normal' since everything may not be ready for the return of visitors to the destination (Speakman 2011). Failure to deliver adequate services to 'loyal' tourists can result to negative publicity.

The chaos theory is useful in a study dealing with crisis communication in the tourism industry since as Speakman (2010) explains, an understanding of the chaos theory can provide techniques and opportunities to assist in the management of a tourism crisis. He adds that the adoption of chaos theory can improve the planning and response framework for tourism crises. The theory will be used in communicating to the publics to be aware of the possibility of a crisis since tourism is always on 'the edge of chaos', in a state of 'tenuous equilibrium' in which a 'trigger-event' can directly or indirectly induce a crisis; and in a an 'edge of chaos' is the sheer unpredictability of what will happen next (Speakman).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) was developed by Coombs (1995). The theory says that crises are negative events, and stakeholders will make attributions about crisis responsibility, and those attributions will affect how stakeholders interact with the organization in crisis. According to Kyhn (2003), SCCT belief is that the effectiveness of communication strategies is dependent on characteristics of the crisis situation, and that by understanding the crisis situation, a manager can choose the most appropriate response. Coombs and Holladay (2010) explain that SCCT is audience oriented because it seeks to illuminate how people perceive crises, their reactions to crisis response strategies, and audience reactions to the organization in crisis, hence the nature of the crisis situation shapes audience perceptions and attributions in order to understand how people make attributions about crises and the effects of those attributions on their attitudes and behavioral intentions.

According to Coombs and Holladay (2010), the core of SCCT is crisis responsibility and attributions of crisis responsibility have a significant effect on how people perceive the reputation of an organization in crisis and their affective and behavioral responses to that organization following a crisis. They say that reputation matters because it is an important intangible resource for an organization. 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). SCCT says affect and behavioural intentions are other crisis outcomes- they may generate sympathy, anger and *schadenfreude* (taking joy in the pain of others) and

may lead to negative word of mouth including reduced purchase decisions. Anger is the motivator that moves people to action, and in the case of the negative communication dynamic, that action is relaying negative messages to others about the organization in crisis (Coombs & Holladay).

As Ritchie (2004) explains, there is need for immediate, reactive, and strategic communication to provide a steady flow of correct and consistent information to the publics; information designed with customized messages to different publics identified in advance. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory provides the selection of the appropriate crisis response strategies, what Coombs (1995) calls 'choosing the right words'. Coombs and Holladay say SCCT translated attribution theory into the language of crisis communication by giving crisis response strategies on what crisis managers should say and do after a crisis occurs, since communication is the essence of crisis management.

According to Coombs and Holladay (2010), the outcome of SCCT research was the creation of crises response strategies that crisis managers might use. The list of ten crises response strategies emphasizes protecting the victims in the crisis and the organization's perceived acceptance of responsibility for the crisis. The first response is denial, where the management claims there is no crisis; then scapegoat, where the management blames some outside entity for the crisis; attack the accuser, where the management confronts the group or person claiming that something is wrong; excuse, where the management attempts to minimize crisis responsibility by claiming lack of control over the event or lack of intent to do harm and justification, where the management attempts to minimize the perceived damage caused by the crisis.

Further Coombs and Holladay (2010) say SCCT gives other five crisis response strategies as ingratiation, where the management praises other stakeholders and/or reminds people of past good works by the organization; concern, where the management expresses concern for victims; compassion, where the management offers money or other gifs to victims; regret, where management indicates they feel badly about the crisis and apology where management accepts full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.

Coombs and Holladay (2010) explain that crisis response should begin with instructing and adjusting information. Instructing information tells stakeholders how to protect themselves during an ongoing crisis like evacuation or protective measures to take and adjusting information which helps stakeholders cope psychologically with a crisis. It gives basic information on a crisis event and corrective action to prevent a repeat of crisis. According to Coombs and Holladay (2010) SCCT groups crisis into three types: victim, accident and intentional. Crisis managers select the reputation repair crisis strategies based upon the threat presented by the crisis. For the victim type, there is low crisis responsibility and threat for the organization, and therefore it should be managed using instructing and adjusting information (Coombs & Holladay). For the accident type, justification and/or excuse crisis response strategies should be added to instructing and adjusting information while the intentional type may warrant apology and/or compensation added to instructing and adjusting information (Coombs & Holladay).

Additionally, Coombs and Holladay (2010) aver that there are intensifying factors that alter attributions of crisis responsibility and intensify the threat from the crisis. These are crisis history and prior reputation. In crisis history is whether an organization has had a similar threat in the past. They say that past crises help to establish a pattern of "bad behavior" by an organization and those stakeholders attribute greater responsibility when past crises exist. Prior reputation relates to how well or poorly the organization has treated its stakeholders in the past or the general relationship with the stakeholders; and organizations with negative prior reputation are attributed greater crisis responsibility (Coombs & Holladay).

This theory may be useful in a study that deals with crises communication since it can be used to explain how to communicate in the aftermath of a crisis in order to avert a negative backlash on the organization's reputation. This is because as Coombs and Holladay (2010) argue, crisis communication is a very applied concept and managers will take the advice offered to help them cope with crisis.

As can be seen from this paper, crises can appear from all quarters of life and crises of whatever nature or magnitude is a concern of many scholars. They have come up with theories that seek to explain occurrences and how organizations can prepare for them.

REFERENCES

[1]   AlBattat, A. and Som, A.P.M. (2013). Emergency Preparedness for Disasters and crises in the Hotel Industry.SAGE Open , 1-10.
[2]   Blake, A. and Sinclair, M.T. (2003). Tourism crisis Management: U.S. Response to September 11. Annals of Tourism Research , 813-832.
[3]   Coombs, T. W. (1999). Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and responding. London. Sage Publications.
[4]   Coombs, T. and Holladay (2010). The Handbook of Communication. West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell.

[5]   de Sausmarez, N. (2007). Crisis Management, Tourism and Sustainability: The Role of Indicators. Journal of Sustainable Tourism , 700-715.
[6]   de Sausmarez, N. (2013). Challenges to Kenyan tourism since 2008: crisis management from the Kenyan tour operator perspective. Currrent Issues in Tourism , 792-809.
[7]   Devi, E. and Shenoi, S. (2012). Tsunami and the Effects on Coastal Morphology and Ecosystems. Proc Indian National Science Academy , 513-528.
[8]   Evans, N. and Elphick, S. (2005). 'Models of Crisis Management: an Evaluation of their Value for Strategic Planning in the Tourism Industry' . International Journal of Tourism Research , 135-150.
[9]   Faulkner, B. (2004). Chaos and comlexity in tourism: in search of a new perspective. Pacific Tourism Review , 93-100.
[10]   Faulkner, H. (2001). Towards a Framework for Tourism Disaster Management. Tourism Management , 135-147
[11]   George, A. M. (2012). Case studies in crisis communication. New York: Routledge.
[12]   Gitonga, A. (2014, December 21). Why Naivasha is giving the coast a run for local holiday makers. Standard Digital: Your Gateway , pp. 1-3.
[13]   Kyhn, S. (2008). Situational Crisis Communication Theory: Its use in a complex crisis with Scandinivian Airlinrs' groundin of Dash 8-Q400 airplanes. Aarhus Denmark: Aarhus University.
[14]   Pennington-Gray, L., Thapa, B., Kaplanidou, K., Cahyanto, I., & McLaughlin, E. (2011). Crisis Planning and Preparedness in the United States Tourism Industry. Cornell Hospitality Quarterly , 312-320.
[15]   Reddy, R. (2006). Impact of Tsunami on the Tourism Industry and Ecosystem of the Andrian and Nicobar Islands, India. Paris: UNESCO.
[16]   Ritchie, B. W. (2004). Chaos, crises and disasters: a strategic approach to crisis management in the tourism industry. Tourism Management , 669-683.
[17]   Rousaki, B. and Alcott, P. (2006). Exploring the crisis perceptions of hotel managers in the UK. Tourism and Hospitality Research , 27-38.
[18]   Santana, G. (2004). Crisis Management and Tourism: Beyond Rhetoric. Journal of Travel &
[19]   Tourism , 299-321.
[20]   Sellnow, T., Seeger M.W., and Ulner, R.R.(2002). Chaos theory, informational needs and natural disasters. Journal of Applied Communication Research , 269-292.
[21]   Speakman, M.K. (2011). A critique of contemporary tourism crisis disaster management models and frameworks. A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of MSC by research at the University of Central Lancashire.
[22]   Thiertart, R. A. and Forgues, B. (1995). 'Chaos theory and organization'. Organization Science , 19-31.
[23]   Zahra, A. and Ryan, C.(2007). "' From chaos to cohesion- Complexity in tourism structures: an analysis of New Zealand's regional tourism organizations'. Tourism Management , 854-862.