

Public Relations, Stakeholder Trust and Crisis Communication: Lessons from Turbulent Business Environments in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Organisations in Kenya operate amid regulatory shocks, currency and price volatility, political contestation and digitally amplified scrutiny. In such conditions public relations (PR) is less a publicity function than a boundary-spanning capability through which firms earn, protect and repair stakeholder trust. This paper makes a theoretical and methodological contribution. First, it integrates strategic PR, stakeholder salience, the ability-benevolence-integrity model of trust, situational crisis communication theory and legitimacy theory into one framework with seven structural hypotheses and one serial indirect-effect hypothesis. Second, it specifies a five-phase explanatory-exploratory sequential mixed-methods protocol covering case selection, instrument design, sampling, analytic decision rules and trustworthiness criteria. Third, it supports the protocol with computed power analyses for multiple regression and a Monte Carlo study of indirect-effect power: 385 stakeholder responses give power of .93 for $F^2 = .05$ and about .80 for a small-to-medium mediated effect. Fourth, it translates the framework into a time-phased crisis communication protocol for practitioners. No primary field data are reported; figures labelled stylised or illustrative are theory-derived, and the power and simulation results are computational. The framework is intended to guide empirical work in Kenya and comparable emerging economies.

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1. Introduction

Business organisations in Kenya operate in an environment that management scholars would describe as turbulent in the sense of Emery and Trist: change arrives from several directions at once, and the relationships among the sources of change are themselves unstable [1, 2]. Currency and price movements, abrupt shifts in fiscal and regulatory policy, contested elections and street-level protest, governance scandals, service failures and a news cycle accelerated by mobile-first social media converge on the same managers within short periods. Under such conditions, whether stakeholders keep extending credit, patronage, labour and licence to a firm depends heavily on how the firm communicates before, during and after adverse events.

Public relations (PR), understood as the management of communication and relationships between an organisation and its publics, is the function that carries most of this burden [3, 4]. The strategic-management tradition argues that PR creates value when it scans the environment, brings stakeholder expectations into decision making and sustains relationships built on mutual influence rather than one-way persuasion [5, 6]. Trust is the relational outcome that links

these activities to economic consequences. It is the willingness of one party to be vulnerable to another on the expectation that the other will act in ways important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor that other [7]. Crises threaten trust because they expose the gap between what stakeholders expected and what the organisation delivered, and the communication that follows either narrows or widens that gap [8, 9].

Four problems limit the usefulness of existing work for Kenyan and comparable settings. First, the theories explaining crisis communication, trust, stakeholder salience and legitimacy developed largely in parallel, so researchers seldom specify how they connect. Second, much of the empirical base consists of scenario experiments with student or online-panel participants in high-income countries, which leaves open whether findings travel to environments where institutions are thinner, informal networks denser and rumour faster [10, 11]. Third, field studies often under-specify sampling, measurement and analytic decision rules, which hampers replication. Fourth, environmental turbulence is usually treated as background rather than as a theoretical boundary condition.

This paper responds with a theoretical and methodological contribution rather than a report of new field data, and it follows the view that a theoretical contribution must explain what the constructs are, how and why they are related, and under which conditions [12]. Four research questions guide it. **RQ1:** How does environmental turbulence shape the strategic PR capability of firms? **RQ2:** Through what mechanisms does crisis communication quality translate into stakeholder trust, and what role does strategy fit play? **RQ3:** How do stakeholder salience and turbulence condition these relationships? **RQ4:** What research design can test the resulting model rigorously where secondary data are scarce? The contributions are an integrative framework with eight hypotheses, a fully specified five-phase mixed-methods protocol, computed power and simulation evidence that justifies the sampling plan, and a time-phased communication protocol that practitioners can apply now.

In Section 2 the relevant theories are reviewed and synthesised. Section 3 characterises Kenyan turbulence as a boundary condition. In Section 4 the framework and hypotheses are developed, in Section 5 the research design is presented and in Section 6 the measurement model. Section 7 reports the sample-size and power analyses, Section 8 the analytic strategy and Section 9 the criteria for validity, trustworthiness and ethics. Section 10 discusses theoretical and practical implications, Section 11 limitations and a research agenda, and Section 12 concludes.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Public relations as a strategic, boundary-spanning function

Grunig and Hunt distinguished four models of PR: press agency, public information, two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric communication [3]. Excellence theory later argued that the symmetrical model, together with a seat for the communication function in the dominant coalition and a participative culture, explains why some organisations communicate more effectively and with greater return [5, 6]. A resource-dependence reading gives the idea an economic footing: organisations depend on external actors for resources and legitimacy, and boundary-spanning roles such as scanning, buffering and bridging reduce that dependence [13]. In this paper *strategic PR capability* therefore denotes the organisation's standing capacity to scan its environment, to translate stakeholder expectations into decisions and to sustain two-way relationships. The construct is distinct from the volume of publicity or the size of the communications department. Its main weakness as a normative theory is that evidence from African organisations remains thin, which motivates empirical testing rather than assumption.

2.2 Stakeholders and salience

Stakeholder theory holds that firms should attend to any group that can affect or is affected by the achievement of organisational objectives [14]. Donaldson and Preston separated descriptive, instrumental and normative uses of the theory, and the present framework adopts the instrumental use: attention to stakeholders is examined for its consequences for trust and reputation [15]. Because managers cannot answer every claim equally, salience matters. Mitchell, Agle and Wood proposed that salience

arises with a stakeholder's power, the legitimacy of the claim and the urgency of the claim, and that these attributes are dynamic and socially constructed [16]. Salience is therefore treated here as a moderator: the same crisis message should carry different consequences for a regulator, a lender or an anxious customer.

2.3 Trust and its repair

The integrative model of Mayer, Davis and Schoorman defines trust as willingness to be vulnerable and decomposes trustworthiness into ability, benevolence and integrity, with the trustor's propensity to trust as a stable individual difference [7]. Rousseau and colleagues note that trust is both a psychological state and a basis for action, and that its bases differ across calculative, relational and institutional forms [17]. In marketing, trust and commitment jointly sustain long-term exchange relationships [18]. The repair literature shows that the effect of an apology or a denial depends on whether the violation concerns competence or integrity: apologies tend to work better for competence-based violations, while denials can work better for integrity-based violations when the accused is in fact innocent [9]. Accepting more blame can help when evidence of guilt is clear [19]. Dirks, Lewicki and Zaheer extend the analysis to relationships between organisations and show that repair is an interactive process involving both parties [20]. The implication is that the dimension of trust damaged by a crisis should shape the response.

2.4 Crisis communication

A crisis is a perceived violation of salient stakeholder expectations that can seriously affect organisational performance and generate negative outcomes [10, 21]. Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) uses attribution theory to predict how much responsibility stakeholders assign to the organisation. Crises fall into victim, accidental and preventable clusters, and crisis history and prior reputation intensify attributions [8, 11]. SCCT recommends that response strategies, ranging from denial and diminishment to rebuilding and bolstering, be matched to the level of attributed responsibility. Image-repair theory catalogues the discursive options [22], while Sturges distinguishes instructing information (what to do to stay safe), adjusting information (how to cope psychologically) and internalising information (what the event means for the organisation's reputation) [23]. Weick's analysis of sensemaking explains why early communication matters: under ambiguity people act first and rationalise later, so an official information vacuum is quickly filled by others [24, 25]. In the social-mediated crisis communication model, information form and source interact with publics' own channel use [26, 27]. Proactive disclosure, or 'stealing thunder', has been found to reduce reputational damage relative to disclosure by third parties [28].

2.5 Legitimacy and reputation

Suchman distinguishes pragmatic, moral and cognitive legitimacy and argues that organisations must gain, maintain and repair each of them [29]. Reputation is the aggregate of stakeholders' perceptions of an organisation's past actions and future prospects, and it works as a signal that reduces uncertainty about quality [30]. Both are valuable as outcomes because they capture what trust ultimately secures:

continued access to resources and the licence to operate. Legitimacy is especially relevant in turbulent settings where regulation is contested or inconsistently enforced.

2.6 Synthesis

Table 1 summarises the lenses and what each contributes. The synthesis shows complementarity rather than rivalry.

Excellence theory supplies the antecedent capability, stakeholder theory the differentiation of audiences, trust theory the mediating outcome and its dimensions, SCCT the logic of response matching and legitimacy theory the distal outcome. What each lacks is an account of how turbulence changes the value of communication; Section 3 supplies it.

Theoretical lens	Core premise	Key constructs	Role in this framework	Principal limitation
Excellence / strategic PR	Symmetrical, participative communication adds value when linked to strategic decisions	Two-way symmetry; access to dominant coalition; scanning	Antecedent capability (H1, H2)	Normative; limited African evidence
Stakeholder salience	Managerial attention is allocated by power, legitimacy and urgency	Salience classes; dynamic attributes	Moderator of response effects (H5)	Weak measurement; digital publics shift quickly
Integrative trust model	Trust is willingness to be vulnerable and rests on ability, benevolence, integrity	ABI dimensions; propensity; repair	Mediating outcome (H4, H6, H8)	Individual-level; organisational aggregation unresolved
SCCT and image repair	Attributed responsibility determines the best response posture	Crisis clusters; history; response strategies	Strategy-fit logic (H3)	Mostly experiments; Western samples
Legitimacy and reputation	Acceptance and signalling secure resources and licence to operate	Pragmatic, moral, cognitive legitimacy	Distal outcome (H6)	Broad constructs; indicator choice matters
Resource dependence and sensemaking	Dependence motivates boundary spanning; ambiguity drives meaning-making	Boundary spanning; enactment	Turbulence mechanism (H1, H7)	Few direct communication measures

Table 1. Theoretical lenses synthesised in the framework, their premises, roles and limitations.

3. The Kenyan Context: Turbulence as a Boundary Condition

Turbulence refers to the degree of instability and unpredictability in an organisation's task and general environment. Dess and Beard summarise task environments along munificence, dynamism and complexity [2]. For theory building the useful point is that turbulence raises the value of information while lowering its reliability, and so changes both the demand for organisational communication and its credibility.

Kenya presents several forms of turbulence at once. Table 2 organises them into six types that also serve as stratification dimensions for case selection in Section 5. The typology is analytic and derived from the strategy and communication literatures; it is not an empirical census. The ratings in Fig. 7 were assigned by the author as a transparent starting rubric to be revised during Phases 1 and 2, and should not be read as measured data.

Four institutional features merit attention as potential boundary conditions. First, mobile-first connectivity means information about an organisational failure can reach stakeholders within minutes through messaging groups and social platforms, often before any official statement. Second, high-context and relational communication norms may increase the weight stakeholders give to perceived sincerity, the personal accountability of leaders and the consistency between words and conduct. Third, disclosure regulation differs between listed firms, which face securities-market and governance obligations such as the Capital Markets Authority code and the Companies Act, and the many unlisted and family-owned firms that do not [31, 32]. Fourth, the Data Protection Act makes the mishandling of personal data an explicit compliance and reputational risk for any organisation that processes it [33]. Each feature is a candidate moderator or contextual theme in the empirical phases.

Turbulence type	Typical crisis triggers	Stakeholders most exposed	Core communication challenge
Regulatory and fiscal shocks	Sudden tax or licensing changes; enforcement actions; data-protection breaches	Regulators, customers, lenders	Explaining compliance posture quickly without sounding defensive
Macroeconomic volatility	Currency depreciation; input-price spikes; interest-rate moves	Suppliers, employees, investors	Price and pay messaging that preserves perceived benevolence
Political and social contestation	Election disputes; protests; boycotts	Employees, communities, customers	Neutrality versus voice; avoiding perceived partisanship
Governance and ethics failures	Fraud; conflicts of interest; leadership disputes	Investors, regulators, employees	Integrity repair needs visible accountability, not only words
Product and service failures	Outages; recalls; safety incidents	Customers, business partners	Instructing information first; speed with accuracy
Digital amplification	Viral allegations; misinformation; impersonation accounts	All publics, especially young adults	Monitoring, verification and rapid correction across channels

Table 2. Typology of turbulence relevant to Kenyan firms and associated communication challenges (analytic, not empirical).

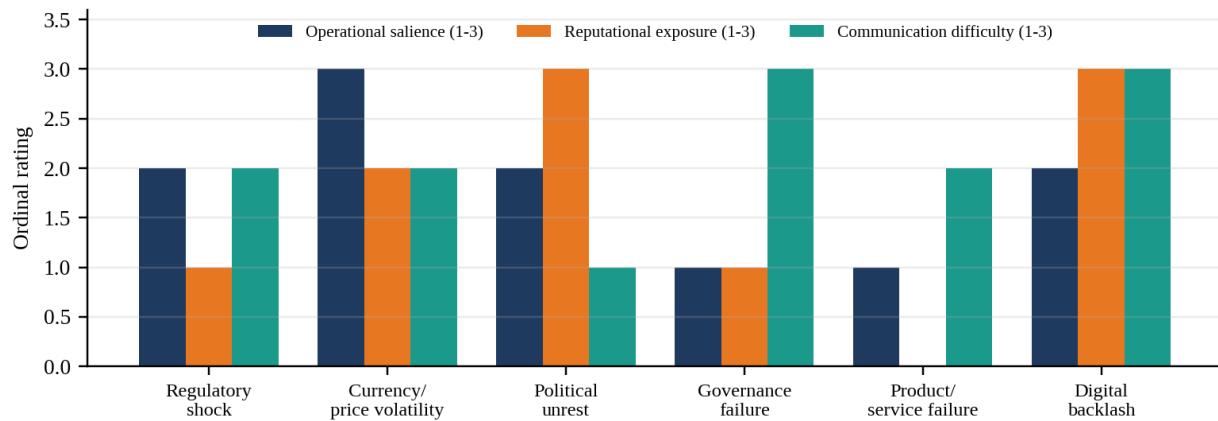


Fig 7. Indicative analytic ratings (1 = low, 3 = high) of the six turbulence types on three dimensions, used as a starting rubric for case stratification. Ratings are author-assigned and illustrative.

4. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Fig. 1 presents the framework. Environmental turbulence is the contextual driver; strategic PR capability is the organisational antecedent; crisis communication quality is the proximal response; stakeholder trust is the mediating relational outcome; and reputation and legitimacy are the distal outcomes. Crisis attributes and stakeholder salience enter as conditions. Table 3 states the eight hypotheses formally, and the paragraphs below give the reasoning for each.

4.1 Hypothesis development

H1 (turbulence and capability). Resource-dependence logic predicts that organisations facing greater uncertainty invest more in boundary-spanning activity, because information and external support become more valuable [2, 13].

H2 (capability and quality). Organisations that already practise scanning, symmetrical dialogue and early access to the dominant coalition can detect issues sooner, draft accurate messages faster and coordinate spokespersons more reliably [5, 6]. These are the attributes of communication quality defined in Section 6.

H3 (strategy fit). SCCT implies that quality is not generic eloquence but the fit between crisis cluster and response posture [8]. Fig. 4 expresses this as a prescriptive matrix in which ratings from 0 to 3 summarise how well each posture matches each cluster under SCCT guidance. Instructing and adjusting information fit victim crises, whereas a full rebuilding posture (apology and compensation) fits severe preventable crises or those with an unfavourable history. The matrix converts H3 into a measurable fit score: the matrix rating for the observed cluster-posture pair, rescaled to 0-1.

H4 (quality and trust). Communication supplies evidence about ability (competent handling),

benevolence (care for those affected) and integrity (honesty and consistency) [7, 9]. Fig. 3 shows stylised trajectories that follow from this logic: fit-matched, early and transparent communication limits the initial fall in trust and speeds recovery; partial or delayed disclosure slows recovery; and denial later contradicted by evidence produces both a deeper fall and a persistent integrity deficit. The curves are theory-derived illustrations, not estimates.

H5 (salience). Salient stakeholders have more power to act on their trust judgments and more urgent claims, so they are expected to respond more strongly to communication quality [16].

H6 (trust and legitimacy). Trust reduces perceived uncertainty about future conduct and so supports reputation and the cognitive and moral legitimacy through which organisations retain support [29, 30].

H7 (turbulence as moderator). Under high turbulence stakeholders have fewer reliable alternative signals and a greater need to reduce uncertainty, so communication quality should matter more for trust [24]. In stable conditions, track record should dominate.

H8 (serial mediation). Together H2, H4 and H6 imply an indirect effect of PR capability on reputation through communication quality and trust. H8 tests the sequence that makes the capability argument operational.

4.2 Rival explanations

Three rivals are tested rather than dismissed. Prior reputation may drive both communication quality and trust (spuriousness or reverse causation); crisis severity may drive attribution, response and trust simultaneously; and a stakeholder's propensity to trust may inflate every perceptual measure. The design therefore includes prior reputation, severity and propensity as controls, collects variables from different sources and plans robustness checks (Section 8).

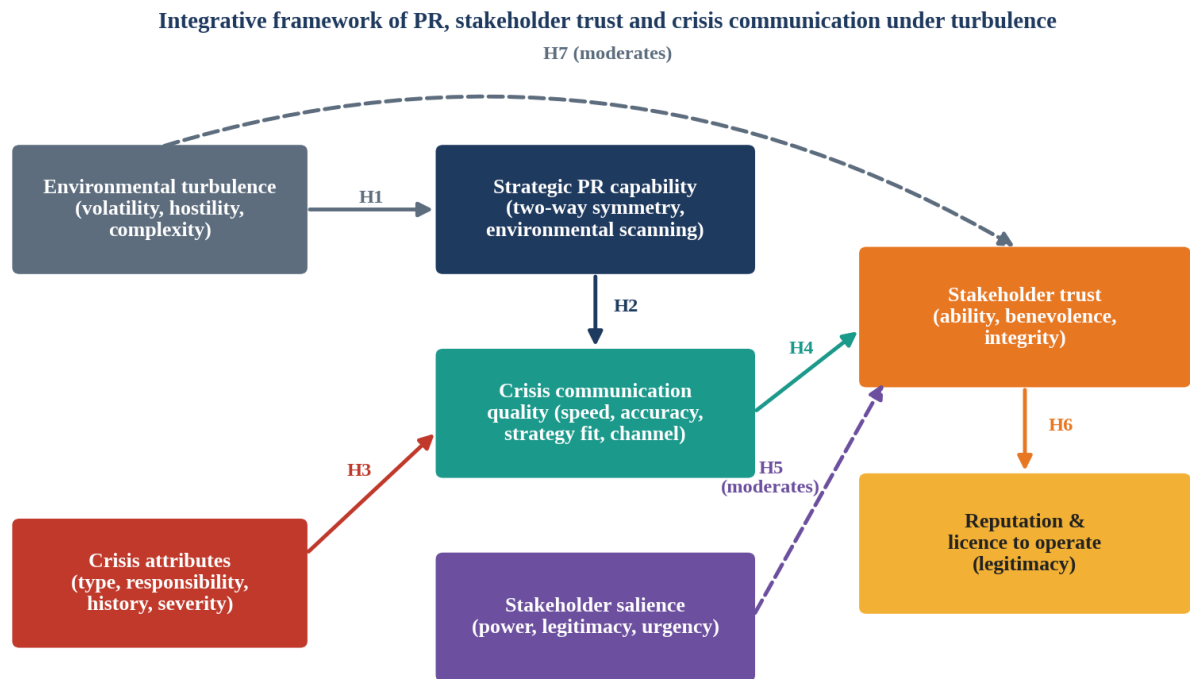


Fig 1. Integrative framework: turbulence, strategic PR capability, crisis communication quality, trust and legitimacy, with crisis attributes and stakeholder salience as conditions (H1-H7; H8 is the serial indirect path H2 → H4 → H6).

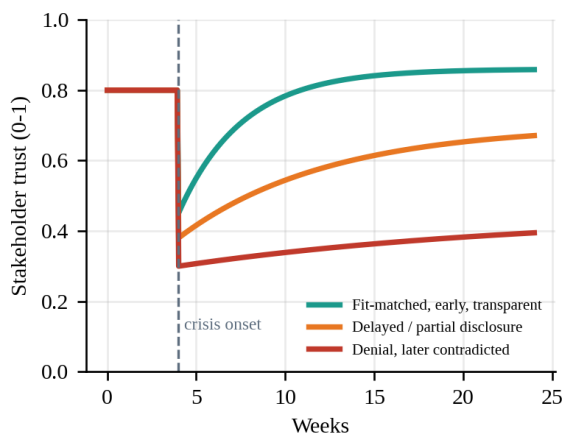


Fig 3. Stylised trust trajectories implied by H4 (illustrative, theory-derived; not empirical estimates).

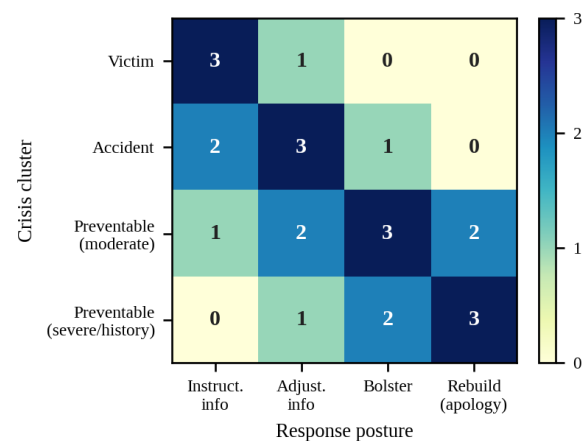


Fig 4. Prescriptive fit matrix for H3: 0 = poor fit, 3 = best fit (author synthesis of SCCT guidance).

ID	Hypothesis	Theoretical basis	Sign	Primary test
H1	Environmental turbulence is positively related to strategic PR capability	Resource dependence; task environments (Pfeffer & Salancik; Dess & Beard)	+	Firm-level regression (Source A)
H2	Strategic PR capability is positively related to crisis communication quality	Excellence theory (Grunig; Dozier et al.)	+	Firm-level regression (Source A)
H3	Strategy fit between crisis cluster and response posture is positively related to crisis communication quality	SCCT (Coombs)	+	Fit score from Fig. 4; regression
H4	Crisis communication quality is positively related to stakeholder trust	Trust model; repair research (Mayer et al.; Kim et al.)	+	PLS-SEM path (Source B)
H5	Stakeholder salience strengthens the quality-trust relationship	Salience theory (Mitchell et al.)	+(mod.)	Two-stage interaction; multi-group
H6	Stakeholder trust is positively related to reputation and legitimacy	Legitimacy; reputation (Suchman; Fombrun & Shanley)	+	PLS-SEM path (Source B)
H7	Turbulence strengthens the quality-trust relationship	Sensemaking; uncertainty reduction (Weick)	+(mod.)	Cross-level interaction; sensitivity checks
H8	PR capability affects reputation indirectly through quality and trust	Integration of H2, H4, H6	+(serial)	Bootstrap specific indirect effect

Table 3. Hypotheses, theoretical bases, expected signs and primary tests.

5. Research Design and Methodology

5.1 Philosophical position and design logic

The design is pragmatist in its commitment to the methods that best answer each question and critical-realist in ontology: communication mechanisms and trust dynamics are treated as real but observed imperfectly through perceptions, documents and behaviour. Mixed methods are justified by complementarity. Quantitative testing estimates the size and generality of relationships, while qualitative case work identifies how turbulence changes what counts as credible communication and why hypothesised relations may fail [34]. Fig. 2 shows the five-phase sequence and Table 4 summarises it.

5.2 Phases

Phase 1: scoping review. A review following PRISMA-ScR maps how PR, crisis communication, trust and legitimacy have been studied in Kenya, East Africa and comparable emerging economies [35]. Searches of Scopus, Web of Science, African Journals Online and Google Scholar combine communication terms ("crisis communication", "crisis management", "public relations") with relational outcomes (trust, reputation, legitimacy) and geography (Kenya, "East Africa", "sub-Saharan Africa", "emerging market*"). English-language studies from 2000 to 2026 reporting empirical or conceptual contributions are eligible. Two reviewers screen independently, resolve disagreements by discussion and chart variables in a shared codebook. The output is a refined set of propositions and a bank of candidate items.

Phase 2: multiple-case study. Six firms are selected purposively under theoretical replication logic [36, 37]. Each experienced a publicly visible crisis within the past five years and employs at least 50 people, and together the cases span the turbulence types in Table 2, listed and unlisted ownership, and contrasting trust outcomes (recovery and non-recovery). Data comprise 24 to 30

semi-structured interviews with communication managers, senior executives and stakeholder representatives (regulators, suppliers, customers, employees), plus organisational documents and archived public statements and social-media posts. The purpose is to refine constructs, uncover context-specific mechanisms and generate items.

Phase 3: instrument development and pilot. Items from Phases 1 and 2 are reviewed by an expert panel, translated and back-translated, pre-tested in cognitive interviews and piloted with about 40 respondents. Pilot data inform item-total correlations, reliability estimates and wording revisions, but not factor-structure conclusions, because 40 cases are too few for stable factor analysis.

Phase 4: linked two-source survey. Source A comprises organisational informants (senior communication, corporate-affairs or strategy managers) from at least 150 firms, who report on turbulence, PR capability, crisis characteristics and their own assessment of the response. Source B comprises stakeholders (employees, customers, suppliers, lenders, investors) of at least 30 of the same firms, who report on perceived communication quality, trust, salience and reputation. A target of 385 stakeholder responses (about 12 per firm) follows from Section 7. Firms are drawn from a frame assembled from the Registrar of Companies, the Nairobi Securities Exchange listing and chamber-of-commerce directories, stratified by sector and size. Stakeholder samples are quota-based because no population frame exists; precision statements therefore describe design benchmarks rather than probability-based inference, and generalisation is analytical rather than statistical.

Phase 5: integration. Findings are merged through joint displays and meta-inferences (Section 8.5), and discrepant results are followed up with additional interviews.

Explanatory-exploratory sequential mixed-methods design

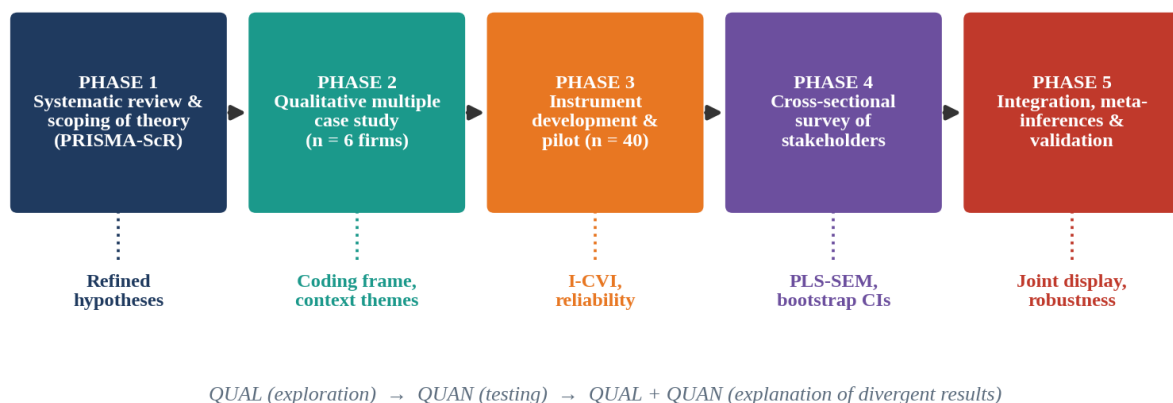


Fig 2. Five-phase explanatory-exploratory sequential mixed-methods design with the principal output of each phase.

Phase	Purpose	Method	Sample / data	Principal output
1	Map evidence; refine propositions	PRISMA-ScR scoping review	Databases 2000-2026; dual screening	Propositions; item bank
2	Explore mechanisms and context	Multiple-case study; thematic analysis	6 firms; 24-30 interviews; documents	Coding frame; context themes
3	Develop and test instrument	Expert panel; cognitive interviews; pilot	7 experts; 10 interviews; $n \approx 40$	Revised scales; I-CVI; reliability
4	Test hypotheses H1-H8	Linked two-source survey; PLS-SEM	Source A ≥ 150 firms; Source B 385 stakeholders	Path estimates; indirect effects
5	Integrate and explain	Joint displays; follow-up interviews	All strands	Meta-inferences; robustness

Table 4. Summary of the five-phase research design.

6. Measurement

Table 5 lists constructs, indicative items and sources. All multi-item scales use seven-point agreement or frequency anchors. Existing instruments are adapted rather than adopted unchanged: items are reworded for the organisational target and crisis setting, translated into Kiswahili and back-translated [38], and rated by a panel of seven experts (communication scholars, practitioners and a psychometrician) for relevance, with item-level content validity indices of at least .78 required for retention [39]. Cognitive interviews with ten respondents check comprehension. Turbulence items draw on market-turbulence work, and reputation items on the Reputation Quotient [40, 41].

Crisis communication quality is modelled as a formative composite of speed, accuracy, consistency, empathy and strategy fit, because the dimensions are not interchangeable: a very fast message cannot compensate for inaccuracy. Trust is a hierarchical construct whose lower-order components, ability, benevolence and integrity, are reflective [7, 42]. Controls include firm size, age, ownership and sector, crisis severity, time since the crisis, prior reputation, propensity to trust and stakeholder type.

Procedural remedies for common-method variance include separating predictor and criterion sources, randomising item order, guaranteeing anonymity and including a theoretically unrelated marker variable [43, 44]. Statistical checks are described in Section 8.

Construct	Dimensions and indicative item	Source (adapted)	Respondent	Format
Environmental turbulence	Volatility, hostility, unpredictability. "Conditions in our main markets change in ways that are hard to predict."	Jaworski & Kohli (1993); Dess & Beard (1984)	Organisational informant	7-point; 8 items
Strategic PR capability	Scanning, symmetrical dialogue, strategic access. "Communication staff take part when strategic decisions are made."	Grunig (1992); Hon & Grunig (1999)	Organisational informant	7-point; 12 items
Crisis attributes	Cluster (victim, accidental, preventable), severity, history	Coombs (2007); two independent coders	Documents and informant	Categorical; 5-point severity
Crisis communication quality	Speed, accuracy, consistency, empathy, strategy fit. "The organisation told us what happened before we heard it elsewhere."	New scale informed by Coombs (2007); Sturges (1994)	Stakeholder (informant for triangulation)	7-point; 15 items (formative)
Stakeholder trust	Ability, benevolence, integrity. "I believe the organisation is honest about its problems."	Mayer & Davis (1999)	Stakeholder	7-point; 15 items
Stakeholder salience	Power, legitimacy, urgency	Mitchell et al. (1997)	Stakeholder; informant rating	7-point; 9 items
Reputation and legitimacy	Reputation; pragmatic and moral legitimacy	Fombrun et al. (2000); Suchman (1995)	Stakeholder	7-point; 12 items

Table 5. Constructs, dimensions, indicative items, sources and respondents.

7. Sample Size and Statistical Power

Rules of thumb for structural models, such as ten cases per indicator, ignore effect size, so the plan rests on explicit power calculations [45, 46]. Power of the omnibus F-test for a regression with six predictors was computed from the noncentral F distribution at $\alpha = .05$ for effects around Cohen's benchmarks [47]. Table 6 and Fig. 5 show that $N = 385$ gives power of .93 for $f^2 = .05$ and nearly 1.00 for $f^2 \geq .10$, whereas detecting $f^2 = .02$ would require many more observations (power = .50 at $N = 385$). The figure of 385 also coincides with the Cochran benchmark for estimating a proportion to within ± 5 percentage points at 95% confidence

under maximum variance, which is useful for descriptive reporting.

Stakeholders are nested within firms, so the effective sample is smaller than the nominal one. With an assumed intraclass correlation of .05 and about 12 respondents per firm, the design effect is $1 + (12 - 1)(.05) = 1.55$, and 385 responses carry the information of about 248 independent observations. Power at $N = 250$ remains .98 for $f^2 = .10$ and .75 for $f^2 = .05$, adequate for the main paths but marginal for smaller effects. The organisational-informant sample (150 firms) gives .82 power for $f^2 = .10$, enough for H1 to H3.

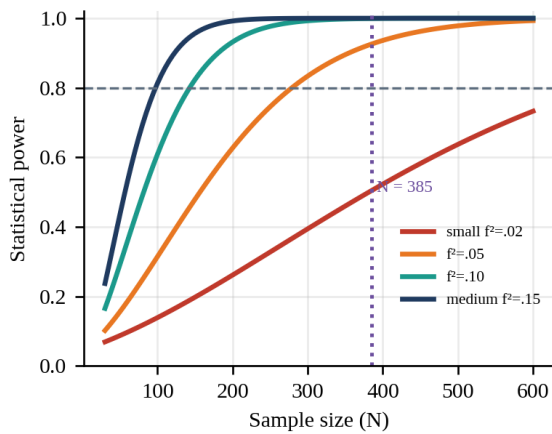


Fig 5. Power of the omnibus F-test (6 predictors, $\alpha = .05$) by N and f^2 ; dashed line = .80; dotted line = N = 385.

Effect f^2	N = 150	N = 250	N = 385
.02 (small)	.20	.33	.50
.05	.48	.75	.93
.10	.82	.98	1.00
.15 (medium)	.96	1.00	1.00

Table 6. Computed power, six predictors, $\alpha = .05$.

Mediation power depends on the product of two coefficients, so it was examined by Monte Carlo simulation. For each combination of standardised paths (medium-medium $a = b = .39$; small-medium $a = .14$, $b = .39$; small-small $a = b = .14$) and sample size, 600 datasets were generated from normal distributions with a direct effect $c' = .10$, and indirect effects were tested with 95% Monte Carlo confidence intervals (800 draws per dataset). The mean estimated indirect effect was within $\pm .004$ of its true value in every condition, indicating negligible bias; Monte Carlo standard errors of power were below .02. Table 7 and Fig. 6 show power above .95 for medium-medium paths at N = 100, about .80 for small-medium paths at N = 385 and .61 for small-small paths at N = 385. The study can therefore credibly confirm moderate mediated effects, but null findings for small indirect effects must be reported as inconclusive, supported by equivalence tests, and not as evidence of absence.

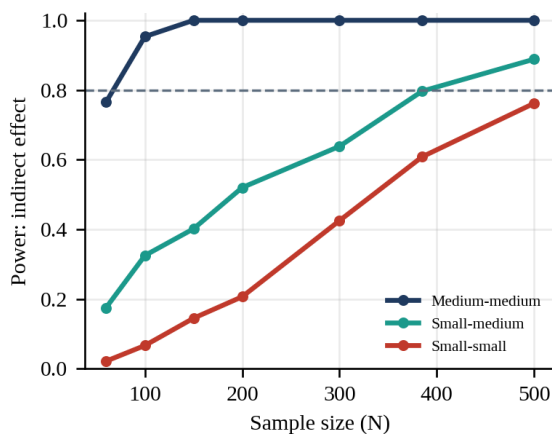


Fig 6. Monte Carlo power for the indirect effect (600 replications per point; $c' = .10$; $\alpha = .05$).

N	Medium-medium	Small-medium	Small-small
100	.95	.33	.07
150	1.00	.40	.15
200	1.00	.52	.21
300	1.00	.64	.43
385	1.00	.80	.61
500	1.00	.89	.76

Table 7. Simulated power for the indirect effect by path size and N.

8. Analytic Strategy

8.1 Data preparation and estimator

Screening will examine missingness (items above 5% missing are inspected for pattern, with multiple imputation if data are not missing completely at random), univariate and multivariate outliers (Mahalanobis distance, $p < .001$), straight-lining and attention-check failures, and distributional shape. Because composite-based PLS-SEM makes no multivariate-normality assumption and handles formative constructs and complex models with moderate samples, it is the primary estimator [45]. Covariance-based SEM serves as a robustness check for the reflective part of the model [48].

8.2 Measurement model

Table 8 lists the thresholds applied in sequence: indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent and discriminant validity, collinearity and fit, which follow standard sources [49, 50, 51, 52]. Formative composites are evaluated by outer weights, their bootstrap significance (5,000 resamples) and variance inflation factors. Measurement invariance of composites across stakeholder types is assessed with the MICOM procedure before any multi-group comparison [53].

8.3 Structural model

Paths are estimated with bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap intervals. The serial indirect effect (H8) follows the product-of-coefficients logic with bootstrap intervals rather than the causal-steps approach [54, 55]. Moderation (H5, H7) is tested with the two-stage approach and probed at ± 1 SD. Because stakeholders are nested within firms, standard errors are cluster-adjusted and a multilevel specification is estimated as a sensitivity analysis. Effect sizes are read against Cohen's f^2 benchmarks and predictive relevance with PLSpredict ($Q^2_{predict} > 0$), not significance alone.

8.4 Endogeneity and common-method bias

Prior reputation, severity and propensity to trust enter as controls; marker-variable and full-collinearity checks address common-method variance [44, 56]; and a lagged subsample resurveyed after six months examines temporal ordering. Because a cross-sectional design cannot establish causality, the vignette experiment proposed in Section 11 is recommended for H3.

8.5 Qualitative analysis and integration

Interviews, documents and social-media archives are analysed with a hybrid deductive-inductive thematic procedure: an initial frame derived from the framework (Table 9), open coding for emergent themes, two independent coders on a 20% subsample (Cohen's kappa $\geq .70$ before proceeding), within-case analysis followed by cross-case pattern matching [37, 57, 58]. Saturation is

tracked with a log of new codes per interview [59]. Integration occurs at three points: Phase 2 findings shape item content in Phase 3; Phase 4 results sit beside Phase 2 themes in joint displays that classify each hypothesis as

confirmed by both strands, by one, or discrepant; and discrepant cases are re-examined through follow-up interviews [60].

Criterion	Threshold	Applies to	Source
Outer loading	$\geq .70$ (retain $.40-.70$ if AVE and CR remain adequate)	Reflective indicators	Hair et al. (2022)
Cronbach α / composite reliability	$.70$ to $.95$	Reflective constructs	Nunnally & Bernstein (1994)
Average variance extracted	$\geq .50$	Convergent validity	Fornell & Larcker (1981)
HTMT	$< .85$ (conservative); $< .90$ (liberal)	Discriminant validity	Henseler et al. (2015)
Variance inflation factor	< 3 (inner model); < 5 (formative outer)	Collinearity	Hair et al. (2022)
Full-collinearity VIF	≤ 3.3	Common-method bias	Kock (2015)
SRMR	$\leq .08$	Approximate model fit	Hu & Bentler (1999)
Bootstrap	5,000 resamples; BCa 95% CI	Path and weight significance	Hair et al. (2022)
Effect size f^2	$.02$ small; $.15$ medium; $.35$ large	Structural paths	Cohen (1988)
Predictive relevance	$Q^2_{\text{predict}} > 0$	Out-of-sample prediction	Hair et al. (2022)
Item content validity index	$\geq .78$ with seven experts	Phase 3 items	Lynn (1986)

Table 8. Pre-specified decision rules for measurement and structural models.

9. Validity, Trustworthiness and Ethics

Table 10 sets out quality criteria for each strand. Quantitative strands follow the psychometric and statistical standards above, while the qualitative strand uses the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability [61]. Table 9 gives the qualitative coding frame that connects themes to hypotheses.

The study requires clearance from a recognised institutional ethics committee and a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation before data collection. Participation is

voluntary and based on informed consent, and respondents may withdraw without penalty. Personal data are processed in line with the Data Protection Act: only necessary data are collected, identifiers are separated from responses, firms are pseudonymised in all outputs and data are stored on encrypted media with access restricted to the research team [33]. Recalling a crisis can be distressing or commercially sensitive, so interviewers will not press for confidential information, will allow participants to skip questions and will offer each firm a summary report as reciprocity. The researcher will declare any consulting or teaching relationship with a participating organisation and exclude such organisations from the sample.

Theme	Definition	Linked hypotheses	Illustrative indicators for coding
T1 Turbulence sensing	How firms detect and interpret environmental shifts	H1	Monitoring routines; issue logs; informal intelligence
T2 Capability architecture	Structure, access and culture of the PR function	H1, H2	Reporting line; role in crisis team; dialogue mechanisms
T3 Response design	Content, timing and posture of messages	H3	Delay to first statement; apology or denial; corrective actions
T4 Channel and amplification	Channels used and how rumour or social media shaped events	H3, H7	Messaging groups; radio; press; social platforms
T5 Trust evidence	What stakeholders cite as signs of ability, benevolence, integrity	H4, H6	Statements about honesty, care and competence
T6 Stakeholder differentiation	How salience shaped attention and message tailoring	H5	Regulator briefings; supplier and lender calls
T7 Legitimacy repair	Efforts and outcomes in restoring the licence to operate	H6, H8	Regulator relations; media tone; patronage

Table 9. Qualitative coding frame (initial deductive themes; open coding adds emergent themes).

Strand	Criterion	Procedure
Quantitative	Content validity	Expert panel with I-CVI; cognitive interviews; Kiswahili back-translation
Quantitative	Construct validity	Measurement model (AVE, HTMT); known-groups tests contrasting high- and low-severity crises
Quantitative	Reliability	α and composite reliability; test-retest on pilot subsample after two weeks ($ICC \geq .70$)
Quantitative	Statistical conclusion validity	A priori power; cluster adjustment; Holm correction for multiple tests; equivalence tests for nulls
Qualitative	Credibility	Triangulation of interviews, documents and social media; member checking; peer debriefing
Qualitative	Transferability and dependability	Thick description of firm and crisis; audit trail; versioned codebook and coding log
Qualitative	Confirmability	Reflexive memos; negative-case analysis
Integration	Inference quality	Joint displays with pre-specified convergence and discrepancy rules

Table 10. Quality and trustworthiness criteria by strand.

10. Implications for Theory and Practice

10.1 Theoretical implications

Four implications follow if the hypotheses are supported. First, the framework moves PR from the margins of crisis theory to an antecedent position: crisis communication quality becomes partly an outcome of capability built before any crisis, which complements the focus of SCCT on message choice [8]. Second, treating turbulence as a moderator (H7) offers a boundary condition for SCCT and trust-repair findings that were largely established in comparatively stable settings; if the quality-trust slope steepens under turbulence, models developed in stable environments will understate the importance of communication in emerging markets [10]. Third, the hierarchical treatment of trust links crisis communication to the ability-benevolence-integrity tradition and makes it possible to predict which dimension a given response repairs [9, 20]. Fourth, the linked two-source design offers a template for reducing common-method variance in crisis research without abandoning stakeholder perceptions as the outcome of interest.

10.2 Practical protocol

Although the framework awaits empirical testing, its logic yields guidance consistent with established crisis-communication research [21, 62, 63]. Three principles follow. First, *speak early and truthfully*: disclosure by the organisation before third parties do limits reputational damage and protects perceived integrity [28]. Second, *match the response to the crisis*: the fit matrix in Fig. 4 warns against reflexive apology for events beyond the firm's control and equally against deflection when evidence of preventability is strong. Third, *differentiate without contradicting*: tailor channel and detail to each stakeholder group, but keep the facts identical across

audiences, because inconsistency is read as an integrity signal.

Table 11 sets out a time-phased protocol that links actions to the trust dimension they protect. It is sequence-based rather than template-based. Where relationships are personal and informal, direct contact with high-salience stakeholders such as lenders, regulators and key distributors is hypothesised to be needed before or alongside public messaging, since these stakeholders can act quickly on their doubts (H5).

11. Limitations and Research Agenda

As a conceptual and methodological paper it cannot test its own hypotheses. The stylised trajectories (Fig. 3), the fit matrix (Fig. 4) and the turbulence ratings (Fig. 7) are theory-derived or author-assigned judgments to be validated or revised empirically. The power and simulation results rely on normality, assumed effect sizes and an assumed intraclass correlation, and real data may differ. Self-reported perceptions may diverge from behaviour, cross-sectional estimation limits causal inference and most theories reviewed were developed elsewhere, so constructs may need re-specification.

Five directions follow. (1) Vignette experiments crossing crisis cluster with response posture and manipulating the dimension of trust violated, to test H3 and Fig. 4 with Kenyan samples. (2) Longitudinal designs that track trust before and after real crises, to compare empirical trajectories with Fig. 3. (3) Computational analysis of social-media discourse during crises to measure speed, amplification and sentiment. (4) Comparative studies across East African economies to separate Kenya-specific from emerging-market effects. (5) Research on synthetic media, impersonation and AI-generated misinformation, which add new forms of integrity attack that current theories only partly address.

Time window	Core actions	Trust dimension protected	Channels (illustrative)
Pre-crisis (continuous)	Issue scanning; stakeholder map and salience ranking; holding statements; spokesperson training; verification routines	Ability	Dashboards; stakeholder forums
0-1 hour	Activate crisis team; verify facts; first statement acknowledging the event and action under way; instructing information	Ability, integrity	Website and social posts; direct messages to affected parties
1-24 hours	Name an accountable executive; brief regulators, lenders and staff; correct misinformation; adjusting information; publish an update schedule	Benevolence, integrity	Press briefings; direct calls; staff channels; radio where reach matters
1-14 days	Disclose causes and corrective actions; remedy proportional to responsibility; answer questions publicly	Benevolence, integrity	Updates; stakeholder meetings; FAQs
Recovery (weeks to months)	Report progress against commitments; independent review where integrity is damaged; learning review; revise plans	Ability, integrity	Progress reports; follow-up briefings; staff debriefs

Table 11. Time-phased crisis communication protocol derived from the framework.

12. Conclusion

This paper argues that, in turbulent business environments, PR should be theorised and managed as the capability through which organisations earn, protect and repair stakeholder trust. By integrating excellence theory, stakeholder salience, the ability-benevolence-integrity model of trust, SCCT and legitimacy theory, the framework explains why communication quality should

matter more when turbulence is high and why the same message can have different consequences for different stakeholders. It also specifies how to test these claims: a five-phase mixed-methods protocol, measures that can be audited, decision rules fixed in advance and a sampling plan justified by computed power and simulation. A target of 385 stakeholder responses supports confident detection of moderate effects, while small indirect effects will require explicit caution.

The contribution is a testable and transparent structure rather than an empirical finding: hypotheses that can fail, measures that can be inspected and analyses that can be replicated. For practitioners, the time-phased protocol offers a defensible sequence for the first hours and days of a crisis. For scholars, the next step is execution of the protocol in Kenya and, if supported, extension to other East African economies.

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