

**THE ROLE OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN PRINT MEDIA
ORGANIZATIONS DURING HEALTH CRISES IN UGANDA**

JACQUELINE NALUBWAMA

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**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
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Declaration

I, hereby declare that this research proposal is my own work and has not been produced by any previous researcher for any academic purposes.

Jacqueline Nalubwama

Signature..........

Date.....21/07/2025.....

Approval

This work is supervised from its inception until the completion of the proposal. This work has been submitted with my approval as a University Supervisor from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication of Uganda Christian University.



Signature

Professor James Kiwanuka-Tondo

Date.....21/07/25.....

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Dedication

I dedicate this research proposal to my family, and coursemates for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this journey. I also dedicate it to my children; may they know that perseverance yields results.

List of Abbreviations

SCCT	Situational Crisis Communication Theory
COVID-19	Coronavirus pandemic
UCU	Uganda Christian University
Et Al.	And Others

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the role of internal communication strategies in media organizations during health crises. This study employed a qualitative research method, specifically semi-structured interviews to collect data from purposely selected eleven participants. The research followed an interpretivist paradigm, allowing for an in-depth exploration of how internal communication strategies were used in media organizations during health crises. The study was guided by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, and data was collected from *The New Vision* employees, including managers, editors, and reporters, who directly experienced the crisis. The findings revealed the pivotal role digital tools play in communication, especially during a crisis, and the importance of keeping staff engaged during a crisis with empathetic messaging. The study showed the organizational and managerial disconnect that happened during a crisis, which caused a misalignment in internal communication. Lastly, the findings revealed crisis-induced uncertainty, which stemmed from the ambiguity of the internal communication. The study has made a significant contribution to our understanding of media organisations since it highlights the internal communication challenges that they face and offers pragmatic solutions, which can be used to address them during a crisis situation.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter gives the background to the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, scope of the study, justification of the study, significance of the study, and operational definition of key terms. The study aimed at investigating the role of internal communication during the pandemic by print media, by highlighting its importance in guiding decision-making, ensuring employee well-being and keeping the public informed.

1.1 Background to the Study

Globally, internal communication is the structured exchange of information within an organization, aimed at ensuring operational efficiency, enhancing employee engagement, and providing clarity during times of uncertainty (John et al., 2018). During health crises such as pandemics, its role in media organizations becomes particularly vital. Effective internal communication enables journalists, editors, and media executives to coordinate responses, disseminate accurate information, ensure staff safety, and maintain organizational continuity amid disruptions (Koskinen & Pihlanto, 2021). Given the media's role as a key source of public information, internal communication strategies directly impact the accuracy and timeliness of news reports during pandemics.

Health crises create an environment of uncertainty where rapid, clear, and consistent internal communication becomes essential in media organizations (Seshadri et al., 2020). The

COVID-19 pandemic, for example, presented unprecedented challenges to newsrooms globally, forcing organizations to adopt new internal communication strategies to sustain operations (Mugisha, 2020). The need to transition to remote work, ensure journalists' safety, and manage misinformation increased the demand for real-time digital updates, virtual newsrooms, structured briefings, and emergency protocols (Weiner, 2020; Pantic, 2023). Studies show that organizations that employed multi-channel internal communication systems were more effective in mitigating disruptions and maintaining productivity (Li et al., 2021).

A study in Finland revealed that 78% of media organizations integrated internal communication platforms like Slack and Microsoft Teams to ensure continuous information flow among journalists (Koskinen & Pihlanto, 2021). These platforms facilitated real-time collaboration between newsroom teams, enabling quick editorial decision-making while working remotely. In the United States, 85% of leading news organizations, including *The New York Times* and CNN, adopted multi-channel internal communication strategies such as virtual town halls, emergency WhatsApp groups, and internal newsletters to keep staff informed and aligned (Seshadri et al., 2020). These approaches enhanced organizational resilience, improved employee well-being, and ensured that misinformation was swiftly addressed before publication (Warren, 2020).

In China, where strict lockdowns were enforced, media organizations relied on WeChat-based internal networks to communicate editorial priorities, assign stories, and provide health safety updates to journalists in the field. Over 80% of media companies in the country incorporated mobile communication platforms for internal updates, workplace safety guidance, and remote monitoring of journalists (Li et al., 2021). However, despite these advancements, challenges such as digital literacy gaps and unequal access to reliable internet posed barriers, particularly in rural-based media houses (Li et al., 2021).

In Africa, the role of internal communication during pandemics in media organizations is shaped by infrastructural disparities, economic constraints, and technological adoption gaps (Michelle & Roman, 2019). Studies indicate that while some large media organizations successfully implemented digital communication strategies, smaller media outlets struggled due to limited internet connectivity, lack of funding, and inadequate internal communication policies (Motsoeneng & Sekhonyane, 2021). For instance, during the Ebola crisis in Nigeria, internal communication frameworks helped coordinate responses between journalists and health authorities, ensuring the timely dissemination of safety protocols (Ogunsola et al., 2019). However, in rural media houses, 60% of organizations lacked digital communication tools, which led to delays in relaying crucial health information (Ogunsola et al., 2019). A similar challenge was observed in Egypt, where only 25% of media organizations had formalized internal communication policies before the COVID-19 pandemic (El-Sayed & Ahmed, 2020). The lack of structured internal communication channels hindered crisis response efforts, as most Egyptian media organizations relied on printed memos and verbal briefings, which were inefficient during lockdowns. In contrast, South African media organizations adapted by integrating digital platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and workplace intranets. Reports indicate a 40% increase in the use of these tools among newsrooms to coordinate remote reporting and ensure journalist safety (Motsoeneng & Sekhonyane, 2021). However, challenges such as limited internet access in rural areas created disparities, excluding some journalists from critical internal briefings. These findings underscore the need for inclusive and accessible internal communication strategies, particularly for smaller media organizations.

In East Africa, internal communication played a critical role in coordinating pandemic responses within media organizations, but implementation varied across countries. In Kenya, 68%

of media organizations relied on WhatsApp, email bulletins, and virtual town halls for internal communication during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mwangi & Ngugi, 2022). Nation Media Group, one of the largest media houses, implemented weekly virtual updates to keep journalists informed about safety measures and editorial priorities. However, smaller media organizations faced financial constraints, limiting their ability to adopt digital communication strategies. In Tanzania, studies indicate that only 45% of media houses had formal internal communication policies before the pandemic, leading to fragmented and inefficient crisis responses (Mgaya & Mtebe, 2021). Many Tanzanian media organizations continued to rely on traditional memos and physical notices, delaying timely updates. Rwanda demonstrated notable progress in the use of internal communication strategies, with 75% of media organizations utilizing centralized digital platforms to enhance coordination (Munyaneza et al., 2023). The Rwanda Broadcasting Agency implemented real-time digital dashboards to streamline workflows, manage journalist health records, and monitor editorial processes. This proactive approach ensured operational continuity and improved crisis response efficiency. These findings suggest that while East African nations have made strides in leveraging internal communication during pandemics, disparities in technological adoption, resource availability, and organizational preparedness remain significant challenges.

In Uganda, the internal communication landscape within media organizations revealed both successes and significant challenges. Studies show that at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, only 40% of media houses had access to digital communication tools, resulting in delays in information flow and disruptions in editorial coordination (Tumwesige, 2021). Print media outlets such as *Daily Monitor* and *Bukedde* attempted to adapt by implementing WhatsApp groups, virtual editorial meetings, and internal bulletins, but these efforts were often hindered by

insufficient training and low digital literacy among staff (Nabunya & Ssenyonga, 2023). Additionally, internet connectivity hampered the effectiveness of these communication tools (Akampurira, 2023).

The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) issued directives aimed at standardizing internal communication during the pandemic, but only 35% of media organizations fully complied, with financial limitations and technical capacity cited as primary barriers (Okello & Nabiryo, 2022). Larger media organizations, such as *The New Vision*, adopted hybrid communication strategies, combining digital platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams with traditional printed circulars to ensure editorial continuity (Akampurira, 2023). Despite these advancements, challenges such as unequal digital adoption, resistance to change, and unreliable internet connectivity persisted, exposing gaps in Uganda's media communication infrastructure during pandemics.

The analysis of internal communication strategies during pandemics highlights a critical need for media organizations to invest in resilient communication frameworks. The successes in countries like Rwanda and Finland demonstrate the potential of centralized digital platforms in managing crisis communication effectively. However, persistent challenges in Uganda, Nigeria, and Egypt underscore the need for stronger policies, increased digital literacy, and improved technological infrastructure to enhance internal communication resilience during future health crises.

The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) played a pivotal role by issuing directives to standardize internal communication during the pandemic. However, Okello and Nabiryo (2022) noted that only 35% of media organizations complied fully, citing financial constraints and a lack of technical capacity as major barriers. Even with these directives,

discrepancies in implementation were evident, as smaller media houses struggled to transition to digital platforms while larger organizations like *The New Vision* leveraged their resources to adopt hybrid communication strategies. However, despite its relative success, challenges such as uneven digital adoption and resistance to change among staff members persisted, highlighting significant gaps in Uganda's internal communication landscape during pandemics. This study examined the role of internal communication strategies in Ugandan media organizations during health crises, assessing their effectiveness, challenges, and areas for improvement.

1.2 Problem Statement

Internal communication is critical for managing health crises, particularly in print media, as it ensures timely and accurate dissemination of information, fosters collaboration, and enhances decision-making (Kanti et al., 2023; Weiner, 2020; Argenti, 2017). However, several barriers hinder its effectiveness during pandemics, especially technological limitations (Ruck & Men, 2021; Pantic, 2023). Tumwesige (2021) highlights that 60% of print media outlets in Uganda, including *Bukedde* and *The Daily Monitor*, lacked robust digital tools for internal communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to delays in coordinating responses and sharing updates. Nabunya and Ssenyonga (2023) found that insufficient training in using digital platforms like Zoom and Slack among employees further exacerbated these delays, undermining organizational cohesion during the crisis. Additionally, regulatory efforts by the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) to standardize internal communication protocols were poorly implemented. Okello and Nabiryo (2022) reported that only 35% of media organizations complied with these directives, citing limited financial resources and inadequate infrastructure as significant barriers. Akampurira (2023) adds that while larger media houses like *The New Vision* were better positioned to adapt by leveraging hybrid communication strategies, smaller outlets struggled due to a lack of resources

and resistance to technological change. These challenges highlight a critical gap in understanding how internal communication can be optimized to support crisis management in print media. Despite the fact that internal communication during crises is acknowledged to be crucial, there has been little empirical study on the subject, with most of the literature concentrating on external crisis communication (Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020). It is against this backdrop that the current study examined the role of internal communication strategies during pandemics in media organizations in Uganda.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the role of internal communication strategies in a media organization during pandemics. The study examined the internal communication strategies utilized by *The New Vision* from March to June, 2020 and assess the staff perceptions employed by *The New Vision's* internal communication strategies. Additionally, the study investigated the challenges *The New Vision* encountered in implementing internal communication initiatives amidst the uncertainties and disruptions caused by the pandemic, and made recommendations from *The New Vision's* internal communication experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.4 Specific Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the internal communication strategies utilized by *The New Vision* during the period from March to June 2020.
- ii. To examine the challenges encountered by *The New Vision* in implementing internal communication strategies amid the uncertainties and disruptions caused by the pandemic

1.5 Research Questions

- i. What internal communication strategies were used by *The New Vision* during the period from March to June 2020?
- ii. What challenges were encountered by *The New Vision* in implementing internal communication strategies amid the uncertainties and disruptions caused by the pandemic?

1.6 Scope of the Study

1.6.1 Content Scope

The study focused on investigating the role of internal communication in print media during a crisis, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic. It examined the internal communication mechanisms employed by *The New Vision* Uganda from March to June 2020, with a particular emphasis on how internal communication strategies were used to disseminate critical information, ensure employee safety, and maintain organizational cohesion. The study also addressed the challenges faced by *The New Vision* in implementing these communication strategies during the crisis. The study aimed to provide practical recommendations based on the findings to improve internal communication strategies for future crises.

1.6.2 Geographical Scope

The geographical scope of this study was limited to *The New Vision* Uganda, a major print media house located in Kampala, Uganda. The study focused on the internal communication practices within the organization. The research gathered data from staff members within *The New Vision* who were directly involved or impacted by internal communication during this period.

1.6.3 Time Scope

The time scope of the study focused on the period between March and June 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted global and local operations. This period marks the peak of the pandemic's early impact on the print media sector in Uganda, especially in terms of internal communication.

1.7 Justification of the Study

The choice of *The New Vision* as a case study subject stems from its significance as a major player in Uganda's media landscape and its unique position as a print media house amidst the digital transformation sweeping the industry, locally and globally. The period under review, from March to June, 2020, is the onset and escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic, presents a compelling context to examine the challenges, strategies, and outcomes of internal communication within the organization. This is because it was a time of uncertainty as the world grappled with the pandemic that was described as a “generational-defining pandemic affecting families and communities in every country on the planet” (Radcliffe, 2021).

1.8 Significance of the study

This study will help media organizations, particularly *The New Vision*, enhance their internal communication strategies during crises like pandemics. By examining the mechanisms and challenges of internal communication during COVID-19, media houses will gain practical recommendations to improve organizational resilience, ensuring timely information dissemination and smoother operations in future crises.

The study will offer valuable insights to employees by highlighting the importance of effective internal communication during uncertain times. Understanding these strategies will

empower staff to engage more actively and feel supported in crisis situations, improving overall morale and collaboration within the organization.

Policymakers in the media and communications sectors will benefit from the study's findings on the effectiveness of internal communication frameworks during pandemics. The study will provide evidence to guide the creation of policies and regulations that ensure media houses are well-prepared for crises, fostering more resilient communication systems across the sector.

This research will contribute to the academic understanding of internal communication within the context of crisis management in the print media sector, particularly in Uganda. It will address gaps in existing literature and offer a foundation for future studies on the role of communication during crises in developing countries.

The study's recommendations will be beneficial to other media organizations, both in Uganda and elsewhere, in enhancing their crisis communication strategies. By learning from *The New Vision's* experiences, these organizations can better manage internal communication during future pandemics, ensuring smoother transitions and more effective crisis response.

1.9 Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Internal Communication refers to the exchange of information among employees within an organization through formal and informal channels.

Crisis Communication refers to the management and dissemination of information during a crisis to mitigate damage and maintain clarity and coordination.

Crisis refers to an event or situation that disrupts normal operations, creating uncertainty and challenges that require immediate attention.

Employee Engagement refers to the level of enthusiasm, commitment, and involvement that employees have towards their work and the organization.

Communication Strategy refers to a planned approach for conveying messages within an organization, especially during a crisis, to achieve specific objectives.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This section presents reviewed literature from books, scholarly articles, journals, and also provides empirical evidence from researchers. For example, authors such as Cleary (2023), Men and Stacks (2013), and Baker and Walsh (2020) discuss the role technology plays in facilitating internal communication during a crisis. Additionally, authors [Mhlanga and Moloji (2020); Anagnostopoulos and Van den Bulck (2020); and Zakiri (2020)] discuss the internal communication challenges organisations face during a crisis.

The section also delves into the theory the study was anchored on, which is the Situational Crisis Communication Theory by W. Timothy Coombs (2007) and Coombs & Holladay (2005; 2012).

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was guided by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), developed by W. Timothy Coombs in 2007. This theory provides a framework for organizations to navigate the complex process of crisis communication, helping them maintain their reputation through the effective management of internal and external communications during crises. Internal communication plays a crucial role in crisis communication, as it directly affects how employees perceive the crisis and how well they can manage the situation. Coombs (2007) emphasizes that during crises, organizations must communicate effectively with internal stakeholders (such as employees) to ensure a sense of coherence, alignment, and trust. This is particularly important in media organizations like *The New Vision*, where clear and timely communication can mitigate anxiety, confusion, and misinformation among staff (Seeger & Ulmer, 2001).

Furthermore, as crises can create uncertainty, internal communication serves as a vital mechanism to provide updates, explain the crisis's impact on operations, and reassure employees about safety measures (Coombs, 2007). Thus, internal communication is directly linked to crisis communication because it ensures that employees remain informed and engaged, helping the organization maintain a positive reputation even in times of adversity.

2.1.1 Application of SCCT to the Study

This study applied SCCT to examine how *The New Vision* employed internal communication strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Coombs (2007), the theory categorizes crises into three types: victim crises, accidental crises, and intentional crises. This categorization helps organizations determine the most appropriate communication strategies to use. During the Covid-19 pandemic, *The New Vision* faced a crisis that could be considered a victim crisis, as it was caused by an external factor (the global pandemic) rather than any fault of the organization. SCCT suggests that for victim crises, organizations should focus on providing bolstering strategies that enhance their reputation by showing empathy, providing support, and maintaining transparency (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). The study explored how *The New Vision* employed these strategies, focusing on their internal communication mechanisms and channels, such as emails, meetings, and newsletters, to keep employees informed and emotionally supported during the pandemic.

Furthermore, SCCT stresses the importance of attribution of responsibility during a crisis. How employees attribute the crisis to the organization or external factors can affect their reactions to the organization's communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). This study investigated how *The New Vision* managed the attribution of responsibility for the crisis and whether employees perceived the internal communication efforts as adequate in addressing their concerns. Did *The*

New Vision take responsibility for internal challenges, or did they blame external factors? Understanding how the attribution of responsibility was communicated will provide insights into the organization's internal crisis management approach.

Lastly, empathy and support are crucial components of effective crisis communication (Coombs, 2007). During the pandemic, employees of *The New Vision* were likely experiencing heightened stress, fear, and uncertainty. SCCT advises organizations to express empathy and offer support, which could include emotional messaging, clear communication on safety measures, and resources for mental well-being. The study examined how *The New Vision* addressed its employees' emotional and psychological needs through its internal communication channels.

In general, by applying the SCCT, the study examined how internal communication at *The New Vision* was structured during the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, it assessed the communication strategies employed, how these strategies were perceived by employees, and whether the organization successfully mitigated the crisis's impact on staff morale and trust.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Internal Communication Mechanisms

The COVID-19 pandemic forced organizations to adapt their communication strategies rapidly as Welch and Jackson (2007) argue that adaptive internal communication is crucial in crisis management because it allows organizations to maintain employee engagement and operational continuity. Digital tools and platforms became crucial during the pandemic as noted by Men and Stacks (2013), who emphasize the role of technology in facilitating effective internal communication. According to Men and Stacks (2013), technology serves as an essential enabler for effective communication, especially when face-to-face interactions are limited. For print media houses like *The New Vision*, Mhlanga and Mloi (2020) suggest that adopting remote working

environments and utilizing digital communication mechanisms became critical to overcoming operational disruptions caused by the pandemic. Research by Baker and Walsh (2020) further underscores the importance of virtual meetings, transparent leadership communication, and the use of collaborative platforms in maintaining organizational workflow and employee morale. In light of these insights, this study investigated whether *The New Vision* swiftly adopted digital communication mechanisms during the pandemic and assess whether these mechanisms helped bolster internal communication and enhance employee morale.

Shi et al. (2022) define communication mechanisms as the unity of communication forms, methods, and processes, which include disseminators, channels, information, and receivers. These elements are vital in ensuring effective communication, particularly in crises, where the efficiency of communication mechanisms is crucial to managing uncertainty. De Pablos-Heredero et al. (2015) emphasize that the effectiveness of communication mechanisms can be measured by factors such as frequency, accuracy, and problem-solving. Internal communication channels, as Cleary (2023) notes, include emails, internal memos, employee newsletters, surveys, intranets, and digital noticeboards. During the pandemic, organizations like *The New Vision* needed to rely heavily on these channels to ensure timely and accurate information dissemination. This study explored which communication mechanisms *The New Vision* employed to manage internal information flow and how these mechanisms were adapted to the unique challenges posed by the pandemic.

Moden (2008) argues that communication during a crisis is more complex than in everyday operations, as it involves not only the dissemination of information but also the coordination and collaboration between various levels of an organization. Zakiri (2020) also stresses that effective crisis communication requires a high level of coordination and cooperation, emphasizing that organizations must prioritize consistent and persistent communication. As Coombs (2007)

suggests, the specific nature of the crisis will guide the selection of communication strategies. Thus, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, *The New Vision's* communication strategies should have been carefully tailored to meet the needs of the organization's various stakeholders. This study assessed *The New Vision's* internal communication mechanisms, including how they managed information flow and whether the strategies employed helped in managing the crisis effectively.

Wright (2009) identifies three internal communication strategies often used by organizations: information openness, supportive climate, and performance-based communication. Information openness involves sharing details openly with staff, which can be a powerful tool in demystifying decisions made at higher levels of the organization. However, as Wright (2009) note, this strategy can sometimes lead to a top-down approach that limits employee input. The supportive climate strategy focuses on encouraging positive behaviors among managers, which can have a trickle-down effect on staff morale. This approach can help create a more cohesive work environment, particularly when employees are under stress. Lastly, the performance-based communication strategy focuses on aligning communication efforts with organizational goals, which can be beneficial when resources are limited. Given the constraints faced by media houses like *The New Vision* during the pandemic, this study explored how these strategies were applied to manage internal communication during the crisis.

Benoit (2010) and Coombs (2007) offer several communication strategies that organizations can adopt during a crisis, including denial, diminishment, bolstering, and rebuilding. These strategies, depending on the crisis's severity, can help mitigate reputational damage and improve stakeholder relationships. The study assessed how *The New Vision* employed these strategies, particularly focusing on the effectiveness of internal communication mechanisms used to address employee concerns and morale during the pandemic. Coombs (2007) argues that clear,

consistent communication is essential in maintaining an organization's reputation during a crisis. Therefore, examining the channels and strategies employed by *The New Vision* will offer insights into how internal communication mechanisms can help manage employee perception during a crisis.

Duncan and Moriaty (1998) argue that effective communication is central to the success of any organization, particularly in crisis situations. They note that management functions such as planning, organizing, and controlling cannot be performed effectively without strong communication channels. This is especially relevant in media organizations like *The New Vision*, where internal communication plays a pivotal role in aligning employees with organizational objectives. This study investigated the communication mechanisms employed by *The New Vision* during the COVID-19 pandemic and examined how these mechanisms impacted the organization's ability to maintain operational continuity and employee engagement.

Zakiri (2020) argues that open communication channels are essential for reducing negative reactions among employees, particularly during a crisis. By ensuring a free flow of information from top to bottom and vice versa, management can prevent the spread of misinformation and alleviate employee anxiety. This study explored the open communication channels that *The New Vision* used to avoid negative reactions from employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Cloke and Goldsmith (2000) highlight that organizations that focus on conflict resolution and employee engagement during crises are more likely to build trust and loyalty. The study examined how *The New Vision's* internal communication mechanisms helped foster a sense of security and engagement among its staff during the pandemic.

Research by Anagnostopoulos & Van den Bulck (2015) emphasizes the role of internal communication in enhancing organizational commitment and employee engagement, particularly

during times of crisis. This is especially true for print media houses like *The New Vision*, where transparent and effective communication is crucial for aligning employees with organizational goals. In the context of the pandemic, this study investigated how *The New Vision* used internal communication mechanisms to keep its employees engaged and informed, ensuring that they remain motivated to fulfill their roles during the crisis. Mishra et al. (2014) argue that empathetic and supportive communication is essential in maintaining employee well-being, especially in high-stress situations. This study assessed how *The New Vision* addressed the well-being of its staff through internal communication, particularly in the context of the pandemic's unique challenges for media professionals.

2.2.2 Perceptions of Internal Communication Strategies in Disseminating Critical Information During a Crisis

According to Parker (2023), employee perception refers to how employees interpret information and experiences in the workplace. It is also the best aspect to know how much an employee is satisfied towards the organization, and it is the most essential aspect that can drive the employees towards the organization (Thiruvengatraj and Ramya, 2017). It is affected by several things such as: past experiences, personal values, and expectations. Additionally, it can also be affected by the company's communication strategies, feedback mechanisms, and recognition programmes. Parker adds that since perception is subjective, each employee may have a different interpretation of the same work situation. Therefore, the study sought out The New staff to assess their perceptions of the company's internal communication strategies during the pandemic of 2020.

Mishra et al. (2018) argue that effective communication during a crisis is essential for maintaining employee engagement and organizational commitment. They found that transparent and empathetic communication not only helps to reduce anxiety among employees but also strengthens their connection to the organization. During a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, employees often experience heightened stress and confusion, making clear and concise communication more critical. Mishra et al. (2018) emphasize that organizations with well-structured internal communication strategies are better positioned to manage crises and ensure that employees remain aligned with organizational goals.

Vermillion (2018) stresses that communication during a crisis must be strategic to avoid confusion and conflicting messages. She argues that during times of crisis, a centralized communication point is crucial. Vermillion recommends that organizations provide information early and frequently, as this can help prevent the spread of conflicting messages. She emphasizes that when an organization's communication is coordinated, it fosters a unified response to the crisis, which can mitigate uncertainty and align employees with the organization's objectives. Vermillion (2018) highlights that a failure to centralize communication during a crisis can lead to confusion, eroding trust among employees and external stakeholders.

Wright and Robertson (2019) argue that information openness during a crisis can be highly beneficial. They suggest that an open communication environment encourages employees to ask questions, share concerns, and seek clarification. This transparency fosters trust and a sense of security among employees, ensuring they feel informed and supported. However, they also caution that openness must be managed carefully to avoid oversharing sensitive information. According to Wright and Robertson, open communication needs to be balanced with strategic messaging that aligns with the organization's crisis management plan.

Moden (2020) asserts that internal communication during a crisis requires a balance between transparency and discretion. He argues that while it is important to communicate essential information, it is equally important to manage the dissemination of that information across various levels of the organization. Moden (2020) emphasizes that crisis communication must be focused and efficient, ensuring that all employees receive consistent messages, while also addressing their concerns in a timely manner. This structured approach, according to Moden, helps prevent unnecessary panic and ensures that employees remain engaged with the organization's crisis management efforts.

Coombs (2020) highlights several crisis communication strategies, including denial, minimization, and rebuilding. He argues that organizations must tailor their communication strategies to the specific nature of the crisis and the audience they are addressing. Coombs suggests that during a crisis, the communication strategy should evolve based on the circumstances. For instance, minimizing the severity of a crisis may help reduce panic, but it must be accompanied by honesty and clarity about the steps the organization is taking to address the issue. Coombs (2020) underscores the need for flexibility in crisis communication, where different strategies can be applied at various stages of the crisis.

Anagnostopoulos & Van den Bulck (2020) emphasize the critical role of leadership in internal communication during a crisis. Their research found that when leaders are visible, transparent, and approachable, employees are more likely to feel secure and supported. Anagnostopoulos and Van den Bulck argue that effective leadership communication during a crisis can help alleviate feelings of uncertainty and enhance organizational commitment. Clear and empathetic communication from leadership not only helps employees navigate the crisis but also fosters a sense of loyalty and trust, even during difficult times.

Mishra et al. (2020) further discuss the role of empathy in crisis communication. They argue that during a crisis, organizations must adopt empathetic communication practices to address the emotional and psychological impacts on employees. Empathy in communication helps employees feel valued and understood, which strengthens their connection to the organization. Mishra et al. (2020) emphasize that organizations that communicate with empathy are better able to retain employee trust and engagement, even when faced with challenging circumstances.

In addition, the role of digital communication tools has become increasingly important in crisis communication. Men and Stacks (2019) argue that during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, digital platforms are essential for maintaining communication with employees. They found that organizations with well-established digital communication infrastructures were better able to disseminate timely information and keep employees informed. However, Men and Stacks (2019) also note that organizations must ensure that employees have access to the necessary technology and training to engage with these digital tools effectively.

Cleary (2023) highlights the importance of inclusivity and accessibility in digital communication. She argues that digital communication should not be viewed as a one-size-fits-all solution but should be integrated into a broader communication strategy that considers the diverse needs of the workforce. Cleary (2023) points out that employees have varying levels of digital literacy, and organizations must ensure that digital tools are accompanied by adequate support and training. This approach helps ensure that employees can effectively navigate digital platforms, reducing the risk of information gaps and confusion.

Kigambo (2020) emphasizes the importance of internal communication strategies that prioritize employee well-being during a crisis. He notes that the COVID-19 pandemic posed unique challenges for Ugandan media workers, who faced increased workloads and stress.

Kigambo (2020) argues that organizations should implement communication strategies that provide regular updates, offer mental health support, and maintain open lines of communication. Such strategies not only help manage the immediate effects of the crisis but also contribute to long-term employee resilience and organizational loyalty.

Moreover, Zakiri (2020) asserts that open communication channels are crucial for preventing negative reactions from employees during a crisis. He suggests that when information flows freely between management and staff, it helps to reduce anxiety and fosters a more supportive work environment. Zakiri (2020) argues that transparency and openness during a crisis are essential for maintaining employee trust and engagement, especially when employees are concerned about their safety or job security.

2.2.3 Challenges Encountered by Print Media in Implementing Internal Communication Initiatives Amid the Uncertainties and Disruptions Caused by the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic presented numerous challenges for print media organizations, particularly in the implementation of internal communication initiatives. These challenges were primarily driven by the abrupt shift to remote work, a decline in operational resources, and the increased complexity of managing communication flows within organizations. According to Men and Stacks (2019), the transition to remote working, which was a direct result of the pandemic, caused significant disruptions in internal communication practices. The closure of physical offices, coupled with the limitations of digital platforms, made it difficult for media organizations to maintain consistent and effective communication with employees. This disruption was exacerbated by the lack of preparedness for a large-scale remote work environment, leaving many organizations struggling to adapt their communication strategies to the new reality (Cleary, 2023).

Furthermore, Mhlanga and Moloji (2020) argue that the reliance on digital tools and platforms during the pandemic posed additional challenges for print media organizations. While digital communication tools are essential for maintaining communication during a crisis, many media houses, especially in developing countries, faced difficulties in accessing reliable technology. This lack of access to digital infrastructure, as highlighted by Mhlanga and Moloji (2020), led to gaps in information dissemination and hindered the ability of media organizations to effectively engage their employees. Additionally, employees with limited access to the internet or inadequate digital skills were often left out of crucial communications, further exacerbating the challenges faced by organizations during the pandemic.

The rapid changes and uncertainties caused by the pandemic also led to difficulties in managing the volume and complexity of information. Vermillion (2018) highlights that one of the key challenges in crisis communication is the overwhelming amount of information that needs to be communicated. In the case of print media organizations, the constant flow of updates related to government regulations, health guidelines, and operational changes created a chaotic communication environment. Vermillion (2018) suggests that organizations must adopt a strategic approach to information management, ensuring that only relevant and necessary information is communicated to employees. However, this was often difficult for media houses, where the sheer volume of information contributed to confusion and disorientation among employees.

In addition, internal communication in print media organizations was further complicated by the need to maintain employee morale during a period of heightened uncertainty. According to Mishra et al. (2018), maintaining employee morale during a crisis is a major challenge for organizations. In print media houses, employees faced increased workloads and stress due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic, as well as the constant need to adjust to rapidly changing

conditions. Mishra et al. (2018) argue that organizations must prioritize transparent and empathetic communication to alleviate employee concerns and maintain morale. However, many media organizations struggled to maintain consistent and supportive communication, which led to feelings of isolation and anxiety among employees.

The financial strain caused by the pandemic also posed significant challenges for print media organizations in implementing effective internal communication initiatives. As print media revenues declined due to reduced advertising and circulation, many organizations were forced to cut costs, which included reductions in communication resources and personnel. According to Anagnostopoulos and Van den Bulck (2020), the financial constraints faced by media houses made it difficult to invest in the necessary communication tools and support systems needed to maintain effective internal communication. This limited financial flexibility resulted in a reliance on traditional communication channels, such as emails and phone calls, which were often insufficient to keep up with the demands of a rapidly evolving crisis.

In addition, the rapid transition to digital communication platforms posed challenges related to employee engagement. According to Wright and Robertson (2019), employee engagement is crucial for maintaining productivity and morale during a crisis. However, the shift to remote work and the increased reliance on digital platforms led to a decline in face-to-face interactions, which are vital for fostering engagement and a sense of connection among employees. Wright and Robertson (2019) argue that organizations need to find ways to maintain employee engagement through digital communication, such as virtual team meetings and interactive platforms. Yet, many print media organizations struggled to effectively engage employees through these digital channels, which led to feelings of detachment and disengagement among staff members.

The issue of information overload and unclear messaging was another significant challenge faced by print media organizations during the pandemic. According to Zakiri (2020), one of the primary issues in crisis communication is the risk of overwhelming employees with excessive information, leading to confusion and disengagement. In the case of print media houses, employees were inundated with updates about operational changes, health guidelines, and organizational policies. Zakiri (2020) suggests that effective communication requires a balance between providing sufficient information and avoiding information overload. However, the fast-paced nature of the pandemic, combined with the urgency of the situation, made it difficult for media organizations to manage this balance effectively.

Furthermore, Coombs (2020) emphasizes the importance of crisis communication strategies that are tailored to the specific needs of employees. During the pandemic, many media organizations struggled to adopt communication strategies that were suited to the diverse needs of their workforce. For example, employees with different levels of digital literacy faced difficulties in accessing and engaging with digital communication tools. Coombs (2020) argues that crisis communication should be inclusive, ensuring that all employees, regardless of their technological proficiency, have equal access to critical information. However, the lack of digital literacy and access to technology posed significant barriers to effective communication in many print media organizations during the pandemic.

2.3 Literature Gap

Despite the extensive research on internal communication strategies during crises, there remains a significant gap in the exploration of the direct link between internal communication and crisis communication in developing countries. While existing studies predominantly focus on

developed regions, giving insights into organizational communication strategies in crises (Mishra et al., 2018; Coombs, 2020), there is limited attention to how these strategies are adapted in Uganda's socio-political and economic context. Additionally, there is existing literature on external communication, but there is little empirical study on internal communication yet it is also considered important (Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020; Ruck, 2013). Furthermore, while many studies highlight the importance of employee engagement, transparency, and leadership, few have examined the impact of internal communication on employee morale and perceptions of crisis management in Ugandan organizations. Therefore, the study investigated the internal communication mechanisms employed during the COVID-19 pandemic by *The New Vision* in Uganda to add the developing countries' perspective to the body of knowledge.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods, tools, and procedures to be employed in the research. It provides a comprehensive overview of the research paradigm, research design, sampling methodologies, tools and instruments for data collection, strategies for data analysis, considerations regarding reliability and validity, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Paradigm

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, which is well-suited for qualitative research aimed at understanding the experiences, perceptions, and meanings that individuals attach to their interactions and behaviors. Creswell (2014) asserts that the interpretivist paradigm emphasizes the importance of context and seeks to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those involved. This approach is appropriate for exploring internal communication strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it allows for in-depth insights into how employees perceive and respond to communication practices within their organizational environment. By using qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, this paradigm enabled the researcher to uncover the complexities and nuances of internal communication in crisis management, focusing on the meanings and interpretations of the participants themselves (Gujaratti, 2014).

3.2 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive design, which is particularly well-suited for examining a specific instance in-depth within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). It also used a case study design, which allowed for a detailed exploration of the internal communication strategies employed by *The New Vision* during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the effectiveness of these strategies in a crisis. Since the research aimed to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of participants within a specific organization, the case study design was ideal for capturing these insights while maintaining contextual relevance (Stake, 1995). Both designs are critical in understanding phenomena in qualitative research.

3.3 Research approach

The research approach was qualitative. It was selected because it offers an opportunity for researchers to go deeper, beyond the surface of the problem, to arrive at a deeper understanding of the subject matter (Kioko et al, 2022), which in this case is the role of internal communication during a crisis in a print media house. Therefore, a research design is important because it is used to determine the answers to research questions (Kumar, 2014), which the study will use to find answers to the objectives.

The qualitative approach provides a chance to prompt the viewpoints and experiences of the participants, as well as get a better insight into the problem from the perspective of the study participants (Daymon & Holloway, 2010 as cited in Kioko et al. 2022). The study used the qualitative approach to prompt viewpoints of *The New Vision* employees, who were interviewed for the study about their perceptions of the company's internal communication strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. Importantly, the qualitative approach aided the study attain the

answers to the research questions because there isn't any right or wrong answer in social research (Gillan & Pickerill, 2012). Therefore, the study gained insights from the interviewees, who are *Vision Group* employees, about the internal communication strategies utilized by the company during Covid-19 in 2020.

Such an approach is advantageous to the study because it does not focus on numbers, but on describing or defining research into the lives, personalities, and experiences of people (Amaratunga, Baldry, Sarshar, & Newton, 2002). The qualitative approach was suitable for this study because it aimed to analyze the role of internal communication during a crisis, such as the pandemic of 2020, in a print media house (*The New Vision*) in Uganda.

3.4 Research Method

The research specifically used in-depth interviews to collect data participants, who were employees of *The New Vision*. This method was appropriate because it aided the research to collect authentic primary data from participants who worked and experienced the pandemic from March 2020, which is the scope of the study. The participants shared their experiences, perceptions and misgivings about the company's internal communication strategies during the pandemic, which gave the study depth and richness.

3.5 Target Population

The target population for this study was *Vision Group* employees who were present during the scope of the study, which is the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. These employees were chosen because their experiences will enrich the research in analyzing how pivotal the role of internal communication in a print media house is during a crisis.

The study therefore considered employees in managerial positions because they are the ones responsible for deploying the internal communication strategies during the pandemic, and they will ably be in position to explain why they chose the mechanisms they used for internal communication at the time. The study also considered editors, who were in charge of teams of reporters, and reporters, who shared their experiences and perceptions of the internal communication at *The New Vision* during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020.

3.6 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study used the purposive sampling technique, where participants were selected for research. Purposive sampling is appropriate for qualitative studies because it aids the study to select the right participants that possess the required information, which answers questions of the research problem (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Therefore, by using purposive sampling, the study found answers to the role of internal communication in a print media house during a crisis, specifically the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 in *The New Vision*. As a result, the sample size was determined by the point of saturation (Mwita, 2022), which was eleven.

3.7 Data Collection Tools

The study used an interview guide to collect data from the participants of the study, who were *The New Vision* employees who were present during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, and Kangasniemi (2016) define an interview guide as a document that enables the researcher to structure the way interviews will be conducted so that participants share their experience while answering the research problem at the same time.

In order to have a successful interview, Boyce and Neal (2006) suggest that the researcher should plan who will take part in the interview, develop instruments that will be used for interview

(recorder or notebook) and develop an interview guide. The study therefore, used an interview guide to find the answers to the research questions.

3.8 Procedures for Data Collection

3.8.1 Before Data Collection

Before data collection, the researcher obtained formal authorization through an introductory letter from the University Research Department at Uganda Christian University. This provided credibility and ensured adherence to university protocols (Bryman, 2016). The researcher then prepared an interview guide designed to gather in-depth insights from key informants, such as employees with lived experiences within *The New Vision*. This tool was tailored to address the specific objectives of the study while ensuring clarity and relevance for the target audience (Dearnley, 2005). The researcher reached out to the selected participants, providing information about the study's purpose, objectives, and ethical considerations, including confidentiality and informed consent. All participants were assured that their responses would be treated with the utmost privacy (Robson, 2011).

3.8.2 During Data Collection

During the data collection phase, the researcher conducted face-to-face and email interviews with key informants who had direct experiences and insights into the internal communication mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic at *The New Vision* (Creswell, 2014). Each participant was encouraged to share their experiences honestly, with the understanding that there will be no right or wrong answers, as the focus was their individual perceptions and experiences (Patton, 2002). The researcher provided participants with informed consent forms, ensuring that they understood their rights, including voluntary participation, the ability to withdraw at any time, and

the confidentiality of their responses (Silverman, 2016). Anonymity was ensured by coding the interview responses and refraining from collecting personally identifiable information (Merriam, 2009). The researcher paid close attention to ethical principles, fostering an environment, where participants felt comfortable sharing their perspectives (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

3.8.3 After data gathering, processing and analysis

After data collection, the researcher transcribed and organized the interview responses for analysis. The data was systematically coded, with themes and patterns emerging from the responses, which will guide the subsequent analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher ensured that all collected data would be securely stored, maintaining the integrity and confidentiality of the participants' contributions (Kaiser, 2009).

Data analysis is the process of analyzing data in various formats, which helps to clean and transform all data into a consistent form so it can be effectively studied (Amadebai, 2024). Additionally, Amadebai (2024) notes that data analysis allows researchers to study data collectively, which results in uncovering very minor patterns and details that would otherwise have been ignored.

For this qualitative study, the data analysis process involved thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is particularly well-suited for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. The authors posit that thematic analysis is theoretically flexible for identifying, describing and interpreting patterns or a theme within data and in detail; and that it is valid because it is accessible, transparent and flexible. Nowell et al (2017) commend thematic analysis for producing insightful and trustworthy findings.

The in-depth interviews conducted with key informants were transcribed verbatim, and then the researcher coded the data to identify significant themes and categories related to internal

communication strategies, employee perceptions, and crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic (Boyatzis, 1998). The researcher employed an inductive approach to data analysis, allowing the themes to emerge naturally from the data, rather than imposing predefined categories (Saldana, 2016). This process involved familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming the final themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis helped the researcher to interpret the data concerning the research questions and objectives, and to identify how internal communication during the pandemic impacted employee morale, perceptions, and organizational communication strategies. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher engaged in member checking by sharing preliminary findings with a subset of participants for validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The study thus used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process of thematic analysis, which is described below by Dawadi (2020):

1. Familiarising with the data to find out the number of possible themes that are linked to the research questions.
2. Generating initial codes, whereby codes will be developed from data extracts.
3. Searching for themes because "a theme captures something important about the data in relation to a research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun and Clarke, 2006:10).
4. Reviewing themes to ascertain the salient themes and sub themes to choose which to keep or discard.
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Writing a report

To carry out the aforementioned six phases, the study used the aid of NVivo software to analyse data because the software can accommodate a rich and large amount of data for analysis (Dollah, Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2017).

3.9. Quality Control

3.9.1 Validity

Validity in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the data collection instruments and findings accurately reflect the phenomenon being studied (Cypress, 2017). It ensures that the study measures what it claims to measure, and that the results are relevant, meaningful, and well-founded (Merriam, 1998; Golafshani, 2003). For qualitative research, validity is often assessed through face validity and content validity (Guion, 2002). Face validity refers to how relevant the participants perceive the interview questions to be in relation to the research topic (Holden, 2010). Content validity, on the other hand, involves ensuring that the interview guide comprehensively covers the key topics related to the study's objectives (Engel, 2020; Bush, 1985). In this study, the researcher ensured the interview guide had strong content validity by reviewing it for clarity, relevance, simplicity, and ambiguity, using feedback from peers, communication experts, and the research supervisor (Yaghmie, 2003). The research supervisor's review of the interview instruments further enhanced the validity of the data collection process.

3.9.2 Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research concerns the consistency and dependability of the data and findings (Creswell, 2014). To ensure reliability in this study, the researcher interviewed participants who have substantial institutional knowledge and experience, particularly those who worked at *The New Vision* during the 2020 pandemic, which is the scope of the study. These key

informants provided valuable insights into the role of internal communication in crisis management within the organization, enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings (Merriam, 2009). The participants' firsthand experience during the crisis added reliability to the data, ensuring that the research accurately captures the lived experiences and organizational practices.

Therefore, the study achieved reliability by choosing credible participants who were present during the scope of the study, studying them through thorough observations, and documenting their responses. This is because reliability in qualitative research concerns "being thorough, careful and honest in carrying out the research" (Robson, 2002: 176).

3.9.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an essential practice in qualitative research, allowing researchers to critically reflect on how their personal biases, assumptions, and context influence the research process (Olmos-Vega, Stalmeijer, Varpio, & Kahlke, 2022). It involves a conscious effort to understand how the researcher's subjectivity may shape data interpretation (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). Reflexivity is not about eliminating bias but recognizing and valuing it as an integral part of the research process (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). The researcher engaged in personal reflexivity, regularly reflecting on assumptions and reactions throughout the study to minimize bias and ensure a transparent and unbiased interpretation of the data (Walsh, 2003; Dowling, 2006). Given that the researcher is an employee of *The New Vision*, interpersonal reflexivity was particularly important. The researcher acknowledged the potential influence of their relationship with the participants and remained mindful of how this dynamic could shape the data collection and analysis process (Walsh, 2003). This helped ensure the integrity and trustworthiness of the research findings.

3.9.4 Ethical Considerations

The study conformed to all ethical considerations, starting with seeking permission to carry out the study from the institution, Uganda Christian University. Thereafter, since the research was about the role of internal communication in a print media house during a crisis, specifically *The New Vision* during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, the researcher sought permission from Vision Group management to carry out interviews of its employees. This is because the in-depth interviews provided the study with data.

In this study, participants were given the assurance that all collected data would be treated with the utmost confidentiality, ensuring anonymity and privacy. As a result, personally identifying information was replaced with codes or pseudonyms, and strict security measures were implemented to safeguard data. Respondents had the right to say 'yes' or 'no' regarding their participation in the study.

Additionally, consent forms were provided, outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and measures to ensure anonymity and privacy. By signing, participants acknowledged that they understood and agreed to participate voluntarily, with the assurance that their data would be protected and handled confidentially.

3.9.5 Limitations of the study

The study used in-depth interviews to collect data, whose primary advantage is that they provide much more detailed information than other data collection methods, such as surveys. However, they were not without limitations because they are prone to bias and can be time-intensive. Therefore, if supplemented with other data collection methods—such as surveys, in-depths interviews are good (Boyce and Neale, 2006). Surveys would give a broader picture of what transpired during the pandemic.

The study suffered from bias because some of the interviewees disagreed with the way the company, *The New Vision*, used internal communication during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, from June to March. Several interviewees were disgruntled and biased against the company.

On the other hand, a few interviewees were in favour of the company's internal communication strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, from March to June, which meant that the researcher had to cross-check the information to mitigate the bias.

Chapter Four

Presentation of Findings

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings obtained through thematic analysis and guided by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007), which provide a framework for organizations to navigate the complex process of crisis communication, helping them maintain their reputation through the effective management of internal and external communications during crises. The themes are directly linked to the objectives of the study. To adhere to anonymity and confidentiality, the participants' real names are not used, but they are referred to using their initials.

The findings are presented as dominant themes and subthemes that are supported with interview excerpts that reveal the participants' point of view, which gives the study credibility and depth. The objectives included: (i) To examine the internal communication strategies utilized by *The New Vision* during the period from March to June 2020. (ii) To examine the challenges encountered by *The New Vision* in implementing internal communication strategies amidst the uncertainties and disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Thematic analysis revealed the main themes, which are: 1. Internal Communication strategies and tools used; 2. Perceived Effectiveness of Internal Communication; 3. Impact on Employee Experience; 4. Challenges in Implementing Communication, and 5. Lessons and Recommendations for Future Crises. Under Internal Communication strategies and tools used, there emerged two sub-themes: Digital tools as primary channels and One-way vs. Two-way Communication; while Perceived Effectiveness of Internal Communication revealed the following sub-themes: Informational vs Relational Outcomes, Connectivity and Accessibility

Issues and Uneven Communication Impact. The Impact and Employee Experience theme featured these sub-themes: Dis-empowerment and Distrust, Emotional Disconnect, and Well-being vs. Policy Gaps; while Challenges in Implementing Communication had these sub-themes: Technological and Infrastructural Limitations, Organizational and Managerial Disconnect and Crisis-Induced Uncertainty. Lastly, Lessons and Recommendations for Future Crises had the following sub-themes: Need for Empathetic, Transparent Communication, Two-way Communication and Feedback Loops, and Institutional Preparedness and Training. The discussion follows the themes and sub-themes mentioned above.

4.1 Theme 1: Internal Communication strategies and tools used

During the interviews, participants were asked to explain the internal communication strategies and tools that *The New Vision* employed during the scope of the study (March to June, 2020). They were asked to share the internal communication strategies and tools the company used. Their answers revealed an understanding of why the company chose those strategies and tools during the crisis of Covid-19 pandemic. They were particularly asked questions which aimed at explaining the internal communication strategies and tools *The New Vision* used during the Covid-19 pandemic from March to June, 2020. Questions such as: *What internal communication strategies were used by The New Vision during the period from March to June 2020?*, which was directly linked to the first objective of the study. In addition, the participants were asked: *How do you perceive the effectiveness of internal communication strategies within your organization during the Covid-19 pandemic?*

Their answers explained *The New Vision*'s decision to choose the internal communication strategies and tools it used during the pandemic and revealed the perception of its employees

towards those strategies and tools. In so doing, the employees shared their experience of adhering to the company's internal communication strategies while using the company's tools during the pandemic, which highlighted their endurance and loyalty to the company.

4.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Digital tools as primary channels

All the participants were knowledgeable about the internal communication strategies and tools *The New Vision* used during the pandemic. They each cited the different digital tools the company used during the crisis of 2020 (Covid 19 pandemic). They said the company's internal communication strategy was mainly going digital in its operations. They thus mentioned digital tools such as emails, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and WhatsApp. They also said there were a lot of phone calls to staff from management during the pandemic.

As one participant, GM, explained:

“*The New Vision* employed a mix of digital communication tools, including emails, and internal memos to keep staff informed. Zoom and Microsoft Teams were used for meetings, while regular updates from top management were shared to align everyone on new protocols and safety measures.”

The findings revealed that *The New Vision* mainly used digital tools during the pandemic, which highlighted the important role technology plays in communication during a paralysing crisis such as Covid19 pandemic was.

4.1.2 Sub-theme 2: One-way vs. Two-way Communication

On the staff's perception of the internal communication strategies used by the company, the participants revealed that they felt the communication had a top-down approach, which did not allow for feedback from them.

One participant, IB, said:

“Email was the chief mode of communication used by *The New Vision* in that period. Online meetings, through applications like Teams, were also adopted. Through these, there was mainly top-down and largely one-way communication.”

Another participant, CO, shared:

“During the initial outbreak of Covid-19, that was during 2020. New Vision primarily relied on what I call a top-down communication approach. This is where information about the company's operational changes remote work arrangements, salary cuts were disseminated, but it was mostly through email and virtual meetings. But overall, the strategy was what I would call a reactive response that really lacked employee involvement or feedback messages; either you take it or leave it.”

The participants acknowledged that the information they received was resourceful as it gave them important facts about the company's new operations and Covid-19, especially adherence to the SOPs (standard operating procedures). However, they largely felt that the communication had a top-down approach and was reactive and so lacked feedback loops to allay their fears and anxiety during the pandemic. Notably, the participants agreed that while information about Covid-19 [safety precautions] and new ways of operations was disseminated

efficiently, the lack of interactivity and feedback channels made it feel impersonal and disengaging to many staff.

4.2 Theme 2: Perceived Effectiveness of Internal Communication

When asked during the interview, *How do you perceive the effectiveness of internal communication strategies within your organization during the Covid-19 pandemic?*, the participants were encouraged to open up and speak freely about the strategies. They were able to share their views on how effective the internal communication of the company was during the pandemic of 2020.

As one participant, BS, shared:

“Effectiveness? Email was not so reliable and could easily be missed due to poor internet. This made some communications not to reach some intended workers.”

Another participant, IO, strongly said:

“Very ineffective the more reason some staff sued the company for changing their terms of employment without following the right procedures as per labour laws of the country.”

As a result, the findings revealed that the messaging, to a larger extent, lacked empathy.

4.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Informational vs. Relational Outcomes

The findings revealed that the messages informed but didn't “engage,” “communication lacked empathy,” and “felt manipulative”. Participants shared that the communication left them wondering if the company ever cared for them because the messaging was impersonal.

Participant, CO, said:

“Personally, the internal communication strategies during this period was largely ineffective and impersonal. There was minimal consultation with staff. It was more of an instructional process before the major decisions were implemented, so the messages really focused on survival and operational continuity, which I felt was manipulative for *The New Vision* in nature given its history of profit making...”

EN, another participant, said:

“I believe effectiveness would depend on what the intended outcome of the communication was. If it was just to inform, then they were effective. Staff were informed. If it was to boost employee engagement, then they were not effective. If anything, staff became more disengaged with the announcement of the pay cuts, redeployment of roles and restructuring with new leadership positions that saw the promotion of some and the redundancy of others.”

Another participant, TM, shared:

“The internal communication was not effective. Many employees were left out or lost during the online communications.”

Participant TM’s response highlighted the technological challenges some of the staff faced, in that poor connectivity or a lack of connectivity made them miss the company’s communications during the pandemic, implying that such employees felt the company was disengaged.

4.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Connectivity and Accessibility Issues

Technological challenges during the pandemic were significant at *The New Vision* as the findings illustrated. Participants expressed challenges of internet connectivity because most of them were working from home and different locales in Kampala and Wakiso [where many largely stay] have different connectivity strengths.

A participant, DO, said:

“Setting up staff who were working from home was also problematic. Sending teams to set up so that some people were working remotely was not easy; they had to take machines home. We had a small IT workforce, and they had to troubleshoot for so many people. Then someone would say, ‘Power went off at home.’ Or, ‘I didn’t have connection.’ So work was not delivered on time, if at all it was. So that transition was not smooth.”

The findings also revealed a small IT team at *The New Vision*, which was overburdened with the workload and setting up workstations for staff working at home. Additionally, the company did not have adequate devices [computers] for all who needed to work from home. There was also the issue of “missed emails” as some participants revealed, because of the bulk messaging during the pandemic.

RM, a participant, said:

“Email and zoom did not work because they were easily missed but letters were individual and would not go unnoticed. Phone calls were not as effective because at the end of the day it’s hard to recall or to prove what both parties said.”

Another participant, BS, said:

“Challenges faced were lack of internet to be able to send mails. Internet bundles would run out fast thus delaying replying mails.”

Another participant, GN, noted the irregularity in the messaging, saying:

“One key challenge was poor internet connectivity for remote staff, which affected virtual meetings and email communication. Another was the lack of clarity in some messages from management.”

4.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Uneven Communication Impact

The findings revealed that there was a case of uneven communication impact as some departments were fully connected and given information, while others were neglected. Information delays were also revealed, which further highlighted the unevenness of communication during the pandemic.

As one participant, GM, stated:

“The strategies were moderately effective. They ensured continuity of communication despite the remote work environment. However, there were delays in responses at times, and not all departments had the same level of access to information or communication tools.”

Another participant, BS, also shared that communication did not reach some members of *The New Vision* staff, saying:

“Email was not so reliable and could easily be missed due to poor internet. This made some communications not to reach some intended workers.”

4.3 Theme 3: Impact on Employee Experience

During the interviews, participants were asked the following questions: *What internal communication challenges did you encounter during the pandemic, and how were they addressed?* and *Did you feel appreciated and valued in the internal communication messages that the company sent out during the pandemic?* These questions aimed at directly getting answers to the challenges the employees faced during the pandemic while working for *The New Vision*. As a result, the participants expressly shared their experiences of the messaging of the company’s internal communication. For example, BS, a participant said,

“I did not feel appreciated at that time because that’s the period my MD sent out frustrating communications of salary cuts and changing from permanent to contract without terminal benefits.”

4.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Dis-empowerment and Distrust

The findings had nuances of a coercive tone by management to its staff and unilateral decision-making, which some participants said was unfair. To demonstrate the coercive tone and unilateral decision-making at *The New Vision* during the pandemic, CO, a participant, shared this:

“For me, the biggest challenge was that one-sided decision-making by management. For example, Kabushenga gave us those life-threatening messages. I recall in one of those virtual meetings, he gave an example of “if you do not take this, there is the gate, the

exist.”—meaning that whoever did not heed these directives had only one alternative, which was to leave the organization.” [Robert Kabushenga was the CEO of *The New Vision* at the time.]

Another participant, EN, also shared her experience, which showed how disempowered the staff felt during the pandemic.

“I had many questions about the new structure but there was no place to get them addressed. Senior management blamed the changes on the Board, which we could not access as staff members.”

In addition, the findings also revealed the sour fruit of the abrupt salary cuts that the staff had to contend with during the pandemic. As TM, a participant shared:

“...addressing the elephant in the room, which is the dismissive and transactional way the organization communicated this salary cut was really bad because there was little acknowledgement of the personal sacrifices the staff were making. I remember some staff used to walk. I actually one time walked from New Vision to Kiira Municipality. But there are so many other people who would walk from New Vision to Kireka, New Vision to Bweyogerere, Mutungo and Ntinda, and the outskirts of Kampala to work and then walk back.

“Management decided that they would cut our salaries but we were not consulted or explained to,” said TM, a participant.

4.3.2 Sub-theme 2 Emotional Disconnect

The findings revealed a thread of dissatisfaction of staff with the way *The New Vision* handled the internal communication during the pandemic. For that reason, during the interviews the codes in this sub-theme that were captured include: feeling unappreciated, stressed, and betrayed. Some participants felt that their loyalty to the company was not considered when the company made its decisions during the pandemic through the internal communication they received.

GN, a participant, shared her view, inferring that the company did not appreciate and thus betrayed its staff during a trying time that the pandemic was. She thus said:

“The messages on Covid-19 made me feel my life mattered; however, everything else made me feel like a liability to the company I had served so faithfully.”

Another participant, CO, echoed GN’s view, saying:

“People would come into work without that vigour or excitement to tackle the day. The mood in the newsroom was one of betrayal by an institution we had loyally served. Personally, I joined New Vision even before I completed university as an intern. The institution shaped me, and I was able to rise through the ranks, and I gave it my youth, the most important years of my youth...and then getting this betrayal of a really poor contract that did not make sense is not good”.

4.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Well-being vs. Policy Gaps

The findings shed some light on the company’s internal communication during the pandemic. In this regard, the findings captured these codes: “pandemic-related health information effective” and “employment changes poorly communicated”. All the participants

agreed that information about the pandemic was useful because it was quite informative, but the other communication about their well-being and future was poorly communicated. Some participants had this to say:

One participant, GN shared her experience:

“The communication on Covid-19 SOPs and how to go about treatment when one got infected was helpful. HR also got in touch with those infected and offered advice.

The sudden pay cuts and probable loss of employment was traumatizing. I feel the company could have communicated better at such a time instead of using threats.

Employees were unprofessionally handled during this time. We all understood the uncertainty the company was faced with, but they should have communicated their position in a more empathetic manner.”

Another participant, EN, shared:

“The communication on Covid-19 SOPs and what to do if one got infected, including info on who to contact and where to seek treatment, as well as how to conduct oneself while in the field to avoid infection, was consistent, regularly shared and it worked in keeping the majority of staff members safe. It also helped to make people feel like management cared about their well-being. However, staff were not prepared for the sudden cut in pay, or temporary and in some cases permanent layoffs, as well as the restructuring and the change from permanent to contract status. There was a lot of speculation and gossip caused by the way the changes were “imposed” on staff. Some felt that the changes favoured some staff members unfairly at the cost of others. In response,

management resorted to threats instead of making efforts to communicate the reasons behind the changes better.”

Their responses revealed how effective, consistent, and well-received the communication on the pandemic was. However, matters related to do with employment-related communication were not effective because the staff said the messages were insensitive, which deepened employee anxiety and mistrust.

4.4 Theme 4: Challenges in Implementing Communication

4.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Technological and Infrastructural Limitations

Under this subtheme, the findings highlighted the importance of technology in communication during a crisis, particularly during the pandemic when the world came to a standstill [restricted movement and interaction]. In the study, participants revealed how a lack of preparation and the challenge of setting up tech equipment for staff negatively affected communication and their work because of delays. As a result, participants cited poor internet, power outages, and delayed setup for staff working remotely as some of the limitations they faced during the pandemic while working for *The New Vision*. For instance,

“Setting up staff who were working from home was also problematic. Sending teams to set up so that some people were working remotely was not easy; they had to take machines home. We had a small IT workforce and they had to troubleshoot for so many people. Then someone would say, ‘Power went off at home.’ Or, ‘I didn’t have connection.’ So work was not delivered on time, if at all it was. So that transition was not smooth,” said a participant, DO.

4.4.2. Sub-theme 2: Organizational and Managerial Disconnect

During the pandemic at *The New Vision*, participants revealed the confusion that characterized the workspace as some said there was no clear chain of command. Others also noted that there was a misalignment between departments and vague or inconsistent messaging. One participant, who belongs to the human resource office, said:

“There was a communication challenge: who makes the communication? There were many competent voices coming from here and there, so we needed a chain of command for all communications. People kept hearing rumours, and as management that situation was unique because even management was shrouded in uncertainty and they also did not know. This was something new and never dealt with on such a large scale. So, there were a lot of rumours and one standard answer was: ‘We also don’t know’ [from management]. But questions came to our office and we would say, “Eh, you heard that? Tell me more.”

Another participant, GM, revealed the inconsistent messaging at the time saying:

“Another [challenge] was the lack of clarity in some messages from management.”

Yet another participant, BS, hinted at the disparity in communication for different departments, saying:

“Email was not so reliable and could easily be missed due to poor internet. This made some communications not to reach some intended workers.”

GM, a participant, also shared the disparity, saying:

“However, there were delays in responses at times, and not all departments had the same level of access to information or communication tools.”

4.4.3. Subtheme 3: Crisis-Induced Uncertainty

The findings shed light on the confusion and anxiety that the pandemic brought to *The New Vision* and its operations. Participants said the company made drastic changes such as the “confusing restructuring”, “fear of layoffs” and “ambiguity around new roles”. For example, one participant, EN, shared:

“However, staff were not prepared for the sudden cut in pay, or temporary and in some cases permanent layoffs, as well as the restructuring and the change from permanent to contract status. There was a lot of speculation and gossip caused by the way the changes were “imposed” on staff. Some felt that the changes favoured some staff members unfairly at the cost of others. In response, management resorted to threats instead of making efforts to communicate the reasons behind the changes better.”

The participant, EN, noted that there was ambiguity around new roles given to staff:

“There was also the feeling that some departments were trying to usurp others and with the fear of losing jobs people became more territorial yet the newsroom was supposed to transition into integration.”

4.5 Theme 5: Lessons and Recommendations for Future Crises

4.5.1 Sub-theme 1: Need for Empathetic, Transparent Communication

During the study, this question was asked, *Are there specific areas or practices that*

should be focused on or enhanced that The New Vision used during the pandemic? The findings revealed codes that pertained to more empathy and engagement. For example, IO, a participant, said:

“More close staff interaction and communication; Improve on its transparency; Reform its human resource department to be more staff-friendly.”

As a result, codes such as “tone matters”, “involve staff in decision-making,” and “avoid threats” were predominant, which highlighted the unanimous view of the participants that staff matter.

Some of the participants shared the following views:

“I think organisations really need to be honest. They must adopt what I call a people-first approach in crisis communication and this includes being transparent in your decision-making processes, being empathetic and compassionate, using a compassionate tone in all your messaging as compared to threats; providing regular and consistent updates with room for feedback. But also respect for legal frameworks on employee rights; I mean some of us have covered stories about people’s human rights being infringed. We have done stories about teachers demanding for better pay, soldiers and the police; all these people in their different work spaces pointing out inequalities in employment. So then how can we be the very people that sort of squander this? We should be better students of this to sort of enforce, to practice what we preach. Otherwise, for me it looked like we were drinking water and preaching wine, or the reverse, drinking wine and preaching water,” CO, a participant.

“Dialogue should be encouraged instead of just imposing changes. Employees are not dumb; their voice should be heard. Communication should also be clear and transparent,” said GN, a participant.

“Future internal communication should prioritize timeliness, transparency, and two-way feedback. Organizations should have a crisis communication plan in place with clearly defined channels and roles to ensure smooth and inclusive communication during disruptions,” said GM, a participant.

“I would have listened more. I think it is important to design communication to meet the existing needs. In the existing atmosphere of mistrust and fear, I would have tried to make sure that the teams felt listened to, understanding their fears and then reassuring them,” said IB.

4.5.2. Sub-theme 2: Two-way Communication and Feedback Loops

The findings highlighted the importance of two-way communication and feedback loops in an organization during a crisis, such as the pandemic. Participants of the study revealed that feedback is integral to allaying the staff’s fears during a crisis. As a result, the responses below stress how important two-way communication and feedback are:

“They should prioritise transparency, utilise various communication channels, encourage two-way dialogue, and foster a culture of engagement. This includes regularly soliciting feedback, implementing an "open door" policy, and using technology to facilitate communication,” said EN, a participant.

“I would advise frequent/more regular communication in times of crisis such as the pandemic. It is also important to set up a strong feedback loop (two-way communication) to hear people’s concerns and respond to them in reassuring and empathetic ways or to clarify areas of confusion. It is crucial to have more personal and less detached means of communication like mass email,” said IB, a participant.

“I think all forms of communication can be used at the same time especially if it’s something quite important and sensitive. Feedback should also be allowed on an individual basis like talking through the issue and asking around to internalize the message,” said RM, a participant.

4.5.3. Sub-theme 3: Institutional Preparedness and Training

The findings shed light on what *The New Vision* staff think and feel the company ought to have done and what they should do in case of future crises. For that reason, participants shared their views, which were the codes the study captured, and they include: “strategic communication departments”, “training for digital tools”, and “clear crisis protocols”.

Participants shared views such as these below:

“Whereas the shift to digital tools for communication was necessary at the time, I think it needs to be complemented with genuine human engagement. Therefore, perhaps future engagements should focus more on inclusive communication that respects individual circumstances, avoid intimidation as a management tool because that never works,” said CO, a participant.

“Organizations should have a crisis communication plan in place with clearly defined channels and roles to ensure smooth and inclusive communication during disruptions,” said GN, a participant.

“I think I would have had a crisis communication protocol in place and it would more or less determine how we would handle the situation. So, we were forced to develop it we went along. We hit the ground running,” said DO, a participant.

“You need to have that protocol in place. You need to have that committee and you need to do scenario planning, worst case scenario, on how to handle crisis communication,” added DO.

Chapter Five

Discussion of Findings

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of findings, conclusions, and recommendations. It was organized as per the objectives of the study, which include: (i) To examine the internal communication strategies utilized by *The New Vision* during the period from March to June 2020. (ii) To examine the challenges encountered by *The New Vision* in implementing internal communication strategies amidst the uncertainties and disruptions caused by the pandemic. Therefore, this chapter discussed the findings obtained from thematic analysis of interview data. The discussion engaged with relevant literature on internal communication and organizational crisis management to contextualize the findings.

5.1. Internal communication strategies utilized

One of the two objectives of the study was to examine the internal communication strategies utilized by *The New Vision* during the pandemic of 2020, and the findings revealed that the company employed a digital strategy to run its operations in the crisis. The company, like many others globally, used digital tools to carry out its internal communication strategies during the pandemic (Koskinen & Pihlanto, 2021; Li et al, 2021). According to scholars [Koskinen & Pihlanto, 2021; Li et al, 2021], these digital tools helped maintain organizational cohesion and supported employees' mental wellbeing during the crisis. Men and Stacks (2013) assert that technology is an essential enabler for effective communication, especially when face-to-face interactions are limited.

East Africa adopted digital platforms in their internal communication strategy, with 68% of Kenya's media organisations using WhatsApp, email bulletins, and virtual town halls to sustain operations and the safety of employees during the pandemic (Mwangi & Ngugi, 2022). South African companies reported a 40 percent increase in digital communication use during the pandemic (Motsoeneng & Sekhonyane, 2021); while in Finland, 78 percent of companies relied on advanced internal communication strategies during the pandemic, adopting digital platforms like Microsoft Teams and Slack for virtual meetings and projects (Koskinen & Pihlanto, 2021). Similarly, the participants of the study highlighted the adoption of digital platforms and tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams for virtual meetings and other communication, emails, and WhatsApp for work assignments and discussions at *The New Vision*.

However, although the digital shift was a Godsend during the pandemic, the findings noted that some staff at *The New Vision* were left out because of unequal access to communication tools, which hindered seamless internal communication in some departments (Li, Wang & Zhang, 2021; Tumwesigye, 2021). Additionally, participants agreed that *The New Vision* predominantly used digital tools successfully to continue its operations during the pandemic, but with a top-down approach. While information was disseminated efficiently, the lack of interactivity and feedback channels made it feel impersonal and disengaging to staff.

The findings are in line with the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007), which suggest that an organization during a crisis should first identify the nature of the crisis, which is the crisis type identification. As indicated by the findings in the study, the pandemic classified *The New Vision* as a 'victim' crisis, where the organization is also a victim of the pandemic's impacts (Coombs, 2007). This could include operational disruptions, or challenges in news gathering and reporting. The findings resonated with the theory in that

participants expressed their anxiety and fears about the new operations brought about by the disruption of the pandemic. Additionally, the findings reveal why *The New Vision* chose a digital strategy during the pandemic because it was the reliable and safe way to operate in the pandemic. In fact, some participants shared that they understood why the company chose the digital way because it was also a victim of circumstances.

Participants agreed that *The New Vision* navigated the pandemic using its internal communication strategies to inform its staff about the changes and new operations. Coombs (2007) stressed the importance of organisations communicating effectively with their internal stakeholders during crises to ensure a sense of coherence, alignment, and trust. However, participants unanimously revealed that communication about the pandemic and new operations [digital strategy] was effective, but was detached, which left them feeling like the company cared more for its survival than its staff. As a result, participants said the question of trust arose among members of staff.

5.2. Challenges in implementing internal communication strategies

The findings show that the implementation challenges were both technological and structural. Poor internet connectivity, power outages, and a lack of access to digital tools hindered remote work and disrupted communication flow. One participant, for example shared about poor internet connectivity (Akampurira, 2023) for staff working remotely, who missed the virtual meetings and email communication.

The digital disruption brought about by the pandemic was a first for all, and it proved to be challenging even for *The New Vision*. Cleary (2023) said the disruption was exacerbated by the lack of preparedness for a large-scale work environment, leaving many organizations

struggling to adapt their communication strategies to the new reality. This was the case for the study, as findings revealed that setting up staff who were working from home was also problematic. Participants shed light on the fact that sending teams to set up so work stations for staff working remotely was a challenge; they had to take machines home from work.

Mhlanga & Moloji (2020) pointed out that reliance on digital tools and platforms during the pandemic posed challenges for print media organizations, saying that many media houses in developing countries had difficulty in accessing reliable technology. That was not the case as the findings revealed that technology was available; the challenge though was poor internet connectivity and some staff who did not have devices (computers and Smart phones) and access to digital tools.

Cleary (2023) suggests that the importance of inclusivity and accessibility in digital communication. She further notes that different employees have varying levels of digital literacy, and organizations must ensure that digital tools are accompanied by adequate support and training. Participants however revealed that their digital shift during the pandemic was a case of “learning on the job”; it was confusion. Similarly, Coombs (2020) stresses the importance of crisis communication strategies that are tailored to the specific needs of employees, arguing that they should be inclusive, ensuring that all employees, regardless of their technological proficiency, have equal access to critical information.

The absence of a clear communication chain of command contributed to inconsistency and confusion. Some employees reported receiving mixed messages from different levels of management, which further eroded confidence in the leadership’s crisis management capacity. Anagnostopoulos & Van den Bulck (2020) emphasize the critical role of leadership in internal

communication during a crisis because effective leadership communication can alleviate feelings of uncertainty and enhance organizational commitment. Participants' responses resonate with the scholars as they shared a lack of chain of command in the internal communication during the pandemic, where different voices addressed staff.

Staff perception was another challenge and participants shared their grievances about the messaging from management, which included: feeling disengaged, lack of empathy and an aura of confusion in communication. This disconnection between management and employees underscores the role of internal communication in shaping organizational culture and employee well-being. According to Macey and Schneider (2008), effective internal communication enhances employee engagement by reinforcing inclusion, recognition, and respect. Conversely, at *The New Vision*, communication strategies appeared to deepen alienation and uncertainty, leading to reduced morale and heightened suspicion, particularly when staff were asked to accept unfavourable changes without participation.

Therefore, the communication achieved basic operational continuity, but failed in fostering trust, motivation, and inclusion, especially due to technology limitations and a lack of staff engagement. Participants recalled snags or hitches in communication due to missed emails, inconsistent messaging, and poor internet connectivity, which caused delays in the company's operations.

Moden (2020) asserts that internal communication during a crisis requires a balance between transparency and discretion, arguing that though it is important to share essential information, it is equally important to manage the dissemination of that information across

various levels of organisations. Participants echoed Moden's view because they shared that access to information was varied, with some departments feeling left out.

During a time of uncertainty, *The New Vision* management faced the challenge of "getting people to understand the gravity of the pandemic" as one participant revealed. Besides the uncertainty the pandemic posed, staff also expressed the uncertainty of losing their jobs because the company was suddenly laying off people without consulting or discussing with them. Such a strong fear as loss of a job could have been handled with sensitivity, as Mishra et al (2018) stress the role of empathy in crisis communication, arguing that organizations must adopt empathetic communication practices to address the emotional and psychological impacts on employees.

Furthermore, management at *The New Vision* also faced the challenge of uncertainty because they too did not know what the future held during the pandemic.

Lastly, there was a case of too much information, wrong and right, which the management at *The New Vision* had to contend with during the pandemic. Defined by a World Health Organisation report, *7-8 April Global Consultation on Managing the COVID-19 infodemic*, "an infodemic is an overabundance of information—some accurate and some not—that occurs during an epidemic. It spreads between humans in a similar manner to an epidemic, via digital and physical information systems. It makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it." Participants of the study said there was an infodemic during the pandemic, and management did not know much either to allay staff fears of Covid-19, which posed a challenge (Zakiri, 2020).

According to the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, an organization during a crisis can adopt a crisis response strategy as a response to a victim crisis, where the organization

should focus on offering support and information (Coombs, 2007). *The New Vision*, as participants shared, communicated the steps taken to protect employees' health and ensure continuous and reliable news dissemination. Coombs and Holladay (2002) suggest that providing accurate and timely information is crucial in maintaining stakeholder trust. However, participants felt the messaging was impersonal and lacked empathy, which bred anxiety and mistrust among its staff. Some employees did not even receive the communication regularly due to technological issues.

5.3. Recommendations from internal communication experiences

Lessons and recommendations abound for *The New Vision's* internal communication strategies, response and actions during the pandemic. In the interviews, participants emphasized the need for more transparency, empathy and engagement in its internal communication.

Several participants suggested establishing consistent feedback loops such as virtual suggestion boxes, one-on-one staff consultations, and regularly scheduled newsletters tailored to different departments. These align with best practices in crisis communication that prioritize stakeholder engagement, clarity, and emotional intelligence (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Johansen et al., 2012; Wright & Robertson, 2009).

Participants called for a robust communication department to handle internal communication, especially during a crisis, staffed with professionals trained in strategic and corporate communication. Such a unit would not only facilitate preparedness but also ensure that messages are tailored, timely, and responsive to evolving staff needs.

The theory, Situational Crisis Communication Theory, suggests rebuilding reputation after a crisis, which aligns with some participants' view of the company. Coombs (2014) emphasizes the importance of focusing on future improvements and learning from the crisis. *The New Vision* should in future communicate how it's adapting to the changing media landscape post-COVID-19, such as digital transformation and enhanced online news delivery.

Participants shared that the company should learn lessons from the pandemic experience, which aligns with theory's take on evaluating the communication. Organisations ought to assess the effectiveness of the crisis communication strategies in altering stakeholder perceptions (Coombs, 2014). This could involve analyzing reader feedback, engagement metrics on digital platforms, and advertiser retention rates. In this regard, participants suggested support systems and open communication channels.

A call for improvements in technological infrastructure—such as internet provision, digital literacy training, and equipping remote staff—were seen as essential to sustaining communication in disrupted contexts. Men & Stacks (2019) highlight the pivotal role digital platforms play in communication during crises, especially in maintaining communication with employees. They argue that organisations with well-established digital communication infrastructure were able to disseminate timely information and keep employees informed. Findings revealed that *The New Vision* has room to improve its digital infrastructure, training and access to include all its staff.

The theory advocates adaptation and learning in the post-crisis. Organizations are urged to apply the lessons learnt to improve crisis management and communication strategies

(Coombs, 2007). The New Vision can develop more robust contingency plans for future crises, enhancing its resilience and operational stability.

The participants echoed Vermillion (2018), who suggests that communication during a crisis must be strategic to avoid confusion and conflicting messages. Anagnostopoulos & Van den Bulck (2020) are in support of the critical role of leadership in internal communication during a crisis, as some participants shared that there wasn't a clear leader during the crisis.

Scholars also suggest continued monitoring and engagement, where organisations maintain ongoing dialogue with stakeholders to build and sustain trust (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007). This will entail regularly updating stakeholders on new initiatives and changes implemented in response to the crisis.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The conclusions of this study were drawn from the objectives, which were: examining the internal communication strategies utilized by *The New Vision* during the period from March to June 2020; the challenges encountered by *The New Vision* in implementing internal communication strategies amidst the uncertainties and disruptions caused by the pandemic.

The study's findings support the following conclusions:

6.1.1 The Internal Communication strategies utilized by The New Vision during the pandemic from March to June, 2020

Technology played a pivotal role in ensuring the continuity of the business at *The New Vision* during the COVID-19 pandemic. The company's swift choice to use digital tools and platforms enabled its employees to continue working even during a time of restriction on movement and association. It was able to set up workstations for employees, who had to adapt to the new way of operation, which was remote working and digital usage. Participants said they had to acquaint themselves with the digital tools and platforms 'on the go', which is why they suggested focused training on digital usage to ease the adaptability of staff in crises.

The New Vision, like other companies globally, quickly adapted to digital operations during the pandemic as a survival tactic. However, the participants of the study revealed that the digital strategy was effective in keeping the company afloat at the expense of its employees' well-being.

They shared that the internal communication messages were unempathetic, detached, and impersonal, especially the messages announcing salary cuts and layoffs.

They stressed that the digital strategy also left out some employees who did not have devices, laptops, or computers, and those with poor internet connectivity. They said their colleagues felt alienated, as did those who were in some relegated departments. Participants said some departments were not privy to the information contained in the company's internal communication.

Additionally, the internal communication strategies also bred a top-down approach, which did not leave room for feedback or allow for staff consultation. The participants viewed it as reactive communication.

The findings align with the objectives because they confirm the internal communication strategies utilized by *The New Vision* during the pandemic, which were largely to ensure the company's survival in a time of crisis. The communication thus achieved basic operational continuity, but failed in fostering trust, motivation, and inclusion, especially due to technology limitations and lack of staff engagement.

6.1.2 Challenges encountered by The New Vision in implementing Internal Communication strategies amidst the uncertainties and disruptions caused by the pandemic

The New Vision encountered several challenges during the pandemic, such as technological and infrastructural limitations. Poor internet connectivity, power outages, and delayed setup for remote work created snags in the company's operations during the pandemic. Therefore, the challenge posed by poor internet connectivity to a larger extent, was not within the company's control as well as power outages. The delayed setup for remote work was also a challenge that the

company can improve by growing its IT department, which participants said was rather small and was thus overwhelmed by the workload.

Organisational and managerial disconnect also posed a challenge for the company while implementing its internal communication strategies during the pandemic. There was a lack of a clear chain of command, misalignment between departments, and there was vague or inconsistent messaging.

There was also crisis-induced uncertainty due to the confusing restructuring owing to the new operations, fear of layoffs, and ambiguity around new roles. As a result, the pandemic exposed structural weaknesses in *The New Vision's* internal communication system and internal mismanagement.

The findings resonate with the second objective as participants' experiences verify the challenges the company encountered in implementing its internal communication strategies during the pandemic.

6.1. 3 Recommendations from *The New Vision's* internal communication experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic for future crises

There are several recommendations from *The New Vision's* internal communication experiences during the pandemic for future crises, such as more empathetic messaging and generally more compassion for the staff. Participants unanimously called for better and prepared communication strategies during future crises as opposed to reactionary strategies. In other words, they recommended people-first principles, emotional intelligence, and feedback integration.

Participants also suggested that media companies should establish a robust communication department to handle effective and inclusive communication, especially during future crises. They recommended that the department should have strategic crisis communication professionals, who are well-suited to handle internal communication during a crisis.

The findings also highlighted and recommended the importance of digital training for all staff at *The New Vision*, and other media houses, to allow for the inclusivity of its staff. Some staff were left out during the pandemic due to digital illiteracy.

Lastly, the study found that there is room for more studies on internal communication in media organizations, particularly during a crisis, because participants inferred that media houses think they are good communicators, yet *The New Vision* did not effectively communicate to its employees. Its communication was more instructional than relational during the pandemic. There is a need for more research on internal communication in other media houses, especially broadcast media, to examine the critical role internal communication plays in the face of a crisis.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Jackie Nalubwama, and I am a student at Uganda Christian University. The purpose of this interview is to gather insights on the role of internal communication during a crisis. Your responses will help in understanding how internal communication strategies are employed, particularly in the context of a crisis, and how they impact organizational effectiveness.

Please feel free to share your honest thoughts. The interview will be confidential, and your identity will remain anonymous. Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose not to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with.

Interview Guide Questions:

1. What internal communication strategies were used by The New Vision during the period from March to June 2020?
2. How do you perceive the effectiveness of internal communication strategies within your organization during the Covid-19 pandemic?
3. Can you provide any specific examples of communication strategies that worked and those that didn't work during the pandemic?
4. What internal communication challenges did you encounter during the pandemic, and how were they addressed?
5. Were there any notable successes or failures that you would like to share?

6. Did you feel appreciated and valued in the internal communication messages that the company sent out during the pandemic?
7. If you were in-charge of internal communication at the time during the Covid-19 pandemic, what would you have done differently?
8. From your vantage point, did the management at The New Vision empower its staff with the necessary tools and support during the pandemic? If so, please give examples and explain how the staff were empowered.
9. In your view, how do you think internal communication can be improved to better manage crises in the future?
10. Are there specific areas or practices that should be focused on or enhanced that The New Vision used during the pandemic?

Appendix 2: Codebook

Category	#Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
Internal communication strategies	-Email, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp, HR newsletters, phone calls -Top-down approach, reactive communication, lack of feedback loops, personalization issues	Internal Communication Strategies and Tools Used	-Digital Tools as Primary Channels -One-way vs. Two-way Communication
Challenges in Implementing the Internal Communication strategies	-“Messages informed but didn’t engage,” “communication lacked empathy,” “felt manipulative” - Poor internet, missed emails,	Perceived Effectiveness of Internal Communication	-Informational vs. Relational Outcomes -Connectivity and Accessibility Issues -Uneven Communication Impact

	<p>inconsistent message reach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some departments well-connected, others neglected; information delays 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Abrupt salary cuts, coercive tone, unilateral decision-making - Feeling unappreciated, stressed, and betrayed - Pandemic-related health information effective; employment changes poorly communicated 	<p>Impact on Employee Experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Disempowerment and Distrust -Emotional Disconnect -Wellbeing vs. Policy Gaps

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poor internet, power outages, delayed setup for remote work - No clear chain of command, misalignment between departments, vague or inconsistent messaging - Confusing restructuring, fear of layoffs, ambiguity around new roles 	<p>Challenges in Implementing Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technological and Infrastructural Limitations -Organizational and Managerial Disconnect -Crisis-Induced Uncertainty
<p>Recommendations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tone matters, involve staff in decision-making, avoid threats - Staff forums, feedback boxes, 	<p>Lessons and Recommendations for Future Crises</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Need for Empathetic, Transparent Communication

	regular digital newsletters - Strategic communication departments, training for digital tools, clear crisis protocols		- Two-way Communication and Feedback Loops - Institutional Preparedness and Training
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