

**UNIVERSITY
OF
LUSAKA**

SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

**ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CRISIS
COMMUNICATION. A CASE OF ZESCO LIMITED, LUSAKA.**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES,
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BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION - GENERAL.**

BY

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DECLARATION

I Falesi Phiri hereby declare that this paper represents my own work, and that all the works of other persons have been duly acknowledged. I further declare that this work has not been previously presented for any degree at this and indeed at any other university for similar purposes.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my lovely children Bwalya Mwape and Kuwala Mwape. Even when I locked myself away and heard you crying out “I want mommy”, or when I left home in pursuit of this achievement, you remained my pillars of strength and source of confidence. To my father Lazarous Kabvinira Phiri, this is for you too. Thank you for your unwavering love, encouragement and support and for laying a solid foundation in my education.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ERB	:	Energy Regulation Board
OECD	:	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
REA	:	Rural Electrification Authority
SCCT	:	Situational Crisis Communication Theory
SPSS	:	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

ABSTRACT

Electricity is one of the most important commodities in every contemporary society. The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of social media in crisis communication with a specific case Lusaka. This study, therefore, sought to: investigate the perception of customers towards the social media channels adopted to communicate crisis by ZESCO Limited; describe the most effective communication channels of social media in communicating with stakeholders during crisis at the utility company; and determine the effectiveness of crisis communication in minimizing the impact of crisis to the organization and its stakeholders. The study adopted an exploratory research design. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. This meant that there was triangulation of information collected through different instruments and from different sources. Semi-structured questionnaires were administered to 384 ZESCO limited customers. However, only 366 were returned and 16 of these ruled out as invalid. Interviews were also conducted with 8 ZESCO Limited members of staff. Stratified random sampling was employed to select ZESCO Limited customers whereas employees were sampled using purposive sampling. In terms of data analysis, qualitative data was coded based on the themes and sub-themes that emerged. Quantitative data, on the other hand, was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Software (SPSS). The use of SPSS involved recording variables and presentation of data using percentages as well as other graphical representations such as graphs, pie charts and frequency distribution tables. The findings of the study revealed that most customers, specifically 78.31%, accessed information on service disruptions through social media, particularly Facebook and although the perception on the information shared was mostly positive, a considerable number of respondents felt that it not accurate enough which represented 74.57% of the respondents. WhatsApp was also considered highly useful in reporting outages even though it was discovered to be a one-way communication platform. The communication was considered to be effective by most of the participants as it enabled them to plan their business and as well as personal activities. The study recommends the introduction of social media monitoring tools, implementation a two-way communication mechanism across all platforms and regular benchmarking of social media communication strategies against other African utility companies.

Key Words: Electricity, Communication, Crisis, Social media, Perception, Effectiveness

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Crisis communication management has become an inevitable part of the communications management process in a whole. The massive adoption of social media presents a unique way of communicating crisis at every level through information dissemination and interactions with stakeholders. Palen et al. (2010) claim that social media makes it possible for information to be shared quickly and widely during emergencies, which speeds up response times and lessens the impact of disasters on local communities. This instantaneous communication can help with economic activity and logistical operations during electricity crises. According to Veil, B. F. et al. (2011), social media platforms are effective means of communication for coordination and collaboration, which enhances crisis response and reduces both immediate disruptions and long-term financial losses. In the electricity sector, timely restoration of services can prevent large-scale economic disruptions, such as business closures and production delays. This chapter provides a synoptic view of the research. The foundation of the study is laid down in its background information and to further concretize the reader's understanding of its full context, additional information is provided in the statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, the scope and significance of the study. Operational definitions and the organization of the report have also been presented.

1.1 Background

The globally electricity industry is a dynamic and diverse sector that is essential to contemporary economies and societies. It pertains to the global generation, transmission, distribution, and consumption of electricity. As of 2022, worldwide energy consumption had reached new levels, with consumers spending about USD 10 trillion on energy, or more than USD 1,200 per person (IEA, 2023). This spike highlights the sector's considerable economic influence as well as the growing financial burden of energy consumption around the world.

Traditionally, electricity generation has been dominated by fossil fuels such as coal, natural gas and oil, making up over 80% of the world's energy supply spanning decades. However, current trends show a gradual fall in this dominance, with forecasts indicating a drop to 73% by 2030 (IEA, 2023). This trend is mainly due to the rapid adoption of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power,

which are estimated to account for 80% of new power capacity by 2030 (ibid). Notably, solar photovoltaic (PV) technology is expected to contribute over half of the additional capacity.

The electricity industry is now witnessing major advances in technology, particularly in renewable energy and energy efficiency. For example, the implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) in data centers has increased electricity demand, necessitating a rethinking of energy policies to balance growth and sustainability (Fredman, 2025). Furthermore, small modular nuclear reactors (SMRs) have emerged as a promising method for producing zero-emission electricity. However, SMRs confront problems in terms of regulatory licensing, financing, and competition from lower-cost energy sources (Gardner, 2025).

The power sector in Africa faces considerable issues, such as restricted access, inadequate infrastructure, and dependence on conventional sources of electricity. Sub-Saharan Africa has the world's lowest electrification rate, with only approximately 51.5 % of populations having access to power as of 2022 (World Bank Data, 2023). There are also significant disparities between countries and within countries, especially between urban and rural areas. This mismatch emphasizes the critical need for infrastructure development to address the energy access gap.

The per capita energy consumption in Sub-Saharan Africa is also much lower than the world average. In 2022, the per capita electricity consumption in OECD countries was approximately 8,091 kWh (OECD, 2022). In contrast, Sub-Saharan Africa's per capita electricity consumption was significantly lower, averaging around 550 kWh in the same year (African Development Bank, 2022). This sharp disparity highlights the continent's energy scarcity and the critical need for significant improvements in energy production and distribution. In addition, even in places that are connected to the power grid, electricity supply is frequently erratic. For example, the manufacturing sector in some African countries faces 56 days of power outages each year on average, resulting in financial losses and discouraging foreign investment.

Zambia heavily relies on hydropower for its electricity generation. The national installed generation capacity increased to 3,871.32 MW in 2024, up from 3,811.32 MW in 2023 (Ministry of Energy, 2025). This growth was driven by additional capacity from solar power plants, notably the Kitwe solar plants, which expanded from 34 MW in

2023 to 94 MW in 2024. The electricity generation landscape continued to be dominated by hydroelectric plants with a share of 82 percent (ibid).

The country's energy sector has been underinvested, resulting in infrastructure that is struggling to match present demand. This underinvestment is largely attributable to low electricity pricing, which has discouraged private sector participation and limited funding for critical repairs and expansions (Kunda, 2014). Efforts to enhance the energy sector include policy changes that encourage investment in renewable energy. The government has put together structures to encourage private investment and diversify energy sources beyond hydropower. However, obstacles like as legal requirements and limited financial incentives have hampered growth.

ZESCO Limited, the major supplier of electricity, is Zambia's state-owned utility which is a vertically integrated electricity parastatal incorporated under the Companies Act (ZESCO ESU, 2018). ZESCO was founded in 1970 and is wholly owned by the Government of the Republic of Zambia. However, ZESCO operates as an autonomous entity that is overseen by the government through the Board of Directors to ensure that performance targets are met (ibid). The Company's mandate is to generate, transmit, distribute, and supply electricity throughout Zambia. It has six main types of customers namely residential (domestic customers), commercial, government, international customers (exports), industrial and the mining sector (ZESCO, 2013). The mining sector is the largest consumer of electricity in Zambia, utilizing more than 50% of the total generated power (Ministry of Energy, 2022) . In 2021, domestic consumption accounted for about 32.1% of the electricity usage (IRENA, 2024) with a significant reliance on biomass for energy needs, particularly in rural areas.

ZESCO plays a critical role in Zambia's socio-economic landscape through several key contributions:

- i. Economic expansion and industrialization: ZESCO promotes economic activity and industrial expansion by supplying power to households, companies, and industries. The mining, manufacturing, and service sectors, all of which are critical to Zambia's economy, need a steady supply of electricity.
- ii. Employment and capacity building: Both directly and indirectly, ZESCO's operations generate job opportunities. In addition to creating thousands of jobs,

the construction and engineering industries have benefited from the development of infrastructure projects like the Kafue Gorge Lower Power Station.

- iii. Rural development: By extending electricity to rural communities in partnership with the REA, ZESCO improves quality of life, makes it possible to employ contemporary technologies in healthcare, education, and agriculture, and lowers urban migration by generating possibilities in rural areas.
- iv. Energy security and regional influence: ZESCO aims to create energy security in Zambia by growing generation capacity and investing in renewable energy sources. Surplus electricity can be exported to neighboring countries, which strengthens regional ties and generates foreign exchange earnings.

As a state-owned corporation, ZESCO operates under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Energy and is governed by the Energy Regulation Board (ERB), which was founded under the Energy Regulation Act in 1995. It is governed by rules established by a number of important legislative tools.

1. The Electricity Act. This Act under Chapter 33 of the Laws of Zambia, was enacted in order to regulate the production, transmission, distribution, and supply of electricity as well as to address issues related to or incidental to the aforementioned (Kumwenda, 2009). The purpose of this act was to establish a relationship between the power provider and the consumer. It lays out the responsibilities of the electricity provider, which in turn give consumers rights. From the standpoint of service delivery, if the provider has an obligation, the customer has the right to have that duty fulfilled. According to the Act, a consumer is also someone to whom power is provided under a supply agreement (ibid).
2. The Energy Regulation Act: The Energy Regulation Board (ERB) was established under the Energy Regulation Act No. 12 of 2019 and is responsible for regulating the energy sector, which includes electricity. The ERB controls tariffs, checks compliance with standards, and encourages competition and investment in the sector.

The Rural Electrification Act: This law seeks to increase socioeconomic development by bringing electricity to rural areas. In order to carry out rural

electrification initiatives, it sets up the Rural Electrification Authority (REA), which collaborates closely with ZESCO. The Rural Electrification Act is codified under the Laws of Zambia as Act No. 5 of 2023. The government's continued commitment to strengthening rural electrification efforts is shown in this legislation, which replaces the previous Rural Electrification Act of 2003.

ZESCO uses both traditional and modern techniques to communicate with its stakeholders. The current communication policy applies to both employees and consumers (ZESCO, 2012). It aims to improve and preserve ZESCO's public image by ensuring accurate, timely, and responsive communication with all stakeholders, both internally and externally. The strategy aims to improve and sustain public credibility while also making the best use of the organization's resources (ZESCO, 2012). The company's policy statement emphasizes the need of diligently applying the policy. The Marketing and Public Relations Departments oversees ZESCO's communication policy. This department is in charge of monitoring the overall effectiveness of the communication system in accordance with best practices.

There has been a growing increase in the use of social media in the world of communication, with Twitter and Facebook being the most commonly used channels (Dunbar, Arnaboldi, Conti, & Passarella, 2015). Social media are information-based tools and technologies that are used to share information and facilitate communications with internal and external audiences. They allow issues to be identified, monitored and managed extremely quickly and also allows for real time interaction with stakeholders. Organizations have taken advantage by using it to communicate much more effectively and quicker with their customers about their businesses as well as responding to queries and questions (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Carroll & Buchholtz, 2014). Further research has shown that organizations have taken up the use of social media as a communication tool, not just for marketing and public relations messages, but also for crisis communication which is also known as crisis management (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

ZESCO, Zambia's state-owned power utility, has faced significant challenges in effectively communicating its load management strategies during power outages. Anecdotal evidence and statistical data both draw attention to these problems.

According to an Energy Regulation Board (ERB) study (2017), 51% of businesses reported that ZESCO failed to strictly adhere to the published load shedding schedules, resulting in operational disruptions and uncertainty. The same ERB study discovered that 17% of businesses did not receive any information about ZESCO's load shedding schedules, indicating a significant communication gap (ibid). Further, due to a significant power supply shortage, in August 2024, ZESCO extended load shedding periods in Lusaka to up to 20 hours per day (Daily nation, 2024). Residents and businesses were unprepared for this sudden change, which was attributed to Maamba Energy starting annual plant maintenance. It was implemented with little warning. ZESCO also acknowledged that unexpected technical challenges frequently caused delays in restoring power following load shedding (ZESCO, 2024). However, these issues are not always promptly communicated to the public, causing frustration and operational difficulties for businesses and households.

These examples highlight the critical need for ZESCO to improve its communication strategies by ensuring timely, transparent, and consistent information dissemination in order to effectively manage public expectations and mitigate the negative effects of load shedding on Zambia's socioeconomic landscape. This research, therefore, was undertaken to assess the effectiveness of social media in crisis communication at the utility company.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 Main Objective

- To analyze the effectiveness of social media in crisis communication at ZESCO Limited.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- To investigate the perception of customers towards the social media channels adopted to communicate crisis by ZESCO Limited.
- To describe the most effective communication channels of social media in communicating with stakeholders during crisis at the utility company.
- To determine the effectiveness of crisis communication in minimizing the impact of crisis to the organization and its stakeholders.

1.4 Research Questions

This paper addresses the following questions;

1. What is the perception of customers towards the social media channels that have been adopted to communicate crisis at ZESCO Limited?
2. What are the most effective communication channels of social media in communicating the crisis at the utility company?
3. How effective is crisis communication in minimizing the impact of the crisis to the organization and its stakeholders?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Zambia is currently facing a huge power deficit which has led to long hours of power rationing. This has further exacerbated the problem of vandalism to the ZESCO property and infrastructure. Vandalism targeting electricity infrastructure has far-reaching consequences that affect public safety, economic stability, and the reliability of power systems. The key impacts include public safety hazards, power supply disruptions and infrastructure vulnerabilities. Electricity faults on installations have also led to serious consequences, impacting both safety and system reliability. The disruptions of power supply caused by the aforementioned has consequently affected the growth of the economy as most businesses and industries rely heavily on electricity for production.

The findings from this study reveal the value that social media adds to communicating crises in the electricity sector. It shows that the adoption of social media channels offers an opportunity to handle these negative events in a proactive way by keeping stakeholders informed through regular updates, addressing issues directly and managing the narrative as well as showcasing responsiveness and commitment to improvement. By effectively communicating relevant and timely information, and proactively interacting with stakeholders, they can create situational awareness which can ultimately help to mitigate the impact of the crisis.

The findings can further be used to bridge the knowledge gap in the field of crisis management in the energy sector as well as provide a basis for further research.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study focused on the employees who are responsible for handling marketing communications and public relations at ZESCO Limited headquarters which are based

in Lusaka. It also included customers of the utility company who possess smart mobile devices with the ability to use social media.

There are various social media channels which include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, Telegram and Threads to mention a few. The study was limited to Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms and Concepts

- Perception. Customer perception refers to how a customer feels about a company. This includes their thoughts, emotions and opinions related to a brand and its products or services.
- Crisis. Coombs (2015) describes a crisis as an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact on an organisation's performance and generate negative outcomes.
- Crisis communication can be defined as the strategic use of words and actions to manage information and meaning during a crisis process (Combs, 2010).
- Social media. Social media is defined as computer mediated communication channels that allow users to engage in social interaction with broad and narrow audiences in real time or asynchronously (Bayer, Trieu & Ellison, 2020).

1.8 Organisation of the Report

This section provides an overview of the study from chapter one through to chapter six. Chapter one provides background information and preparatory remarks pertaining to the study. It lays some ground work on the social media communication strategies that ZESCO Limited has put in place in order to communicate with its customers in times of electricity crisis. It includes the statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, scope, significance and definition of keys terms. Chapter two reviews relevant literature related to the study. The literature was reviewed from related studies that depicted the use of social media by various organisations during crisis. The theoretical framework on which this study is based is also highlighted. Chapter three reveals the methodology that was employed to successfully collect data for this study. It provides an insight on the research design, population, sample size, sampling techniques, data collection procedure, and data analysis. The fourth chapter is in response to the research questions. It presents the findings from all the respondents. Therefore, it provides a brief presentation of the research findings using

the research questions as sub headings. Chapter five further gives in-depth information to ascertain the extent to which the research objectives of the study have been attained. It also uses the theoretical framework and literature which was reviewed in chapter 2 for discussion. Chapter six draws the conclusion and the recommendations which are based on the major findings of the research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the works or studies the researcher consulted in order to understand and investigate the research problem. It aids in amplifying particular claims and concepts associated with the research. Key subjects covered in this study include communication, crisis management, consumer perception, social media, and previous research and studies that are specifically connected to this field of study. The theoretical framework is also highlighted. By relating the research to preexisting theories and knowledge, it lays the groundwork for the study.

2.1 Empirical Literature Review

2.1.0 Perception

The process by which consumers choose, arrange, and analyze data to create a meaningful image of a company, its goods, or service is known as customer perception. It includes the views, knowledge, and/or awareness that consumers have about a company and its products. Numerous elements, such as individual experiences, advertisements, reviews, and word-of-mouth communications, impact this perception. Customer perceived value is defined by Zeithaml (1988) as the consumer's total evaluation of a product's usefulness based on perceptions of what is given and what is received. In this evaluation, the perceived quality and advantages of the goods are weighed against the felt sacrifice of paying the price.

Customer perception is influenced not only by the functional aspects of a product or service, but also by emotional and social variables. Gentile et al. (2007) argue that customer experience, which has a substantial impact on perception, is a complex notion that includes sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social responses to a company's offers. Additionally, customer perception changes over time as a result of multiple encounters and experiences with a company. According to Lemon and Verhoef (2016), each element of a company's offering influences consumer perception, including advertising, packaging, product and service features, simplicity of use, reliability, and customer care quality.

According to a PwC report from 2019, 73% of global consumers prioritize customer experience over price and product quality when making purchasing decisions. This emphasizes the importance of consumer perception in the overall brand strategy.

Furthermore, even when they approve of a company's product, 59% of customers will abandon it after a series of negative experiences. These figures highlight the essential role that consumer perception plays in customer retention and sales, as firms attempt to recruit and retain loyal customers.

Public perception and trust are critical components of successful crisis communication. Gupta and Brooks (2019) found an intricate association between social media activity and public trust during emergencies. Research indicates that timely and transparent communication improves an organization's trust with the public. In times of uncertainty, affected communities rely on social media for information, and their perceptions are shaped not just by the content of the messages transmitted, but also by the communicators' responsiveness and sincerity. Transparent engagement is crucial for organizations to protect their reputation and gain the trust of their target audience. On the other hand, open and constant communication on social media creates a reputation for dependability and increases public trust in institutional information. This changing dynamic highlights how crisis communicators must deliberately use social media, modifying their content to speak to public concerns while paying attention to comments and queries.

2.1.1 Importance of Customer Perception

Understanding and managing customer perception is crucial for businesses due to its significant impact on several key areas:

- i. Influence on purchase decision. Customer perception directly influences purchasing decisions. When consumers have a positive attitude about a brand, they are more inclined to pick its products or services over competitors. On the other hand, negative perceptions may discourage prospective customers, resulting in lower sales and market share. Customer perception matters greatly since it drives purchasing decisions, brand loyalty, and ultimately affects the company's bottom line (Inabo, 2025).
- ii. Impact on brand loyalty. A positive perception increases brand loyalty, resulting in repeat business and long-term customer connections. Loyal customers not only generate a consistent cash flow, but they also serve as brand ambassadors, recommending the company to others.

- iii. Impact on brand reputation. Customers' aggregate perceptions help to shape a company's reputation. A solid favorable reputation boosts credibility and trustworthiness, attracting new clients and investors. A poor reputation, on the other hand, might result in a loss of trust and a decline in market share. Positive customer impression can result in higher customer satisfaction, word-of-mouth referrals, and recurrent purchases, thereby promoting growth for the company.

2.1.2 Social Media

Organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of incorporating social media into crisis management. This assumption is supported by Ki and Nekmat (2014), who used the SCCT to analyse Fortune 500 companies' Facebook usage and the efficacy of their crisis management. They manually reviewed the Facebook pages of those companies that had used Facebook for crisis management and noted their response strategies.

2.1.3 Features of Social media

Mayfield (2008) defines social media as having five key characteristics which are connectedness, community, conversation, openness, and participation. Connectedness is an important feature of social media because it allows users to connect with other users, giving them a sense of social ties and interpersonal relationships (Teixeira, 1992). Social media websites and other platforms use various mechanisms to provide the connectedness feature. The community feature according to Mayfield (2008), enables users to connect with others who share similar interests or backgrounds. Examples of community feature are Facebook groups, community rooms and chat groups.

The conversation feature of social media allows users to communicate with each other in real time (Mayfield, 2008). This means that the communication between the sender and the receiver is two-way and without time delay. Real-time communication is now possible thanks to the advancement of contemporary web 2.0 technologies. Facebook messaging, which allows users to communicate with one another via text, picture, or voice call, is an example of a social media conversation. Users can also use Facebook's commenting feature to both leave and reply to comments. Likewise, most social media platforms have a messaging feature.

Openness on social media refers to the variety of options available at a low cost and effort (Mayfield, 2008). Nowadays, most social media platforms offer primarily free services, though some extra features are available as paid versions. Examples include Facebook which is mostly free but advertising on Facebook requires a fee. Similarly, basic features on LinkedIn are free, but advanced levels require a subscription. Participation on the other hand refers to the interaction between the parties (Burgoon et al., 2000). As a result, on social media, one user creates content, and another user interacts with it by providing feedback. According to Mayfield (2008), social media is making it harder to distinguish between media and audiences because all users can create, read, communicate, consume, and edit various kinds of data.

2.1.4 Social Media Channels

Social media channels are interactive digital platforms that allow users to generate, circulate, and exchange material, thus promoting communication and creation of communities. These platforms provide a wide range of services, including social networking sites, microblogs, wikis, and media-sharing networks. This study will focus on the social networking sites, specifically Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp.

2.1.4.0 Facebook

Since its launch in 2004, Facebook has developed into a multifunctional platform with a wide range of regional applications. With more than 3.04 billion users worldwide, Facebook is the most popular social networking site (Larson, 2025). Over time, the platform's features have expanded to include news consumption, social networking, content sharing, and business promotion. With men making up 56.8% of the global user base and women 43.2% as of January 2024, the user demographic is overwhelmingly male (Dixon, 2024). Men between the ages of 25 and 34 make up the largest age group, accounting for 18.4% of all users worldwide (Kemp, 2023).

Facebook has become the dominant social media platform in Africa, holding a market share of more than 50% since January 2021 (Kiprono, 2023). As evidence of Facebook's pervasiveness in daily life, the continent had about 271 million users in 2021 (Galal, 2024). Facebook is used in Africa for a variety of purposes, such as communication (by helping friends and family connect), information access (by offering news and educational content), and business (by helping small and medium-sized businesses reach a wider audience). According to a survey done in Ghana, Kenya,

Nigeria, and South Africa, 49% of participants use Facebook to make new friends, and 68% use it to find news and current events (Adika, 2023). Nonetheless, issues like internet access and digital literacy continue to exist, impacting the degree and style of Facebook usage in different regions.

Facebook plays an important role in Zambia, especially given the country's high level of mobile internet penetration. As of December 2023, Zambia had approximately 3,927,300 Facebook users, accounting for 18.2% of the country's total population (NapoleonCat, 2023), a figure that has continued to rise. In Zambia, Facebook usage is classified into three types: social interaction, business promotion, and information access. Despite these applications, challenges like limited internet access and digital literacy persist. Efforts to overcome these barriers are critical for fully realizing Facebook's potential in Zambia.

2.1.4.1 LinkedIn

LinkedIn, established in 2003, has evolved into the world's premier professional networking platform, boasting over 1 billion users globally as of 2025 (The Global Statistics, 2025). Its functionalities and user engagement vary across different regions, influenced by cultural, economic, and technological factors. It is a valuable tool for professional networking, job searching, and knowledge sharing all over the world. According to Sullivan et al. (2020), people with strong networking skills are more likely to use LinkedIn effectively, which can lead to career benefits like job search assistance and career sponsorship. The platform is open and universal in nature, thereby allowing anyone to join and contribute to its large user base. The user base is diverse, with professionals from a variety of industries and experience levels. The features on the platform, such as private messaging and profile customization, meet users' requirements for professional representation and communication (Jati & Mohanty, 2012).

LinkedIn's popularity in Africa has grown. The platform is used for job search, professional networking, and business development. Its impact on social capital formation is significant. According to Thangam et al. (2021), social media platforms such as LinkedIn have connected people like never before, all with the click of a mouse (Bhanye, 2023). However, challenges such as limited internet access and digital literacy continue to affect the extent to which LinkedIn is used across the continent.

The use of LinkedIn is steadily growing in Zambia, especially among professionals and academics. Platforms such as LinkedIn are being used for professional networking and knowledge sharing. This is according to a study which evaluated the use of scholarly communication platforms in Zambia (Subaveerapandiyan. et. al, 2023). LinkedIn is becoming increasingly popular in higher education as a marketing and networking resource. Mukosa et al. (2022) discuss the use of social media marketing in Zambian higher education institutions, focusing on LinkedIn's potential to increase institutional visibility and engagement.

However, compared to Facebook and WhatsApp, LinkedIn is not as widely used by journalists in Zambia. The majority of Zambian reporters, according to Gondwe (2021), value Facebook more than LinkedIn for professional practice, suggesting a preference for platforms that provide wider audience engagement.

2.1.4.2 WhatsApp

Since its 2009 launch, WhatsApp has grown to become one of the most widely used instant messaging apps worldwide, with approximately 2.96 billion unique monthly active users as of mid-2024 (Ceci, 2025). Its cost-effectiveness, multimedia capabilities, and user-friendly interface have all helped it become widely used in a variety of geographical areas. WhatsApp facilitates voice and video calls, instant messaging, and the sharing of different kinds of media, making it a major tool for communication on a global scale. It is a popular option for both personal and professional communication because of its end-to-end encryption, which guarantees privacy. Users value WhatsApp's real-time communication features and intuitive interface, which has led to its incorporation into daily routines, according to a survey analysis by Kumar and Sharma (2017).

WhatsApp's popularity in Africa has skyrocketed, thanks in large part to its low cost and ability to function on basic smartphones, which are widely available. The platform has expanded beyond personal communication, with applications in business, education, and healthcare. Shambare (2020) discusses how WhatsApp's rapid adoption in South Africa exemplifies technological leapfrogging, which allows users to bypass traditional communication infrastructures. WhatsApp has also proven useful in educational settings. Simui et al. (2022) investigated the use of WhatsApp as a support service in distance education in Zimbabwe and Zambia, concluding that it has become

an essential component of electronic teaching and learning, ranging from early childhood development programs to higher education.

In Zambia, WhatsApp has impacted journalism, education, healthcare, and communication habits, among other areas of society. In education, both students and teachers use WhatsApp extensively. Akakandelwa et. al (2018) looked into how it was used by University of Zambia final-year undergraduate adult education students. According to the results, 89% of participants utilized WhatsApp for educational purposes, valuing its ability to facilitate immediate communication and the sharing of resources. But there were drawbacks, like expensive internet and privacy issues.

Zambian journalists have integrated WhatsApp into their professional practices. Gondwe (2020) investigated social media use among journalists in Zambia and Tanzania, discovering that WhatsApp is used to query sources, disseminate news, and interact with audiences. Despite its benefits, issues such as misinformation and the need for digital literacy were raised.

2.1.5 Crisis

In today's practice of the corporate governance process, there is a high prevalence of organizations falling into crisis at any level of their operations. There is no organization which is resistant to crisis situations (Coombs, 2007), regardless of how successful, influential or respectful it is. Due to the frequency of occurrence of various crises, corporate management is often compelled to engage more in crisis management processes. Various theorists and practitioners define crisis situations in different ways. A crisis can be defined as an event that interrupts the usual activity of an organization and, if managed poorly, can ruin a good corporate reputation in only a couple of days, even wipe off the corporation from the face of earth (Langford, 2009). Skoko (2006) points out that a crisis for a corporation is a circumstance that prevents it from operating normally, endangers its ability to function and makes it impossible for organization to achieve its goals. He also stresses that a crisis that initially appears like one that cannot result in dramatic consequences for the organization, can in the end turn out to be so severe that it can threaten its long-term existence. Dilenschneider (2000) provides one of the best descriptions of crisis situations when stating that there are no two identical crisis situations and that every crisis has its specific causes, development cycle, duration, rhythm and unknowns.

One of the major crises that Zambia has faced in recent years is load shedding. There are significant economic ramifications to load shedding, which is the deliberate disruption of the electrical supply to balance demand and avoid grid failures. According to studies, Zambia's manufacturing sector has suffered from power outages, resulting in lower production and monetary losses (Mulenga, 2017). Similarly, frequent load shedding has led to higher operating expenses and lower productivity for Zambia's small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) (Bwali & Mubuyaeta, 2024).

Another crisis which Zambia is experiencing is vandalism. It has further been exacerbated by load shedding. The dependability of power systems is seriously threatened by vandalism of electrical infrastructure. A study conducted in Kenya found that a number of reasons, such as economic factors, a lack of community ownership, and insufficient security measures, contribute to the vandalism of power transmission equipment (Kigen & Kayi, 2024). Economic progress in Nigeria has also been hampered by attacks and vandalism on electricity transmission lines, which have raised maintenance costs and resulted in an unstable power supply (Wokoma & Ojuka, 2024). Similar to this, socioeconomic issues including unemployment and poverty have been linked to infrastructure vandalism in Zimbabwe, which has disrupted the provision of energy (Mavhura, 2024)

2.1.6 Communication

The field of communication is continually evolving, impacted by advances in technology and changing social dynamics. Recent study has looked into a variety of communication topics, ranging from the impact of digitalization on corporate practices to the intricacies of interpersonal connections in the digital age. Effective communication is an essential component of successful interpersonal interactions, conflict resolution, and decision-making processes. Ahmad and Chowdhury (2022) undertook a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews to investigate perspectives of effective communication in the workplace. Their findings highlight the value of clarity, active listening, and empathy in generating healthy interpersonal dynamics and making sound decisions. The study also underlines that resolving issues quickly through good communication tactics can improve organizational cohesion and productivity.

The introduction of digital technologies has dramatically altered business communication tactics. Buhmann et al. (2022) investigated the evolution and impact of communication technologies (CommTech) and digital infrastructure in corporate environments. Their findings show that digitization is a significant driver in the continuous development of the communications sector, with new digital technologies acting as both a catalyst and a backbone for rapid transition. The study also states that communication agencies and departments are under significant pressure to adapt to a changing digital environment with constant information flow, requiring the adoption of ever-new technologies to support basic organizational functions as well as the management and strategic execution of communication strategies.

The growth of social media platforms has further disrupted traditional communication patterns, resulting in new kinds of social interaction. Amelia et. al (2023) conducted a study on how social media usage affects communication behavior. The findings show that social media has modified traditional communication patterns and created new kinds of social interaction, resulting in enhanced global connectivity while also posing privacy concerns, altering communication standards, and new forms of nonverbal communication.

2.1.7 ZESCO's Communication Policy

ZESCO Limited, Zambia's national power utility, is critical in providing electricity and energy solutions throughout Zambia and the Sub-Saharan area. Effective communication between ZESCO and its stakeholders, notably consumers, is critical to maintaining service efficiency, customer satisfaction, and operational transparency. While ZESCO's formal communication policy is not publicly available, several research and reports provide light on the company's communication methods and their performance.

2.1.8 ZESCO's Communication Strategies

Steyn (2003) describes a communication strategy as a conceptualization of how the organization will achieve its communication goals. This viewpoint emphasizes the planning part of communication to achieve specific corporate goals. ZESCO has adopted a diverse approach to communication, utilizing both traditional and digital media to communicate with its customers.

2.1.8.0 Traditional Media

The company disseminates information through traditional channels. Despite the rise of digital platforms, traditional channels have distinct advantages in addressing broad audiences while maintaining credibility. The traditional media channels used by ZESCO can be classified according to their attributes and the type of content that they disseminate:

- i. Print media. This includes newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and newsletters. Organizations employ print media to communicate precise information, official announcements, and in-depth articles. The tactile element of print documents frequently increases confidence and enables for targeted dissemination to specific audiences.
- ii. Broadcast media. This form of media, which includes television and radio, allows organizations to reach a large audience by airing news pieces, interviews, and commercials. The audiovisual features of television and the auditory focus of radio cater to varied audience tastes and can effectively transmit messages quickly.
- iii. Outdoor Media. Billboards, posters, and signage fall within this category. These mediums are used to increase brand visibility and reinforce messaging in high-traffic areas, attracting the attention of a large audience.

Organizations are still facing challenges in adapting traditional media strategies to the current media landscape. To retain a comprehensive reach, firms must blend conventional and digital media strategies due to audience dispersion caused by digital platforms. Furthermore, Media Richness Theory initially proposed by Daft and Lengel (1986), suggests that conventional media differs in its ability to effectively deliver information. For example, print media may lack the immediacy of feedback when compared to face-to-face communication, limiting its usefulness in some situations. Furthermore, audiences are increasingly turning to digital platforms for news and information, forcing businesses to adapt by combining traditional media and new media channels. Leaders, for example, are using podcasts and cooperating with influencers to reach out to targeted groups.

2.1.8.1 Digital Media

In today's digital landscape, social media is an essential component of business communication strategies. Organizations use a variety of social media platforms to connect with stakeholders, increase brand visibility, and create collaboration within themselves. ZESCO has embraced social media to improve customer satisfaction after realizing the growing significance of digital engagement. Social media sites like Facebook are being utilized to provide information on energy-saving techniques, respond to consumer questions, and give real-time updates. Fostering a more responsive and involved interaction with customers is the goal of this strategy (Kayombo and Parhik, 2022).

Businesses use social media in a variety of ways, each with a unique set of communication goals:

- i. **Social networks:** Platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn allow businesses to create profiles, publish updates, and interact with a large audience. These networks help with brand exposure and community building.
- ii. **Microblogs:** Twitter is a prime example of a microblogging platform where businesses may post brief announcements and updates and have live discussions with stakeholders.
- iii. **Blogs:** Corporate blogs offer in-depth content such as articles, insights, and thought leadership pieces, enabling firms to demonstrate expertise and engage audiences through detailed narratives.
- iv. **Video Sharing Platforms:** YouTube and similar platforms enable corporations to exchange multimedia material such as tutorials, commercials, and corporate messages, hence increasing engagement through visual storytelling.
- v. **Photo Sharing Platforms:** Instagram and Pinterest allow businesses to upload visual images advertising products, services, and brand aesthetics in order to engage viewers visually.
- vi. **Forums and Collaborative Projects:** Websites such as Wikipedia and Reddit enable community debates and joint content production, enabling businesses to take part in crowdsourced initiatives and knowledge exchange.

- vii. Enterprise Social Networks: By encouraging intra-organizational communication, information exchange, and staff cooperation, internal platforms like Social cast improve internal workflows.
- viii. Product/Service Review Platforms: Businesses can manage their online reputation and customer relations by keeping an eye on and reacting to consumer reviews on websites such as Yelp.

While social media has many advantages, businesses still have to deal with issues including controlling public perception, protecting data privacy, and ensuring consistent messaging across platforms. Creating thorough social media rules and training courses is crucial to reducing risks and utilizing these platforms to their maximum capacity.

2.1.9 Challenges in ZESCO's Communication Policy

1. Inter-departmental communication gaps

Significant communication gaps have been found both inside and between ZESCO's departments (Mumba and Phiri, 2019). These gaps frequently result form disagreements that managers and supervisors fail to resolve quickly, which impairs coordination and interpersonal communication.

2. Customer perceptions of information dissemination

Customers have varying perspectives on the success of ZESCO's information dissemination tactics. Some customers believe the information provided is not sufficient or imprecise, resulting in misunderstandings and dissatisfaction (Sampa, 2003).

3. Response time and feedback mechanisms

Customers have highlighted several concerns such as inadequate feedback from customer care lines, unresponsiveness to phone calls, and delays in resolving faults and attending to new connections (Kayombo and Parhik, 2022). These concerns create discontentment in customers and reduce trust in ZESCO's services.

4. Financial and operational constraints

ZESCO has been experiencing financial issues, including diminishing revenues and rising debt, limiting its ability to invest in new generation capacity and infrastructure (Deka, 2022). These limits also have an impact on the company's ability to maintain effective communication channels and respond to customer complaints swiftly.

2.1.10 Crisis Communication

According to Coombs (2007) crisis management is viewed as a process that happens in three phases, each of which implies several groups of activities. Pre-crisis phase implies all activities conducted before a crisis happens. This phase also has several sub-phases which include signals detecting, prevention and crisis preparation. Managers in the pre-crisis stage are faced with a crucial task of developing systems for early recognition of problems and finding a proper solution to these problems.

Once a crisis has been detected, it is highly important to undertake activities that will prevent it from developing further. The crisis event phase begins with the occurrence of a specific event that signals the official start of a crisis and ends when the crisis is considered resolved. This phase also has two sub-phases which are crisis recognition and crisis containment. Recognizing a crisis entails understanding how events are classified and accepted as part of the crisis. Interacting with stakeholders through direct communication and other activities is a vital part of this phase (Ibid).

Marconi (2004) outlines crucial actions to take at the start of any crisis. Naming a spokesperson is the first step, implying that a specific individual will be the only person who communicates with the media during a crisis. A PR manager, corporate lawyer, or CEO could all be good options, but the most important thing is to be coherent and consistent in your messaging. Being the first to tell your side of the story allows the corporation to take control of its communication management. Giving the public and media information about the company's beneficial historical contributions to the society in which it operates is necessary to place it in a broader context than the crisis itself. Keeping people around the corporation informed is critical because all individuals close to the corporation are very interested in events related to it and will be dissatisfied if all information about the crisis comes from the media. Keeping the team together entails constant and rapid communication with key individuals within the corporation, which fosters a sense of pride and affiliation and reduces the possibility

of negative energy prevailing. Lastly, honesty and sensitivity entail accepting responsibility when necessary, communicating openly with everyone, and apologizing to everyone who is affected by the situation's outcomes. Hiding behind legislative actions and technical details gives the impression that one is turning away from problems, which creates a negative image of the corporation in the public.

Finally, the post-crisis phase highlights the need for crisis management efforts to continue after a particular crisis has passed. Several key activities are undertaken in this phase. These include evaluation, learning from the existing crisis and other post-crisis activities such as monitoring stakeholder reactions and all further development of issues connected to the just finished crisis (Ibid).

When it comes to crisis communication management amid a crisis, one of the world's leading managers Jack Welch (2006) emphasizes five prerequisites for effective crisis management. According to Welch, it is always necessary to assume that a problem is larger than it appears at first, because crises rarely remain as small as they began. The second precondition states that nothing remains hidden in the business community and everyone will eventually find out everything. This presumption reflects a trend that managers should communicate a problem as openly as possible, even though legal advisors frequently advise managers to communicate as little as possible during a crisis. The third assumption is that the media will attempt to portray managers and their company's crisis management in the worst possible light; however, this should not be an excuse for a retraction or a cessation of communication. The fourth assumption is that a crisis will be followed by changes in business processes and manpower, with most crises ending with some sort of settlement. According to the fifth and final assumption, an organization will not only survive a crisis but will emerge from it stronger and more prepared for future ones. Managers must learn from crises and not pass up any opportunity to share their experience with others.

2.1.11 Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication

The quick spread of social media platforms and smartphone apps has had a significant impact on emergency response and management. People use social media for many things, such as finding information, sharing it, interpreting it, and making sense of it. Individuals endure a high level of uncertainty during crises when critical information is scarce. To alleviate this negative emotion, people will seek information through

different means (Palen & Anderson, 2016). According to Jones et al. (2017), information seeking activity is a strategy for lowering situational uncertainty and, as a result, the mental anguish that such confusion causes. Consequently, many citizens will turn to social media to cover information gaps during periods of significant uncertainty, such as disasters. For example, study on the 2007 California wildfires revealed that affected residents viewed traditional media outlets as vital but insufficient, and hence supplemented this information with content available on social media (Sutton et al, 2008).

Social media provides a listening function. It gives a voice to people who typically do not have one. It also makes it possible for people to participate in public discourse in a remarkably democratic way and promotes the sharing of ideas and information. Social media can reveal some aspects of a country's mental and emotional state during an emergency because of its propensity to unite opinions. This makes it possible to measure public preference and popular opinion currents. It might also reveal how people are acting and responding to certain situations. Crawford (2009) divided online listening into three groups: corporately delegated listening, reciprocal listening, and background listening. Crawford defined background listening as simply tuning in, a minimal level of engagement. Reciprocal listening entails a two-way exchange of messages with mutual sensitivity to their content and implications, whereas delegated listening is a type of arm's length engagement, in which messages are monitored and responded to, if at all, collectively. As a result, listening entails keeping track of opinions, providing advice, or gathering information relevant to corporations.

Social media also helps in monitoring a crisis situation. While the listening function entails gathering information passively, monitoring is done to enhance responses to events and better manage the public by understanding what people are doing and thinking. Organizations can use social media to monitor public sentiment and identify emerging narratives, allowing them to adapt their communication strategy accordingly. According to a questionnaire survey (Barr, 2011), 80% of the US public and 69% of online users believe that national emergency response organizers should regularly monitor social networking sites. However, in most places, this has not occurred. Agencies are concerned that social networks will generate inaccurate information of questionable origin (Goolsby, 2010). Nonetheless, there is enormous potential to make

data dissemination a two-way process, in which information is received from and fed back to the public (Crowe, 2012).

Several studies have been conducted on the role of social media in crisis communication. Drawing from case studies of the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (UK) and the Oslo Police Operation Center (Norway), a paper by Haraldsen (2014) presents guidelines for effective social media use in crisis situations. In a systematic review by Eriksson (2018), he compiled research from multiple fields to determine the best social media tactics for crisis communication. Major takeaways included using social media to facilitate dialogue, understanding platform-specific dynamics, conducting pre-crisis planning, and combining social media monitoring with traditional media approaches to improve crisis response. Recommendations included building public relationships prior to crises, ensuring honesty and transparency, and avoiding speculation or posting personal opinions during emergencies. Another study by Khondhaker Al Momin et al. (2022) analyzed Twitter data from Hurricane Laura to identify crisis communication trends. They provided insights on developing effective social media communication strategies for complex disasters by identifying influential communities and analyzing their role in information dissemination. Koli (2024) further discussed how social media has transformed crisis communication by facilitating real-time information dissemination and public engagement, emphasizing the importance of effective digital strategies and communication frameworks during crises.

Social media platforms are being used more and more by the energy industry worldwide to effectively handle crises. Companies all over the world keep a strong online presence to improve their stakeholder engagement and brand reputation, according to a quantitative study of social media use in the energy and resources sector (Duojie & Liu, 2023). According to the study, social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn are frequently used to spread information during emergencies, giving businesses the opportunity to stay transparent and reach a large audience. This worldwide trend emphasizes how crucial social media is for enabling real-time communication and lessening the negative effects of crises on an organization's reputation

The role of social media in crisis communication in the electricity sector has been further researched in continents such as North America and Europe. During crises,

such as power outages or natural disasters, utilities utilize social media platforms to provide timely updates. For instance, during Superstorm Sandy, Public Service Electric and Gas Company (PSE&G) effectively used Twitter to communicate with customers, earning recognition for their proactive approach (Glasser, 2015). These organizations can effectively manage public perception and response during energy-related crises by offering timely information and emotional support. This method emphasizes how social media can be used strategically to inform and sympathize with impacted communities, increasing the efficacy of crisis communication tactics.

Social media plays a crucial role in crisis communication in Africa's electrical sector, allowing for faster information transmission, public participation, and reputation management. Studies have investigated its diverse role. In Ghana, the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) has been evaluated for its utilization of social media channels to communicate with the public during crises (Senyo, 2015). The study discovered that ECG uses social media to communicate information, respond to customer concerns, and manage its public image amid power outages and other electrical issues. This strategy increased transparency and improved consumer interactions.

However, some African public institutions are still unwilling to completely incorporate social media into their crisis communication plans, despite the acknowledged advantages. For example, some government organizations in Kenya see social media as a possible risk rather than a tool for disaster relief (Kibos, 2015). Effective communication during emergencies may be hampered by this hesitancy, which emphasizes the necessity of a cultural change in these companies to embrace digital media. Research in South Africa also revealed a number of factors impacting the use of social media as a crisis communication tool (Ramluckan, 2016). These include organizational preparation, perceived benefits, and the digital divide among stakeholders. The study highlights that, while social media provides considerable benefits for crisis communication, issues such as limited access to technology and variable levels of digital literacy might impede its successful usage.

Notwithstanding the advantages, there are drawbacks and moral dilemmas when using social media for crisis communication. The quick spread of information can result in false information, which makes crisis management more difficult. False narratives

can further lead to dangerous behaviors, and erode confidence in reliable information sources, making misinformation a serious hazard during emergencies. Furthermore, privacy and the possibility of public panic present ethical challenges. According to a case study on disaster communication tactics, mistrust and hostility between journalists and communicators may impede the efficient exchange of information, highlighting the necessity of cooperation and ethical knowledge (Bowen, 2016). In order to guarantee the veracity and correctness of information disseminated on social media during emergencies, it is imperative that organizations create ethical standards and verification procedures.

2.1.12 Gaps in Literature

In the literature on social media crisis communication, several potential gaps remain that warrant further investigation.

1. Content-specific analysis in African utilities

Even though there have been various studies on the impact of social media in crisis communication, few have focused on African utilities explicitly. Research typically focuses on Western contexts, creating a void in understanding how African socioeconomic and infrastructural issues influence crisis communication techniques in organizations such as ZESCO.

2. Customer perception and engagement

There is little empirical data on how Zambian customers perceive and interact with social media channels during emergencies. More detailed research is required to assess satisfaction, trust, and the overall impact of these communications on consumer behavior.

3. Comparative effectiveness of social media channels

The literature does not provide a comprehensive comparison of the effectiveness of various social media platforms (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp) in utility crisis communication. A thorough comparative analysis could identify which methods are most successful for reaching out to various stakeholder groups during an emergency.

4. Integration with traditional communication methods

Research often treats social media in isolation, with less focus on how it integrates with conventional crisis communication strategies (press releases, public meetings, etc.). Understanding this interplay is crucial for a holistic approach to crisis management in organizations like ZESCO.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.0 Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Coombs initially presented this theory in his 1995 article “Choosing the Right Words: The development of guidelines for the selection of the appropriate crisis response strategies”. However, the theory was not named Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) before 2002 (Coombs and Holladay, 2002). Before that, the theory was referred to as the symbolic approach to CM communication (Coombs, 1995). SCCT is made up of three main components: the crisis, crisis response strategies, and a system for matching crisis situations and crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2006). The belief is that the effectiveness of communication strategies is determined by the characteristics of the crisis. A crisis manager can choose the best response by first understanding the situation. SCCT is an attempt to understand, to explain, and to provide prescriptive actions for crisis communication (Heath and Coombs, 2006).

2.2.1 Diffusion of Innovation Theory

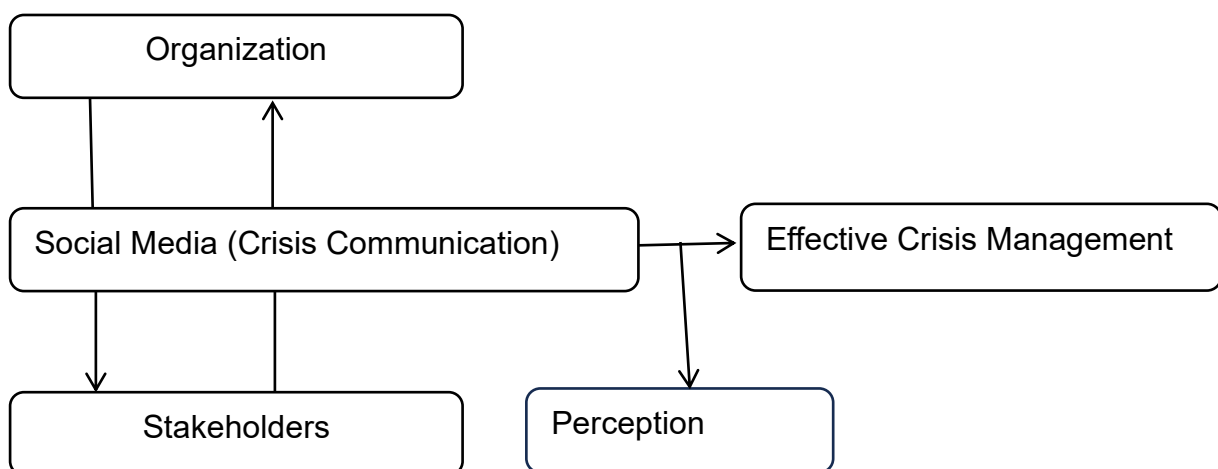
This theory explains how new ideas spread and are accepted. It was pioneered by Everett Rogers, a communication and sociologist scholar, who claimed that only a small percentage of people adopt an innovation in its early stages. According to Rogers (2003), diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through specific channels over time among members of a social system. When approximately 20% of the population adopts a new behaviour, the remaining 70% will also adopt it. This concept has had an impact on crisis communication by shaping efforts to change behaviour and attitudes during emergencies. Specifically, diffusion of innovation theory can identify behaviours that are most easily changed, people who may adopt new practices and influence others, and the most effective ways to spread new ideas.

2.2.2 Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory of crisis management is a strategic approach that guides organizations through crisis response. It emphasizes identifying and prioritizing stakeholders, understanding their interests, and encouraging open communication during a crisis. According to the stakeholder model, all stakeholders have intrinsic value (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Thus, firms should have multiple objectives, and managers should make decisions that consider the interests of all stakeholders (Jensen, 2002). This theory contends that successful crisis management is dependent on developing positive relationships with stakeholders, considering their perspectives, and aligning actions with shared interests. Recognizing the critical role of stakeholders in crisis situations allows organizations to effectively navigate challenges and cultivate resilience through transparent and strategic communication.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework depicts the concepts that have provided a basis for the research. It illustrates the relationship between the variables.



In the above model, social media is the independent variable, perception is the mediating variable and effective crisis management is the dependent variable. It creates a link between the aforementioned variables. The organization and its stakeholders interact through the available social media platforms that the organization has adopted. The attempt to accomplish effective crisis communication is greatly influenced by the perception that the customers have towards the organization and its modes of communication. It depicts the importance of the Stakeholder Theory which places an emphasis on identifying and prioritizing

stakeholders, understanding their interests, and encouraging open communication during a crisis. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory can identify behaviors and attitudes that are most easily changed, people who may adopt new practices and influence others, and the most effective ways to spread new ideas. These theories border on customer perception, which impact the effectiveness of crisis communication.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

The most suitable research approach for this study was the mixed methods approach. It allowed for a thorough analysis of current events within their actual environment (Yin, 2003). The researcher was able to measure quantifiable outcomes such as engagement rates and reaction times while simultaneously capturing the rich contextual data required to comprehend organizational processes and customer interactions by utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

Qualitative methods, such as interviews with ZESCO's communication staff, revealed attitudes, experiences, and contextual elements that influence crisis communication. Similarly, quantitative tools such as content analysis of social media metrics and consumer surveys provide statistical evidence of the effectiveness of communication strategies (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). This combination not only improves the validity and reliability of findings through data triangulation, but it also allows for a thorough examination of the phenomenon under investigation (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

3.2 Research Design

A research design is a blueprint or plan developed specifically to answer the research question and control variance. The primary goal of all research is to either test the research hypothesis or provide an answer to the research question (Dulock, 1993). There are various types of research designs. This research used an exploratory research design. Burns and Groove (2001) define exploratory research as research conducted to gain new insights, discover new ideas, and increase understanding of the phenomenon.

3.3 Research Philosophy

This study adopted a pragmatic research philosophy, which acknowledges that reality is complicated and multifaceted, and that different viewpoints are required to comprehend phenomena (Cresswell, 2014). In the context of evaluating the effectiveness of social media in crisis communication at ZESCO Limited, a pragmatic approach enabled the integration of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture the complete range of experiences and measurable outcomes.

Ontologically, this study assumed that the reality of crisis communication is created by interactions between individuals and quantifiable using empirical evidence. The study recognizes that stakeholders' experiences such as consumers and employees are subjective and socially constructed, but these experiences may be systematically studied using quantitative indicators such as engagement rates and reaction times.

Epistemologically, the study took a constructivist approach, noting that knowledge is co-created through interaction between the researcher and participants. This viewpoint is critical for understanding the complexities of how social media affects crisis communication, as it incorporates subjective interpretations and contextual variables. At the same time, the pragmatic philosophy emphasizes the gathering of data in order to validate interpretations and provide practical insights (Morgan, 2014).

Methodologically, a mixed-methods approach was used. Quantitative data such as social media analytics and customer surveys provided objective metrics of communication effectiveness, whilst qualitative methods such as interviews collected stakeholder perspectives and experiences. This balanced technique not only ensured a thorough examination, but also adds to theoretical and practical advances in the subject.

3.4 Study Population

A population consists of all members of a specific group (Plitcha and Kelvin, 2013). It includes an entire group of people or study elements that serve as the research's focus. The study population for this study was comprised of ZESCO Limited customers based in Lusaka. This group encompassed residential, commercial and social electricity users. Their experiences and perceptions of crisis communication via social media were critical for evaluating overall effectiveness. These customers provided insights into service delivery, satisfaction, and the clarity and timeliness of messages received during crisis situations (Chisanga and Tembo, 2022). As of 2022, ZESCO had a total customer base of 1, 202, 983 (ERB, 2022). The study also included the ZESCO communication staff from marketing and public relations, who play a pivotal role in developing and executing crisis communication strategies.

3.5 Sample Size

Burns and Grove (2011) define a sample as a subset of the accessible population chosen by the researcher to take part in a study. The sample size for quantitative data

contained three hundred and eighty-four participants. The sample was derived using Cochran's formula which directly addresses the sampling variability of proportions and thus aligns with key outcomes in this study. By explicitly incorporating the desired margin of error (e) and confidence level (through Z), researchers can tailor the sample size to achieve, for example, $\pm 5\%$ precision at 95% confidence (Cochran, 1977). This ensures that the findings are both statistically reliable and interpretable. The sample size was also large enough to collect sufficient data to adequately describe the phenomenon of interest and answer the research questions.

Given the diversified customer base of ZESCO in Lusaka, a sample size of three hundred and eighty-four participants further helped to capture a wide range of perceptions and experiences, thereby increasing the validity of the findings. This sample size was also enough for carrying out subgroup studies, such as comparing different age groups or socioeconomic segments, which provided greater insights about how different demographics react to social media crisis communication. Lastly, practical factors including time and respondent accessibility all contribute to the selection of three hundred and eighty-four participants. This figure ensured that the investigation produced significant and useful results by striking a balance between logistical viability and statistical rigor.

For qualitative research, a smaller sample size is often ideal because the emphasis is on depth and richness of data as opposed to statistical generalizability. In this study, a sample size of 12 participants was employed. The idea of data saturation, which is the point at which more interviews produce little new information, justifies this range. According to research by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), saturation can frequently be reached with 12 to 15 interviews in groups that are relatively homogeneous, especially if the research topic is narrowly focused.

3.6 Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of study participants. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling strategy in which participants are deliberately chosen based on their knowledge, experience, or traits related to the research topic (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim, 2016). Rather than employing random selection, researchers utilize their discretion to select individuals who are most likely to contribute rich, relevant, and diverse data about the subject under investigation. Purposive

sampling was used to intentionally pick people who are directly associated with or affected by ZESCO's social media communication methods during crises. The researcher chose ZESCO customers, especially those who actively engage with the company's social media platforms during outages or crisis situations. Their feedback offered valuable insights into the effectiveness and clarity of the messages disseminated. ZESCO communication staff from marketing and public relations were also included. These are the individuals who are responsible for managing social media communications during crises. Their perspectives provided an understanding of the challenges and strategies employed. This approach ensured that the data collected was highly relevant and directly informed the study's objectives, leading to more in-depth and actionable findings.

In selecting the three hundred and eighty-four participants for the study, stratified random sampling is the probability sampling technique that was adopted. In this method, the population is initially separated into different subgroups, or strata, with similar features. The subgroups for ZESCO's customers include residential, commercial, and social users. Stratified random sampling ensures that each subset of the customer base is well represented in the final sample. This is especially essential given ZESCO's diverse user base, since it gathers a broad range of crisis communication experiences and opinions via social media (Creswell, 2013). The method further enables meaningful comparisons between various client categories. For example, it is easy to determine whether residential clients have considerably different perceptions than commercial or social customers.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

A mixed-methods approach was been adopted to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights. Questionnaires are among the data collection instruments that were used. They are useful for gathering quantitative data from a large sample of ZESCO customers. They were designed to measure customer satisfaction, perceived effectiveness, and overall engagement with social media communication during crises. Semi-structured questionnaires ensured comparability and statistical rigor (Creswell, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were also conducted. Conducting in-depth interviews with ZESCO communication staff and crisis management experts provided qualitative insights into the strategies, challenges, and operational aspects of social media use during crises. These interviews allowed for probing questions that revealed

nanced perspectives (Patton, 2015). The study further utilized content analysis. Analyzing the content and engagement metrics of ZESCO's social media posts during crisis events offered objective data on message reach, frequency, and public interaction. This method can reveal patterns and correlations between communication strategies and customer responses (Neuendorf, 2017).

3.8 Research Design Matrix

Research Objective	Research Question	Data Sources/Participants	Data Collection Instrument	Sampling Techniques
1. To investigate the perception of customers towards the social media channels adopted to communicate crisis by ZESCO Limited.	What is the customers' perception towards the social media channels that have been adopted to communicate crisis by ZESCO?	ZESCO customers (residential, commercial, and social users)	Questionnaires	Stratified Random Sampling:
2. To describe the most effective channels of social media in communicating with stakeholders during crisis.	What are the most effective channels of social media in communicating with stakeholders during crisis?	ZESCO stakeholders (customers, communication staff)	Questionnaires & Interviews	-Purposive Sampling
3. To determine the effectiveness of crisis communication in minimizing the impact of the crisis on the organization and its stakeholders.	How effective is crisis communication in minimizing the impact of the crisis on the organization and its stakeholders?	Customers; ZESCO communications team	Questionnaires; Interviews;	Mixed Sampling Approach: - For customers: Stratified Random Sampling to ensure diverse customer experiences are represented. - For the communications team: Purposive Sampling to select key individuals involved in crisis management.

3.9 Data Analysis

To fully investigate the variables under study, both quantitative and qualitative analysis methodologies were required. SPSS is an example of statistical software that are suitable for quantitative analysis and it was utilized here. Advanced descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and correlation studies are made possible by SPSS and can be used to measure the connections between engagement indicators, customer satisfaction, and the effectiveness of crisis response (Field, 2018). For qualitative data, such as customer interviews and content analysis of social media posts, NVivo is the tool that was utilized. NVivo allows for the coding, categorization, and thematic analysis of textual data, offering detailed insights into customer views and the complex nature of crisis communication (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

3.10 Data Collection Procedures

Semi-structured questionnaires were distributed to obtain quantitative data on ZESCO consumers' perceptions of social media effectiveness in times of crisis. Online surveys were sent via email and WhatsApp platforms. The survey included closed and open-ended questions that assessed the timeliness, clarity, and satisfaction of the information received (Creswell, 2013). The interviews were recorded using a smartphone application. Notes were also taken, summarizing key points while the interview was ongoing.

3.11 Measures of Data Quality Control

In order to ensure that the research outcomes are both credible and actionable, the researcher considered the following measures of data quality control:

Validity

1. Content validity

Created questionnaires and interview methods based on extensive literature research and expert contacts. This guaranteed that the instruments addressed all facets of crisis communication and customer perception (Creswell, 2013).

2. Construct validity

Utilized established scales and measuring items from past research on social media effectiveness and crisis communication. A pilot test of these instruments with a small

set of respondents was conducted to ensure that the questions accurately assess the intended construct.

3. Triangulation

A combination of several data sources (questionnaires and interviews) to corroborate findings. Triangulation helps to ensure the uniformity of results across different approaches, which improves overall validity.

Reliability

1. Test-retest reliability

Conducted the exact same survey to a subset of participants at two distinct times to see if the instrument could produce consistent findings throughout time.

2. Standardized procedure

Gave and specific instructions for gathering data. Standardization improves dependability by reducing errors and guaranteeing that each participant is handled equally during data collection (Fowler, 2014).

Generalizability

1. Representative sampling

Made use of probability sampling strategies, such as stratified random sampling, to ensure that different client segments (residential, commercial, and social) were fairly represented. This improved the capacity to extrapolate results to the whole clientele.

2. Sample size justification

Selected an appropriate sample size that is statistically significant. For example, a sample of 384 respondents helps to strike a balance between statistical power and resource restrictions.

3. Contextual documentation

Clearly recorded the study context, methods, and limitations so that others can judge how the findings apply to similar circumstances. Detailed contextualization improves the transferability of study conclusions.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with human behavior and guides the norms or standards of behavior and interpersonal relationships (Akaranga and Makau, 2016). It refers to an ethos or way of life, which are social norms for conduct that distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable behavior (Akaranga & Ongong'a, 2013). This paper addressed a variety of ethical issues. Participants were adequately informed about the purpose of the study and were given the option of participating or not. The participants' anonymity and confidentiality were protected by not disclosing their names or identities during data collection, analysis, and reporting of study findings. Ethical clearance was also sought and granted by the ethics committee.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and interprets the empirical data collected for this study, which sought to assess the effectiveness of social media as a tool for crisis communication at ZESCO Limited. The data collection process involved both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the research questions and objectives. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the study was able to capture not only the measurable patterns in customer experiences but also the deeper insights from ZESCO communication staff who manage crisis communication efforts.

4.1 Response Rate and Demographics

The response rates achieved for both groups of respondents are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Survey Response Rate

Target Population	Sample size	Responses received	Response rate
ZESCO customers	384	350	91.15%
ZESCO communication staff	12	8	66.67%

Source: Survey Data (2025)

In conducting this research, the study population was carefully defined to include both ZESCO customers and internal staff directly involved in crisis communication functions. This dual-targeted approach was adopted in order to capture the full spectrum of perspectives required for a comprehensive assessment of ZESCO's social media crisis communication effectiveness. The two groups targeted for data collection were external stakeholders, represented by the customers of ZESCO, and internal stakeholders, represented by communication personnel within the organization.

A total of 384 questionnaires were distributed to ZESCO customers who actively use social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and YouTube. Out of these, 350 completed and valid questionnaires were returned, producing a highly satisfactory response rate of 91.15%. This high response rate not only signifies a

strong willingness on the part of customers to participate in the study but also enhances the representativeness and reliability of the quantitative data obtained.

In parallel, the study conducted interviews with ZESCO communication officers to gather qualitative insights into the operational and strategic aspects of the company's crisis communication practices. Out of the twelve targeted staff members, eight participated in the interviews, yielding a response rate of 66.67%. The participation of these internal communication officers was vital in providing an institutional perspective that complements the customer data.

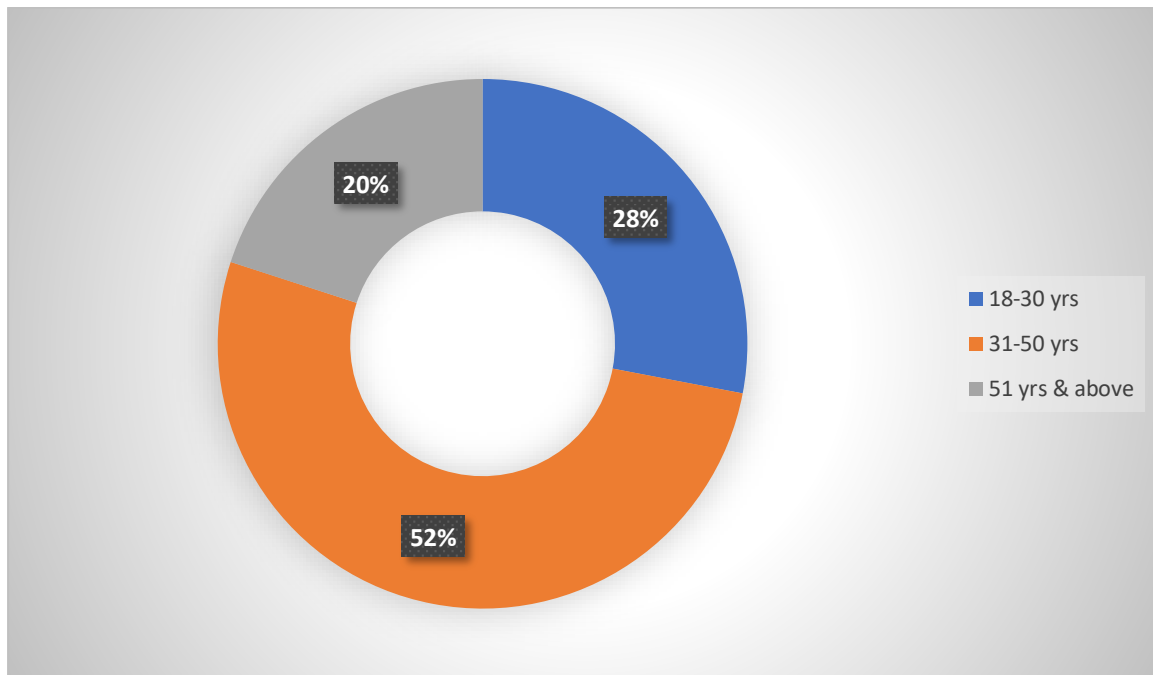
Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by their Sex

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	192	54.9%
Female	158	45.1%

Source: Survey Data (2025)

Beyond response rates, the demographic composition of the respondents provides further context to the study findings. Table 2 presents the gender distribution among the 350 respondents and shows that 54.9% were male (192 respondents), while 45.1% were female (158 respondents). This fairly even gender representation indicates that the study successfully captured perspectives across both male and female customers.

Figure 1: Respondents Age Distribution



Source: Survey Data (2025)

In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents fell within the economically active working population. Specifically, 28% of respondents (98 individuals) were between the ages of 18 and 30, while 52% (182 individuals) were between 31 and 50 years old. Respondents aged 51 years and above constituted 20% of the sample (70 individuals). This age distribution suggests that the study's participants were predominantly adults who likely depend on stable electricity supply for both personal and economic activities, making them particularly sensitive to the effectiveness of crisis communication during service disruptions.

Table 3: Respondents Educational Level

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	16	7.43%
Secondary	76	21.71%
Tertiary	258	73.71%

Source: Survey Data (2025)

Respondents' educational backgrounds also represent a reasonably well-educated populace. Approximately 73.71% of respondents (258 individuals) stated having

received postsecondary education, while 21.71% (76 individuals) had completed secondary education. Only 16 respondents (7.43%) stated that they only received primary schooling. The prevalence of tertiary-educated respondents indicates a sample group that is not just conversant with digital communication platforms, but also perhaps more demanding of the quality, transparency, and timeliness of information received from service providers.

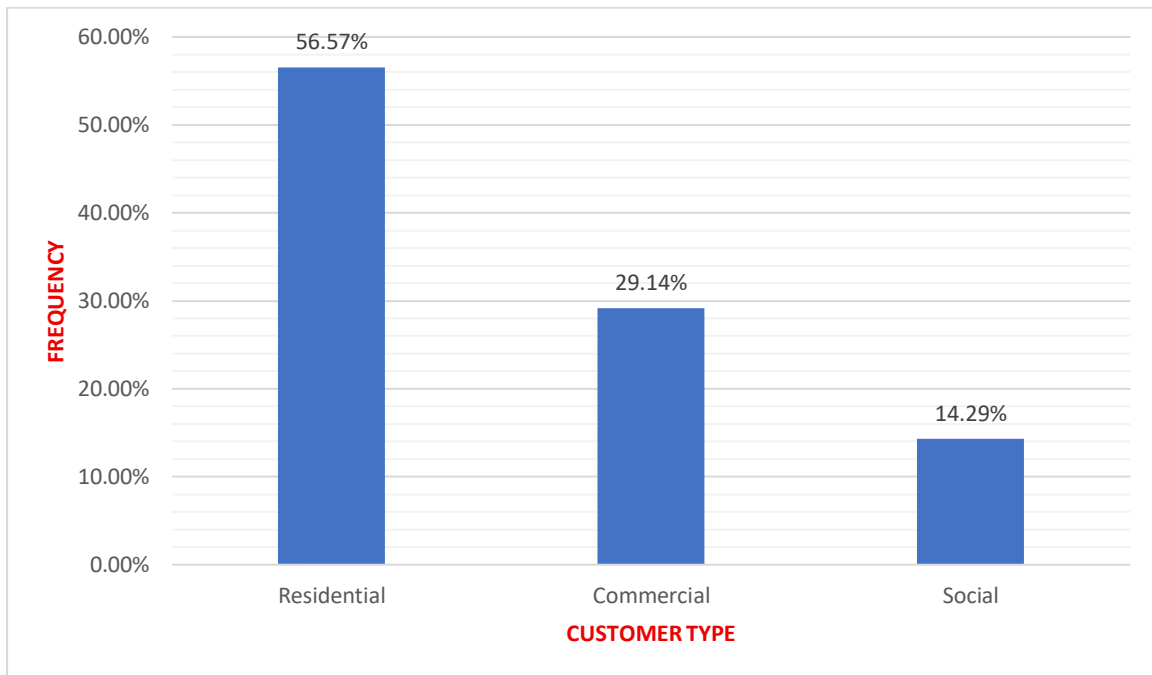
Table 4: Respondents Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Employed	190	54.29%
Business Owner	98	28.00%
Unemployed	38	10.86%
Student	24	6.86%

Source: Survey Data (2025)

The employed respondents in table 4 above, with the highest rating of 54.29%, likely rely on electricity for remote work, office operations, and scheduled duties. A sizable proportion of business owners (28% of respondents) were also surveyed, indicating substantial stakes. Business owners frequently rely on social media for early warnings and expected restoration times to plan accordingly. Unemployed people accounted for 10.86%, and while they are less immediately affected economically, their dependency on energy may still be important for household management or job-seeking activities online. Despite being the smallest group of 24 respondents (6.86%), students rely on electricity for studying, accessing online lectures, and using digital tools.

Figure 2: Respondents Customer Type



Source: Survey Data (2025)

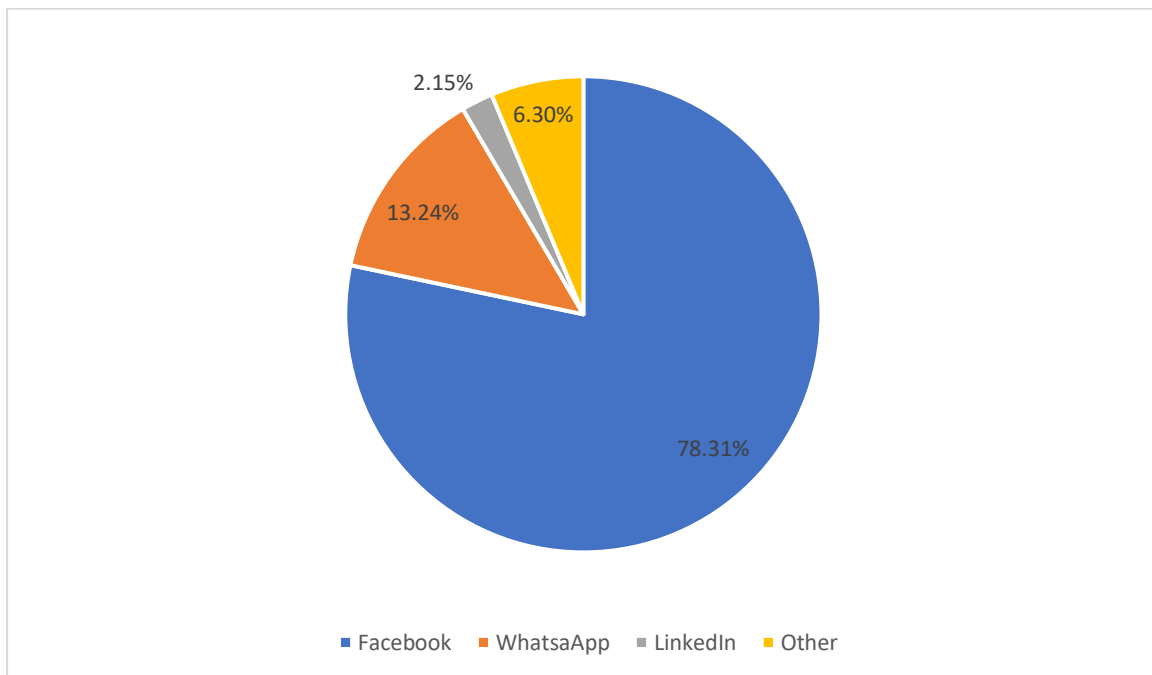
According to Figure 2, the majority of respondents who actively use social media are residential consumers, accounting for 56.57% of all respondents. This clearly indicates that their main source of up-to-date information is social media. A sizable percentage of stakeholders who rely on electricity for productivity and service delivery are businesses, which account for 29.14% of the total. Inaccurate or delayed information can result in operational disruption or financial loss for this group. Schools, hospitals, community centers, and non-governmental organizations are examples of social customers. Even while the proportion is lower at 14.29%, the effects of inadequate communication can be more detrimental, especially in industries like healthcare.

Overall, the response rates and demographic characteristics show that the survey included a diverse and relevant sample of ZESCO's customers. The sample includes people who are not only directly affected by electrical supply issues, but also use digital platforms, making them uniquely qualified to assess the success of ZESCO's social media crisis communication activities.

4.2 Customers' Perception Towards Social Media Crisis Communication

Assessing the success of ZESCO's crisis communication initiatives on social media platforms requires an understanding of client attitudes. How well information satisfies the requirements, expectations, and concerns of the impacted stakeholders during a crisis scenario is a better indicator of effective crisis communication than the amount of information that is shared. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to assess how consumers felt about ZESCO's usage of social media for communication during power outages, such as load shedding, unscheduled outages, and system maintenance disruptions.

Figure 3: Platforms through which Customers Receive Updates

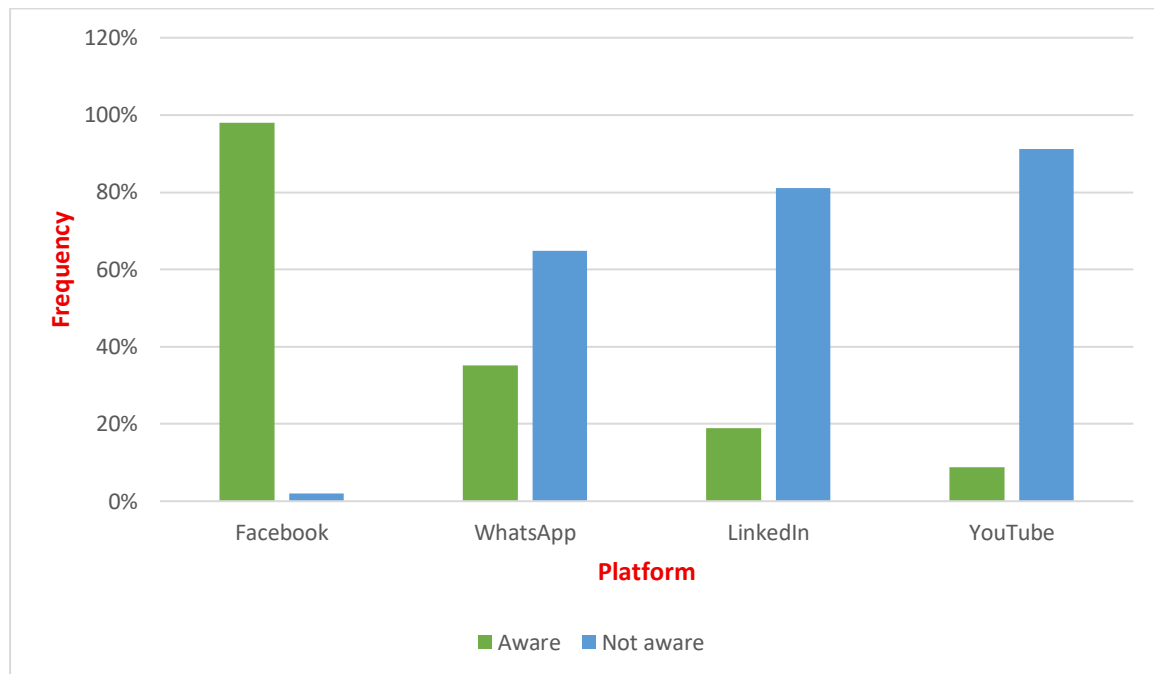


Source: Survey Data (2025)

According to the results above, 78.31% received updates through Facebook, while 13.24% received them through WhatsApp. 6.3% of respondents said they obtained updates via other media such as SMS notifications, television, and radio. As a result, this survey found that the majority of customers obtained their updates through social media. While the number of respondents who utilize other traditional platforms is rather low, it illustrates the continued importance of multi-channel communication, especially for consumers who do not actively use social media or live in areas with limited internet

access. The use of several media emphasizes the need of a diversified communication strategy in promoting inclusivity and comprehensive coverage during a crisis.

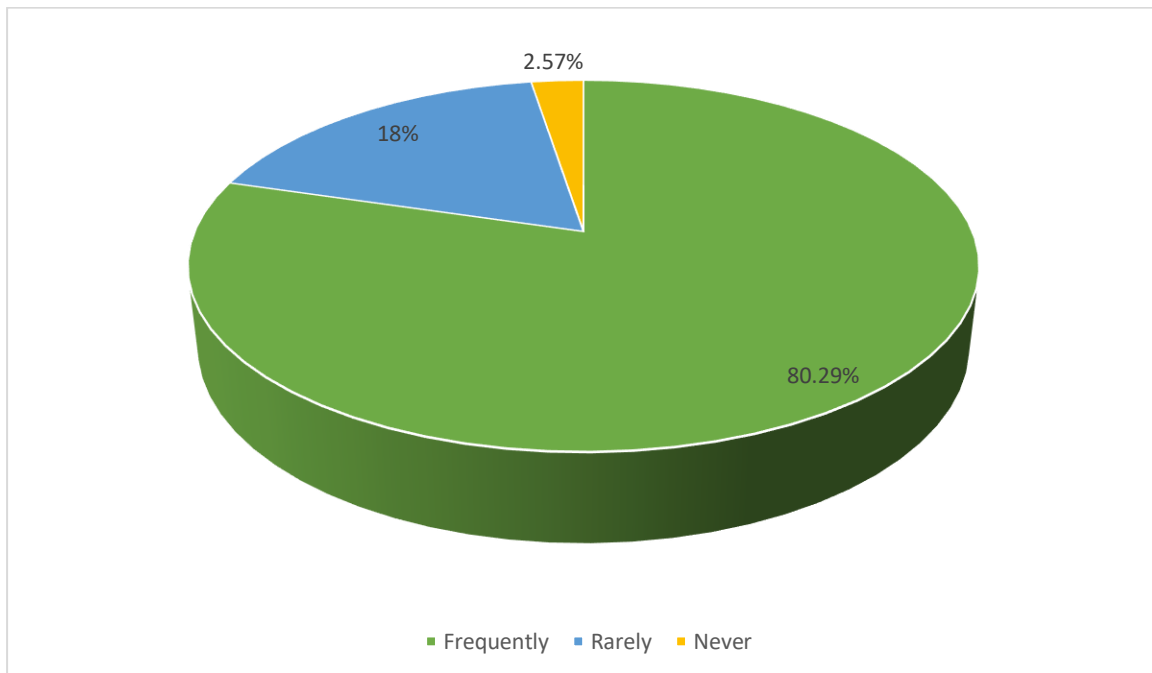
Figure 4: Customer Awareness of ZESCO Social Media Platforms



Source: Survey Data (2025)

The results shown in Figure 4 demonstrate the disparities in consumer knowledge of ZESCO's presence across various social media channels. Remarkably, 98% of respondents said they were aware of ZESCO's Facebook page, highlighting Facebook's supremacy as the most well-known and maybe most successful medium for the utility's crisis communication initiatives. However, other platforms see a sharp decline in awareness. Despite WhatsApp being widely used for daily communication in Zambia, only 35.14% of respondents said they were aware of ZESCO's presence on the platform. This disparity implies that while ZESCO may use WhatsApp, it is probably not being integrated or marketed as much as Facebook. The percentage of respondents who were not aware of ZESCO's presence on YouTube and LinkedIn was even lower, at 81.14% and 91.14%, respectively. According to these figures, ZESCO either does not actively use these channels for communicating with customers or does not adequately promote them.

Figure 5: Frequency of Crisis Related Updates



Source: Survey Data (2025)

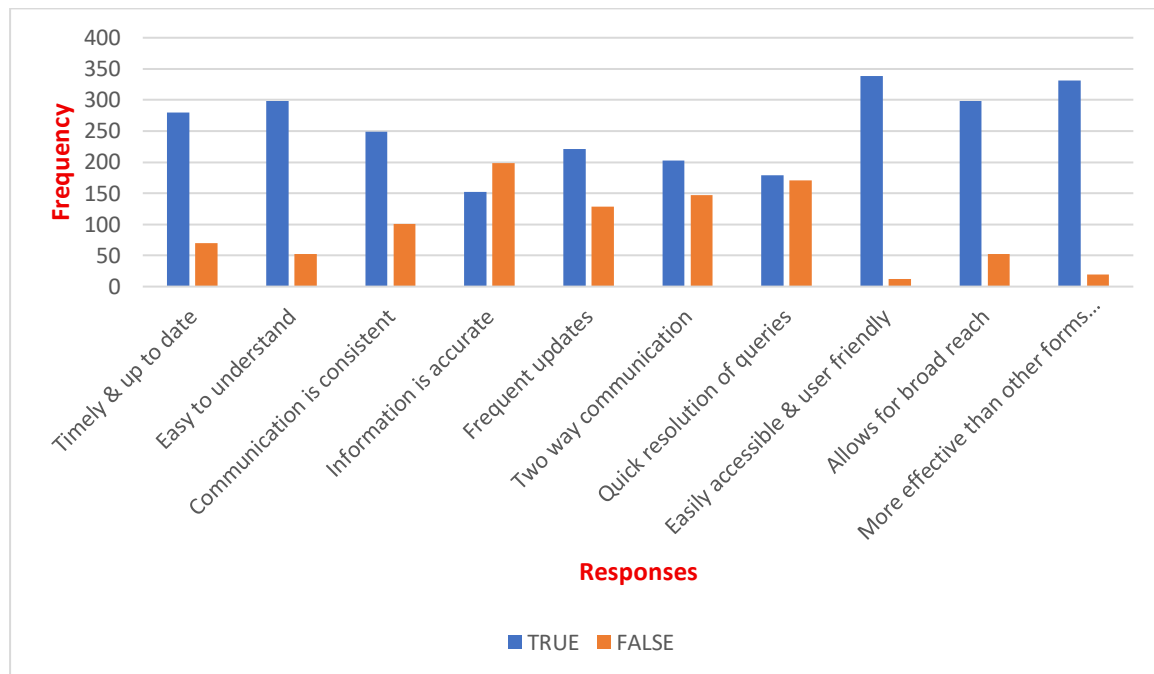
Figure 5 depicts the frequency with which customers received or came across crisis related updates on ZESCO's social media platforms. 281 customers (80.29%) indicated that they frequently received updates. This high percentage demonstrates that ZESCO has been largely consistent in pushing out crisis communication content to its social media audience. 63 (18%) revealed that they received updates on rare occasions. This could be due to differences in social media platform preference, algorithms that affect content visibility, or customer engagement behavior (e.g., how often users check their accounts). Only 9 customers (2.57%) indicated that they never receive or come across any crisis communication related updates. These respondents might be individuals who do not actively use social media, are not following ZESCO's official pages, or are affected by limited internet access.

4.2.1 Customer Responses on Information shared on Social Media

Respondents were asked to indicate whether 'true' or 'false' to several statements regarding the crisis information shared on ZESCO's social media platforms based on their personal experiences. The responses collected allowed for a significant understanding of how the general public views the utility company's social media

communication efforts during times of crisis. The results of this assessment are presented in figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Distribution of responses on Information Shared on Social Media



Source: Survey Data (2025)

As the data indicates, a substantial proportion of the respondents expressed satisfaction with ZESCO’s crisis communication performance on social media. Specifically, 280 or 80% percent of the respondents agreed that the communication was timely and up to date while only 20% disagreed. Further, 298 respondents (85.14%) also agreed that the communication on social media was easy to understand. Regarding ZESCO’s consistency in communicating during crisis, 249 respondents (i.e. 71.14%) indicated that this was true while 101 (i.e. 28.86%) indicated that it was false. On the question of accuracy in the information shared, majority of the respondents submitted that the information provided on the social media platforms was not accurate. This made up 261 of the responses for this statement at 74.57% while 89 (i.e. 25.43%) responses were false. 221 respondents (i.e. 63.14%) and 203 respondents (58%) agreed with the statements that ZESCO provided frequent updates and the platforms allowed for two-way communication respectively, while 36.86% and 42% indicated that the two statements were false. Further, 179 respondents (i.e.

51.14%) submitted that social media allows for quick resolution of issues and 338 respondents agreed that the platforms were easily accessible and user friendly. Only 48.86% and 3.43% of the respondents thought the preceding statements to be false, respectively. The social media platforms' ability to broadly reach affected customers was captured as true by the majority who made up 298 (i.e. 85.14%) of the respondents while only 14.86% disagreed. Finally, a significant number of respondents that is 94.57% indicated that social media was more effective than other forms of communication during times of power crisis. The responses given collectively suggest that the majority of the customers surveyed perceive ZESCO's efforts on social media during crises as generally successful in keeping them informed and engaged. However, accuracy remained a concern for many users.

4.3 Effective Communication Channels

As part of the survey, participants were asked to rate the individual social media channels used by ZESCO in its crisis communication efforts. This investigation sought to determine each platform's success in reaching audiences, giving timely updates, and encouraging customer participation during crisis scenarios such as power outages and load-shedding occurrences.

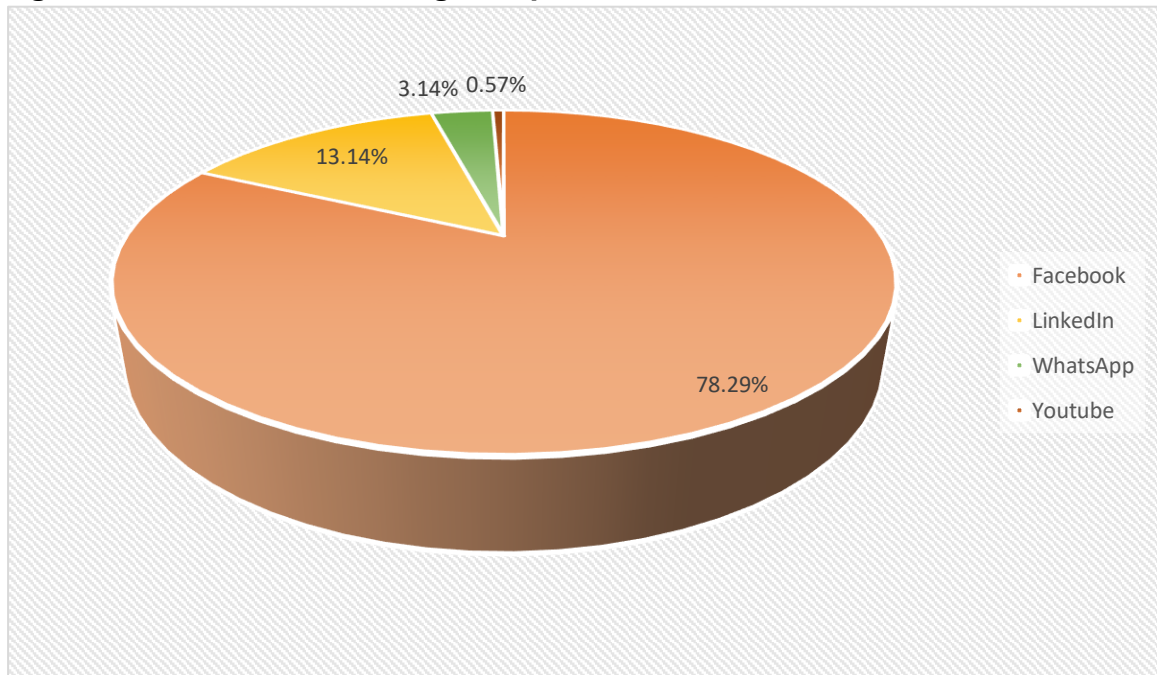
Table 5: Customer Responses on whether they Follow ZESCO social media Platforms

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	288	82.29%
No	62	17.71%

Source: Survey Data (2025)

The results in table 5 above were gathered based on whether participants followed any of the ZESCO social media sites. They show a high level of client involvement on ZESCO's social media platforms. Specifically, 82.29% of respondents (288 customers) reported following ZESCO's social media pages, whereas only 17.71% (62 customers) did not. This high number of followers indicates that the majority of ZESCO's customers understand the importance of using digital platforms to get information, especially during crises like power outages or service disruptions.

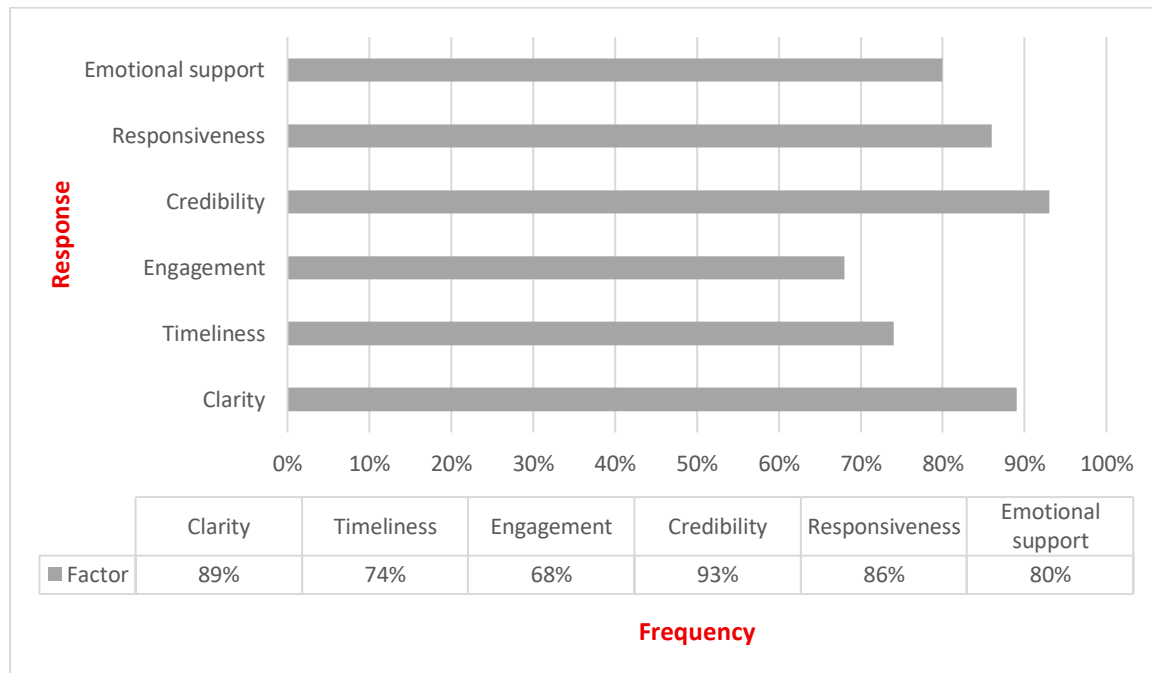
Figure 7: Customer Following on Specific ZESCO Platforms



Source: Survey Data (2025)

The pie chart, which shows statistics on the specific social media networks where customers follow ZESCO Limited, reveals important trends in user interaction across platforms. Facebook is the most popular platform, with 78.29% of customers reporting that they follow ZESCO on the social media site. This obvious choice demonstrates that Facebook is the most effective medium for ZESCO to reach a wide audience. Its success may be attributed to its accessibility, frequent updates, and interactive postings that allow users to share, remark, and engage in debates. LinkedIn is ranked second, which has 13.14% of clientele follow the company on the platform. This suggests that some of ZESCO's audience uses LinkedIn to interact with more formal or corporate communications. These people are most likely professionals, industry stakeholders or job seekers. WhatsApp is used by just 3.14 percent of respondents. This low figure may indicate WhatsApp's limitations as an official public communication platform, especially given the absence of a traditional public profile or page that users may "follow." YouTube is lowest, with only 0.57% of customers following ZESCO there. This suggests that either ZESCO does not routinely update content on YouTube, or that clients do not regard it as a primary source of crisis-related information, maybe due to a preference for text-based updates over video.

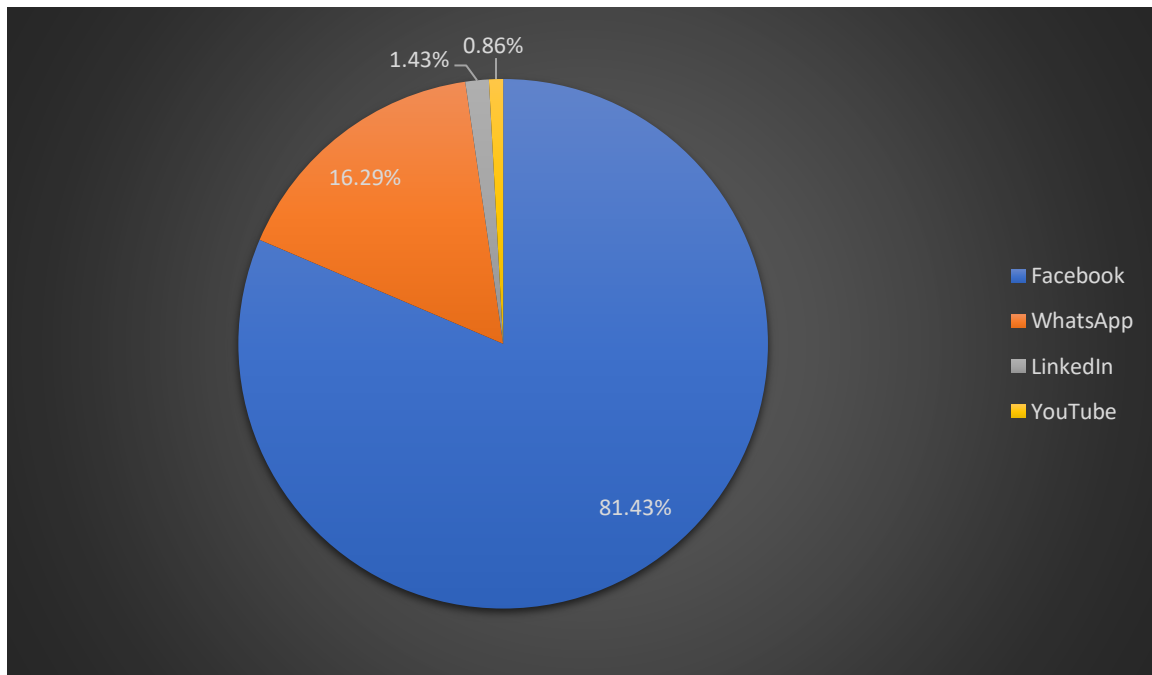
Figure 8: Factors Considered Important in Effective Crisis Communication



Source: Survey Data (2025)

The factors which respondents considered important for effective crisis communication were captured in the figure above. Credibility received the highest rating (93%), showing that customers value information on which they may trust when planning activities that require power. A large proportion of respondents also stated that for communication to be effective, it must be clear and simple to comprehend, which is especially important during power outages and load-shedding announcements. Responsiveness to outages during crises on social media, which scored 86%, was deemed crucial. Quick responses increase user engagement and reduce annoyance. A huge majority of participants, 80%, believed that expressing reassurance or empathy helps to maintain a human touch in digital communication, particularly during extended outages or crises. Despite having a lower percentage (68%), respondents thought that interaction was crucial to good communication since it allowed them to get replies to their comments and their feedback acknowledged.

Figure 9: Platforms Considered Effective in Crisis Communication



Source: Survey Data (2025)

Having identified the factors that were considered as important in effective crisis communication, the respondents further indicated the platforms which they felt addressed these factors adequately. The key observation from figure 9 above is that Facebook was overwhelmingly considered the most effective platform for crisis communication at 81.43%. This suggests that the majority of ZESCO's stakeholders find Facebook reliable for timely updates, community engagement, and information dissemination during crises. The platform's versatility (posts, live updates, comments, sharing) likely contributes to this preference. WhatsApp came in as the second most effective platform, albeit at a much lower rate than Facebook of 16.29%. This result indicates that while WhatsApp is widely used for quick, direct communication, it may be limited by group size, broadcast reach, or interactivity when used for broad crisis communication. Very few respondents viewed LinkedIn as an effective crisis communication tool. This could be due to its professional tone and limited use by the general public for real-time crisis updates. YouTube ranked lowest among the platforms at 0.86%, likely because it is less suited for instant updates and is more effective for detailed explainer videos or post-crisis messaging.

4.4 Impact on Crisis Mitigation

An important objective of this study was to determine the extent to which ZESCO's social media crisis communication efforts helped mitigate the adverse effects of electricity crises on its customers. Effective crisis communication is not simply about providing information; it is also about ensuring that the information enables stakeholders to make timely decisions, manage risks, and maintain a sense of control during uncertain situations. To this end, customers were asked to assess how the information they received via ZESCO's social media platforms helped to mitigate the impact of the electricity service disruptions such as load-shedding, emergency power outages, and maintenance shutdowns.

The summarized findings are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Effectiveness of Social Media Crisis Communication on Impact Mitigation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Helped me plan better	252	72%
Reduced frustration	238	68%
Caused confusion	70	20%
No noticeable impact	28	8%

Source: Survey Data (2025)

The findings demonstrate that crisis communication on social media has a tangible and positive effect on customer preparedness and emotional response during electricity crises. A large majority of respondents, representing 72% of the sample (252 respondents), indicated that receiving timely information from ZESCO through social media platforms allowed them to plan their activities more effectively. By having advance notice of power outages, these customers were able to adjust work schedules, modify household routines, prepare alternative power sources, or take other necessary precautions to minimize disruption.

Closely related to preparedness is the emotional response to crisis events. The study found that 68% of respondents (238 individuals) reported that social media communication reduced their frustration during periods of electricity crises. Electricity shortages, particularly when unexpected, often generate significant anxiety, financial

loss, and operational disruptions, especially for businesses and institutions that rely heavily on power for their daily operations. The ability to access credible, timely, and consistent information appears to have alleviated some of the psychological stress commonly associated with these service interruptions.

Nevertheless, not all respondents experienced positive outcomes as a result of the communication efforts. Approximately 20% of respondents (70 individuals) reported that delays or inconsistencies in communication sometimes led to confusion, which may have exacerbated rather than mitigated the impact of the crisis for these customers. These cases highlight the critical importance of accuracy, consistency, and real-time responsiveness in crisis communication efforts.

A smaller portion of respondents, 8% (28 individuals) reported that receiving information from ZESCO's social media platforms had no noticeable impact on their ability to prepare for power outages. This may suggest that, for certain customers, either the information provided was not sufficiently detailed or timely to allow effective planning, or the nature of the outages was such that their activities could not easily be rescheduled regardless of notice.

The evidence from these findings underscores the significant role that timely, transparent, credible and accessible information plays in reducing the disruptive effects of electricity crises on customers. While ZESCO's social media communication efforts have made substantial contributions in this regard, the existence of respondents who reported confusion or negligible impact also reveals opportunities for further improvement, particularly in enhancing response speed, consistency of information, and proactive engagement during fast-developing crisis events.

4.5 Findings from Staff Interviews

In addition to the quantitative data collected from customers, qualitative data was obtained through in-depth interviews with ZESCO's internal communication staff. These individuals are directly involved in the development, implementation, and monitoring of the organization's crisis communication strategies on social media platforms. The insights gathered from these interviews provide an important

institutional perspective, complementing the customer feedback and offering a behind-the-scenes view of how crisis communication is managed at ZESCO.

4.5.1 Role of Social Media in Reducing Pressure on Traditional Customer Service Channels

One of the recurring themes from these conversations was the important role that social media has played in relieving pressure on ZESCO's regular customer care channels during power outages. One of the communication professionals indicated that during peak crisis moments, such as unanticipated outages or lengthy load-shedding schedules, consumer inquiries and concerns that were formerly routed to call centers were increasingly addressed via social media platforms. He remarked, *"Before we began using Facebook more actively, our phone lines would be congested. But now, even during a blackout, we can post updates and engage customers there rather than calling in."* According to staff estimates, during significant service interruptions, call center traffic decreased by up to 35% as a result of users being able to report unanticipated outages and extended load shedding via WhatsApp and the efficient distribution of timely information via platforms like Facebook. "WhatsApp has helped us receive complaints of defects instantly from different places," another employee was quoted as saying. *"Instead of making phone calls, they send SMS. In times of high demand, that is a huge comfort,"* he added. In addition to reducing phone line congestion, this shift in consumer inquiries to social media platforms allows the business to respond to a higher volume of clients in a more effective and transparent manner.

4.5.2 General Perceptions of Customers Towards ZESCO's Social Media Channels

The interviews found that the implementation of real-time answers on social media platforms has improved customer happiness and perception of the company. Customers value being able to speak with humans instead of robots as it allows for more tailored and meaningful interactions depending on their individual queries. *"Customers value real-time responses because they feel like they are talking to a real person and not simply an automated message,"* said one of the marketing department's representatives. *"It has a significant impact."* Excellent client feedback has shown that customers are satisfied with the real-time responses. Furthermore, the

organization's social media presence has grown significantly as a result of this enhanced communication strategy, as seen by a noticeable rise in followers and engagements. *"Our followers and page likes increased by over 50% last year, and that's primarily due to how actively we communicate now, especially during crisis moments,"* she continued. All things considered, the company's perceived credibility and trust have increased as a result of its efforts to communicate with customers directly and effectively in real time. According to the interviews, the company posts credible information on social media to guarantee the legitimacy of the information it shares with clients. Their role was to communicate clearly and frequently about changing circumstances, including those pertaining to power generation, transmission, and distribution, which are subject to various factors beyond their control, such as weather and infrastructure issues. They placed a strong emphasis on transparency and being honest with customers. They did concede, though, that not all communications were well received, particularly when they dealt with uncomfortable realities, and that their job was to keep lines of communication open. *"We make it a point to post only factual and true material,"* said one of the interviewees. *"We don't mince words, even when things are difficult. We present it honestly."* Since they are steadfast in their commitment to providing correct information in spite of outside influences on service delivery, this strategy aims to foster confidence.

Trends in customer feedback have shown indications of trust concerns. However, interview participants agreed that the organization is still committed to truthful communication. They acknowledged that when unexpected challenges arose (such as external causes impacting power supply), the public saw them as dishonest. Nonetheless, the organization has noticed a shift in customer confidence, particularly as they implement effective communication strategies and keep promises about service improvements, such as introducing load-shedding schedules that help customers plan better. A member of the public relations team stated, *"If we're honest and clear, they tend to trust us more over time, even if the message is not what they want to hear."* This trend indicates that customers are growing more tolerant and understanding, which will ultimately lead to a decline in negative perceptions.

4.5.3 Identification of Effective Social Media Communication Channels

Facebook and bulk messaging proved to be the most successful platforms for connecting with stakeholders, according to the discussions. Bulk messaging was found to be the most successful digital platform, even though it is not a social media platform, because it reaches all clients, regardless of phone type, guaranteeing that everyone receives critical updates. With regards to social media, Facebook emerged as the most effective and was highlighted for its wide reach and high interaction rate, as most customers are now using this platform. Other platforms mentioned, such as LinkedIn and WhatsApp, were revealed not to be as prominently effective for crisis communication. LinkedIn was noted for its professional tone but does not have the same level of interaction as Facebook, while WhatsApp is limited as it primarily serves as a one-way channel for customers to reach out for verification rather than receiving proactive information. One of the interviewees stated that, *“WhatsApp is good for customers to send in reports or ask questions, but we can’t really use it to send out messages to everyone, so it’s quite limited.”* Thus, Facebook was identified as key social media tool for effective communication with stakeholders.

4.5.4 Effectiveness of Social Media Communication in Minimizing Crisis Impact

The conversations revealed that crisis communication has been significant in mitigating the negative impacts on the organization and its stakeholders. The organization has been proactive in sharing information with both internal and external stakeholders, ensuring that they are all aligned and aware of ongoing issues. The introduction and publishing of load shedding schedules for example helped reduce panic among the residential, commercial and social customers by providing them with a clear understanding of when they would have electricity, thus allowing them to plan their activities more effectively.

Additionally, the organization's ability to analyze customer feedback has allowed them to adapt and improve their communication strategies over time, which played a crucial role in gaining customer confidence. Encouraging two-way communication has also led to a decrease in negative comments as customers began to trust the information being shared and hold the organization accountable for updates on the situation. One of the respondents was quoted as saying that, *“Our customers now know they can ask*

us questions on social media and actually get answers. This has really helped reduce the angry comments we used to see.” Overall, the organization has employed effective crisis communication strategies that have contributed to a better rapport with customers and minimized potential backlash during crises.

Furthermore, it was discovered that the organization utilizes several metrics and feedback mechanisms to assess the impact of its crisis communication efforts. These include:

1. **Analytics of Comments and Interactions:** The organization conducts analysis to determine which posts or advertisements generate the most engagement. This helps in understanding customer responses and areas needing improvement.
2. **Feedback from Customers:** Customers are encouraged to share their experiences and frustrations, allowing the organization to adapt its messaging and communication strategies based on direct input from stakeholders.
3. **Engagement Reduction Metrics:** By monitoring the volume of negative comments, the organization can gauge improvements in public confidence and trust.

These metrics allow the organization to adjust its strategies effectively and provide insights into the effectiveness of their crisis communication efforts.

Collectively, the perspectives shared by ZESCO’s communication staff highlight both the strengths and the areas for improvement within the company’s existing crisis communication framework. Social media has clearly emerged as a critical tool for public engagement and operational efficiency, but the success of these platforms ultimately depends on ZESCO’s ability to allocate adequate resources, address misinformation threats, and continuously adapt to the evolving demands of digital communication during crises.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the study's findings, interpreting the empirical results in light of the existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and real-world crisis communication practices reviewed in earlier chapters. The aim of this chapter is to move beyond the descriptive presentation of data offered in Chapter Four and engage critically with the research questions by examining how the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of social media in crisis communication at ZESCO Limited.

Crisis communication, particularly within essential service sectors such as electricity provision, operates at the intersection of multiple disciplines, including public relations, risk communication, stakeholder management, and organizational crisis response. In this study, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) provided an important conceptual framework for understanding how ZESCO's communication strategies influence customer perceptions, trust, and preparedness during crisis events. SCCT emphasizes that the timeliness, transparency, and appropriateness of communication are critical in shaping stakeholder reactions, minimizing reputational damage, and mitigating the consequences of service disruptions.

The discussion in this chapter will systematically explore how the study's findings correspond with or diverge from the key themes and arguments identified in the existing literature on social media and crisis communication. Particular attention will be paid to customer perceptions of ZESCO's crisis communication performance, the effectiveness of specific social media platforms in disseminating information, the impact of timely communication on customer preparedness, and the internal operational challenges faced by ZESCO's communication teams. The discussion will also examine broader implications for organizational learning, public trust, and stakeholder engagement in the context of crisis management.

This chapter's critical analysis of the study's findings along these dimensions will not only provide answers to the research questions but also useful information that can guide ZESCO's future crisis communication plans and the larger conversation about social media's role in crisis management for public utilities.

5.1 Perception Towards Social Media Channels

The study's findings showed that most participants had a positive opinion of ZESCO's social media crisis communication initiatives. These high satisfaction levels provide empirical evidence in favor of a number of important hypotheses in the literature on crisis communication, especially those pertaining to the crucial roles that timeliness, transparency, and trust-building play. According to ZESCO customers' positive reviews, the company's efforts to promptly inform the public about load-shedding schedules, unplanned outages, and service restoration timelines have contributed to a greater sense of accountability and transparency, which has bolstered public trust. This is supported by Vaughan et al. (2021) who notes that timeliness helps to build and sustain confidence, whereas a lack of timely information causes an information gap.

80% of the respondents agreed that the communication was timely and 85.14% also agreed that the communication on social media was easy to understand. 71.14% further agreed that the communication was consistent. This reflects a positive perception of the customers towards the information shared by ZESCO across its platforms. However, a lower portion of the respondents at 58% indicated that the platforms allow for two-way communication. This is consistent with the assertion by Zulfiah and Zulham (2024) that organizations can not only communicate their messages to the public, but they must also respond to criticism, questions, and concerns from the audience. This connection enables firms to display empathy, transparency, and responsiveness to the problem at hand. Recent studies conducted in Ghana further highlight the effectiveness of dialogic communication which is a fundamental component of the stakeholder theory on social media in times of crisis (Tella, 2023). By demonstrating responsiveness and empathy, two-way exchanges contribute to the development of trust and organizational legitimacy. Customers are more likely to have faith in ZESCO's skill and compassion when they believe the utility is actively participating rather than just broadcasting.

The number of respondents who agreed that the information was accurate was high at 74.59%. As indicated, dialogic communication in which stakeholders participate, ask questions, and get clarification is promoted by stakeholder theory. However, this discourse breaks down if the original messaging is inaccurate (Zigo, 2020). False or

unreliable communications might prevent stakeholders from offering insightful criticism or working together, which is crucial for making sense of the situation together and solving problems together in times of crisis.

The findings of this study, therefore, confirm that ZESCO's current use of social media in crisis communication although not without areas for improvement has achieved many of the core objectives identified in crisis communication theory. Transparency, timeliness, and credibility remain central pillars in safeguarding public trust during service interruptions, and ZESCO's efforts in these areas have, to a large extent, been recognized positively by its customer base.

5.2 Platform-Specific Strengths and Weaknesses

The study's analysis of platform-specific performance further illustrates how ZESCO's social media crisis communication strategy aligns with the distinct functional characteristics of each platform. The findings confirm that Facebook, which was rated at 81.43% as the platform that adequately addresses various factors considered to be important for crisis communication, currently serves as the most effective platform while WhatsApp, LinkedIn and YouTube play a much more limited role in this context.

It was revealed that ZESCO established a 24/7 Facebook Monitoring Team. Given the nature of electricity supply crises, which can occur unexpectedly at any time, it was stated that it is essential that ZESCO maintains continuous oversight of its social media channels. This has been achieved by assigning staff to work in rotating shifts, ensuring that customer queries, complaints, and reports of outages are monitored and addressed promptly. Continuous monitoring allows the organization to not only respond more quickly to customer concerns but also detect and correct misinformation before it spreads widely. This is in line with the SCCT is a framework that helps crisis managers understand how stakeholders perceive an organization's responsibility during a crisis and match appropriate crisis response strategies.

Facebook has proven to be a highly effective tool for disseminating broad, asynchronous updates to a wide and diverse audience. This is supported by the findings of Kwok, Lee & Han (2022) who conducted a study and discovered that Facebook posts received much greater involvement (likes, comments, shares) than

other platforms during COVID-19. Their research concludes that Facebook is a key tool for real-time crisis communication because of its reach and interactive capabilities. Its large user base, combined with its capacity for multimedia content, detailed text posts, and public comment threads, makes it an ideal platform for issuing general service announcements, responding to customer concerns, and addressing widespread outages. This platform's ability to accommodate two-way interactions fits well with the diffusion of innovation theory. The theory asserts that through interactions and engagement with the diverse stakeholders across different segments of the population, organizations can identify behaviors that are most easily changed, people who may adopt new practices and influence others, and the most effective ways to spread new ideas.

WhatsApp, as it was discovered on the other hand, serves as a one-way communication platform for reporting and service access. The use of a one-way communication platform by ZESCO Limited for reporting outages and accessing services presents both benefits and challenges, particularly in the context of customer engagement and crisis management. While the system provides a level of convenience and accessibility, it also limits interaction, which can affect customer satisfaction and the efficiency of service delivery.

One of the primary advantages of this platform is its efficiency and simplicity. Customers are able to quickly report power outages, access their account information, check billing status, or request certain services without needing to wait in long queues or make phone calls. The automation reduces pressure on ZESCO's customer service personnel, allows for faster processing of routine queries, and improves overall operational efficiency. It is particularly useful during widespread outages when call centres might otherwise be overwhelmed. Additionally, the platform ensures that ZESCO can standardize and track requests, enabling better data collection for future planning and fault analysis. This aligns with studies such as those by Buhmann et al. (2022), which highlight how digital communication technologies improve organizational efficiency and customer engagement during service interruptions.

However, a significant disadvantage of the one-way system is the lack of interactivity, which can lead to customer frustration. Since customers cannot receive immediate feedback or updates through the same platform, they are left without confirmation of

whether their report was received or when the issue might be resolved. A study by (Lafferty et., al 2021) concluded that in the healthcare system, such lack of communication lead to users consulting unofficial channels to verify receipt or seek clarity. Gaps in communication may undermine trust, particularly in crisis situations when stakeholders seek reassurance and real-time updates. Customers might feel ignored or confused if follow-up information is not available through the same channel.

Moreover, one-way systems limit the ability of ZESCO to gather customer feedback, which is critical for continuous improvement. In a two-way communication setup, customers could provide insights, ask questions, or even help identify patterns in service issues, contributing to more responsive and adaptive service models. By contrast, the current platform positions customers as passive participants in the communication process, rather than as engaged stakeholders.

LinkedIn, while still utilized by ZESCO, was found to have limited relevance in the context of crisis communication. Only 1.43% percent of respondents reported following crisis updates through LinkedIn, and most acknowledged that its content tended to focus on formal corporate announcements, policy updates, or business-oriented content. Its limited audience engagement and lack of interaction makes it less suitable for the kind of real-time, customer-focused crisis communication demanded during service disruptions. This finding reflects the platform's more professional orientation, which is better suited for corporate reputation management rather than rapid public engagement in crisis contexts.

Collectively, these platform-specific findings demonstrate that ZESCO's current crisis communication strategy largely aligns with both theoretical expectations and practical realities. Facebook and WhatsApp provide the necessary speed, accessibility, and interactivity required for effective customer engagement during crises, while LinkedIn continues to serve a more limited but complementary role in maintaining institutional visibility.

5.3 Effectiveness of Crisis Communication in Impact Mitigation

The findings gathered provide compelling evidence that social media crisis communication has had a meaningful impact in mitigating the negative effects of power outages among ZESCO customers. This is represented by 72% of the

respondents who reported that the communication helped them plan better during outages. It demonstrates that timely and relevant updates on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp enable customers to adjust their routines, such as rescheduling household chores, business operations, or academic work. It can further boost corporate trust while reducing stakeholder uncertainty. These findings affirm the central basis of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, which posits that well-managed communication can reduce uncertainty and empower stakeholders to respond constructively to crisis situations.

Additionally, a considerable number of respondents at 68% indicated that crisis communication through social media reduced their frustration. The revelation that social media crisis communication lessens customer frustration is supported by studies demonstrating that emotionally supportive communication during crises boosts positive emotions while limiting negative ones. For example, a study on COVID-19 crisis communication discovered that techniques stressing business continuity and awareness generation were helpful in enhancing positive emotions and minimizing negative emotions (Dhar and Bose, 2022). When customers are informed, even about delays or problems, they are less likely to feel neglected or powerless, which can greatly reduce stress and public backlash. This emotional management is particularly crucial for utility companies like ZESCO, whose services are vital for daily life and economic activities.

On the other hand, a smaller proportion of customers represented by 20% of the respondents reported that the communication caused confusion, which signals areas where improvement is needed particularly in message accuracy and credibility. The discovery that some communication generated uncertainty is consistent with literature that emphasizes the dangers of misinformation when messages lack clarity. (Riana et., al 2024) notes that quick or incorrect responses to a situation might exacerbate the problem and harm the organization's reputation. (Zulfiah and Zulham, 2024) further emphasize that as a result, organizations must ensure that their messages to the public are clear, transparent, and consistent. Furthermore, the number of respondents that said that the crisis communication had no noticeable impact could reflect a disconnect between the platform used and the customers' access to or understanding of it.

Overall, these findings suggest that while ZESCO's use of social media for crisis communication is largely effective, especially in enhancing customer preparedness and emotional stability, there is room to enhance clarity and accuracy. The results support existing literature advocating for crisis communication strategies that are interactive, audience-specific, and timely, as these features significantly influence public perception and organizational resilience during crises.

5.4. Implications of Findings

The study's findings have major implications for utility firms such as ZESCO Limited and other organizations looking to use digital platforms for public involvement during disasters. The findings show that the majority of customers use social media, primarily Facebook, to receive crisis-related updates. This emphasizes the importance of social media in timely information distribution, as well as the public's growing expectation that organizations maintain active and responsive digital communication channels. Furthermore, the results show that although users value the availability of self-service platforms such as WhatsApp, real-time interaction and feedback are limited by the one-way nature of communication. This implies that social media's ability to effectively communicate during emergencies depends not only on the ease of reporting service disruptions but also on how responsive and interactive those platforms are. Therefore, in order to increase accessibility, clarity, and trust, organizations should think about incorporating multilingual support and two-way communication tools. The study also found that good crisis communication improves consumer planning and reduces frustration, demonstrating its importance in minimizing the effects of service outages. These findings emphasize the necessity for constant investment in social media strategies, staff training, and digital tools that can improve consumer interaction during critical moments.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.0 Introduction

The forgoing chapter discussed the findings presented in chapter 4. This chapter presents a conclusion for this study and provides recommendations based on the research objectives, the findings and the theoretical framework.

6.1 Conclusion

This study set out to assess the effectiveness of social media as a tool for crisis communication at ZESCO Limited, particularly during electricity supply disruptions such as load-shedding, unplanned outages, and technical failures. Drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative data, the research has provided valuable insights into customer perceptions, platform-specific performance, and internal organizational challenges that shape ZESCO's crisis communication outcomes.

The first research question and objective sought to determine the perception of customers towards the social media channels adopted to communicate crisis by ZESCO Limited. The positive perception of customers towards ZESCO's efforts in communicating crisis through social media which is reflected in the findings demonstrates the organization's growing capacity to meet the public's information needs during crises. The study revealed that the information posted by ZESCO on its social media channels reflected clarity, timeliness, a broad reach and consistency. However, there was a revelation that the information lacked accuracy which caused customer anxiety.

The second research question and objective endeavored to establish the most effective communication channels of social media in communicating with stakeholders during crisis at the utility company. The study concludes that among the various social media platforms employed, Facebook has proven to be the most effective tool for immediate crisis communication. It offers a broader platform for more detailed and interactive communication, serving as a valuable space for general public updates, discussions, and customer inquiries. This immediacy enables customers to make rapid decisions in response to changing electricity supply conditions. WhatsApp by contrast excels in capturing customers who have been affected by the service disruptions through the registration of complaints. It also gives customers a platform to check area

specific load management schedules. This enables the organization to immediately capture and react to those affected by the outages especially unplanned outages. LinkedIn on the other hand serves a more limited but complementary role in maintaining institutional visibility.

The third research question and objective sought to investigate whether crisis communication through social media was effective in minimizing the impact of the crisis to the organization and its stakeholders. It was discovered that the communication was effective in helping customers to plan their activities around service disruptions more effectively through the advance notices of power outages received via social media. It was also found to reduce customer frustration during outages. Some of the psychological stress that is frequently connected to these service outages has been reduced by the availability of fast and reliable information. However, others indicated that communication delays or discrepancies caused uncertainty, potentially exacerbating rather than mitigating the crisis's impact on these customers.

6.2 Recommendations

The recommendations are aimed at contributing to the optimization of the effectiveness and efficiency of information disseminated on social media platforms used by ZESCO Limited in crisis communication. In view of the findings the following are the recommendations made to ZESCO Management:

- I. Introduce social media monitoring tools such as Hootsuite, Meltwater to track customer feedback, identify emerging issues, and assess the public's emotional tone. This data can inform communication strategy and identify areas where more explanation or reassurance is needed.
- II. Implement a two-way communication mechanism across all platforms to enable real time and interactive engagement. This will enhance platform effectiveness.
- III. Regularly benchmark social media communication strategies against other African utility companies (e.g., Eskom in South Africa or KPLC in Kenya) to learn best practices and adapt successful innovations in impact mitigation.

6.3 Focus for Future Research

1. Impact of Two-Way Social Media Communication on Stakeholder Engagement

One area for future research topics could be how interactive or two-way communication systems (such as chatbots, live answers, and customer feedback loops) affect customer satisfaction, trust, and responsiveness during crises. The recent study highlighted a problem in one-way communication on platforms such as WhatsApp. Investigating the benefits and drawbacks of switching to a two-way paradigm may yield meaningful insights for enhancing communication outcomes. This would enable scholars and practitioners to better understand how organizational context, regulatory frameworks, and customer digital literacy influence the usefulness of social media in crisis situations.

2. Comparative Analysis Across Different Utility Providers

Future studies should examine the ways in which various energy utility firms in different African nations use social media to communicate and mitigate crises. A comparison of ZESCO Limited with comparable companies such as Kenya Power (Kenya) or Eskom (South Africa) can reveal creative solutions, regional difficulties, and best practices.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Questionnaire for ZESCO Limited customers



Dear respondent,

I am a final year student at the University of Lusaka pursuing a Master of Business Administration. I kindly request for your participation in completing this short questionnaire. My research title is “Assessing the Effectiveness of Social Media in Crisis Communication: A Case Study of ZESCO Limited, Lusaka”. Your insights will significantly contribute to the success of this research. All information is confidential and used strictly for academic purposes. Do not write your name on the questionnaire.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Gender:

Male Female

2. Age Group:

18–30 31–50 51 and above

3. Educational background

Primary Secondary Tertiary

4. Occupation

Employed Unemployed Business owner Student

5. Customer Type:

Residential Commercial Social (e.g School, church)

Section B: Perception Towards Social Media Channels

5. How do you usually receive updates from ZESCO during a crisis (e.g., power outages, load shedding)?
- Facebook WhatsApp LinkedIn Other (please specify):

6. Are you aware that ZESCO uses social media to communicate during crises (e.g., load shedding, system failures)?
- Yes No
7. Which social media platforms used by ZESCO are you familiar with? (Tick all that apply)
- Facebook WhatsApp LinkedIn Other (please specify):

8. How often do you see crisis-related updates (e.g., power outages, load shedding) from ZESCO on social media?
- Frequently Rarely Never
9. Please rate your agreement with the following statements regarding ZESCO's crisis communication on social media by ticking 'True' or 'False'.

Statement	True	False
A. Information shared via social media is timely and up to date.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Messages are clear and easy to understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. ZESCO's social media communication is consistent during crises.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. I trust the accuracy of information shared by ZESCO on social media.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. ZESCO provides frequent updates until the crisis is resolved.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. The platform allows for two-way communication (e.g., feedback, queries).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G. Social media allows for quick issue resolution or redirection.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
H. The platform is easily accessible and user-friendly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I. The platform used by ZESCO allows for broad reach to all affected customers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Statement	True	False
J. Social media is more effective than other forms of communication (e.g., TV, SMS, Radio).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section C: Effective Communication Channels

10. Do you follow any of ZESCO's social media platforms?

- Yes No

11. If yes, which platform(s) do you follow ZESCO on? (Select all that apply)

- Facebook WhatsApp LinkedIn Other (please specify):

12. On which social media channel do you frequently receive updates from ZESCO.

- Facebook WhatsApp LinkedIn Other (specify): _____

13. Which factor (s) do you consider the most important when evaluating the effectiveness of crisis related communication (e.g., load shedding, faults related power outages) on social media?

- Clarity (clear and easy to understand information)
- Timeliness (information is provided in a timely manner)
- Engagement (interactive communication).
- Credibility (trustworthy and reliable information)
- Responsiveness (timely response to queries and concerns)
- Accessibility (accessible and user-friendly)
- Emotional support (reduces anxiety and provides clear guidance on actions I should take)

14. Which social media channel (s) do you feel adequately addresses these factors?

- Facebook WhatsApp LinkedIn Other (specify):

Section D: Effectiveness of Crisis Communication

15. Has ZESCO's use of social media helped you better prepare for or respond to a power-related crisis?

- Yes No Not Sure

If yes, describe briefly: _____

16. To what extent do you agree that ZESCO's social media crisis communication reduces confusion or misinformation?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

17. Do you think ZESCO's crisis communication helps to reduce frustration in times of power crisis?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

End of Questionnaire

Thank you for your time and contribution!

Appendix II: Interview Guide for ZESCO Limited Staff

- Thank you for taking the time to meet today. My name is Falesi Phiri, and I am conducting a study titled 'Assessing the Effectiveness of Social Media in Crisis Communication: A Case Study of ZESCO Limited, Lusaka.'
- The purpose of this interview is to gather your insights and experiences regarding your social media crisis communication practices. Your responses will remain confidential and will help to improve the organisation's communication strategies.

Section 1: Customer Perceptions Toward Social Media Channels

1. General Perceptions:

- Based on your experience, how would you describe customers' general perceptions of the social media channels that you use during crisis situations?
- What specific feedback have you received from customers regarding the effectiveness of these channels?

2. Content and Clarity:

- How do you think the clarity and quality of the messages posted on your social media channels influence customer perceptions? Can you provide any examples?
- Do you think the language and visuals used in your posts resonate well with the target audience? In what ways?

3. Trust and Credibility:

- From your standpoint, how does the organization ensure that the information shared on social media is perceived as credible and trustworthy by customers?
- Have you noticed any trends in customer feedback that suggest trust issues or, conversely, a high level of confidence in the information provided?

Section 2: Identification of Effective Communication Channels

4. Channel Effectiveness:

- Which social media channels do you find most effective in reaching your stakeholders during crisis events, and why?

- How do various platforms (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp) differ in their effectiveness for crisis communication according to your observations?

5. Engagement and Interaction:

- Can you discuss any examples where a particular platform generated significant engagement or positive feedback during a crisis?
- How does the interactivity of a platform (for instance, comment sections and direct messaging) contribute to its effectiveness in crisis scenarios?

6. Platform-Specific Strengths and Weaknesses:

- What strengths and weaknesses have you observed for each of the key platforms you use?
- Are there any channels that you believe require more attention or a revised strategy to better serve stakeholder needs during emergencies?

Section 3: Effectiveness of Crisis Communication in Minimizing Crisis Impact

7. Impact Mitigation:

- In your experience, how effective has your crisis communication been in mitigating the negative impacts of crises on the organization and its stakeholders?
- Can you share any specific instances where the communication strategy clearly helped to reduce panic or provided effective guidance during a crisis?

8. Feedback and Outcome Measurement:

- What metrics or feedback mechanisms does the organization use to assess the impact of its crisis communication efforts? How reliable are these measures?
- Have you observed any improvements in stakeholder confidence or reductions in negative outcomes (e.g., operational disruptions, public criticism) that could be attributed to your social media communication efforts?

9. Suggestions for Improvement:

- Based on your experience, what changes or improvements would you recommend for your crisis communication strategy using social media?
 - Are there any best practices from other organizations that you believe the corporation should consider adopting?
-

Closing

- Do you have any additional comments or insights regarding your social media crisis communication practices that we haven't covered today?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add about how you can further enhance your crisis communication efforts for better stakeholder outcomes?

Thank you very much for your time and valuable input.