



IRSTI 19.71

Article

<https://doi.org/10.32523/2616-7174-2024-148-3-85-99>

## Crisis communication and public trust: insights from social media use in Kazakhstan

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**Abstract.** The study presents the results of a quantitative investigation into the behavior of the public in Kazakhstan during a crisis. Two hundred two participants were surveyed as part of the study to determine what elements affect the public's opinion of an organisation's crisis response and what influences the public's trust in organisations during a crisis. Survey data were analysed to ascertain how the public's use of social media influences their opinion of an organisation's response to a crisis and the elements that affect public trust in organisations during a crisis. The study's conclusions significantly impact organizations hoping to foster public trust and successfully convey their crisis responses. This study is critical because it sheds light on how the Kazakhstani populace behaves during a crisis. The findings can assist organizations in communicating their responses to the public and fostering public trust during a crisis. Additionally, the study offers insightful data regarding how the public uses social media in times of crisis, which can assist companies in adjusting their communication plans to reach the audience better.

**Keywords:** crisis, public behaviour, trust, social media, survey, quantitative study.

### Introduction

In a time of extraordinary connectivity and instantaneous information sharing, organisations must understand the dynamics of crisis communication to maintain public trust. This study explores the particulars of general behaviour in Kazakhstan during times of crisis, revealing the complex interactions between public perception, organisational responses, and social media. The goal of the study's backdrop and context is to understand better how Kazakhstani citizens behave in times of crisis, with a particular emphasis on how social media use affects such behaviour. The study polled 202 participants using a quantitative research design to acquire information on the elements influencing public perceptions of an organisation's crisis

management and the elements influencing public confidence in those organisations at such times.

The study's main goals were to find out how social media affects how the public views an organisation's crisis response and to determine what factors are most important in fostering or undermining public confidence in organisations in crisis.

The study is important because it can teach organisations about the critical elements that influence public opinion and trust in crisis. Organisations must comprehend the dynamics of public perception and trust as they work to navigate and handle crises effectively. Coombs [1] talks about how crucial it is to act quickly and decisively in the early phases of a crisis. The premise is that organisations have a limited window of opportunity to address an issue before public attitudes harden in the era of social media and instant communication. As a result, the initial hours of a crisis are critical, and a belated response may significantly affect how the public views the issue.

It is anticipated that the results reached from the examination of survey data will have applications for companies looking to improve public trust and strengthen their crisis communication plans.

Understanding the complex interaction between social media use, public behaviour, and organisational crisis response in Kazakhstan is the focus of this research.

The study aims to ascertain the factors that impact the public's perception of an organisation's crisis response and determine what influences the public's trust in organisations in times of crisis. The research offers a critical examination of Kazakhstani citizens' actions during times of crisis, with a focus on the impact of social media. The research results would provide practical advice to institutions seeking to build public confidence and efficiently convey their crisis management measures, hence assisting in creating more robust crisis management plans. By analysing the variables impacting public opinion and trust during crises in the Kazakhstani context, this study aims to close a significant knowledge gap.

## Literature review

A crucial and essential component of crisis management as a whole is crisis communication. In times of disaster or emergency, it stands for the planned and strategic information sharing between an organisation and its stakeholders. This theoretical framework emphasizes how vital good communication is to reducing the possible harmful effects of a crisis and building resilience both inside an organisation and outside of it.

Crisis communication promptly and accurately informs internal and external stakeholders about events or situations that could jeopardize the organisation's operations, reputation, or general well-being. It goes beyond just disseminating information; it includes managing messaging strategically to meet different audiences' changing requirements, concerns, and expectations.

Key theoretical frameworks have significantly contributed to the understanding of crisis communication over the years.

Establishing and maintaining credibility and trust is essential during any crisis. Building and maintaining credibility and trust is related to effective crisis communication. Stakeholders in

a crisis, such as the general public, staff members, and investors, look for trustworthy, honest, and transparent information. An organisation's communication style shapes perceptions, and trust is essential for surviving and emerging from a crisis. Barton [2] stresses the value of being ready and able to prevent crises. This can entail discussing how companies can foresee future emergencies, put preventative measures in place, and create reaction plans.

Complexity, ambiguity, and elevated emotions are hallmarks of crises. In this turbulent climate, crisis communication is a navigational aid that aids stakeholders in understanding the issue, the organisation's response, and the actions being done to address the crisis. Confusion and worry are lessened by clear and effective communication, which strengthens the reaction.

Crisis communication goes beyond just disseminating information; it also entails interacting with stakeholders. This interaction resolves pressing issues and reaffirms the organisation's dedication to responsibility and accountability. A proactive attitude to problem-solving and recognition of stakeholders' concerns are essential components of crisis communication efficacy. Using a stakeholder approach, businesses design their communication strategy with the interests and concerns of several stakeholders, such as the public, investors, staff, and consumers [3].

The dynamic character of crises is acknowledged by crisis communication theory. It highlights how important it is for organisations to have flexible communication strategies, allowing them to respond to fresh information and modify their messaging as necessary. Resilience and readiness for future organisational challenges are enhanced by drawing lessons from prior crises and applying them to communication strategies. Pearson and Clair [4] contest the idea that crises are only bad things that happen to people. They contend that crises can also present chances for organisational development, learning, and transformation. Organisations might take advantage of favourable results by rephrasing a situation.

Fearn-Banks [5] underlines how crucial it is to plan your strategic communications before, during, and after a crisis. This could entail creating communication plans, figuring out stakeholders' demands, and being transparent. In today's world, media and technology play a crucial part in crisis communication. A systematic approach to media relations is necessary due to the quick distribution of information across multiple platforms. Furthermore, social media's presence increases the need for prompt and accurate communication because false information can spread quickly and affect public opinion.

The findings of a quantitative investigation of the actions of the people in Kazakhstan during a crisis are presented in this research. Two hundred two persons were surveyed as part of the study to determine what elements affect the public's opinion of an organisation's crisis response and what influences the public's trust in organisations during a crisis.

Given the increasing frequency of natural catastrophes and the expanding impact of digital communication platforms, it is critical to comprehend the dynamics of crisis communication. This study investigates the nuances of organisational reactions and public views during crises by drawing the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What aspects of a crisis in Kazakhstan majorly impact the public's trust in organisations?

**RQ2:** What effects does the public's use of social media have on how an organisation is perceived by the public in Kazakhstan during a crisis, and what conclusions can be drawn from

the survey results to help organisations effectively communicate their crisis response plans to the public?

This study is critical because it sheds light on how the Kazakhstani populace behaves during a crisis. The study questions aim to ascertain how the public's use of social media influences their opinion of an organisation's response to a crisis and what elements affect the public's trust in organisations during a crisis. The study's findings can assist organisations in communicating their reaction to a crisis and fostering public trust in the process. Additionally, the study offers insightful data regarding how the public uses social media in times of crisis, which can assist companies in customizing their communication plans to reach the public more successfully.

## Methodology

The quantitative nature of the study design aims to explain events by gathering numerical data and analysing it using statistical techniques [6]. The study looks into how the public feels about public sector institutions, how they behave on social media during crises, and how they feel about crisis solutions. The online poll, administered through the [www.surveo.com](http://www.surveo.com) platform, was directed towards regular individuals with no prior experience with crisis management.

Two hundred two persons were chosen as the sample size. Practical limitations, statistical power, or resource considerations might have impacted the sample size selection. A combination of targeted outreach and convenience sampling was used to choose the participants. The survey was shared on Facebook and in several active groups, and older respondents received direct emails or messages.

The questionnaire has twelve questions, some of which ask about personal details. Three categories of questions are presented: social media use, crisis communication response, and perceptions of public sector organisations. The research objectives and current crisis management theories were considered when designing the questions. Five people with varying ages and backgrounds participated in the testing phase, which resulted in changes to two questions and the resolution of technical problems.

The completed and signed ethics form proves the study complies with ethical guidelines. The respondents gave their informed consent and consented to participate in the study. Consent papers were signed, and participants received assurances of confidentiality for interviews. Upon completion, participants will also receive a copy of the paper.

Facebook and targeted group postings were used with an online survey platform ([www.surveo.com](http://www.surveo.com)) to collect data. Elderly participants were sent direct emails and messages. The poll was conducted during two weeks, which might be deemed brief. The survey acknowledged difficulties related to the restricted age range of its participants.

Difficulties were encountered during the data collection process, such as timing problems, content-related issues with two questions, and technological failures with mobile phone access. The survey instrument was modified to solve these issues.

Mathematically based techniques will be employed to examine the gathered data. The results will be displayed using charts and diagrams using descriptive statistics, giving a concise picture of the attitudes and actions of the respondents during times of crisis.

Key findings include a percentage of participants supporting a given crisis solution and examining the relationship between response preferences and demographic characteristics. Regarding social media use, how often and what kind of social media are used during crises? It is identifying trends in the use of social media by various age groups. The survey resulted in assessing respondents' opinions of public sector organisations in crisis investigation of the variables affecting these organisations' levels of trust and mistrust.

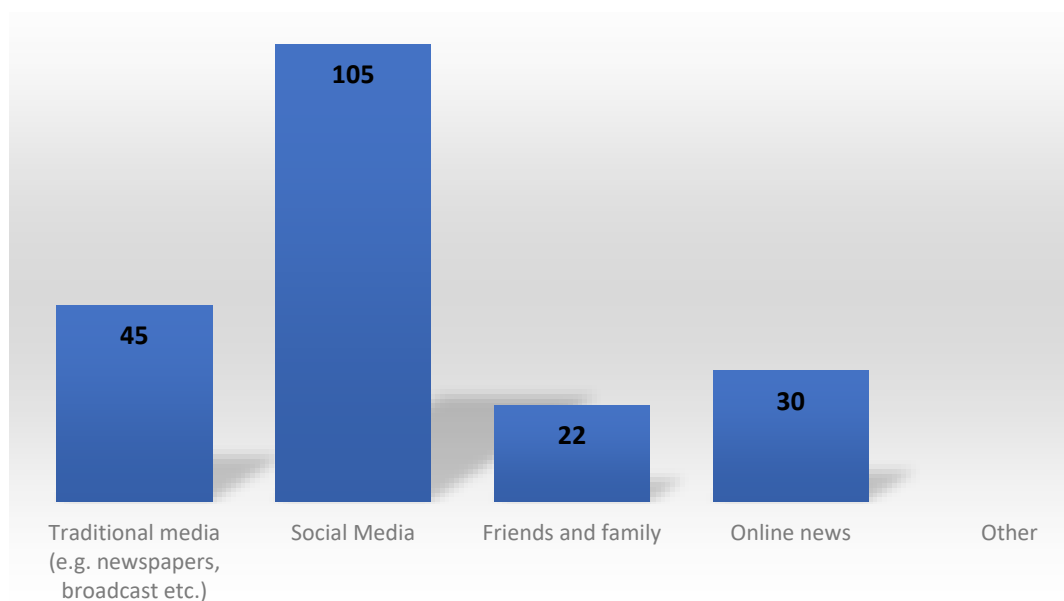
The study admits its limitations, which include a narrow age range and a brief data-gathering period. Because the poll is online, older generations may be less likely to participate, which could lead to a skewed age distribution among respondents. These restrictions should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

## Results and analysis

This section discusses the survey findings to determine the importance of crisis communication and social media use in Kazakhstan's public sector during the crisis.

Of the 202 participants, 59% are female and 41% are male. The majority of responders, or 73%, are between 18 and 35, while only 7% of participants are older than 55.

Question: In an emergency, where do you get news?



The question aims to ascertain the primary media outlets that the general population uses for news or breaking events. The findings show that a sizable portion of respondents — nearly half of them, or 51.72% – visit social media sites to stay updated (Figure 1). The media is the second-largest information source. 22.17% of news comes from traditional media, more than 14.7% from online sources. Accordingly, social media is the most influential news platform during a crisis. Traditional media continues to dominate, although more people are turning to news websites for information.

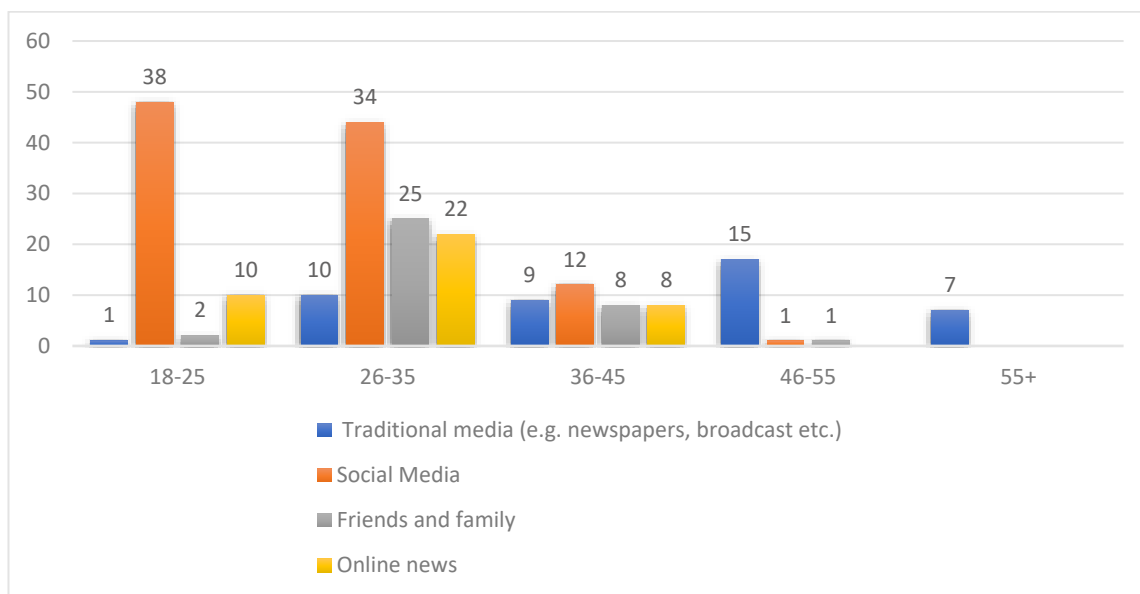


Figure 2. Media channel usage by age

Young people tend to utilize social media extensively; among those between 18 and 35, 48.65% indicated that digital media was their primary source of information (Figure 2). By contrast, 84.62% of senior citizens (over 46) use traditional media. The middle-aged group (36–45 years old) is not represented in the data meaningfully because their preferences are evenly spread across all channels. One could argue that conventional media still has a place in society, even though young people mainly obtain their news from social media.

Question: How much can you count on an involved organisation to act quickly in the event of an emergency?

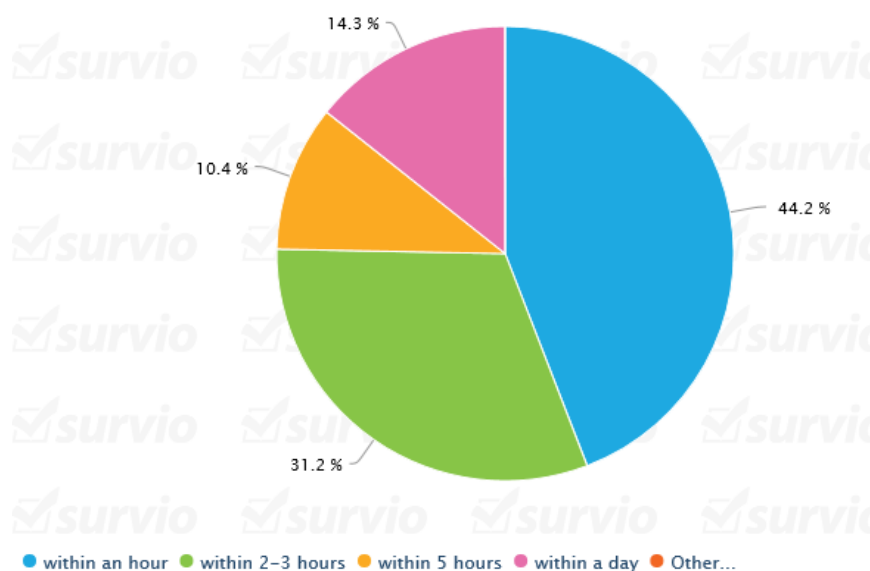


Figure 3. The public's expectation of prompt action in an emergency

Being swift is one of the most crucial first steps in handling a crisis [7]. The inquiry seeks to determine the ideal speed at which to respond to a catastrophe. The findings show that when a crisis arises, people anticipate hearing from an organisation within the first several hours (Figure 3). However, the majority of participants (31.2%) expect an organisation's comment within two to three hours, and 44.2% of respondents like to see a response within an hour. Nonetheless, it is evident from the data that organisations are most likely to reply within the first three hours. Social media's rapid growth may be the reason for the public's high expectations, as it validates the idea that during a crisis, "Golden hours become Golden minutes."

Question: Please provide a ranking from 1 to 5. What is the significance of having an organisation representative there at the scene of a crisis, including fatalities?

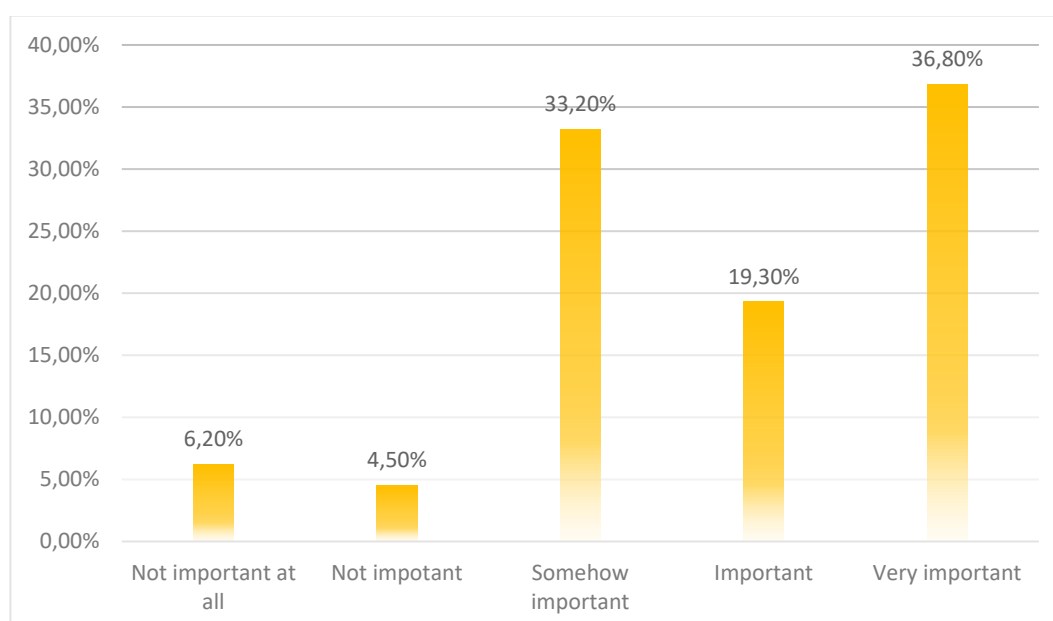


Figure 4. The significance of having someone present at the scene of a crisis

According to the question's results, a lot of people believe that having an organisation representative on a site is crucial. While not all respondents think it is crucial, the majority of respondents (89.3%) would rather see someone from an involved organisation. A spokesperson from the organisation is crucial for media briefings during a crisis, according to many writers [8], and experts even go so far as to suggest sending someone to the site. The questionnaire supports expert opinion and theory.

Question: Who manages crises the best?

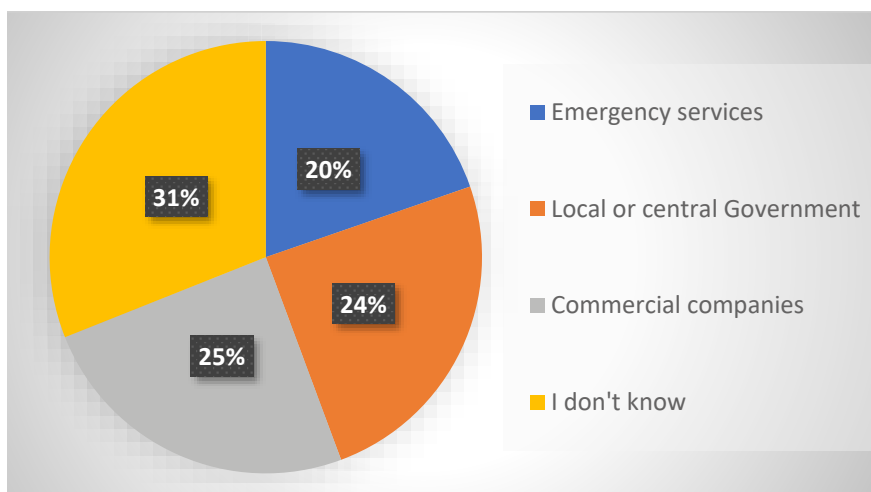


Figure 5. Crisis-management-savvy organisations

All sorts of organisations yield comparable answers to the inquiry. Generally, organisations with the best crisis management are considered commercial businesses and local/central government, with 25% and 24%, respectively (Figure 5). Additionally, emergency services are close to them (20% for crisis handling efficiency).

Question: How much do you think you can trust news from social media

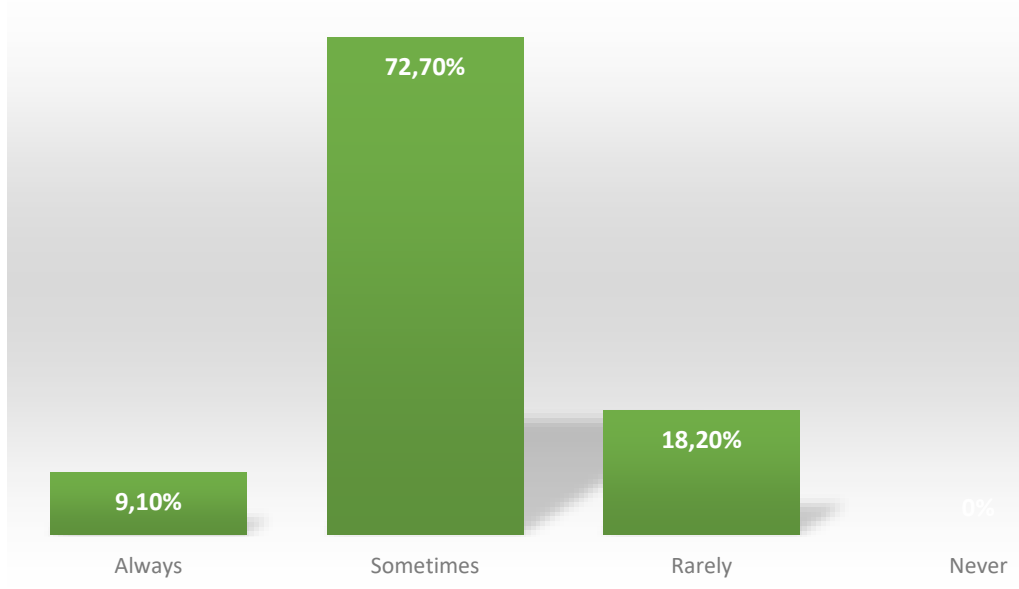


Figure 6. Social media users' trust in news sources

The question aims to determine the credibility of social media news. According to the findings, most users do not place a high value on news on social media. The most significant percentage of all responses, 72.2%, comes from respondents who said they occasionally trusted them. The



findings address the question of the veracity of news on social media, refute ideas that contend social media is unreliable, and present experts' opinions on the subject (Figure 6). When a crisis arises, there may not be enough time to get information out quickly, yet rumours are rampant and easily spread via social media [9].

Question: During the crisis or issue, are organisations willing to engage in social media discourse with the public and receptive to their opinions?

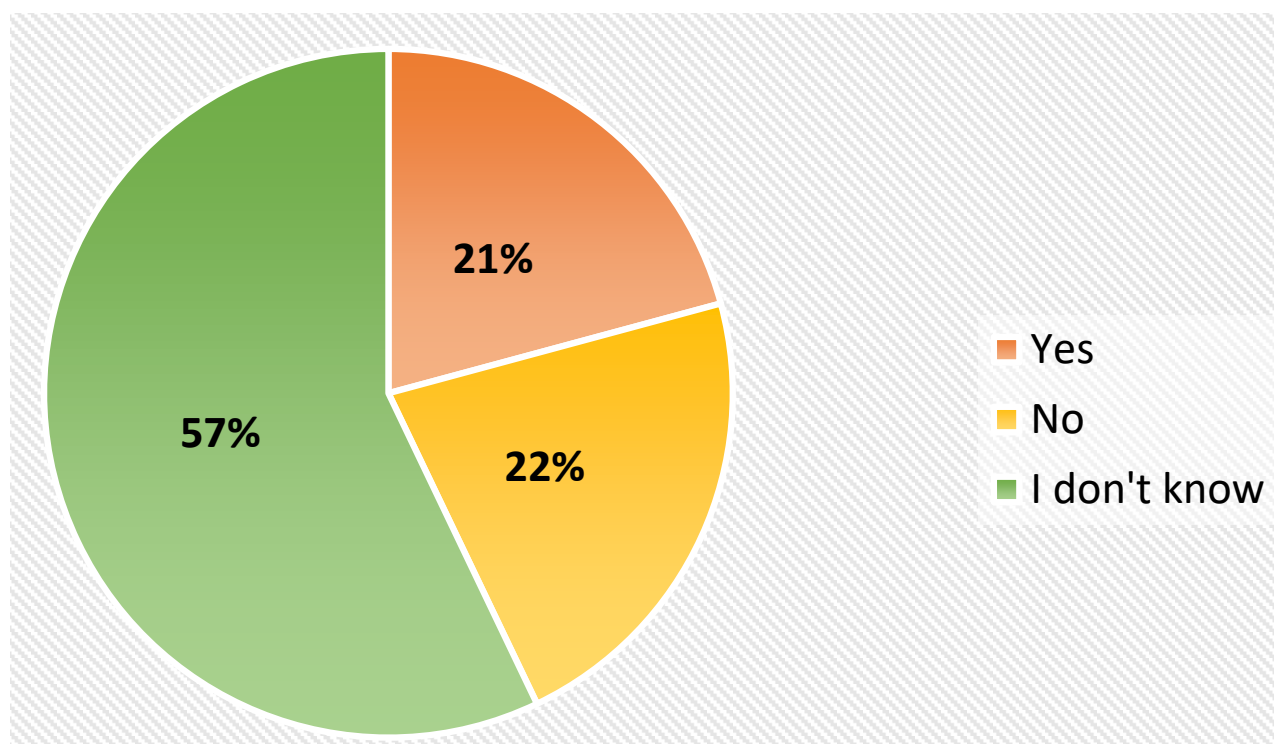


Figure 7. Public perception of organisations' transparency on social media in times of crisis

Regarding the public's perception of organisations' willingness to communicate with them in times of crisis, over half of respondents (57%) are unsure of the answer, and the percentage of respondents who said, "Yes, they are open" and "No, they are not ready to have a dialogue" were similar, at 22% and 21%, respectively (Figure 7). When asked if there is two-way communication between organisations and the public on social media during a crisis, 63.1% of respondents from Kazakhstan said "No". This begs the question of how symmetrical or asymmetrical this communication is [10].

Question: Which organisations do you use social media to follow?

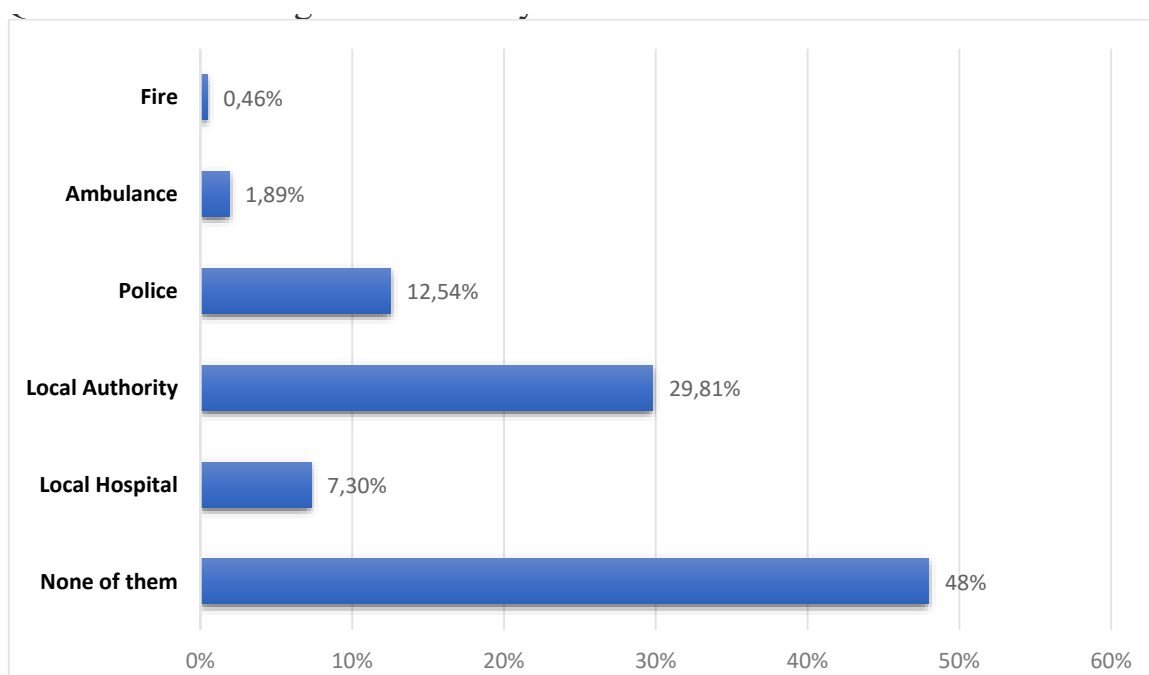


Figure 8. Social media accounts that public sector organisations follow

Which public sector organisations have social media subscriptions is shown in Figure 8. On digital channels, nearly half of the respondents (48%) have little interest in public sector organisations. With 29.31% of the total, local authorities are the most followed, followed by the police with 12.5% and the local hospital with 29.8%. The fact that individuals typically follow emergency services when something needs to be done in their community or nation may be the cause for their lack of interest.

Question: What are your initial thoughts when you see an emergency?

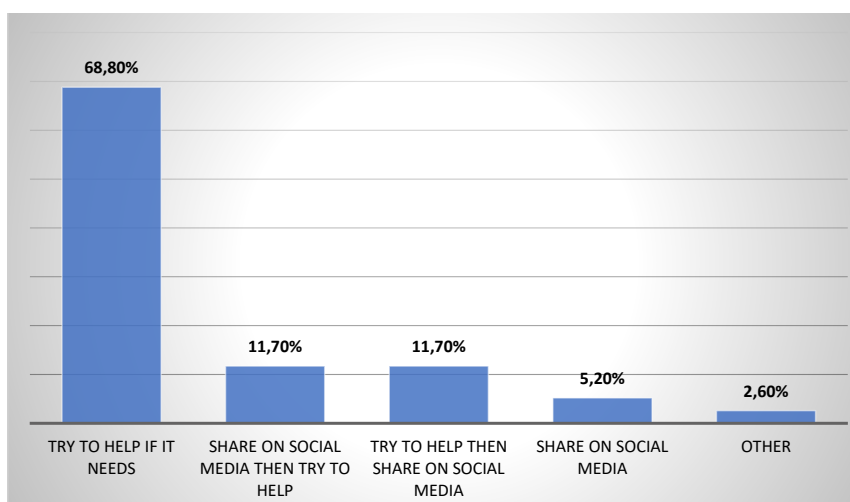


Figure 9. The public's initial responses to emergencies

This inquiry aims to find out what people would do in an emergency. Sixty-eight per cent of respondents said they would only assist rather than post on social media (Figure 9). Regarding social media sharing, 21.4% of participants split their responses evenly between “Share on social media then try to help” and “Try to help then share on social media.” Only 5.2% of participants said they would solely share on social media. The outcome validates the notion that everyone can become a source of knowledge [11] and the experts' assessment that the amount of user-generated content should rise. However, because respondents want to improve their responses, the number of people who will “Try to help” in real life may be substantially lower [12].

Question: How likely are you to post something favourable or unfavourable from a scene on social media?

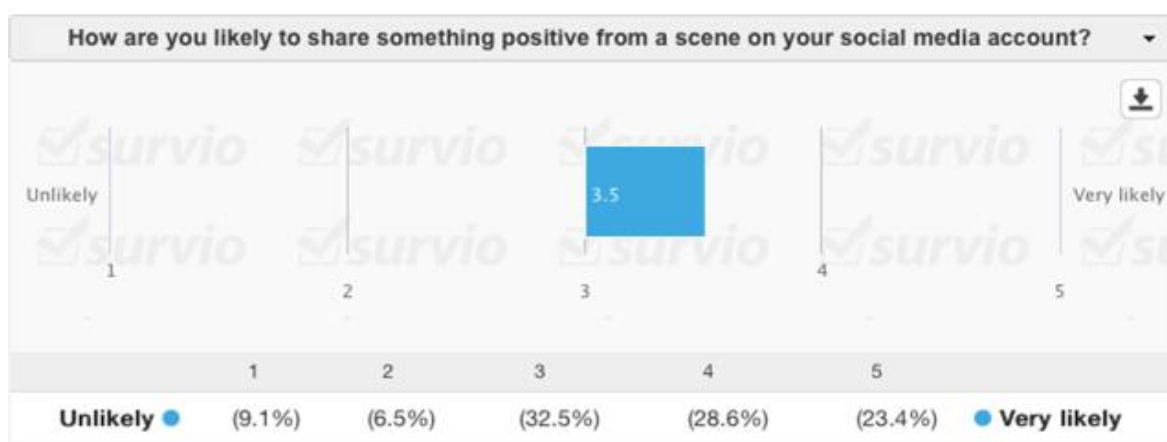


Figure 10. The propensity of users to spread encouraging posts

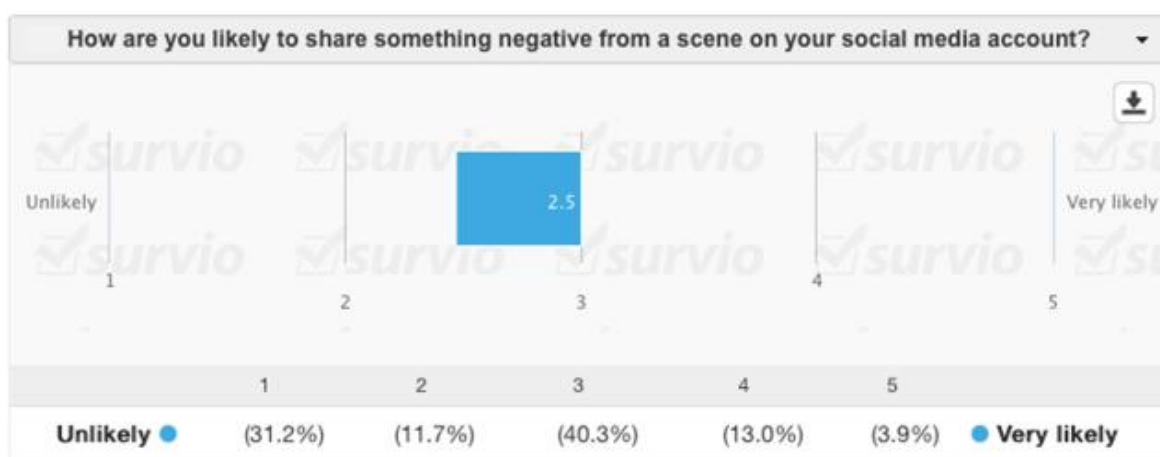


Figure 11. The propensity of users to spread unfavourable posts

Two other inquiries aim to uncover how people participate in “citizen journalism” and the probability of disseminating favourable or unfavourable news. The findings show that there are

differences in the general tendency for the two categories of news. Of all participants, Figure 10 demonstrates that 52% are inclined to share positive news on social media, whereas only 16.9% are likely to share negative news (Figure 11). However, bad news is frequently shared on social media and predominates in media outlets. In contrast to neutral or positive news, stories with a negative tone are more favoured, according to a study by Trussler and Soroka [13]. This raises the possibility that poll respondents were dishonest and biased. More research should address this.

## Conclusion

According to the study, a sizable per cent of participants rely on social media sites to get emergency news. The importance of timely communication is highlighted by the public's high expectations for a prompt reaction during a crisis, with 44.2% anticipating a response within an hour.

Most respondents (89.3%) believe that having an organisation representative on the scene during a crisis is necessary, consistent with the idea that a spokesperson is essential for effective crisis communication. The perception of the most effective crisis management is shared by commercial businesses and local/ central government; 32.9% of respondents believe that the former is the most adept at handling crises.

According to the study, 72.2% of respondents said they only occasionally believe the news they get on social media. This indicates a lack of firm trust in this type of information. The public is still determining how willingly organisations will engage in conversation on social media during a crisis; in Kazakhstan, 63.1% of respondents think there is no two-way communication on social media during a crisis.

To sum up, the study draws some suggestions and recommendations:

- Considering the varying preferences of age groups, organisations should adjust their communication plans to take into account social media's prominence during times of crisis.
- The research highlights the significance of promptly taking action during the initial hours of a crisis. Crisis communication plans should align with public expectations, especially given how quickly social media is gaining traction.
- Upholding public confidence in times of crisis depends on having a representative present. Establishing a spokesperson's presence can help an organisation communicate more effectively and with greater credibility.
- Companies need to handle the issues of news on social media being believable. A concerted effort should be made to counter the spread of rumours by supplying timely and correct information.
- In times of crisis, organisations should strive to project an image of being amenable to social media conversation. Open and honest lines of communication can increase public confidence.
- Organisations must comprehend the role of the public during catastrophes to realize that most respondents choose to assist above publishing on social media.

– Companies need to be mindful of possible biases in user-generated content and carry out more studies to find out what influences people's propensity to spread good news instead of bad news.

There are some limitations and prospects for further research. The study recognizes certain limitations, such as a restricted duration for gathering data and an uneven age distribution among participants. Subsequent studies may examine a broader spectrum of age groups and delve deeper into the elements affecting users' actions on social media during emergencies. Furthermore, eliminating biases in user-generated content and evaluating how cultural context affects crisis communication will lead to a more thorough comprehension of public attitudes and actions.

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### **Дағдарыс кезіндегі коммуникация және қоғамдық сенім: Қазақстандағы әлеуметтік желі қолдану тәжірибесі**

**Аңдатпа.** Зерттеуде дағдарыс кезінде Қазақстан қоғамының мінез-құлқына жүргізілген сандық талдау нәтижелері ұсынылған. Зерттеу барысында қоғамда кез келген ұйымның дағдарысқа қарсы әрекетіне қатысты пікіріне әсер ететін басты факторларды, сондай-ақ дағдарыс кезінде халықтың ұйымдарға деген сеніміне не әсер ететінін анықтау мақсатында 202 қатысушы арасында сауалнама жүргізілді.

Сауалнама нәтижесі қоғамда әлеуметтік желіні қолдану деңгейі адамдардың ұйымның дағдарысқа қарсы әрекетін бағалауға және дағдарыс кезінде ұйымдарға деген қоғамдық сенімге әсер ететін факторларды анықтау үшін талданды. Зерттеу нәтижелері қоғамның сенімін нығайтып, дағдарысқа қарсы іс-шараларды сәтті орындауға ұмтылатын ұйымдар үшін айтарлықтай маңызға ие. Зерттеудің жаңашылдығы оның кез келген дағдарыс кезінде Қазақстан халқы қалай әрекет ететіні жайлы жаңа деректерді ұсынуымен ерекшеленеді. Зерттеу нәтижелері ұйымдарға дағдарыс кезінде жұртшылықпен тиімді жұмыс жүргізуге және сенімді нығайту үшін коммуникация саласындағы стратегияларын жетілдіруде пайдалы болуы мүмкін. Сонымен қатар, зерттеу дағдарыс кезінде қоғамның әлеуметтік желіні қалай қолданатыны туралы құнды деректер береді, бұл компанияларға аудиториямен тиімді байланыс орнатуға арналған жоспарларын жаңартуға мүмкіндік береді.

**Түйін сөздер:** дағдарыс, әлеуметтік мінез-құлық, сенім, әлеуметтік желі, сауалнама, сандық талдау.

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### **Кризисные коммуникации и общественное доверие: опыт использования социальных сетей в Казахстане**

**Аннотация.** В данном исследовании представлены результаты количественного анализа поведения общественности в Казахстане в условиях кризиса. В рамках исследования опрошено 202 участника с целью выявить факторы, влияющие на мнение общественности о реакции организации на кризис, а также определить, что влияет на доверие общественности к организациям в период кризиса.

Полученные данные были анализированы для выяснения, как использование социальных сетей общественностью влияет на их восприятие реакции организации на кризис, а также для выявления факторов, влияющих на общественное доверие к организациям в период кризиса. Выводы исследования оказывают значительное воздействие на организации,

стремящиеся укрепить доверие общественности и успешно донести свои антикризисные меры. Это исследование имеет критическое значение, так как оно проясняет, какое поведение демонстрирует население Казахстана в условиях кризиса. Полученные результаты могут быть полезны для организаций в совершенствовании своих коммуникационных стратегий для эффективной передачи своей реакции общественности и укрепления доверия в период кризиса. Кроме того, исследование предоставляет ценные данные о том, как общественность использует социальные сети в период кризиса, что может помочь компаниям адаптировать свои коммуникационные планы для более эффективного взаимодействия с аудиторией.

**Ключевые слова:** кризис, общественное поведение, доверие, социальные сети, опрос, количественный анализ.

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