

Original Article

# Mediating Crisis: The Role of Mass Media in Local Government Crisis Communication Plan

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**Abstract** - Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study examines the mass media's role in the local government crisis communication plan of Kidapawan City. Guided by four research questions, it investigates: (1) the primary function of mass media during crises; (2) the role of local government units (LGUs) in coordinating with media; (3) the challenges LGUs face in this coordination; and (4) how media influence public perception and behavior. Key informant interviews with LGU officials and media practitioners were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed nine major themes. A prominent theme is the dual-platform strategy, wherein radio and social media enhance message reach and immediacy. Mass media also emerged as a source of emotional and educational support, providing practical guidance and psychological reassurance. Coordination between LGUs and media is largely institutionalized, yet hindered by challenges such as political media bias and information overload during crises. The media's participatory role was evident through on-the-ground interviews and social media engagement, allowing the public to co-construct crisis narratives. These findings supported the Uses and Gratification Theory, which explains how the audience relies on media for information and emotional needs, and the Agenda-Setting Theory, which highlights the media's role in shaping public focus. Situational Crisis Communication Theory contextualizes LGU communication strategies based on stakeholder expectations. Overall, mass media function as information disseminators and strategic partners in crisis governance, fostering public trust, responsiveness, and resilience.

**Keywords** - Humanities and social sciences, Crisis communication, Crisis management in Local Government Unit (LGU), mass media, Strategic communication, Media collaboration, Philippines.

## 1. Introduction

The Local Government Units (LGUs) in the Philippines continue to face challenges in effectively utilizing mass media platforms to disseminate timely, accurate, and credible information during a crisis. Diana and Ayuningtas [1] emphasized that crises often emerge suddenly and can spread rapidly, with verified and unverified information reaching mass audiences within minutes. This accelerated flow of information presents both opportunities and risks for LGUs, particularly when misinformation spreads faster than official advisories. Philippine Institute for Development Studies [2] underscores the urgent need for LGUs to strengthen their crisis and risk communication efforts through digitalization and technology upgrades to prepare them better for emergencies. Rezeki et al. [3] highlight the need for LGUs to adopt comprehensive communication frameworks that align with the media landscape, address community needs, and effectively engage both traditional and digital platforms in times of crisis.

The Philippines, situated within the Pacific Ring of Fire and the typhoon belt, is globally recognized as one of the most

disaster-prone countries[14][35]. Natural Calamities, from earthquakes and volcanic eruptions to frequent typhoons, threaten public safety and governance. Within this hazard-prone context, effective crisis communication becomes not just a function of public information but a lifeline that shapes risk perception, preparedness behavior, and coordinated community response [34].

Given the Philippines' heightened exposure to natural hazards, the need for localized and responsive communication systems becomes even more urgent [35]. While national agencies establish broad directives, it is at the local level where crisis communication efforts are most immediate and impactful. Since the enactment of Republic Act 7160, or the Local Government Code of the Philippines, Local Government Units (LGUs) have played a pivotal role in crisis response with mandates encompassing the delivery of basic services, emergency relief, healthcare, and public information dissemination [4] However, despite their strategic functions, the contributions of LGUs often remain underappreciated, partly due to limited access to localized information. The Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement (PICE) [5]



emphasized that civic engagement relies heavily on effective information flow. At the same time, Vandrevale [6] highlighted the centrality of robust communication systems in fostering community participation during crises. Rezeki et al. [3] further stressed the importance of public relations strategies facilitating citizen involvement in decision-making processes.

This reality underscores the fundamental role of mass media as both a partner and a watchdog in democratic societies. The media is considered the “fourth estate,” a cornerstone of democratic governance due to its ability to hold power to account and inform citizens of government actions, according to Bhattacharyya & Hodler [7]. Holbert [8] posits that a core democratic function of the news is to enable citizens to become informed, while Kovach and Rosentiel [9] stress that a functioning democracy relies on the media’s ability to provide information essential for self-governance. More than a vehicle for state messaging, the media must serve as a platform for pluralistic and balanced discourse, promote transparency, and amplify the voices of diverse publics in shaping government priorities [10]. This is especially relevant in crisis communication, where information accuracy, clarity, and timing can have life-saving consequences [10]. Communication is a relational process that shapes human response [11]. An organization’s inability to manage messaging proficiently during emergencies can aggravate crises and erode public trust [12].

Furthermore, while the Literature acknowledges the value of media in disseminating warnings and updates during a crisis, few empirical studies have examined how dual-platform strategies, such as the simultaneous use of radio and social media, enhance or hinder crisis communication efforts at the grassroots level, particularly in a developing context. This gap is especially salient in areas where digital connectivity coexists with a longstanding reliance on traditional broadcast media, such as radio, creating hybrid information ecosystems that demand nuanced communicative approaches [36]. Moreover, the evolving role of media, not only as transmitters of information but also as emotional support agents, participatory framers, and facilitators of community mobilization, remains underexplored within Southeast Asian disaster governance scholarship [3].

This study, therefore, addresses this empirical and contextual void by exploring the role of mass media in the crisis communication planning of local governments, with a specific focus on Kidapawan City, a locality recurrently impacted by earthquakes and severe weather disturbances. Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, this research investigates how government-media coordination, dual-platform dissemination, and community feedback mechanisms intersect to shape the crisis communication ecosystem. By foregrounding the perspectives of key informants from both government and media institutions, this

study offers a context-specific, experience-driven understanding of mass media’s integrative and mediating role in disaster response governance. In grounding the investigation, it explores four key questions: (1) What is the role of mass media during crises? (2) How do LGUs coordinate with the media? (3) What challenges hinder this coordination? Moreover, (4) How does the media influence public perception and behavior during crises?

## 2. Review Related Literature

In the Philippines, recent history has shown how *ineffective communication during disasters* has led to catastrophic outcomes, magnifying the human and economic toll. Crisis Communication, therefore, plays a critical role in mitigating the impact of such emergencies. Coombs [10] defines a crisis as the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens stakeholders’ expectations and significantly disrupts an organization’s operations. While Seegar et al [13] characterized crisis as a distinct unexpected and non-routine event rooted within an organization-based event or series of events, which creates a high level of uncertainty and threat. Both definitions emphasize that crises are distinct events with severe, potentially long-term impacts that require immediate responses [12].

Between 1990 and 2019, one of the most catastrophic earthquakes to occur in the Philippines was the 1990 Luzon earthquake, with a magnitude of 7.8, which caused widespread devastation across northern and central Luzon [15]—resulted in the collapse of infrastructure, death of approximately 1,621 individuals, thousands of injuries, and displacement of more than 100,000 people [16-17]. The estimated economic loss reached \$369 billion, underscoring the socioeconomic impact [18].

More recent disasters have further underscored the critical role of effective communication. During the 2011 *Typhoon Sendong* in Cagayan de Oro and Iligan, many residents were caught off guard due to the lack of adequate warning systems [19]. A year later, *Typhoon Pablo* caused widespread damage in Mindanao, exacerbated by insufficient community preparedness and a lack of coordinated messaging from government agencies. The communication gap became evident during *Typhoon Yolanda in 2013*, where thousands perished in Leyte largely due to public misunderstanding of the term “storm surge” used in official advisories [20]. The inability to translate technical meteorological terms into locally understood concepts revealed a systemic breakdown in risk communication. This systematic breakdown became evident during major typhoons, where warnings, although technically accurate, were not effectively communicated to vulnerable populations. For instance, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) defines storm surge (*daluyong ng bagyo*) as an abnormal rise in sea level due to tropical cyclone

winds and pressure, knowledge that, if communicated clearly, could have saved lives [21].

A similar challenge was observed in October 2019 when a series of earthquakes struck Kidapawan City and surrounding areas in Cotabato Province, with magnitudes ranging from 6.3 to 6.6 on October 16, 29, and 31. These seismic events, classified as an earthquake swarm, resulted in significant destruction to residential and commercial structures, public facilities, and essential infrastructure. The earthquakes led to numerous casualties, injuries, and the displacement of thousands of residents. Among the most severely affected areas was Kidapawan City, where damage was extensive and emergency services were heavily mobilized. These events underscored the urgent need for robust crisis communication mechanisms at the local government level. In particular, the role of mass media, especially radio and social media, was crucial in disseminating timely and accurate information, coordinating emergency response, and promoting community resilience during the disaster [22-23].

More recently, in December 2023, Mindanao experienced a 7.6 Magnitude earthquake that struck Hinatuan Municipality in Surigao Del Sur Province, Caraga Region, Mindanao, southern Philippines. According to the Disaster Response Operations Monitoring and Information Center (DSWD DROMIC) and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), nearly 1,800 people have been displaced, approximately 400,000 affected, and 2,279 houses damaged across Caraga and Davao Regions [24].

In crisis settings, media and local government units play a pivotal role in shaping public understanding and promoting resilience through coordinated communication efforts and the timely dissemination of information, as noted by Marx et al. [32]. However, historical failures in Philippine disaster communication, such as those during Typhoons *Sendong*, *Pablo*, and *Yolanda*, reveal critical gaps, including the inability to localize technical terms and a lack of timely warnings. These lapses have led to catastrophic consequences, underscoring the life-saving importance of effective risk communication. Local examples reinforce this urgency: the 2019 earthquake swarm in Cotabato, especially in Kidapawan City, exposed vulnerabilities in emergency messaging. Similarly, the 2023 7.6 magnitude earthquake in Mindanao displaced and affected hundreds of thousands. In both cases, radio and social media delivered crisis updates and coordinated responses. These incidents underscore local government units (LGUs) need to establish robust, inclusive, and localized communication systems that prioritize accuracy, clarity, and community engagement during emergencies.

To fully understand how such an inclusive and localized system functions in practice, particularly in high-risk settings, it is essential to ground the inquiry within robust theoretical

perspectives. This study is grounded in three interrelated communication theories that explain the complex role of mass media in local government crisis communication: Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), Agenda-Setting Theory, and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). *As proposed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, Uses and Gratification Theory* explains how audiences actively seek media to meet needs such as information, emotional support, and social connection, particularly during crises. It highlights why citizens turn to both radio and social media for timely and relevant updates [30].

Agenda-setting theory, introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972), demonstrates how the media influence public focus by prioritizing specific issues. In disaster contexts, coordinated media-government efforts help shape public attention around critical topics, such as warnings and relief. Finally, SCCT (Coombs, 2007) provides a framework for selecting appropriate crisis responses based on the type of crisis and the public's attribution of responsibility. It emphasizes context-sensitive communication strategies such as reassurance or corrective action to maintain trust and manage public perception. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how media and LGUs can collaboratively manage crisis communication in strategic, responsive, and community-centered ways.

### 3. Methods and Materials

This qualitative phenomenological study employed purposive sampling to select eight key informants. Purposeful sampling selects information-rich cases for in-depth study; the size and specific cases depend on the study purpose, according to Nyimbili [25]. Etikan et. al explain that purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting participants based on their characteristics relevant to the phenomenon being studied [26]. This technique included individuals with direct knowledge and experience relevant to the research focus on crisis communication [27].

The participants of this study were five local government officials from Kidapawan City, and three were representatives from local media outlets. These individuals were selected due to their direct involvement in crisis communication during natural disasters. Data were gathered through semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), allowing participants to share in-depth, reflective narratives of their lived experiences concerning mass media's role in the city's crisis communication during natural disasters.

The interview questions were developed based on a thorough review of related Literature and grounded in three theoretical frameworks: Agenda-Setting Theory, Uses and Gratification Theory, and Situational Crisis Communication Theory. These theories guided the development of open-ended questions to elicit nuanced accounts of participants' perspectives and interactions during crises.

**Table 1. Profile of Interview Participants**

Code	Agency	Years of Working in an Agency
KII1	City Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office	7 years
KII2	City Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office	5 years
KII3	City Information Office	1 year
KII4	City Information Office	5 years
KII5	City Social Welfare and Development Office	5 years
KII6	DXDM Happy FM	10 years
KII7	DXND Radyo Bida	2 years
KII8	Juander Radio FM	2 years

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to delve into the lived experiences of individuals involved in crisis communication, particularly focusing on the role of mass media in local government crisis communication. The researcher was the primary instrument for data collection, analysis, and interpretation, conducting semi-structured key informant interviews to gather rich, in-depth narratives. The study employed the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for data analysis, which involved a systematic process of transcribing interviews, identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, and clustering themes, while maintaining researcher reflexivity and ensuring trustworthiness through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Before data collection, the researcher obtained ethical approval from the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC), securing informed consent from all participants and ensuring their privacy and confidentiality. Interviews were conducted with key individuals from local government units and media organizations in Kidapawan City. The analysis process involved "Epoche" (bracketing personal biases), meticulous verbatim transcription, harmonization of individual experiences, and synthesizing textural and structural descriptions into a composite essence to capture the core experiences related to mass media in local government crisis communication.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section shows the findings of the study based on the analysis of data collected through *Key Informant Interviews (KII)*. The analyzes included extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and developing textural and structural descriptions to uncover the participants' lived experiences during natural crises.

### 4.1. The Primary Role of Mass Media in Local Government Crisis Communication Plan

The use of a dual-platform media strategy and the role of mass media as a source of emotional support during crises.

Informants emphasized the strategic integration of radio and social media to maximize public reach and ensure consistent information flow. They also highlighted how mass media play a crucial role in reducing fear and anxiety by providing timely and accurate updates.

#### 4.1.1. Strategic Use of Dual-Platform Media

Integrating traditional radio and social media enabled wide and inclusive information dissemination. Radio was essential for reaching rural and low-connectivity areas, while social media allowed real-time updates, multimedia content, and interactive communication. This dual strategy addresses the digital divide and ensures inclusive communication, reflecting the need for hybrid media systems in disaster-prone contexts [28-29]. Local government officials view mass media as crucial for crisis communication, enabling the real-time sharing of official advisories and public service announcements. Both radio and social media are heavily relied upon, with officials recognizing social media's widespread reach and radio's continued importance, especially in rural areas. This dual-platform strategy allows local governments to disseminate consistent and comprehensive information to diverse audiences, integrating traditional and digital tools to enhance reach and ensure redundancy. This approach is supported by the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that people actively seek information and reassurance during uncertain times, turning to radio for reliability, television for visuals, and social media for immediacy.

*"During emergencies, the city government has a radio program through the City Information Office. But aside from the radio program, social media is also very strong now, so we deliver information through both radio and social media" (KII 3)*

*"Facebook and other platforms. It is a very strong channel of bringing information and keeping people informed about what is happening". (KII 2)*

*"Radio seems to be more active, especially during crises. That is why we promote listening to the radio, because its purpose is to provide information. That is why we now ensure that complete and consistent information is disseminated through social media and radio".(KII7)*

*"Radio seems to be more active, especially during crises. That is why we promote listening to the radio, because its purpose is to provide information. That is why we now ensure that complete and consistent information is disseminated through social media and radio".(KII7)*

#### 4.1.2. Mass Media as Agents of Information, Education, and Emotional Support

Media not only transmitted official bulletins but also served as platforms for public education and psychosocial support. Informants highlighted how radio broadcasters and

government social media pages became trusted voices, delivering updates and messages of hope and emotional reassurance. This confirms prior findings that media play a dual cognitive and affective role in times of crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Blumler & Katz, 1974).

*“Our mission, ma’am, is to inform the people or to give information and raise awareness to the public about what is happening” (KII8)*

*“Basically, the function is still aligned with our objective; NDBC exists to inform, educate, and entertain. Those are the three main purposes. And then in times of crisis, that is where these come in to inform, to educate, and to entertain”. (KII 6)*

*“People are often distressed or in panic. For example, during the earthquake, some lost their homes, others lost family members. They were really in distress. So they would turn to the radio, at least for information. However, also for entertainment, listening to music or dramas helped them cope. Moreover, the educational aspect came in when we broadcast escape routes, guidance, and interviews with disaster officials. We also aired psychological support, with experts like psychologists giving tips for managing anxiety”. (KII 6)*

These accounts highlight mass media's adaptive and human-centered role in local disaster contexts. The media provides stability and comfort in emotionally charged situations, offering practical knowledge (escape routes, emergency contact numbers) and psychosocial support (music, dramas, expert interviews). This theme aligns with the U&G Theory [30], which suggests that audiences actively engage with media to satisfy various psychological and social needs. In times of crisis, people seek media for information, reassurance, distraction, guidance, and social connection. As Yuliana explains, the media role is essential in disseminating information, solutions, and emotions among people during a disaster [28].

#### 4.2. The Role of LGU's Plan in coordinating with the Mass Media

Local Government Units (LGUs) are the primary source of verified information during crises, emphasizing strong government-media coordination to ensure accurate and timely dissemination. This coordination is supported by the Institutional Mandates of LGUs, which involve formalized communication protocols and established media partnerships within their crisis management functions. Together, these themes highlight the structured and authoritative role LGUs play in facilitating effective crisis communication via mass media.

**Table 2. The Primary Role of Mass Media In a Local Government Crisis Communication Plan**

Essential Themes	Core Idea	Thematic Statements
Dual-Platform Strategy in Media Dissemination	Use of both traditional (radio and Digital (social media) platforms to reach wider audiences	<i>“Almost all media entities now have their own social media accounts... news often breaks on the radio first, then is shared on Facebook.” (KII3)</i>
		<i>“Facebook and other platforms. It is a very strong channel of bringing information and keeping people informed about what is happening”. (KII 2)</i>
		<i>“That is why we now ensure that complete and consistent information is disseminated through both social media and radio platforms.” (KII7)</i>
Media as Agents of Information and Emotional Support	Mass media not only disseminates information but also helps ease public fear and anxiety.	<i>“Mass media gives correct and accurate information. People rely on it during a crisis, emotionally and mentally.” (KII 6)</i>
		<i>“People are often distressed or in panic. For example, during the earthquake, some lost their homes, others lost family members. They were really in distress. So they would turn to the radio, at least for information. But also for entertainment, listening to music or dramas helped them cope” (KII6)</i>

##### 4.2.1. Media-Government Coordination and Protocol

A recurring theme was the necessity of strong and institutionalized coordination between media outlets and LGU communication offices. Protocols for message clearance, synchronized advisories, and designated spokespersons improved communication efficiency.

*“During the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2019 earthquake, the City Local Government Unit (LGU) provided*

*various aid and incentives. The City Information Office utilized broadcasts to inform barangays about the distribution of this assistance, regardless of whether it originated from the provincial, city, or national government”. (KII 4)*

*“We actively engage with broadcast entities. Having come from the broadcast industry myself, I understand how these systems operate. The city government cannot effectively*

*serve the public without the crucial support of local media. Therefore, we must ensure the city government leads this effort, facilitating strong collaboration between broadcast media and local authorities.”- (KII 4)*

Further, KII 2 described how his rapport with the journalist enabled real-time communication during the crisis.

*“The good thing there is, because I was with the media before, I joined the local government unit and eventually became a disaster risk reduction and management officer. The opportunity is that there is a relationship of being one with or among us. The media consider me one of them. That is what happened in 2019. While I was managing the situation during the earthquake, my line was open with them. I give them information. It was just like I was having a live report”. (KII 2)*

The informant’s disclosure highlights the strategic collaboration between local government and media, emphasizing that crisis communication cannot be effectively executed in isolation from media institutions. This perspective aligns with Agenda-Setting Theory by McCoombs and Shaw, which posits that the media can influence the public agenda by determining which issues are given prominence. By actively facilitating partnerships with local broadcast entities, the city government positions itself as a source of information and as a coordinator of media discourse, ensuring that critical issues are framed appropriately and receive sustained public attention.

#### 4.2.2. Institutional mandates of LGU

One of the informants highlighted the formal authority and institutional responsibility of local government units (LGUs) in managing crisis communication. According to Key Informant two (KII 2), this responsibility is not arbitrary, but somewhat grounded in national policy frameworks and legal instruments such as Executive Order No. 82 (2012) and Republic Act No. 10121, also known as the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010.

*“Actually, the local government unit, especially the crisis management team, has the authority emanating from Executive Order No. 82, released in 2012 by former president Benigno Aquino. Then, it is also consistent with the Republic Act 10121, where the government authorises the incident command system to be used in crises. So, the local government unit is mandated to form bodies that will manage information as the first responder and the first informant of crises, whether that is, the crisis term is very broad, which can be a peace and order-related situation. Or that may also be a disaster situation. That is not just zeroed or limited to disasters. However, the crisis management team may also consider people's concerns about peace and order situations, such as what happened in the Zamboanga siege and Marawi many years ago. Including disasters like in the Pawan City, we had a series of strong earthquakes in 2019” (KII 2)*

The statement provided by Key Informant Two (KII 2) aligns closely with the core tenets of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes the importance of organizational responsibility, timely information dissemination, and adaptive response strategies during crises (Coombs). SCCT posits that an organization’s response to a crisis should be contingent upon the type of crisis and the degree to which the public attributes responsibility to the organization. In the context of local government units (LGUs), their mandated role as first responders and informants illustrates a high level of organizational responsibility, particularly in the early stages of a crisis. As described in the narrative, the LGU’s actions are grounded in formal policy frameworks, specifically Executive Order No. 82 (2012) and Republic Act No. 10121, which institutionalize the use of the Incident Command System (ICS) as the operational backbone of crisis response in the Philippines. These legal and procedural mechanisms echo SCCT’s emphasis on crisis preparedness and structured response, reinforcing the legitimacy and authority of LGUs in managing and communicating during diverse crisis scenarios, whether disaster-related, such as the 2019 earthquakes in Kidapawan City, or security-related events like the Zamboanga Siege or the Marawi crisis.

#### 4.2.3. Digitally-enabled Executive Communication: Accelerating Crisis Response through Social Media Bypass

Another compelling theme surfaced from the data is the local chief executive’s strategic use of social media to bypass traditional bureaucratic reporting protocols in favor of faster, more direct communication with constituents during emergencies. This practice underscores a shift in local crisis communication away from hierarchical, multi-step systems regulated by the Anti-Red Tape Authority toward executive-led, real-time crisis management.

Key informant two (KII2) offers insight into this adaptive communication approach:

*Our mayor is very social media savvy. Moreover, that is making our services a lot swifter than what is provided by the ARTA. In the ARTA, you have their minute one, when the caller calls the radio room, what happens next, bla bla bla. That is being bypassed; the ARTA is regulating that. It is being shortcut by the mayor. Do you know what he did? Whenever there is a strong, heavy rain, he will post right away on social media, Facebook, for instance. He will say, Any situation... So the affected population does not need to call the barangay official or pro-co-official, and will not have difficulty calling my number. They photograph exactly what is going on at the time of the incident.- KII 2*

In this model, the mayor uses his official Facebook account to initiate crowd-sourced crisis reporting, inviting citizens to upload real-time visual documentation of incidents. This decentralizes the information flow, shifting the

communication process from institution-centered to citizen-driven. In doing so, the LGU demonstrates agility and responsiveness that traditional ARTA procedures often lack due to bureaucratic layers and formal protocols. The informant further explained the grassroots impact of this communication model:

*“Residents now report incidents directly from their homes by posting them immediately on social media. There is no longer a need to wait or search for official reports, although emergency calls are still monitored at the radio room. This approach has proven to be highly effective. Previously, our response and management typically took three to a week. But with this system, you simply cannot afford delays once something is posted on social media, people start seeing and reacting to it within a second”* (KII2)

This underscores the core logic of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which posits that the success of a response strategy depends on stakeholder expectations, timing, and message control (Coombs, 2007). In the digital age, where crises unfold and escalate in real time, delayed institutional responses risk credibility. By communicating directly, the mayor accelerates intervention and enhances leadership visibility, emotional presence, and public trust.

Key Informant two (KII 2) added,

*“We cannot run to people’s situations if we do not know what is happening to them. And this time, the mayor has taken away the barriers by posting. And the mayor has more than 100,000 followers. So every follower, when they post, will be notified”*. ( KII 1)

This observation underscores a fundamental principle of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) that effective crisis communication is contingent not only on the content of the message but also on the timing, accessibility, and stakeholder expectations (Coombs). In this scenario, the mayor’s use of social media to relay real-time crisis updates eliminates bureaucratic delays, removes communication bottlenecks, and ensures that accurate information reaches constituents instantly. SCCT emphasizes that the speed and transparency of communication are vital in preserving public trust, especially when the crisis is perceived to be escalating (Coombs & Holladay) [12].

This direct-to-public approach is a preemptive crisis response, allowing the LGU to engage with its citizens even before formal response mechanisms are fully operational. According to Austin, Liu, and Jin [34], when the public turns to social media during a crisis, they seek factual updates, emotional reassurance, and visible leadership. The mayor’s immediate engagement, as evident in posts viewed by over 100,000 followers, meets this expectation by offering

information and presence, reinforcing perceptions of a competent and responsive local government.

Moreover, the theory’s recommendation of adjusting communication strategy to stakeholder needs reflects how the mayor maximizes the social media algorithm, utilizing Facebook’s notification system to ensure message penetration. This aligns with findings from Houston et al., who argued that crisis communication through digital platforms enhances response effectiveness by leveraging social media’s interactive and networked nature to reach communities in real time. However, while this model increases responsiveness and civic participation, it must also be integrated with formal emergency protocols to ensure alignment with institutional mandates and accountability frameworks, as emphasized by the Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA) in regulating government processes.

#### ***4.3. Challenges encountered by Local Government Units (LGUs) in collaborating with mass media during crisis situations***

Two key themes describe the challenges that Local Government Units (LGUs) face in working with mass media during crises. The first theme, *Navigating Political Bias and Media Fragmentation in Crisis Communication*, highlights how perceived political bias in local media can hinder coordination and lead to conflicting crisis narratives, requiring LGUs to maintain neutrality while ensuring cooperation.

The second theme, *Time Pressure and Communication Overload in Crisis Information Management*, reflects the multitasking burden on LGU personnel, who must simultaneously manage disaster response operations and meet the media’s demand for real-time updates, often compromising efficiency and communication accuracy.

##### ***4.3.1. Navigating Political Bias and Media Fragmentation in Crisis Communication***

Participants acknowledged the fragmented and sometimes politicized media landscape, noting how political affiliations can influence information framing. This complexity required the LGU to maintain neutrality and credibility, especially when disseminating life-saving information. The risk of politicization highlights the necessity of independent, fact-based reporting during emergencies [7].

*“The city’s information system is affected because there are political gaps. That is the unfortunate reality with broadcast media; most seem to have political biases. The city government cannot work with the people alone without the support of local media. But can’t we work together on these issues? There are so many challenges surrounding the City LGU. So it cannot just be us. We need stakeholders, and one of them is the broadcast media.”* (KII3)

**Table 2. The Role of the LGU is to Coordinate with the Mass Media**

Essential Themes	Core Idea	Thematic Statements
Media-Government Coordination and Protocol	LGUs are the primary source of verified information; coordination ensures timely dissemination.	<i>“During the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2019 earthquake, the City Local Government Unit (LGU) provided various forms of aid and incentives. The City Information Office utilized broadcasts to inform barangays about the distribution of this assistance, regardless of whether it originated from the provincial, city, or national government”. (KII 4)</i>
		<i>"We actively engage with broadcast entities. Having come from the broadcast industry myself, I understand how these systems operate. The city government cannot effectively serve the public without the crucial support of local media. Therefore, we must ensure the city government leads this effort, facilitating strong collaboration between broadcast media and local authorities."- (KII 4)</i>
		<i>“The good thing there is, because I used to be with the media before, I joined the local government unit and eventually became a disaster risk reduction and management officer. The opportunity is that there is a relationship of being one with us or among us. The media consider me one of them. That is what happened in 2019. During the earthquake, while I was managing the situation, my line was open with them. I give them information. It was just like I was having a live report”. (KII 2)</i>
Institutional Mandates of LGUs	LGUs institutionalize communication protocols and media partnerships.	<i>“Actually, the local government unit, especially the crisis management team, has the authority emanating from Executive Order No. 82, released in 2012 by former President Benigno Aquino. Then, it is also consistent with the Republic Act 10121, where the government authorises the incident command system to be used in crises. So, the local government unit is mandated to form bodies that will manage information as the first responder and the first informant of crisis situations, whether the crisis term is very broad, that can be a peace and order-related situation.” (KII 2)</i>
Digitally-enabled Executive Communication: Accelerating Crisis Response through Social Media Bypass	Executive leads real-time crisis communication.	<i>“Our mayor is very social media savvy. And that is making our services a lot swifter than what is provided by the ARTA. In the ARTA, you have their minute one, when the caller calls the radio room, what happens next, etc. That is being bypassed; the ARTA is regulating that. It is being shortcut by the mayor. Do you know what he did? Whenever there is a strong, heavy rain, he will post right away on social media, Facebook, for instance. He will say, any situation... So the affected population does not need to call the barangay official or pro-co-official, and will not have difficulty calling my number. They take a photograph of what is going on exactly at the time of the incident.”- KII 2</i>
		<i>“We cannot run to people’s situations if we do not know what is happening to them. And this time, the mayor has taken away the barriers by posting. And the mayor has more than 100,000 followers. So every follower, when he posts, will be notified”. (KII 1)</i>
		<i>“Whenever the Mayor makes a declaration, there is a corresponding communication protocol. If the Mayor anticipates heavy rainfall, he immediately posts updates on social media”. (KII 1)</i>
		<i>“Residents now report incidents directly from their homes by posting them immediately on social media. There is no longer a need to wait or search for official reports, although emergency calls are still monitored at the radio room. This approach has proven to be highly effective. Previously, our response and management typically took three to a week. But with this system, you simply cannot afford delays once something is posted on social media, people start seeing and reacting to it within a second”(KII 2)</i>

This statement reveals how political tensions and institutional mistrust hinder effective crisis communication. The LGU's role is thus not only to generate accurate information and manage external relationships with media organizations that may have competing political agendas. The challenge is twofold: (1) avoiding information distortion due to partisan reporting, and (2) ensuring media collaboration without infringing press freedom. This difficulty aligns with Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which underscores that effective crisis communication depends on strategic coordination with all key stakeholders, including media outlets [31]. If stakeholder trust is compromised, as in cases where media actors question government communication's legitimacy or neutrality, the public may receive conflicting narratives, undermining message consistency and stakeholder confidence [31].

#### 4.3.2. Time Pressure and Communication Overload in Crisis Information Management

The urgency of disaster response created time-sensitive pressures on media and government communicators. The volume of information and the speed at which it must be validated and disseminated often led to communication fatigue and coordination bottlenecks. This theme echoes Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory [10], which underscores the challenges of message control during high-pressure events.

*“People will call you all at once, simultaneously. And the very challenging situation is: which of these people will you accommodate first, right? Because they have the same prime time. And these people want to get information from you all simultaneously. So the challenge there is how will you*

*manage your time while you are doing disaster risk reduction and management activities, you are also expected to not fail the people by updating them on what is going on through the media channels”.* ( KII2)

This testimony reveals the overlapping demands of operational coordination and public communication, a dual responsibility that often places LGU personnel in difficult decision-making positions. On one hand, they are directly involved in logistical disaster management; on the other, they are expected to act as real-time information sources across various platforms, including mass media, radio, and social media.

This challenge can be contextualized through Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes timely, accurate, and continuous communication during crises [10]. SCCT stresses that the effectiveness of crisis response is significantly influenced by how well information is managed and disseminated to stakeholders. When multiple media outlets demand updates simultaneously, the LGU's capacity to fulfil these expectations becomes a key credibility determinant. Failing to communicate adequately, even if a logistical response is ongoing, can lead to perceptions of unresponsiveness, potentially eroding public trust [31].

#### 4.4. Mass Media Influence Public Perception and Behavior During A Crisis

Two key themes underscore the influential role of mass media in shaping public perception and guiding behavior during crises. The first theme, *Localized Resilience Through Community Leadership*, highlights how media promotes stories of local leaders and collective action, inspiring other communities to adopt similar resilience strategies.

**Table 4. Challenges do LGUs face in working with the mass media during a crisis**

Essential Themes	Core Idea	Thematic Statements
Navigating Political Bias and Media Fragmentation in Crisis Communication	LGUs face coordination challenges due to perceived political bias within local broadcast media. This affects unified messaging and may result in conflicting crisis narratives. LGUs must maintain media neutrality while securing cooperation.	<i>“The city’s information system is affected because there are political gaps. That is the unfortunate reality with broadcast media; most of them seem to have political biases. The city government cannot work with the people alone without the support of local media. But can’t we work together on these issues? There are so many challenges surrounding the City LGU. So it cannot just be us. We need stakeholders, and one of them is the broadcast media.”</i> (KII3)
Time Pressure and Communication Overload in Crisis Information Management	During crises, LGUs are burdened by simultaneous operational duties and media demands. With media expecting real-time updates, LGU personnel face multitasking challenges that may compromise both field response and information delivery.	<i>“People will call you all at once, simultaneously. And the very challenging situation is: which of these people will you accommodate first, right? Because they have the same prime time. And these people want to get information from you all simultaneously. So the challenge there is how will you manage your time while you are doing disaster risk reduction and management activities, you are also expected to not fail the people by updating them on what is going on through the media channels”.</i> ( KII2)

The second theme, *Participatory Framing Through Media*, emphasizes the interactive role of social media, where the public actively contributes to crisis discourse by sharing feedback, reporting incidents, and influencing the framing of real-time narratives. Together, these themes demonstrate the media's dual role in Empowering communities and facilitating public engagement during emergencies.

#### 4.4.1. Public-Driven Agenda and Participatory Framing through the Mass Media

This theme highlights how media outlets engage with the public to shape news content, particularly in crisis communication. Media practitioners serve not only as transmitters of government information but also as conduits of public sentiment.

The proactive involvement of citizens through interviews, digital feedback, and audience monitoring reflects a participatory communication dynamic where grassroots perspectives influence the media's agenda. This aligns with the agenda-setting role of mass media in elevating certain issues and voices into public discourse.

*"We do 'Man On The Streets' or 'people on the streets'. For every issue, if possible, and for all issues, especially serious ones, we try to get the public's opinion through that segment. So, someone goes to different places, such as barangays, where the concern is. If it is a general issue, we will stay here in Kidapawan. However, we specifically conducted interviews at the terminal because the people there are from other towns in North Cotabato. Aside from that, we also have a text line, and our Facebook account receives feedback. We also monitor the comments on our Facebook posts". (KII 7)*

*"One of the most effective things we do is MOTS, or Man on the Street interviews. We go out and ask ordinary people about current issues. For example, we gathered public opinion about Digong's arrest just yesterday. We make sure to include many people with different sides and various perspectives. It is not a formal debate, but we try to capture the raw, on-the-ground sentiment. We ask simple questions like, 'What do you think? Do you disagree? What is your view on what happened?' It is more of an informal, spontaneous interview where people can freely share their thoughts and experiences". (KII 6)*

Citizens actively contributed to constructing crisis narratives through on-the-ground reporting, tagging, sharing, and commenting. Informants emphasized how local voices shaped the media agenda and reframed stories in culturally resonant ways. This participatory media framing enhances relevance and responsiveness, echoing the Uses and Gratifications perspective where audiences co-create meaning [30].

#### 4.4.2. Amplifying Public Sentiments through On-the-Ground Interviews and Social Media Engagement

Media outlets conducted street-level interviews and citizen feedback sessions to capture real-time sentiments. This humanised the crisis and made public concerns more visible to decision-makers. Social media comments, shares, and reactions served as sentiment indicators, aiding in calibrating future communication efforts.

*"We specifically conduct interviews at the terminal because the people there are from other towns... we try to reach different barangays wherever the concern is located" (KII7)*

This on-the-ground strategy allows media organizations to act as intermediaries between government messaging and community realities, giving visibility to issues that may be overlooked. It reflects the core of Agenda-Setting Theory, which posits that the media shape public discourse by choosing which topics and whose voices are given prominence (McCombs & Shaw) [33]. Furthermore, these interviews help personalize crisis events, offering authentic, emotional, and localized accounts that resonate with the wider public. They also serve as a feedback mechanism for local government units (LGUs), providing insights into how policies and actions are perceived on the ground.

#### 4.4.3. Audience Engagement via Social Media Platforms

The theme *Audience Engagement via Social Media Platforms* encapsulates the evolving nature of crisis communication, where the public no longer serves merely as an audience but as active participants in the reception and co-construction of information.

The integration of interactive digital tools such as Facebook comment sections, text hotlines, and direct messaging has significantly enhanced the capacity of local media and government agencies to monitor public sentiment, respond to urgent concerns, and adapt messaging strategies in real time. This bidirectional flow of communication aligns with the participatory shift in media use, particularly during crisis events when public reliance on timely and interactive platforms intensifies.

Participants in this study described how social media functions not only as a tool for disseminating government advisories but also as a platform for interaction and feedback. As one key informant noted:

*"During a crisis, for example, when there is a breaking report, people immediately react, you see comments, messages, even phone calls... That is how you know they are closely following. Their reactions are part of the message. The interaction itself becomes part of the communication strategy" (KII2)*

*“We really maximize Facebook... we have text lines and monitor comments. People also share their experiences and concerns during the crisis”. (KII5)*

This demonstrates how local media and local government units (LGUs) are utilizing the dialogic affordances of digital platforms to adapt their messaging based on public reactions, inquiries, and reports. Such participatory engagement reinforces the relevance of Uses and Gratification Theory, which asserts that audiences actively seek out media that satisfy their information, social interaction, and reassurance needs, especially in times of uncertainty (Blumler & Katz) [30]. Moreover, the capacity of social media to enable rapid audience feedback aligns with the interactive function of crisis communication, which emphasizes the need for real-time

monitoring and adaptive messaging in response to evolving public sentiment [34]. The comment sections, reaction buttons, and direct messaging features of social media platforms provide immediate insight into how the public perceives a crisis and what information or reassurance they seek. This feedback loop strengthens media accountability, fosters public trust, and enhances message clarity, which are crucial during emergencies.

In summary, social media platforms extend the traditional function of mass media by enabling responsive and participatory crisis communication. Through digital engagement, the public becomes a co-creator of crisis discourse, helping shape how narratives are framed and how responses are implemented on the ground.

**Table 5. Mass Media Influence Public Perception And Behavior During Crisis**

Essential Themes	Core Idea	Thematic Statements
Public-Driven Agenda and Participatory Framing through the Mass Media	Local media integrates public voices into crisis narratives through grassroots interviews, citizen feedback, and digital platforms like Facebook.	<i>“We do ‘Man On The Streets’ or ‘people on the streets’. For every issue, if possible, and for all issues, especially serious ones, we try to get the public’s opinion through that segment. So, someone goes to different places, such as barangays, where the concern is. If it is a general issue, we will stay here in Kidapawan. However, we specifically conducted interviews at the terminal because the people there are from other towns in North Cotabato. Aside from that, we also have a text line, and our Facebook account receives feedback. We also monitor the comments on our Facebook posts”. (KII 7)</i>
		<i>“One of the most effective things we do is MOTS, or Man on the Street interviews. We go out and ask ordinary people about current issues. We make sure to include many people with different sides and various perspectives. It is not a formal debate, but we try to capture the raw, on-the-ground sentiment.”. (KII 6)</i>
Audience Engagement via Social Media Platforms	Feedback mechanisms such as text lines, comment sections, and live monitoring help media adapt to public concerns and amplify emerging grassroots narratives.	<i>“We specifically conduct interviews at the terminal because the people there are from other towns... we try to reach different barangays wherever the concern is”. (KII7)</i>
Amplifying Public Sentiment through On-the-Ground Interviews	Media bridges government messaging and community experiences, using interviews in diverse locations to gather varied public perspectives.	<i>“During a crisis, for example, when there is a breaking report, people immediately react, you see comments, messages, even phone calls... That is how you know they are closely following. Their reactions are part of the message. The interaction itself becomes part of the communication strategy” (KII2)</i>
		<i>“We really maximize Facebook... we have text lines and monitor comments. People also share their experiences and concerns during the crisis”. (KII5)</i>

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that mass media play a critical and multifaceted role in the crisis communication efforts of Kidapawan City’s local government. Far beyond mere

Information dissemination, the media function as strategic partners in governance, enhancing public engagement, emotional resilience, and real-time responsiveness. The use Both traditional radio and digital social media platforms exemplify an adaptive, dual-platform strategy that addresses

connectivity gaps and audience diversity, an approach supported by the Uses and Gratification Theory. The findings also underscore the media's agenda-setting capacity, as local governments (LGUs) collaborate with broadcasters to prioritize urgent issues such as evacuation and public safety. Furthermore, the growing shift toward participatory communication highlights the role of public voices in shaping media content, reinforcing the relevance of second-level agenda-setting and the co-construction of crisis narratives. Effective communication, however, is contingent on trust-based relationships, credible messengers, and clear institutional protocols, all challenged by political bias, fragmented messaging, and information overload, underscoring the need for institutionalized frameworks and collaborative media governance during crises.

The study opens several avenues for future inquiry in crisis communication, media studies, and public administration. It underscores the importance of developing

localized frameworks that integrate both traditional and digital media platforms in disaster-prone areas of the Global South. Comparative studies across different local government units (LGUs), especially within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), can assess the replicability and adaptability of Kidapawan City's strategies. Further research is also warranted into the lived experiences of frontline communicators, including government information officers and media practitioners, particularly regarding emotional labor, ethical decision-making, and information gatekeeping during high-pressure scenarios. Additionally, this study invites deeper exploration of participatory media and citizen journalism in formal crisis communication planning. By examining the operational, ethical, and political implications of public involvement in crisis reporting, future research can contribute to more inclusive, accountable, and resilient communication systems, particularly in digitally networked environments where citizens increasingly act as co-producers of public information.

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