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*Beata Grebliauskienė**
*Elene Tsitsilashvili***

TRANSFORMATIONS IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS DRIVEN BY TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

Abstract. In a complex and unpredictable contemporary world, every organization, regardless of size or preparedness level, faces unexpected challenges. How an organization navigates and communicates during such times determines its long-term success and resilience.

The paper examines how today's rapidly evolving, hyperconnected, and culturally diverse ecosystem has redefined communication practices, strategic planning, and core components of crisis and sensitive issue communication for multinational organizations in a multicultural context. Through qualitative interviews with communication professionals from various fields, the study highlights the transformation from traditional, static, and hierarchical communication to dynamic, adaptive, and audience-oriented models. Key findings underscore the pivotal role of an audience-centric and culturally sensitive approach, with real-time monitoring in the strategic planning of crisis and sensitive issue communication.

Keywords: communication technologies, strategic planning, crisis and sensitive issue communication

Introduction. In today's hyperconnected world, an increasing number of organizations operate across diverse cultural, political, and geographical contexts. Even though the crisis is an inevitable and potential threat to every organization, the complexity of a multicultural environment creates additional challenges in navigating those situations. The crisis not only threatens financial and operational flow but also impacts reputation, stakeholder trust, and the public image. Multinational organizations operating in multicultural contexts face significant obstacles when crafting crisis responses that resonate with diverse groups across countries and cultures. Thus, effective communication aligned with cultural schemas, communication norms, and expectations is crucial. As traditional crisis communication models are often developed in specific cultural contexts, they may be insufficient for contemporary, interconnected, digitally-first, and culturally diverse landscapes.

* **Beata Grebliauskienė** — Assist. Professor, PhD, Vilnius University (Vilnius, Lithuania), ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6504-4587>, beata.grebliauskienė@kf.vu.lt

** **Elene Tsitsilashvili** — Master's student in International Communication, Communication Faculty, Vilnius University (Vilnius, Lithuania), elene.tsitsilashvili@kf.stud.vu.lt

In response to these challenges, contemporary crisis and sensitive issue communication has undergone significant changes, adopting a more dynamic and audience-centered approach. Organizations are no longer able to control the narrative or determine communication in advance; instead, they have to monitor real-time developments and tailor messages to specific social and cultural contexts. Meanwhile, digital communication tools and AI have transformed how organizations detect crises, respond to them, and strategically plan their communication.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the core challenges and shifts in crisis communication planning and implementation resulting from the advancement of communication technologies. The study highlights the evolving practices and adaptations that multinational organizations employ to navigate today's complex and interconnected ecosystem.

Tasks, methods and materials.

Audience-centric approach in crisis communication. Every organization, regardless of its preparedness, may encounter unexpected events that challenge its stability and threaten its reputation throughout its existence and operation. While some challenges can be managed at an initial level, with zero or minimal impact, others could escalate into uncompromising situations that require immediate attention. Strategies employed to navigate such situations have a significant effect on an organization's long-term resilience, reputation, and public trust. Thus, managing such events requires a deep understanding of crisis and sensitive issue management, as well as how it differs from everyday challenges and problems. Such challenging situations interfere with the normal functioning of the organization and pose several threats, including reputational damage, financial loss, operational disruption, or even the organization's existence [5].

Crisis and sensitive issue management is a process of planning a strategy to handle a sudden and significant event and protect an organization or company from damage by minimizing the adverse outcomes of the event. These kinds of disruptive events not only impact operational performance but also undermine stakeholder trust. Effective crisis and sensitive issue management includes crisis communication that not only terminates the process but also helps the organization maintain or even improve its name and reputation following the high-pressure scenario. Coombs [3] defines crisis communication as «the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes.» Effective crisis and sensitive issue communication refers to observing, understanding, and addressing the concerns and emotions of different audience groups. This approach, known as audience-centric communication, emphasizes creating crisis responses based on the unique characteristics, cultural aspects, features, and communication preferences of stakeholders. Unlike the traditional crisis communication model, which often focuses on tailoring messages from the organization's perspective to protect its reputation, audience-centric approaches shift the focus toward the receivers of the message and how they interpret and react to it. The success of crisis responses is primarily

measured by how well they align with the audience's perceptions and cultural context. Thus, understanding and navigating the culture of the target audience is a pivotal part of managing crisis communication.

Cultural awareness as an audience feature in crisis communication. Culture is an invisible thread that determines how people perceive the world. It is a set of lenses through which people see the universe. Culture is not just about language or traditions; it is about costumes, beliefs, values, unwritten rules that people follow, and the shared behavior of any society, race, or group of people at a particular time. Culture is communicated over time through objects, language, rituals, and art [6]. Culture is an inseparable aspect of the audience, influencing individuals' reasoning, expectations, and interpretations. Especially during adverse circumstances, audiences are culture-centric, with a primary focus on their own values, norms, and perspectives, thereby undermining the interpretations and concerns of other audiences. Culture-centrism emphasizes the importance of analyzing each audience separately, as they perceive and reflect messages differently, based on their cultural frameworks [8].

Hofstede [7] describes culture as the «collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another». It is a system of societal norms shared by major groups of the population. Those societal norms set the climate within society, including the development of institutions and their functioning, thus influencing the public perception of crises and crisis responses. Cultural schemas are cognitive structures that encompass knowledge, beliefs, values, norms, and expectations shared by members of a cultural group [11]. They serve as mental templates to interpret social situations. These schemas encompass event sequences, beliefs about what is desirable, assumptions about the world, and emotions associated with the problem. In crises, schemas significantly influence reasoning by shaping the way information is processed and interpreted. Cultural schemas influence how people perceive, interpret, and recall information about the crisis. Schemas provide a framework for processing ambiguous information, as uncertainty and conflicting information are common during a crisis. By providing a set of default assumptions and expectations, individuals can process and analyze the information. Cultural schemas influence what information is remembered and recalled. People are more likely to remember information that is persistent in their culture, which also leads to the biased perception of the crisis and its aftermath. These schemas not only influence how the event is perceived and interpreted but also govern expectations for appropriate behavior and dictate a proper communication style, filtered by cultural dimensions and values. They shape information processing and, therefore, have a significant influence on reasoning. Cultural schemas dictate how people acquire, interpret, and remember the information about the crisis. Individuals tend to pay selective attention to information that is more consistent with their cultural schema and tend to neglect inconsistent information.

This phenomenon is not only limited to cultural values but also intersects with deeper layers, such as religious and moral beliefs. In many societies, a moral

framework is created that dictates how individuals interpret corporate actions, judge ethical responsibility, and expect organizations to respond to crises. In some cultures, religion is more than a personal belief. It is a collective and fundamental principle deeply rooted in societal structure and reflected in norms. Traditionally, religion provides its followers with guidelines, outlining moral codes and ethical doctrines. They give a fixed standard of contrasting notions, such as right and wrong, moral and immoral, thereby dictating individuals' reasoning and behavior [9]. Guidelines produced by religious beliefs dictate how people communicate within the group, cope with and evaluate complex situations, and interpret their own as well as others' responsibilities.

Similar to religious beliefs, schemas influenced by historical background and collective memory serve another crucial framework through which individuals dictate social interactions [10]. All cultures possess a collective memory — knowledge that individuals have based on their own experiences and what is collectively recognized, even if they have not personally experienced it. This includes not only the events people experienced themselves but also second-hand memories. Collective memory refers to the shared pool of past traumas, triumphs, values, and narratives that bind individuals into a social community. Through collective experience, historical background influences the formation of norms and beliefs, and thus, cultural values are shaped by both collective traumas and resilience.

Culture shapes communication by determining the norms and styles that are considered acceptable and effective within a particular society. These norms encompass rules governing the conveyance of messages, the type of communication valued, and the context in which a specific type is preferred. The cultural norms shape not only how conversations occur but also the expectations of the parties involved. Cultural values and features, through which people interpret social interaction and cultural schemas, shape the expectations that receivers bring to a message and the styles that senders adapt to meet those expectations. Cultural schemas establish a framework for communication styles and norms that are effective and suitable within a particular society. These norms outline the framework for conveying ideas and crafting messages, as well as the type of communication that is acceptable in a specific context. They directly shape the expectations the receivers bring to a message, and the styles senders adopt.

The Impact of Digital Transformation on Communication Practices. In today's hyperconnected world, crisis communication has undergone a radical transformation due to the rise of the digital media ecosystem, which surrounds both social media platforms and the online presence of traditional media outlets. As a result of the massive usage of digital media, the nature of crisis communication is evolving at an unprecedented pace. This digital transformation presents an organization with a paradoxical situation, offering significant advancements through the introduction of tools and capabilities that can be effectively used in crisis responses, while on the other hand provoking a set of unexpected challenges in an over-transparent digital landscape, unlimited and uncontrolled access to information, and an accelerated news flow.

Digital media has transformed how crisis information is generated and shared. In a contemporary over-transparent world, information spreads in an unlimited manner and quickly transcends countries and cultures. Along with the precise and rapid exchange of information, the advancement of communication technologies has created an unexpected and complex environment that dictates how messages are delivered and unfold. In this setting, information is explored virtually by everyone, even geographically and contextually detached audiences. In this digital environment, geographical and cultural boundaries are easily crossed. Digital platforms enable instant global reach, allowing local events or messages to resonate instantly with individuals who share the same cultural schemas, values, or religious beliefs. Therefore, crises originating in one specific context can swiftly elicit intense reactions and attention even in distant locations, due to the shared cultural patterns and identities rather than physical proximity.

Digitalization fundamentally transformed the reality of delivering and disseminating crisis responses. Crisis messages are no longer visible and accessible only to the intended audience. Information posted online is accessible to everyone, without any limit or border, whether they are the primary target audience or not. As messages crafted for a specific audience, tailored to its cultural background, knowledge, and emotional state, are now explored by non-targeted audiences, they lose their particular context and control over interpretation. These incidental stakeholders apply their own biases and frameworks, interpreting the messages through their cultural lenses, which can lead to misinterpretation, decontextualization, negative feedback, and public outrage. Thus, the organization loses control of how this message is understood and framed by the audience.

Communication technologies and the advancement of digital means transformed the audience expectations as well [1]. As mentioned previously, cultural schemas inherently dictate audience expectations for organizational responsibility and behavior; on the other hand, technologies expand these expectations and introduce new ones. The accelerated nature of information flow reshaped the expectations regarding the timeliness of response. As instant digital updates and notifications are a part of daily life, the audience expects the organizations to acknowledge the crisis and reveal primary information immediately. Peer-to-peer sharing gives individuals the opportunity to discuss the crisis online; therefore, organizations are now expected to be present in that conversation without delay. The stakeholders expect availability and engagement within the interactive and dialogic landscape. Contemporary audiences anticipate their voices to be heard [1]. Despite the potential for positive outcomes, organizations must navigate carefully to avoid negative consequences, as the advancement of digital technology creates significant challenges as well. This unlimited access and contextualization lead to a rapid adjustment of unverified information, unrealistic expectations of disclosure, and misinterpreted, fragmented, and decontextualized narratives.

The contemporary digital landscape challenges some traditional crisis communication approaches, such as the notion of the «golden hour.» In crisis

communication, the first hour after the crisis occurs is considered the crucial window. This is the prime opportunity for organizations to address the statement and attempt to shape public perception and narrative. However, reality diminished and narrowed this time window to «golden minutes», «golden seconds», or sometimes even a «zero hour» [14]. The acceleration creates difficulties in credibility, pioneering in information delivery and verification, and challenges the organization's ability to establish itself as the first and most credible source of information [12]. Organizations are no longer able to control what gets published as they did during the traditional media age. Instead, they can only monitor what the audience is publishing. The primary task for crisis managers is monitoring and responding to the public's narrative, rather than communicating their pre-prepared messages [2].

In addition to this technological shift, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine translation (MT) have revolutionized global communication by adding a new layer of complexity and capability. Modern MT systems, such as Google Translate, DeepL, and AI, which are also frequently used for translational purposes, have made immediate translation available to everyone worldwide. These innovations, step by step, eliminate traditional language barriers in everyday interactions and enable immediate information access to diverse information sources. Machine translation reduces language barriers, making the translation process more accessible and convenient for diverse audiences. However, this advancement presents a new layer of communication challenges for multinational organizations [12].

In summary, it can be stated that the advancement of communication technologies has significantly transformed crisis communication by increasing message speed, reach, and visibility. As a result, international organizations with a large diversity of stakeholders face significant challenges in maintaining message clarity, cultural sensitivity, and stakeholder trust.

Research methodology. The conducted empirical study aims to answer the question: How do international organizations meet the challenges above, and how have contemporary technological advancements affected the shift in key components of multinational crisis communication in multicultural contexts?

The study employs the qualitative research approach, focusing on in-depth interviews. As qualitative research captures the depth and complexity of human experiences, it enables a profound understanding of the evolving nature of communication practices in multicultural contexts [4]. This research type allows researchers to identify cultural nuances, emerging patterns, and best practices that impact the key components of contemporary crisis communication in multinational organizations.

The methods employed in this study include in-depth interviews, followed by a thematic content analysis of the interview material.

The interviews were conducted with three communication professionals working in international business and international non-profit organizations. The interviewees have direct and hands-on experience managing crisis and sensitive issue communication. In the study, respondents were coded as Resp. A, Resp. B, and Resp. C.

Research findings and discussion. The analysis of interview data revealed the evolving nature of contemporary multicultural crisis and sensitive issue communication in a multinational context. The shows that traditional crisis communication frameworks are still relevant. However, technological advancement introduces a shift from conventional models to strategic, more adaptive, technology-driven, and culturally sensitive approaches.

Foundation of crisis communication: from static to dynamic systems. The analysis of responses reveals that the foundational principles of multinational crisis communication, such as transparency, clarity, timeliness, and consistency, remain core elements of effective crisis communication. Despite their relevance and significance, the application and execution of these concepts have undergone significant transformation. The implementation process now requires more strategic planning and coordination than ever before. «*Crisis communication planning has shifted from static playbooks to dynamic, scenario-based frameworks*» (Resp. B). These principles are no longer static but have become a dynamic process continuously influenced by technological innovation, globalization, and cultural complexity. «*From practical experience, one of the most critical elements is communicating with one voice*» (Resp. C). The respondents consistently emphasized that communication with one voice showcases the importance of the strategic coordination model and how organizations navigate a multidimensional digital system, as well as how they have adopted traditional messaging coherence into a systemic coordination model.

In addition, pre-crisis preparedness, which encompasses simulation exercises, a primary focus on training, scenario planning, and internal drills, reflects the evolving practice of crisis communication from a reactive to a more proactive and preventive approach. In modern accelerated media dynamics, preparedness ensures confidence and message discipline during unpredictable crises or sensitive case situations, especially now when the media ecosystem demands both speed and accuracy.

The concepts of cultural awareness and empathy remain the foundation of effective crisis communication. However, nowadays empathy is not perceived as a soft skill but a strategic attribute for maintaining trust across cultures. This transformation signifies a switch from a rational model of crisis management to audience and human-centric, culturally inclusive communication.

Cultural sensitivity: the rise of contextual intelligence. The respondents underscored that cultural adaptation is now integral to crisis communication. Tailoring tone, language, and channels to specific cultural audiences is no longer a supplementary consideration. As Respondent A emphasized, «*core elements in crisis communications are empathy, cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, clearness, timeliness, and factual accuracy are crucial*». This change requires high coordination within the teams and careful preparation before the message release. The shift is directly caused by digital immediacy, as messages cross borders instantly, reaching diverse audiences and interpretations. Using simple language and recognizing emotional and cultural nuances are listed as key strategies to prevent

misinterpretation. These practices are no longer spontaneous but deeply integrated into coordinated message frameworks, internal guidelines, and pre-crisis planning processes.

Respondents also pointed out the importance of feedback and two-way communication that is enabled by modern digital platforms. *»Effective strategies include feedback loops — enable two-way communication for adjustments»* (Resp. C).

These shifts lead to a fundamental change from one-sided and directional responses to interactive communication. Engaged, participatory, and dialogic communication aligns with the contemporary needs and expectations of the audience, which demand openness and involvement.

The respondents underscore the growing use of local partnerships and influencers in practice, which showcases the decentralization of authority in message dissemination. *«While managing crisis communication in multinational fields, I rely on local expertise... always have open channel communication with them»* (Resp. C). Due to the increased use of digital platforms, crisis messages might be misinterpreted by non-target audiences. Organizations have started using local, trusted voices to deliver culturally resonant messages, thereby building credibility, cultural adaptability, and ensuring effective message dissemination. *«We ensure alignment by designating official spokespersons and centralizing message development. This structure allows us to respond rapidly while maintaining message integrity across different geographies»* (Resp. B).

Cultural sensitivity has become a core strategic asset, enabling multinational organizations to navigate a complex, multicultural environment without compromising their global identity. These insights underscore the increasingly pressing need and importance of an audience-centric approach in communication. Cultural sensitivity is not just an advantage, but has become a must-have element that reflects the local audience's perceptions, emotions, and values as part of their reasoning and decision-making. This adaptation highlights the importance of contextual intelligence in strategic planning for crisis and sensitive issue communication.

Evolving practices: internal coherence and external trust. The focus on internal coordination and alignment has increased, which is a premise of external credibility. *«Communication planning begins internally with clear communication channels, rapid and consistent information flow among the international and local teams»* (Resp. C). To maintain response integrity, the planning process has shifted from individual response-making to a systemized structure.

In this media dynamic, where information flows are accelerated, all teams should have the same level of knowledge and preparedness to avoid further escalations. The hierarchical communication approach evolved into a technology-enabled system utilizing digital coordination platforms. Digital platforms enable international teams to maintain consistency and coherence in messaging despite geographical or time differences, which leads to a significant shift from earlier hierarchical communication

structures to more networked coordination systems, balancing global control with local adaptability. «*The phased implementation of various internal systems has helped us adapt to changing media dynamics while preserving message coherence*» (Resp. A).

This turn fosters horizontal collaboration across multinational teams, enabling faster verification and delivery of accurate information. On the other hand, this internal alignment encourages transparency within the company and teams, reducing the likelihood of misinformation leaks. This understanding also shifts the role of employees who are not only internal stakeholders but secondary communicators whose perception is linked to public credibility. As respondent B noted, «*Establish a clear channel and way of communication that works for your team. Proactive internal meetings, updating everyone on what is happening.*»

Another noticeable shift in crisis communication components is building and maintaining stakeholder trust. The trust is reached not only through verbal assurances but also through visible, consistent, and factual behavior, grounded in empathy and transparency. Stakeholder communication transforms from managing perception to co-creating meaning and accountability. Some trust-building mechanisms were established, including open consultations during the crisis, frequent and ongoing updates, and localized engagement through local respected figures and opinion leaders. «*To keep the trust, it was a great practice to launch free consultation opportunities for people to inform them about the crisis, future implications, or generally what was happening to them. It was giving stakeholders the feeling that they were respected and also the company was a first source of information*» (Resp. C). Organizations leverage localized legitimacy by utilizing community figures as trust carriers. This practice highlights that credibility in multicultural environments highly depends not only on a global reputation but also on local impressions and acceptance.

Adapt to digital transformation. Additionally, one of the most significant shifts in communication practice is related to digital tools and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Due to the rise of digital infrastructure, the information circulates faster than ever, and the environment has become complex and decentralized. This transformed nature leads organizations to lose control over the narrative. In addition to this, as messages are disseminated promptly and untargeted to all kinds of audiences, without considering their needs, values, and cultural peculiarities, communication today requires stronger coordination and a more systematic, strategic approach. «*Communication professionals should monitor what was reported, collected, and shared. Make communication factual. The audience should adopt the language. Executions should be quick and consistent*» (Resp. B). Communicators must monitor media, dedicate more time to social listening and sentiment analysis, and anticipate potential escalations. These practices became part of strategic planning and internal coordination.

As the respondents hold different hierarchical positions, such as communication coordinator, lead, and manager, the insights show that coordination is not just a technical process but a structural attribute. Synchronized decision-making and real-

time message coordination became the vital parts of effective crisis and sensitive issue communication.

The overall communication process has transformed from pre-defined planning to dynamic implementation. *«Planning has become a living system that should be updated and executed in real time»* (Resp. A). Earlier organizations had time to develop strategies in advance; however, nowadays they have to operate under ongoing pressure and readiness. The planning process has become flexible and reactive, integrated with real-time monitoring. Thus, in this context, proactiveness has shifted to early reactivity.

Additionally, although digital transformation did not replace the core principles of crisis communication, it enhanced and complicated them. Communication now requires simultaneous attention to global consistency and local relevance. Communicators now have to operate in hybrid environments that are influenced by cultural, technological, and ethical competencies. They have to balance accuracy with urgency, ensuring prompt and verified information. In response to these challenges, professionals shifted their approach to a data-driven, reactive, and ethically adapted direction.

AI was referred to as both an opportunity and a risk. AI literacy and ethical considerations became the core elements of crisis management. Respondent A stated that *«AI should be referred to as a tool but not a primary source»*. In practice, automated content should not be released without human review, which is also linked to human-machine collaboration. *«AI is a double-edged sword: while it helps detect threats, it also enables more sophisticated attacks like deepfakes and AI-generated phishing. Thus, automated content should never go public without human review, and ethical oversight is essential to preserve trust»* (Resp. C).

Across interviews, one common challenge was revealed: the unpredictability of information flow, which shifted predetermined crisis communication to adaptive and scenario-based frameworks.

These insights highlight the transfer from reactive communication to controlled speed and calibrated transparency. Digital transformation has forced organizations to adopt strategic and culturally oriented communication. Nowadays, communicators should be involved in controlled transparency, apply ethical judgment, and real-time internal and external collaboration.

Conclusion. Technological advancements have transformed the traditional view of communication; therefore, one-way dissemination of messages is no longer sufficient. The audience-centric approach, which focuses on understanding the nature of stakeholders, their interests, perceptions, and concerns, becomes essential. Aligned with an audience-centric approach, the discussion underscores the inseparable role of cultural schemas in shaping the audience's reasoning, perceptions, and expectations, especially during a crisis.

The findings reveal the pivotal role of a culturally oriented approach and contextual intelligence in responding to and leveraging today's complex ecosystem. A key shift identified is the transition from static, reactive frameworks to dynamic,

scenario-based planning. Communication is no longer guided by pre-set playbooks but by living systems that require constant updates, flexibility, and contextual responsiveness.

Technological innovations have not replaced traditional principles, but rather enhanced and reshaped them, demanding more coordinated, strategic, and culturally adaptive approaches.

The successful crisis and sensitive issue communication lies in integrating the approach of audience understanding and digital agility. Adopting these shifts helps multinational organizations navigate a digital environment and mitigate the impacts of crises in a hyperconnected, multicultural world.

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ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЇ КРИЗОВИХ КОМУНІКАЦІЙ У МІЖНАРОДНОМУ БІЗНЕСІ ТА НЕПРИБУТКОВИХ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЯХ ПІД ВПЛИВОМ ТЕХНОЛОГІЧНОГО ПРОГРЕСУ

Гребляускене Беата

доктор філософії (PhD), доцент,
Вільнюський університет, Литва
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6504-4587>

Ціцилашвілі Елена

магістрантка,
Вільнюський університет, Литва

Анотація. У сучасному глобалізованому та надзвичайно взаємопов'язаному середовищі міжнародні бізнес-структури та неприбуткові організації дедалі частіше стикаються з кризовими ситуаціями, що мають потенціал підірвати їхню репутацію, довіру стейкхолдерів та операційну стабільність. Цифрова трансформація, стрімке поширення інформації та зростання культурної різноманітності суттєво змінили характер кризових комунікацій, переходячи від ієархічних, статичних моделей до динамічних, адаптивних і орієнтованих на аудиторію підходів.

Метою дослідження є аналіз ключових викликів та змін у плануванні й реалізації кризових та чутливих комунікацій, зумовлених розвитком цифрових технологій та зростанням культурної складності міжнародного середовища. Методологічно робота спирається на якісні напівструктуровані інтерв'ю з фахівцями у сфері комунікацій, що дозволило зануритися у практичний досвід взаємодії з кризами в різних культурних контекстах.

Результати демонструють перехід від традиційних моделей до системного, орієнтованого на контекст та технології підходу, у якому провідну роль відіграють культурна чутливість, емпатія, адаптивність, оперативний моніторинг та цифрова координація команд. Виявлено зростання значущості локальних партнерств, двосторонньої комунікації та довіри як ключових чинників ефективного реагування. Окрему увагу приділено подвійній природі штучного інтелекту, що водночас розширяє інструментарій моніторингу й створює нові ризики для достовірності інформації.

Зроблено висновок, що ефективні кризові комунікації у мультикультурному середовищі потребують інтеграції аудієнт-орієнтованих, культурно чутливих та цифрових підходів, що дозволяє організаціям підтримувати довіру та зменшувати негативний вплив криз у гіперпов'язаному світі.

Ключові слова: комунікаційні технології; стратегічне планування; кризові та чутливі комунікації.

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