A NARRATIVE REVIEW ON GOVERNMENT CRISES MANAGEMENT AND REPUTATION IN FACING PUBLIC PERCEPTION DURING PANDEMIC COVID-19 IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract:

The public opinion of the government is crucial, and various problems can have a big impact on it. Government personnel that fail to deliver on their promises or engage in unethical behaviour taint the government's image, leading to citizen disenchantment. Accountability is essential for preserving a good reputation. Corruption, abuse of power, or negligence without proper repercussions erode trust in the system. Citizens want their leaders to be held accountable for their acts to keep the government's integrity. Furthermore, mishandling crises or neglecting to handle important concerns on time can amplify bad opinions. Poor crisis management reflects negatively on the government's ability and reactivity, undermining its reputation even more. Thus, the present study aims to identify Malaysia's strategies for handling COVID-19 and public perception in maintaining the government's reputation. To achieve this, the narrative review has been conducted on Google Scholar reviewing previous studies conducted since 2021 onwards. Findings show that Transparency, trust, and accountability are three pillars that influence how the public perceives government. When these aspects fail, it causes a negative perception to spread. One significant concern is a lack of transparency. When the acts, choices, or policies of the government are cloaked in secrecy or presented in an opaque manner, it generates suspicion and erodes trust. The public expects to have access to information that impacts their life, and any attempt to suppress or distort such information undermines credibility. Broken promises or discrepancies between words and behaviour cause trust deficiencies.

Introduction

Failure to manage public perception can escalate a crisis, complicating government efforts to ensure compliance and control during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. In Malaysia, the proliferation of misinformation and fake news amplified public anxiety and scepticism. Misinformation spread rapidly across social media platforms, undermining trust in official communication channels (Mohamad et al., 2023; Masngut & Mohamad, 2021). Many Malaysians turned to unofficial sources for information, highlighting a credibility gap in government communication efforts (Low & Chong, 2022).

This study explores the strategies employed by the Malaysian government to manage public perception and maintain its reputation during the pandemic. Using the OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19) as a framework, it examines crisis management approaches, including governance arrangements, whole-of-society responses, and crisis communication (OECD, 2022). Figure 1 illustrates the three-pronged strategy adopted to navigate pandemic-related challenges, emphasizing pandemic preparedness, crisis management, and response and recovery measures.

The Malaysian government faced significant challenges in combating fake news while addressing public concerns over delayed responses to vaccination rollouts and economic stimulus packages (Khalid, 2021). These issues exacerbated trust deficits and underscored the need for robust, transparent communication strategies. Therefore, this narrative review aims to analyse the government's crisis management tactics and their impact on public perception, focusing on strategies for fostering trust, transparency, and accountability.
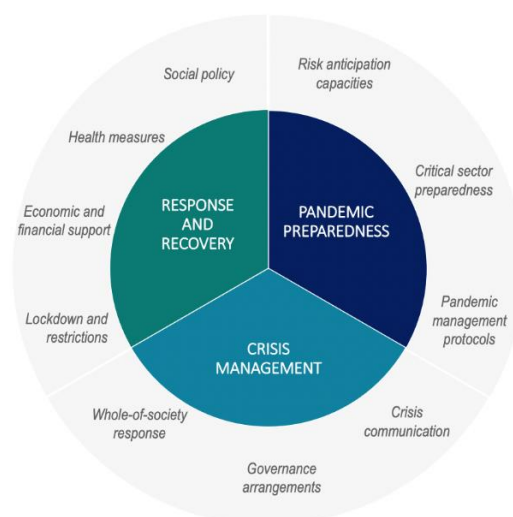
Figure 1: Evaluating (COVID-19) Public Responses Framework (OECD, 2022)
Source: OECD (2022)

Figure 1 explains the three strategies in managing crisis management which includes 1) Whole-of-society-response, (2) governance arrangements and (3) crisis communication. The governance arrangement explores government initiatives in organising their management of the crisis, structures to co-operate among agencies and to gather scientific advice on the pandemic, or by deploying tools to facilitate internal communication (OECD, 2020). Meanwhile, for crisis communication, the unprecedented use of communication channels and information technologies to reach out to citizens about the spread of the virus and the policies undertaken to control infection, and to share instructions on how to comply with lockdown and social distancing requirements (WHO, 2021). Governments focus on the impact of these new communication channels and methods on the effectiveness of their crisis management and on the acceptability of measures rolled out to mitigate the impact of the crisis for instance MySejahtera application, sebenarnya.my and fact check journalism (Malaysian Ministry of Health, 2021). Lastly, the whole-of-society response is the evaluations examining the different levels of government that have worked together to manage the pandemic response, with the involvement of its citizens and stakeholders in decision-making processes related to crisis response, and what measures could have helped safeguard democratic rules.
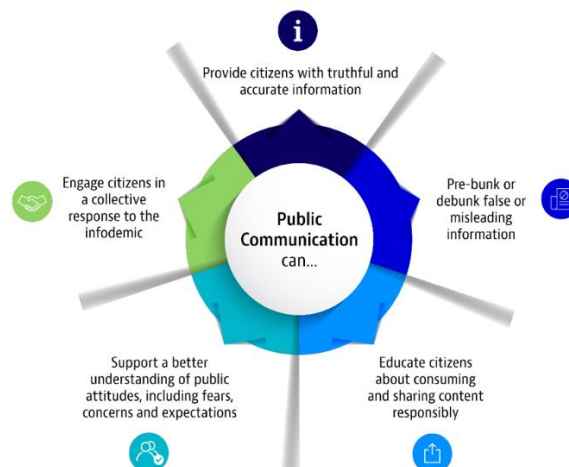
Figure 2: Ways that Public Communication Can Support Policy and Fight Disinformation (OECD, 2020)

Source: OECD (2020)

Figure 2 emphasises the integral role of public communication in fostering a whole-of-society response during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. As outlined by OECD (2020), effective public communication ensures the dissemination of truthful and accurate information, which helps combat misinformation and build public trust. By actively engaging citizens in a collective response to the infodemic, governments can foster collaboration across all societal levels, including individuals, communities, and stakeholders. This approach involves debunking false information and educating citizens about responsible content sharing, which is critical in reducing fear and misinformation. Moreover, public communication facilitates a deeper understanding of societal attitudes, concerns, and expectations, enabling targeted responses that address public needs. Such efforts align with the principles of a whole-of-society response, where inclusive decision-making and clear communication empower citizens to contribute actively to crisis management (OECD, 2020).
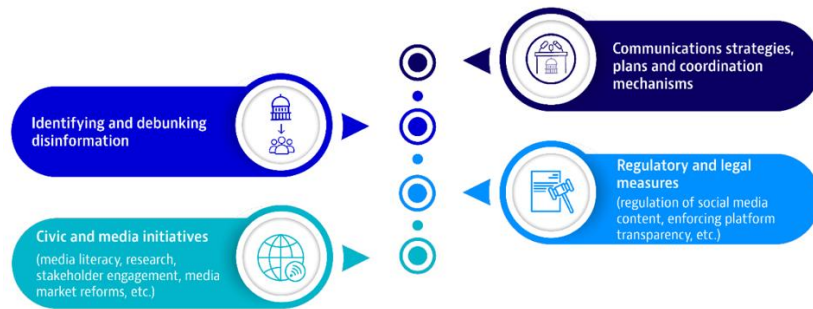
Figure 3: Range of Governance Responses to Disinformation (OECD, 2020)
Source: OECD (2020)

Figure 3 illustrates how public communication plays a critical role in strengthening governance arrangements during crises by fostering transparency, coordination, and trust. According to OECD (2020), effective governance arrangements require structured frameworks that enable government agencies to work cohesively while ensuring clear and timely communication with citizens. Public communication supports governance by providing truthful and accurate information, which builds public confidence in the measures taken by authorities. Additionally, it plays a vital role in debunking false or misleading information, ensuring that citizens have access to reliable guidance, particularly during rapidly evolving crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Governance arrangements are also reinforced through initiatives that engage citizens in decision-making processes, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and cooperation across all sectors of society. This approach aligns with the goals of public communication to educate citizens about responsible content consumption and to encourage their active participation in compliance with public health measures. By integrating these strategies into governance structures, governments can enhance their ability to respond effectively to crises, reduce misinformation, and promote collective trust and action (OECD, 2020).

Literature Review

Government Crises Management During Pandemic
During a pandemic, governments grapple with a myriad of interconnected crises demanding adept management. The sudden surge in patients strains healthcare systems, necessitating increased capacities, secure medical supplies, and the establishment of temporary facilities (Ardakani et al., 2023; Ndayishimiye et al, 2022). Supply chain disruptions exacerbate shortages of crucial medical equipment and essential goods, demanding strategic interventions to ensure an uninterrupted flow. Economic fallout ensues, prompting stimulus packages and aid to stabilise economies and alleviate citizen hardships (Puaschunder, 2022). Accurate information dissemination becomes paramount to quell panic and combat misinformation, while the enforcement of public health measures walks a tightrope between compliance and potential social unrest. International collaboration is crucial for resource allocation, vaccine distribution, and collective research efforts (Amankwah-Amoah & Hinson, 2022). The corporate crises worsened with the existence of social media platforms that led to the fast perceptions circulated during the pandemic time (Adnan & Yaacob, 2021). Managing vaccine development, approval, and equitable distribution while addressing hesitancy and ensuring fair access poses a significant challenge. Mental health support services become imperative due to isolation and uncertainty, while educational disruptions necessitate strategies for remote

learning and institutional support (Van Staden & Naidoo, 2022). Long-term planning for robust healthcare systems, early warning mechanisms, and preparedness for future crises becomes a critical goal (Zhang et al., 2022). Successfully navigating these crises hinges on a coordinated, flexible, and communicative approach involving experts, policymakers, community leaders, and citizens alike.

COVID-19 Pandemic in Malaysia

During 2020 and 2021, Malaysia, like many countries, faced several waves of COVID-19 infections. The situation fluctuated, with varying numbers of daily cases and corresponding responses from the government to curb the spread of the virus. In 2020, Malaysia saw its first wave of COVID-19 cases, prompting the government to implement movement control orders (MCOs) and other restrictions to limit the virus's spread. These measures included travel restrictions, closure of non-essential businesses, and social distancing protocols. Throughout 2020 and into 2021, Malaysia experienced subsequent waves of infections, leading to adjustments in restrictions and measures based on the severity of the outbreaks (Sam et al., 2022). The country continued to focus on testing, contact tracing, and isolation/quarantine protocols to manage and contain the spread of the virus. Vaccination efforts began in Malaysia in 2021, aiming to immunise the population against COVID-19. The government-initiated vaccination drives to achieve higher immunisation coverage, aiming to control the spread of the virus and mitigate its impact on public health and the economy. New variants of the virus, such as the Delta variant, also emerged during this period, prompting concerns and necessitating adjustments in response strategies (Giovanetti et al., 2022; Bian et al., 2023). The specifics regarding the number of cases, vaccination rates, and government responses during this period would require detailed data from reputable sources or official government reports, as the situation evolved significantly during 2020 and 2021.

The Importance of Government Reputation

Protecting a government's reputation is pivotal for fostering public trust, attracting investment, and ensuring effective governance. A positive reputation engenders trust among citizens, enhancing compliance with regulations and support for government initiatives, particularly during crises like pandemics. Moreover, a government with a favourable reputation for stability, transparency, and fair governance becomes an attractive destination for foreign investment and robust trade relationships, fostering economic growth. This reputation also facilitates effective governance, as public support aids policy implementation and societal problem-solving. During crises, such as natural disasters or pandemics, a positive reputation becomes instrumental in managing public perception, minimising panic, and enabling smoother crisis resolution. Additionally, a government's reputation plays a significant role in international diplomacy, influencing its standing and relationships with other nations. A positive reputation fosters diplomatic collaborations, negotiations, and global influence, contributing to a stronger national image and soft power. To uphold this reputation, transparency, accountability, ethical governance, and responsiveness to public concerns are paramount. Open communication, timely addressing of issues, and fulfilling promises serve as linchpins in protecting and nurturing a government's positive reputation, reinforcing its credibility and trustworthiness both domestically and on the global stage.

Implication of Positive Perception

A government's positive perception is a linchpin for multifaceted implications that significantly shape its efficacy and influence. Firstly, this favourable view cultivates trust and cooperation

among citizens, fostering compliance with regulations, active civic participation, and widespread support for government endeavours (Blitstein-Mishor et al., 2023). Economically, such a perception attracts investments, stimulates growth, and bolsters consumer confidence, laying the groundwork for job creation and overall prosperity. This positive sentiment extends to political stability, reducing unrest and reinforcing the government's legitimacy, leading to a more cohesive society (Jou & Ooi, 2022; Roknifard, 2023). Internationally, a well-regarded government benefits from strengthened diplomatic ties, fostering partnerships, trade agreements, and collaborations. This elevated global standing amplifies a country's influence on the international stage (Saks, 2022). Moreover, a positive perception streamlines policy implementation, leveraging public support for more efficient decision-making and the resolution of societal challenges. It also contributes significantly to a nation's soft power, attracting tourists, promoting cultural exchanges, and enhancing the country's global image (Adoui, 2023). Crucially, during crises, the trust derived from a positive perception leads to greater public compliance with emergency measures, fortifying the government's crisis management capabilities. This positive sentiment also plays a pivotal role in promoting social cohesion and inclusivity, fostering a sense of unity among diverse communities. Overall, a government's positive perception serves as the bedrock for socio-economic development, effective governance, and global influence. It establishes an environment conducive to stability, growth, and collaboration, nurturing a harmonious relationship between the government and its citizens while amplifying the nation's stature on the world stage.

Implication of Negative Perception
A government's negative perception yields far-reaching implications that imperil its efficacy and influence across multiple fronts. An unfavourable view erodes trust and cooperation among citizens, breeding non-compliance with regulations, diminished civic engagement, and a lack of support for governmental initiatives (Purnamasari et al., 2022). Economically, it hampers the government's ability to attract investments, stalling growth and causing a decline in consumer confidence, potentially precipitating economic stagnation. Moreover, negative perceptions sow seeds of political instability by undermining the government's legitimacy, fuelling public discontent, and fostering conditions ripe for protests or challenges to its authority. Internationally, strained diplomatic relations emerge, as scepticism and reluctance among international partners hinder agreements or collaborations (Gerstl, 2022). Policy implementation encounters hurdles, resistance, and lack of support, complicating the government's efforts to enact reforms or address societal concerns. Furthermore, the erosion of soft power diminishes the nation's influence, deterring tourism, limiting cultural exchanges, and diminishing credibility on the global stage. During crises, this negativity exacerbates challenges, hindering emergency management due to a lack of trust and non-compliance with essential measures. Most significantly, societal divisions deepen, fostering disunity, polarisation, and social unrest, fragmenting the fabric of the nation. Addressing and rectifying these negative perceptions becomes imperative for the government to regain trust, restore confidence, and effectively discharge its duties.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)
The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) offers valuable insights for governments, particularly in crisis management and shaping public perception, as seen in Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic (Low & Choong, 2022). SCCT emphasises the differentiation of crises based on their severity and attributions, acknowledging that public perceptions can vary. In the context of the pandemic, the severity was contingent on factors

like case numbers, the government's response, and public attitudes toward the crisis (Liu, Shahab & Hoque, 2022). SCCT also presents response strategies aligned with crisis severity, such as denial, diminish, or rebuild. Notably, transparently addressing crisis severity proved pivotal for crisis mitigation and reputation management for the Malaysian government. They adapted communication strategies based on the crisis's severity, offering transparent updates, implementing stringent measures during critical phases, and flexibly adjusting responses. SCCT emphasises that tailored response strategies are crucial, suggesting that transparent communication, regular updates, and demonstrating empathy resonate better during a pandemic. Adhering to SCCT principles, governments can tailor crisis communication strategies, aligning them with crisis severity and public perceptions. In Malaysia's case, understanding and applying SCCT principles facilitated the crafting of more effective crisis communication strategies. This approach positively influenced public perception and contributed to managing the government's reputation amidst challenging times, ensuring responsiveness and transparency in crisis communication.

Image Repair Theory (IRT)

The Image Repair Theory (IRT) provides a complementary framework to analyse how governments manage public perception and maintain credibility during crises. IRT posits that when an organisation or individual's reputation is threatened, specific communicative strategies can mitigate reputational damage (Benoit, 1997). These strategies include denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective actions, and mortification, which are essential for managing public perception in crisis situations (Benoit, 2015). The Malaysian government, during the COVID-19 pandemic, employed several image repair strategies, such as reducing offensiveness, corrective actions, and demonstrating accountability through frequent public updates and transparent policy explanations (Low & Choong, 2022). For example, the introduction of tools like the MySejahtera application showcased proactive efforts to address public concerns and misinformation, contributing to repairing trust and credibility (Kaur, 2021). The use of government fact-checking portals such as Sebenarnya.my further supported the reduction of misinformation, reinforcing transparency in crisis communication (Ahmad, 2020). IRT also highlights that timely, empathetic, and honest communication can rebuild public trust, particularly when accusations or misinformation arise (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). These principles align closely with the Malaysian government's crisis communication efforts, where applying IRT helped sustain public trust and manage perceptions amidst a challenging public health crisis (Liu, Shahab & Hoque, 2022).

Summary of Past Findings

Table 1: Summary of Past Findings on Crisis Communication and Reputation Management

| Study	Key Findings
Coombs (2007)	SCCT categorises crises into victim, accidental, and preventable, suggesting corresponding response strategies.
Benoit (1997)	IRT identifies image repair strategies such as denial, evasion of responsibility, and corrective actions for reputation management.
Liu, Shahab, & Hoque (2022)	Government crisis management during COVID-19 relied on digital communication strategies for public engagement.
Low & Choong (2022)	Malaysian government's strategic responses to COVID-19 included transparency and adaptability in crisis communication.

Study	Key Findings
Ahmad (2020)	Fact-checking platforms play a crucial role in combating misinformation and maintaining public trust.
Kaur (2021)	Digital tools such as MySejahtera enhanced public health response and communication strategies during COVID-19.

Source: Author's Own Work

Table 1 summarise the government crisis management and reputation strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia can be better understood through various theoretical frameworks, each offering distinct perspectives on public perception and crisis communication. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Coombs (2007) provides a strategic approach to categorizing crises and selecting appropriate responses based on crisis attribution. It highlights how governments can adapt communication strategies to mitigate reputational damage. Similarly, Image Repair Theory (IRT) by Benoit (1997) emphasises how governments utilise denial, corrective action, and mortification strategies to rebuild public trust during crises. These frameworks collectively highlight how strategic government crisis communication during the pandemic influenced public perception, trust, and overall crisis response effectiveness (Liu, Shahab, & Hoque, 2022; Low & Choong, 2022). By integrating these theories, this review provides a comprehensive understanding of how Malaysia's government handled public perception, crisis messaging, and reputation management amid the pandemic.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative methodology, specifically a narrative review approach, to synthesise existing literature on government crisis management and reputation during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on statistical analysis, this narrative review emphasizes a thematic synthesis of findings from previous research to construct a coherent and insightful discussion (Greenhalgh, Thorne, & Malterud, 2018). This method enables the identification of patterns, trends, and controversies within the field, integrating multiple perspectives from diverse sources.
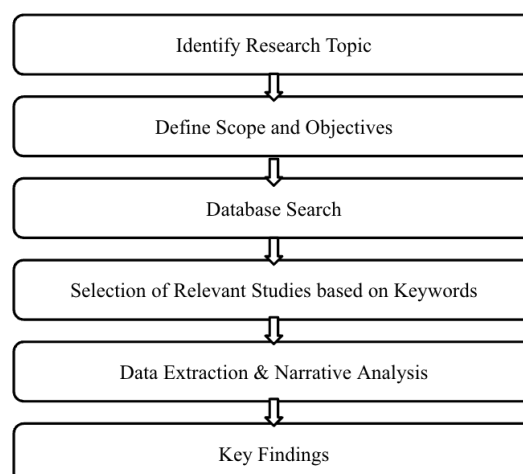
Figure 4: Flowchart of the Narrative Review Process

Source: Author's Own Work

The flowchart of the review process begins with identifying the research topic, focusing on government crisis management, reputation, and public perception during the pandemic. Next, the study defines the scope and objectives, emphasising narrative analysis over numerical data analysis. A database search covering 2020-2024 was conducted, ensuring the inclusion of recent and relevant publications. The selection of relevant studies was based on predefined keywords, including "Government crisis management and Malaysia," "Government crises and Malaysia and Reputation," "Malaysia Government and Crisis Communication," "Malaysian Government and Stakeholders Decision Making," and "Malaysian Government and Government Arrangement."

The data sources include a wide range of academic and policy-related publications, including government reports, annual documents, peer-reviewed journal articles, and policy papers. The study draws from a diverse population of literature written by crisis management scholars, public administration experts, and media analysts. The sample size consists of a selection of highly relevant research articles and government reports obtained through Google Scholar and other academic repositories. The data analysis process employs narrative analysis, a qualitative approach that identifies key insights from selected studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This includes content analysis, which extracts themes, narratives, and frameworks related to government crisis communication and reputation management.

This analysis was conducted to examine government responses, public reactions, and media influence across various sources. Additionally, the study incorporates pattern identification, allowing for the recognition of recurring issues, strengths, and gaps in Malaysia's crisis management strategies. Finally, critical evaluation is performed to assess the effectiveness of government crisis communication measures and their impact on public trust. Through this structured and insightful approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the Malaysian government managed public perception and reputation during the COVID-19 pandemic (Liu, Shahab, & Hoque, 2022; Low & Choong, 2022).

Findings & Discussions

Evaluating Public Perception and Government Reputation
Table 1 presents the outcomes derived from a systematic keyword search conducted on Google Scholar databases, spanning from 2020 to 2023. The study sought to delineate governmental strategies and approaches concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, with particular emphasis on the popularity of research endeavours during this period. The findings consistently highlight the Malaysian government's concerted efforts, totalling between 17,100 to 17,200 studies, illustrating a predominant focus on safeguarding the government's reputation. Notably, some studies showcase overlapping keywords, indicating a convergence in research themes. The studies analysed cover various aspects, including government crises, reputation management, crisis communication, stakeholder decision-making, and government arrangements. The findings offer a comprehensive view of the strategies and actions undertaken by the Malaysian government and their impact on public perception.

Government Crises and COVID-19 in Malaysia
The search yielded 17,100 results for the keyword combination "Government Crises and COVID-19 and Malaysia." This indicates a substantial interest in understanding the Malaysian government's handling of crises during the pandemic. Research by Shah et al. (2020), Khalid

(2021), and Mustapa & Mohamad (2021) provides detailed analyses of the government's crisis management strategies. These studies highlight the challenges faced by the government, including healthcare system pressures, economic disruptions, and the need for rapid policy responses. The findings suggest that the Malaysian government's crisis management was multifaceted, involving swift policy implementation, resource mobilisation, and public communication. However, the effectiveness of these measures varied, with some studies pointing to gaps in coordination and execution. The research underscores the complexity of managing a public health crisis and the need for continuous improvement in government crisis response frameworks.

Reputation Management during the Pandemic

The keyword search "Government Crises and COVID-19 and Malaysia and Reputation" resulted in 17,200 studies, indicating a strong focus on how the pandemic affected the government's reputation. Notable studies by Mohamad et al. (2020), Masngut & Mohamad (2021), and Perumal et al. (2022) examine the strategies employed by the Malaysian government to safeguard and enhance its reputation during the crisis. These studies reveal that reputation management was a critical component of the government's pandemic response. The government engaged in various image repair strategies, such as emphasising successful interventions, highlighting international cooperation, and showcasing leadership competence. Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of reputation management varied, with some segments of the population remaining sceptical about the government's actions. The research indicates that while reputation management can mitigate negative perceptions, it must be accompanied by tangible results and transparency to be fully effective. The studies suggest that the government's reputation was influenced by both its crisis management performance and the effectiveness of its communication strategies.

Crisis Communication

The search for "Malaysia Government and COVID-19 and Crisis Communication" yielded 17,300 studies, highlighting the importance of communication during the pandemic. Research by Masngut & Mohamad (2021) and Perumal et al. (2022) provides insights into the communication strategies employed by the Malaysian government to manage public perception and disseminate information. The findings indicate that effective crisis communication was pivotal in managing public trust and compliance with health measures. The government utilised multiple communication channels, including social media, press briefings, and public service announcements, to provide timely and accurate information. These efforts were aimed at addressing public concerns, combating misinformation, and promoting health guidelines. However, the research also highlights challenges in crisis communication, such as inconsistencies in messaging, delays in information dissemination, and the impact of misinformation. The studies suggest that improving the clarity, consistency, and timeliness of communication can enhance public trust and cooperation during crises.

Stakeholder Decision-Making

The keyword search "Malaysia Government and COVID-19 and Stakeholders Decision Making" resulted in 17,500 studies, emphasising the role of stakeholder engagement in the government's response to the pandemic. Studies by Lee et al. (2022), Chang & Wu (2021), and Hamid et al. (2021) explore how the Malaysian government involved various stakeholders in decision-making processes. The findings reveal that the government's approach to stakeholder decision-making was inclusive, involving healthcare professionals, business leaders,

community representatives, and other key stakeholders. This collaborative approach facilitated the development of comprehensive and contextually relevant policies. Engaging stakeholders also helped in addressing diverse needs and perspectives, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and acceptance of government interventions. The research indicates that stakeholder engagement contributed to more informed and balanced decision-making. It also fostered a sense of shared responsibility and cooperation among different sectors of society. However, the studies also point out the need for improving the mechanisms for stakeholder feedback and participation to ensure more robust and responsive governance.

Government Arrangements

The keyword search for "Malaysia Government and COVID-19 and Government Arrangements" yielded the highest number of studies (17,600), indicating a significant focus on the structural and organisational aspects of the government's pandemic response. Research by Hashim et al. (2021) and Mustapa & Mohamad (2021) examines the institutional arrangements and inter-agency coordination mechanisms employed by the Malaysian government. The findings suggest that effective government arrangements were crucial for managing the multifaceted challenges of the pandemic. The research highlights the importance of having clear roles and responsibilities, efficient resource allocation, and strong inter-agency collaboration. The studies reveal that the Malaysian government established various task forces and committees to oversee different aspects of the pandemic response, ensuring a coordinated and comprehensive approach. However, the research also identifies areas for improvement, such as enhancing inter-agency communication, streamlining decision-making processes, and building greater flexibility into organisational structures to adapt to evolving situations. The findings underscore the need for continuous evaluation and adaptation of government arrangements to improve crisis response capabilities.

Integrating Global Strategies and Local Insights: Enhancing Public Perception and Government Legitimacy Through Comparative Analysis and Research Convergence

The studies reviewed indicate that the Malaysian government's strategies were informed by global best practices and frameworks, particularly those advocated by the OECD. The alignment with international guidelines highlights the government's efforts to adopt a holistic and adaptive approach to crisis management. The research suggests that the Malaysian government's focus on structured arrangements, stakeholder engagement, and effective communication is consistent with global standards for effective crisis management. This comparative analysis indicates that while the Malaysian government faced unique challenges, its strategies were broadly in line with international best practices, contributing to a more resilient and responsive governance framework. The findings also shed light on the relationship between public perception and government legitimacy. The research indicates that public perception was a critical factor in determining the success of the government's pandemic response. Studies by Shah et al. (2020) and Khalid (2021) highlight how the government's actions influenced public trust and compliance with health measures. The findings suggest that maintaining a positive public perception was essential for effective crisis management. Transparent communication, visible leadership, and demonstrable results were key to building and sustaining public trust. The research also highlights the importance of addressing public concerns and feedback to enhance government legitimacy and ensure broader acceptance of policies.

A notable observation from the keyword search is the overlap in research themes, as indicated by the similar number of results across different keyword combinations. This convergence suggests that researchers were examining the interconnections between government arrangements, stakeholder decision-making, crisis communication, and reputation management. The overlapping themes reflect a holistic approach to studying the government's response, recognising that these elements are interdependent and collectively contribute to effective crisis management. The findings from this systematic keyword search have several implications for future research and policy. First, there is a need for continued exploration of the long-term impacts of the government's strategies on public trust and social cohesion. Second, future research should investigate the effectiveness of specific communication strategies in different cultural and demographic contexts. Third, policymakers can use these insights to refine crisis management frameworks, ensuring that they are adaptable and resilient to future challenges.

The systematic keyword search and subsequent analysis revealed that the Malaysian government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was comprehensive and aligned with global best practices. The emphasis on structured governmental arrangements, stakeholder engagement, and effective crisis communication played a crucial role in managing the crisis and maintaining public trust. The findings underscore the importance of an integrated approach to crisis management, where reputation management and public perception are considered alongside operational strategies. These insights provide a valuable foundation for future research and policy development, aiming to enhance the resilience and responsiveness of governmental systems in the face of global crises. Moreover, a noteworthy trend emerges indicating that the strategies employed by the Malaysian government align closely with the framework established by the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). These strategies predominantly centre around government arrangements, followed by stakeholder decision-making processes, before addressing crisis communication. This emphasis underscores the prioritisation of structured governmental frameworks and collaborative decision-making strategies in managing the pandemic."

Table 1: Results of Studies Conducted on Public Perception and Malaysian Government Reputation

Keywords	Results	Source
Government Crises and COVID-19 and Malaysia	17,100	Shah et., 2020; Khalid, 2021; Mustapa & Mohamad, 2021
Government Crises and COVID-19 and Malaysia and Reputation	17,200	Mohamad et al., 2020; Masngut & Mohamad, 2021; Perumal et al, 2022
Malaysia Government and COVID-19 and Crisis Communication	17,300	Masngut & Mohamad, 2021; Perumal et al, 2022
Malaysia Government and COVID-19 and Stakeholders Decision Making	17,500	Lee et al., 2022; Chang & Wu, 2021; Hamid et al., 2021
Malaysia Government and COVID-19 and Government Arrangements	17,600	Hashim et al., 2021; Mustapa & Mohamad, 2021

Source: Author's Own Work

Table 2: Summary of Main Findings on Government Crisis Management and Reputation During COVID-19 in Malaysia

Themes	Key Findings	Sources
Public Perception and Reputation	Emphasis on safeguarding government reputation with strategies such as successful interventions, leadership competence, and international cooperation. Varied effectiveness in reputation management efforts.	Shah et al. (2020), Khalid (2021), Mustapa & Mohamad (2021)
Government Crises Management	Multifaceted crisis response involving swift policy implementation, resource mobilisation, and public communication. Highlighted gaps in coordination and execution.	Shah et al. (2020), Khalid (2021), Mustapa & Mohamad (2021)
Crisis Communication	Effective use of multiple communication channels (social media, press briefings) to address public concerns and combat misinformation. Challenges include inconsistency and delays.	Masngut & Mohamad (2021), Perumal et al. (2022)
Stakeholder Engagement	Inclusive decision-making involving healthcare professionals, businesses, and communities. Enhanced effectiveness through collaboration but needs improved feedback mechanisms.	Lee et al. (2022), Chang & Wu (2021), Hamid et al. (2021)
Government Arrangements	Strong inter-agency collaboration, task forces, and committees established for pandemic response. Emphasis on flexibility and efficiency but noted gaps in inter-agency communication.	Hashim et al. (2021), Mustapa & Mohamad (2021)
Integrated Global Strategies	Alignment with OECD frameworks and global best practices, including structured governmental arrangements, stakeholder engagement, and crisis communication for resilient governance.	Shah et al. (2020), Khalid (2021), OECD Frameworks

Source: Author's Own Work

Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis of governmental strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic reveals a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach taken by the Malaysian government. The data, derived from a systematic keyword search on Google Scholar databases from 2020 to 2024, highlight the popularity and focus of research conducted during this period. The findings, summarised in Table 1, indicate a substantial number of studies (ranging from 17,100 to 17,600) examining various aspects of the government's response to the pandemic. This section delves into the key findings, exploring the implications of the Malaysian government's strategies and their alignment with global frameworks.

The research aimed to analyse governmental strategies amid the COVID-19 pandemic, spotlighting the popularity of studies conducted during this period. Notably, the findings consistently underscored the Malaysian government's intensive focus, reflected in an extensive body of research totalling between 17,100 to 17,200 studies. This immense attention primarily revolved around safeguarding the government's reputation, evident through a convergence of overlapping keywords across various studies. Moreover, a discernible trend surfaced indicating

alignment between the strategies adopted by the Malaysian government and the established framework by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). Noteworthy was the emphasis on structured governmental arrangements, prioritising mechanisms that facilitate effective decision-making among stakeholders, preceding crisis communication initiatives. This trend indicated a deliberate focus on institutional frameworks and collaborative strategies, illustrating the government's approach to navigating the complexities of the pandemic.

Governmental Focus and Research Popularity

The research underscores the Malaysian government's intensive focus on managing the COVID-19 crisis, as evidenced by the extensive body of research dedicated to this topic. With studies totalling between 17,100 to 17,200, it is clear that a significant portion of academic and policy-oriented research has been directed towards understanding and evaluating the government's actions (Shah et al., 2020; Khalid, 2021; Mustapa & Mohamad, 2021). This immense attention primarily revolves around safeguarding the government's reputation, a critical aspect during any crisis. The convergence of overlapping keywords across various studies suggests a shared interest and common themes among researchers, further emphasising the importance of this topic (Mohamad et al., 2020; Masngut & Mohamad, 2021; Perumal et al., 2022).

Alignment with OECD Frameworks

A notable trend emerging from the findings is the alignment between the strategies adopted by the Malaysian government and the framework established by the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). The OECD's guidelines and recommendations serve as a benchmark for best practices in crisis management, providing a structured approach to handling complex situations like a pandemic (OECD, 2022). The Malaysian government's emphasis on structured governmental arrangements, prioritising mechanisms that facilitate effective decision-making among stakeholders, and focusing on crisis communication, reflects a deliberate alignment with these established frameworks (Hashim et al., 2021; Mustapa & Mohamad, 2021).

Structured Governmental Arrangements

The prioritisation of structured governmental arrangements is evident from the keyword analysis, with 17,600 studies focusing on this aspect. Effective crisis management requires a well-organised and coordinated approach, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process. The Malaysian government's strategy underscores the importance of having robust institutional frameworks in place, enabling swift and efficient responses to emerging challenges. This structured approach not only enhances the government's ability to manage the crisis but also fosters greater public trust and confidence in its actions.

Stakeholder Decision-Making Processes

The emphasis on stakeholder decision-making processes is another critical aspect highlighted in the research, with 17,500 studies focusing on this theme (Lee et al., 2022; Chang & Wu, 2021; Hamid et al., 2021). Involving stakeholders in the decision-making process ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, leading to more informed and effective decisions. The Malaysian government's approach reflects an understanding of the value of collaborative strategies, recognizing that effective crisis management requires the input and cooperation of

various stakeholders, including health professionals, policymakers, and the public. This inclusive approach not only enhances the quality of decisions but also promotes a sense of shared responsibility and collective action (Perumal et al., 2022).

Crisis Communication

Crisis communication is a vital component of any effective response strategy, and the research indicates a significant focus on this aspect, with 17,300 studies examining the Malaysian government's communication strategies (Masngut & Mohamad, 2021; Perumal et al., 2022). Clear and transparent communication is essential for maintaining public trust and ensuring that accurate information is disseminated promptly. The Malaysian government's emphasis on crisis communication reflects a recognition of its importance in managing public perception and mitigating the spread of misinformation. Effective communication strategies help to reassure the public, provide necessary guidance, and foster a sense of solidarity and resilience during challenging times (Masngut & Mohamad, 2021).

Reputation Management

The extensive focus on safeguarding the government's reputation, as indicated by the convergence of overlapping keywords, underscores the importance of reputation management during a crisis. Maintaining public trust and confidence is crucial for the successful implementation of crisis response measures. The Malaysian government's deliberate efforts to protect its reputation reflect an understanding of this critical aspect. By aligning its strategies with global frameworks and prioritising structured decision-making processes, the government aims to present itself as competent and reliable, thereby enhancing its credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the public (Mohamad et al., 2020; Masngut & Mohamad, 2021; Perumal et al., 2022).

Implications for Future Research and Policy

The findings from this analysis have several implications for future research and policy development. Firstly, the significant focus on the Malaysian government's response to COVID-19 highlights the need for continued research in this area. Future studies should explore the long-term impacts of the government's strategies, examining their effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement. Additionally, comparative analyses with other countries' responses can provide valuable insights into best practices and innovative approaches to crisis management. Policy-wise, the alignment with OECD frameworks and the emphasis on structured governmental arrangements suggest a pathway for other countries to follow. Governments can benefit from adopting similar strategies, prioritising stakeholder involvement, and ensuring clear and transparent communication during crises. By learning from the Malaysian government's approach, policymakers can enhance their preparedness and resilience in the face of future challenges (Khalid, 2021; Hashim et al., 2021).

Overall, these findings highlight the Malaysian government's strategic approach in addressing the pandemic, emphasising reputation management, aligning with global frameworks, and prioritising structured decision-making processes as essential pillars in managing the multifaceted challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis. The results suggest several reasons for the prevalent focus identified in the research. Firstly, the governmental focus and research popularity demonstrate the significant attention and resources dedicated to understanding and evaluating the Malaysian government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This extensive body of research underscores the importance of examining governmental actions during a crisis

to inform future strategies and policies. Secondly, the alignment with OECD frameworks indicates a commitment to adopting established best practices and global standards in crisis management. By following these guidelines, the Malaysian government ensures that its strategies are informed by internationally recognized principles, enhancing the effectiveness and credibility of its response. Thirdly, the emphasis on structured governmental arrangements reflects the importance of having robust institutional frameworks in place. These arrangements facilitate coordinated and efficient responses, enabling the government to manage the complexities of the pandemic effectively. A well-structured approach ensures that all necessary components of crisis management are addressed systematically (Shah et al., 2020; Mohamad et al., 2020; Masngut & Mohamad, 2021).

Fourthly, the focus on stakeholder decision-making processes highlights the value of involving diverse perspectives in the decision-making process. By engaging various stakeholders, the Malaysian government ensures that decisions are well-informed and consider the needs and concerns of different groups. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of shared responsibility and enhances the quality of crisis management efforts. Fifthly, the significant attention to crisis communication underscores its crucial role in maintaining public trust and confidence. Clear, transparent, and timely communication is essential for providing accurate information, mitigating misinformation, and guiding public behaviour during a crisis. Effective communication strategies are vital for ensuring that the public remains informed and reassured. Sixthly, the extensive focus on reputation management emphasises the importance of maintaining public trust and confidence in the government. Safeguarding the government's reputation during a crisis is paramount, as it directly impacts the public's willingness to comply with government directives and support crisis response measures. By prioritising reputation management, the Malaysian government aims to present itself as competent and reliable, thereby enhancing its credibility (Perumal et al., 2022; Hamid et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022).

Lastly, the findings have significant implications for future research and policy development. The insights gained from examining the Malaysian government's response to COVID-19 can inform future strategies and policies, both in Malaysia and globally. Comparative analyses with other countries' responses can provide valuable lessons and best practices, contributing to a more resilient and effective approach to crisis management. Future research should continue to explore the long-term impacts of these strategies, identifying areas for improvement and innovation in crisis response. These key points collectively highlight the strategic approach taken by the Malaysian government in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasising the importance of research, alignment with global standards, structured arrangements, stakeholder involvement, effective communication, and reputation management. By understanding and building on these elements, future crisis management efforts can be enhanced, ensuring a more robust and resilient response to global challenges (Chang & Wu, 2021; Mustapa & Mohamad, 2021; Ndayishimiye et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the research highlights the Malaysian government's strategic approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasising reputation management, alignment with global frameworks, and prioritising structured decision-making processes. The extensive body of research dedicated to this topic reflects the importance of these strategies in navigating the complexities of the crisis. By focusing on structured governmental arrangements, stakeholder involvement, and effective crisis communication, the Malaysian government aims to maintain public trust and confidence, ensuring a coordinated and resilient response to the pandemic.

These findings provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the Malaysian government's strategies, offering lessons for other countries facing similar challenges. The alignment with OECD frameworks and the emphasis on collaborative decision-making processes underscore the importance of adopting best practices and global standards in crisis management. As the world continues to grapple with the impacts of COVID-19, these insights can guide future research and policy development, enhancing our collective ability to respond to crises effectively and efficiently (Hashim et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2020; Khalid, 2021).

Overall, the study objectives were partially achieved, with significant strengths identified in reputation management, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with global standards. These efforts underscore the Malaysian government's strategic approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic and its focus on safeguarding public perception. However, certain gaps were evident, particularly in areas such as inter-agency coordination, transparency, and the adaptability of strategies, which limited the overall effectiveness of the government's response. Despite its contributions, the study had several limitations. It did not provide a detailed exploration of the long-term impacts of government strategies on public trust and socio-economic stability. Furthermore, the analysis did not fully account for cultural and demographic variations, which are critical for tailoring crisis management strategies to diverse populations. Additionally, the lack of robust mechanisms for collecting real-time stakeholder feedback hindered a more comprehensive evaluation of decision-making processes and their effectiveness during the crisis. To address these gaps, future research should prioritise investigating the long-term impacts of governmental strategies on public trust, socio-economic recovery, and societal resilience. Comparative studies with other countries can also offer valuable insights, helping to refine best practices and identify transferable crisis management approaches. Moreover, future studies should explore the development of adaptive governmental structures that are more flexible and responsive to rapidly evolving crises. Finally, a focus on implementing dynamic communication strategies that are tailored to different demographics and cultural contexts could further enhance the effectiveness of government responses in future crises.

Acknowledgements

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