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## **SPECIFICITY OF THE CRISIS COMMUNICATION STUDY IN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FIELD**

*The purpose of the research is to analyze the specificity of crisis communication study in the public administration field.*

**Research methodology.** *The methodological basis of the research involves the use of general scientific methods to study social phenomena and processes (analysis, synthesis, modeling, typologization, extrapolation, interpretation, abstracting, generalization, as well as methods of systemic, comparative, and structural-functional analysis).*

**Results.** *It is shown that the development of the state and society is constantly faced with crises of various nature and degree of consequences criticality. As a result of crisis manifestations (unpredictability of consequences, uncontrollability, instability), the need for effective communications of public authorities and society increases significantly. It was found that crisis communications in public administration should be characterized by a quick response to the situation; reliable provision of relevant information to interested groups; demonstrating the position of openness. Crisis communications management focuses on pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis periods based on the collection, processing and dissemination of information for management decision-making. It was established that effective public management of crisis communications minimizes the time to eliminate the crisis, helps restore control over the situation, and strengthens social confidence in public authorities.*

**Novelty.** *The novelty of the research consists in establishing the features of crisis communications in the public administration system and defining approaches to crisis communications management.*

**Practical importance.** *The results of this study can be used as a basis for the formation of a public management system of crisis communications in order to increase the potential of public authorities in crisis periods.*

**Keywords:** *public administration, crisis situation, crisis communications, information and communication technologies.*

### **I. Introduction**

Information support has always remained the basis for understanding the current state of the management system and played a key role in decision-making by management entities. Gradually, the processes of accumulating and manipulating information are gaining global importance, forming the foundations of the information society and the digital perception of reality. These trends have led to significant transformations in the political, socio-economic, and communicative spheres of public life. The development of information and communication technologies, the need for comprehensive information provision and warning of society is the basis of public policy in developed countries. The presence of a significant number of unpredictable crises creates the need for public authorities in effective crisis situations management based on an effective system of communication with society. The theory and methodology of crisis communication research in the process of public administration have been significantly updated, taking into account the increased requirements for ensuring security by a state in times of natural and technological catastrophes, epidemics, terrorist attacks, and armed conflicts. Ukraine, in this sense, being in the context of active development of the global information society, is experiencing the most dramatic difficulties on its way, primarily related to the military confrontation with Russian aggression. Thus, one of the key areas is the problem of implementing crisis communications in the public administration system in Ukraine.

Issues related to the study of various areas of crisis communication analysis in the public administration field have been studied in the works of such foreign and Ukrainian scientists as H. Bustras, N. Vovk, G. Dzyana, R. Dzyany, L. Kochubey, L. Mokhnar, V. Tokakis and others. Based on the topicality of the issue, the specificity of the crisis communication study in the public administration field requires a deeper consideration, especially during the introduction of martial law in Ukraine.

### **II. Problem statement and research methods**

The purpose of the article is to analyze the specificity of the crisis communication study in the public administration field.

The research methodology involves the use of general scientific methods of studying social phenomena and processes (analysis, synthesis, modeling, typologization, extrapolation, interpretation, abstracting, generalization, as well as methods of systemic, comparative, and structural-functional analysis).

### III. Results

In the system of public administration, research is based on ways and methods that allow solving scientific problems, which involves the use of a certain conceptual framework, principles of building methodological approaches, and action plans. In recent years, researchers in the public administration field have been paying special attention to the study of crisis phenomena as the main destructive factor in the system of public policy implementation and achievement of the established management goals of the country's socio-economic development.

In fact, probably the biggest problem facing public administration in the 21st century is the various manifestations of crises, which sometimes have catastrophic consequences. In terms of scientific understanding, it is necessary to clarify the essence of crisis phenomena as well as the role of public administration in the anti-crisis activities processes. A crisis is a certain event that is expected to result in an unstable and dangerous situation that affects an individual, a group, a community, or the whole society. The above is considered negative changes in such areas as security, economy, politics, social, or environmental issues, especially when critical changes occur unexpectedly and unpredictably [12].

The «crisis» term is defined as the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens the important expectations of stakeholders, significantly affects the activities of the entity (organization), and creates further negative results. During the crisis, certain features are clearly manifested: its unexpected occurrence for the target group, audience, or country includes «non-standard events» and causes a high degree of uncertainty and anxiety; interest groups (stakeholders) are the subject of consideration in a number of crisis events; the crisis leads to negative consequences for political institutions or any other agents [19]. In a crisis, there is a rapid increase in information flows, which cause their uncontrollability, considering the probable spread of both reliable information and misinformation, which leads to misinterpretation of facts, reputational losses of entities, and negative impact on their perception by the mass consciousness of citizens [2].

The public administration sphere has a complex communication system where there are vertical and horizontal links, formal and informal processes. In times of crisis, communication processes between the public authorities and society reach their maximum aggravation and get out of control, becoming poorly controlled. Maintaining a high level of trust is the main condition for finding a favorable way out of the crisis and minimizing reputational losses. In times of crisis, the main principles of communicative interaction between the government and society are openness of information, the widest possible coverage of crisis events, as well as decisions and actions taken through existing communication channels, and the promptness of delivering relevant information to its consumers. The scientific development of the crisis communication problems is insufficient, which is due to the complexity of the object of study; significant expansion of the social networks' communicative potential; insignificant use of social networks for crisis communication in public administration; the initial stage of the scientific methods' formation, and ways of studying modern trends in crisis communication.

To conduct a comprehensive analysis of communication and crisis management, it is necessary to use an approach that takes into account the pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis states, where the primary focus is on crisis recognition and response. Crisis recognition refers to the process in which a crisis is declared and confirmed by different institutional agents (business, political environment, and media agents) depending on the factors of the crisis' nature and scale, the experience of the dominant coalition, and the persuasiveness of the manifestation. The next step is material actions to respond to crisis events. During the communication process, crisis management should respond quickly, consistently, and openly (availability of instructive information in order to avoid serious consequences, information adjustment for reputation management) [19].

For public authorities, a crisis is a critical moment where a wrong decision can disrupt their functionality. Communication becomes a key factor, enabling both the exchange of messages between individuals, legal entities, and governance entities, the transfer of information and opinions, reaching agreements, demonstrating and imposing public acts, as well as negotiating and reaching consensus. The main goal of any crisis response program based on a public communication strategy is to influence the public to change the crisis' interpretation. The crisis facilitates the conceptualization and application of communication strategies aimed at limiting or eliminating the damage caused.

If the public administration fully implements its own functions before the crisis, it is possible to foresee its effectiveness in detecting signals of a future crisis, preparing for the crisis and its prevention, recognizing and containing the crisis, and recovering from the crisis. External communication, mainly through the mass media, is an important factor that influences and contributes to crisis recognition and containment, with subsequent support of the public administration system's image. Public administration should aim to make decisions under time constraints, transform internal official communication channels and procedures, change the strategy of external communication with an emphasis on effective crisis management (political instability crisis, financial crisis, military conflicts) in the created dynamic and unpredictable environment [18].

Scholars studying crisis public administration processes employ the theory of integration, which takes the level of institutional change into account. These changes reflect the supranational, historical,

or intergovernmental way of organizing crisis management [15]. In addition to the theory of integration, scholars study the theory of organization as the basis of crisis management. The response strategy involves social dialogue (informing citizens about the problems), which allows to reduce the level of negative perception of crisis phenomena by society. Interactions within the symbolic approach include convincing people that there is no crisis, forming a less negative perception, and forming a positive image of the public administration system. An element of the symbolic approach is the formation of relationships, which is used to understand the dynamics of interaction between the public administration system and society [14].

In public administration, crisis situations should get more attention as they require a specific communication process. Without a well-developed communication strategy in a crisis situation, the institutions' image is unreliable and may be at risk. Furthermore, communication conveys and emphasises the public authority's mission, which is the primary goal in its interactions with citizens. These aspects complement its identity, i.e., public image. Communication strategies in crisis situations, as well as relationships with the press, can influence citizens' perceptions and trust in public institutions [12]. Communication in public administration involves interaction with the public, stakeholders, and within the public administration system based on certain methods (propaganda; persuasion; involvement; education; clarification; dialogue; mediation; information) [4]. At the same time, researchers highlight some mistakes made when faced with a crisis [6]: lack of decisive action and reaction; measures that only increase tension; unwillingness to reliably cover the crisis; confrontation.

In public administration, crisis communication is a relatively new area of communication research and involves the use of indirect messages and different types of audiences in periods of increased manifestation. M. Sheehan considers crisis communication as a process that takes place within the framework of risk and crisis management and consists of such phases as the pre-crisis period, crisis response, and post-crisis period [17]. At the pre-crisis stage, crisis communication focuses on risk monitoring, decision-making to manage potential crises, and training of crisis managers. Crisis communication includes the collection and processing of information for decision-making, as well as the creation and dissemination of messages. Post-crisis communication involves evaluating the crisis management efforts and providing further crisis messages, if necessary [12]. Crisis communication is based on the processes of collecting, processing, and disseminating the information (key messages) necessary to resolve the crisis situation, which involves making managerial decisions [11].

W. T. Coombs [10] outlines the main approaches to the implementation of crisis communications: the dynamism of providing information and responses to inquiries after the next stage of the crisis continuation; coordination (compatibility, consistency of messages); openness (impartial work with target audiences). Experts offer to be guided by the concept of crisis communication, which should take into account the time factor, be based on openness and completeness of information, support of official state communications, and the presence of a single center for the formation of a strategic narrative [8].

Crisis response is essential to build the image of public authorities in case of communication failure during a crisis; to encourage better understanding before the crisis is resolved; to convey convincing solutions to key groups through successful communication skills to restore the image. As a subfield of PR, research on communication in crisis situations studies certain response strategies, coordinated relationships with stakeholders, and implemented communication force [19]. Research on institutional image and crisis management focuses on media representations of institutional images during a crisis, as well as the discursive construction of identities in public authorities [16].

Crisis communications should take into account the uncontrollability of the actions' consequences; reduction of parameters in the public administration system; increasing importance of information and interpretation of events; change of information channels [14]. In case of the authorities' inability to solve key socio-political problems during the crisis, the communication stability of society becomes the dominant characteristic of the country's stability, which allows it to actively interact with the external environment and adapt to changes [3].

The functions of crisis management in the public administration activities can include both general management functions (planning; organization; motivation; control), and special functions of crisis management (information, coordination; communication; feedback; analysis; diagnosis; forecasting; resource; innovation; control) [7].

Researchers of communication in the system of public administration highlight the problems in their activities related to the unsystematic implementation of state policy; making managerial decisions without balanced consultations with experts; low professional level of employees of public authorities' information departments [5]. Modernization of the public administration system involves the wide-scale introduction of new, more advanced forms of social development management with an end-to-end system of developed communications. In the current conditions of reforming public administration, effective crisis communications should become an integral attribute of the public authorities' activities and meet the level of Ukrainian society's development. The implementation of these important tasks can be ensured by the wide introduction of the latest information and communication technologies in the public authorities' activities [9].

One of the important topics in the study of crisis communications in public administration is the issue of accountability, the ability of public authorities to meet the expectations of key stakeholders on a

particular issue. The crisis, by its manifestation, warns the public about the possibility that the management entity does not meet the accountability standards, not doing what is necessary to meet the legitimacy standards. The essence of crisis communication should focus on the practices, policies, and ethics that prevent or neutralize the harm from the crisis. Crisis communication is normative, as is its management. The goal of governance and communication is to prevent harm to others; community participants should be responsible and legitimate. Crisis discourse involves developing (co-creation) of fact-based, evaluable and policy-ready offers. It is expected that the offered factual conclusions can be supported for a long time and withstand scrutiny by many other participants [13].

Crisis communications serve as a link between the authorities and the public before, during and after a crisis situation. Crisis communications should not only alleviate or eliminate the consequences of the crisis, but also create a more positive reputation for the public authorities than it was before the crisis. In the pre-crisis period, crisis communication focuses on gathering information about crisis risks, making decisions about how to manage potential crises, and training specialists who will be involved in the crisis management process. Crisis communication includes the analysis of the information received for public administration decision-making, as well as the creation and dissemination of crisis messages to citizens outside the group of public managers. The post-crisis period involves analyzing the crisis management efforts, communicating the necessary changes to the society and providing further crisis messages, if necessary. Crisis communication focuses on the category of response to the activities of the authorities after the crisis. Crisis response is visible to stakeholders and is very important for the effectiveness of public crisis management efforts.

In summary, the task of crisis communications focuses on mitigating the impact of the crisis on the public authorities' activities and their target audiences, minimizing the time for crisis elimination, and quickly restoring control over the situation and communication. Qualitatively organized crisis communications help to preserve state attributes and institutions as well as human life; protect citizens and their property; strengthen public confidence in public authorities; demonstrate the competence of public officials; and promote the consolidation of law and order. However, for effective communication immediately after the beginning of the crisis situation, it is necessary to have formed strategic documents based on the relevant state policy, because society largely evaluates the success of measures to overcome the crisis by the effectiveness of the implementation of crisis communications of the authorities.

#### IV. Conclusions

In conclusion, crisis phenomena caused by the unpredictability of various negative conditions, problems, and dangers have a significant impact on people, communities, society, and the state. Crisis conditions are characterized by poor manageability, critical influence on the mind, disinformation, complicated flows of social processes, and the loss of reputation of public administration entities. This requires a quick response, openness, reliable coverage of events by public authorities, and the provision of effective crisis communications. Proceeding from the above, the peculiarity of crisis communications in the public administration system is the essential need for decision-making under time constraints, changes in internal channels and administrative procedures of communication, and the implementation of an effective strategy of external communication. Crisis communications should focus on the pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis periods, which involve the processes of collecting, processing, and disseminating the information necessary to resolve the crisis situation in order to make management decisions. Effective state management of crisis communications allows to minimize the time for crisis elimination, to save institutions from reputational losses, to save lives and property, as well as leads to the rapid restoration of control over the situation, and strengthens public confidence in public authorities.

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**Киричок А. П. Специфіка дослідження кризової комунікації в галузі державного управління**

**Мета дослідження** – аналіз специфіки дослідження кризової комунікації в галузі державного управління.

**Методологія дослідження.** *Методологічна основа дослідження передбачає використання загальнонаукових методів вивчення суспільних явищ і процесів (аналіз, синтез, моделювання, типологізація, екстраполяція, інтерпретація, абстрагування, узагальнення, а також методи системного, порівняльного та структурно-функціонального аналізу).*

**Результати.** Показано, що розвиток держави та суспільства постійно стикається з кризами різного характеру та ступеня критичності наслідків. У результаті кризових проявів (непередбачуваність наслідків, некерованість, нестабільність) значно зростає потреба дієвих комунікацій органів державної влади та суспільства. З'ясовано, що кризові комунікації в державному управлінні мають характеризуватися швидким реагуванням на ситуацію; достовірним наданням зацікавленим групам актуальної інформації; демонстрацією позиції відкритості. Управління кризовими комунікаціями зосереджується на передкризовому, кризовому та посткризовому періодах на основі збирання, обробки та розповсюдження інформації для прийняття управлінських рішень. Встановлено, що ефективно державне управління кризовими комунікаціями мінімізує час на ліквідацію кризи, сприяє відновленню контролю над ситуацією, посилює суспільну довіру до органів державної влади.

**Новизна.** Новизна дослідження полягає у встановленні особливостей кризових комунікацій у системі державного управління та визначенні підходів до управління кризовими комунікаціями.

**Практичне значення.** Результати цього дослідження можуть бути використані як основа при формуванні системи державного управління кризовими комунікаціями з метою підвищення потенціалу органів державної влади в кризові періоди.

**Ключові слова:** державне управління, кризовий стан, кризові комунікації, інформаційно-комунікативні технології.

**Kurczok A. Specyfika badania komunikacji kryzysowej w branży administracji publicznej**

**Cel badania** – przeprowadzenie analizy specyfiki badania komunikacji kryzysowej w branży administracji publicznej.

**Metodologia badania.** *Metodologiczna podstawa badania przewiduje wykorzystanie ogólnonaukowych metod badania zjawisk i procesów społecznych (analiza, synteza, modelowanie, typologia, ekstrapolacja, interpretacja, abstrakcja, uogólnienie, a także metody analizy systemowej, porównawczej i strukturalno-funkcjonalnej).*

**Wyniki.** Wyświetlono, że rozwój państwa i społeczeństwa ciągle napotyka kryzysy o różnym charakterze oraz stopniu krytyczności konsekwencji. W wyniku przejawów kryzysu (nieprzewidywalność konsekwencji, brak kontroli, niestabilność) znacznie wzrasta potrzeba efektywnej komunikacji organów administracji publicznej i społeczeństwa. Stwierdzono, że komunikacja kryzysowa administracji publicznej powinna się charakteryzować szybką reakcją na zaistniałą sytuację; wiarygodnym przekazywaniem aktualnych informacji zainteresowanym grupom; demonstracją pozycji otwartości. Zarządzanie komunikacją kryzysową koncentruje się na przedkryzysowym, kryzysowym oraz pokryzysowym okresie na podstawie gromadzenia, przetwarzania i rozpowszechniania informacji w celu podejmowania decyzji zarządczych. Ustalono, że efektywna administracja publiczna komunikacją kryzysową minimalizuje czas likwidacji kryzysu, sprzyja odrodzeniu kontroli nad sytuacją, wzmacnia zaufanie społeczne do organów administracji publicznej.

**Nowość.** Nowość badania polega na ustaleniu właściwości komunikacji kryzysowej w systemie administracji publicznej oraz określeniu podejść do zarządzania komunikacją kryzysową.

**Znaczenie praktyczne.** Wyniki niniejszego badania mogą być wykorzystane jako podstawa przy formowaniu systemu administracji publicznej komunikacją kryzysową w celu zwiększenia potencjału organów administracji publicznej pod czas okresów kryzysowych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** administracja publiczna, kryzys, komunikacja kryzysowa, technologie informacyjno-komunikacyjne.