

Complexities of Crisis Communication Conundrum: War of Words - South Africa Versus Rwanda

Edgar Julius Malatji

*College of Human Sciences School of Arts, Department of Communication Science, University of South Africa,
Muckleneuk, South Africa*

ABSTRACT

The conundrum of crisis communication during the reports about the demise of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) soldiers at the hands of M23 rebels needs academic intervention. As such, this paper expounds on the complexities of crisis management through appropriate crisis communication among the South African and Rwandan governments. The key principle of crisis communication is to provide accurate information to restore calm among the constituencies. Also, this phenomenon needs credible sources to play a cardinal role in briefing all stakeholders about the developments of the crisis without contradictions. In the South Africa-Rwanda case, the government officials failed to restore calm by spreading contradictory messages. These contradictory messages left most people confused. Amid this crisis communication conundrum, the SANDF had already lost 14 soldiers. This study is undertaken through a critical analysis of the messages between South African and Rwandan governments. The exploratory research design is aptly rooted in dissecting the phenomenon. Theoretically, the study is based on the canons of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). Further, the qualitative data were in the form of speeches, tweets, news reports, and press conferences during the exchanges between the two African nations. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to deconstruct the secondary data. The poor management of the crisis was the direct result of improper crisis management. Both Rwandan and South African governments were culpable in the poor management of the crisis. Accordingly, this study recommends that governments should apply the basics of crisis communication to avoid exacerbating the problem.

Keywords: Crisis communication; South Africa; Rwanda; Conundrum; Words