

**CRISIS COMMUNICATION.  
A CASE STUDY ON THE “COLECTIV” BLAZE**

**Delia Pop-Flanja\***

---

DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2019.1.07

Published Online: 2019-07-01

Published Print: 2019-17-15

---

**Abstract**

*The aim of this article is to tackle crisis communication and the image of the crisis at a multi-organizational level, with a focus on the public sector, in the cases of severe crises that pose threats to security and health. For the theoretical background, the article is based on the situational crisis communication theory introduced by the communication scholar Timothy Coombs and the image restoration theory introduced by William Benoit. The crisis that was analysed is an event that took place in Bucharest in October 2015, namely the “Colectiv” club blaze, which caused the death of dozens and the injury of more than one hundred people, having a major impact on the Romanian society.*

**Keywords:** crisis communication, *Colectiv* blaze, emergency situations, social media.

---

\* **Delia Pop-Flanja** is a lecturer at the Faculty of European Studies within Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca. Her research interests are communication skills, intercultural communication, discourse analysis and crisis communication.  
Contact: delia.flanja@ubbcluj.ro

## Introduction

As crises are diverse and the contexts in which they occur are rarely the same, the utility of theories in the domain of crisis communication might be questioned. However, theories, as well as models of good and bad practices, are not mere academic endeavours and can contribute to the resolution of crises in the sense that patterns of communication behaviours or reactions to those behaviours can be identified, providing the organization with guidelines or options when faced with such situations.

Since there have been a lot of discussions on the crisis management of the 2015 *Colectiv* blaze, the purpose of this article is to assess the crisis from the point of view of the communication strategies that were used by the organizations involved, the impact of these strategies on the perception of this event at a national and international level and the role played by social media.

The originality of the article consists in analysing this crisis from the point of view of the communication strategies of multiple actors that contributed to the manner in which the *Colectiv* club blaze was perceived, taking into consideration that most studies in crisis communication focus on the messages conveyed by one organization.

## Literature Review

The communication scholar Timothy Coombs developed the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and considers that effective crisis responses depend on the assessment of the situation and the related reputational threat. According to Coombs, “SCCT seeks to use research and theory to develop recommendations for the use of crisis response strategies. The crisis response strategies are matched to the nature of the crisis situation.” The higher the degree of severity of the crisis is, the higher the degree of perceived responsibility will be. Severity of the damage is perceived as “the amount of financial, physical, environmental, or emotional harm a crisis can inflict.” In order to assess the reputational threat, four

elements are to be taken into consideration, namely the type of crisis, the severity of the crisis, the crisis history and the relationship history.<sup>1</sup>

Coombs combined existing crisis response strategies to form a comprehensive repertoire, with the purpose of repairing organizational images. He classified the strategies in five main categories: nonexistence, distance, ingratiation, mortification and suffering. Nonexistence strategies have the purpose of eliminating the crisis, as if it did not exist, by denial, clarification, attack and intimidation. Distance strategies attempt to make the crisis acceptable, through excuse and justification. Ingratiation strategies include bolstering, transcendence and praising others and focus on the aspects of the organization that are considered as positive by the public. Mortification strategies, on the other hand, focus on obtaining forgiveness, through remediation, repentance and rectification. The last category, suffering, portrays the organization as a victim, in order to get the sympathy of the public. In classifying crises, Coombs acknowledged the internal-external dimension and whether the crisis is the result of something unintentional or intentional. These aspects should be taken into consideration when deciding on the response strategy.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the type of the crisis, the damage caused and the accuracy of the evidence, another important factor in establishing the appropriate response strategy is the performance history of the organization, as a form of credibility. A positive performance history makes the claims of the organization more trustworthy and it is essential for the ingratiation strategies.<sup>3</sup>

Another researcher that focused on analysing crisis communication, more precisely on image restoration, is William Benoit. Benoit's Image Restoration model offers alternatives of response strategies in case the image of an organization is threatened or has been damaged. He proposes five rhetorical responses, divided in several subcategories.

---

<sup>1</sup> Timothy W. Coombs (2006), "The Protective Powers of Crisis Response Strategies: Managing Reputational Assets During a Crisis", in *Journal of Promotion Management*, vol. 12(3/4) 2006, pp. 241-245, <http://www.haworthpress.com/web/JPM>, [accessed on 12.03.2019].

<sup>2</sup> Timothy W. Coombs (1995), "Choosing the Right Words: The development of guidelines for the selection of the appropriate crisis response strategies", in *Management Communication Quarterly*, 8, 447-476, pp. 450-455.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 460-461.

- the denial strategy, with two sub strategies: simple denial and shifting blame;
- evading responsibility, to reduce the perceived responsibility for the crisis situation, with four sub strategies: provocation, defeasibility, accidental, good intentions;
- reducing offensiveness, divided in: bolstering, differentiation, transcendence, minimization, attacking accuser and compensation offer;
- corrective action;
- mortification, which consists in acceptance of blame, expression of regret or request for forgiveness.<sup>4</sup>

Whether it is because of the limited resources and their distribution, of circumstances that are not under our control and that can stop us from fulfilling our obligations, of humane errors or of differences in our priorities, Benoit considers threats to one’s image are inevitable. Although reality is the source of meaning, “humans and their symbols give meaning to reality”<sup>5</sup>. Hence, good or bad communication in a crisis situation can give a different meaning to the crisis *per se*.

## Methodology

The crisis situation that is subject of analysis in this study is a tragic accident that occurred during a concert performed by the band Goodbye to Gravity in the *Colectiv* Club in Bucharest, in October 2015. The blaze is considered to have been caused by the fireworks that set the flammable polyurethane foam on fire. The fire spread rapidly and a lot of the people attending the concert were trapped inside. The initial number of fatalities was of 27 and it reached a number of 65, whereas dozens others were injured. The club’s co-founder, together with two other associates, were arrested on

---

<sup>4</sup> William L. Benoit, (2015). *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of image restoration Strategies*, second edition, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, pp. 22-31.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p.6.

2 November and charged with negligent bodily harm, manslaughter and negligent destruction.<sup>6</sup>

Since the trial is still on-going and no convictions were made when this article was written, we will present solely the perceptions of the public regarding the culprits of the tragedy, without a claim that any of the parties has been officially recognized and convicted as guilty.

The research methodology consists in a content analysis of the crisis responses of various actors involved in the crisis communication, of institutions such as the Department for Emergency Situations, the Ministry of Health, the Government, the Presidency or representatives of the *Colectiv* Club, as well as some reactions to those responses. The sources include academic research, official websites of public institutions, press releases, TV stations broadcasts, newspaper articles and social media websites.

## Results

The extent at which the perceived responsibility, or the reaction of the media and the public regarding different actors involved in the crisis, was attributed during the *Colectiv* blaze can be explained through the four elements that Coombs recommends taking into consideration in assessing the reputational threat: type, severity, history of crisis and relationship history<sup>7</sup>. Hence, the reactions were directed more towards the authorities than towards the owners of the club, the cause of the crisis was attributed more to external than to internal factors. Since it is a case that Romania did not have to deal with before, there was no prior negative relationship history to owners of such clubs. After the incident, improper conditions in case of similar events were brought into discussion, but there was no history of similar incidents.

---

<sup>6</sup> RomâniaTV.net (2015), "Alin Anastasescu, Paul Gancea și Costin Mincu, patronii Club Colectiv, au fost reținuți", published on 2 November 2015 18:38, updated on 3 November 2015 08:21, [https://www.romaniatv.net/alin-anastasescu-unul-dintre-patronii-club-colectiv-a-fost-retinut\\_254527.html](https://www.romaniatv.net/alin-anastasescu-unul-dintre-patronii-club-colectiv-a-fost-retinut_254527.html), [accessed on 12.03.2019].

<sup>7</sup> Timothy W. Coombs (2006), "The Protective Powers of Crisis Response Strategies: Managing Reputational Assets During a Crisis", in *Journal of Promotion Management*, vol. 12(3/4) 2006, pp. 241-245, p.245. <http://www.haworthpress.com/web/JPM>, [accessed on 12.03.2019].

However, there were negative opinions regarding the capacity of the authorities to respond to emergency situations because, for example, of the plane crash that happened in January 2014 in the Apuseni Mountains, which resulted in the death of two people, when accusations regarding the delay in the tracking of the plane and the interventions were made<sup>8</sup>. Also, the Romanian public health system was generally perceived by the population as offering improper conditions, which made the accusations regarding the improper treatment of the patients and the delay in seeking help from abroad seem plausible, even in the absence of evidence in this respect. Moreover, we can legitimately consider that public organizations have a higher degree of responsibility towards the citizens than private ones.

One of the associates of *Colectiv* club, Costin Mincu, offered several interviews, but only in 2017 and 2018, in which he stated that local authorities, inspectors of the Romanian General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations and the pyrotechnical experts should be judged as having a potential blame for the accident: “I am aware [...] that I have my share of responsibility, but I would like it to be defined correctly and to understand at the end what I did wrong, where it was my competence to do something that I didn’t do. I think this is what everyone should want, to know, when this process will end, the whole truth. How could such a thing happen, who are the people that made mistakes, what institutions made mistakes”<sup>9</sup>. We can identify partial shifting of blame and evading responsibility as response strategies. However, since at the moment of the crisis there were no statements from the representatives of the club, the attention was focused on the declarations of the authorities.

Regarding social media interaction, no social media account or online platforms were created for this event by the authorities, in order to interact with the citizens, which could have placed citizens in an active role of information sharing. Taking into consideration that even in the 2016

---

<sup>8</sup> Cătălin Lența, (2014), “Două anchete în cazul prăbușirii avionului medical”, 21.01.2014, published on RFI România, retrieved from <https://www.rfi.ro/stiri-social-47058-doua-anchete-cazul-prabusirii-avionului-medical>, [accessed on 10.02.2019].

<sup>9</sup> Costin Mincu (2017), “ #Colectiv 2 ani | Mărturia patronului acuzat”, published on Digi 24.ro, on 30 October 2017, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/social/colectiv-2-ani-marturia-patronului-acuzat-819496>, [accessed on 1.03.2019], [author’s translation].

report the *Control report on the emergency intervention of 30.10.2015 at the fire from Colectiv Club*, the issuing organization, namely the Government of Romania<sup>10</sup>, used the media as one of the sources of information, we can presume such an interaction with the citizens could have been useful both for keeping them informed, but also for getting informed. Also, freedom of expression is extremely valued, particularly since it had a week manifestation during the communist regime in Romania<sup>11</sup>.

There was an update on the situation on the Facebook page of the Department for Emergency Situations, regarding the possibility of donating blood for the victims, the phone numbers available for information on where the victims of the fire can be found (which, according to comments, did not offer sufficient information), updates on the victims sent for treatment abroad or the message of Klaus Iohannis, the president of Romania. However, the Facebook page was more a platform of information than of interaction, as, for example, the post on blood donations had one comment and 99 shares, and there were no responses from the Department for Emergency Situations to the comments.<sup>12</sup>

Also, lists with where the hospitalized patients were available in the media, but the quoted source was the Facebook page of a rock band, some lists were handwritten, so questions can be raised regarding the accuracy of those lists and how they were obtained<sup>13</sup>. The media is considered by some to have taken the role of communicating with the public, they “appealed to the public to prove the solidarity and compassion”<sup>14</sup>.

---

<sup>10</sup> Government of Romania (2016), “Control report on the emergency intervention of 30.10.2015 at the fire from Colectiv Club - Bucharest”, [http://gov.ro/fisiere/comunicate\\_fisiere/raport\\_c.pdf](http://gov.ro/fisiere/comunicate_fisiere/raport_c.pdf), [accessed on 10.02.2019].

<sup>11</sup> Adrian Corpădean (2016), “Vie intellectuelle et libre expression sous le régime de Ceaușescu. Une rupture de la tradition francophone de l’entre-deux-guerres”, in *Synergies Roumanie*, no.11/2016, 35-45.

<sup>12</sup> Department for Emergency Situations, official Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/departamenturgente/>, [accessed on 10.02.2019].

<sup>13</sup> Stirileprotv.ro (2019), “FOTO: Listele cu persoanele ranite in incendiul din clubul Colectiv si spitalele unde sunt internate”, <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/foto-listele-cu-victimele-incendiului-din-clubul-colectiv-si-spitalele-unde-sunt-internate.html>, [accessed on 1.04.2019].

<sup>14</sup> Irina Pop (2015), “The Political Communication Crises in Romania - A Case Study - Club Collective of October 30, 2015”, in *Central European Political Science Review, Quarterly of Central European Political Science Alliance*, Vol. 17, No. 63, 2016, 209-227, p. 212.

Nevertheless, the official Facebook page of the Secretary of State Raed Arafat, head of the Department for Emergency Situations, had a significant number of comments and shares. The post shared on 5 November 2015 as an answer to an open letter published by Hotnews.ro , titled *The TRUTH about the intervention at the Colectiv club #Colectiv*, which implies the information speculated is not correct, had 396 views and 55 comments. His very elaborate answers to the accusations against the handling of emergency situations, on 28 November 2018, had 1.1K comments and 2045 shares. However, these latter responses are given on his behalf, on his social media account, even if he specifies that it is also the official position of the institution that he represents.<sup>15</sup>

Next, we are going to analyse the declarations of Secretary of State Raed Arafat, in an interview given on the Romanian National Television on November 12, 2015.<sup>16</sup> Rather than conveying an emotional message and expressing empathy, Arafat focuses on elaborate medical explanations. Though he does not have exact information on the number of patients hospitalized abroad, he thoroughly explains the process of patient transfer and acceptance. The reason for detailing the transfer process is to respond accusations that patients were not transferred quickly enough to hospitals abroad that could offer better recovery conditions. Arafat talks about international intervention, such as NATO intervention in the transport of the victims abroad or doctors coming from Israel, France and Great Britain. He also talks about the collaboration between the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Health, which means that the crisis is addressed from different organizational levels. However, he does not claim complete control over the situation and he states having admitted from the beginning the lack of resources to deal with the crisis.

---

<sup>15</sup> Raed Arafat, official Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/DrRaedArafat/posts/1236325936394278>, <https://www.facebook.com/DrRaedArafat/posts/1249982525028619>, [accessed on 10.02.2019].

<sup>16</sup> Raed Arafat (2015), interview given for the national TV station, special edition ȘtirileTVR, “Raed Arafat despre tragedia din Colectiv: Săptămâna viitoare facem analiza cazului. Facem un set de lecții învățate, pentru viitor”, available at: [http://stiri.tvr.ro/raed-arafat-despre-tragedia-din-colectiv--saptamana-viitoare-facem-analiza-cazului--facem-un-set-de-lectii-invatare--pentru-viitor\\_67372.html#view](http://stiri.tvr.ro/raed-arafat-despre-tragedia-din-colectiv--saptamana-viitoare-facem-analiza-cazului--facem-un-set-de-lectii-invatare--pentru-viitor_67372.html#view), [accessed on 10.02.2019].



The Secretary of State gets defensive when being asked to respond to the accusations of mishandling the situation. He responds by saying that the accusations are not legitimate and that the accusers did not take responsibility for the accusations, since some were anonymous. He avoids calling the situation a crisis situation, as he considers it as being a situation of undercapacity or out of the ordinary: "there are situations when we are used to people showing up and starting to criticize [...] but the hospitals were open for those that wanted to help". This strategy of attacking and discrediting the accusers continues when he responds to the accusations made by a doctor, Arafat stating that "I think the doctor talks without knowing how the mechanisms work and how systems work and how the world works." Also, he points out that even other countries would have trouble coping with a similar situation. As a lesson learned, though he admits there will be more, he considers that the entire management of the emergency situations, both medical and non-medical, should be in one place, for a better coordination and communication between the institutions.

Arafat considers that the way emergency operations are being commented on TV can lead to mistakes in the management of those operations: "It is a psychological thing: if you get used that at each intervention, even if you do your job well, you are wrongfully accused and without documentation, from the first minute, [...] by the so called experts that are on TV and have no idea what is happening on the field and they start to comment on what you do, it is clear that at one point you will hesitate in your decisions, you will take wrong decisions, to satisfy those in the [TV] studio."<sup>17</sup> Even if from a psychological point of view, as he points out, his allegations seem to be true and pertinent, we must take into account that the people that he considers might be influenced by the above mentioned comments represent an institution that deals with emergency situations and that they should not respond in order to satisfy the viewers and the commentators, but in accordance with clear guidelines in such situations. Those comments might indeed hinder the image of the institution, but in situation dealing with security and health, it is a fair presumption that the image of the organization should not be a factor that hinders the

---

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, [author's translation].

operations of the emergency situation department. What we can agree with is that a weakened image of such an organization can discredit it and make its actions more difficult and less trustworthy.

All in all, the message that the Secretary of State is trying to convey is that he is in control of the situation, there are things that need to be improved but lessons have already been learned and there is a plan in order to better respond to such situations. As image restoration responses, we can observe the denial strategy, transcendence, attacking the accuser or corrective actions.

A positive aspect of the communication strategy is that several press releases were given immediately after the blaze by the Secretary of State Raed Arafat, together with the Ministry of Health, Nicolae Băncicioiu<sup>18</sup>. This shows collaboration between the two institutions and allows for a homogenous message to be delivered to the public.

However, analysing the statements made by Arafat in the above discussed interview, regarding the undercapacity of the hospitals that was allegedly recognized from the beginning of the operation, they are not in accordance with the statements made by Băncicioiu, who ensured the population in his interventions following the incident that “We do not need anything for the moment, our doctors can manage the situation [...] for the moment we are handling things very well.” A few days later the minister claims that his statement was misinterpreted and that he did not say that help was not needed. Still, his credibility was questioned by the media and accusations that he did not activate in time the special European mechanism for finding suitable hospitalization places within the European Union for the patients were brought.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Raed Arafat & Nicolae Băncicioiu (2015), press statements “Palatul Victoria Declarații de presă susținute de Ministrul Sănătății, Nicolae Băncicioiu și Raed Arafat”, published on the official website of the Government of Romania 31 October 2015, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9anXVj\\_p5SY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9anXVj_p5SY), [accessed on 10.02.2019].

<sup>19</sup> Stirileprotv.ro (2015), “Băncicioiu, pe 1 noiembrie: “Nu avem nevoie de nimic”. 6 zile mai târziu: “Nu am spus niciodată că nu avem nevoie de ajutor”, published on 10 November 2015 at <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/incendiu-in-colectiv/banicioiu-despre-ranitiile-din-colectiv-eu-nu-am-spus-niciun-moment-ca-nu-avem-nevoie-de-ajutor.html>, [accessed on 1.03.2019], [author’s translation].

Moreover, the *Colectiv* accident turned into a political crisis. Media abroad presented the political implications of the tragedy. *The Guardian*, for example, in an issue of 4 November 2015, stated that the Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta, together with the Romanian Government and Cristian Popescu Piedone, mayor of the district where the *Colectiv* Club was located, resigned following large protests over the tragedy. Ponta declared that “I am obliged to take note of the legitimate grievances which exist in society. I hope handing in my and my government’s mandate will satisfy the demands of protesters.”, whereas Piedone admitted moral responsibility for the deadly fire: “I assume the moral blame. As for the legal [blame] I will leave it to justice to pronounce”<sup>20</sup>. As we can see in the two statements above, the prime-minister’s resignation was not a form of taking any responsibility for the negative outcome of the fire, but it was imposed by the complaints of the public. In the case of Piedone, he does admit moral blame but refrains from addressing the legal aspects of that blame.

Adina Dudau, lecturer in Public Management at the University of Glasgow, considers that, even if “it takes more than a fire to bring down a government”, links can be made between the blaze and the reaction of the population against the government and that the reaction was not caused by the blaze itself, but it was just the context that made people express their lack of satisfaction with the political system. The crisis had both active and latent errors, the active ones being related to the human errors that were made and the latent ones to the circumstances that allowed the crisis to occur. She states that “as details emerged of what happened on October 30, a collective sense of empathy gave way to popular rage against the system that allowed this to happen.[...] Romanians hit the streets of Bucharest and every other major Romanian city, demanding an end to endemic corruption at all levels of government. This, they argued, was to blame for the poor enforcement of safety regulations that appeared to have caused this tragedy.” Dudau also makes a comparison between the fire from *Colectiv*

---

<sup>20</sup> Mark Tran (2015), “Bucharest nightclub fire: PM and government resign after protests”, published in *The Guardian*, 4 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/04/romanian-government-resigns-nightclub-fire-victor-ponta>, [accessed on 1.04.2019].

and other similar incidents worldwide pointing out that it was only in Romania that politicians and national leaders resigned as a result<sup>21</sup>.

To what extent was the crisis considered to be handled well by the authorities, from the perspective of the public? According to newsmagazine *Gândul*: “So far, two weeks after the tragedy of Colectiv, the authorities failed to present a plan of the crisis operations nor did they provide answers to all the questions of civil society and the media. The communication organised by the authorities, vital during a crisis, did not exist in the case of Colectiv”<sup>22</sup>

In a quantitative content analysis of the posts from the group *Corupția ucide - #Colectiv* (<https://www.facebook.com/ucide.coruptia/>) between 31 October and 4 December 2015, Monica Pătruț identifies three major frames used by protesters: Diagnostic / Identity-Injustice Frame, Prognostic Frame and Motivational / Agency Frame. The highest percentage is allocated to the Prognostic Frame (46%), with an emphasis on *changing the actual political class and identifying new criteria for a careful selection of the future politicians and establishing more harsh anticorruption laws and institutions*. Pătruț states that the responses of the public institutions were delayed and incomplete<sup>23</sup>.

A positive aspect of the communication between the authorities and the citizens is the initiative of inviting several representatives of the civil society at a dialog with the Romanian President Klaus Iohannis. In a statement from 5 November 2015, the President states that he is pleased the manifestations happening the previous night were not violent and that the message he has for those involved is that they were seen, heard and their

---

<sup>21</sup> Adina Dudau (2015), “How could a fire in a nightclub bring down the Romanian government?”, published in *The Conversation* on 6 November 2015, <http://theconversation.com/how-could-a-fire-in-a-nightclub-bring-down-the-romanian-government-50260>, [accessed on 1.03.2019].

<sup>22</sup> Andrei L. Popescu (2015), “Tragedia care a schimbat România. Cine și unde a greșit în criza de la Colectiv?”, published in *Gândul* on 13 November 2015, <https://www.gandul.info/stiri/tragedia-care-a-schimbat-romania-cine-si-unde-a-gresit-in-criza-de-la-colectiv-14884595>, [accessed on 1.04.2019], [author’s translation].

<sup>23</sup> Monica Pătruț (2017), “A #Col(lectiv)e Romanian Tragedy. A Case Study on Social Media Fighting Corruption”, in *BRAND*, volume 8, issue 1, 38-46, available at: <https://www.edusoft.ro/brain/index.php/brand/article/view/697/780>[accessed on 10.02.2019].

demands will be taken into consideration: "I have decided that in the continuation of the consultations with the political parties, which we have planned for today and for tomorrow, to consult for the first time a new actor: the civil society. [...] It is important for me and I wish to know their opinions and options. In this manner, I will know when I make a decision, the options of the political parties, but, and this is important to me, the options of the civil society as well"<sup>24</sup>. We consider this initiative as a positive aspect from the point of view of the communication with the public, as it shows transparency and willingness to take the opinions of the citizens into consideration.

In a document issued by the Government of Romania in 2016, the *Control report on the emergency intervention of 30.10.2015 at the fire from Colectiv Club*, one of the problems identified, confirmed by some of the victims of the fire, is the "lack of official information from the authorities of the qualified persons regarding the condition of the victims, their number, hospitals distribution, situation of fatalities, etc."<sup>25</sup>

The report also stipulates that "some teams panicked and started to chaotically convey information to the dispatcher" and that "taking into consideration the specificity of an emergency intervention in the case of accidents with multiple victims, the separation, both institutional and *de facto*, is imposed of the activities of communication to the public of the information regarding the intervention, which must be done by persons with exclusive attributions in this respect, from that of coordination and leading of the intervention activities"<sup>26</sup>.

From this part of the report we can conclude that the communication to the public done by the Secretary of State Raed Arafat, in charge of coordinating the intervention activities, should have been passed

---

<sup>24</sup> Klaus Iohannis (2015), "Press statement of the President of Romania, Mister Klaus Iohannis", on the official webpage of the President of Romania, 5 November 2015, available at <https://www.presidency.ro/ro/presedinte/agenda-presedintelui/declaratia-de-presa-a-presedintelui-romaniei-domnul-klaus-iohannis1448280402>, [accessed on 1.03.2019], [author's translation].

<sup>25</sup> Government of Romania (2016), "Control report on the emergency intervention of 30.10.2015 at the fire from Colectiv Club - Bucharest", [http://gov.ro/fisiere/comunicate\\_fisiere/raport\\_c.pdf](http://gov.ro/fisiere/comunicate_fisiere/raport_c.pdf), [accessed on 10.02.2019], [author's translation].

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

on to persons with exclusive attributions in this respect. However, since the Romanian public is accustomed to receiving information on emergency situations from Arafat, and, taking into consideration the discrepancies in the information that was circulating and also the allegations of misconduct that were brought against the emergency intervention teams, we consider that he was the appropriate person to address the public on behalf of the Department for Emergency Situations.

Several PR crises communication experts who expressed their opinions regarding the Colectiv incident, such as Ana-Maria Diceanu, head of the crisis management division at GMP PR or Corina Vintan, managing director at Links Associates-Edelman Affiliate, consider that PR crisis management was handled poorly and that the public sector should be more open to consulting PR experts from the private sector<sup>27</sup>.

## Conclusions

Though crisis communication research has a wider focus on the private sector, we identified in the case analysed above several responses or image restoration strategies that are being used in the public sector as well. We can presume that the focus on the private sector is due to the fact that it is easier to identify who should respond to such crises, as well as the stakeholders. Answers from the public sector require a more complex analysis, it is more difficult to identify the communication strategy and to propose a certain manner in which similar crises should be handled.

Moreover, aspects related to national policies and political aspects in general should be addressed in order to fully comprehend the response to a certain crisis, and, in this context, the lessons to be learned from the success or failure of the way the crisis communication was handled are not as generally applicable as in the private sector.

---

<sup>27</sup> Romanița Oprea (2015), “How a nation learns a PR crisis-handling lesson”, statements of Ana-Maria Diceanu and Corina Vintan in BR Business Review, published on 9 December 2015, <http://business-review.eu/featured/how-a-nation-learns-a-pr-crisis-handling-lesson-92878>, [accessed on 1.04.2019].

Also, since there are two facets to a crisis situation, the crisis *per se* and how it is perceived or how people influence its perception, a thorough social media interaction should be regarded by public institutions as a matter of the utmost importance in properly addressing crises.

## Bibliography

1. Benoit, William (1997), "Image repair discourse and crisis communication", in *Public Relations Review*, vol. 23, issue 2, 1997, 177-186.
2. Benoit, William (2015). *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of image restoration Strategies*, second edition, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
3. Cmeci, Camelia & Coman, Ioana (2018), "Twitter as a Means of Emotional Coping and Collective (Re)Framing of Crises. Case Study: The "Colectiv" Crisis in Romania", in *Social Communication* vol. 2/2018, 6-15, <https://content.sciendo.com/abstract/journals/sc/4/2/article-p6.xml?rskey=MKXeqz&result=9>, [accessed on 12.03.2019].
4. Coombs, Timothy W. (1995), "Choosing the Right Words: The development of guidelines for the selection of the appropriate crisis response strategies", in *Management Communication Quarterly*, 8, 447-476.
5. Coombs, Timothy W. (2006), "The Protective Powers of Crisis Response Strategies: Managing Reputational Assets During a Crisis", in *Journal of Promotion Management*, vol. 12(3/4) 2006, <http://www.haworthpress.com/web/JPM>, [accessed on 12.03.2019].
6. Corpădean, Adrian (2016), "Vie intellectuelle et libre expression sous le régime de Ceaușescu. Une rupture de la tradition francophone de l'entre-deux-guerres", in *Synergies Roumanie*, no.11/2016, 35-45.
7. Pătruț, Monica (2017), "A #Col(lectiv)e Romanian Tragedy. A Case Study on Social Media Fighting Corruption", in *BRAND*, volume 8, issue 1, 38-46, available at:

<https://www.edusoft.ro/brain/index.php/brand/article/view/697/780>  
[accessed on 10.02.2019].

8. Pop, Irina (2015), “The Political Communication Crises in Romania - A Case Study - Club Collective of October 30, 2015”, in *Central European Political Science Review, Quarterly of Central European Political Science Alliance*, Vol. 17, No. 63, 2016, 209-227.
9. Pop-Flanța Delia (2019), “Terrorist Attacks – A Challenge in Crisis Communication”, In Editor Adrian Lesenciuc, *Redefining Community In Intercultural Context*, Vol. 8, Nr. 1/2019, Henri Coandă Air Force Academy Publishing House, Brașov, 219-225.
10. Arafat, Raed & Băncicioiu, Nicolae (2015), press statements “Palatul Victoria Declarații de presă susținute de Ministrul Sănătății, Nicolae Băncicioiu și Raed Arafat”, published on the official website of the *Government of Romania* 31 October 2015, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9anXVj\\_p5SY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9anXVj_p5SY), [accessed on 10.02.2019].
11. Arafat, Raed (2015), interview given for the national TV station, special edition *ȘtirileTVR*, “Raed Arafat despre tragedia din Colectiv: Săptămâna viitoare facem analiza cazului. Facem un set de lecții învățate, pentru viitor”, available at: [http://stiri.tvr.ro/raed-arafat-despre-tragedia-din-colectiv--saptamana-viitoare-facem-analiza-cazului--facem-un-set-de-lectii-invatate--pentru-viitor\\_67372.html#view](http://stiri.tvr.ro/raed-arafat-despre-tragedia-din-colectiv--saptamana-viitoare-facem-analiza-cazului--facem-un-set-de-lectii-invatate--pentru-viitor_67372.html#view), [accessed on 10.02.2019].
12. Arafat, Raed, official Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/DrRaedArafat/posts/1236325936394278>, <https://www.facebook.com/DrRaedArafat/posts/1249982525028619>, [accessed on 10.02.2019].
13. Dudau, Adina (2015), “How Could A Fire In A Nightclub Bring Down The Romanian Government?”, published in *The Conversation* On 6 November 2015, <http://theconversation.com/how-could-a-fire-in-a-nightclub-bring-down-the-romanian-government-50260>, [accessed on 1.03.2019].



14. Iohannis, Klaus (2015), "Press statement of the President of Romania, Mister Klaus Iohannis", on the official webpage of the *President of Romania*, 5 November 2015, available at <https://www.presidency.ro/ro/presedinte/agenda-presedintelui/declaratia-de-presa-a-presedintelui-romaniei-domnul-klaus-iohannis1448280402>, [accessed on 1.03.2019].
15. Lența, Cătălin (2014), "Două anchete în cazul prăbușirii avionului medical", 21.01.2014, published on *RFI România*, retrieved from <https://www.rfi.ro/stiri-social-47058-doua-anchete-cazul-prabusirii-avionului-medical>, [accessed on 10.02.2019].
16. Mincu, Costin (2017), " #Colectiv 2 Ani | Mărturia patronului acuzat", Published On *Digi 24.Ro*, On 30 October 2017, <https://Www.Digi24.Ro/Stiri/Actualitate/Social/Colectiv-2-Ani-Marturia-Patronului-Acuzat-819496>, [Accessed On 1.03.2019].
17. Oprea, Romanița (2015), "How A Nation Learns A Pr Crisis-Handling Lesson", Statements of Ana-Maria Diceanu and Corina Vintan in *Br Business Review*, Published on 9 December 2015, <http://business-review.eu/featured/how-a-nation-learns-a-pr-crisis-handling-lesson-92878>, [accessed on 1.04.2019].
18. Popescu, Andrei Luca (2015), "Tragedia care a schimbat România. Cine și unde a greșit în criza de la Colectiv?", published in *Gândul* on 13 November 2015, <https://www.gandul.info/stiri/tragedia-care-a-schimbat-romania-cine-si-unde-a-gresit-in-criza-de-la-colectiv-14884595>, [accessed on 1.04.2019].
19. Tran, Mark (2015), "Bucharest nightclub fire: PM and government resign after protests", published in *The Guardian*, 4 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/04/romanian-government-resigns-nightclub-fire-victor-ponta>, [accessed on 1.04.2019].
20. \*\*\*Department for Emergency Situations, official *Facebook* page, <https://www.facebook.com/departamenturgente/>, [accessed on 10.02.2019].

21. \*\*\*Government of Romania (2016), “Control report on the emergency intervention of 30.10.2015 at the fire from *Colectiv* Club - Bucharest”, [http://gov.ro/fisiere/comunicate\\_fisiere/raport\\_c.pdf](http://gov.ro/fisiere/comunicate_fisiere/raport_c.pdf), [accessed on 10.02.2019].
22. \*\*\*RomâniaTV.net (2015), “Alin Anastasescu, Paul Gancea și Costin Mincu, patronii Club Colectiv, au fost reținuți”, published on 2 November 2015 18:38, updated on 3 November 2015 08:21, [https://www.romaniatv.net/alin-anastasescu-unul-dintre-patronii-club-colectiv-a-fost-retinut\\_254527.html](https://www.romaniatv.net/alin-anastasescu-unul-dintre-patronii-club-colectiv-a-fost-retinut_254527.html), [accessed on 12.03.2019].
23. \*\*\*Stirileprotv.ro (2015), “Banicioiu, pe 1 noiembrie: “Nu avem nevoie de nimic”. 6 zile mai tarziu: “Nu am spus niciodata ca nu avem nevoie de ajutor”, published on 10 November 2015 at <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/incendiu-in-colectiv/banicioiu-despre-ranirii-din-colectiv-eu-nu-am-spus-niciun-moment-ca-nu-avem-nevoie-de-ajutor.html>, [accessed on 1.03.2019].
24. \*\*\*Stirileprotv.ro (2019), “FOTO: Listele cu persoanele ranite in incendiul din clubul Colectiv si spitalele unde sunt internate”, <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/foto-listele-cu-victimele-incendiului-din-clubul-colectiv-si-spitalele-unde-sunt-internate.html>, [accessed on 1.04.2019].