An abstract graphic on the left side of the page consists of numerous thin, black, curved lines that resemble a network or a stylized tree. Interspersed among these lines are several solid blue circles of varying sizes. The lines and circles are set against a white background, which is partially obscured by a large blue rectangular area on the right side of the page.

The handling of the COVID-19 pandemic by 10 Downing Street

Content Analysis of Boris Johnson's Press Conferences

Bachelor thesis in Communication Science (BSc)

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Abstract

Aim: The recent coronavirus pandemic has affected the globe and the lives of many. The world leaders were required to show strong skills of communication during the pandemic to manage the crisis. This study examines how the British government handled the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and aims to show the importance of appropriate and reliable crisis communication. It investigates and explains a more reliable manner for the government to respond to the crisis. It, also, has the aim of adding to the limited amount of research on frame building theory.

Method: Using three variables containing a 34-item coding scheme, 37 press conferences by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom regarding the coronavirus pandemic throughout the year 2020 have been analysed. The transcriptions of the press conferences were coded regarding their use of crisis response strategies, framing theory, and taken action.

Findings: The results of this study show that the Prime Minister rejected the situation at first, then praised the country's resources and preparedness, which did not reflect reality and was damaging from the outset. His communications lacked urgency, transparency, and consistent messaging. He was unable to identify and learn from his mistakes.

Conclusion: The study found a general lack of effective and reliable communication. The pandemic, however, is still underway, and it is too early to conclude that the United Kingdom will be unable to meet the challenge. They have a chance to change the tide the next year and possibly learn from their mistakes.

Practical implications: Usage of crisis response strategies correctly, being transparent, and consistency in messaging is vital. Implementation of reliable communication culture is necessary for complex organizations like the national government. Citizens, after all, rely on their governments to resolve issues and keep them safe.

Keywords: government crisis communication, crisis response strategies, framing, reliable organizations, coronavirus, United Kingdom, press conferences

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Introduction

Pestilences have a way of recurring in the world. There have been as many contagious diseases as wars in history and they are both preventable occurrences that have the possibility to disrupt societies (Flecknoe et al., 2018). One of the most noteworthy pandemics was the Bubonic Plague, also referred to as the Black Death. It had originated from China in 1334 and spread through Central Asia by following the trading route, Silk Road. Later it arrived in Europe in 1347 and claimed 150 million lives globally (Huremović, 2019). The plague reappeared several times in the following centuries, but it was never as intense as the Black Death (Huremović, 2019; Newman, 2012). The first global pandemic that occurred in the modern medicine setting was Influenza, also known as the Spanish Flu. Despite its name, the true origin of the Spanish Flu remains unknown, especially because it started spreading after World War I. It had taken more lives in a year than the Black Death had in a century (Huremović, 2019). Another significant outbreak is the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Its significance lies in the fact that it was the first contagious disease that gathered immense public attention in the twenty-first century. Again, it had emerged from China and was caused by the SARS coronavirus (SARS-CoV) (Holmes & Rambaut, 2004; Huremović, 2019). Recently, the world has been affected by another pandemic caused by the coronavirus disease. It has affected public health, the global economy, the entire food system, and social life (World Health Organisation, 2020b). This pandemic tested the global leaders' crisis management and communication abilities. During the pandemic, the leaders were required to show strong skills of communication to guide an effective response strategy for the crisis (McGuire et al., 2020).

COVID-19 and United Kingdom

In December 2019, the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was first discovered in Wuhan, China (Fauci et al., 2020). This infectious disease was caused by a virus that is structurally related to the virus that causes SARS. Therefore, this virus that affects the

respiratory system, has another name, SARS-CoV-2. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the most common symptoms of this virus are fever, dry cough, and feeling tired. The organization also states that the general public is likely to recover from this virus without any special treatment. However, several groups are presumed to be at serious risk (n.d.a). Three months after the first occurrence of the disease, the infection was declared a pandemic by the WHO (Abbey et al., 2020).

While the world was surprised by this a medical historian, Frank Snowden (2019) argued that COVID-19, like all pandemics, was not an accidental or random event. Moreover, in September 2019, the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB) had published an annual report on global preparedness for health emergencies. They had warned that: “The world is at acute risk for devastating regional or global disease epidemics or pandemics that not only cause loss of life but upend economies and create social chaos” (2019, p. 11). They had even predicted a SARS variant infectious disease would emerge from China. Thus, not only was a pandemic expected but the world leaders were warned about it. Nevertheless, in 2019 the Global Health Security (GHS) index indicated that there was an overall weak preparedness for a possible pandemic in the world. Furthermore, GHS stated that the United States of America and the United Kingdom were the most prepared countries for a pandemic. Later, the GHS index was used to assess the readiness of countries towards the COVID-19 pandemic. It demonstrated that the best-ranked countries are among the worst-hit countries by the recent pandemic (Abbey et al., 2020).

In Britain, the first reported cases occurred on the 29th of January 2020. It was more than a month after Boris Johnson, the leader of the Conservative Party, won a parliamentary majority in the elections on the 12th of December 2019. Additionally, the government’s focus was strictly on the Brexit negotiations (Sanders, 2020). In February, while Italy followed by Spain went into lockdown, the United Kingdom appeared to be nonchalant (Sanders, 2020). On the 3rd of March, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson, held his first press

conference stating that “we should be going about our business as usual”. Nine days later, on the 12th of March, World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic. At the end of July, the UK Office for National Statistics reported that the excess death rates of England between the 21st of February and the 12th of June were the highest in Europe (Campbell & Morgan, 2020). Later, United Kingdom ended the year 2020 with a press conference by Boris Johnson stating that the COVID-19 virus had mutated into a more contagious variant which was later addressed as the British variant by the media (Baca & Bejar, 2021).

Richard Horton, the editor in chief of a UK-based medical journal, made a damning criticism about the government of the United Kingdom. In his latest book, he wrote that it was the biggest science policy failure for a generation (Horton, 2020). Horton’s critique of the unfolding crisis seems to be contrasting with the portrayal of the “great success” by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. In Boris Johnson’s press conferences, his repeated acclamations of “following the science”, working on “world beating” initiatives to “defeat coronavirus”, and how the nation ought to be “very proud” seem to not be in line with the facts. Since, comparable countries and those that were thought to be less resourced and qualified for a pandemic appear to prosper better than the United Kingdom in terms of health, economic, and social indicators (Wardman, 2020).

Communications of the United Kingdom During the Pandemic

Society, and with-it governments, are created, maintained, and adapted through communication. Without continuous information exchange society would cease to exist. Efficient and responsive governments depend on these exchanges. Communication helps the citizens to know what the government is (not) doing and helps the government to understand what the people need (Hague et al., 2019). Additionally, governments are public organisations, and they can experience crises (Vettenranta, 2015). In this case, the United Kingdom is experiencing a public health crisis, like the rest of the world. The communicative challenges for the public

organisations during a public health crisis are maintaining the credibility of the government, the legitimacy of their response, and the reputational damage they take (Coombs, 2007). Firstly, communication is vital during an emergency in order to control the situation. Accurate and timely communication is important during a crisis, especially one related to public health. Public health behaviour directly affects the public's health and reflects their beliefs on this topic (Hildt-Ciupińska & Pawłowska-Cyprysiak, 2020). The government can have an effect on the public's health beliefs and guide their behaviours. Thus, public health behaviour relies on the response by the government. Moreover, governments depend on the public to implement new rules to contain the pandemic. Thus, the credibility and legitimacy of the government, and the public's trust in it, are critical to flatten the curve during the pandemic (Vardavas et al., 2021). Secondly, the way that governments approach a crisis, as public organisations, can promote a positive or negative reputation of the country. This promotion can be observed in national and international settings. Having a negative national image would disrupt the citizens' trust while, the negative international image would decrease the country's perception, tourism, investments, expansion of international companies, among others (Vardavas et al., 2021).

An important aspect of crisis communication is the channel that the governments use. Throughout time, communication channels have been subject to change. In the late 19th century newspapers were popular, while the 1930s was the golden age for radios. From the 1950s until the 1990s Television was the most popular mass medium for citizens to hear about the recent news. After the 1990s with the arrival of the internet, communication started to change course. International communication broadened, mobile phone ownership expanded, and social media usage increased. During this change the newspapers remained significant channels for governments to have communications with citizens, however, their primacy was supplanted by broadcasting. This communication channel changed the information transmission from written to spoken, from abstract to personal, and from reported to live (Hague et al., 2019). Therefore, this communication channel is widely used when addressing the public, especially during a

pandemic. It is the best way to inform the citizens about updates and have a 'genuine' communication with them.

The British government has multiple communication services and channels that are highly professional and praised (Sanders, 2020). In this research, a narrow portion of these services will be analysed, namely the press conferences by Boris Johnson. Press conferences by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom fit under the definition of broadcasting and are the most direct way to get the recent developments. Moreover, the United Kingdom, like Germany, is a prime ministerial government, which means that Boris Johnson is the dominant figure who deals directly with ministers, and they follow him (Hague et al., 2019). This is different from than Cabinet government, which can be seen in Finland, where discussions in the cabinet determine the overall policy. Whereas in the Netherlands, there is a ministerial government present where individual ministers operate with little direction from the Prime Minister or cabinet and are the leaders in their own domains (Hague et al., 2019). Additionally, according to the official government website of the United Kingdom, on the page 'how government works', Boris Johnson is the "leader of Her Majesty's Government and is ultimately responsible for all policy and decisions" (n.d.). Therefore, the analysis of the press conferences by the ruler of Britain, the Prime Minister, will be made. With these press conferences, the attitude of the government and the strategies they use will be better observed. Special attention will be given to the framing of the situation by the government. Moreover, the reliability of the government of the United Kingdom can be better judged this way.

Research Aim

This research aims to reveal how important it is for governments to respond to crises in an appropriate and reliable manner. This research will examine how the government of the United Kingdom responded to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. As in that it explores the reliability of the governmental communication, whilst providing recommendations to enhance this reliability.

Hence the research questions, *“What crisis response strategies did the government of the United Kingdom use during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020?”*, *“How did the government of United Kingdom frame the COVID-19 pandemic through 2020?”* and *“To what extent did the government of United Kingdom have a reliable crisis communication during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020?”* Furthermore, this research provides a guideline for governments to use for responding to any kind of infectious disease crises and emergency risks in the future. Additionally, this research will be a supplement to the limited amount of research concerning the frame building theory and crisis communication in a political context.

Theoretical Framework

The Case of United Kingdom

In order to analyse the crisis communication of the British government, it is important to have a clear timeline of what happened in the United Kingdom during the pandemic in 2020. This chronology can be split into five phases. The first phase is from January until mid-March can be characterized as casual communication. The second phase, which ran from the end of March to the end of April, coincided with an increase in cases and sent a strong message to the public about the need of staying home. The third phase occurs in May when the lockdown measures begin to fade, and a new crisis emerges. The next phase is during the summer, from June until September. The government works on rebuilding the economy in this phase. The final phase is the last three months of 2020, it includes a second lockdown, announcement of the new variant of coronavirus, and approval of two vaccines.

The first phase starts with the novel coronavirus triggering cases outside of China in January 2020. During the first two months, the novel coronavirus issue was treated as a foreign problem by the United Kingdom. They had advised against travel to China and informed the public about the emergence and detection of the virus. At this point, the risk was determined to be low by the WHO and there was little public awareness. The first two cases in the United Kingdom were confirmed on the 31st of January (Sanders, 2020). By the end of February, the risk caused by the coronavirus outbreak was raised to moderate. On the 3rd of March, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson, had his first press conference regarding the coronavirus. During this conference, the Prime Minister stressed that the only thing that can be done was to wash hands, and everyone should go about their business as usual. On the 6th of March, the third case of coronavirus was confirmed in the United Kingdom, and numbers started to rise afterwards (Hadjidemetriou et al., 2020). Boris Johnson announced that there had been 4 deaths due to the outbreak in the United Kingdom on the 9th of March and declared the four phases of the action plan to tackle the virus: contain, delay, research, and mitigate. Two days

later the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. Furthermore, during the press conference on the 12th of March, Boris Johnson said that a lot of people would lose loved ones before their time and that the risk of the outbreak was raised from moderate to high. Later the UK government advised against all non-essential travel and gatherings. During this time there was high media coverage on the outbreak in Italy and the public concern started to grow (Sanders, 2020). On the 18th of March, Boris Johnson stated that the schools will close for all students who do not have essential workers as their parents.

On the 23rd of March, the second phase starts with the United Kingdom going into lockdown where all non-essential shops were closed. Additionally, the Prime Minister started to use the “stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives” slogan. Afterwards, the confirmed positive cases reached twelve thousand and among them was the Prime Minister and Health Secretary of the United Kingdom. Moreover, the Prime Minister’s condition worsened, and he was moved to intensive care (Hadjidemetriou et al., 2020). It was until the end of April when he could return to his position. In April, the general lockdown was extended for an additional three weeks. Later, newspapers, such as The Guardian and the Daily Mirror revealed that the chief aid, Dominic Cummings, had broken the rules of lockdown when he drove 420km across England (BBC, 2020b).

The third phase follows the scandal and the public requests Dominic Cumming’s resignation; however, he does not resign, and the Prime Minister defends him against the citizens. After this, the slogan against the coronavirus changed to “Stay alert, control the virus and save lives”. The government of Scotland refused to adopt the new message because of the scandal concerning Dominic Cummings’ disregard for the lockdown measures. Followed by this Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland stopped following the advice of Boris Johnson and followed their own regulations (Aspinall, 2021). In May face masks were recommended and there was an easing concerning the lockdown measures. Furthermore, the Prime Minister insisted the public move on from the Cummings scandal. Later, Cummings stated that the

senior ministers and staff had fallen “disastrously short” in managing the pandemic (Cowburn, 2021).

The next phase starts in July, the face masks became mandatory in shops and the Health Secretary stated that the second wave started across Europe. In August, the government launched a scheme to help restaurants, cafes, and pubs. The campaign was called “Eat out to help out” and the meals were offered at half of the price. In September, the Health Secretary warned the nation once again about the second wave. Furthermore, on the 18th of September Boris Johnson announced that the second wave has arrived in the United Kingdom. A curfew that starts at 22:00 began on the 24th of September and working from home was recommended.

The final phase starts on the 31st of October when the country enters another national lockdown for four weeks. In November, after the presidential elections in the United States of America, Dominic Cummings resigned from his duties (Aspinall, 2021). In December, the lockdown came to an end and the United Kingdom became the first country to approve the Pfizer and BioNTech coronavirus vaccine (Roberts, 2020). Margaret Keenan, 90, was the first person in the world to receive the Pfizer and BioNTech vaccine. With this, the National Health Service (NHS) launched its biggest vaccine campaign (BBC, 2020). On the 14th of December, authorities of the United Kingdom reported a new variant of the coronavirus to the WHO (2020c). Due to this, many countries closed their borders to Britain and France banned freight and passengers from the United Kingdom. Twenty per cent of goods arriving in the United Kingdom had been stopped by the French government (Boffey & Walker, 2020). On the 19th of December, the Prime Minister “cancelled” Christmas for almost 18 million citizens in London by returning lockdown to the area. On the 30th of December, Boris Johnson had his last press conference of the year 2020 by announcing the emergence of the new coronavirus variant. Moreover, it was announced that another 20 million people in the United Kingdom would move to the tightest restrictions, lockdown. This meant that 78 per cent of the population had to spend

the holidays in a lockdown. Meanwhile, the British vaccine from Oxford University and AstraZeneca got approved for use by the government (Aspinall, 2021).

Crisis Communication

A crisis generally emerges as an unexpected or sudden event that disturbs the operations within an organization or nation. It not only poses an economic but also a reputational threat to the affected parties (Cornelissen, 2017). A reputational threat is the damage a crisis can inflict on an organisation, and they are divided into three factors, initial crisis responsibility, crisis history, and prior relational reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). To understand the reputation threat better it is important to clarify the different crises. The crises are separated into three clusters by Coombs and Holladay (2002). These crisis clusters are based on the crisis type and the attribution of the responsibility. There are three clusters, the victim, accidental, and intentional crisis clusters. The victim cluster is usually the type of crises that involves the occurrence of natural disasters where the attribution of responsibility is considerably low. In this cluster, the organization is seen as the victim of the crisis as well as the stakeholders. The accidental cluster involves crises like technical errors where the crisis happens unintentionally and, again, have a minimal attribution of responsibility. The last cluster, intentional, has a stronger attribution of responsibility mainly because the crisis happened on purpose and could have been prevented. Examples of this cluster can be organizational misdeed (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

With rapid contamination and high mortality rates especially among the risk groups and elderly population, the pandemic has formed critical economic and social damage on countries and global markets. Leading an efficient response to the pandemic requires world leaders to plan and communicate in a clear and consistent manner (McGuire et al., 2020). First, it is vital to comprehend the crisis cluster the pandemic fits into. For a long time, the social sciences have demonstrated that natural disasters occur when a phenomenon collides with a society that has

been rendered susceptible by political decisions, economic choices, or social organization (Revet, 2020). Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic has occurred because the virus met a society that was made vulnerable by decisions taken for political, economic, and societal purposes. Since the victim crisis cluster includes incidents such as natural disasters and the pandemic is in the same line as these disasters it can be suggested that the pandemic was a victim cluster crisis. To back this claim, it can be seen that the government of the United Kingdom was a victim in this crisis as well and the responsibility was considerably low owing to the nature of the incident. There are several theories on responding to crises by several experts. Three theories will be used in this research in order to analyse how the United Kingdom has responded to the pandemic crisis. Namely, the theories are Coombs' Crisis Response Strategies, the framing theory, and a model by Sanders (2020) that compares high and low reliable organizations. The theory by Coombs will be used to help describe the response strategies Boris Johnson followed in his press conferences. Moreover, the concept of framing will be taken into account during the analysis in order to further investigate the portrayal of the pandemic towards the general public by the government of the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, the model by Sanders will be used to analyse the difference between the portrayal of the crisis by Boris Johnson and the events that have happened. This way the UK government's crisis response and reliability during the COVID-19 pandemic will be inspected.

Crisis Response Strategies

To restore the reputation, minimize the negative effect, and discourage negative behavioural intentions, crisis management tactics are used. In management and communication, crisis response tactics, or what management says and does during and after a crisis, have been widely studied. A collection of useful crisis response strategies has been compiled by Coombs in 2007. According to Coombs, in terms of reputation preservation, crisis management strategies have three goals: alter crisis attributions, shape views of the crisis-affected

organization, and reduce the adverse impact of the crisis (Coombs, 1995). These three goals all contribute to the broader aim of preserving reputation. Any combination of these three goals can be used for responding. Moreover, stakeholders view the organization as taking greater responsibility for the crisis when crisis response strategies become more supportive and display greater empathy for victims. These crisis response strategies in essence are a way of framing the crisis (Coombs, 2007). The crisis response strategies are divided into two by Coombs (2007), primary and secondary, these crisis response strategies are described in Table 1. The primary is the main response strategies used in crises and the secondary are supplemental to the primary crisis response strategies.

The primary crisis response strategies are divided into three: deny, diminish, and rebuild strategies. First of all, the deny tactics aim to break down any link between the organization and the crisis. If the organization is not in the midst of a crisis, the incident will have no impact on it. Moreover, the company will be spared any reputational harm if the stakeholders, including the media, accept this strategy. Secondly, diminish crisis response strategies claim that a crisis is not as serious as people believe it is, or that the organization did not have influence over it. The detrimental consequences of a crisis are minimized if crisis managers minimize an organization's connection to the crisis (Coombs, 2007). However, for this strategy to go as planned proof and a favourable prior reputation is needed (Brown & White, 2011). Lastly, the rebuild strategy aims to improve the organization's image by providing victims with financial and/or symbolic assistance. Offering reimbursement or issuing a complete apology are both good for credibility. This strategy is followed for crises that pose a stern threat to the reputation of an organisation. This can be caused by intentional or accidental crises in combination with an unfavourable prior reputation (Coombs, 2007).

The secondary crisis response strategies are under the bolstering tactic. Bolstering provides an opportunity to construct reputational resources. Furthermore, the support of positive stakeholder relationships may be used to help maintain the organization's image, commend

stakeholders for their actions during the crisis to improve relationships with them or gain sympathy from becoming a victim of the crisis. In addition to these bolstering strategies by Coombs (2007), expression of concern towards the victims by the crisis manager has been added for this study. The concern strategy is a part of Coombs' 2006 version of the crisis response strategies. This is included since according to the neo-institutional theory, organizations are considered legitimate when they are consistent with societal norms (Allen & Caillouet, 1994). A crisis is usually a violation of these norms; however, the concern strategy can help normalize this. During a crisis that impacts the health of the public, the concern element can help the organisation to be seemed more legitimate by conforming to societal expectations while the situation violates them.

These strategies are used as supplements to the primary strategies because when used alone they have the potential to be perceived as the organization that cares about itself rather than the public (Park, 2017). To illustrate, according to Park (2017), the reminder strategy could be effective under a minor victim crisis, however, it might not be the best option in response to a preventable severe crisis. In addition to this, a study conducted by Kim and Sung (2013) has found that sharing both positive and negative information can be more effective in generating positive responses rather than sharing only the positive information in a victim crisis. This finding suggests that transparency is a vital aspect of crisis communication (Kim & Sung, 2013).

According to Brown and White (2011), there is not one correct way of using crisis response strategies. They argue that in crisis situations dynamic relationships with the stakeholders are naturally occurring. They also argue that there is not one strategy that will work every time. To decrease attribution of responsibility and limit the harm the company will take, the dynamics of the stakeholder relationship, the organization's reputation, and any other external impacts should be assessed before deciding on the appropriate response to a stakeholder (Brown & White, 2011).

Table 1

Crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2007, p. 170)

Primary crisis response strategies

Deny crisis response strategies

Attack the accuser: Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization.

Denial: Crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis.

Scapegoat: Crisis manager blames some person or group outside of the organization for the crisis.

Diminish crisis response strategies

Excuse: Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.

Justification: Crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis.

Rebuild crisis response strategies

Compensation: Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims.

Apology: Crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.

Secondary crisis response strategies

Bolstering crisis response strategies

Reminder: Tell stakeholders about the past good works of the organization.

Ingratiation: Crisis manager praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization.

Victimage: Crisis managers remind stakeholders that the organization is a victim of the crisis too.

Concern: Crisis managers express concern for the victims

Framing Theory

The theory of framing is similar to the physical frames used for pictures or paintings. An artist, to illustrate, knows that the frame they put around their image influences the perception and reaction of the audience. In the case of journalism, the frames are not tangible objects but are used to attain a certain objective. Media tell a story about the events that happen despite giving space for factual elements. The process of telling a story can be referred to as framing. These frames lead the audience to interpret the same facts differently (Poirier et al., 2020).

Thus, the framing theory is an influential tool when it comes to shaping public opinion (Poirier et al., 2020). Hence, in the same way, artists take the frames they use for their art under careful consideration, journalists would choose their frames with caution when writing articles as well. Despite a growing body of research for the implications of framing and its importance in the shaping of public opinion, getting communication researchers to agree on a conceptual description of a frame has proven challenging. Nevertheless, various authors' descriptions of frames have concurred on the depicting of frames as the result of selection or emphasis (Rodelo & Muniz, 2018). Entman's (1993) definition argues that:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.
(p. 52)

In addition to this, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identified five frames: human interest, conflict, morality, economic, and attribution of responsibility. Firstly, the human interest frame "brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event" (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). Personal lives are presented in the human-interest frame to personalize the narrative, with emotive elements emphasized (Luther & Zhou, 2005). This frame ultimately leads the people to have a more negative or positive attitude toward the crisis since it stimulates the psychological pulse of people. Since it influences participants' emotional response, it can be a predictor of blame and responsibility in a crisis (An & Gower, 2009). Secondly, the conflict frame is used to reflect conflict and disagreement among individuals or groups. Thirdly, the morality frame takes up the problem from a context of morals. The economic frame portrays the financial consequences of the problem at hand on an individual, group, or country level (An & Gower, 2009). Lastly, the attribution of responsibility frame is depicted as a way to present an issue and attribute the responsibility for its cause or solution to another party. The news media in the United States can be used as an illustration since they

have been credited with the usage of this by shaping public understanding of who is responsible for a key social problem (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). In the case of poverty, the issue is episodically covered by the media instead of thematically, which encourages the public to offer individual-level explanations for social problems. Therefore, in this case, the individual is held responsible for their fate, rather than the system (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

Furthermore, Fairhurst (2005) suggested that claims of legitimacy and objectivity manifest themselves linguistically, hence, the skill of framing is, among other things, based on language. Politicians put care and attention into the framing of their messages delivered in speeches. Since how an issue is framed can have a significant effect on the opinions of the citizens, politicians ought to choose which problems to emphasize and how to discuss them. Leaders attempt to convince the public that they have a legitimate claim and that their side of the story should be listened to (Feste, 2011). Five key language tools are highlighted by Fairhurst (2005), metaphors, catchphrases, contrast, spin, and stories. Firstly, metaphors are phrases that represent or symbolise another meaning. Further, catchphrases are repetitively used phrases to describe the crisis. Additionally, contrast illuminates the crisis in terms of its opposite while spin frame avoids responsibility by diverting the attention elsewhere. Lastly, the story frame is the government telling stories about the crisis to the public. These language tools influence the legitimacy and truth of the framing done by the communicator.

Although the theory of framing is usually applied in mass media, in this research, the framing used by the government of the United Kingdom in Boris Johnson's press conferences will be explored. The importance of this lies in the fact that the information governments send out to both the citizens and the media can be framed. Scheufele (1999) and De Vreese (2005) suggested that framing should be a comprehensive process. They distinguished three different stages of the process of framing, the construction of frames (frame building), the establishment of frames (frame setting) and, the consequences of framing at the individual and societal levels (Rodelo & Muniz, 2018). In other words, the stages are the production of the

news, the content of the news, and the attitudes of individuals after processing the news. Furthermore, Hänggli (2012) argues that frame building is the flow of frames from political actors to journalists. This flow can be observed in many communications, such as press conferences, press releases and interviews, that the political actors deliver to newsrooms in order to influence their news frames. Inside governments, the most crucial news influencer is usually the Prime Minister (Glazier & Boydston, 2012; Rodelo & Muniz, 2018). During the COVID-19 crisis, governments would want to create certain frames in order to take on specific crisis management strategies. To illustrate, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom praised the British actors involved in the crisis to frame the government in a more positive light. Which, inevitably, caused an overestimation of the capabilities of the British government (Sanders, 2020). Hence, framing is a vital part of understanding the crisis communication strategies used and the consequences they brought on.

High and Low Reliability Model

A rich communication culture is needed within an organization for it to pursue a reliable performance. Research on High Reliability Organizations was started approximately 20 years ago by a team from the University of California, Berkeley, who looked at 'error-free' organizations (Lekka, 2011). To examine these companies, the researchers utilized a multi-method approach that comprised guided workshops, interviews, observations, and questionnaires with high-level operators and managers, (Roberts, 1993). The foundation of the high and low reliability model was done by Lekka in 2011 in a literature review. Later, in 2020, this research was used by Sanders to develop the high and low reliability model in order to assess the pandemic crisis. This model is made up of several principles needed for reliability. The details of the core six principles for a highly reliable organization can be seen below. Table 2 summarizes the communication characteristics of high and low reliability organizations.

Moreover, it will be used to analyse the reliability of the government of the United Kingdom during the coronavirus crisis in 2020.

First of all, the capacity of organizations to not only foresee but also cope with and recover from errors and unexpected events is referred to as "commitment to resilience" (Weick et al., 1999; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). This principle assures that leaders can respond effectively to crises and emergencies, and they recover from them (Lekka, 2011). Moreover, there are early detection measures in place that monitor weak signals that could indicate impending disasters. Openness to and interaction with early warning signs, as well as a lack of complacency about the potential for crisis are vital (Sanders, 2020). According to Weick and Sutcliffe (2007), this principle exemplifies an organizations commitment to learning from experience and errors both from within the organisation and from other industries.

Secondly, situational awareness entails a thorough grasp of the larger picture, as well as a clear focus and attention to operations. The organization gathers and analyses data that allows it to identify gaps in its defences. The organization understands both the risks it faces and the adequacy (or lack thereof) of its defences to control them (Lekka, 2011).

Furthermore, Weick et al. (1999) and Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) suggested the principle of deference to expertise. High-reliability organizations have a hierarchical structure with clearly defined roles and duties, as well as reporting lines so that everyone knows who is accountable for what. In an emergency, however, this structure disappears, and decision-making is delegated to individuals with the specialist knowledge necessary to address a specific situation, regardless of their position within the organization's hierarchy. Hence, this principle ensures decision-making, and sense-making is carried out by those who have a clear knowledge of the event or problem, particularly in times of crisis (Sanders, 2020).

The fourth principle, collective and individual consciousness of risk and failure, suggests that everyone is aware of the failures in processes or protocols that lead to adverse outcomes. Mistakes are viewed as indications of a system's "health and reliability." As a result, high-

reliability organizations value and reward reporting of errors since they are seen as learning opportunities and a way to get a realistic picture of operations (Lekka, 2011). The benefit of an organization being alerted to prospective errors surpasses the gratification received from finding and punishing people and/or creating a scapegoat to deflect blame (Weick et al., 1999). Thus, mistakes are perceived as early signs of possible failures in the future and examined. In doing so, explanations that oversimplify the reality are avoided and weaknesses are detected before they turn into crises (Sanders, 2020).

The fifth principle is the refusal to oversimplify the causes for the error. This reliability enhancing aspect focuses on the ability to collect, analyse, and prioritise warning signs. Moreover, it avoids making assumptions regarding the issues (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). Organizations that aim to explain their world without oversimplifying ought not to ignore perspectives that do not fit into the most readily available explanations. In addition, healthy scepticism is viewed as a valuable addition to the information context (Lekka, 2011; Sanders, 2020; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

The next principle is mindful leadership, and it entails engagement, active listening, transparency, and encouraging cooperation by the leader (Lekka, 2011; Sanders, 2020). Hopkins (2008) argued that a mindful leadership style should provide necessary resources to ensure operational safety. Incidents that happen in other organizations should be used to check their organization. Audits should be commissioned, and bad news should be sought.

Finally, the principle “just culture” is based on organizations that have a culture of learning from their mistakes. The development of this principle requires open reporting that encourage the personnel to make a statement about errors. Later these are used to learn rather than to condemn the staff (Sanders, 2020). It is an open reporting system for incidents and errors. However, a distinction is necessary for developing this principle between behaviours that require disciplinary action and ones that do not. It is not about tolerating unacceptable behaviour, rather supporting the reporting of errors and accidents (Lekka, 2011).

Table 2

Communication characteristics of high and low reliability organizations (Sanders, 2020, p.360)

High Reliability Communication		Low Reliability Communication	
Organising principles	Communication characteristics	Organising principles	Communication characteristics
Commitment to resilience	Reaction and recovery capacity evidenced by rapid response to early warning signs of errors/incidents. "Living" crisis communication plan.	Complacency (satisfaction with existing situation and inattention to risk).	Reject or excuse early warning signs of errors/incidents. Dormant or inexistent crisis communication plan.
Situational awareness	Appropriate explanatory communication to stakeholders.	Focus on narrow interests	Knowledge gaps producing inadequate communication to stakeholders about the existing situation.
Deference to experience	Communication migrates to those with expertise to enrich leadership decision-making. Active organizational listening.	Primacy of hierarchical leadership	Top-down communication without active listening to those with expertise.
Collective and individual consciousness of risk and failure	Honesty, authenticity and candour about mistakes.	Lack of awareness of risk and failure	Lack of appropriate transparency. Absence of culture and protocols to capture and respond to errors.
Resistance to oversimplification	Deep analysis of incidents and errors resulting in effective learning and appropriate communication.	Oversimplification	Ineffective learning and inappropriate communication as a result of superficial analysis of incidents and errors.
Mindful leadership	Leads by example. Focus. Listening and responsive. Acknowledges errors. Seeks out bad news.	Superman leadership	Remote. Non-communicative. Does not recognize errors. Avoids bad news.
Just culture	Errors are learning opportunities for the organization and individuals. Communication enhances learning outcomes.	Blame culture	Punitive environment. Individual errors are punished. Communication castigates individuals.

Overall, the timeline of the British government's actions regarding the pandemic has been divided into five phases. This is necessary to be able to examine the changes that occur throughout the year 2020. Moreover, the crisis clusters suggest what type of crisis response strategy is necessary to respond to a specific type of crisis. The crisis cluster the United Kingdom is in has been identified as a victim crisis. This suggests that the attribution of responsibility is considerably low. Keeping this in mind, three theories are looked into to analyse the crisis the government of the United Kingdom is in. The crisis response strategy theory will be used to understand the extent the Prime Minister responded to a victim crisis. Furthermore, framing theory is significant in analysing how the frame building has been used by the government. The crisis response strategies will be a valuable input in understanding the frame building process of the government. Finally, the UK government's reliability during the COVID-19 pandemic will be inspected with the model of high and low reliability by Sanders (2020). In order to use this model to analyse the outcomes from the crisis response strategies and framing theory will be vital. The reason for this is that to understand the reliability of the communication of the government the framing they used will be used as input. This way the importance of appropriate and reliable response to crises will be revealed. Additionally, a contribution to the knowledge about frame building theory will be made by providing a link to the crisis response strategies and reliable communication model.

Method

Design

A qualitative research method will be used in this research. More accurately, content analysis will be utilised in order to objectively and systematically depict the content of communications of the United Kingdom. Content analysis is valuable since it can enhance the theoretical understanding of a vast number of topics including crisis management (Stemler, 2015). In this research, the press conferences by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom for the COVID-19 outbreak will be analysed. Using content analysis in this research offers the opportunity to further examine the crisis communication strategies taken by the government of the UK and how they framed the pandemic, in doing so, find out what it means for their reliability.

Borrowing from the thematic content analysis, the PM's communications are split into five phases. These five phases will serve as a timeline to examine how the response strategy has changed over the course of one year. To summarise, the initial phase from January to the beginning of March was characterised by a casual communicative response. The second phase from the end of March to the end of April aligned with a surge of cases and gave a clear message to the public about the need to stay at home. In May, the lockdown measures began to subside, there was a sense of confusion about what was intended as the messaging changed from 'Stay at home' to 'Stay alert'. The fourth phase was during the summer, from June until September. In this phase, the government worked on recovering the economy after several lockdowns. The last phase is the last three months of the year 2020. The United Kingdom had to enter another national lockdown due to the second wave. This phase also includes the approval of two COVID-19 vaccines and the declaration of a new variant of the novel coronavirus.

Instruments

A deductive coding strategy will be used by basing the study on multiple theories. The transcriptions of the press conferences will be content analysed using a codebook based on the previously mentioned methods proposed by various experts. The codebook consists of three variables, crisis response strategies, framing theory and action. The first variable, Crisis response strategies by Coombs (2007), will be used to analyse the strategies Boris Johnson has taken in his communication. Furthermore, the five frames identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) human interest, conflict, morality, economic, and attribution of responsibility. In addition to that, Fairhurst's (2005) five key language tools, metaphors, slogans, contrast, spin, and stories, are added to enhance this variable. As a third variable, the recommendations the government has made over the course of a year concerning the behaviours of the citizens during the pandemic will be taken into account. To illustrate, some of the codes are "washing hands", "lockdown" and "avoid mass gatherings", among others. This is an important variable to detect the increase of the measures and the Prime Minister's framing of the pandemic with the implemented measures. The prepared codes can be found in the codebook, Table 3 and a more elaborate version can be found in appendix A.

Table 3

Codebook

Variable	Code	Subcode	Subcode
Descriptive	1. Date		
	2. Phases		
Crisis Response Strategies	3. Deny crisis response strategies	3.1. Attack the accuser	
		3.2. Denial	
		3.3. Scapegoat	
	4. Diminish crisis response strategies	4.1. Excuse	
		4.2. Justification	
	5. Rebuild crisis response strategies	5.1. Compensation	
6. Bolstering crisis response strategies		5.2. Apology	
		6.1. Reminder	

Variable	Code	Subcode	Subcode
		6.2. Ingratiation	
		6.3. Victimage	
		6.4. Concern	
Framing	7. Human interest		
	8. Conflict		
	9. Morality		
	10. Economic		
	11. Attribution of responsibility		
	12. Language tools	12.1. Metaphor	
		12.2. Catch phrases	12.2.1. Doing the right thing at the right time
			12.2.2. Stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives.
			12.2.3. Stay alert, control the virus, save lives.
			12.2.4. Scientific advice/ Guided by science
		12.3. Contrast	
		12.4. Spin	
		12.5. Stories	
Action	13. Recommendation	13.1. Wash hands	
		13.2. Quarantine	
		13.3. Avoid travelling	
		13.4. Avoid gatherings	
		13.5. Avoid mass gatherings	
		13.6. Shutting schools	
		13.7. Lockdown	13.7.1. National lockdown
			13.7.2. Local lockdown
		13.8. Face Masks	
		13.9. Work from home	
		13.10. Easing lockdown	

Corpus

To establish the corpus to be analysed in this study, criteria for inclusion have been formulated. The press conferences by Boris Johnson regarding the COVID-19 pandemic will be analysed in this study. The reason behind this, is that this communication channel is spoken, personal, and live, instead of reported. This way the framing is done by the government instead of the media. Furthermore, press conferences are extensively used to address the public since it is the best way to inform the citizens about the updates regarding the crisis. Moreover, Boris

Johnson is the Prime Minister of a prime ministerial government meaning that he makes the executive decisions during the coronavirus crisis. Thus, these press conferences will be vital in understanding the crisis communication strategies that have been used and to measure the reliability of the government of the United Kingdom during the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These press conferences start on the 3rd of March 2020 and end on the 30th of December 2020, which is the last press conference held by the Prime Minister about COVID-19 in 2020. All of these conferences take place in Boris Johnson's office, 10 Downing Street. There are in total 37 press conferences done by the Prime Minister about the novel coronavirus, including the announcement of the new 'British variant' of the virus. All of the press conferences made by Boris Johnson addressing the coronavirus will be used as a corpus and none will be excluded. The Prime Minister has had routine press conferences until the 25th of March. Afterwards, he was infected with the novel coronavirus and hospitalised. No one took on the responsibility to carry the routine press conferences after his hospitalization. Therefore, there was a gap of press conferences until the 30th of April. However, because of the substantial amount of press conferences attended by him, this will not be an issue. Furthermore, the transcription of the press conferences' will be used in this research.

Analysis

Firstly, transcriptions of the press conferences by Boris Johnson concerning the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the year 2020 are obtained from the official government website. These 37 press conferences are then grouped in the five aforementioned phases. This ensures a more detailed examination of the different strategies used and how it has affected the reliability of the government. Secondly, these grouped transcriptions are analysed using the ATLAS.ti software program, where the codebook has been used to manually code the corpus. There are 14 main codes to be used to study the transcriptions. These codes consist of the descriptive, crisis response strategies, framing, and action variables as can be seen in Table 3. The first set of

variables are descriptive, this enables the identification of the document with codes such as the date and phase it belongs to. The other two variables will help look at the framing the government has done and the employed crisis communication strategies. The last variable is the recommendations the government makes to the citizens regarding the actions to be taken because of the crisis.

The corpus will be analysed with paragraphs as a unit of analysis. However, in the cases of language tools code, the corpus will be analysed on a sentence basis. The press conferences are spoken; thus, the paragraphs are short and suitable for an analysis based on that. The reason for the language tools to be analysed on a sentence basis is due to the fact that the subcodes are not suitable for a paragraph-based analysis. To illustrate, a subcode of language tools is catchphrases and these phrases can be observed in sentences rather than paragraphs because of their nature. After the process of coding the corpus is completed, the analysed data will be interpreted by examining which crisis response strategies were used at which times and with which frames and how these have changed over the course of a year. Later the theory of high reliability organizations by Sanders (2020) will be applied. The model will be used by examining the events that have occurred, the usage of crisis response strategies and framing, and actions taken by the government to stop the spread of the virus. This way the government's reliability will be inspected with their response to the crisis. After the analysis, it will be possible to suggest the reliability of the government and offer an alternative route the government can take concerning their crisis communication strategy.

Before performing the full analysis, determining the reliability of the codebook is necessary. Intercoder reliability has been guaranteed with a test in collaboration with an additional coder. Two researchers coded ten per cent of the corpus using the codebook in appendix A. Hence, four press conferences were randomly selected, and the two researchers individually coded them. The coded documents were analysed on SPSS and Cohen's Kappa was run to determine if there was an agreement between two researchers coding of the same

content, which can be observed in Table 4. There has been substantial agreement by the researchers on all main codes, as all Kappa's were above 0,6. Therefore, no changes to the codebook are needed to be made (Burla et al., 2008).

Table 4

Interrater reliability

Variables	Codes	Cohen's Kappa Value
Crisis Response Strategies	11	0.80
Frames	13	0.64
Action	11	1.00

Results

In the following section, the results of the performed analysis of Boris Johnson's portrayal of the COVID-19 pandemic will be introduced. First of all, the results regarding the usage of crisis response strategies by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom will be shown. Subsequently, the usage of these strategies over the course of five phases will be elaborated on. However, it is important to provide a frequency table for the press conferences in phases first, as can be seen in Table 5. Thereafter, the general findings of the frames, the frequencies and their usage over the course of 2020 will be present. After the examination of frames used in total and their frequency, the results from the co-occurrence analysis of crisis response strategies and frames will be presented. Lastly, the general findings regarding recommendations Boris Johnson had made to the public will be taken into account.

Table 5

Frequencies of Press Conferences in Phases

Phases	Press Conferences
Phase 1	7
Phase 2	5
Phase 3	5
Phase 4	9
Phase 5	11
Total	37

Crisis Response Strategies

Looking at the usage of Crisis Response Strategies in the press conferences by Boris Johnson about the coronavirus pandemic throughout the year 2020, a difference in usage of these strategies can be seen in Table 6. Firstly, the biggest gap can be observed between the deny (n=4) and bolstering (n=92) crisis response strategies. Boris Johnson has opted for using bolstering strategy more than any other response strategies. In this, the ingratiation (n=69), where the government praises the stakeholders and/or itself for the works done during the crisis, has been used the most. The following quote can be used to demonstrate the ingratiation

used to praise the stakeholders: "It's thanks to the efforts of those working in the NHS that we can still be confident the NHS can cope." In addition to this, Boris Johnson's statement "I am delighted that the biggest breakthrough yet has been made by a fantastic team of scientist right here in the UK" can show the praising of the government and Britain as a whole. It can be noticed that the next most used strategy is justification (n=31) from the diminish crisis response strategy. It is used to justify the damage taken from the crisis by phrases such as, "...like every other European country facing similar challenges." Distinctively, even though the rebuild crisis response strategy (n=20) is used more than the deny strategy, the apology has never been used. However, compensation (n=20) is the third most used strategy. Thereby, it is apparent that the rebuild strategy and compensation are the same. This strategy can be observed with expressions like "And we will expand our unprecedented economic support to assist those affected by these decisions." Another tactic that is worth mentioning used is concern (n=12) being the fourth most used strategy. An example of concern can be the phrase "And though the death toll has been tragic, and the suffering immense. And though we grieve for all those we have lost." Attack the accuser (n=1), an approach that is part of the deny crisis response strategy was used in the crisis concerning Dominic Cummings where the Prime Minister accused the reporters during the scandal of false information: "allegations about what happened when he was in self-isolation and thereafter, some of them palpably false". Hence, it is noteworthy to mention that this method was not used directly to deal with the coronavirus pandemic crisis.

Table 6*Frequencies of Crisis Response Strategies*

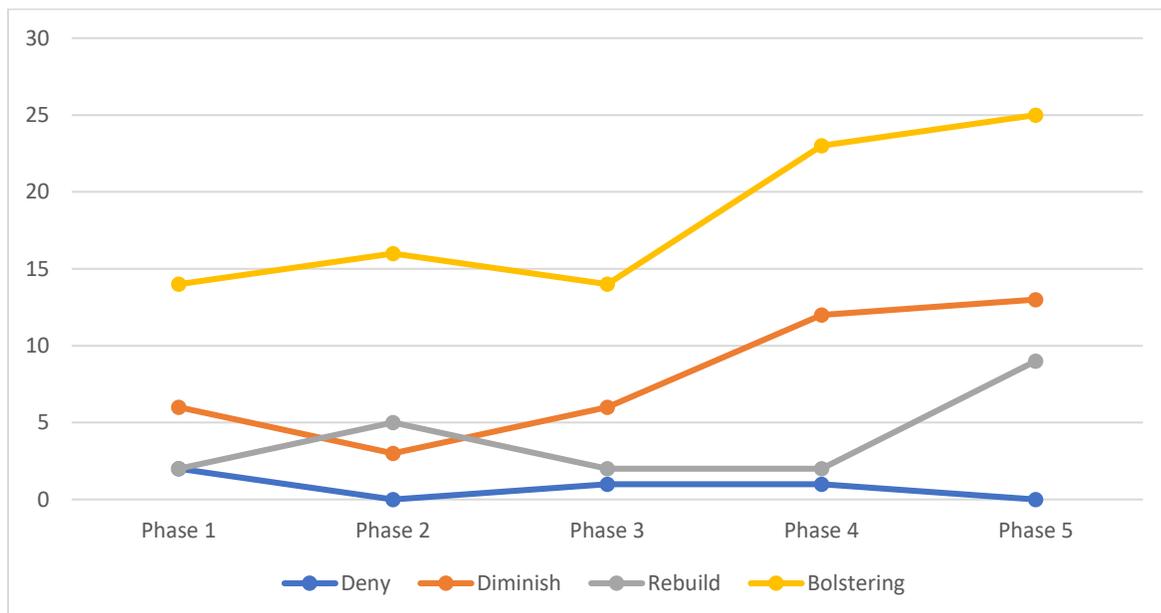
Crisis Response Strategies		Total	
3. Deny crisis response strategies	3.1. Attack the accuser	1	
	3.2. Denial	2	
	3.3. Scapegoat	1	4
4. Diminish crisis response strategies	4.1. Excuse	9	
	4.2. Justification	31	40
5. Rebuild crisis response strategies	5.1. Compensation	20	
	5.2. Apology	0	20
6. Bolstering crisis response strategies	6.1. Reminder	7	
	6.2. Ingratiation	69	
	6.3. Victimage	6	
	6.4. Concern	12	92

Looking at this in chronological order of the occurrences of these strategies, the following were found. Boris Johnson first used a denial and diminishment tactic, telling the public that the coronavirus would have little effect in the UK. Boris Johnson denied that there was a crisis regarding the coronavirus with the expression “business as usual” in his first press conference. Later, with the second phase, he shifted to a rebuild approach, in which he compensated the impacted parties economically. This was done since the country went into a national lockdown for two months. Since this situation harmed the reputation of the government it was important to gain back the support of the stakeholders by providing compensations to them. The diminish strategy follows an increase after the second phase to mainly provide justifications or excuses to decisions that are made to combat the spread of the virus. Moreover, in the following phases, he used the deny strategy to dismiss the crises that have occurred due to the coronavirus such as when Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland stopped following the UK regulations regarding the pandemic and acted as independent states. The Prime Minister denied that there was an issue with the phrase “it is right that they move at the right pace for them, according to their circumstances.” Although it was the scandal concerning Dominic Cummings that they decided to stop following the UK regulations. Throughout the year, crisis response techniques that are bolstering have been frequently employed. This was primarily

used to praise the government and stakeholders. Additionally, it is observed that the usage of bolstering is the highest in the final phase. It is noteworthy to mention that this is an absolute increase due to the press conferences being the most in the last phase. This can be observed in Table 5 where the frequencies of the press conference in each phase are shown. The bolstering strategy having been widely used suggests the government praised the stakeholders and itself to maintain its reputation. As the year draws to a close, a surge in diminish and rebuild strategies may be observed. This can be due to the fact that the French border being closed for freight travel by President Macron. Hence, Boris Johnson followed a diminish strategy to address this issue and justify that it is not as serious as it seems. In addition, the increase in rebuild can be the case since the government enters its second national lockdown. This harms the reputation of the government and in order to maintain it, Boris Johnson seems to have resorted to the usage of rebuild strategy.

Figure 1

Crisis response strategies occurrence in five phases



Framing Theory

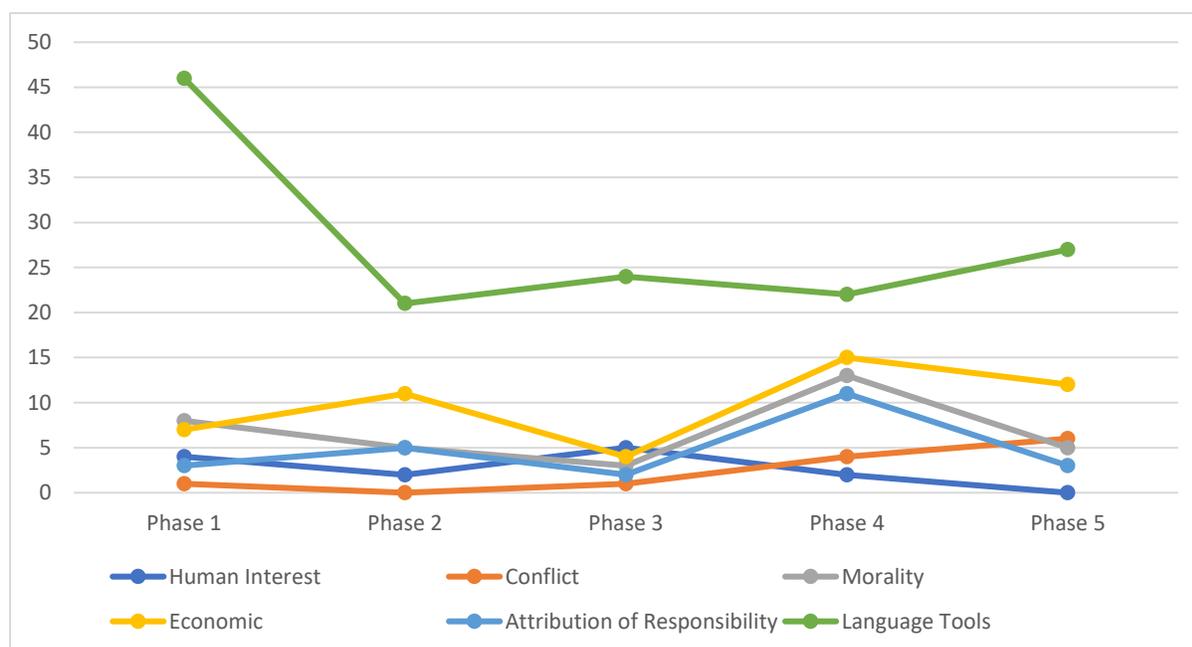
To answer the second research question, how the government framed the pandemic through 2020, an analysis has been done on the usage of framing by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom regarding the coronavirus crisis. Before presenting the frames occurrences in each phase a general description of the frequencies of frames are necessary. The frequencies of the frames' usage can be observed in Table 7. It is interesting to note that of the frames used, Language tools (n=140) were the most prevalent. Furthermore, among those tools, metaphor (n=58) was used for the majority, followed by catchphrase (n=49). Of the used catchphrases, scientific advice/guided by science (n=16) appears to be the most used (Appendix B). The economic frame (n=49) has been used as much as the catchphrase. This frame can be seen in phrases such as “we can see the impact that this is having on the UK economy and on business, on great, great companies.” In addition to this morality (n=34) is the third most used frame type. This can be seen, for instance, in the quote “the education of our children is crucial for their welfare, their health, for their long term future and for social justice.” The frames from language tools, the stories (n=6), contrast (n=11) and conflict (n=12) frames were used the least.

Table 7

Frequencies of Frames

Frames	Total
7. Human interest	13
8. Conflict	12
9. Morality	34
10. Economic	49
11. Attribution of responsibility	24
12. Language tools	
Metaphor	58
Catchphrase	49
Contrast	11
Spin	16
Stories	6
	140

In Figure 2 a line graph is presented to have a visual description of how the usage of the frames has changed over time. A more elaborate version of this graph can be found in Table B1 in Appendix B. The language tools have the highest frequencies of all the phases. In the table in appendix B, it can be seen that in the first phase catchphrases (n=21) have been used the most. The most used catchphrase is the scientific advice/ guided by science (n=12). However, in phase two, it can be observed that the language tools frame significantly decreases due to the decline of catchphrases (n=8). The slogan “stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives” was started to be used in the second phase. Additionally, the usage of this slogan decreases in phases 3 and 4 and an increase is seen in the last phase. Meanwhile the slogan “stay alert, control the virus, save lives” starts to be used in the third phase and then a decline of the usage is seen throughout the rest of the phases. The usage of spin is the most in the last phase with a frequency of 8. The metaphor tool has been used consistently through the phases with a focus on the war metaphor. This is present in the press conferences with phrases such as “invisible killer”, “this enemy can be deadly”, “shielding” and “we must act like a wartime government.” The morality frame has had a peak at phase four with a frequency of 13. The economic, morality and attribution of responsibility frames seem to be in correlation with each other. It can be observed that the frequencies of these frames are similar throughout each phase, especially in the third phase. These frames seem to gain popularity in phase two and four where the lockdown measures are prominent. The human interest frame has a peak in the third phase where the lockdown measures started to decrease. Lastly, an overall increase through the phases can be seen in the conflict frame. This is due to other crises starting to build up throughout Boris Johnson’s press conferences. To illustrate, when Boris Johnson addresses a conflict between the government and the leaders of Manchester he states: “Despite the failure to reach an agreement, I hope the Mayor and council leaders...will now work with us.”

Figure 2*Frames' occurrence in five phases*

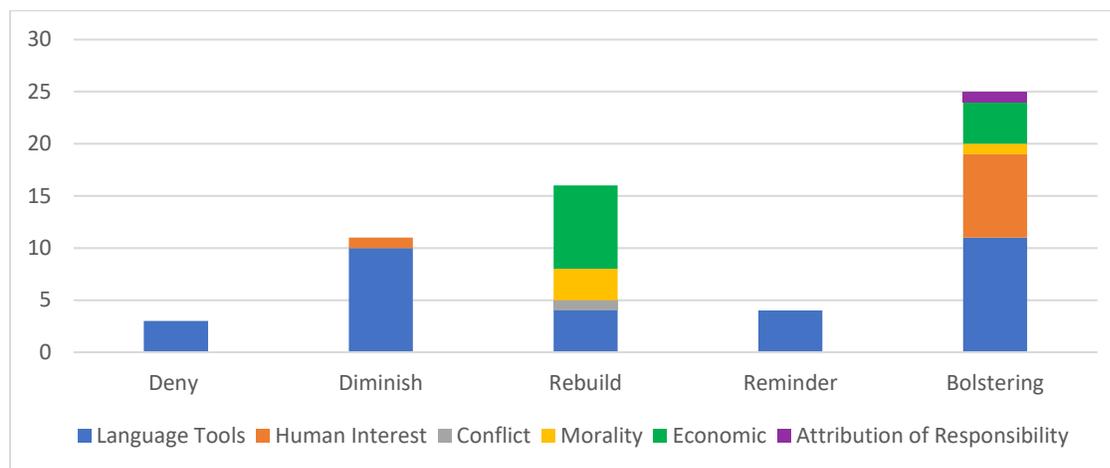
Crisis Response strategies and Frames

In order to fully understand how the government framed the pandemic crisis, it is vital to analyse the co-occurrences of both the variables crises response strategies and frames. The graph that provides a visual representation of these co-occurrences is presented in Figure 3 and a more detailed table can be found in Appendix B, Table B2. Looking at the data, the spin frame is noticeable in the deny and diminish crisis response strategies. In the compensation tactic, the morality and economic frames are prominent suggesting that there was financial compensation in a majority of cases. The metaphor tool is widely and only used with the bolstering strategies. It is worthy to mention that, with the reminder strategy, only the language tools frame has been used. Attribution of responsibility has only been used with ingratiation suggesting that the government praised the stakeholders while attributing responsibility to them for the pandemic. Interestingly, the economic frame has been used with the ingratiation tactic suggesting that the government praised the stakeholders and the government's financial abilities. However, they have also used the economic frame with the victimage and concern strategy. The morality frame

has only been used with the compensation and concern strategies. Ingratiation is the strategy that has been used with most frames overall.

Figure 3

Co-occurrences of Crisis Response Strategies and Frames



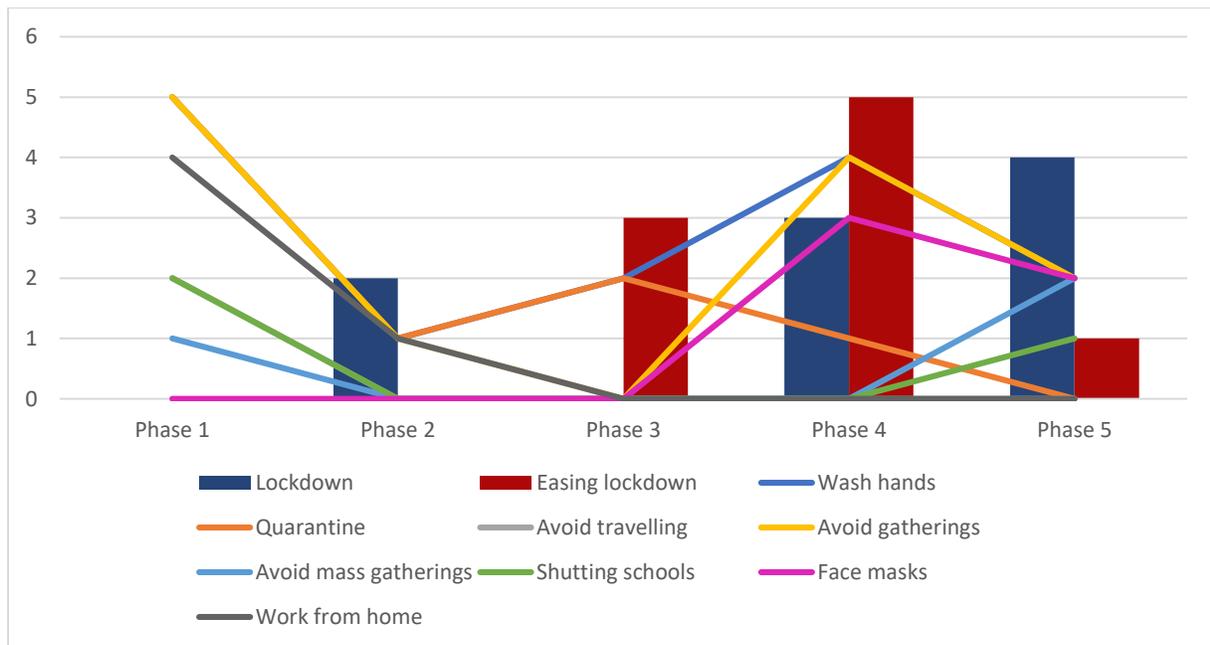
Action

Firstly, taking a general perspective, the lockdowns' occurrences in phases two, four, and five are seen. In the fourth phase, local lockdowns had been enforced instead of the national, thereby increasing the easing of the lockdown measures. Taking this into consideration the recommendations and regulations the government has made over the course of the five phases can be presented. Wash hands, quarantine and avoid gatherings recommendations have been made five times in the first phase showing urgency in this context. Moreover, shutting schools, work from home and avoid travelling recommendations have been made in the first phase. In the second phase with the introduction of the lockdown, it can be seen that these recommendations have been replaced by stricter regulation. With the easing of the lockdown in phase three, only the wash hands and quarantine recommendations seem to be made. Potentially causing the government to go into another lockdown in the fourth phase. Again, with the easing of the lockdown in the fourth phase, the recommendation of wearing face masks is introduced. However, the government does not seem to increase any other recommendations

during this phase. Potentially causing the government to go into another lockdown in the last phase. While the recommendations seem to decrease, the avoid mass gatherings seem to stand out as the only increasing recommendation. This is due to phase 5 being around December where many celebrations are a tradition, and the government did not want to accelerate the spreading of the virus more through mass gatherings. The following phrase can serve as an example to this, “no one should be gathering in large groups to see in the New Year.”

Figure 4

Recommendations' occurrences in five phases



High and Low Reliability Model

To determine the reliability of crisis communication in the UK it is important to analyse the three variables, crisis response strategies, framing theory and action in accordance with the high and low reliability model. This has been done on a phase basis where analysis of each phase will be presented in the following.

Phase 1. Public Health England knew that a pandemic was the number one risk to Britain and its CEO had stated that being prepared and responding quickly and effectively to a pandemic is a top priority for the government (Public Health England, 2014). In April 2020, an unnamed source disclosed that the rehearsal for an influenza pandemic that took place in 2016 had revealed a lack of personal protective equipment and ventilators (Calvert et al. 2020; Sanders, 2020). The coronavirus epidemic hit the headlines on the 24th of February, despite the high media coverage of Italy's lockdown and the impact of the virus on the world the government's communication provided no indication that the virus was moving towards the United Kingdom (Sanders, 2020). The Prime Minister had his first press conference regarding the coronavirus pandemic, and he dismissed the issue as a minor problem and stated, "business as usual". These suggest an abundance of early warning signs. Boris Johnson seemed to have been complacent and by rejected these signs and denying the existence of an issue. Boris Johnson attended an international rugby match on March 7th, despite widespread calls for large-scale public events to be cancelled. He stated that the mass gatherings had no effect on the spread of the coronavirus. However, the World Health Organization in February 2020 stated, "The transmission of respiratory infections, including influenza, has been frequently associated with mass gatherings" (p. 1). The Prime Minister's disregard for this information shows inadequate communication to the stakeholders. His actions can be seen as focused on narrow interests.

The Prime Minister reassured the public that the United Kingdom is prepared for a possible pandemic with the next press conference on the 9th of March. He stated that they had 'world beating scientific experts' a 'fantastic NHS' and claimed that the United Kingdom is well prepared. This message was then contradicted by the health minister and Boris Johnson when they appealed for faster construction of ventilators (Sanders, 2020). This can be sign of complacency and can cause the government damage in the long run. Three days later the Prime Minister stated in his press conference that more families were going to lose loved ones

before their time. A jarring change in messaging is observed from this press conference. Moreover, even though the government addressed the danger, they did not impose rules or made recommendations apart from “wash your hands”. Thus, an inexistent crisis communication plan can be seen from the Prime Minister’s changes in stance towards the issue multiple times and inability to make regulations. Moreover, the Prime Minister continuously declares that mass gatherings do not have an effect on the spread of the coronavirus, hence, social distancing and banning gatherings stayed in discussion. Four days later the government changed its communication strategy and started imposing rules and justifying the late response with phrases like “we are doing the right thing at the right time by following the scientific advice”. This justification seems to be not transparent.

Phase 2. By late March the seriousness of the situation was apparent, and the country went into a lockdown for two months. During this time, the Prime Minister made statements such as, we will ‘send the virus packing in 12 weeks’ which turned out to be not true. Proving that his messaging continued to downplay the virus's seriousness owing to a lack of urgency. In late March Boris Johnson became ill with the coronavirus and was in intensive care at the hospital, he disappeared from the stage until late April and had his next press conference on the 30th. In that, he stated that he was “frustrated” with the logistical problems concerning protective gears and ventilators and with expanding the testing of the virus. the Prime Minister did not actively listen to the Public Health England and failed to assess the risk of the problem and provide the necessary equipment to the health care workers in time. Despite mounting pressure from health and care workers, the Prime Minister refused to apologize or acknowledge any mistakes in his leadership (Sanders, 2020). The impact of this can be seen from the poll results as well. According to Politico (n.d), the polls for national parliament voting intention started to drop for the Prime Minister’s party, Conservative and Unionist Party, during this phase. Voting intention fell from 51 to 39 per cent in five months and there was a tie between the two opposing parties, the Conservative and Unionist Party and Labour Party.

Phase 3. Boris Johnson's response to claims that his senior adviser had broken the lockdown rules in late March might be one of the most damning instances in his leadership. His adamant support for Dominic Cummings seemed to imply that they were above the law and did not have to go through what the public was experiencing. The Prime Minister instructed the stakeholders to 'move on' from the issue. A lack of appropriate transparency from the Prime Minister can be observed again. After the scandal, Boris Johnson changed his catchphrase from "stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives" to "stay alert, control the virus and save lives" causing confusion among the stakeholders. Subsequently, these led Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to act as independent states blatantly disregarding the Prime Minister and escalate the crisis. The recognition of errors made by the government is not present at this stage. Due to the changes in the slogan usage, an inappropriate communication can be noticed. The superficial analysis and oversimplification of the Cummings scandal caused the government to take on a new message to fix the crisis. This suggests insufficient communication towards the stakeholders not to mention the refusal of effective learning by the administration.

Phase 4. In the fourth phase, the government worked on rebuilding the economy, hence eased the restrictions. It is noticeable that in this phase the Prime Minister decreases its communication with the public by press conferences. Over the course of four months, he has made nine press conferences relatively lower than any other phase. Boris Johnson introduced the local lockdown restrictions in this phase stating that it will be a better alternative for the national lockdown due to many variables like the economy, mental and physical health of the public. He states that these local restrictions were not used in the beginning because a national lockdown was needed at that time. The reason for this explanation can be due to the handling of the pandemic by the New Zealand administration. They had gone into a four-tier lockdown system at the beginning of the pandemic and had one of the most successful management of the crisis (Uhl-Bien, 2021). The United Kingdom took on the same system a couple of months

later to improve its economy. Naturally, the Prime Minister had to provide a justification for the usage of a successful system later in the year. The reason was that, unlike New Zealand, United Kingdom followed a denial strategy and was late to have an efficient response. However, his justification was “doing the right thing at the right time”. Suggesting that they did everything at the right time as advised by the scientific experts. These facts suggest inadequate communication by Boris Johnson that lacks transparency. Furthermore, the government, again, possibly causes an overestimation of the stakeholders’ capability by praising them. Boris Johnson rejects to see the early warnings of the second wave provided by the scientific experts and fails to take precautions, again. This possibly causes England to enter another national lockdown in the next phase. Boris Johnson making the same mistake again in one year can indicate that there is ineffective learning in the public organization. At this point, the approval of the government’s handling of the public health crisis was registered a 60-point drop in the net rating by the public. While in March it was plus 42 it dropped down to minus 18 during this phase (Kellner, 2020).

Phase 5. In the final phase with the government’s decision to go into another national lockdown followed by local lockdowns the catchphrase “stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives” appears to be used again to convey the message of staying home. Changing the slogan again shows inconsistent messaging in communication. A new, more easily transmittable variant of the virus is found in the United Kingdom in this phase. In response to this the French President, Macron, banned freight travel across the two countries. Boris Johnson addresses this issue by first saying that they have been working on “exactly this kind of event” due to Brexit. He later explains how freight travel would not affect the spread of the virus. Afterwards, he states that the virus can easily move from one country to another. Again an inconsistent messaging can be seen by the Prime Minister since he contradicts himself multiple times during the same press conference. Followed by this he spins the topic by saying half a million citizens have already been vaccinated. Furthermore, Boris Johnson continues to praise the stakeholders in

this phase as well and potentially causing another national lockdown in the next year. Therefore, it becomes apparent at this point that the United Kingdom cannot learn from the mistakes they have made over the past year of pandemic. Additionally, towards the end of December Boris Johnson tells the public to not gather in mass groups. With this statement, he contradicts himself again since he previously said that mass gatherings do not have an effect on the spread of the virus due to the backlash towards him when he attended a large scale event.

Discussion and Conclusion

The following section discusses the previously presented results with regard to the research questions. It will consequently explore how the earlier formulated research questions can be answered. After the discussion of the study's results, the reliable communication model will be taken into consideration. With the examination of how the United Kingdom framed the pandemic crisis with Boris Johnson's press conferences, the reliability model will be of help to determine to what extent this communication was from a reliable public organisation. Subsequently, the limitations of this study are explained, and suggestions for future research are given. Next, the research's answers will be brought to a close. Finally, the practical implications will be presented. These implications will result in a more reliable and effective crisis communication plan for public health emergencies.

Discussion of the findings

The findings of this study show that there were specific crisis management strategies used in certain situations. Moreover, these strategies were combined with frames in order to deliver the messages Boris Johnson wanted to the stakeholders. Additionally, this framing of the crisis was in correlation with the recommendations they have made throughout the phases. Henceforth, the findings of this study will be discussed and explained with respect to the previously presented insights from the literature.

Crisis Communication Strategies

Considering the first research question (*"What crisis management strategies did the government of United Kingdom use?"*), it can be deduced that they have used all of the crisis response strategies in various phases except for apology. Boris Johnson first followed a denial and diminish strategy where he informed the public that the coronavirus would not have an effect in the United Kingdom. Later he switched to the rebuild strategy where he provided economical compensation to the affected stakeholders. Bolstering crisis response strategies

have been used widely throughout the whole year. This was used mostly to praise the government and the stakeholders during the pandemic. Approaching the end of the year, a rise in diminish and rebuild strategies can be seen.

Firstly, the Prime Minister addressed the spread of coronavirus in early March denying that it would affect the United Kingdom. During this phase, he advised the stakeholders to wash their hands and stay home if they were feeling ill. The Prime Minister used a denial strategy to break ties with the public health crisis. By doing so he would have altered the crisis attributions achieving one of the three crisis management goals. Indeed, loosening the ties between organisations and crises decreases the attribution of it (Coombs, 1995). However, this strategy does not work if the organization is in the midst of a crisis because the structure of the crises is dynamic and gives way to possibilities of various events. Moreover, for the strategy to work, the media should accept it. In this case, the public health crisis had just started and was far from over. Additionally, the high media coverage of Italy's struggle with this outbreak was an indication that the media would not accept such a strategy. Therefore, it was not successful in loosening the ties between the government and the crises failing to accomplish one of the crisis management goals.

Later, due to the developments in the world, the government changed their stance against this situation. The government raised the risk of the outbreak to high and Boris Johnson stated that many will lose their lives in his press conference on the 12th of March. Afterwards, they started to take more actions against the coronavirus. At this point, the diminish strategies were used to justify the actions taken by the government. According to Kim and Sung (2013), it is important to provide both good and bad news during a crisis in order to be transparent. However, this harsh change in the crisis communication strategy can be seen as harmful. Especially considering that the deny strategy did not work, following a diminish strategy would not be helpful. This is because diminish strategy should be used if the ties of the crisis and the organization are minimized (Coombs, 2007). Since the deny strategy fails to minimize these ties

it can be suggested that this strategy would not work at this stage. However, it is understandable that this response was followed to attempt to accomplish the crisis management goal, being the reduction of adverse effects (Coombs, 1995).

In the second phase, the government went into a lockdown after considering that it was the necessary option. Lockdown measures limited freedom, changed social life, and influenced most of the stakeholders financially. Additionally, according to the Prime Minister many large companies were affected by this lockdown, not to mention the economy in its entirety. Due to this, the government followed the rebuild strategy in order to improve the affected reputation and credibility. They provided compensations to the affected parties. This strategy was combined with bolstering to construct reputational resources. In theory, this ought to improve the reputation of the government (Coombs, 2007). This procedure was followed to achieve the crisis management goal of reducing adverse effects of the outbreak (Coombs, 1995). However, there is no one correct way of using the crisis response strategies, according to Brown and White (2013). Stakeholder relationship, organizational reputation and external impacts should be taken into account. In the short run, it might have been useful to maintain the reputation. Nonetheless, in the long run, the ingratiation strategy caused an overestimation of the capabilities of the government and the stakeholders. This caused the country to go into another lockdown soon after (Sanders, 2020), meaning that it decreased its reputation in the longer run.

Phase three started with the ending of the lockdown measures and the media coverage increasing concerning the Dominic Cummings scandal. This caused an increase in the usage of the deny and diminish crisis response strategies to alter the attribution of the crisis. Diminish strategy was used first in an attempt to make the scandal seem less important and justifications followed by excuses were presented to the stakeholders. However, the link between the crisis and the organization was not minimized. Furthermore, the proof of a legitimate excuse was not present, and the prior reputation of the government was not favourable (Politico, n.d.). Therefore, this strategy was not successful from the beginning (Coombs, 2007). Later a deny

strategy was used to attack the accusers of the Dominic Cummings scandal. Notwithstanding, for this strategy to work the media must accept the narrative. Since the accuser of the incident was the media, attacking would not be an appropriate strategy because the media would not accept it (Coombs, 2007). On the other hand, a decrease in the rebuild strategy can be observed since the government eased the lockdown measures and refused to apologise for the Cummings scandal. According to Coombs (2007), an apology or compensation is important for credibility in case of an intentional incident. Cummings scandal being intentional and a decrease in rebuild strategy caused reputational harm. This can be also seen by the public plea for chief aid's resignation.

The deny crisis response strategy is prominent in the fourth phase. This is due to the continuing of the Cummings scandal. Following the chief aid's disregard to the lockdown measures, Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland started following their own measures and disregarded the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister attempted to minimize the link between the crisis and the government by denying that there was a crisis in the first place. However, the Prime Minister's adamant support for the chief aid in the previous phase made it harder for the link to be loosened. This is because Boris Johnson represents the government and supporting a figure that has an unfavourable perception by the stakeholders makes it harder for the media to accept this denial strategy (Coombs, 2007). The link between the Cummings scandal and the states following their regulations is too strong for the media to ignore.

In this phase, the government started following the three-tier local lockdown system. The system was adapted from the New Zealand government. To justify the new system and provide excuses as to why they were not used beforehand, the Prime Minister used a diminish strategy. Therefore, an increase in this strategy can be observed in this phase. However, for the diminish strategy to work the ties between the pandemic crisis and the government should have been loosened. Moreover, proof of why this system is being used now should have been given. The

Prime Minister failed to provide proof other than the phrase “doing the right thing at the right time”. Additionally, the absence of a favourable reputation due to the previous events inevitably caused this strategy to fail (Coombs, 2007).

The bolstering strategy also increased during the fourth phase. Precisely, the usage of the ingratiation tactic had an increase. The reason for this increase is to improve the reputation and achieve the crisis management goal of shaping the views of the parties that were affected by the crisis (Coombs, 1995). However, this strategy caused the public to overestimate their and the government’s work against the virus. This is because the government praised itself and the stakeholders. Consequently, this potentially caused the public to decrease their risk perception generating an increase in coronavirus cases (Sanders, 2020).

The final phase starts with the second national lockdown, hence, an increase in the rebuild strategy can be seen. Particularly, the compensation tactic has been used to help the stakeholders recover from the financially harmful regulations. This is an attempt to improve the reputation of the government (Coombs, 2007). It is a useful strategy in this case for the government of the United Kingdom since the government has an unfavourable reputation in this phase (Coombs, 2007). Later a diminish strategy has been followed to address the crisis concerning the freight ban on the French border. This political crisis occurred due to the discovery of the new variable in the United Kingdom. Media addressing the new variant as the “British variant” made the ties of the crisis to the government stronger (Beca & Bejar, 2021). Moreover, Boris Johnson’s inconsistent argumentation that does not provide proof caused this strategy to inevitably fail (Coombs, 2007). An attempt to improve the reputation of the government by the Prime Minister through praising the stakeholders with the ingratiation strategy, again, caused the country to go into another national lockdown in the following month (Sanders, 2020).

Overall, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom has used many crisis response strategies over the course of one year during the coronavirus pandemic. Most of these strategies were not successful in dealing with the crisis since the criteria of their usage were not fulfilled. Moreover, the apology strategy was not used even though the theory of crisis response strategies suggested it.

Framing Theory

In view of the second research question (*“How did the government of the United Kingdom framed the pandemic throughout 2020?”*), it can be reasoned that the framing has changed throughout the five phases due to the dynamic structure of this crisis. In order to fully answer this question, the findings from the framing theory and crisis response strategies will be used. The reason for this is that according to Coombs (2007), the crisis response strategies in essence provide input for the framing of a crisis. To comprehend how the government framed the crisis throughout the year 2020, the findings will be interpreted phase by phase.

In the first phase, it is noticeable that the Prime Minister approaches the public health concern with denial from the deny response strategies. He states “business as usual” in his first press conference regarding this issue. With the usage of the denial strategy, language tools can be observed. This combination is used to provide legitimacy and truth to the denial of the outbreak crisis (Feste, 2011). The spin frame from the language tools has been used and due to its nature of spinning the topic, it decreases the transparency. This creates a perception of loose ties between the government and the crisis (Fairhurst, 2005). After the high media coverage of Italy’s situation with the crisis, the government starts to take actual precautions. The Prime Minister starts using metaphors in combination with the diminish strategy as a tool to justify to the public how important the situation is. The metaphor frame has been used to base the ‘complex’ and ‘unfamiliar’ crisis on a phrase the general public would understand (Fairhurst, 2005). He later starts using the catchphrase “following scientific advice” and “doing the right

thing at the right time” as a way to justify the actions that are taken late by the government and to make them seem legitimate and truthful (Feste, 2011).

In the second phase, the country enters a lockdown that will last for four weeks. Soon after the start of the lockdown Boris Johnson gets infected with the coronavirus and is hospitalised. While Boris Johnson is recovering from the virus the lockdown gets extended for four more weeks. The Prime Minister returns to work two weeks before the end of the lockdown. During this lockdown, the Prime Minister uses the catchphrase “stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives” to enhance the legitimacy of the regulations. They attribute the responsibility of getting through the pandemic to the stakeholders and their ability to follow the rules. This is an attempt to reach the crisis management goal of alteration of the attribution. It is necessary and used well to get the public to take action against the spread of the coronavirus. Moreover, in order to shape the views of those who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic the usage of the economic frame with the bolstering and rebuild crisis response strategies can be observed. Herewith, Boris Johnson declares that the government will financially help the ones in need.

The third phase starts with the ending of the two-month-long lockdown. Following this, multiple news outlets accuse Dominic Cummings, chief aid of the Prime Minister, of breaking the lockdown measures multiple times. In response to this Boris Johnson first uses the excuse and justification tactics from the diminish response strategies followed by the attack the accuser by deny strategies where he accuses the news outlets of false information. Subsequently, the catchphrase that Boris Johnson had been using repeatedly “stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives” changes to “stay alert, control the virus and save lives”. The change in the catchphrase harms the legitimacy and truthfulness of this response. This contradicts the purpose of this language tool deeming it adverse (Fairhurst, 2005; Feste, 2011). At this phase, the ingratiation can be seen at its lowest with concern at its highest and the human interest frame accompanies these bolstering strategies. This combination provides an emotional angle to the framing in this phase for the first and last time in the year 2020. This strategy improves

the legitimacy of the communications. An emotional angle nudges the stakeholders to feel more positive about the actions of the government. This is due to the fact that this angle makes the stakeholders perceive that the government cares about their citizens and the concern element provides legitimacy to this perception (An & Gower, 2009; Coombs, 2006).

The fourth phase focuses on rebuilding the economy by easing the restrictions taken against the coronavirus. In order to make this more effective, the government opts for the local restrictions and lockdowns for the first time. The conflict frame increases due to the Dominic Cummings scandal and the change in the catchphrases. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do not agree with Boris Johnson's stance on this issue and start acting as independent states concerning the pandemic. The increase in the conflict frame suggests that the government build the frames concerning these conflicts. This provides an advantage for the government to determine the narrative of the incidents (Hänggli, 2012; Rodelo & Muniz, 2018). However, the Prime Minister denies this incident and fails to take the opportunity of providing the media with a successful narrative. Moreover, Boris Johnson combines the justification strategy with the morality frame in this phase. This is done to address the issue of implementing a successful regulation that has a less significant impact on the freedom, social lives and economy of the country late in the year. This justification combined with the morality frame exemplifies that the government's justification was based on what they think is best for the citizens and the country (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). However, a lack of transparency can be seen due to no proof for this moral evaluation being presented. This strategy has a chance of working only if the media 'buys' the story (Coombs, 2007). An increase in ingratiation tactic and economic frame suggests that the government praises the stakeholders' financial capabilities. In addition, an increase in the attribution of responsibility can also be observed in combination with the ingratiation strategy. This is due to Boris Johnson praising the stakeholders for carrying the attributed responsibility. This is necessary to gain the sympathy and the trust of the public (Coombs, 2007; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). However, the exaggeration of the ingratiation

caused an overestimation of the stakeholders' capability and caused another lockdown in November (Sanders, 2020).

In the final phase, the government first imposes a national lockdown followed by local lockdowns throughout most of the cities in Britain. Consequently, the catchphrase "stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives" appears to be used by Boris Johnson again. This attempt in gaining the legitimacy of the catchphrase to enhance the validity of the regulation is unsuccessful. In this phase, an increase in conflict can be observed due to the relations with the French government. After the discovery of the new variant of the virus started spreading in the United Kingdom, President Macron banned freight travel between the two countries. As a response to this, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom framed the conflict by using diminish crisis response strategy where he provided excuses and used the spin frame. This was an attempt to reduce the seriousness of the crisis. He provides proof for his justification such as stating that this incident only affects twenty per cent of the food traffic to the UK. He declares that the French President and he had "a very good call" suggesting that the issue will be resolved. This is important in reducing panic and excessive food shopping in the country (Coombs, 2007). However, spinning the topic and bringing attention to the increase in the vaccination process reduces transparency (Fairhurst, 2005). Moreover, even though an increase in bolstering strategies concurrently used with the economic frame, the compensation tactic is used the most in this phase. This suggests that while Boris Johnson praises the stakeholders and the government for their economical capabilities, he offers the most amount of financial compensation since the pandemic started. This is due to the aim of attempting to increase the reputation of the government. Since after two national lockdowns and multiple local lockdowns the reputation was visibly weak. The prime examples to present this are the decrease in poll results (Kellner, 2020; Politico, n.d.).

All in all, the pandemic was first framed as an issue that would not affect the United Kingdom, however, it did not take long for the government to realize the seriousness of the

situation. Later language tools were used to explain the importance of the situation and justify the government's late response to it. Moreover, the responsibility was attributed to the stakeholders to withstand the crisis. Nevertheless, the government praised themselves and the stakeholders and financially helped them to maintain their reputation. Although, the praising overestimated the capabilities of both the public and the government causing multiple lockdowns. Additionally, at times, an emotional angle has been taken to approach the public. Furthermore, when different crises arrived due to the pandemic deny and diminish strategies were used in combination with spin, thereby, decreasing the transparency of the public organization.

High and Low Reliability Model

The reliability model summarizes the communication characteristics of high and low reliability organizations. This model will be used to answer the last research question ("To what extent did the government of the United Kingdom have a reliable communication?") by analysing the previously presented interpretations in this context. Over the course of one year of pandemic reveals a troubling picture of complacency in the United Kingdom's remarkable readiness, overpromising on achievements, and sending mixed messages to the stakeholders about how to respond to the pandemic.

The deny strategy used in the first phase shows a lack of working early detection measures. The reason for this is that the outbreak was not prepared for by the government of the United Kingdom. The lack of protective gear and ventilators suggest that the Prime Minister was not open to interaction with the early warning signs of this crisis (Lekka, 2011). Moreover, even though the government was not ready for the pandemic a complacency can be observed from Boris Johnson's statements. An example of his complacency can be observed when he declares that the United Kingdom is prepared for any possible pandemics (Sanders, 2020). Furthermore, even when Italy has a high media coverage due to it being the coronavirus

epidemic of Europe, United Kingdom does not learn from their mistakes. These suggest that the commitment to resilience principle is not fulfilled due to the lack of effective response and recovery (Lekka, 2011; Weick, et al., 1999; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). Therefore, gaps in defence systems are not identified pointing to the communications lacking the situational awareness principle (Lekka, 2011; Sander, 2020).

In the second phase after the national lockdown start, Boris Johnson states that they will send the virus “packing in 12 weeks”. This turns out to be not truthful when the pandemic continues to the year 2021. This bolstering strategy causes an assumption to be made by the government. It is vital to not make assumptions and oversimplify the complexity of crises in order to enhance the reliability of the government (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). The oversimplification of the problem suggests an inactive listening to those of expertise. Hence, the principle of collective and individual consciousness of risk is not fulfilled. Moreover, the realization of the necessary equipment being limited in this phase suggests a superman leadership, where the leader cannot provide the necessary equipment (Hopkins, 2008; Sanders, 2020). On the other hand, Prime Minister providing financial compensations to the stakeholders to provide necessary resources is an aspect of mindful leadership (Hopkins, 2008).

The Dominic Cummings scandal is prominent in the third phase. When it comes to the principles of high reliability organizations this crisis requires attention. Boris Johnson’s support for a party who made an intentional error causing a crisis does not satisfy the just culture principle of highly reliable organizations. Since according to this principle unacceptable behaviour should not be tolerated (Lekka, 2011). A general lack of transparency in this crisis suggests an absence of the awareness of risk and failure principle. Furthermore, failure to recognize errors in this scandal indicates a superman leadership (Sanders, 2020). Oversimplification of this scandal made it worse by causing inappropriate communication and changes in catchphrases. This oversimplification caused Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland to refuse to follow the Prime Minister, thereby being inadequate to satisfy the resistance to the

oversimplification principle. This mistake being made in the previous phase implies that there is ineffective learning from the past, hence, supporting the absence of the commitment to resilience principle (Lekka, 2011; Weick, et al., 1999; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

In the fourth phase, the Prime Minister relatively lowers the amount of press conference he makes. Decreasing communication with stakeholders during a public health crisis can be interpreted as a superman leadership, according to Sanders (2020). The justification that lacks transparency for the new measurements, such as Prime Minister's reasoning "doing the right thing at the right time", insinuates the insufficiency of awareness of risk and failure principle. Boris Johnson's leadership is warned by the scientists of the UK asserting that a second wave is incoming. The Prime Minister fails to listen to his advisors and continues to praise the country. This shows an absence in the deference to expertise principle since the communication did not migrate to the experts during the crisis. Furthermore, Boris Johnson not reacting to the second early warning signs imply that the government does not satisfy the commitment to resilience principle. Since the Prime Minister fails to interact with these warnings and fails to learn from past mistakes.

In the fifth phase, the change in the catchphrase can be observed again. This shows inconsistent messaging and focuses on narrow interests. This is due to the catchphrase being changed in the first place was because the Prime Minister supported his chief aid during the Cummings scandal. Thus, the government lacking the principle of situational awareness can be seen (Lekka, 2011; Sanders, 2020). Furthermore, inconsistent communication during the crisis caused by the freight travel ban shows a dormant crisis communication (Sanders, 2020). Although the country is in a national lockdown and a new variant of the coronavirus is spreading in the United Kingdom the Prime Minister continues to use the ingratiation strategy to praise the stakeholders. This causes another wave of coronavirus since the risk perception of the citizens is lowered. It is seen that the Prime Minister makes this mistake repeatedly to maintain the reputation of the government, however, it causes adverse effects. Moreover, ineffective learning

from past errors is, again, visible (Sanders, 2020). Lastly, the Prime Minister contradicting himself in this phase is observed. After attending a large-scale event in March, he declares that these mass gatherings do not have an effect on the spread of the airborne virus. However, in this phase, he states that the stakeholders should not gather in mass groups to celebrate the New Years. This shows a focus on narrow interests and does not satisfy the high reliability organisation principle of situational awareness (Sander, 2020).

In conclusion, the Prime Minister's statements, that highlighted Britain's outstanding resources and preparations, demonstrated complacency about the country's capabilities to respond to a possible pandemic. This did not represent the realities and was harmful at the start of the pandemic. Prime Minister's communication continued to lack a sense of urgency and danger that the country was facing in the following phases. Moreover, a lack of transparency and failure to recognize errors can be observed since the government was not transparent about the capabilities of the country and did not take responsibility for their mistakes in managing the crisis. Additionally, ineffective learning within this organization can be seen due to the Prime Minister's repeated mistakes. Throughout the year inadequate communication and mixed messaging can be observed by the government causing confusion among the stakeholders. These suggest that the government of the United Kingdom had a low reliable communication during the coronavirus pandemic crisis in the year 2020.

Limitations and future research

In the following, it will be reflected upon what limitations need to be addressed for the present study. Keeping in mind that acknowledgement of the limitations of this study will provide an opportunity to make suggestions for further research. Since communication is a wide area to analyse and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic is longer than one year many limitations are apparent in this research.

First of all, the government of the United Kingdom has a wide range of communication channels, however, due to the scope of this study a narrow portion of the United Kingdom's communication channels were analysed. The Prime Minister's press conferences of the course of the first year of the pandemic have been chosen to be analysed. The reason for this is that the press conferences are the most official way that reaches the most amount of people and it is an important part of the broadcasting channel. Additionally, since the pandemic is still ongoing the first year has been analysed. This, however, provided significant insight on the start of the pandemic and how the communication strategy had changed to fit the dynamic structure of the pandemic. Furthermore, the news reflecting the strategies the government has taken were not taken into consideration. This could be useful in understanding the government's communication better. In this way, the public perspective on communication could have been analysed. Nonetheless, not involving this provided a deeper analysis and understanding of the political communication the government presented. Additionally, multiple crises happened during the coronavirus pandemic that had an effect on the way the government took a stance that was not analysed in depth. These were the Dominic Cummings scandal followed by the three states (Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland) disregarding the Prime Minister and lastly, the French ban on freight travel. However, these were not in the scope of a bachelor thesis and an analysis that scratched the surface of these incidents provided adequate information about the communication strategy that the United Kingdom followed. Another limitation concerns the frame building theory. There is not much research done on frames used by the governments to control their messaging, thus, the codes for the framing theory had to be taken from the codes created for analysing the media frames. Notwithstanding, this proved to add to the research done on this theory. Lastly, the manual coding of the corpus unavoidably comes with subjectivity. The fact that there was sufficient intercoder reliability does not change this limitation. This limitation can be observed better with the framing variable due to its complexity

and openness to interpretation. Regardless, content analysis is valuable due to its ability to enhance the theoretical understanding of crisis management (Stemler, 2015).

For future research, it can be interesting to look at the crisis from other or more communication perspectives such as analysing the less official broadcasting tool, Twitter. This can be interesting due to its unofficial nature contradicting with it being a tool for official announcements to stakeholders. Moreover, extending the research from how the government communicated to how the stakeholders perceived this communication can add insight into this issue. In addition, future research can also take the whole period of the pandemic into account rather than focusing only on one year. A more in-depth analysis of the crises that happened during the pandemic can be an important feature for future research. Finally, more research on the frame building theory can be an addition to the political communication discipline.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the aim of this study was to determine how the government of the United Kingdom framed the coronavirus crisis and assess the reliability of their communication. Examining the crisis response strategies, the government has used in the Prime Minister's press conferences in accordance with the used frames, insight on the framing of crisis has been gained. It has been found that the framing of the pandemic by the UK government changed due to the dynamic structure of this crisis. While at first, they framed it as an issue that would not affect the United Kingdom, they then changed their stance against it. They explained the situation was serious and they were well prepared. Even though they financially helped the affected stakeholders their complacency was the only consistent aspect in their messaging. However, this caused them to overestimate their abilities and worsen the crisis in the long run. In addition, they tackled different issues within the pandemic crisis by denying them.

The observation of the framing the government has done in combination with the events that have occurred it was possible to assess the reliability of the government's communication.

It has been revealed that Boris Johnson had low reliable communication throughout the year 2020 when managing the coronavirus pandemic crisis. The Prime Minister's complacency about the capabilities of the United Kingdom did not depict the realities and was adverse at the start of the pandemic. He failed to show commitment to resilience by not interacting with early warning signs and failing to recognize errors and learning from them. His communication did not exclusively lack urgency, it also lacked transparency and taking responsibility for the mistakes that were made, suggesting a lack of situational awareness and mindful leadership. Decision making was not delegated to the ones with expertise during a crisis causing the government to make wrong choices. Lastly, the problems were oversimplified with narrow interests causing a negative loop of events.

The analysis that investigated the handling of the crisis by the UK government suggests weak communication overall. However, the pandemic is still ongoing, and it is too early to suggest that the United Kingdom could not rise to the challenge. They have the potential to turn the tide with the vaccination programme the following year, and perhaps learn from their mistakes.

Practical Implications

To conclude this study, the final aim of formulating practical implications on how to plan an effective and reliable communication for a public health crisis will be elaborated on. Using the previously presented models and taking the events that have occurred during the pandemic as a learning opportunity a better crisis communication plan for future emergency health crises such as, pandemics and epidemics, will be presented in the following.

The difference between the countries that succeeded and those that struggled with the public health crisis was adaptive order. Countries that performed well recognized the magnitude of the problem, and their leaders initiated adaptive organisational responses earlier on. Countries that did not succeed in enacting a response resorted to concealment and denial (Uhl-

Bien, 2021). Implementing procedures such as test and trace throughout the crisis, closure of borders, imposing lockdowns, and mandating face coverings with the detection of early warnings is vital in combating health crises. Instead of using a denial strategy, action should be taken with the first signs of danger. Consistent messaging to the stakeholders is a necessity throughout the whole crisis. Underlining the urgency with the assurance that the government the citizens depend on, is ready to tackle the problem is crucial. Ingratiation strategy should be used to keep up the morale of the citizens at the right times. With the usage of frames such as the human interest frame, an emotional angle should be taken to unite the public at times of struggle. Being transparent about an issue the government is facing by not using spin frames or deny and diminish strategies is needed. Most importantly, recognizing errors and apologising to the public is essential in gaining their support.

Most modern organizations operate in a complex environment. In complex organizations, events and actions combine to generate unintended, unanticipated, and unforeseen effects, raising the risk of mistakes (Axelrod & Cohen, 2005). Organizations with the degree of complexity of a national government can especially benefit from implementing a more reliable organizational culture. The capacity to recognize, admit, and learn from mistakes should not be absent from the handbooks of government or other leaders. A “living” crisis communication plan should be in the place where the government reacts and adapts to the early warning signs. Leaders ought to listen to multiple experts on the subject to enrich their decision making. Errors in managing the crises should be analysed and learned from to not make those mistakes again. It is unlikely that any organization can expect to escape crises if it does not strive to eliminate a low reliability culture. Citizens expect their governments to be competent, to handle issues, and to keep them safe. It is difficult to predict how they will manage in the future if communication methods are not employed effectively and reliably.

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Appendix A

Codebook

Variable	Code	Subcode	Subcode	Description	Example	
Descriptive	1. Date			Date of the press conference	3 March 2020	
	2. Phases			The phase that the press conference belongs to	Phase 1	
Crisis Response Strategies	3. Deny crisis response strategies	3.1. Attack	the	accuser	Prime Minister confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the government.	And though there have been many other allegations about what happened when he was in self-isolation and thereafter, some of them palpably false.
				3.2. Denial	Prime Minister asserts that there is no crisis.	I want to stress that for the vast majority of the people of this country, we should be going about our business as usual.
				3.3. Scapegoat	Prime Minister blames some person or group outside of the government for the crisis.	When coronavirus started to spread around the world, first from Wuhan and then from northern Italy and other areas, we introduced enhanced monitoring at

Variable	Code	Subcode	Subcode	Description	Example
					the border in an attempt to stop the virus from gaining a foothold in the UK
	4. Diminish crisis response strategies	4.1.	Excuse	Prime Minister minimizes responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.	I want to stress that we in the UK fully understand the anxieties of our friends about Covid, their anxieties about the new variant, but it is also true that we believe the risks of transmission by a solitary driver sitting alone in the cab are really very low.
		4.2.	Justification	Prime Minister minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis.	Our country remains extremely well prepared, as it has been since the outbreak began in Wuhan several months ago.
	5. Rebuild crisis response strategies	5.1.	Compensation	Prime Minister offers money or other gifts to victims.	giving local authorities across England around a billion pounds so they can protect vital services as they fight the virus.

Variable	Code	Subcode	Subcode	Description	Example
		5.2.	Apology	Prime Minister indicates the government takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.	<i>Example is not available since the Prime Minister did not apologize in his press conferences.</i>
	6. Bolstering crisis response strategies	6.1.	Reminder	Tell stakeholders about the past good works of the government.	just to remember, that we will get through this, this country will get through this epidemic, just as it has got through many tougher experiences before
		6.2.	Ingratiation	Prime Minister praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the government.	From the very beginning of this crisis I have followed the advice of our world leading scientists.
		6.3.	Victimage	Prime Minister reminds stakeholders that the government is a victim of the crisis too.	The coronavirus is the biggest threat this country has faced for decades – and this country is not alone.
		6.4.	Concern	Prime Minister expresses concern for the victims	I am under no illusions about how difficult this will be for businesses which have already had to endure

Variable	Code	Subcode	Subcode	Description	Example	
Framing	7. Human interest			A human face or an emotional angle is brought up to the presentation of an event.	hardship this year. I am truly, truly sorry for that. Tomorrow, there will be a moment of remembrance for those whose lives have tragically been lost before their time.	
				Conflict or disagreement among groups or individuals are presented	Last night at 11pm the French Government imposed restrictions on UK freight crossing to France when accompanied by a driver.	
				9. Morality	The problem or recommendations are taken up from a moral point of view	It is a fact that by adopting those measures we prevented this country from being engulfed by what could have been a catastrophe in which the reasonable worst case scenario was half a million fatalities.
				10. Economic	Economic consequences of the problem are portrayed	And as we take these actions together and as we make

Variable	Code	Subcode	Subcode	Description	Example
	11. Attribution of responsibility			The responsibility of the problem's cause or solution is attributed to another party.	these sacrifices, we can see the impact on the real economy. Already, fantastic British companies, already under huge strain, big and small. Opening up more of Britain in this COVID-Secure way is only possible if everyone continues to stay alert to the risks of coronavirus.
	12. Language tools	12.1. Metaphor	12.1.1. War metaphor	Description of the crisis' likeness to war	All over the world we are seeing the devastating impact of this invisible killer.
		12.2. Catchphrases	12.2.1. Doing the right thing at the right time	Repetitively used phrases to describe the crisis	Doing the right thing at the right time
			12.2.2. Stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives.	Repetitively used phrases to describe the crisis	Stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives.
			12.2.3. Stay alert, control the virus, save lives.	Repetitively used phrases to describe the crisis	Stay alert, control the virus, save lives.

Variable	Code	Subcode	Subcode	Description	Example
			12.2.4.	Repetitively used phrases to describe the crisis	Scientific advice/ Guided by science
		12.3.	Contrast	Illuminates the crisis in terms of its opposite	I believe that in every respect he has acted responsibly, and legally, and with integrity, and with the overwhelming aim of stopping the spread of the virus and saving lives.
		12.4.	Spin	Avoids responsibility by diverting the attention elsewhere	I have just spoken to President Macron - we had a very good call - we both understand each other's positions and want to resolve these problems as fast as possible.
		12.5.	Stories	The government telling their story about the crisis to the public	And today we have put the first British corona patient into a randomised trial for drugs that may treat the disease
Action	13. Recommendation	13.1.	Wash hands	Washing hands is recommended	Wash your hands regularly and for 20 seconds,

Variable	Code	Subcode	Subcode	Description	Example
		13.2. Quarantine		Self-quarantine is recommended	wash your hands. Wash our hands, keep social distance, isolate if you have symptoms – and get a test.
		13.3. Avoid travelling		Avoid travelling is recommended	We advise all those over 70 and those with serious medical conditions against going on cruises and we advise against international school trips.
		13.4. Avoid gatherings		Avoid gatherings is recommended	So, second, now is the time for everyone to stop non-essential contact with others and to stop all unnecessary travel.
		13.5. Avoid mass gatherings		Avoid mass gatherings is recommended	and avoiding large gatherings of any kind.
		13.6. Shutting schools		Shutting schools is recommended	I am afraid the start of the new term will be delayed until at least January 18
		13.7. Lockdown	13.7.1. National lockdown	National lockdown is enforced	From Thursday until the start

Variable	Code	Subcode	Subcode	Description	Example
			13.7.2.	Local lockdown is enforced	of December, you must stay at home.
			Local lockdown		we are today simplifying, standardising and in some places toughening local rules in England by introducing three levels of Covid Alert.
		13.8.	Face Masks	Wearing face masks is recommended	Second, wear a face covering over your mouth and nose if you are in an enclosed space and in close contact with people you don't normally meet. I know wearing a face covering feels odd to some people and I understand that. But face coverings do make it harder for the virus to spread – so please, wear one to protect others.
		13.9.	Work from home	Working from home is recommended	To work from home if at all possible.
		13.10.	Easing lockdown	Measures to reopen society are enforced	11May we set out our plan to recover.

Appendix B

Tables

Table B1

Frequencies

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Total s
3. Deny Crisis Response Strategies						
3.1. Attack the accuser	0	0	1	0	0	1
3.2. Denial	2	0	0	0	0	2
3.3. Scapegoat	0	0	0	1	0	1
4. Diminish Crisis Response Strategies						
4.1. Excuse	0	0	4	3	2	9
4.2. Justification	6	3	2	9	11	31
5. Rebuild Crisis Response Strategies						
5.1. Compensation	2	5	2	2	9	20
5.2. Apology	0	0	0	0	0	0
6. Bolstering Crisis Response Strategies						
6.1. Reminder	1	2	0	1	3	7
6.2. Ingratiation	10	10	7	20	22	69
6.3. Victimimage	0	4	1	1	0	6
6.4. Concern	3	1	6	1	1	12
7. Human interest	4	2	5	2	0	13
8. Conflict	1	0	1	4	6	12
9. Morality	8	5	3	13	5	34
10. Economic	7	11	4	15	12	49
11. Attribution of responsibility	3	5	2	11	3	24
12. Language Tools						
12.1. Metaphor	19	12	9	10	8	58
12.2.1. Doing the right thing at the right time	9	1	0	0	0	10
12.2.2. Stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives.	0	4	2	2	6	14
12.2.3. Stay alert, control the virus, save lives.	0	0	5	3	1	9
12.2.4. Scientific advice/Guided by science	12	3	1	0	0	16
12.3. Contrast	4	1	2	2	2	11
12.4. Spin	1	0	3	4	8	16
12.5. Stories	1	0	2	1	2	6
13. Recommendations						
13.1. Wash hands	5	1	2	4	2	14
13.2. Quarantine	5	1	2	1	0	9

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Total s
13.3. Avoid travelling	2	0	0	0	0	2
13.4. Avoid gatherings	5	1	0	4	2	12
13.5. Avoid mass gatherings	1	0	0	0	2	3
13.6. Shutting schools	2	0	0	0	1	3
13.7. Lockdown	0	2	0	3	4	9
13.7.1. National lockdown	0	2	0	1	1	4
13.7.2. Local lockdown	0	0	0	2	3	5
13.8. Face Masks	0	0	0	3	2	5
13.9. Work from home	4	1	0	0	0	5
13.10. Easing lockdown	0	0	3	5	1	9
Totals	117	78	69	129	110	503

Appendix C

Corpus

A complete transcript of the analysed press conferences in an Atlas.ti file is available at the secretary of the Communication Science department at the University of Twente. A complete transcript of Boris Johnson's press conferences regarding the coronavirus pandemic can be found in the references section and on the following link.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/slides-and-datasets-to-accompany-coronavirus-press-conferences#transcripts>