

# Ready or Not: Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte and Her Crisis Response Strategy During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Using Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Coombs (2007), this study analyses the case of Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte's CoViD-19 Crisis and her crisis response strategy to address the situation. The study looks at the crisis communication of Quezon City on issues stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic. The SCCT provides a framework for the organization facing a different complex case of crisis to protect the reputational organization's assets. The organization's ability to select the most appropriate and beneficial response helps them deal with an emergency and crisis (Coombs, 2007). Simultaneously, in this paper, SCCT was used to examine the stakeholder's perceptions about the organization's action and response by Mayor Belmonte on the crisis. This paper concludes Mayor Belmonte did not follow the recommendations of SCCT by combining Deny, such as Attacks the Accuser, Deny and Scapegoat tactics, and Diminish strategies such as Excuse and Justice tactics, to respond to the wide variety of stakeholder's groups. Mayor Belmonte's crisis response strategies and tactics do not align with the SCCT. The theory recommends corrective action and response such as Rebuild as well as Bolstering strategies are "considered as the most effective communication of crisis response strategy when an organization perceived a strong attribution of crisis responsibility and results in a severe reputational threat" (Coombs, 2007). By reviewing the situation that Mayor Belmonte faced, this paper concludes that she was under severe threat. Mayor Belmonte's CoViD-19 crisis is the preventable cluster based on the overall stakeholder's perception of the crisis. The preventable cluster considered her primary, secondary, and additional stakeholders. It depicted an organizational misdeed with and without injuries, and the appropriate responses to adapt to re-establish the organization's reputation is a Rebuild strategy because interventions such as Compensation and Apology should work to improve the organization's reputation. Conversely, Mayor Belmonte chose to frequently employ Deny strategy (Attacks the Accuser and Scapegoat) and Diminish strategy (Excuse and Justice) to respond to various stakeholders.

*Keywords:* Crisis Communication, Covid-19 Pandemic, Situational Crisis Communication Theory, Risk Management, Reputation, Public Relations Local Government

## Introduction

"It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently" (Warren Buffett, 2005).

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Quezon City<sup>1</sup> Mayor Joy Belmonte<sup>2</sup> (Mayor Belmonte) received criticisms from netizens for supposedly being slow to act amid the Luzon-wide enhanced community quarantine.

The public perceives Mayor Belmonte unsatisfactorily handled the coronavirus disease (COVID)-19 crisis. She was the subject of hate, dislike, and hatred on social media during the pandemic.

Critics slammed her every statement as she tried to defeat chatters and to lash out haters on social media networks.

At one point, she lost her cool on social media after drawing flak from her constituents.

Under the fierce spotlight, the camp of Mayor Belmonte had not only to juggle with media relations but also with ample defense to the issues and explanation to the general public.

When a crisis involves reputation, the ability of Mayor Belmonte and her crisis management team to know and foresee the way to act and react to its different stakeholders is vital to maintain the communication levels meet their expectations.

Using Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Coombs (2007), this study analyses the case of Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte's COVID-19 Crisis and her crisis response strategy to address the situation.

The case study looks at the crisis communication of Quezon City on issues stemming from the COVID 19 pandemic, mainly, the initial relief distribution and the public demonstration of residents of Sitio San Roque.

### **Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)**

The Department of Health (DOH) reported the first case of COVID-19 in the Philippines on 30 January 2020.

On 7 March 2020, the DOH confirmed the first local transmission of COVID-19.

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus (WHO, 2020).

The pandemic began in Wuhan, China, in December 2020.

### **Declaration of Enhanced Community Quarantine**

President Rodrigo Duterte, on 16 March 2020, declared the entire Luzon under the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) as a response to the growing pandemic.

The ECQ is considered a total lockdown.

It restricts the movement of people with some exceptions.

One of the restrictions is the temporary closure of non-essential shops and businesses.

Besides, the ECQ suspended land, air, and sea travel with exclusions.

Some local government units (LGUs) also put in place curfew.

The government extended the period of quarantine from April 12 to April 30, 2020.

President Duterte extended the ECQ based on the recommendation of The Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID).

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quezon\\_City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quezon_City).

<sup>2</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joy\\_Belmonte](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joy_Belmonte).

### **Bayanihan to Heal as One Act<sup>3</sup>**

The President signed Republic Act (RA) No. 11469<sup>4</sup> or the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act (Bayanihan Act) on 25 March 2020.

“Bayanihan” means collective work.

Its precursor, Proclamation 922, declared a state of a public health emergency and mobilized LGUs and government agencies to fight the pandemic on 8 March 2020.

The ECQ impacted the political, economic, social, cultural, legal, and environmental environment and affected the lives of 72 million people.

The ECQ aims to combat the effect of the threat that is looming the nation.

### **Role of LGUs**

Beginning 15 March 2020, the President instructed LGUs to implement stringent social distancing measures.

LGUs’ next steps were to suspend classes in all levels, prohibit mass gatherings, impose community quarantine, and activate local task forces and barangay health emergency response teams.

Furthermore, LGUs refer, convey, and transport persons under investigation to the nearest health facilities for immediate treatment, isolation or admission, and work with the DOH regional offices to prevent local transmission.

Transmissions in LGUs pose higher chances for the virus to spread.

LCEs have to avoid the situation from escalating by cooperation and vigilance.

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) issued “Memorandum Circular (MC) No. 2020-062 or the Suppletory Guidelines on the Implementation of ECQ in Luzon and State of Public Health Emergency in Other Parts of the Country Due to the COVID-19 Threat” on 21 March 2020.

The MC directs LGUs to implement the directives of the President fully.

The Bayanihan Act granted special powers to the president.

Under Section 4 of the said law,

the President has the power to xxx 3. Ensure that all local government units (LGUs) are acting according to the regulations and directives issued by the national government while implementing the standards of the community quarantine to their respective locales. The LGUs are still allowed to exercise their autonomy in situations not defined by the national government; xxx.

The law also states: “xxx Violators of this law include LGU officials disobeying national directives; xxx”.

A whole-of-government approach to national emergencies is allowed by the 1987 Constitution.

The president has supervision and control of the entire bureaucracy, including LGUs.

### **LGUs in Metro Manila**

Luzon represents almost 60% of the Philippine population.

It includes densely populated cities in Metro Manila, such as Quezon City.

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<sup>3</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayanihan\\_to\\_Heal\\_as\\_One\\_Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayanihan_to_Heal_as_One_Act).

<sup>4</sup> Reflections on the Bayanihan Act or Republic Act No. 11469 <https://law.upd.edu.ph/reflections-on-the-bayanihan-act-or-republic-act-no-11469/>, published on March 30, 2020.

People who survive daily and members of the informal sector reside in the National Capital Region (NCR).

The President immediately announced and implemented the lockdown.

It left LGUs relatively with little to no time to prepare.

People panic to receive food rations.

The order did not consider the inefficiency of public services in the time of pandemics, such as the number of days the people will have to wait for the food and non-food aid from the LGUs.

Aside from concerns on community-based transmissions, the crisis bothered local chief executives (LCEs) on how to distribute essential items to their constituents.

The ECQ placed the burden on LGUs at all levels—from provincial to city/municipality to barangay across socio-economic classes, such as highly urbanized to Class D or Class E localities.

LGUs need both to feed its residents and to plan the manner or mechanism to allot aid packages.

There were challenges in the distribution of relief goods.

Residents perceive many of their leaders in the LGUs practice patronage politics.

They believe LGU officials only give food packs to their followers in the 2019 local elections.

The travel ban indirectly constrained the delivery of essential food items as LGUs had a varying interpretation of the ECQ.

Medical items, including personal protective equipment (PPE) and test kits, were blocked and stocked in sea and airports.

LGU borders held rice, vegetables, and other food supplies.

The impossible mission is how to feed quarantined people from the poorest of the poor.

They complained that after almost a month, they had not received the promised food aid.

After the concerns on the food ration, there came the implementation of the Social Amelioration Program (SAP).

Same with the food aid, several factors hinder the timely distribution of SAP.

LGUs can identify the poorest and most vulnerable members of the community.

However, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is the one who controls the list of poor households and the release of billions of pesos.

The DSWD cannot trust LGUs with money even as the latter has the “knows best” in quickly identifying the target beneficiaries, the 18 million low-income families, each with at least five members.

At least 3.5 million of the 18 million poor households are currently receiving monthly government subsidies through the Pantawid ng Pamilya Pilipino Program (4Ps).

The problem is that 4Ps uses the 2015 census of the Philippine Statistics Authority.

The five year difference in the census of population was a serious concern when the figures of the LGUs and the national government did not coincide.

It presents a big gap, although the 4Ps implementers said they adjust the figures every year based on the estimated or projected growth rate of the population.

Widespread confusion brought by the massive discrepancy in the data and the issue on the distribution of forms contributed to the further delay in many LGUs.

And LGUs, just like in the case of food rations, were blamed.

LGUs helplessly face their residents' complaints owing to the discrepancies.

LCEs receive the blame for the delay as most of their constituents believe LCEs favor their supporters because the forms have not reached their doorsteps.

As the situation sows seeds of division among their constituents, some LGUs stopped the distribution of forms.

The lack of adequate information from LGUs and the DSWD slowed down the initial distribution of cash aid.

When emotions are high, it is expected from LGUs and DSWD to determine the poor because social welfare is a devolved function to LGUs.

### **Decentralization**

Generally, LGUs receive a 19% fixed share from national taxes.

At least 90% of the total annual budget of LGUs comes from the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA), which represents the just share from the collection of national taxes paid by all employed or productive citizens in the country.

LGUs are the first line of governance in charge of community welfare with the use of monitoring tools, systems, and technologies.

A political reform brought by the 1987 Constitution, decentralization is consistent with people's power.

Sufficient power is given to LGU to do so much in local development.

It aims to lessen the dominance of the national government and make the center relatively insignificant.

However, studies show the reluctance at the center to decentralize development further.

Along with a roll-out, the downloading of necessary funds is wanting.

Decentralization calls for effective partnership as both levels will perform its role with mutual trust.

Such is the case of the DSWD's National Household Targeting System and 4Ps. It involves local social welfare offices, but LGUs mainly follow directions from the DSWD.

It appears that LGUs are mere accessories to the national program.

LGUs should also endeavor to have their reliable data of the poor, such as through the Community Based Monitoring System.

This way, LGUs will be a competent partner of the national government to allow an integrated and fast distribution of government aid.

This cooperation will lead to readiness on both levels when another pandemic poses limitations and problems.

But with COVID-19, LCEs were left with no choice but to face chaos and instability of the health and finances after more than a month of locking down residents without food.

### **The Role of LGUs in Disaster Risk Reduction and Management**

COVID-19 is unprecedented. The Local Government Code expects LGUs to be at the frontline of emergency measures before, during, and after a disaster.

To ensure the general welfare, LGUs act as first responders, from pre-emptive evacuation to the restoration of normalcy and people's lives and livelihood.

The Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Councils (LDRRMCs) cover the four aspects of DRRM. These are disaster preparedness, response, prevention and mitigation, and rehabilitation and recovery.

The enabling law of DRRM, Republic Act No. 10121<sup>5</sup>, ensures and facilitates quick response before, during, and after a disaster.

LCEs, as heads of the LDRRMCs, carry out emergency measures in human-made and natural calamities as may be necessary.

It grants them the use of LDRRM funds, which sets aside at least 5% of LGU's estimated revenue from regular sources to support pre-and post-disaster preparedness activities.

LGUs are allowed to allocate as Quick Response Fund (QRF) or stand by fund the 30% of the 5% above stated for relief and recovery programs.

Once the LGU is on a state of calamity, the LDRRMC receives the LDRRM fund.

### **Quezon City**

Quezon City is a highly urbanized city.

It is the most populated city in the country.

It is the largest city in terms of population and land area in the National Capital Region or Metro Manila.

At one time in history, Quezon City held a distinct status as the nation's capital.

It replaced Manila as the seat of the national government for 27 years (1949-1976).

Occupying one-third of Metro Manila's total land area, the city "proved to be a vast and teeming city with a steadily increasing income".

According to the Quezon City LGU, as of April 25, 2020 (6:41 am), coronavirus cases are now at 1,104.

The LGU said 133 people got well, but 106 others lost the fight to COVID-19.

### **In Focus: City Mayor Joy Belmonte**

Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte is currently serving as the 11th Mayor since June 30, 2019. Before she assumed the city's top post, she became Vice Mayor from 2010 to 2019.

The Mayor is the daughter of the late journalist Betty Go and former Quezon City mayor, district representative and House Speaker Sonny Belmonte.

As Acting Mayor in 2017, she made headlines when she refused to suspend classes early based on weather predictions.

Due to the torrential downpour, it resulted in students suffering.

Because of the incident, she acknowledged "her shortcomings in this situation" and "deserve a better leader".

In 2018, she spearheaded the launching of "Batas QC", the first mobile application in the Philippines to feature local ordinances.

The project raises awareness on rules and the corresponding penalties of non-compliance to minimize the violations among the people in the city.

With her platform on creating homes for abandoned senior citizens and a 24/7 emergency hotline, among others, she won against her closest rival in a large margin.

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<sup>5</sup> Implementing Rules and Regulations of RA 10121 (IRR of RA 10121), Local Government Code of 1991, [https://ndrrmc.gov.ph/attachments/article/1547/Implementing\\_Rules\\_and\\_Regulation\\_of\\_REPUBLIC\\_ACT\\_No\\_10121.pdf](https://ndrrmc.gov.ph/attachments/article/1547/Implementing_Rules_and_Regulation_of_REPUBLIC_ACT_No_10121.pdf).

### Issues on the Actions Taken by Mayor Belmonte During the Pandemic

At the height of the COVID-19 crisis, Mayor Belmonte received criticisms from netizens for what they perceive as her unsatisfactorily handling of the COVID-19 crisis.

She was the subject of hate, dislike, and hatred in social media during the pandemic.



Figure 1. Mayor Belmonte’s Tweet, March 15, 2020.



Figure 2. Statement of Mayor Belmonte, March 19, 2020.

### Official statement of Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte

Napakarami na pong "fake news" na ikinakalat. Nais ko pong bigyang linaw ang ilan sa mga ito.

First, the QC government never sent home 3 COVID-19 positive patients; it was the hospitals that sent them home. That perception was due to an error by ABS-CBN, which they have since corrected: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/03/23/20/qc-health-exec-says-hospitals-not-city-govt-sent-home-positive-covid-19-patients>

Sa katunayan, sinundo namin ang mga pasyenteng ito mula sa kanilang tahanan at inilipat sa aming Hope 1 facility.

Second, QC food packs are not overpriced; they do not cost P2500. That perception was due to an error published by Manila Bulletin, which they have since corrected: <https://www.facebook.com/ManilaBulletinLifestyle/posts/2543755925887125>

I am disheartened that whoever is funding this misinformation campaign has taken advantage of one of the most difficult times in our history to sow confusion, uncertainty, and distrust. They have chosen to create divisiveness at a time when we need to be most united against an invisible enemy that knows no bounds.

Mahaba pa po ang laban kontra sa COVID-19. Ito po ang panahon na kailangan nating protektahan ang isa't isa. Kasama ng buong Team QC, kayo po ang aming inspirasyon sa patuloy na paglilingkod. Bilang ina ng pinakamalaking lungsod sa Metro Manila na humaharap sa napakabigat na hamon ng krisis na ito, araw-araw naming inaalala ang kaligtasan at kalusugan ng tatlong milyong residente, lalong-lalo na ang mga maralitang tagalunsod.

Ang Quezon City ay hindi lamang po isang lungsod. Ito ang ating tahanan, kung saan tayo dapat panatag at ligtas. Samahan po ninyo kami sa pangangalaga at pakikipaglaban para sa ating tahanan. Sa tulong ng Panginoon, mapagtatagumpayan po natin ang labang ito.

Figure 3. Statement of Mayor Belmonte, March 23, 2020.



Figure 4. Joy para sa Bayan Health Kit.

**Official statement of Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte**

Dear QC residents:

As we end the third week of this enhanced community quarantine, we are grateful to all of our frontliners who continue to sacrifice to meet our needs. Taos-puso po akong nagpapasalamat at sumasaludo sa mga nagsisilbi sa mga ospital, sa mga lansangan, sa kani-kanilang barangay at sa iba't-iba pa pong lugar na nangangailangan ng tulong at serbisyo. Kayo po ang mga tunay naming bayani sa krisis na ito, at patuloy kong ipinapanalangin ang inyong kaligtasan.

Kasabay ng paghahanap pa ng mga paraan para mas mapabuti ang aming serbisyo sa ating mga komunidad, nais ko rin pong hingin ang pagkakataong ito para humingi ng paumanhin sa inyo.

First, I sincerely apologize for losing my composure on social media. You are correct that all the projects implemented by the QC government belong to you, as they are funded by your taxes. When I was elected as Mayor, I was given the honor and privilege to serve all QC residents, regardless of political affiliation. Pero alam kong isang malaking pagkakamali na nakapag-post ako ng mga salitang taliwas dito. Inaamin ko po na nagkamali ako.

Second, I apologize for distributing health kits branded with "Joy Para Sa Bayan". While it is true that my team used leftover donated bags from the previous campaign and that they were the most readily available bags on the first day of ECQ, it is clear that this was highly insensitive given the circumstances. Inaamin ko po na nagkamali ako.

When I reflect on these actions, I do not recognize the public servant that I aspire to be. The citizens of Quezon City deserve better. I will do better.

I would also like to take this opportunity to inform you about the ongoing misinformation campaign viciously directed against the QC local government on social media. Our analysis shows that this is fueled by thousands of paid trolls. We appeal to everyone to please be very critical about what you read, like, or share. Huwag po tayong magpadala sa "fake news" at trolls. Sa halip na tumulong at makiisa sa lungsod para malampasan ang COVID-19, may mga taong sinasamantala ang krisis para sa kanilang pansariling interes.

Figure 5. Statement of Mayor Belmonte, April 3, 2020.



Figure 6. Statement of Mayor Belmonte, April 3, 2020.

Table 1 presents the media engagements, activities, and messages of Mayor Belmonte since the onset of the pandemic.

Table 1

*Actions Taken and Statements of Mayor Belmonte on COVID-19 From 29 February to 17 April 2020\**

Date	Actions taken/statements by Mayor Belmonte as reported in the news (ABS-CBN News and Rappler [R])	Summary
April 17	Joy Belmonte signs P2.8-B supplemental budget in QC fight vs COVID-19	“Quezon City mayor Joy Belmonte has signed a supplemental budget worth P2.8 billion for 2020 to fund the city’s campaign against the COVID-19”.
April 15	QC naglabas ng patakaran sa pangangasiwa ng labi ng COVID-19 fatalities	“Naglabas ang lokal na pamahalaan ng Quezon City ng mga patakaran sa pangangasiwa ng labi ng mga namamatay sa COVID-19 para hindi naiipon ang mga bangkay sa mga ospital”.
April 14	<b>Belmonte nagbanta sa mga puneraryang ayaw magserbisyo sa COVID-19 victims</b>	<b>“May parusang naghihintay sa mga puneraryang crematoriums sa Quezon City na tatanggap magserbisyo sa mga taong namatay sa COVID-19, ayon sa pinirmahang ordinansa ni Mayor Joy Belmonte”.</b>
April 12	Joy Belmonte orders temporary halt to retail operations at Balintawak markets	“In a statement, Belmonte said only wholesale selling and drop-off operations will be allowed at the Balintawak markets to maintain physical distancing”.
April 9	QC gov’t: Police have freed 19 vegetable vendors caught during lockdown	“The 19 vegetable vendors who were recently caught violating the lockdown in Metro Manila and Luzon amid the COVID-19 pandemic have been released by the police, the Quezon City government said Tuesday”.
	Quezon City bans acts of discrimination vs COVID-19 patients, frontliners	“The Quezon City government on Wednesday said it has banned acts of discrimination against coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) patients, healthcare workers, and emergency service personnel in the city”.
April 4	DOH: COVID-19 cases in Quezon City rise to 476	“The Quezon City government late Friday said the total number of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases in the city has reached 476, according to the Department of Health (DOH)”.
April 3	QC Mayor Belmonte apologizes for “losing composure on social media”	“Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte on Friday apologized for losing her composure on social media, and for distributing health kits with her name on it”.
	21 residente ng Sitio San Roque na nagtipon sa EDSA para manghingi ng ayuda, kinasuhan	“MAYNILA—Kinasuhan na ng pulisya ang 21 residente ng Sitio San Roque sa Quezon City na nagtipon-tipon sa EDSA para manghingi ng ayuda, matapos mauwi sa gulo ang insidente”.
April 2	NBI says probing Quezon City quarantine protest	“The National Bureau of Investigation is looking into the arrest and police dispersal of several Quezon City residents who demanded food and financial aid from the government, halfway into the monthlong lockdown of Luzon, an official said Thursday”.
April 1	Philippine Red Cross eyes COVID-19 tests in QC	“The Philippine Red Cross said Wednesday it would screen residents in Quezon City for the novel coronavirus as cases of the respiratory disease in the city continued to climb”.
April 1	Quezon City records 11 new COVID-19 cases; total rises to 151	“The Quezon City government late Tuesday disclosed 11 new cases of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the city, raising the total to 151”.
March 31	COVID-19 cases in Quezon City soar to 140 with 27 new cases	“The Quezon City government late Monday said it has recorded 27 new cases of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the city, raising the total to 140 so far”.
March 30	Joy Belmonte taps QC university to house suspected COVID-19 patients	“Joy Belmonte identified QC’s new quarantine shelter to be the ‘sprawling’ Quezon City University (QCU) Complex in Novaliches”.
March 28	Quezon City records seven new COVID-19 cases; total rises to 104	“The Quezon City government late Friday disclosed 7 new cases of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the city, raising the total to 104”.

Table 1 to be continued

March 27	COVID-19 cases in Quezon City rise to 97	“The Quezon City government late Thursday confirmed 10 new cases of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the city, raising the total to 97”.
March 27	Joy Belmonte orders liquor ban in Quezon City [R]	“Under Executive Order No. 24, all persons and establishments are not allowed to sell or distribute liquor, wine, beer, or any other alcoholic product within the city”.
March 26	QC naglaan ng crematorium para sa COVID-19 cases	“Binuksan ng lokal na pamahalaan ng Quezon City ang nakatiwangwang nitong crematorium para doon i-cremate nang libre ang mga residenteng namatay sa COVID-19 o mga sakit kaugnay nito. There are at least 62 coronavirus cases in Quezon City”.
March 24	12 QC barangays now under ‘extreme enhanced community quarantine’ [R]	“There are at least 62 coronavirus cases in Quezon City”.
March 23	Quezon City naghanda ng isolation tents para sa COVID-19 cases	“Nagtayo ng isolation tents ang Quezon City na naka-standby sakaling lumobo ang kaso ng COVID-19 cases ng lungsod”.
March 23	QC health exec says hospitals, not city gov’t, sent home positive COVID-19 patients	“A Quezon City health official clarified on Sunday that the decision to send home 3 QC residents positive for COVID-19 was made by the various Metro Manila hospitals, not the city government, and that it was based on protocols set by the DOH”.
March 22	<b>Three COVID-19 patients in QC sent home due to lack of space in health facilities: mayor</b>	<b>“Three COVID-19 patients in Quezon City were sent home following their test for the virus due to lack of space in facilities, Mayor Joy Belmonte said Sunday”.</b>
March 22	<b>Coronavirus patients sent home as PH hospitals reach limit [R]</b>	<b>“In an ideal situation, all COVID positives should be in an institution, or institutionalized in a hospital, but the problem is that there’s really a lack of bed spaces in all our hospitals now”, says Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte.</b>
March 21	QC’s eight new coronavirus cases raise city’s total to 40	“The Quezon City government on Friday confirmed 8 new cases of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), raising the city’s tally to 40”.
March 20	<b>“Missing” COVID-19 patient in QC located in same street, street number but different barangays</b>	<b>“A coronavirus patient from Quezon City who supposedly went missing was located already”, the city’s mayor Joy Belmonte said.</b>
March 20	QC’s Belmonte hits complaints of “slow” COVID-19 response	“Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte on Thursday scorned those who criticized her local government’s alleged ‘slow’ distribution of aid for residents affected by the month-long Luzon coronavirus lockdown, saying those who ‘hate’ her are not obliged to accept any of her projects”.
March 20	QC Mayor Joy Belmonte’s Wikipedia page defaced with insults, sexist remarks [R]	“The malicious edits refer to her allegedly tepid response to the coronavirus outbreak”
March 19	<b>Belmonte: 3 COVID-19 “hot zones” in QC gated subdivisions</b>	<b>“MANILA—Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte on Wednesday said three of the so-called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) ‘hot zones’ in the city are in gated subdivisions”.</b>
March 18	400,000 families in Quezon City need aid during COVID-19 quarantine: Belmonte	In an interview with radio DZMM, Belmonte said 400,000 families or 2 million people need to be supplied with basic goods, like food and water.
March 18	<b>Coronavirus outbreak reaching urban poor areas is “disastrous”: QC Mayor</b>	<b>“Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte on Wednesday said the local government is doing everything to prevent the coronavirus from spreading to urban poor areas, describing such situation as ‘disastrous’”.</b>
March 18	No total lockdown in Quezon City? Belmonte says police lacks manpower [R]	“In a city with the most number of coronavirus cases in the Philippines to date, only 2 barangays are under extreme enhanced community quarantine”.
March 18	<b>Daan-libong face masks, food packs hatid sa mga sapul ng Luzon lockdown sa QC</b>	<b>“Magpapamahagi ng mga pagkain at groceries ang lokal na pamahalaan ng Quezon City para sa nasa 200,000 pamilyang apektado ng community quarantine sa lungsod, ayon kay Mayor Joy Belmonte”.</b>
March 18	QC gov’t places two barangays under “heightened community quarantine” [R]	“Barangay Tandang Sora and Barangay Kalusugan have 3 coronavirus cases each”.

Table 1 to be continued

March 17	<b>QC malls halt operations amid COVID-19 spread, says Belmonte</b>	<b>“Quezon City mall operators have agreed to stop operations starting Monday up to April 14 or until the government lifts the enhanced community quarantine imposed due to the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), Mayor Joy Belmonte said”.</b>
March 15	Quezon City to impose “public safety hours” from 8 pm to 5 am	“But the order exempts residents who are going to work or returning home from work, as well as those with medical-related purposes”.
March 15	Belmonte imposes 8 pm to 5 am curfew in Quezon City	“The curfew hours will be effective starting Monday, March 16”.
March 15	QC eyes renting hotel to house suspected coronavirus cases	Another option is to convert vacant areas in Quezon City into quarantine section.
March 13	QC declares state of calamity amid COVID-19 spread	“MANILA—Quezon City was placed under a state of calamity Friday ahead of the start of Metro Manila’s community quarantine amid the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)”.
	Quezon City declares state of calamity due to coronavirus [R]	“Under a state of calamity, the city’s 142 barangays may be able to access their Quick Response Fund”.
March 13	Four-day work week, no more fiestas: QC outlines quarantine measures vs COVID-19	“Quezon City will prohibit mass gatherings such as sports events, beauty pageants, and fiesta celebrations while also implementing a 4-day work week for its employees in compliance with the resolution of a government interagency task force to place Metro Manila under ‘community quarantine’”.
March 13	Quezon City boosts quarantine measures during coronavirus lockdown [R]	“Apart from intensifying contact tracing, the city government is also converting empty establishments into isolation rooms”
March 12	<b>Belmonte confirms 5th coronavirus case in Quezon City [R]</b>	<b>“Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte says a private hospital confirmed that the 26-year-old patient was carrying the virus, but was reportedly told to go home because the hospital could not accommodate him”.</b>
March 11	<b>Mayor Belmonte confirms 4th COVID-19 case in Quezon City</b>	<b>“Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte on Wednesday said another resident of the city tested positive for the novel coronavirus disease”.</b>
March 11	<b>QC places 40 people in home quarantine for contact with three COVID-19 patients</b>	<b>“Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte said the 40 underwent medical tests and were placed under home-quarantine, while they wait for their results”.</b>
March 10	<b>Three of 24 novel coronavirus cases from Quezon City: mayor</b>	<b>“Three of the country’s 24 confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) are from Quezon City, Mayor Joy Belmonte said Tuesday”.</b>
February 29	QC trains village health workers in fight vs coronavirus	“The Quezon City government has started training dozens of village health workers as local first responders in handling contagious illnesses like the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)”.

Note. \* Direct quotes in boldface.

Source: <https://news.abs-cbn.com/list/tag/joy-belmonte>; <https://www.rappler.com/previous-articles?filterMeta=Joy%20Belmonte>.

### Criticisms and Hate Campaign vs Mayor Belmonte in Social Media

Table 2 shows how netizens circulated damaging views, undesirable comments and hate messages against Mayor Belmonte in social media sites.

Table 2

#### *Criticisms and Hate Campaign vs Mayor Belmonte in Social Media*

Social media site link	Summary
1. <a href="https://www.change.org/p/mayor-joy-belmonte-resign-mayor-joy-belmonte?recruiter=998374642&amp;recruited_by_id=205b9050-c4e4-11e9-ba22-57e8f0e2fd1a">https://www.change.org/p/mayor-joy-belmonte-resign-mayor-joy-belmonte?recruiter=998374642&amp;recruited_by_id=205b9050-c4e4-11e9-ba22-57e8f0e2fd1a</a>	“Mayor Belmonte, you should be taking care of Quezon City residents. Instead, you have made this a photo-op stunt to increase your media mileage. You also made sure that all packages distributed have your name on it”.

Table 2 to be continued

<p>*907 have signed the Change.org petition as of April 21, 2020 10:37 pm</p>	<p>“Patients with COVID-19 should be in a hospital facility, not in their homes. Why did you send them and let their family members and neighbors be exposed?”</p> <p>“Do you know that you procured BOSCH thermal scanners that is for industrial use, and harmful to humans? Not only your constituents are vulnerable to COVID-19, you will also inflict harmful radiation to them by using your thermal scanners”.</p> <p>“Why did you also use a garbage truck in sending out your latest batch of relief goods?”</p> <p>“Mayor Joy Belmonte, you obviously cannot handle this COVID-19 Luzon lockdown situation; what more if the BIG ONE occurred in Metro Manila. It is time for you to step down as Quezon City mayor”.</p> <p>“Please, Mayor Joy Belmonte, if you love your constituents, you will give up your position as Mayor of Quezon City. Please resign and regain the respect of Quezon City residents”.</p>
<p>2. <a href="https://politics.com.ph/di-ka-nakakatuwa-absent-mayorjoy-belmonte-trends-on-twitter-over-arrest-of-hungry-residents/">https://politics.com.ph/di-ka-nakakatuwa-absent-mayorjoy-belmonte-trends-on-twitter-over-arrest-of-hungry-residents/</a>  April 1, 2020</p>	<p>“Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte drew netizens’ ire on Wednesday (April 1) for turning a blind eye to residents’ plight after police arrested 20 residents of Sitio San Roque who staged a protest”.</p> <p>“Initial investigation by the police showed over 150 residents trooped to EDSA to demand food and other forms of assistance from Belmonte amid the Luzon-wide enhanced community quarantine”.</p> <p>“Chaos started after police began dispersing the rallyists, which led to the arrest of 20 residents”.</p> <p>“Belmonte’s silence on the incident and her inefficient response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis made her the fifth trending topic on Twitter in the Philippines as of Wednesday afternoon”.</p>
<p>3. <a href="https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/inside-track/255279-qc-mayor-joy-belmonte-wikipedia-page-defacement">https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/inside-track/255279-qc-mayor-joy-belmonte-wikipedia-page-defacement</a></p>	<p>“For about two hours on Friday afternoon, a number of anonymous edits were made to Belmonte’s Wikipedia page, mostly to insult her for being ‘incompetent’ and to add misogynistic remarks. (READ: No total lockdown in Quezon City? Belmonte says police lacks manpower)”.</p> <p>“There were 27 revisions in all, including reversions to previously published clean edits of the page. While Wikipedia’s editors are able to reverse the malicious changes, these remain saved on Wikipedia’s edit history”.</p> <p>“The first edit slammed her for alleged incompetence, saying she was ‘an incompetent Filipino politician’ with ‘a pea-sized brain’”.</p> <p>“About an hour after, a revision replaced the statement with more outlandish, misogynistic remarks”.</p> <p>“Joy Belmonte Alimurung is a fictional/non-character from Dragon ball series. (Dragon ball, Dragon ball Z, Dragon ball GT, Dragon ball Super). In the series, her main objective is to make babies in every planets and universe in order to revenge her family’s death. She is also known for celebrating her birthday while everyone is dealing with the coronavirus situation, and also likes hiding from the public like some scared kid”, the revision said.</p> <p>“This version was reverted to a clean edit about 5 to 6 minutes later”.</p>

Table 2 to be continued

	<p>“Joy Belmonte orders liquor ban in Quezon City Under Executive Order No. 24, all persons and establishments are not allowed to sell or distribute liquor, wine, beer, or any other alcoholic product within the city”.</p> <p>“The most recent edits to the story apparently slammed Belmonte for not actively helping out in the effort to stave off coronavirus infections in Quezon City. Aside from naming her ‘Jhoy Belmonte Alimurung’, she was also called ‘a lazy Filipino politician, na hindi kusang tumutulong sa kapwa tao (who does not help her fellowmen out of her own volition)’. The defacers also removed her photo from the page”.</p>
<p>4. <a href="https://philnews.ph/2020/04/12/arnold-clavio-reacts-to-joy-belmontes-remark-on-qc-covid-19-issue/">https://philnews.ph/2020/04/12/arnold-clavio-reacts-to-joy-belmontes-remark-on-qc-covid-19-issue/</a></p> <p>April 12, 2020</p>	<p>“Kapuso broadcast journalist Arnold Clavio reacts to the remark of Mayor Joy Belmonte on the COVID-19 issue in Quezon City”.</p> <p>“In the same post, the last slide/frame that the journalist shared was a photo of Mayor Joy Belmonte, apparently denying all the allegations as she sent a text message stating ‘Fake News’. With this, Arnold Clavio reacts”.</p>
<p>5. <a href="https://twitter.com/officialqcmayor?lang=en">https://twitter.com/officialqcmayor?lang=en</a></p> <p>March 15 Tweet 1.2K Comments 524 Retweets 4.7K Emoticons</p>	<p>“I have decided to distribute these essential health items to 100,000 of our indigent families beginning tomorrow. Bahay bahay po ang distribution para siguradong makarating sa kanila.</p> <p>#JoyParaSaBayan #KasamaKaSaPagunlad #KasamaLahatSaPagunlad”.</p>
<p>6. <a href="https://www.facebook.com/MayorJoyBelmonte/">https://www.facebook.com/MayorJoyBelmonte/</a></p> <p>March 15 post 30K Emoticons 14K Comments 18K Shares</p>	<p>“I have decided to distribute these essential health items to 100,000 of our indigent families beginning tomorrow. Bahay bahay po ang distribution para siguradong makarating sa kanila.</p> <p>#JoyParaSaBayan #KasamaKaSaPagunlad #KasamaLahatSaPagunlad”.</p>
<p>7. <a href="https://philnews.ph/2020/03/24/tiktok-video-featuring-mayor-joy-belmontes-impersonator-goes-viral/">https://philnews.ph/2020/03/24/tiktok-video-featuring-mayor-joy-belmontes-impersonator-goes-viral/</a></p> <p>*One of the latest trends in social media is TikTok. With this application (app), netizens share videos such as singing, dancing, and dubbing.</p> <p>The app had gained massive popularity, especially when the government implemented the ECQ. The ECQ forced people to stay at home due to the health crisis worldwide.</p> <p>March 24, 2020</p>	<p>“A TikTok video featuring the impersonator of Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte caught the attention of many netizens and this went viral”.</p> <p>“Just recently, a video where a netizen ‘dub’ the statement of Mayor Joy Belmonte went viral on social media. The said TikTok video came from user @bientot19 and this was shared on the Facebook Page Viral Videos”.</p> <p>“The female netizen who apparently has a resemblance to the Quezon City Mayor dub Belmonte’s statement. In the interview where the viral video was derived, the mayor was giving the reason why she needed to send home some of the COVID-19 patients in Quezon City”.</p> <p>“As of press time, the video already has more than 50 thousand views, over 1 thousand reactions, and more than a hundred comments”.</p> <p>“Facebook user Ja Ni Ssa shared a video of another impersonator of Mayor Joy Belmonte from the TikTok video of @angbebegerlmo”.</p>
<p>8. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7YJaetMMeo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7YJaetMMeo</a></p> <p>March 24, 2020 1,939,781 Views 29,986 Comments</p>	<p>“Spokesperson ni Mayor Joy Belmonte, nagbigay ng pahayag tungkol sa mga isyu sa QC!”</p>

Table 2 to be continued

<p>9. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I30mIrpmejE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I30mIrpmejE</a>                  March 20, 2020                  962,398 Views                  1,999 Comments</p>	<p>“ogie diaz nainis sa Pagiging-attitude ni Mayor Joy Belmonte?!                  “hindi mo pera yan!, pero namin yan!”</p>
<p>10. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrOJEh81QCg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrOJEh81QCg</a>                  March 25, 2020                  167,353 Views                  445 Comments</p>	<p>“jay sonza binanatan si QC Mayor Joy Belmonte sa diumano pagiging pabaya sa kinakaharap ng lungsod”.</p>
<p>11. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDq7ANw3fnM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDq7ANw3fnM</a>                  March 26, 2020                  702,054 Views                  3,488 Comments</p>	<p>“Para kay mayor Joy Belmonte...”</p>
<p>12. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmXk8P1GFG8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmXk8P1GFG8</a>                  April 2, 2020                  373,146 Views                  1,232 Comments</p>	<p>“Ganito pala pamamalakad sa Quezon City, Arnell Ignacio may tirada kay Mayor Joy Belmonte”.                  “Ngayon na pagkakataon na dapat ipakita ni Mayor Joy Belmonte ang kanyang magagawa para tulungan ang mga tao na kanyang nasasakupan”.</p>
<p>13. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0B65mW7P-o">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0B65mW7P-o</a>                  March 24, 2020                  241,796 Views                  662 Comments</p>	<p>“Shame on you Mayor Joy Belmonte of Quezon City”.</p>
<p>14. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3I1zVKL_XI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3I1zVKL_XI</a>                  March 23, 2020                  847,424 Views                  1,924 Comments</p>	<p>“Makagago pinagmumura si mayor joy belmonte ng quezon city”.</p>
<p>15. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUt14ruf5X4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUt14ruf5X4</a>                  April 1, 2020                  835,875 Views                  3,438 Comments</p>	<p>“Nakatikim ng realltalk si mayor joy belmonte dapat laging handa hindi laging wala bulok na sistema”.</p>

### Crisis

As a multi-faceted health emergency and global crisis, COVID-19 requires critical preparedness, readiness, and response actions.

A crisis “is a significant threat that can have negative consequences if not handled properly” (Coombs, 2007). It results in “possible damage that can impose on an organization itself, its stakeholders, and lastly, the industry” (Coombs, 2007).

No one was ready for this pandemic, and many leaders from all sectors still grapple on how to cope with and mitigate its effects.

Crises are unexpected entities with the potential to create adverse results. Because of their nature, to be ready for emergencies is hard for organizations; and disasters that occur unexpectedly may result in deterioration of the organizational structure, along with adverse outcomes in employees, products, services, financial state, and corporate reputation. To be ready for crises requires being alert for a mess all the time (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1993).

Lerbinger (1997) categorized eight types of crises: natural disasters, technological emergencies, confrontations, malevolence, organizational misdeeds, workplace violence, rumors, and human-made failures.

For example, the COVID-19 pandemic is a source of confrontations, misdeeds, rumors, and human-made failures.

It presented an intricate problem that needs special crisis planning and response measures.

### **Crisis Management**

With COVID-19 and beyond, leaders operate in a very dynamic environment.

Survival in an unprecedented crisis would depend on how leaders adapt to this volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) situation.

Crisis Management is “the process a company deals with a major event that threatens and harms the organization and its stakeholders, or the general public” (ASIS International, 2009).

Environmental scanning, as a tactic and strategy of crisis management, can include analyzing social and political trends that may affect business or attempting to maintain and negotiate specific systems that may cause dissonance, or eliminating the risk of incident or failure.

Confrontations, personal or organizational misdeeds, rumors, and human-made failures spread through online networks quickly and may be picked up by news outlets.

Rapidly the situation has gone viral, and the company has a crisis with the possibility to destroy carefully cultivated relationships with key publics.

In most cases, social media has fast-tracked the transfer of information, accurate or not, faster than ever before.

Palen (2008) investigated the substantial implications of social media use for emergency management practice and policy. He found online social media use as an emergent, meaningful, and often a particular form of public participation and backchannel communication.

On the other hand, Freberg (2012) concluded in a study that “contemporary public relations practice, and crisis communications, in particular, is being challenged by the emergence of social media” (p. 6).

Viral social media messages could be a disadvantage to risk management and crisis communication professionals because information can contain all kinds of noise.

Information can also be perceived differently by individuals contingent upon the background of the members of the audience.

The responses of social media communities sooner or later can become a clamor that will create conflict for other parties.

### **Crisis Communication**

Crisis communication is “an organization interaction, dialogue, or conversation between an organization and its stakeholders before, during, and after the crisis occurrence” (Benoit, 2005, p. 407).

Experts in public relations have significant responsibilities to create crisis communication plans, to provide information, and to prevent negative public opinion about the institution and its leaders.

In a crisis, there is a need to evaluate the behaviors along with the messages the organization sends.

Because of this reality, it is crucial to managing these messages as the organization executes a public relations program.

There are two stages to look at public relations campaigns.

The first stage is to accept the existence of the crisis, gain information about it, and mobilize the crisis management team, which was brought together in preparation for a crisis phase.

The second phase is informing the organizational environment about the crisis, telling employees, informing the audience, and the media (Coombs, 2015).

Crises occur in many different dimensions and forms. They can potentially threaten the feeling of trust shared between the institution and its audience (Nijkraake, Gosselt, & Gutteling, 2015).

When a crisis hits a leader of an organization, the trust, credibility, image, and reputation of the leader and the organization he represents are on the line.

Every institution faces a crisis resulting from internal or external factors. Being ready for a disaster is quite crucial for eliminating its adverse effects because emergencies require immediate intervention, and time pressure is quite intense (Nijkraake et al., 2015).

Crises unexpectedly come and demand fast action.

Furthermore, communication has to flow between the company and its stakeholders because an effective crisis communication includes the capacity to identify different target groups and adapt communication (Swedish Emergency Management Agency, 2008).

Also, crisis communication was considered as a pivotal part of the process of organizational reputation recovery after the crisis occurs (Gottschalk, 1993).

It is part of crisis management. It includes a strategic plan and procedure for recovery for an organization that suffered from negative impacts, and the organization's public relations have a significant role in response to control the damaging situation (Coombs, 1999).

In a crisis, the perception of the stakeholders such as silent boosters, champions, avoiders, and blockers becomes a reality.

The stakeholders' groups have unique information needs that the crisis communication team should provide in a timely and acceptable manner.

Crisis communication, at its heart, it is essential for an organization to plan proper communication during a crisis to gain public support. It is an attempt to influence perceptions about the crisis in a way that is ideal for the organization (Hearit & Courtright, 2003). Therefore, public relations teams have to protect and defend an organization and stakeholders from threats.

Moreover, an organization has to view a crisis from a balanced perspective, including both threats and opportunities. It has much more prominent potential for recovering from a disaster, instead of overemphasizing and focusing a lot on the threat risk to an organization's reputation or image to "just" react adequately (Ulmer et al., 2015).

### **Social Media During Crisis**

Stakeholders such as customers, media, non-government organizations, interest groups have been more knowledgeable, mindful, and exacting.

Social media is now the most effective communication means in the whole world in a short time. It has the ability and power to keep masses posted, entertained, and impressed (Civilec et al., 2016).

Odyakmaz (2013) listed some of the characteristics of social media: Those are:

1. Interactivity: Virtual communication environments are interactive environments. Communication is both ways on social media. Netizens are both producers and consumers in all stages of discussion.

2. Instantaneity: Transferring the messages is the main feature of communication through the Internet.

3. Serving to individuals and masses: Social media aims at communicating with all sectors of society.

4. No hierarchic relationships or classlessness: One can ignore hierarchical relationships on social media.

Social media is an environment where people can talk regardless of education, job, gender, or income.

5. Information pollution: Social media serves the creation of an information society that gives the false impression that “it is effortless to access information”.

Comments and complaints about products and services in social media sites pose a threat to business organizations, specifically the government.

Fake news also shared with the public through social media. Studies reveal that the more people share information, word, or rumor spreading on social media, the more accredited it becomes. After a certain threshold, one perceives information as the truth (Civilec et al., 2016).

Especially the retweet count and speed, the effect of Twitter is how widespread a message gets (Fischer & Reuber, 2011).

No doubt, the most important communication channel in today’s world is the Internet.

One of the most critical features of social media is that it creates an opportunity for the user to produce information. This feature allows social media to share uncontrolled and uncensored information (Wagner, Vollmar, & Wagner, 2014).

The positive feature of the new media is the formation of shared awareness and democratic culture, while the negative part is the spread of polluted information through the blurred mixture of trustworthy and untrustworthy content.

Social media is a powerful governance tool to promote empowerment, participation, transparency, and accountability.

Social media provides individual participation not only for various purposes but also nearly in all political, ideological, financial, cultural fields. The new media is an environment for individuals to be sources of the news (Kassam, 2013).

The essential behavior to adopt in case of a crisis is to communicate with consumers with the fastest and most appropriate channel (Rutsaert & et al., 2014; Sturges, 1994).

However, social media also present some disadvantages for the individual, business, community, and society.

It impacted the way people use, consume, or produce information and content.

Social media is a means of interaction where people can create and exchange information in virtual communities and networks (Ahlqvist et al., 2008).

It allows people to reach a broad audience through various platforms for just any purpose.

Disinformation often occurs on social media. The quick response among consumers prevents disinformation. It is necessary to use social media effectively. The increase in access to the information which can on the Internet has made it challenging to reach accurate, consistent, and trustworthy information (Firat & Kurt, 2015).

Social media and social media tools are places where individuals can express themselves freely and uncontrollably.

That makes social media a channel suitable for disinformation.

Manipulation is one of the most critical problems in the digital world. It is used quite often in social media.

Without checking the source of information, millions of users in social media share various false contents (Lysenko & Desouza, 2012).

With web technology, the work of crisis communicators focuses on making sense of social media’s good and bad side.

Stories of social media used to generate disagreement between the parties can also be seen in the news and other narratives. The challenge for crisis communication managers is to counter or diminish the effects of negative social media postings and other detrimental news.

### Brief Description of the Case Study

On 15 March 2020, Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte posted on her Facebook and Twitter accounts the following message:

I have decided to distribute these essential health items to 100,000 of our indigent families beginning tomorrow. Bahay bahay po ang distribution para siguradong makarating sa kanila. #JoyParaSaBayan #KasamaKaSaPagunlad #KasamaLahatSaPagunlad.

A photo of a facemask, hand soap, alcohol, multi-vitamins capsules, and ascorbic acid tablets comes with this message.

The single social media post earned various adverse reactions and sparked negative comments from netizens.

Other risky moves and a series of blunders followed.

One of those is her statement released on Facebook on 20 March 2020 and was circulated in mainstream media that reads: “You have no obligation to accept any of my projects”.

Under the fierce spotlight, the camp of Mayor Belmonte had not only to juggle with media relations but also with ample defense to the issues and explanation to the general public.

When a crisis involves reputation, the ability of Mayor Belmonte and her crisis management team to know and foresee the way to act and react to its different stakeholders, as shown in Table 3, is vital to maintain the communication levels meet their expectations.

Table 3

*Mayor Belmonte’s Stakeholder Map*

Type of stakeholders	Stakeholder’s group	Influence/Contribution
Primary	National government	Government authorities that control and monitor the operational activities of MJB
	Employees	QC LGU had an average of 4,000 employees in 2019 running business activities, organization assets (plant, property and equipment) and other resources
	Customers	Approximately 3M residents especially the poor and the vulnerable
	Suppliers	Producers, manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers of relief goods, personal protective equipment, and other essential supplies and materials
Secondary	Press or media	Regularly report MJB in the news
	Special interest groups	Wide range of special interest groups which encompass the organization that might be concerned
	Competitors	Competitors or political opponents of MJB
Additional	Victims	A group or individual who have suffered either physically, mentally, or financially during the crisis

Source: Coombs (2007).

Public relations need to act quickly and responsibly when crisis, characterized by surprise, threat, and short response time (Herman, 1963), occurs.

The stakeholder groups and public opinion expect a speedy response, and the longer they wait to take a stance, the worst it looks for the organization, in this case, the Quezon City LGU and its LCE, Mayor Belmonte.

To deal with challenges that tumble Mayor Belmonte's reputation and political career, she and the crisis management team notably used many communication response strategies to communicate with interest groups during the crisis.

### **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)**

#### **What is SCCT?**

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) stresses the lowering crisis attributions of responsibility for any crisis. SCCT aims to determine communication upon the nature of the crisis and the company's reputational assets.

It is one of the widely used theoretical approaches for responding to organizational crises in communication research.

Introduced by W. Timothy Coombs, a Professor in Communication Studies at Eastern Illinois University in 1995, SCCT's theoretical name was "The Symbolic Approach to Communication Theory".

SCCT is a theory that illustrates the categorization type of crisis through the variations of attributions that may arise during a particular dilemma. An audience could vary in their opinion that a company is accountable for a specific crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

Additionally, the handbook of Ulmer et al. (2015) in the "Effective Crisis Communication: Moving Crisis to Opportunity" outlined how SCCT is applied.

Meanwhile, the SCCT by Coombs and Holladay (2002) involves two core elements, namely: (1) the crisis, and (2) crisis response strategies.

SCCT is an attempt to evaluate the reputational threat posed by the crisis. It recommends crisis response strategies based on the reputational threat level (Ulmer et al., 2015). It also gives an understanding of how to protect reputational assets during a crisis (Coombs, 2007).

Therefore, by understanding the crisis, a crisis manager can choose the most appropriate combination strategy during pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis (Heath & Coombs, 2006).

#### **The Crisis Situation (The Case of Mayor Belmonte) in SCCT**

During the crisis,

the first step that public relations team or crisis managers can act is to determine the crisis through categorizing its type to assess the reputational threat of a crisis by understanding how the media and other stakeholders are defining the crisis. (Coombs, 2007)

Coombs (2007) stated that through the SCCT, each type of crisis generates specific and predictable levels of crisis responsibility and different attributions of organizational responsibility to respond to the crisis.

Thus, by identifying the crisis type, the public relations teams, and the crisis manager can anticipate how much responsibility stakeholders will attribute to the organization at the initial crisis responsibility level (Coombs, 2007).

SCCT grouped the crisis into three different types of crisis which covers: (1) victim cluster, (2) accident cluster, and (3) preventable cluster.

As seen in Table 4, clusters include various crisis types.

Table 4

*The Categorization of Crisis by Its Type (The Case of Mayor Belmonte)*

Crisis cluster	Crisis type	Description	Reputational threat of crisis
Victim	Natural disaster	Acts of Nature	Minimal attributions of crisis responsibility and results in a minor reputational threat
	Rumor	False and damaging information about an organization is circulating	Minimal attributions of crisis responsibility and results in a minor reputational threat
Accident	Challenges	Stakeholders claim an organization is operating in an inappropriate manner	Moderate attribution of crisis responsibility and results in a moderate reputational threat
Preventable	Organizational misdeed with no injuries	Stakeholders deceived without injury	Strong attribution of crisis responsibility and results in a severe reputational threat
	Organizational misdeed with injuries	Stakeholders placed at risk by management and injuries occur	Strong attribution of crisis responsibility and results in a severe reputational threat

Source: Coombs (2007).

All of the listed types of crisis, it shows the Victim cluster generates minimal attributions of crisis responsibility and faces a minor reputational threat to the organization (Coombs, 2007).

The organization is considered as part of the victims, along with the stakeholders during the crisis (see victim cluster).

In the second group of crisis clusters, namely the accidental cluster, all of the crisis exemplifies unintended actions by the organization. The organization did not also intend to create a crisis. The crisis in this cluster produces moderate attributions of crisis responsibility or, in other words, that organization facing a moderate reputational threat (Coombs, 2007).

On the other hand, the Preventable cluster consists of a crisis that places stakeholders at risk. The organization knowingly takes inappropriate actions or human error, which actually could have been avoided by the organization. The crisis types produce a high attribution of crisis response (Coombs, 2007).

**Crisis Response Strategy (The Case of Mayor Belmonte)**

The Crisis Response Strategy in the SCCT intends to repair the reputation and reduce the adverse effects of a crisis in an organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

The SCCT uses attribution theory to develop a theoretical link between crises and crisis response strategies by considering crisis responsibility that provides the conceptual relationship between the two.

Moreover, corporate response strategies are beneficial to repair the organization’s reputation, to reduce negative affect and to prevent harmful behavioral intentions. The more accommodative strategy will be more effective and efficient in reducing anger and harmful communications within the stakeholders (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

Coombs and Holladay (2002) categorized crisis response strategies in two main crisis response strategies based on the level of responsibility acceptance. These are: (1) primary crisis response strategies, and (2) secondary crisis response strategies.

Each category contains different tactics that most effective in crisis response per the crisis type to avoid or minimize reputational damage.

### Case Study Analysis (The Case of Mayor Belmonte)

#### Analysis and Evaluation of Mayor Belmonte's Stakeholder's Group

External and internal stakeholders comprise Mayor Belmonte's environment, as shown in Table 3.

The most frequently quoted definition about stakeholders in strategic management study was by Freeman (1984). He described stakeholder "as a group or individual who can affect or is affected by the accomplishment of the organization's objective".

Besides, Bryson (1995) defined a stakeholder as any individual, group, or association that can place a claim on an organization's attention, assets, or output or is affected by that output.

Furthermore, this paper also included "additional stakeholders" out from the fundamental stakeholder's group classification by Clarkson (1995).

The additional stakeholders include groups or individuals who have suffered either physically, mentally, or financially during the crisis (Coombs, 2007).

Crisis impacts stakeholders differently, and more often, their interests and needs are contradictory during the crisis.

Therefore, the ability of the organization to communicate openly and accurately during the crisis is the critical point of successful crisis communication (Seeger et al., 2001) and the way to eliminate the failures to meet the needs of stakeholders in a reasonable time (Ulmer, 2001).

The distinctive group of stakeholders defined by Clarkson (1995) encompasses primary and secondary stakeholder groups as well as additional stakeholders.

Table 5 below shows the limited range of Mayor Belmonte's stakeholders and a brief description of their influence and contribution to Mayor Belmonte's actions.

Table 5

#### *Mayor Belmonte's Stakeholders' Responses and Actions to the Crisis*

Stakeholders' group	Name/Organization	Responses
Primary: National Government Agencies	DILG Secretary Eduardo Año <a href="https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1253216/ano-no-mercy-for-qc-residents-who-protested-delayed-aid#ixzz6KJJxWcSI">https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1253216/ano-no-mercy-for-qc-residents-who-protested-delayed-aid#ixzz6KJJxWcSI</a>	"So we'll throw them in jail. No mercy for them", Año said in a phone interview. "Everyone should cooperate. We are in a crisis and they are exploiting the situation". Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte in a statement appealed to the police to release the protesters "in the interim for humanitarian reasons".
Primary: National Government Agencies	DILG Secretary Eduardo Año <a href="https://dilg.gov.ph/news/DILG-issues-show-cause-order-to-two-Punong-Barangays-for-violating-ECQ/NC-2020-1092">https://dilg.gov.ph/news/DILG-issues-show-cause-order-to-two-Punong-Barangays-for-violating-ECQ/NC-2020-1092</a>	"Ang parada sa Barangay Libis ay nagdulot ng paglabas ng maraming tao at pagkumpulan sa kalye. Nabalewala nito ang strict physical distancing na puwedeng magdala ng panganib ng virus sa maraming tao". "Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte likewise admonished the Barangay Libis chair and ordered her to explain last Saturday".
Primary: National Government Agencies	NBI Deputy Director Ferdinand Lavin <a href="https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/04/02/20/nbi-says-probing-quezon-city-quarantine-protest">https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/04/02/20/nbi-says-probing-quezon-city-quarantine-protest</a>	"The inquiry will cover the alleged shortage of relief aid in Sitio San Roque and reports that a group allegedly incited the residents to violate the lockdown's ban on mass gatherings". "I do not have the details yet. I was informed by the anti-graft [division] that we are also looking into that".

Table 5 to be continued

		<p>“Asked who the NBI will invite to explain over the protest, Lavin said: The barangay captain, possibly the mayor—depends on how the situation will develop”.</p>
<p>Primary: Employees</p>	<p>Quezon City Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit Head Rolando Cruz</p> <p><a href="https://www.msn.com/en-ph/news/national/3-possible-covid-19-cases-sent-home-due-to-doh-rules-qc-gov-t/ar-BB11xABN">https://www.msn.com/en-ph/news/national/3-possible-covid-19-cases-sent-home-due-to-doh-rules-qc-gov-t/ar-BB11xABN</a></p>	<p>“Under a memorandum of the DOH, individuals with mild symptoms and the non-elderly are to be sent home”.</p> <p>He was citing DOH Memorandum 2020-0108, which indicates that “persons under investigation (PUIs) and positive COVID-19 patients who exhibit mild symptoms with no co-morbidities and non-elderly are advised to be sent home for strict self-isolation and close monitoring by local health authorities”.</p>
<p>Primary: Customers/Residents of Quezon City</p> <p>Secondary: Press/Media</p>	<p>Jay Sonza</p> <p><a href="https://bandera.inquirer.net/245381/opinion-letter-ni-jay-sonza-kay-joy-belmonte-trending-kinampihan-ng-netizens">https://bandera.inquirer.net/245381/opinion-letter-ni-jay-sonza-kay-joy-belmonte-trending-kinampihan-ng-netizens</a></p>	<p>“While you admitted that you do not fully understand the enhanced community quarantine order for the mitigation of COVID-19, you did what you thought was the best you can”.</p> <p>“On both occasions, you called several media conferences to tell the people of QC and the entire world that you do not have a full grasp of your role in the CQ and ECQ”.</p> <p>“You printed 500k to 1M ecobag with your name on it and put in a piece of soap, a bottle of alcohol, a face mask”.</p> <p>“Then you followed it with a random sampling of food distribution, with matching rehearsals on how to hand it to a recipient, all caught on still and video camera and broadcast on mainstream and new media”.</p> <p>“JAY SONZA”.</p> <p>“Tandang Sora, Quezon City, Philippines”.</p>
<p>Primary: Customers/Residents of Quezon City</p> <p>Secondary: Press/Media</p>	<p>Ogie Diaz</p> <p><a href="http://balita.net.ph/2020/03/21/ogdie-diaz-may-unsolicited-advice-kay-mayor-joy/">http://balita.net.ph/2020/03/21/ogdie-diaz-may-unsolicited-advice-kay-mayor-joy/</a></p>	<p>“Eto, sa totoo lang tayo, ha? Ibinoto ko si Joy Belmonte bilang mayor, wa echos yan”.</p> <p>“Ayan ang sagot niya tuloy. Pero ok lang ako, mayora, ha? Kahit di po ako makatanggap ng relief goods na may tatak na ‘Joy Para Sa Bayan’ ha? Mas kailangan po talaga yan ng mga ka-lungsod ko, lalo na yung arawan lang ang kita. Tama po yan”.</p> <p>“Sana, tuloy-tuloy po ang pagbibigay ng ayuda sa kanila hanggang mawala ang COVID-19 na ito”.</p> <p>Pero, mayora, baka type nyo namang bigyan ng pagpupugay ang mga taxpayers natin, ha? Opo, kasi pera po nila yang ipinambibili nyo ng relief goods, although mas kahanga-hanga po kayo kung ang nakalagay lang sa supot ay “from Quezon City Government” or kahit nga may nakasulat na “Buwis n’yo ‘to, anubeh?”</p> <p>Pero sige po, ok na po sa akin kung meron pang naka-print na “Joy Para Sa Bayan” basta wag lang po nating kalimutan na buwis po yan ng mga taga-lungsod. Pakibanggit naman po para masabi ko sa sarili kong, “Uy, me ambag ako diyan!”</p>

Table 5 to be continued

		<p>“Okay lang din po kung yung mga di naniniwala sa palakad nyo o sa paraan ng pamamahala nyo ay di makasali sa sinasabi nyong pabahay nyo, pa-healthcare nyo, libreng edukasyon nyo at kahit ‘di pa makasali sa social benefits nyo”.</p> <p>“Bigay nyo na po yan sa higit na nangangailangan basta po tutuparin lang ang ipinangako”.</p> <p>“Eto naman ang ipapangako ko bilang taga-media, taga-Kyusi at taxpayer: kung tuloy na po ang PABAHAY nyo, pa-send po ng mga pictures para matulungan ko po ang PR department nyo na magpakalat ng magandang balita na yan. Let me know po kung meron na ha? Baka ako lang ang nahuhuli sa balita”.</p> <p>“Saka gusto ko pong saluduhan yung mga staff nyo na nagre-repack ng goods. Kasi 400,000 goods ang dapat magawa nila, sana healthy and safe pa din sila pagkatapos kahit walang face mask yung iba”.</p> <p>“Anyway, yun pong sabi nyo na parang sa 2022 na lang kayo ‘gantihan’ ng mga haters nyo, mayora, ito po munang COVID-19 ang tapusin natin kasi kahit di nyo sabihin yan, taumbayan pa din naman ang magdedesiyon. Malay nyo manalo uli kayo kung wala naman kayong matinding makakalaban, ‘di ba?”.</p> <p>“Basta madam mayora, lagi nyo na lang pong isipin at isapuso na lahat ng ginagawa nyo ay para sa bayan at hindi para sa 2022”.</p>
<p>Primary: Customers/Residents of Quezon City</p> <p>Secondary: Press/Media</p>	<p>Arnel Ignacio</p> <p><a href="https://www.abante.com.ph/arnell-ignacio-may-mensahe-kay-mayor-joy-belmonte.htm">https://www.abante.com.ph/arnell-ignacio-may-mensahe-kay-mayor-joy-belmonte.htm</a></p>	<p>“Mayor Joy alam ko marami ka nang sinalubong na masasakit na salita. Do not get angry. Do not get hurt. You cannot do that. You cannot afford to do that ngayon”.</p> <p>“Kaya lang nagkakaganyan ang mga taga-QC kasi naghihintay lang sila ng inyong malaking kilos. Malaki ang problema, pero hindi ka rin naman maliit”.</p> <p>“Pinaka-powerful na tao sa buong Pilipinas, at isa kang Belmonte”.</p> <p>“Mayor, huwag mo na sabihin yung mga limitasyon, kung ano ang hindi natin kaya. Katulad noong mga hindi ma-accommodate sa ospital. Madaming multi-purpose, gym, ang Quezon City”.</p>
<p>Secondary: Press/Media</p>	<p>Karen Davila</p> <p><a href="https://politics.com.ph/di-ka-nakakatuwa-absent-mayorjoy-belmonte-trends-on-twitter-over-arrest-of-hungry-residents/">https://politics.com.ph/di-ka-nakakatuwa-absent-mayorjoy-belmonte-trends-on-twitter-over-arrest-of-hungry-residents/</a></p>	<p>“ABS-CBN news anchor Karen Davila tweeted: QC Mayor Joy Belmonte, your constituents need you”.</p>
<p>Secondary: Press/Media</p>	<p>Arnold Clavio</p> <p><a href="https://philnews.ph/2020/04/12/arnold-clavio-reacts-to-joy-belmontes-remark-on-qc-covid-19-issue/">https://philnews.ph/2020/04/12/arnold-clavio-reacts-to-joy-belmontes-remark-on-qc-covid-19-issue/</a></p>	<p>“Nagtataka lang ako sa last frame#9, kung itinuturing natin na bagong bayani ang mga frontliner bakit ngayon ay pinapalabas natin sila na sinungaling? Hindi kredibilidad ko ang nasa linya, kundi ang buhay ng mga frontliner na humingi ng tulong sa akin upang malabas ang totoo!” he said.</p>

Table 5 to be continued

<p>Secondary: Special Interest Groups</p>	<p>Publicus Asia</p> <p>Quezon City: [ranked lowest with 33.74 net approval (NA = SD – SA)]</p> <p>Strongly Disapprove – 36.84 Disapprove – 23.68 Neither – 21.93 Approve – 14.47 Strongly Approve – 3.07</p> <p>No. of Respondents: 228</p> <p><a href="http://www.publicusasia.com/publicus-response-to-ncr-mayors-net-approval-chart/">http://www.publicusasia.com/publicus-response-to-ncr-mayors-net-approval-chart/</a></p>	<p>“Approval of Mayor/LGU per City”. In fact, the Local Chief Executives were not named and the question asked on the questionnaire was:</p> <p>Q19: Please indicate your level of approval or disapproval with the manner in which your MAYOR AND CITY GOVERNMENT is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>This indicates that what is being measured here is approval or disapproval on both the mayor and the institution as a whole. In a crisis, this is not just about the mayor but the whole bureaucracy of the city hall which he or she leads.</p>
<p>Secondary: Special Interest Groups</p>	<p>Various netizens</p> <p><a href="https://politics.com.ph/di-ka-nakakatuwa-absent-mayorjoy-belmonte-trends-on-twitter-over-arrest-of-hungry-residents/">https://politics.com.ph/di-ka-nakakatuwa-absent-mayorjoy-belmonte-trends-on-twitter-over-arrest-of-hungry-residents/</a></p>	<p>Netizen @francisyuuuh said: “the incompetence of joy belmonte reached the level where the people are starving—dying.”</p> <p>Twitter user @__jin_ri said: “QC is in distraught that they resorted to risking their lives just to ask for food. Nagugutom sila mayor Joy Belmonte, OH MY GOODNESS LOOK AT YOUR PEOPLE!!! This is definitely an LGU problem considering that the neighboring cities are somehow thriving with competent officials”.</p> <p>Netizen @dudeistheword tweeted: “Joy Belmonte’s incompetence IS BEYOND. Shouldn’t our government be measuring the performance of how well each LGUs is dealing with the epidemic. Oof, even the national government sucks so”.</p> <p>Twitter user @pieishere said: “I fucking hate Joy Belmonte right now. We dont see this happening in Pasig or in Manila and other key cities. Quezon City is so fucked up”</p>
<p>Additional Stakeholders</p>	<p>Various residents of Sitio San Roque, Quezon City</p> <p><a href="https://www.msn.com/en-ph/news/national/sitio-san-roque-folk-appeal-for-release-of-colleagues-say-they-only-want-food/ar-BB121xS3?srcref=rss">https://www.msn.com/en-ph/news/national/sitio-san-roque-folk-appeal-for-release-of-colleagues-say-they-only-want-food/ar-BB121xS3?srcref=rss</a></p>	<p>“Josie Lopez, the community leader of Sitio San Roque, appealed to the QCPD to release her colleagues, saying they only wanted food for the table”.</p> <p>“Hindi nga po kami mamatay sa COVID-19, mamamatay naman po kami sa gutom at sa parusa ninyo. Hindi po dapat ganitong sistema ang ginagawa niyo sa amin,” she said.</p> <p>“One resident could not help but break down and said she only wanted food for her family”.</p> <p>“Yan na lang ang pag-asa namin ang magbigay ng pagkain sa amin para sa pamilya namin, wala kayong karapatang manghuli,” she said”.</p> <p>Lara Vargas appealed to Mayor Joy Belmonte, saying ever since the lockdown was implemented, her family has yet to receive any food packs.</p> <p>“Simula noong lockdown, wala na ho kaming pera, wala na hong sagod, ‘yon ‘yong hinaing namin ditong mga mahihirap, wala ho kaming matatanggap kahit isang butil po, dilat na ‘yong mata namin. Sana maawa naman sila”, she said.</p>

Table 5 to be continued

		<p>“Nagtatago ho siya eh wala kaming makausap dito na mayor”, Vargas added.”</p> <p>“Jacinto Caminade, on the other hand, said <u>local authorities neglected to give his family relief goods</u>”.</p> <p>“Bibigyan daw kami ng pantawid gutom, bakit ngayon walang dumating kahit isa? Kahit katiting na bigas, walang dumating sa amin. Bakit ganiyan? Matagal na ‘yong COVID-19, bakit kami wala pa?”</p>
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### Mayor Belmonte’s Response Strategy to the Crisis

In response to the crisis, Mayor Belmonte and her crisis management team issued at least three personal/official statements. These are:

1. QC’s Belmonte answers critics: “You have no obligation to accept any of my projects”, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1245681/qcs-belmonte-answers-critics-you-have-no-obligation-to-accept-any-of-my-projects>, March 20, 2020 (statement published on Facebook on the same date)

2. Statement of the Quezon City Government, <https://www.facebook.com/QCGov/posts/statement-of-the-quezon-city-government-the-quezon-city-government-wishes-to-cla/241680560553042/>, 1 April 2020

3. Quezon City mayor apologizes over social media mistake, “Joy Para Sa Bayan” bags, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/4/3/quezon-city-mayor-belmonte-public-apology-enhanced-community-quarantine.html>, 3 April 2020

4. Joy Belmonte apologizes for losing cool on social media, Joy para sa Bayan bags, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/metro/732566/joy-belmonte-apologizes-for-losing-cool-on-social-media-joy-para-sa-bayan-bags/story/>, 3 April 2020

The following news reports quoted Mayor Belmonte:

1. No total lockdown in Quezon City? Belmonte says police lacks manpower, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/255091-belmonte-says-qcpd-lacks-manpower-lockdown-quezon-city>, 20 March 2020

2. 3 COVID-19 patients in QC sent home due to lack of space in health facilities: Mayor, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/03/22/20/3-covid-19-patients-in-qc-sent-home-due-to-lack-of-space-in-health-facilities-mayor>, 22 March 2020

Table 6 shows a summary of the crisis response strategies of Mayor Belmonte.

Table 6 and Figure 7 show Mayor Belmonte’s camp used a combination of Primary Response-Deny-Scapegoat Primary Response-Diminish-Excuse, Primary Response-Diminish-Justice five times each in all the six sources/references available as response strategies frequently.

Mayor Belmonte chose the Scapegoat tactic to blame other people from the external of the organization for the crisis. At the same time, Mayor Belmonte resorted to Excuse and Justice as tactics to reduce the responsibility for the crisis and the perceived damage.

She employed Primary Response-Deny-Attacks the Accuser four times while Secondary Response-Rebuild-Apology three times (3x).

Mayor Belmonte used the Attacks the Accuser tactic to oppose or confront parties who claim a crisis is present while she used Apology to confess blame and accept responsibility.

She also used Primary Response-Deny-Denial twice (2x), Secondary Response-Rebuild-Compensation twice (2x), and Secondary Response-Bolstering-Victim twice (2x).

Denial means denying the existence of a crisis. Compensation and Victim are both tactics that aim to rebuild reputation. The first is evident when an organization compensates the victims by offering money or gifts. At the same time, Victim explains to the stakeholders that the organization is a victim, too.

Lastly, Mayor Belmonte engaged in Secondary Response-Bolstering-Reminder once (1x) and Secondary Response-Bolstering-Ingriatiation once (1x).

Reminder tactic informs the stakeholders about the organization’s past good works while Ingriatiation is called for to praise stakeholders.

Table 6

*Crisis Response Strategies of Mayor Belmonte*

Type of crisis response strategy	Strategy	Tactics	Description	Statement	News source/ reference
Primary	Deny	Attacks the Accuser	Where the crisis managers oppose or confront the people or group who claim a crisis exists	“To those who hate me, you are under no obligation to accept any of my projects – housing, education, healthcare, social benefits”.	(3)
				“...viciously directed against the Quezon City Local Government <sup>6</sup> ”.	(4)
				“I am disheartened that whoever is funding this misinformation campaign has taken advantage of one of the most difficult times in our history to sow confusion, uncertainty, and distrust”.	(5)
				“Instead, they were allegedly instigated by yet to be determined personalities to hold a rally and claim that the local government has not distributed any food packs in their area. Upon further questioning however, some residents acknowledged that they did receive food packs”.	(6)
		Denial	When the crisis managers deny the existence of a crisis or claim that there is no crisis exist	“Because the people who want to be served and patiently wait for it don’t deserve for their lives and that of their families to be politicized”.	(3)
				“The Quezon City government wishes to clarify the unfortunate incident that occurred this morning at Sitio San Roque. First, the local government and Brgy. Bagong Pag-asa deny media reports that no food packs have been distributed in the area”.	(6)
		Scapegoat	When crisis managers blame to other people from the external of the organization	“Ang nag-test sa kanila ang nagpauwi sa kanila at nadatnan na lang namin sila sa bahay after the list was given to us by the (Department of Health)”.	(1)
				“So if you put everything under extreme enhanced community quarantine or heightened enhanced community quarantine, the manpower resources of the Quezon City Police District will be insufficient. It will be overstretched, and it will not be effective because of the size of our city”.	(2)
				“We are slow? I think perhaps the <u>suppliers were overwhelmed by the volume we were ordering and could not comply immediately even if we placed our order the day after the President announced an Enhanced Community Quarantine</u> ”.	(3)
				“... viciously directed against the Quezon City local government”.	(4)
				“I am disheartened that whoever is funding this misinformation campaign has taken advantage of one of the most difficult times in our history to sow confusion, uncertainty, and distrust”.	(5)

<sup>6</sup> Quezon City Local Government—Background, <https://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/about-the-city-government/background>.

Table 6 to be continued

Diminish	Excuse	When crisis managers aim to reduce the organization's responsibility for the crisis and justification defined as the crisis managers aim to reduce the perceived damage	"Ang nag-test sa kanila ang nagpauwi sa kanila at nadatnan na lang namin sila sa bahay after the list was given to us by the (Department of Health)".	(1)
			"Our city, according to the DILG, DOH, is different because it is very large".	(1)
			"We appeal to everyone to please be very critical of what you read, like, or share. Let us not fall for 'fake news' and trolls".	(4)
			"Sa katunayan, sinundo namin ang mga pasyenteng ito mula sa kanilang tahanan at inilipat sa aming Hope 1 facility".	(5)
			"In fact, there is continuous distribution of food packs throughout the city, both from the local government and the barangays to ensure that affected families are looked after during this crisis period. As per COA guidelines, all recipients of food packs must be properly documented and the city government wishes to assure the public that this is strictly being complied with, and documents are available for scrutiny in the interest of transparency". "Nevertheless, the mayor has instructed city personnel to review the list to make sure nobody has been inadvertently left out".	(6)
			"Ang nag-test sa kanila ang nagpauwi sa kanila at nadatnan na lang namin sila sa bahay after the list was given to us by the (Department of Health)".	(1)
	Justice	When crisis managers aim to reduce the perceived damage	"Our city, according to the DILG, DOH, is different because it is very large".	(2)
			"We appeal to everyone to please be very critical of what you read, like, or share. Let us not fall for 'fake news' and trolls".	(4)
			"Sa katunayan, sinundo namin ang mga pasyenteng ito mula sa kanilang tahanan at inilipat sa aming Hope 1 facility".	(5)
			"In fact, there is continuous distribution of food packs throughout the city, both from the local government and the barangays to ensure that affected families are looked after during this crisis period. As per COA guidelines, all recipients of food packs must be properly documented and the city government wishes to assure the public that this is strictly being complied with, and documents are available for scrutiny in the interest of transparency". "Nevertheless, the mayor has instructed city personnel to review the list to make sure nobody has been inadvertently left out".	(6)
			"400,000 food packs will be distributed to families living in the 142 barangays of the city".	(3)
			"The Mayor however appeals to the leadership of the QCPD to release the detainees in the interim for humanitarian reasons, with a warning that following the President's directive that using a crisis situation to incite chaos, anarchy, panic, confusion and sedition is punishable by law under the Revised Penal Code and the Bayanihan To Heal As One Act".	(6)
Rebuild	Compensation	When crisis managers aim to compensate the victims by offering money or other material things (i.e. gifts)	"I sincerely apologize for losing my composure on social media. You are correct that all the projects implemented by the QC government belong to you".	(4)
			"While it is true that my team used leftover donated bags from the previous campaign, and that they were the most readily available bags on the first day of ECQ, it is clear that this was highly insensitive given the circumstances".	(4)
	Apology	When crisis managers publicly confess blame and accept responsibility by apologizing to the stakeholders	"I do not recognize the public servant that I aspire to be. The citizens of Quezon City deserve better. I will do better".	(4)

Table 6 to be continued

Secondary	Bolstering	Reminder	The organization tells the stakeholders about its past good works	“I don’t have a plan? That was the plan. The barangays using their Quick Response Funds released because we were the very first city to declare a State of Calamity would be used to support our constituents for the first week since I already knew that a volume of goods for 2M people would take time to arrive”.	(1)
		Ingratiation	When the organization praises its stakeholders	“I thank our barangays for your extremely hard work these past few days”.	(2)
		Victim	When the organization explains to the stakeholder if they were a victim too during the crisis occurs	“Instead of helping the city fight the spread of COVID-19, some people are taking advantage of the crisis for their own interests”.	(4)
				“Based on interviews conducted by Task Force Disiplina led by action officer Rannie Ludovica, of residents who were along North Edsa, it was revealed that they were allegedly informed by an individual purportedly from a TV crew that food packs would be distributed to them this morning and that the DSWD would allegedly be distributing cash. After reaching the area, the residents discovered that there was no food or cash distribution.”	(6)

Source: Coombs (2007).

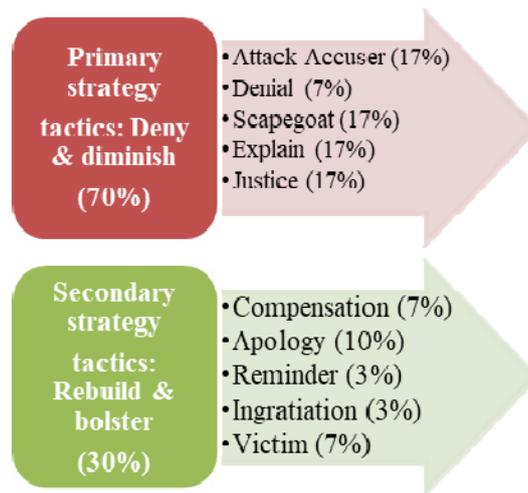


Figure 7. Crisis response strategies of Mayor Belmonte.

**Overall Crisis Communication Response by Mayor Belmonte According to the SCCT**

As the previous data on the stakeholders’ responses show, the crisis incident represented a severe reputational threat to Mayor Belmonte.

When an organization is perceived to have a high responsibility for such a crisis, the SCCT recommends employing a crisis response strategy with a high level of acceptance of responsibility.

Based on the SCCT, the right responses to be in harmony with rebuilding the organization’s reputation is the Rebuild strategy because answers such as Compensation or Apology should work to improve the organization’s reputation.

In addition to the Rebuild strategy, an organization also might use the Bolstering approach, such as Reminder, Ingratiation, and Victim.

This paper used four questions based on the secondary data from a content analysis of the crisis communication employed by Mayor Belmonte. Those are from five articles, one statement released through Facebook, two press conferences, and two news reports quoting Mayor Belmonte) during a specific period from 20 March 2020 to 11 April 2020. The four questions were:

- Question 1: What response strategies did Mayor Belmonte employ in dealing with the crisis during a specific period from 20 March 2020 to 11 April 2020?
- Question 2: What is the most frequently used crisis communication strategy from the SCCT?
- Question 3: Does Mayor Belmonte achieve consistency about crisis communication strategy, across all sources for all outgoing crisis communication messages?
- Question 4: What are the response strategies selected by Mayor Belmonte that matched with the options of response strategies suggested by the SCCT?

**Question 1: What response strategies did Mayor Belmonte employ in dealing with the crisis during a specific period from 20 March 2020 to 11 April 2020?**

This study found a total of 30 strategies used by Mayor Belmonte: 37% and 33% ( $n = 11$  and  $n = 10$ ) were from the Deny and Diminish response strategies, respectively. The findings are from the content analysis of different sources (1 statement released through Facebook, two press conferences, and two news reports quoting Mayor Belmonte), which she made from the period of 20 March 2020 to 11 April 2020 (see Table 7).

Table 7

*Crisis Communication Strategies in Clusters Used by Mayor Belmonte*

Crisis response strategy	<i>N</i>	Percentage (%)
Deny	11	37
Diminish	10	33
Rebuild	5	17
Bolstering	4	13
Total	30	100

**Question 2: What is the most frequently used crisis communication strategy from the SCCT?**

The study found the Attacks the Accuser, Scapegoat, Excuse, and Justice tactics are the most common crisis response tactics used by Mayor Belmonte. She used that 17% of the time each ( $n = 5$ ) each.

She also employed Apology tactic 10% of the time ( $n = 3$ ). On the other hand, she resorted to Victim and Compensation tactics 7% of the time each ( $n = 2$ ). She used Reminder and Ingratiation tactics 3% of the time each ( $n = 1$ ) (see Table 8).

Table 8

*Crisis Communication Strategies Used by Mayor Belmonte*

Crisis response strategy	<i>N</i>	Percentage (%)
Deny		
Attacks the Accuser	5	17
Denial	2	7
Scapegoat	5	17
Diminish		
Excuse	5	17
Justice	5	17

Table 8 to be continued

Rebuild		
Compensation	2	7
Apology	3	10
Bolstering		
Reminder	1	3
Ingratiation	1	3
Victim	2	7
Total	30	100

**Question 3: Does Mayor Belmonte achieve consistency about crisis communication strategy, across all sources for all outgoing crisis communication messages?**

As shown in Table 9, the study found a consistent message strategy of Deny and Diminish cluster strategies. The Attacks the Accuser and Scapegoat response tactics were the most frequently used tactics in a press conference ( $n = 3$  each), media interview ( $n = 1$  each), and Facebook ( $n = 1$  each). Excuse and Justice were also equally most common tactics resorted to in a press conference ( $n = 2$  each), media interview ( $n = 2$  each), and Facebook ( $n = 1$  each).

Table 9

*Number of Strategies Used by Mayor Belmonte in Each Media Format*

Crisis response strategy	Facebook (1)	Media interview (2)	Press conference (2)
Deny			
Attacks the Accuser	1	1	3
Denial	1	0	1
Scapegoat	1	1	3
Diminish			
Excuse	1	2	2
Justice	1	2	2
Rebuild			
Compensation	1	0	1
Apology	1	0	2
Bolstering			
Reminder	0	1	0
Ingratiation	0	1	0
Victim	1	0	1
Total	8	7	15

**Question 4: What are the response strategies used by Mayor Belmonte that matched with the options of response strategies suggested by the SCCT?**

As the previous data on the stakeholders’ responses show, the crisis incident represented a severe reputational threat to Mayor Belmonte.

When an organization (represented by Mayor Belmonte) perceived a high responsibility for such a crisis, the SCCT recommends employing a crisis response strategy with a high level of acceptance of responsibility.

Based on the SCCT, the appropriate responses to be in harmony with rebuilding the organization’s reputation is the Rebuild strategy because interventions such as Compensation and Apology should work to improve the organization’s reputation.

In addition to the Rebuild strategy, an organization also might use the Bolstering approach, such as Reminder, Ingratiation, and Victim.

Overall, Mayor Belmonte is found not to respond to the crisis within the prescriptions of the SCCT recommendations or options (see Table 10).

During the crisis, Mayor Belmonte employed a combined Deny and Diminish crisis response strategies in communicating with stakeholders.

Table 10

*Summary of the Reputational Threat, the Overall Responses From Mayor Belmonte and SCCT Recommendations*

Common stakeholders perception	Reputational threat or crisis	Mayor Belmonte’s response	SCCT recommendations/options
Preventable cluster: Organizational misdeed with/without injuries	Strong attribution of crisis responsibility and require a severe reputational threat	Deny	
		Attacks the Accuser	
		Denial	
		Scapegoat	
		Diminish	
		Excuse	
		Justice	
		Rebuild	
		Compensation	
		Apology	
		Bolstering	
		Reminder	
		Ingratiation	
		Victim	
		Total of 22 tactics used under Deny and Diminish strategies more than eight tactics used under the Rebuild and Bolstering strategies	Rebuild Compensation Apology Bolstering Reminder Ingratiation Victim  Use more Rebuild and Bolstering strategies than Deny and Diminish tactics

### Discussion

The SCCT provides a framework for the organization facing a different complex case of crisis to protect the reputational organization’s assets. The organization’s ability to select the most appropriate and beneficial response helps them deal with an emergency and crisis (Coombs, 2007).

Simultaneously, in this paper, SCCT was used to examine the stakeholder’s perceptions about the organization’s action and response by Mayor Belmonte on the crisis from 15 March 2020 onwards.

This paper concludes Mayor Belmonte did not follow the recommendations of SCCT by combining Deny, such as Attacks the Accuser, Deny and Scapegoat tactics, and Diminish strategies, such as Excuse and Justice tactics, to respond to the wide variety of stakeholder’s group.

Mayor Belmonte’s crisis response strategies and tactics do not align with the SCCT. The theory recommends corrective action and response such as Rebuild as well as Bolstering strategies are “considered as the most effective communication of crisis response strategy when an organization perceived a strong attribution of crisis responsibility and results in a severe reputational threat” (Coombs, 2007).

By reviewing the situation that Mayor Belmonte faced, this paper concludes that she was under severe threat.

Mayor Belmonte's COVID-19 crisis is the preventable cluster based on the overall stakeholder's perception of the crisis. It considered her primary, secondary, and additional stakeholders.

It depicted an organizational misdeed with and without injuries, and the appropriate responses to adapt to re-establish the organization's reputation is a Rebuild strategy because interventions, such as Compensation and Apology should work to improve the organization's reputation.

Conversely, Mayor Belmonte chose to frequently employ Deny strategy (Attacks the Accuser and Scapegoat) and Diminish strategy (Excuse and Justice) to respond to various stakeholders.

Regarding the Apology response tactic, the apologetic expressions by Mayor Belmonte only came on 3 April 2020 through a press conference while crisis started on 15 March 2020 when she posted in her personal Facebook and Twitter accounts her message:

I have decided to distribute these essential health items to 100,000 of our indigent families beginning tomorrow. Bahay bahay po ang distribution para siguradong makarating sa kanila. #JoyParaSaBayan #KasamaKaSaPagunlad #KasamaLahatSaPagunlad.

This message came with a photo of a facemask, hand soap, alcohol, multi-vitamins capsules, and ascorbic acid tablets.

Such social media posts received many adverse reactions and triggered negative remarks from stakeholders.

Other wrong moves and series of blunders described in news outlets and social media sites followed through.

The apology could seem to be a sufficient crisis response strategy as one can predict the crisis. But said apology came after three weeks. The apology reads:

I sincerely apologize for losing my composure on social media. You are correct that all the projects implemented by the QC government belong to you.

While it is true that my team used leftover donated bags from the previous campaign, and that they were the most readily available bags on the first day of ECQ, it is clear that this was highly insensitive given the circumstances.

I do not recognize the public servant that I aspire to be. The citizens of Quezon City deserve better. I will do better.

Thus, by making an apology at the right time to all stakeholders' groups, Mayor Belmonte could have cleared the media speculation and explain in detail the crisis to eliminate the pattern of the status quo.

In addition to the Apology response tactic, Compensation is an effective tactic to use anytime when victims suffer serious harm. Compensation and Apology represent the highly reconciling tactics that Coombs, 2007 suggests during a crisis with a severe threat. Mayor Belmonte, in one instance, offered Compensation through the official statement released on Facebook on 1 April 2020. To quote:

The Mayor, however, appeals to the leadership of the QCPD to release the detainees in the interim for humanitarian reasons, with a warning that following the President's directive that using a crisis to incite chaos, anarchy, panic, confusion, and sedition is punishable by law under the Revised Penal Code and the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act.

Moreover, in connection with the Apology and Compensation response tactics, Reminder is an effective tactic that should have been used by Mayor Belmonte. The long list of her actions taken on the crisis (see Table 1) show that Quezon City under her leadership was the first city in Metro Manila to declare a state of emergency amid the spread of COVID-19 that allowed the city's 142 barangays to access their Quick Response Fund.

Mayor Belmonte was also the first to take up the challenge of COVID-19's spread when on 29 February 2020, the Quezon City government had started training dozens of village health workers as local first responders in handling contagious illnesses like COVID-19.

Other actions done were ahead of the ECQ declaration on 14 March 2020 to include the imposition of a 4-day work week, and a policy that prohibits mass gatherings such as sports events, beauty pageants, and fiesta celebrations as quarantine measures vs COVID-19 (13 March 2020).

Apart from intensifying contact tracing, the city government also converted empty establishments into isolation rooms on 13 March 2020.

The Reminder tactic is handy to show the good works of Mayor Belmonte and her political and public service history and record to every stakeholder. She won with a wide margin over her closest rival in the 2019 local elections. She was also a three-term Vice Mayor who received awards and recognitions from non-government organizations.

Moreover, additional tactics such as Ingratiation can help her in addressing the crisis.

Frequent praises to Quezon City's team of officials, employees and volunteers by Mayor Belmonte, such as "I thank our barangays for your extremely hard work these past few days", as part of the Ingratiation tactic to thank her stakeholders with their help, sympathy, trust, and loyalty in her leadership could also bolster and support her crisis response strategies.

Apology and Reminder tactics represent the highly adaptive strategies to be used during the crisis that is under serious threat (Coombs, 2007). But Mayor Belmonte employed the right tactics late and seldom in the disaster.

Vital in managing a crisis is the crisis response strategy that must mirror a more prominent sympathy toward the stakeholders and assume more responsibility to the crisis.

However, Mayor Belmonte used Attacks the Accuser and Scapegoat tactics, which are not in line with the recommendation of SCCT to combining both primary and secondary response strategies to generate effective communication.

Mayor Belmonte focused on the Deny and Diminish strategies as her primary crisis response strategies.

A quote from Mayor Belmonte's statement in a press conference that through various media on 20 March 2020 stated:

To those who hate me, you are under no obligation to accept any of my projects—housing, education, healthcare, social benefits.

That means there will be more for those who truly have faith in me as their leader.

Because the people who want to be served and patiently wait for it don't deserve for their lives and that of their families to be politicized.

...viciously directed against the Quezon City local government.

I am disheartened that whoever is funding this misinformation campaign has taken advantage of one of the most difficult times in our history to sow confusion, uncertainty, and distrust.

Instead, they were allegedly instigated by yet to be determined personalities to hold a rally and claim that the local government has not distributed any food packs in their area.

The use of Deny and Diminish strategies were not productive and added salt to injury.

Instead of blaming others, Mayor Belmonte shall project she was also a victim of the crisis.

When there is a limited number of staff and volunteers, and there is an issue on the absorptive capacity of the local health and peace and order system, she and the LGU become the victim on the crisis. The following quotes depict those situations.

That's bigger than the population of the second and third largest cities in NCR.

Mahaba pa po ang laban kontra sa COVID-19. Ito po ang panahon na kailangan nating protektahan ang isa't isa. Kasama ng buong team Quezon City, kayo po ang aming inspirasyon sa patuloy na paglilingkod.

(We are only at the beginning of a long fight against COVID-19. What we need this time is to protect each other. You are what keep us in team Quezon City going.)

Ang lungsod kasi natin ayon sa DILG, DOH [Department of Health] ay kakaiba dahil napakalaki. So if you put everything under extreme enhanced community quarantine or heightened enhanced community quarantine, magkukulang po talaga ang manpower resources ng atin pong Quezon City Police District. Maooverstretch po, at hindi po magiging epektibo dahil sa laki po ng ating lungsod.

(Our city, according to the DILG, DOH, is different because it is very large. So if you put everything under extreme enhanced community quarantine or heightened enhanced community quarantine, the manpower resources of the Quezon City Police District will be insufficient. It will be overstretched, and it will not be effective because of the size of our city.)

Those statements refer to a situation where the LGU is part of the victim of a crisis, too. But the victim tactic was seldom used as a response by Mayor Belmonte in this crisis.

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