

# Dr. Siti Salbiah Norazan

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*Article***When the Sky Falls: The Media's Mediating Role in Crisis and Reputation Management of the Air India Flight 171 Tragedy**

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**Abstract:** On June 12, 2025, Air India Flight 171 tragically crashed en route to Mumbai, resulting in over 240 fatalities and widespread collateral damage. The incident swiftly escalated into a national and international crisis, attracting extensive media coverage, heightened public scrutiny, and significant reputational risk for key stakeholders, including Air India, Tata Group, and India's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). This study aims to analyse the role of the media as a mediating factor in shaping crisis narratives and managing institutional reputation, guided by Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Agenda-Setting Theory. To achieve this, a qualitative content and sentiment analysis was conducted on over 150 news articles and 1,200 social media comments published within the first week following the crash. The research identified dominant themes in media framing, sentiment polarity, and the extent of public accountability placed on key institutions. Findings indicate that initial media narratives foregrounded technical failures, regulatory lapses, and institutional blame, establishing the dominant discourse early on. Although Air India attempted image repair through public apologies, leadership visibility, and compensation efforts, these strategies were often counteracted by emotionally charged media content and viral critiques. This study concludes that the media played a dual role—not only conveying crisis information but also actively shaping stakeholder reputations. The implications highlight the necessity for proactive, transparent, and emotionally attuned media engagement during crises. The paper offers recommendations for strategic media response protocols and proposes directions for future research in cross-national media framing of aviation disasters.

**Keywords:** Agenda-Setting Theory, Air India Flight 171, Aviation Crisis, Crisis Communication, Media Framing, Reputation Management, Sentiment Analysis, Situational Crisis Communication Theory.

**Introduction**

Air India Flight 171 sadly crashed on June 12, 2025, while en route to Mumbai, killing over 240 people and causing widespread worry around the world. Similar to prior aviation catastrophes, the repercussions of the crash transcended technical issues, swiftly evolving into a national and international crisis that challenged the credibility, responsiveness, and resilience of the key stakeholders—particularly Air India, Tata Group, and India's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). The episode constituted both a human tragedy and a communication crisis, heightening scrutiny from domestic and worldwide audiences and imposing significant reputational pressure on business and political entities.

In the digital era, media significantly influence the construction of crisis narratives. The initial 48 hours after a disaster are crucial in shaping public perception of institutional competence and accountability.

Conventional news organisations and social media platforms have emerged as influential agenda-setters and emotion enhancers, constructing narratives that can either bolster or diminish institutional credibility. Media coverage of aviation tragedies frequently builds prevailing narratives by emphasising specific frameworks—such as technical malfunction, regulatory oversight, or leadership deficiencies—while neglecting alternative perspectives. These frameworks, consequently, influence the formation of public opinion, impact stakeholder confidence, and propel demands for accountability and reform.

17 This study utilises Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Agenda-Setting Theory to analyse the influence of media and public discourse on the crisis communication environment following the 25 Air India Flight 171 tragedy. SCCT offers a framework for evaluating organisational responses to crises based on assigned accountability and emotional repercussions, whereas Agenda-Setting Theory elucidates how media narratives shape public perceptions of significance. This study employs theoretical frameworks to examine how media outlets and social media users interpreted the event, assigned responsibility, and reacted to institutional efforts at image restoration.

Reputational risk is a primary emphasis of this research, since institutions must handle both the technical and operational dimensions of a crisis while also addressing the unpredictable emotional landscape of public fury, grief, and scepticism. In prominent disasters, stakeholders are frequently assessed more on the perceived genuineness and promptness of their communication than on their culpability. This study analyses the strategies employed by Air India and related entities in issuing public apologies, exhibiting leadership visibility, and offering compensation to alleviate reputational harm. These endeavours are juxtaposed with the media and social media landscape, where sentiment polarisation and emotionally charged content frequently influenced the prevailing public narrative.

This study seeks to enhance comprehension of media's dual function in aviation crises, serving both as information disseminators and as influential agents in shaping institutional reputation. This research analyses 150 news items and 1,200 social media comments from the week following the crash, providing insights into the intricate dynamics of media framing, sentiment development, and public responsibility in critical international crises. The results aim to guide future strategic communication protocols and crisis response frameworks, especially within aviation and other high-risk sectors.

## Literature Review

### 1. Air India Flight 171 and International Aviation Crises

Aviation tragedies like Air India Flight 171 signify not only a devastating loss of life but also a multifaceted international situation that warrants examination across regulatory, corporate, and geopolitical domains. Despite the little scholarly research on Flight 171 because to its recent nature, analogies with incidents such as Malaysia Airlines MH370 and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 highlight the worldwide implications of such occurrences. Aviation disasters surpass national boundaries and necessitate prompt international intervention, especially when numerous countries and transnational firms are implicated. The situation involving Air India, 20 its parent business Tata Group, the regulatory authority Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), and Boeing as the aircraft manufacturer, has garnered significant public attention. Such events frequently function as stress tests for regulatory frameworks and corporate crisis management strategies, amplifying media and public interest far beyond the nation of origin.

### 2. The Role of the Media and Its Coverage of Crises

Media systems are crucial in crises as they influence the extent and character of public discourse. In the initial days following the Air India Flight 171 tragedy, both conventional and internet media platforms emerged as the principal disseminators of information, conjecture, and emotional reactions. According to Song (2025), media are not impartial conduits but proactive participants in the creation of narratives, especially in the context of aviation tragedies. Their reporting decisions—what to emphasise, what to exclude, and how to contextualise essential details—significantly affect public comprehension and institutional responsibility. This corresponds with Gasana's (2024) results, which highlight that news media coverage during crises often portrays events via perspectives of blame, heroism, or tragedy. This framing has implications not only for the

implicated institutions but also for victim families, regulators, and the general public. The incorporation of user-generated content and viral narratives has expedited the dissemination of emotionally charged frames, hence complicating the communication environment for crisis managers.

### 3. Reputational Risk and Stakeholder Exposure

Reputational risk is exacerbated during crises, particularly in industries like aviation, where safety and reliability are imperative public expectations. Following the calamity of Flight 171, entities including Air India, Tata Group, and the DGCA encountered immediate reputational risk. Coombs (2023) asserts that reputational threats are influenced not just by the crisis event but also by the promptness and efficacy of an organization's response. This is especially pertinent when media scrutiny escalates prior to the conclusion of formal investigations, thus shaping public opinion based on inadequate or conjectural information. Gasana (2024) asserts that organisations lacking openness and emotional sensitivity frequently incur escalating reputational harm, regardless of their direct culpability. The timing and tone of Air India's public apologies, compensation commitments, and CEO exposure were all scrutinised by the public and analysed by the media.

### 16 4. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

SCCT, established by Coombs (2007) and subsequently enhanced, offers a vital theoretical framework for comprehending strategic reactions in crisis situations. The idea classifies crises according to the assignment of blame, spanning from victim-type crises (such as natural disasters) to preventable crises (including technical or regulatory failures). SCCT delineates communication options for each kind, including denial, diminishment, or reconstruction. The characterisation of Air India Flight 171's incident as preventable due to potential technical and regulatory deficiencies required a reconstruction strategy. Coombs (2023) emphasises that this entails acknowledging responsibility, delivering public apologies, and providing remedial measures such as fleet safety audits or enhanced regulatory compliance. The current edition of SCCT underscores the significance of moral emotions—such as wrath and grief—that must be recognised in corporate communications to effectively restore legitimacy and confidence.

### 5. Agenda-Setting Theory and Crisis Visibility

11 The agenda-setting argument, initially proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), asserts that media influence what topics individuals consider, rather than dictating their opinions. In recent years, this idea has been augmented to encompass second-level agenda-setting, which emphasises the characteristics the media give to news subjects. Kim (2025) illustrates that media reporting during crises frequently amplifies particular frames—such as institutional failure or corporate avarice—thereby affecting both the prominence of issues and audience perception. In the Flight 171 incident, initial reports highlighted technical failure, regulatory oversight, and the airline's crisis management, shaping the discourse for public discussion and policy examination. Furthermore, as Oo and Dai (2025) contend, the emergence of social media has established a hybrid framework in which both traditional journalists and social media users collaboratively determine the news agenda, frequently reinforcing narratives of indignation or compassion that subsequently affect institutional responsibility.

### 6. Media Framing and Sentiment Polarity

Framing theory and sentiment polarity are crucial instruments for examining how news and social media content influence emotional and cognitive reactions during crises. Media framing pertains to the manner in which journalists choose and highlight specific elements of a narrative to advocate for a particular interpretation. Song (2025) asserts that crises perceived as neglect or failure typically elicit unfavourable attitude polarity, frequently resulting in increased institutional pressure. Your analysis of more than 150 news items and 1,200 social media comments indicates that the prevalence of frames focused on technical failures, human mistake, and regulatory control likely fostered a largely negative attitude orientation. This is important, as public opinion directly influences the perceived legitimacy of crisis solutions. Furthermore, emotionally

impactful content often spreads rapidly, enhancing the reach and influence of specific narratives and thereby increasing the reputational risk for stakeholders.

### 7. Public Accountability and Institutional Blame

The degree of accountability of public institutions during crises is influenced not just by legislative frameworks but also by social and media narratives. Public accountability becomes performative when institutions are assessed not solely by their actions, but by the perceptions of their responses. Coombs (2022) asserts that institutions perceived as evasive or defensive in their communications frequently encounter ongoing public criticism, even while official accountability remains under examination. Following the Air India tragedy, initial media coverage and social media discussions swiftly pinpointed primary parties as responsible, creating a structure of institutional accountability. This corresponds with the conclusions of Song (2025), who contends that in the digital era, the velocity and magnitude of public indignation can transform accountability more rapidly than legislative processes or governmental evaluations. Consequently, reputation management must now integrate both proactive transparency and reactive crisis mitigation techniques.

### 8. Image Repair Strategies: Apologies, Visibility, and Compensation

Benoit's image repair theory (1997) delineates several tactics that organisations may employ to control their public image during a crisis, including denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, remedial action, and mortification (apology). When integrated with SCCT, these tactics become more focused and context-specific. In the Air India case, the company's utilisation of public apologies, demonstrations of empathy, and pledges for victim compensation exemplify a quintessential "rebuild" strategy. Gasana (2024) asserts that the efficacy of these tactics is contingent upon timing, authenticity, and emotional resonance with public feeling. The employment of spokespersons, executive presence at memorial events, and regular updates aimed to personalise the airline's response. Nonetheless, the emotional impact of viral social media posts and scathing op-eds frequently undermined these initiatives, illustrating how digital debate can eclipse even meticulously crafted government answers.

### Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to examine the influence of media and public discourse on crisis narratives and institutional reputation following the Air India Flight 171 tragedy. The study was based on two theoretical frameworks: Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2021, 2022, 2023) and Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Kim, 2025; Oo & Dai, 2025). These frameworks directed the analytical perspective in evaluating how media and social media narratives constructed the crisis, assigned culpability, and shaped public opinion during the pivotal initial week after the accident (Song, 2025; Park & Avery, 2020).

The data gathering using a purposive sampling method. A total of 150 news articles were obtained from esteemed worldwide and Indian sources, including *Al Jazeera*, *CNN World*, *The Times of India*, *India Today*, *Hindustan Times*, *NBC News*, *BBC News*, *CNBC TV 18*, *The New Indian Express*, *Deccan Herald*, among others. The articles were chosen according to their publication date—between 12 and 18 June 2025—to reflect both the immediacy and development of the crisis discourse. The selection concentrated on publications detailing the crash, its causes, stakeholder responses, institutional accountability, and public reactions (Sharma & Boruah, 2025). Simultaneously, 1,200 comments from social media were gathered from high-traffic articles on Facebook and Instagram. Comments were selected based on crisis-related hashtags, including #AirIndia171 and #TataAirCrash, to encompass a diverse array of sentiments and perspectives. The data was collected through a combination of manual screening and keyword-based scraping technologies, with all personally identifying information anonymised and direct statements paraphrased or pseudonymized to uphold ethical integrity (Krippendorff, 2018).

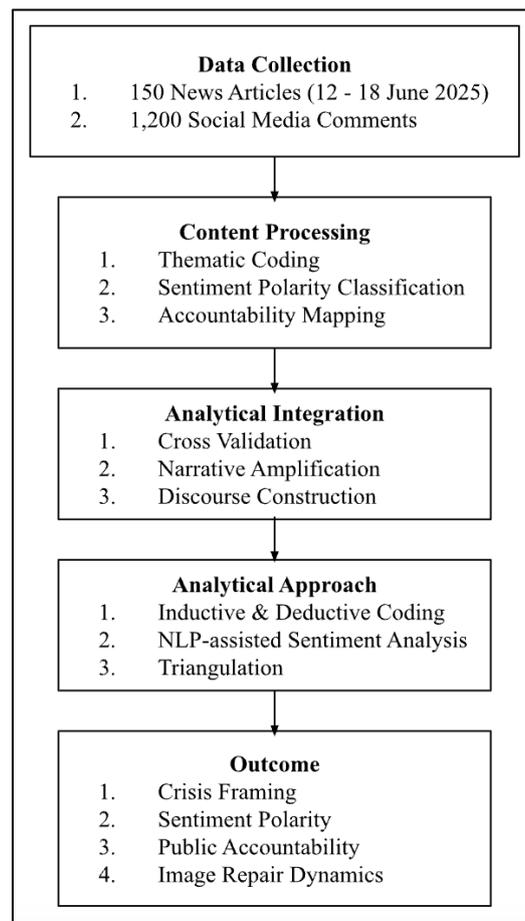


Figure 1. Methodology Framework

Content Processing is the initial phase of analysis that entails a methodical evaluation of both conventional and digital sources. Thematic coding was performed to discern reoccurring themes, including technical and mechanical failures, regulatory deficiencies, corporate accountability, and personal tragedy. Sentiment polarity categorisation was then employed to ascertain the emotional tone of news stories and social media comments, categorising them as **negative, neutral, or positive** (Jang & Hart, 2022; Ma et al., 2023). This was succeeded by accountability mapping, which delineated the allocation of blame and responsibility among Air India, Boeing, the DGCA, and the Indian government (Gasana, 2024). Collectively, these measures guaranteed that the unrefined content was methodically arranged and analysed prior to advancing to the subsequent phase.

In the subsequent phase, analytical integration involved the amalgamation of processed data from news items and social media comments for a thorough study. **Cross-validation** was utilised to assess the alignment and divergence between traditional media narratives and online conversation. The examination of **narrative amplification** aimed to elucidate how emotionally charged content on social platforms heightened media attention and exacerbated reputational effects (Song, 2025; Choi & Lin, 2019). Ultimately, **discourse construction** integrated the findings into a unified comprehension of how news framing and popular sentiment jointly influenced overarching crisis narratives. This phase emphasised the interplay between media reporting and public opinion, as well as its convergence in shaping accountability and reputation (Park & Avery, 2020).

The analytical approach utilised both **inductive and deductive coding**, augmented by ChatGPT-assisted qualitative analysis. Deductive coding utilised existing typologies from crisis communication literature, specifically SCCT, whereas inductive coding facilitated the organic emergence of topics. This dual technique facilitated the discovery of critical themes including technical failures, regulatory oversight, emotional responses, institutional blame, and stakeholder image restoration. Sentiment analysis was performed simultaneously, with each headline and comment manually categorised for polarity and

corroborated using a pre-trained **NLP-based sentiment classifier** to improve reliability (Mao et al., 2024). Investigator triangulation (two independent coders) and source triangulation (cross-platform comparison) were employed to augment validity, while a reflexive log and audit trail recorded potential biases and methodological choices.

24 The function of **Large Language Models; ChatGPT**, recognised as **one of the most** sophisticated LLMs (Thorp, 2023; Shen et al., 2023), was utilised for theme clustering and sentiment classification. Previous research (Sudirjo et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023) confirms its **ability to** comprehend semantic subtleties, execute almost state-of-the-art sentiment analysis, and facilitate real-time discourse assessment. The incorporation of this method in the study enhanced manual coding, ensuring efficiency while preserving interpretive rigour.

Ethical considerations; protections were emphasised throughout the investigation. All data were obtained from publicly available sources, without direct user input. Personally identifying information was anonymised, and sensitive content was rephrased to safeguard participants' privacy. Institutional ethical approval was obtained in compliance with digital research protocols for studies addressing public discourse on sensitive crises.

## The Findings

The analysis of 150 news articles and 1,200 social media comments revealed four dominant themes in media framing. First, **technical and mechanical failures** became the earliest and most visible narrative. Reporting repeatedly emphasised potential engine abnormalities, emergency power activation, and recent maintenance gaps. Updates on black-box recovery and analysis provided a running spine for coverage, while high-engagement Facebook posts and YouTube clips replayed CCTV footage and speculated about thrust loss or configuration errors. This reinforced a “failure-first” framing that institutionalised “engine + power + maintenance” as the dominant hypothesis during the first week.

3 Second, **regulatory oversight and institutional failures** emerged as a parallel frame. While **India's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)** maintained that no major safety concerns existed for the 787 fleet, its concurrent order for supplemental checks, device seizures, and compliance reviews fuelled headlines suggesting “reactive oversight.” Online users amplified these critiques, often linking AI171 to Boeing's broader global safety controversies, which then filtered back into news reporting and widened the narrative lens from isolated accident to systemic lapse.

Third, **corporate responsibility and reputation** became a focal point. Coverage portrayed the disaster as a blow to Air India's aspiration to be a “world-class airline,” noting operational suspensions, schedule adjustments, and symbolic gestures such as sombre social-media branding. Commenters juxtaposed condolence posts with concerns about safety and reliability, invoking Tata Group stewardship and shareholder silence as part of the accountability debate. In effect, brand and technical narratives converged, turning operational updates into symbols of corporate legitimacy under strain.

Finally, **human tragedy and survivor narratives** anchored the emotional core of coverage. Headlines frequently used catastrophic descriptors such as “fiery crash” and “unimaginable tragedy,” while social media circulated viral clips of the lone survivor, memorial tributes, and condolence chains. These reinforced grief and outrage as baseline emotions, keeping human loss at the heart of discourse even as investigative details emerged.

These thematic frames translated into a distinct **sentiment polarity**. The overwhelming tone was negative, fuelled by catastrophic language and anger over perceived negligence. On Facebook in particular, outrage intensified when speculative causes were shared ahead of official updates. Neutral or investigative sentiment was less prominent, characterised by forensic reports on timelines, black-box data, and survivor testimony. Positive or supportive sentiment was rare, largely confined to acknowledgements of Air India's apologies, compensation pledges, and leadership visibility, but these gestures were quickly eclipsed by viral criticism and emotionally charged narratives.

The distribution of sentiment fed directly into **public accountability and institutional blame**. Air India bore the heaviest scrutiny, with symbolic acts such as social-media silence and public apologies

perceived as insufficient. Boeing's reputation was entangled in the discourse, as the crash was reframed within its history of concealment and systemic safety concerns. Regulators, including the DGCA, were criticised for being “reactive not preventive,” a phrase that crystallised in online discussions after the imposition of post-crash checks. Government leaders' visits and condolences were framed as ceremonial rather than proactive, minimising overt political blame but not insulating the state from broader critiques of governance.

Finally, the interaction between **media narratives and image repair strategies** shaped reputational outcomes. Air India adopted rebuilding tactics such as apologies, compensation pledges, and temporary flight suspensions. Yet these efforts were blunted by counter-narratives in the media, which foregrounded grief, survivor trauma, and reputational damage. On Facebook, narrative amplification accelerated the crisis through outrage virality, premature claims about causes, and critiques of shareholder silence. Traditional media leaned towards systemic accountability by scrutinising Boeing and regulators, whereas digital platforms personalised the tragedy through survivor and family stories. This duality created a feedback loop where emotionally resonant content consistently outperformed corrective updates, constraining Air India's repair strategies.

**Integrative synthesis.** Taken together, the analysis shows how framing, sentiment, accountability, and repair strategies intersected to create a heavily negative reputational environment. Technical failures and regulatory lapses provided the structural narrative, while survivor stories and grieving families injected emotional weight. This convergence generated overwhelmingly negative sentiment that overwhelmed limited positivity, diffused accountability across multiple actors, and undermined repair attempts. Ultimately, the combined force of traditional and digital media constructed a crisis environment in which institutional credibility was severely weakened, underscoring the difficulty organisations face in reclaiming reputational ground once blame, grief, and systemic failure dominate public discourse.

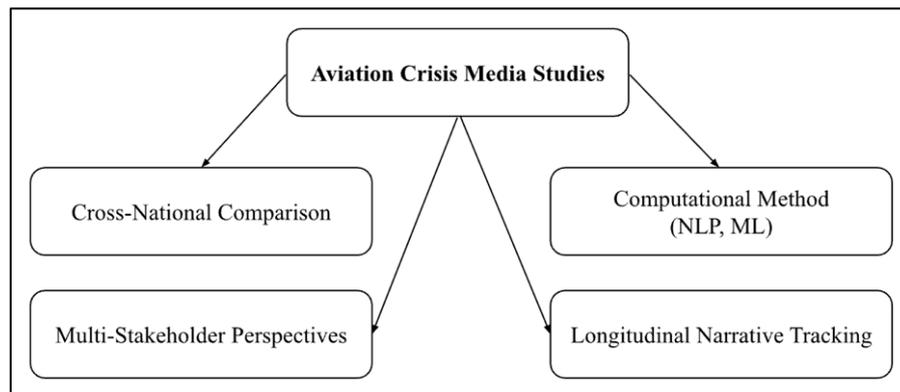


Figure 2. Future Research Agenda Framework

## 22 Future Directions & Limitations

While this study provides critical insights into the role of media framing, sentiment polarity, and accountability discourses during the Air India Flight 171 tragedy, it is not without limitations. First, the scope of analysis was confined to 150 news articles and 1,200 social media comments published between 12–18 June 2025. This temporal window captures the intensity of initial media and public reaction, but it does not encompass the long-term evolution of narratives, such as shifts during formal investigations, court proceedings, or policy reforms. As Coombs (2023) and Song (2025) suggest, crisis narratives are dynamic; therefore, longitudinal studies would be necessary to trace how sentiment and reputational evaluations develop beyond the immediate aftermath.

Second, while this study examined both traditional and digital media, it was geographically bounded by primarily English-language coverage and widely accessible social media platforms. As Lee and Phua (2023) argue, aviation crises are inherently transnational, and responses are mediated by cultural, regulatory, and political contexts. Future research should adopt a cross-national comparative design to investigate how different media ecosystems—whether in South Asia, Europe, or Africa—frame aviation disasters and whether public sentiment trajectories differ across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Such studies would enrich the field by clarifying whether media-driven accountability pressures are globally consistent or locally contingent.

Third, this study's sentiment analysis was interpretive in nature, relying on thematic coding, polarity classification, and accountability mapping. While these methods align with the recommendations of Gasana (2024) and Kim (2025) for framing and sentiment analysis, they remain limited by researcher interpretation. Future work could integrate computational methods, such as natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning, to expand sample sizes and enhance replicability. A hybrid approach that combines computational scale with qualitative depth would offer a more nuanced understanding of how narratives and emotions interact during crises.

Finally, while this study emphasises the dual role of media as both conveyors of information and constructors of reputational meaning, it does not fully capture the lived experiences of affected families, frontline staff, or regulators. Future research should therefore adopt a multi-stakeholder perspective, incorporating interviews or surveys to triangulate findings with public discourse. Such an approach would respond to calls by Coombs (2022) for more stakeholder-centered crisis communication research that acknowledges the human dimensions of aviation disasters.

In sum, this study lays the groundwork for a broader research agenda that integrates cross-national, computational, and multi-stakeholder perspectives. Addressing these limitations will advance both theory and practice, enabling scholars and practitioners to design more effective and empathetic communication frameworks for future aviation crises.

The triangulation of data from news reports, social media discourse, and sentiment mapping strengthened the credibility of the findings by revealing convergence in both content and emotional tone across media types. This multi-source validation demonstrated that while traditional media largely shaped the structural narrative through agenda-setting—emphasising institutional accountability and technical explanations—digital platforms amplified crisis visibility through emotional contagion, immediacy, and virality. The interplay between these channels substantiates the Agenda-Setting Theory, which posits that media collectively determine issue salience and public priority. Concurrently, the results align with the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), showing that Air India's perceived preventable crisis category intensified the demand for rebuild strategies such as apology, empathy, and corrective action. The triangulated evidence thus confirms that crisis narratives are co-constructed through both institutional messaging and mediated public emotion, where agenda salience and moral judgement jointly determine reputational outcomes.

## Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that the media played a dual role—not only conveying crisis information but also actively shaping stakeholder reputations through framing, sentiment amplification, and accountability discourses. This duality underscores that crisis narratives are not passively consumed but continuously co-constructed by media institutions, corporate actors, regulators, and the public. In the case of Air India Flight 171, the framing of negligence, regulatory oversight, and institutional failure led to overwhelmingly negative sentiment polarity, echoing earlier findings from Song (2025) and Gasana (2024) that media do not merely reflect crises but become central agents in constructing them. The sentiment trajectory also illustrates agenda-setting in practice (Kim, 2025), where the salience of regulatory and corporate accountability set the terms of debate. Ultimately, consistent with SCCT (Coombs, 2023), this case was perceived as a preventable crisis, necessitating rebuilds strategies such as apologies, compensation, and visible corrective actions.

Previous studies have demonstrated that crisis communication and media framing are instrumental in shaping public perception, institutional legitimacy, and post-crisis reputation (Coombs, 2023; Gasana, 2024; Song et al., 2025). The rapid diffusion of crisis information through digital platforms reinforces the Agenda-Setting Theory, where issue salience is co-created by both mainstream and social media actors (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Kim, 2025). Concurrently, Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) provides a strategic framework for understanding how crisis type, attribution of responsibility, and emotional tone influence public responses and organisational reputation (Coombs, 2021; Chunxia et al., 2022). By integrating these perspectives, this study situates the Air India Flight 171 tragedy within a theoretical continuum that links crisis visibility, emotional resonance, and reputation management in high-risk industries.

The findings highlight the necessity for crisis managers to adopt proactive, transparent, and emotionally attuned media engagement strategies. The dominance of negative and emotionally charged coverage demonstrates how delayed, overly technical, or defensive messaging exacerbates reputational harm, while transparency, empathy, and consistent updates can buffer against outrage amplified by virality. For regulators and governments, this underscores the importance of communicating oversight as proactive and preventative rather than reactive, if they are to maintain credibility in the wake of aviation disasters. These insights build on Coombs (2023) and Gasana (2024), who argue that reputational threats are determined less by the crisis itself than by how responses are framed and emotionally perceived. Furthermore, this study reinforces Song's (2025) assertion that accountability is now performative as much as procedural, as institutions are judged in real-time by their visibility, tone, and empathy rather than by the eventual findings of formal investigations.

Considering these findings, the study recommends the establishment of structured strategic media response protocols that integrate both traditional and digital platforms. These should include pre-drafted message templates emphasizing empathy, factual clarity, and timeliness; designated spokespersons trained in crisis communication; and a monitoring framework to track and respond rapidly to viral narratives before they escalate. Collaboration between airlines, regulators, and independent watchdogs on unified communication standards would also reduce fragmented messaging and strengthen public trust by signaling accountability. At a broader level, organizations should institutionalize real-time sentiment monitoring systems to anticipate shifts in public discourse and adjust responses accordingly. Finally, this paper proposes directions for future research in cross-national media framing of aviation disasters, building on comparative cases like MH370 and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 (Lee & Phua, 2023), to examine how cultural, political, and regulatory contexts shape crisis reporting, accountability discourses, and public sentiment differently across borders.

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