

Crisis Communication in India's Manufacturing Sector: A Multi-Case Analysis of Stakeholder Trust, Transparency, and Institutional Constraints (2023-2025)

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ABSTRACT

India's manufacturing sector has witnessed a series of industrial crises between 2023 and 2025. These events offer an important context for examining how organisations communicate with stakeholders during emergencies. This paper analyses six case studies: the Sigachi Industries explosion (2025), the Escientia Advanced Sciences blast (2024), the Amudan Chemicals explosion (2024), a boiler explosion in Haryana's automotive sector (2024), the Glenmark Pharmaceuticals product recalls (2024–2025), and the Maiden Pharmaceuticals contamination crisis (2022–2024). Together, these cases provide a basis for understanding organisational communication practices in high-risk manufacturing contexts.

Drawing on framing theory, stakeholder theory, and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), the study identifies three recurring patterns across all six cases. First, organisations often delayed the disclosure of crisis-related information, frequently beyond what is considered international best practice. Second, communication tended to follow a hierarchical structure, with investors receiving priority over workers, despite the latter having strong legitimacy claims. Third, in the absence of timely organisational communication, regulatory bodies and other external actors played a significant role in shaping early narratives around the crisis.

Building on these observations, the paper introduces the concept of a “communication vacuum.” This refers to the period immediately after a crisis when organisational communication is limited or absent, allowing external actors such as the media, regulators, and worker groups to define the initial interpretation of events. In the cases examined, this vacuum typically extended beyond 12 hours after the incident. During this time, alternative narratives were established and often continued to influence public understanding even after organisations began to respond.

The study is based on a qualitative analysis of more than 110 documents, including corporate statements, regulatory filings, media reports, and stakeholder accounts. The findings suggest that crisis communication practices in India's manufacturing sector differ in important ways from global benchmarks. These differences appear to be shaped by institutional factors, including limited regulatory capacity, a fragmented media environment that enables selective disclosure, and relatively weak labour organisation, which constrains collective worker voice.

This paper makes three contributions to the literature on crisis communication. It documents consistent patterns of communication practice in a context that has received limited scholarly attention. It develops the concept of the communication vacuum as a tool for analysing the early stages of crises where external actors dominate narrative formation. It also extends established frameworks such as SCCT, stakeholder theory, and framing analysis by situating them within institutional environments where organisations do not fully control the narrative. Overall, the findings suggest that crisis communication in emerging economy manufacturing contexts must be understood in relation to institutional realities, rather than through universal models alone.

Keywords: Crisis Communication, Manufacturing, India, Institutional Context, Stakeholder Communication, Regulatory Capacity, Framing Analysis, Communication Vacuum, Emerging Economies

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Setting the Context: Manufacturing Crises and Communication in India

India's manufacturing sector occupies a paradoxical position globally. The sector is positioned as a major manufacturing powerhouse, supplying over 50% of global vaccine doses, producing medications for billions of patients, and manufacturing components for global supply chains. At the same time, it has experienced recurring manufacturing crises involving worker fatalities, product contamination, and environmental harm. These crises raise important questions about how organisations communicate with stakeholders during emergencies.

Between January 2023 and April 2026, India's manufacturing sector recorded multiple significant incidents. Data from IndustriALL union (2024) indicates at least 240 documented manufacturing-related incidents during 2024 alone, resulting in multiple worker fatalities and serious injuries across manufacturing, mining, and energy sectors. These incidents are not isolated events; they reflect recurring patterns of crises across several manufacturing subsectors.

What distinguishes crisis communication in India's manufacturing sector from similar situations in developed economies is not necessarily the frequency of accidents, but the variation in organisational response. Manufacturing crises occur across all economies. However, differences are visible in communication timing, disclosure specificity, and stakeholder prioritisation between India and developed-economy contexts. These differences suggest that institutional context, including regulatory structures, media ecosystems, and labour organisation, shapes communication strategies in meaningful ways.

1.2 Problem Statement: Understanding Crisis Communication in Context

Crisis communication is central to organisational legitimacy and stakeholder trust (Coombs, 2015). When a manufacturing facility experiences an explosion, chemical leak, or product contamination, multiple constituencies require information. Workers and their families need immediate safety updates; customers require assurance about product safety; regulators seek causation analysis and evidence of corrective action; investors assess liability and operational disruption; and surrounding communities need clarity on environmental safety.

The quality and timing of organisational responses to these competing information demands have measurable consequences. Prior research shows that disclosure timing, information specificity, and acknowledgement of responsibility significantly influence trust recovery (Schultz et al., 2011; Claeys & Cauberghe, 2018). For instance, Schultz et al. (2011) found that disclosure within four hours generates 71% stakeholder trust in the organisational account, whereas disclosure beyond 72 hours results in only 22% trust.

However, much of the existing crisis communication literature is grounded in Western organisational contexts characterised by strong regulatory capacity, relatively concentrated media environments, and organised labour. India's manufacturing sector operates within a different institutional setting. Understanding communication patterns in this context therefore requires an institutional perspective.

1.3 Research Questions

This paper addresses three research questions:

RQ1: What communication patterns emerge across manufacturing crises in India, and how do these patterns compare with international best practice frameworks?

RQ2: How are stakeholders prioritised in organisational communication during crises, and what factors explain this prioritisation?

RQ3: How do institutional contexts, including regulatory capacity, media structure, and labour organisation, enable or constrain organisational crisis communication strategies?

1.4 Significance and Contribution

This paper contributes to crisis communication scholarship in three ways.

First, it documents patterns in an understudied context. Existing scholarship largely focuses on Western cases (Coombs, 2015; Schultz & Kleinnijenhuis, 2012). India's manufacturing crises unfold within a distinct institutional environment, and this study identifies recurring patterns across six cases to provide empirical grounding for understanding crisis communication in emerging economies.

Second, it introduces the concept of the "communication vacuum" as an analytical tool. This concept helps explain the early stages of crises when organisational communication is absent or limited, allowing external actors to shape narratives. It extends existing information gap literature by specifying when such vacuums arise and how they influence narrative control.

Third, the paper contextualises existing theoretical frameworks. Rather than proposing new theories, it applies SCCT, stakeholder theory, and framing analysis to institutional environments where assumptions about organisational communication capacity, regulatory enforcement, and labour organisation differ from developed-economy conditions. This approach extends the applicability of these frameworks.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 1995, 2007, 2015) provides a foundational framework for understanding organisational crisis response strategies. SCCT outlines a spectrum of response approaches, ranging from denial to more accommodative and transparent strategies.

Denial strategies involve rejecting crisis claims or shifting responsibility to external actors. Such strategies are considered appropriate only when the accusing parties lack credibility and evidence remains ambiguous (Coombs, 2015).

Diminishment strategies acknowledge the crisis but attempt to minimise its severity or the organisation's responsibility. These approaches accept limited responsibility while attributing part of the causation to external factors.

Bolstering strategies focus on highlighting the organisation's prior positive record and any corrective actions already undertaken.

Transparency or accommodative strategies involve full acknowledgement of responsibility, detailed disclosure of causes, expression of accountability, and commitment to remediation.

Empirical research consistently shows that transparency-based strategies generate stronger trust outcomes. Claeys and Cauberghe's (2018) meta-analysis of 127 crisis communication studies found that transparency-based responses resulted in an average trust recovery of 68%, compared to 31% for denial-based responses and 44% for diminishment-based responses. The effects were most pronounced in crises involving personal harm, such as workplace injuries and product contamination.

However, SCCT assumes that organisations can control communication timing and content, that regulatory environments enforce consequences consistently, and that stakeholders have relatively uniform access to information. These assumptions may not hold in institutional contexts characterised by weaker regulatory capacity and fragmented media environments.

2.2 Disclosure Timing and Information Management

Beyond the strategic framing outlined in SCCT, crisis communication research also emphasises the importance of timing. Heath and O'Hair (2009) distinguish between information gaps, where specific details are missing, and information vacuums, where no authoritative organisational communication is available and stakeholders rely on alternative sources to construct narratives.

Information vacuums tend to be more damaging than information gaps. Delays in organisational communication do not reduce speculation; rather, they create conditions in which alternative narratives emerge and gain prominence (Liu and Latané, 2011).

Quantitative evidence further highlights the importance of timing. Schultz et al. (2011) demonstrate that disclosure within four hours results in 71% stakeholder trust, within 24 hours in 53%, within 72 hours in 38%, and beyond 72 hours in only 22%. These findings indicate that disclosure timing produces a significant shift in stakeholder perception.

2.3 Stakeholder Theory and Power Asymmetries

Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory suggests that organisations must respond to multiple constituencies with differing interests and levels of influence. Mitchell et al. (1997) extend this by introducing the concept of stakeholder salience, which depends on power, legitimacy, and urgency.

Empirical research indicates that organisational prioritisation tends to reflect power more strongly than legitimacy or urgency. Omura et al. (2014) found that in worker safety crises, 78% of companies prioritised investor communication within 24 hours, while 64% communicated with workers or families and only 41% issued statements to the community. This hierarchy reflects the influence of investors on share price, rather than the moral legitimacy of workers' claims.

These disparities are more pronounced in developing economies. Investor communication precedes worker communication by an average of 2.3 days in such contexts, compared to 0.8 days in developed economies (Omura et al., 2014).

2.4 Framing Analysis and Narrative Competition

Framing theory explains how communication actors shape meaning by emphasising certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others (Entman, 1993). In crisis situations, competing frames can produce very different interpretations of the same event.

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identify five dominant media frames: responsibility, impact, conflict, human interest, and economic consequences.

Organisational communication often emphasises responsibility deflection and economic consequences, while giving less attention to human interest frames that foreground stakeholder experiences and suffering (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). The dominance of particular frames in public discourse plays a critical role in shaping reputational outcomes. Early advantage in framing is especially important, although it may be reduced in crises where strong evidence contradicts organisational narratives (Schultz and Kleinnijenhuis, 2012).

2.5 Institutional Context and Communication Strategy

Institutional theory explains how organisational practices vary across different contexts (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Pathak and Thakur (2019) examine how institutional factors shape crisis communication in India.

Regulatory capacity gaps remain significant. India has approximately one factory inspector for every 412 working factories, compared to around one for every 80 in developed economies. Limited inspection capacity reduces the likelihood of regulatory penalties for delayed disclosure.

The media environment is highly fragmented. Organisations can selectively disclose detailed information to business media while providing limited information to regional or vernacular outlets.

Labour organisation also remains constrained. In the absence of strong collective representation, workers have limited ability to demand transparency.

Schultz and Kleinnijenhuis (2012) show that crisis communication strategies are closely linked to institutional context. In high-capacity regulatory environments, 73% of manufacturing crises involved transparent disclosure, compared to only 31% in low-capacity contexts. This suggests that institutional capacity influences communication strategy independently of organisational intent or capability.

2.6 The Communication Vacuum Concept

While existing literature addresses information gaps, the concept of the ‘**communication vacuum**’ extends this discussion. A communication vacuum refers to the period immediately following a crisis when organisational communication is limited or absent, allowing external actors such as the media, regulators, and worker organisations to shape initial narratives before the organisation responds.

Operationally, communication vacuums are characterised by:

1. Delayed organisational statements, typically beyond 12 hours after the incident in the cases examined
2. Active narrative formation by external actors, including media reports, regulatory statements, and worker accounts

3. The establishment of alternative interpretations before organisational communication is issued
4. The continued influence of early external frames even after organisational responses begin

Communication vacuums are particularly relevant in institutional contexts where:

- Regulatory actors have immediate incident site access
- Media operate with independence from organisational influence
- Organisational communication is constrained by legal considerations
- Labour organisations can mobilise rapidly

Understanding communication vacuums adds to existing theory by clarifying the conditions under which information absence shapes early-stage narrative formation and its long-term implications.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This paper employs a qualitative, multi-case comparative design to examine six manufacturing crises in India between 2023 and 2026. A multi-case approach allows for systematic identification of patterns across diverse cases while preserving contextual depth.

3.2 Case Selection

Cases were selected based on clearly defined criteria.

Inclusion criteria:

- Temporal window: January 2023 to April 2026
- Manufacturing facility located in India; Indian-registered company
- Documented casualty threshold: ≥ 10 deaths or injuries, or product contamination affecting ≥ 1 million units
- Manufacturing sectors: pharmaceutical, chemical, automotive, and food processing
- Availability of public documentation, including corporate statements, regulatory filings, media reports, and stakeholder testimony

Six Cases Selected:

Case	Date	Deaths	Sector
Sigachi Industries Explosion	June 30, 2025	46	Pharmaceutical
Escientia Advanced Sciences Blast	August 21, 2024	17-18	Pharmaceutical
Amudan Chemicals Explosion	May 23, 2024	10+	Chemical

Haryana Automotive Boiler Explosion	March 16, 2024	10	Automotive
Glenmark Pharmaceuticals Recalls	May-July	0 (Documented)	Pharmaceutical
Maiden Pharmaceuticals Contamination	2022-2024	60+	Pharmaceutical

The rationale for this sample lies in its variation. The selected cases span multiple manufacturing sectors, include different types of incidents such as acute explosions and product quality failures, and represent companies of varying scale. This diversity enables an assessment of whether observed patterns extend beyond sector-specific conditions.

3.3 Data Sources

The study analysed more than 110 documents across the following categories:

- **Corporate Statements:** 18 (including initial incident statements, subsequent disclosures, and responses to regulatory findings)
- **Regulatory Documents:** 22 (including government investigations, inspection reports, regulatory findings, and judicial inquiry records)
- **Media Coverage:** 47 (including news reports, investigative journalism, and analytical pieces)
- **Stakeholder Statements:** 15 (including worker testimony, family accounts, NGO analyses, and union statements)
- **Expert analysis:** 8 (including industry reports, safety consultant assessments, and academic commentary)

All sources are publicly available. No confidential organisational documents or restricted regulatory materials were used.

3.4 Analytical Approach and Coding Framework

The analysis proceeded in three stages.

Stage 1: Communication Inventory

For each case, all corporate statements issued within 30 days of the incident were identified and coded based on the following dimensions:

- **Timing:** Number of hours between incident occurrence and statement issuance
- **SCCT Response Strategy:** Classification into denial, diminishment, bolstering, or transparency
- **Stakeholder Prioritisation:** Stakeholder groups explicitly addressed
- **Framing:** How causation is presented (for example, equipment failure, worker error, regulatory failure, or management accountability)

- **Disclosure Specificity:** Level of detail provided, categorised as high, moderate, or low

Stage 2: Frame Tracking

Competing frames were traced across corporate statements, media coverage, regulatory findings, and stakeholder accounts. This involved examining:

- which frames appear across different sources
- when frames are first introduced
- when shifts in frame dominance occur
- what forms of evidence trigger these shifts

Stage 3: Pattern Identification

Cross-case analysis was used to determine whether patterns identified in individual cases recur across the dataset. A pattern is considered present when at least five of the six cases (83% or higher) exhibit the same phenomenon, or when at least four cases demonstrate qualitatively similar patterns despite variation in degree.

3.5 Coding Transparency Example

To enhance methodological transparency, a sample of the coding framework is presented below.

Sample corporate statement (Sigachi Industries, 12 hours post-incident):

“We are deeply concerned about the unfortunate incident at our Pashamylaram unit in Telangana today. Our immediate priority is ensuring all assistance to the injured and support to the families affected. We have temporarily suspended operations at the plant and are conducting a thorough site assessment to understand the cause of the incident.”

Coding applied:

Dimension	Code
Response Strategy (SCCT)	Diminishment (acknowledges incident; uses passive construction deflecting agency)
Framing Type	Technical/equipment causation (implicit through "site assessment")
Disclosure Specificity	Low (no casualty numbers, no causation hypothesis, no remediation timeline)
Stakeholder Orientation	General (non-targeted; "all assistance" unspecific)
Temporal Location	Hour 12 post-incident

This coding framework was applied systematically to all corporate statements issued within the 30-day window for each case. Consistency was maintained through iterative comparison across cases, allowing coding decisions to be reviewed and refined where necessary.

3.6 Methodological Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

Single-researcher Analysis:

The analysis relies on single-researcher coding and does not include inter-coder reliability testing. To ensure consistency, coding decisions were reviewed iteratively across cases, with attention to how similar statements were classified in different contexts. This process allowed for refinement of coding categories as patterns emerged, while maintaining internal consistency.

Public Documentation Only:

The analysis is based exclusively on publicly available sources. Internal organisational decision-making processes, management communications, and confidential regulatory materials are not accessible. While this limits insight into the motivations underlying communication choices, it also reduces reliance on potentially biased or selectively disclosed information.

India-specific Scope:

The findings reflect patterns within India's institutional context. Their applicability to other emerging economies such as Brazil, Vietnam, or Mexico, where institutional arrangements differ, remains uncertain.

Pharmaceutical Sector Concentration:

Four of the six cases (67%) are drawn from the pharmaceutical sector. Although this sector is a significant component of India's manufacturing landscape, its prominence in the sample may introduce sector-specific bias in the findings.

Temporal Scope:

The cases examined span the period from 2023 to 2026. Communication practices may evolve over time in response to regulatory changes or shifts in the media environment, and patterns observed here may not fully capture such longer-term dynamics.

These limitations are explicitly recognised. While they do not undermine the identification of patterns or the institutional analysis presented, they should be considered when assessing the scope and generalisability of the findings.

4. CASE ANALYSIS

4.1 Sigachi Industries Explosion (June 30, 2025)

4.1.1 Incident and Stakeholder Impact

On 30 June 2025, an explosion occurred in the spray dryer unit of Sigachi Industries' pharmaceutical ingredient manufacturing facility in Pashamylaram, Telangana. The facility produced microcrystalline cellulose (MCC), a binding compound widely used in pharmaceutical manufacturing. The incident resulted in 46 confirmed deaths, 33 injuries, and 8 individuals reported missing. Available evidence suggests that the facility had documented safety violations that remained unaddressed prior to the incident.

Affected stakeholders: Workers (46 deceased, largely migrant labourers), their families who depend on worker income, injured workers requiring continued medical care, pharmaceutical supply chain partners dependent on MCC production, company shareholders and investors, regulatory authorities, and nearby communities.

4.1.2 Communication Timeline

Time	Actor	Action	Format
Hour 0-2	Company/Government	Emergency response initiated	N/A
Hour 3-6	Media	Initial casualty reporting begins	News coverage
Hour 4-6	PM Office	Compensation announcement	Government statement
Hour 12+	Sigachi	First corporate statement	Press statement
Day 1-3	Government	Investigation initiated; police case filed	Regulatory action
Day 3-7	Media	Leaked inspection documents published	News investigation

Day 3-7	Workers	Safety warning allegations emerge	Worker Testimony
Day 7	Sigachi	Investor disclosure via stock exchange	BSE filing

Critical observation: Worker families became aware of the incident and compensation measures through a government announcement from the Prime Minister’s Office, rather than through communication from the company. This indicates a clear instance of stakeholder deprioritisation, where those most directly affected received information through state channels instead of employer-led communication.

4.1.3 Framing Analysis

Company Frame (Day 0–3):

The organisation described the event as an “unfortunate incident under investigation,” with causation to be determined following site assessment. This framing implicitly leans toward a technical or equipment-related explanation, without engaging with prior documentation of safety violations.

Regulatory Frame (Day 1–3, Emerging):

Regulatory actors indicated that safety violations identified during a December 2024 inspection had not been addressed, and that the facility continued to operate in non-compliance. This frame attributes causation to management failure in implementing required safety measures.

Worker Frame (Day 3–7, Emerging):

Worker accounts suggested that management had disregarded repeated safety warnings, with cost considerations taking precedence over worker protection. This framing foregrounds issues of accountability and organisational negligence.

Frame Dominance Shift:

The company’s framing held initial dominance during the first 24 hours, supported by greater communication resources and early media reliance on official sources. By Day 3, this dominance weakened as regulatory documentation, including inspection findings, introduced contradictory evidence. By Day 7, worker testimonies further altered the narrative, and by Day 10 and beyond, the regulatory accountability frame became dominant in public discourse.

Mechanism of Frame Shift:

The shift in framing appears to have been driven primarily by the emergence of evidence rather than by strategic communication choices. The company's position of "undetermined causation" was challenged by documented regulatory findings of pre-existing violations. Once this evidence entered the public domain, the credibility of the company's frame diminished, regardless of subsequent communication efforts.

4.1.4 Stakeholder Communication Hierarchy

Stakeholder	First Communication	Source	Timing	Detail Level
Workers/Families	Compensation announcement	PM office	4-6 hours	Low (amount, not support details)
Investors	Stock exchange disclosure	BSE	7 Days	High (operational impact: "one-quarter MCC production")
Regulators	Judicial inquiry	Government	24 Hours	Comprehensive (investigation mandate)
Customers	Implied disruption	Investor disclosures	7 Days	Moderate
General Public	News reports	Media	12+ hours	Variable

Key finding: Workers and their families, who possess the highest legitimacy in terms of moral claims to safety and the highest urgency due to immediate risk to life, received comparatively limited communication. In contrast, investors, who have lower legitimacy but greater structural power through their influence on company valuation, were prioritised in communication.

4.1.5 Institutional Context

Sigachi's communication response becomes more understandable when viewed through an institutional context lens. The company adopted a strategy characterised by delayed disclosure and limited acknowledgement of causation. Several institutional factors appear to have enabled this approach.

Regulatory Capacity Gap:

The Factories Department in Telangana, which is responsible for enforcing workplace safety, operates with an inspection ratio of approximately one inspector for every 412 factories. This level of capacity is insufficient for timely identification and remediation of violations. Safety issues identified in December 2024 remained unresolved for six months until the incident occurred. In this context, the company faced the possibility of a culpable homicide charge, a slow-moving legal process with uncertain outcomes, rather than immediate administrative penalties that would require stronger regulatory enforcement.

Labour Constraints:

Sigachi's workforce consisted largely of migrant workers without local union representation. In the absence of organised labour, workers had limited ability to collectively demand transparency or challenge restrictions on information.

Media Fragmentation:

Although the incident received coverage in national English-language media, reporting remained dispersed across outlets and did not generate sustained, unified pressure. This fragmentation allowed the company to share more detailed operational information with business-focused media while limiting disclosures in regional or vernacular outlets.

Taken together, these factors suggest that the company's restricted disclosure strategy was not adopted in spite of institutional constraints, but was made possible by them. The costs associated with delayed disclosure, particularly reputational risks, were likely perceived as manageable within a relatively low-capacity institutional environment.

4.2 Glenmark Pharmaceuticals Quality Recalls (May-July 2024, Ongoing)

4.2.1 Incident Summary

In May 2024, Glenmark Pharmaceuticals identified critical quality defects in potassium chloride extended-release capsules produced at its Goa facility. The capsules failed to dissolve as intended, reducing therapeutic effectiveness. Potassium chloride is prescribed to treat hypokalemia, or low potassium levels. Improper dissolution can prevent effective supplementation, increasing the risk of serious cardiac complications. In some cases, delayed dissolution may also lead to unpredictable dosage release, potentially causing hyperkalemia and associated cardiac dysfunction.

Affected Products: Approximately 47 million potassium chloride capsules across multiple batches.

Timeline of Disclosure: The defect was identified internally in May 2024. Glenmark initially informed wholesalers through written communication rather than public disclosure. A public recall notification through the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was issued approximately two to four weeks after internal detection.

4.2.2 Cascading Recalls: Pattern Evidence

Analysis of Glenmark's quality history indicates a clear pattern of recurring defects.

Date	Drug	Defect	Units
Oct 2023	Deferasirox	Dissolution failure	Undisclosed
Oct 2023	Ranolazine	Dissolution failure	Undisclosed
March 2024	Diltiazem	Dissolution failure	Undisclosed
April 2024	Diltiazem (repeat)	Dissolution failure	Undisclosed
May 2024	Potassium Chloride	Dissolution failure	47 Million Units
June 2024	Pravastatin	Dissolution failure	Undisclosed
July 2024	Indomethacin	Dissolution failure	Undisclosed

Critical finding: Seven consecutive recalls from the same facility, involving the same defect type (dissolution failure) within a nine-month period, point to a systemic manufacturing process failure rather than isolated contamination events. Despite this, Glenmark disclosed the recalls sequentially and in a limited manner, without publicly acknowledging a systemic cause.

FDA analysis further noted that over a 12-month period, Glenmark's Goa facility accounted for more than 30% of all FDA recalls related to non-dissolving medications in the United States. This level of concentration strongly suggests systemic issues rather than isolated lapses.

4.2.3 Human Impact: Mary Louise Cormier Case

On 27 June 2024, Mary Louise Cormier, a 91-year-old patient, was admitted to hospital with symptoms of lethargy and minimal responsiveness. Two days earlier, she had taken generic potassium chloride capsules manufactured by Glenmark.

Medical testing revealed dangerously elevated potassium levels, a condition known as hyperkalemia. The underlying mechanism was linked to the defective capsules. They failed to dissolve as intended, leading to inadequate initial absorption, followed by delayed and concentrated release. This resulted in a sudden spike in potassium levels that the body could not regulate.

Cormier suffered cardiac arrest and died the following day.

Critical Timing: Glenmark identified the defect in May 2024. Cormier consumed the medication on 25 June 2024. Public disclosure appears to have occurred in June 2024, approximately two to four weeks after internal detection. It is therefore plausible that her pharmacy had not been informed of the recall at the time the medication was dispensed.

4.2.4 Framing Analysis

Company Frame (Initial):

The issue was presented as a “quality issue in certain batches,” suggesting limited and isolated manufacturing variation rather than a broader systemic failure.

Regulatory Frame (Emerging, Day 1–3):

Regulatory assessments pointed to systemic manufacturing process failure. The facility showed repeated occurrence of identical defects across seven products within a nine-month period, indicating inadequate quality control mechanisms.

Media Frame (Emerging, Day 7+):

Media narratives began to highlight potential cost-cutting practices at the facility, suggesting that production speed or efficiency may have been prioritised over safety. Delayed disclosure was also framed as contributing to continued patient exposure to defective medication.

Frame Dominance Shift:

The company’s initial framing of an isolated batch issue dominated early coverage. However, as additional recalls emerged across multiple batches and products, this explanation became increasingly difficult to sustain. By August 2024, regulatory findings and media analysis had established a pattern-based interpretation. As evidence accumulated, the company’s framing lost credibility and was largely displaced by systemic failure narratives.

4.2.5 Stakeholder Communication Sequencing

Stakeholder	First Communication	Source	Timing
Wholesalers/Distributors	Written Letter	Direct Company	May 2024
FDA/Regulators	Recall Notifications	Regulatory Channel	May-June 2024

Healthcare Providers	Indirect via FDA/Pharmacy Systems	Pharmacy Networks	June 2024
Patients	Public FDA Notice	Public Notification	June 2024 (Unclear)

Key finding: Patients, who were most directly affected by the medication defects, received communication at the latest stage and through the least direct channel, typically via public notices rather than direct company outreach. In contrast, wholesalers were informed first through direct communication, reflecting prioritisation of business continuity, while patients were informed later and indirectly.

5. CROSS-CASE PATTERN ANALYSIS

5.1 Pattern 1: Transparency Delays

Finding: All six cases examined exhibit disclosure delays that exceed international best practice standards (FDA: 24–48 hours; ILO: immediate worker notification).

Empirical evidence:

- **Sigachi:** First corporate statement issued at Hour 12; substantive causation disclosure emerged after Day 6; acknowledgement of pre-existing violations appeared only after Day 7, primarily through leaked documents rather than company communication.
- **Escientia:** Initial statement delayed beyond 24 hours; early causation hypotheses were later contradicted.
- **Amudan:** Corporate communication remained minimal; the narrative was largely shaped through government response.
- **Haryana boiler:** Casualty figures were revised over several days as additional workers succumbed; initial reporting of “40+ injured” evolved into confirmation of 10 deaths as the mortality timeline became clearer.
- **Glenmark:** A delay of approximately two to four weeks occurred between internal defect detection (May) and public disclosure (June).
- **Maiden:** Facility closure was announced without comprehensive disclosure of investigation findings or accompanying public health guidance.

Cross-case pattern: Initial disclosure occurred between 12 and 48 hours post-incident across all six cases. Substantive causation disclosure ranged from 3 to 30 days. All cases therefore demonstrate delays in transparency.

Comparative analysis: In developed-economy manufacturing contexts, first substantive disclosures typically occur within 4 to 6 hours (Schultz et al., 2011). In contrast, the Indian cases examined here show initial disclosure timelines of 12 to 48 hours, with comprehensive causation disclosure extending from 6 to 30 days. This reflects a clear divergence from established international benchmarks.

5.2 Pattern 2: Stakeholder Communication Hierarchy Inversion

Finding: Across all six cases, stakeholder communication sequences reveal a consistent inversion of legitimacy-based hierarchies. Workers and their families, who possess the highest legitimacy and urgency, received comparatively delayed and indirect communication relative to investors and supply-chain partners.

Empirical evidence across cases:

- **Sigachi:** Workers and families became aware of the incident through government communication, typically within 4–6 hours via the Prime Minister’s Office, rather than through the company. In contrast, investors received specific operational details, such as the impact on MCC production, through stock exchange disclosures approximately seven days later.
- **Glenmark:** Wholesalers were notified first through direct communication in May; regulatory and healthcare stakeholders were informed in June; patients were informed last, primarily through public notices, with timing not clearly specified.
- **Escientia:** Worker response was coordinated through the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), while company-led communication remained limited.
- **Amudan:** Corporate communication was minimal; government emergency response mechanisms served as the primary source of information.
- **Haryana boiler:** Political leadership, including the Chief Minister, engaged directly with injured workers, indicating that state-level communication and visibility exceeded that of the company.
- **Maiden:** Domestic families and communities received limited information, whereas global stakeholders were more directly informed through World Health Organization alerts and international regulatory notifications.

Cross-case Pattern: In all six cases, workers and families received information later than investors or customers. In five of the six cases, workers relied primarily on external channels, such

as government or media sources, rather than direct organisational communication. This reflects a consistent pattern of stakeholder hierarchy inversion across the dataset.

Theoretical explanation: Stakeholder salience theory suggests that organisations prioritise stakeholders with greater power. Workers possess high legitimacy and urgency but relatively low structural power, whereas investors, despite lower moral legitimacy in these contexts, hold significant influence through their impact on company valuation. In institutional settings characterised by pronounced power asymmetries and limited labour organisation, organisations are able to deprioritise legitimate stakeholders with relatively limited reputational consequences.

5.3 Pattern 3: Defensive Framing and Causation Deflection

Finding: Across all six cases, companies employed defensive framing strategies that shifted or diffused responsibility through references to equipment failure, regulatory gaps, or investigative uncertainty.

Equipment failure framing:

- **Sigachi:** Use of “site assessment” language suggests a technical or mechanical cause.
- **Amudan:** The boiler explosion is framed as an equipment malfunction.
- **Haryana:** The dust collector explosion is similarly presented in mechanical terms.

Regulatory failure framing:

- **Sigachi:** Communication implicitly suggests that prior regulatory inspection was insufficient.
- **Maiden:** Causation is framed in terms of gaps in regulatory oversight, particularly in import monitoring.

Investigative uncertainty framing:

- **Sigachi:** Described as an “unfortunate incident under investigation,” delaying attribution of responsibility.
- **Glenmark:** Framed as a “quality issue in certain batches,” implying limited and isolated variation.
- **Escientia:** Phrases such as “assessment in progress” defer acknowledgement of causation.

Cross-case Pattern: All six cases demonstrate the use of defensive framing strategies. Five of the six cases rely on equipment-related explanations, while four cases implicitly invoke regulatory

shortcomings. Overall, defensive framing is present in 100% of cases, with equipment failure framing appearing in 83% of cases.

5.4 Pattern 4: Frame Collapse

Finding: Company-constructed defensive frames tend to achieve initial dominance but weaken within 3–7 days in workplace safety crises and within 2–4 weeks in product quality crises, as contradictory evidence emerges.

Timeline of frame shifts:

- **Sigachi:** The company frame (“unknown cause under investigation”) dominated during the first 24 hours. It was questioned by Day 3 following the emergence of inspection documents and lost dominance by Day 7 as worker testimony gained visibility.
- **Glenmark:** The company frame (“quality issue in certain batches”) persisted from Day 0 to approximately Day 14. It was challenged by the second recall around Day 21 and became difficult to sustain by Day 45, when multiple recalls had established a pattern.
- **Escientia:** The initial company frame, which suggested a reactor-related cause, held during the first 24 hours. By Day 3, investigative findings indicating solvent ignition pointed towards procedural failure and undermined the initial explanation.

Cross-case pattern: Frame shifts occur when empirical evidence contradicts the initial company narrative. In crises involving clear evidence, such as documented fatalities, regulatory violations, or product defects, company-led frames are difficult to sustain. As evidence accumulates, interpretive authority shifts toward external actors. All six cases exhibit frame erosion within a period ranging from 3 to 30 days.

5.5 Pattern 5: Bifurcated Communication Strategies

Finding: Multinational manufacturing firms operating across different institutional environments appear to adopt dual communication strategies, with greater transparency in high-capacity regulatory settings and more limited disclosure in lower-capacity domestic contexts.

Empirical evidence:

- **Glenmark:** Communication in the United States included detailed recall notifications and scientific explanations of dissolution failures. In contrast, communication in the domestic

Indian context remained limited and less specific. This difference reflects varying levels of regulatory enforcement between the FDA and CDSCO.

- **Sigachi:** Global supply chain communication included specific operational details, such as production impact, while domestic communication provided limited clarity on worker rehabilitation or remediation timelines.
- **Maiden:** Disclosures to international bodies, including the WHO and foreign regulators, were comparatively detailed. Domestic communication remained more restricted, resulting in international stakeholders having greater clarity on contamination risks than local stakeholders.

Theoretical mechanism: Institutional legitimacy theory (Kostova and Roth, 2002) provides a useful explanation for this pattern. Organisations respond differently to institutional pressures across contexts, aligning more closely with environments where enforcement is strong, while adopting more flexible approaches where oversight is limited.

Cross-case pattern: All multinational firms in the sample (Glenmark, Sigachi, Maiden) exhibit this bifurcated approach. None of the domestic-only firms display a comparable pattern.

5.6 Pattern 6: Regulatory Gaps and Communication Outcomes

Finding: Regulatory systems, rather than consistently preventing communication failures, may in some cases enable or fail to discourage limited disclosure. Organisations appear to assess that the risks associated with regulatory action are lower than the potential legal or reputational consequences of full disclosure.

Empirical evidence:

- **Sigachi:** Safety violations identified in December 2024 remained unresolved for six months. The company faced legal proceedings following the incident, but these processes are typically prolonged and uncertain, rather than immediate administrative enforcement.
- **Glenmark:** Multiple recalls from the same facility occurred over a relatively short period without immediate suspension of operations or mandatory systemic review.
- **Maiden:** Regulatory action in India followed scrutiny from international bodies, including West African regulators and the WHO, indicating delayed domestic response.

Mechanism: Schultz and Kleinnijenhuis (2012) show that regulatory capacity is closely associated with crisis communication strategies. In environments with strong regulatory enforcement,

73% of manufacturing crises involve transparent disclosure. In lower-capacity settings, this figure falls to 31%. This suggests that regulatory capacity shapes communication behaviour in ways that extend beyond organisational intent.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 The Communication Vacuum Concept

The analysis suggests that manufacturing crises in India's institutional context are characterised by what may be termed 'communication vacuums.' These are periods immediately following the onset of a crisis when organisational communication is limited or absent, allowing external actors to shape narratives before the organisation presents its account.

The cases analysed reveal several recurring characteristics of such vacuums:

- **Delayed organisational statements:** All six cases show initial organisational responses occurring more than 12 hours after the incident, in contrast to international benchmarks of approximately 2 to 4 hours.
- **Active external narrative formation:** During this period, media reporting, regulatory interventions, and worker accounts begin to construct alternative interpretations.
- **Early establishment of competing interpretations:** By the time organisations issue formal statements, external actors have already framed causation, responsibility, and stakeholder impact.
- **Persistence of initial frames:** Even after organisations begin to communicate, early external frames continue to shape stakeholder perceptions, and subsequent company narratives are interpreted in relation to these pre-existing accounts.

Theoretical significance: The concept of the communication vacuum extends existing literature on information gaps by emphasising not only the absence of information, but the absence of an authoritative organisational voice during critical periods of narrative formation. In contexts where external actors have immediate access to information, and where organisational communication may be constrained by legal or procedural considerations, the absence of early organisational communication allows narrative control to shift to external actors.

Several institutional factors appear to enable such vacuums in the Indian context:

- Regulatory capacity constraints allow government agencies to respond to incidents before organisations issue formal disclosures.

- A fragmented media landscape encourages multiple, independent narrative constructions rather than reliance on a single official account.
- Limited labour organisation enables worker accounts to emerge independently, without coordinated organisational engagement.

In comparison, in developed economies with stronger communication systems and greater media reliance on official sources, such vacuums tend to be less pronounced.

6.2 SCCT Reconsidered: Institutional Contingencies

Situational Crisis Communication Theory provides a useful analytical framework for understanding crisis response strategies. However, the present analysis suggests that some of its core assumptions require contextual qualification.

SCCT predicts that transparency-based strategies are generally more effective than denial or diminishment. This prediction is most applicable in institutional environments where disclosure expectations are consistently enforced and where organisational communication operates within a relatively stable information environment.

In contexts characterised by regulatory capacity constraints and competing institutional narratives:

- Transparency strategies may have reduced effectiveness if external interpretations have already become established before organisational disclosure.
- More restrictive communication strategies may be perceived as viable, given limited regulatory consequences for delayed or partial disclosure.
- Shifts in narrative dominance are often driven by the emergence of evidence, rather than by organisational communication strategy alone.

These observations suggest that SCCT's strategic recommendations benefit from contextual specification. Transparency strategies are likely to be most effective in environments with strong regulatory enforcement, relatively unified media systems, and stakeholder groups capable of collectively demanding accountability.

6.3 Stakeholder Theory and Power Asymmetries

The findings support stakeholder theory's proposition that communication prioritisation is influenced by stakeholder power. Across all six cases, investors, who possess relatively lower legitimacy in these contexts but greater structural power, received earlier and more direct communication than workers, who have high legitimacy and urgency but limited influence.

At the same time, the analysis indicates that these dynamics are shaped by institutional context. In settings where labour organisation is stronger, workers may exert greater influence over communication priorities. In the Indian context, where labour representation is comparatively limited, workers' claims tend to receive less communicative attention.

This suggests that the legitimacy principle within stakeholder theory operates more as a normative expectation than as an empirical reality. In practice, communication priorities tend to reflect existing power structures rather than moral claims alone.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Synthesis of Findings

This analysis of six manufacturing crises in India between 2023 and 2026 identifies three recurring communication patterns: (1) delays in transparency ranging from 12 hours to over 30 days, (2) stakeholder communication hierarchies that prioritise investors over workers despite the latter's higher legitimacy, and (3) the dominance of external actors in shaping narratives during periods when organisational communication is limited or absent.

These patterns appear to be shaped by institutional conditions. Regulatory capacity constraints, reflected in an approximate ratio of one inspector for every 412 factories, limit timely enforcement. A fragmented media environment allows organisations to manage disclosure selectively. At the same time, gaps in labour organisation constrain the ability of workers to collectively assert their informational rights. Taken together, these factors suggest that restricted communication is not simply a result of organisational limitations or ethical shortcomings, but reflects responses to broader institutional incentives.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

First, the study contributes through pattern documentation. It identifies consistent communication patterns across multiple cases within an institutional context that has received relatively limited scholarly attention. This provides an empirical basis for understanding crisis communication in emerging economy manufacturing sectors.

Second, the paper introduces the concept of the communication vacuum as an analytical tool. This concept helps explain crises in which organisational communication is limited and external actors play a central role in shaping early narratives. It extends existing work on information gaps by clarifying the conditions under which such vacuums arise, as well as their mechanisms and implications.

Third, the study offers an institutional contextualisation of established frameworks. Rather than proposing new theoretical models, it applies SCCT, stakeholder theory, and framing analysis to contexts where their underlying assumptions may not hold in the same way as in developed economies. This approach broadens the applicability of these frameworks by situating them within varied institutional environments.

7.3 Practical Implications

For regulatory reform:

- Strengthening regulatory capacity could enable earlier identification and remediation of safety violations, reducing the likelihood of catastrophic outcomes.
- Introducing mandatory communication timelines, such as worker notification within four hours, regulatory notification within 24 hours, and public disclosure within 48 hours, may help reduce the formation of communication vacuums.
- Enhanced whistleblower protection could facilitate the early identification of systemic risks before crises occur.

For company practices:

- Timely disclosure can limit the emergence of communication vacuums by providing authoritative information before external narratives become established.
- A more stakeholder-inclusive approach to crisis response, particularly one that prioritises workers as high-legitimacy stakeholders, aligns with stakeholder theory while addressing concerns of equity and accountability.
- Transparent, evidence-based explanations of causation can reduce the risk of frame erosion when contradictory information emerges.

For the media ecosystem:

- More sustained and coordinated media attention during crises may reduce the ability of organisations to engage in selective disclosure across different outlets.
- Investigative journalism that brings forward verifiable evidence, as seen in cases involving leaked inspection reports, can shift narrative dominance towards more evidence-based interpretations.

7.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study examines six cases within the institutional context of India. The extent to which these findings apply to other emerging economies, such as Brazil, Vietnam, or Mexico, remains uncertain given differences in regulatory structures, media systems, and labour organisation.

Future research could extend this work in several directions:

- Comparative analysis of manufacturing crises in other emerging economies to assess whether similar patterns are observed
- Inclusion of cases characterised by transparent communication to evaluate whether such approaches lead to improved stakeholder outcomes
- Longitudinal studies examining how different communication strategies influence reputation recovery over time
- Assessment of whether regulatory reforms, such as increased inspection capacity or mandated disclosure timelines, lead to measurable changes in organisational communication practices

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