VICTIMS UNDERSTANDING OF GOVERNMENT THROUGH ACTIONS AND COMMUNICATION: THE CASE OF GARISSA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE TERROR ATTACK

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ABSTRACT: *This study falls within the government communication field. In the study, we aim at exploring what citizens make of government from its actions and communication. The study was contextualized in the government actions and communication during the 2015 Garissa University College terror attack. Terrorism is violent communication aimed at discrediting the position that governments protect citizens' lives and property. How government deals with the attackers and how it communicates to citizens who eagerly await government communication reveals something about the nature of government. Although government communicates to the citizens, studies have been silent on citizen feedback based on the messages and actions of the government. This study adopted a qualitative approach and took a hermeneutic phenomenological design where terror victims' lived experiences were interrogated to elucidate some perceptions towards government and government communication. Three methods were used to generate data, namely: interviews, observation and document analysis. The study findings revealed that terror victims interacted with government — an interaction that revealed a government that send mixed signals on its capacity to handle the situation.*

KEY WORDS: government communication, nature of communication, terrorism

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism is violent communication aimed at sending a message to the government over some political matter (Schmid, 2013). Fundamentally, terrorists push the government to meet some demands by unleashing terror on unarmed citizens. In attacking citizens, terrorists aim at destabilizing the orientation that citizens have of their government. Terrorists seek to show citizens that the government cannot be trusted to protect them and their property. While different formulations of government exist, democracy is

founded on the social pact between the government and the citizens. Social contractarians posit that in the state of nature, people operate on naturally endowed rights. With the fear of having everyone exercise their natural rights to the detriment of each other, the people allow an overarching authority (government) to preserve everyone's rights (Locke, 2014). Civility requires that men move from the state of nature which is the "antecedent to all forms of government" (Russell, 2016: 568). A state is formed on the account that citizens cede their individual rights to a sovereign in return to everyone being assured that their life and property would be protected. The concept of democracy has gained much acceptance and utility with a lot of focus on the concept's etymological origin that means that power seats with the people. In a democracy, the ultimate power rests with the people for the people are the basis of popular sovereignty. Citizens are the centerpiece of a democratic formation.

Based on the social contract, citizens are obligated to obey the laws of the land and uphold the government as the agent of the state. Similarly, the government is obligated to communicate to the citizens and inform the electorate on the pledges and promises made. To reinforce its presence and operations, governments ensure that the citizens are socialized in a desire manner. Scott (2014) looks at political socialization as induction into a political system especially where citizens acquire information on political symbols, institutions, and procedures — all aimed at producing an active member of the political establishment. An active member is the one who has appropriate desirable values; and the political establishment's ideology. The tools for political socialization include the education system, mass media, workplace, neighborhood, and political institutions. It is the political attitude that shapes the different perceptions that citizens have of government and this attitude depends on what the government is saying and what the government is doing. Strach and Sullivan (2011) argue the place of family in governance. The family bring up citizens and teaches children about authority, obedience and obligations. Family is thus one of the basic agents of socialization. Other agents include schools, peer groups, religion, government, mass media (Robert, Foehr & Rideout, 2005).

Therefore, when a certain population is attacked by terrorists, citizens are taken aback because of the hope is that the government would have protected them. During a terror attack, victims experience the government either directly or indirectly. In such times, terror victims' experience of the government is guided by their socialization and this socialization guides victims' expectations and ultimately forms the basis upon which victims develop perceptions towards the government communication. Socialization also points to the fact that reality is socially constructed. Those who socialize us have an influence that comes to play when one must refer to a matter and secure the opinion or support from the agents of socialization.

This study was contextualized on the terror attack on 2 April 2015 at the Garissa University College (GUC) and how the government communicated during this attack. The selection of GUC was informed by the fact the attack left the second highest fatalities after the 1998 bombing of the USA embassy in Nairobi. Additionally, the attack was ranked top 20 worst attacks in the 2015 Global Terrorism Index (START, 2016). Finally, the attack generated considerable government messages and action. This

paper addresses itself to the question of how victims of the Garissa University College terror attack interacted with government and how these interactions helped them make sense of the actions and messages that government communicated at the time. This research question presupposed a relationship between the government and the victims of terror. Ideally, the interactivity between the two parties can be weaved through the victims' experiences. Taking government as an organization, government is bound to communicatively relate with the citizens (Tench & Yeomans, 2006). Government action (or inaction) is related to government communication. Young indicates that government communication is "a dimension of every action or decision a government takes" (2007: xxii). In other words, every action undertaken by government will have a communication angle to it. Government actions need to be communicated to the different audiences. As audiences receive government messages, they package these messages and make meaning out of these messages. Essentially, government communication includes communication from government officials to citizens on government policies, procedures, safety and efforts to ensure security (Fairbanks, Plowman & Rawlins, 2007).

While it has been established that government sends messages to the citizens, there is dearth in literature to suggest the efforts made to understand audiences of government messages. This study explored this gap in literature by tapping into lived experience of victims of terror attack who consumed government messages around and about the time of the attack. The findings of this study help complete the transmission model by seeking feedback on government communication from audiences of government messages. Government communication is a new field of study with an ongoing robust theoretical and methodological discussion on how government can communicate. This discussion needs to recognize the needs, interest and concerns of audiences as a way of making effective government communication efforts.

Theoretical review
The findings of this study were assessed from the postulations of the co-orientation theory. In exploring terror victims' experiences and answering the question how those experiences helped draw an understanding of government, this established the presence of constructs of agreement, accuracy and congruency. The theory helps set ground for exploring how an organization and the publics relate and create understandings. The history of the co-orientation theory has a fair appreciation of the Kuhnian paradigmatic shifts. Initially perceived as a model within the system's theory, the theory draws its seminal beginnings Fritz Heider's psychological balance theory (Heider, 1946). Newcomb's Balance theory marked the entry of the theoretical perspectives in communication discipline formally challenging the Shannon's mathematical theory. In the context of this study, McLeod and Chaffee (1973) co-orientation thoughts and more recent times those Broom and Sha (2013) helped shape the inter and intra-personal constructs of agreement; accuracy and congruency. The theory is forward looking and advances the quest for a research.

METHODOLOGY
Confined within the constructivist paradigm where truth is construed as a social construction of reality, this study found the lived experiences of terror victims as a path

of establishing perceptions towards government actions and communication. To tap into the lived experiences of the participants, I took a hermeneutic phenomenological design and thus comprehended how terror victims experienced and understood government after the terror attack on Garissa University College. Phenomenological studies seek to unearth the essences of lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994, van Manen, 2016). This methodology enabled me secure rich description of what the participants presented and helped tap into "the primordial contents of consciousness" (Crotty, 2015:96) of the participants.

Data generation
Participants were drawn from the victims of the Garissa University College terror attack. The victims included families that lost loved ones during the attack, staff and students who survived the attack and first responders. Ten in depth interviews were carried out. Studies indicate that 2-30 participants are a sufficient to adduce data for a phenomenological study (Colaizzi, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Hermeneutic phenomenological studies can benefit from 10 intense interviews (Gentels, Charles, Ploeg and McKibbon, 2015). The 10 participants were selected on a snowballing sampling design. An interview guide was used to generate data. Interviews with a participant lasted 45 and 60 minutes. Repeat interviews took 20-30 minutes. In addition to in depth interviews, other methods were used – non-participant observation and document analysis methods. These methods helped triangulate my findings.

Data analysis
Data analysis followed in the steps advanced by Moustakas (1994) and van Manem (2016). Using the transcribed interviews, a list of significant statements was developed (Goulding, 2005; Creswell, 2013). These statements enabled the formulation of meanings. Meanings helped in the development of themes (Shosha, 2012). Themes gave a structural understanding of the study and structural descriptions included the answers to the 'how' questions. Field notes came in handy (Miles & Huberman, 1984) and memoing helped develop the first line of thematic exploration. To tighten the study, we used member checking technique where the findings were discussed with the participants. These discussions were done via phone and slight variations were included in the final document. The last step was to synthesis of the textual and structural descriptions. This formed a composite description of the phenomena and it informed the final report (Creswell, 2013). Explicated data was presented using vignettes (Hughes & Huby, 2004). The data explicated from interviews was presented using discrete vignettes (Hughes & Huby, 2002). Vignettes are short stories that help illuminate on the reflections of the participants in a study. Vignettes helped me organize my findings and to unveil participant's perceptions of government having interacted with government actions and communication.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. In protecting the identity of participants, it was not possible for one to associate the views attributed to a pseudonym to a known individual. In addition to concealing the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were necessary for anonymizing the study as we captured

individual and shared expectations that terror victims had of government communication.

FINDINGS

The major finding in this study was that government was big and small in equal measure. Participant's experience of the government revealed different shades of government. There was a difference between what government was willing to do versus what government had the ability to do. If the government was willing to do something, then it must have had the ability to do this. In the same manner, if government had the ability to do something, it must have had the willingness to do it. Willingness and the ability to acted as necessary and sufficient conditions for government operations. Where one condition was available and the other condition missing, the capacity of government was put to question. Participant stories revealed that the government was small and big in equal measure. The interaction with the government led to the understanding that the grandiose picture portrayed by the government had some components that depicted the government as a weakling. From participant's discourse, the government is understood to have various shades which showed a mixed nature of the government.

Understanding government

Participants understood government based on their interactions with government actions and messages. Interactions were influenced by participants personal convictions, family (community) orientations, political socialization, and influence from peers. The role of socialization agents was critical in shaping how participants interacted with the government and how they later understood government. The place of family, community and peers in having participants evaluate their experiences with government, pointed to how participants made meaning of government in joint manner. Social construction of reality depended on how participants were socialized into the community and into the political system. As people interact, they experience and make meaning of their interactions. Interactions are initiated by social change including that which is occasioned by pressure groups, terrorists, or government.

Participants interacted with government, either directly or indirectly. Direct interactions involved where the participants saw or experienced government action or better still consumed government messages firsthand. For instance, John Mwangi's interaction with his county governor and women representative point to a direct interaction. Similarly, David Omwami and Samson Lenawe were among the students who received a donation from a senator and son to the former president.

Indirect interaction with government included instances where participants interacted with government actions through the media or where non-governmental agencies discharged services that were to be discharged with the government. Participant stories pointed to their access to traditional and social and/or new media as well as interface with foreign governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), churches and other interest groups.

From the interactions with the government, participants realized a misnomer between what they held about the government based on political socialization and what sense they made of their interaction with the government. Government was understood to be mall and big in equal measure. From their interaction with the government, participants wondered why the grandiose picture associated with government had components that depicted the government as a miniature structure. Several conversations with participants revealed a mixed nature of government.

Credibility of sources of information
Participants perceived traditional sources of information to be more credible than social media. Traditional media such as radio, television and newspapers offered better experience of interaction between victims and the government. Joseph Luseli was more inclined to television much as he had accessed social media. From television and newspapers, Joseph was able to gather enough information. He noted that:

There were some messages in Facebook and on twitter. I saw hashtags on Garissa University College like 'we stand with you Garissa victims.' I accessed the internet and saw that Garissa University College had been attacked. Just before the 7 pm news, I saw on television, the then Interior Cabinet Secretary was addressing media and confirming that the siege was over.

Joseph contestation was that news on social media was unprocessed and less rigorous compared to traditional media. On his part, David Mutiso listen to radio as radio was "*widely accessible to most people.*" Through radio, David secured real time information and the many FM stations offered him a plausible route for verify what he had received from other stations. Morris Nyongesa initially experienced government through television and later through radio. Radio gave him much information, part of which was drawn from the government. He further argued the case of radio as it provided an opportunity for interpersonal communication between community members as a neighbor would easily share with others what they heard on radio. This horizontal communication among community members demonstrated the value of interpersonal interaction in harnessing government communication and actions. Interpersonal communication can be a complementary aspects of government communication and action.

Having interacted with both the traditional forms of media as well as the social media, participants opined that messages on social media were at variance with what they expected of government to communicate. Joseph Luseli felt "*social media was clogged with quantitative information that availed victims no time to interrogate and harness.*" For Joseph, the government was not heavily present on social media to offer guidance and their absence created room for speculation. Amos Kwena asked government to reign in on bloggers as their messages spurred speculation.

Inability to protect citizens
The fundamental role of the modern state is to protect citizens from internal and external aggression. This explains why intervention of the government is expected whenever things go wrong among the citizenry. Participants perceived the government to be

bigger than the individual and hence well capable to protect the citizens. Participants believed that the government had mechanisms to protect all citizens, although their interaction with the government created a view that they were not protected. Before the attack, Rachael had a different perception of the government. She claimed that she had perceived government:

as the best institute because it was there to protect us. On this account I joined the university in Garissa knowing fully well that the government would protect me. What happened in April of 2015 made me doubt the capability and willingness of my government to protect citizens.

When students raised their concerns with the security teams, they secured many assurances that government was on top of things. The attack showed a government that had failed to protect citizens. Joseph Luseli observed a heavy military presence after the attack and wondered where the military had been before the attack. To him "*the role of the government is to prevent crises not to solve crises because once you are solving it is already too late.*"

The accounts from participants showed a perception that government officers in Garissa did not take seriously the concerns that students had raised. From participant accounts, government's willingness and capacity to act was put in focus. For government to act, there needed to be the willingness to act and the capacity to act. Participants believed that the government had the capacity to contain the insecurity situation but seemed unwilling.

Foreign governments and other responders
The support from foreign governments to the exclusion of the Kenya government created a perception among participants that government could not assure them of its sovereignty. Ordinarily, governments have a ministry that handles foreign relations and foreign governments can only interact with citizens through the said ministry. Participants in the study discussed circumstances in which foreign governments dealt directly with the victims to support their specialized medical care and educational needs.

John Mwangi narrated how victims were being enlisted for educational and medical support at Kenyatta National Hospital with no government support or communication. According to John, the Italian government had posted agents to recruit victims. Taking advantage of the absence of the Kenya government, John noted that some criminals took advantage of the process to recruit persons who were not affected by the attack. The airlift to Italy materialized as John says by the time his daughter's condition improved, "*those who were to go to Italy had gone.*"

Foreign government support for educational purposes was also pronounced. These scholarships were not processed through the ministry of foreign affairs. Amos Kwena confirmed that "*the German DAAD gave us some scholarships.*" Rael Wanjau was a beneficiary of the DAAD scholarship. David Omwami received support for his education from the French government. From the support, David created a perception towards his government when he observed:

The French government came and asked whether we had been supported. In the process some students received scholarships from foreign countries like Germany, France and Italy. I felt that the government was not concerned with me if other foreign governments were concerned about the welfare of other citizens of foreign countries.

Samson Lenewa expressed angst that his government had quietly depended on another government for help. For Samson, the fact that the government did not communicate about the support from other governments spoke to the lack of capacity of government to handle medical and educational needs of the victims. Samson told me:

Apart from the counseling sessions which were done by Red Cross, I did not receive anything from the government…. Yes, I got scholarship, but this support was not from the Government of Kenya. The French government gave me scholarship. I was so surprised that someone from abroad would extent such a favor to me, yet my own government never bothered.

Participants hoped that government would communicate and coordinate the support that victims of the attack would receive. Government never endorsed or condemned the support given and this did not go well with the participants. The silence from government created the perception that government had given up its role in a sovereign state.

In addition to the support from foreign nationals, participants perceived the support from other non-governmental organizations as better organized than the Kenya government. Participants spoke well about non-governmental organizations (NGOs), churches and parachurch organizations. Arising from the support participants received from non-governmental organizations, they perceived those functions as a clear statement that government lacked the capacity in supporting its citizens. Rachael Mwangi, for instance, received counseling from Red Cross although she thought that was a function of the government. Rael Wanjau's fees was partly paid by the Fellowship of Christian unions (FOCUS). Rael wondered why the government of Kenya did not concern itself with the matter.

Morris Wekesa was equally appreciative that churches and NGOs came in to support victims. While comparing the organizations with the government, Amos noted, "*we wonder, the churches and non-governmental organizations that visit people, what protocol do they follow*." For him these organizations were more organized than the government. David Mutiso also spoke to the comparisons that participants did as they interacted with different agencies. David indicated:

In conclusion I must mention the support I received from foreign governments and NGOs. I received full scholarship from DAAD and possibly DAAD will sponsor my postgraduate studies. Many of my colleagues received support either from the governments of Germany, France or Italy. Additional support came from FOCUS. We thank God that these governments ensured that we received and completed our studies. While the Kenya government promised to support our educational pursuit remain mere words, we thank God that someone somewhere heard our cries. I felt awful that my own government could not support its own citizens. As to whether the government organized

this support for us, I wonder why they chose to be silent. To me, the foreign governments turned out to be a brother so close than my government.

Government communication was required to highlight the kind of capacities the government required during the attack. The fact that the government did not work with other exposed the government's underbelly.

Insecure areas not part of Kenya

Government was perceived as not concerned with citizens staying in areas perceived as insecure. Communication from government showed the commitment of government to protect all citizens, but the actions of the government seemed to act to the exclusion of insecure sections of the country. Garissa had been projected as an area that was insecure. John Luseli narrated how students would bump into dead bodies in town. His sentiments were shared by Rael Wanjau who observed: "*Occasionally, we could hear of deaths in town. A majority of those who died were watchmen.*" It appeared that insecure parts were not considered as part of Kenya. Participants felt that government operated on a structure that disregarded insecure areas. Insecurity was associated with Garissa for many years. Participants indicated that they had information on the pending attack on university college attack which was communicated to the security officers although their response was not sufficient to deter the terror attack.

Neglecting Garissa town allowed the attackers to execute their mission with such finesse. Participants in the study were not happy that the government did not seem to have any information about the pending attack when students had raised their concerns with the security teams. Participants wondered how citizens had information on the pending attack, yet the government with all its security machinery seemed unaware of the pending attack. Joseph Luseli opined that the insecurity situation in Garissa created a perception that Garissa was not part of Kenya. After the attack, he observed that:

As I moved from Garissa to Nairobi, I came across heavy police presence at the border between Garissa and Tana River counties. It was a though the rest of Kenya was being cordoned off from Garissa. It was tense traveling the 195 kilometers to Nairobi. I only felt safe when I got to Mwingi. At that point, I knew I was in Kenya.

Rachael Mwangi opined that while in Garissa she "*quickly realized this is not Kenya and maybe [*we were*] in Somalia.*" This perception made Rachael to yearn to go 'back' to her country Kenya. On his part, David Omwami opined that government so painstakingly avoided Garissa which was an insecure area. He told me:

Our appeal to be heard by the government fell on deaf ears. Our college was under surveillance for many days and if Garissa was in Kenya, the security team would have taken our issues seriously. I can remember on one of the days we were relaxing outside our hostels, a Probox car dropped some papers in the college compound. Being curious, we went to check on the papers only to realize that we were being warned not to celebrate Easter in Garissa and that we should go back to Kenya.

Against the characteristic that government ought to protect all citizens, participants felts that their stay in Garissa did not receive the much-needed attention form government.

Instead, participants saw a government that did not consider the insecure areas a part of the country.

Poor coordination

Finally, participants' stories delineated poor coordination as a standing characteristic that depicted the weak aspects of a government. Coordination has been linked to communication (Massie, 2004) and participants' perceptions drew a parallel between coordination functions and communication. The way the government coordinated the rescue of hostages and how the government handled affairs after the attack – all pointed to a government that did not get its act together on coordination and communication. From the narrations of participants, several issues explain the fact that government was poor in its coordination and communication. Some of the issues included a lethargic workforce, poor timing, and poor communication.

Government had a lethargic workforce. The officials were not willing to do their duty, and this cost the lives of many hostages. Amos Kwena called a police officer in Garissa to inform him about the attack only to establish that the officer did not have a clue about the attack. Amos had expected that the officer was best placed to offer the much-needed help and information. Amos painted a picture of why apt coordination would not require a lethargic workforce when he argued:

In security matters, there is need to synchronize issues. At the university, we had our own records. We had two lists – one that had names of those students who were rescued in the operations and the other list had list of those perished. Contrary to the speculation that the numbers shared with the government were wrong, I can tell you the numbers matched with the records we had. The university college had 850 students and out of the 147 who died, 143 were students. What I attest is that government officers were so lethargic. Government officials needed to be pushed all over to do their job. In this, the government it down its citizens.

Rael Wanjau spoke of a lethargic workforce at the government medical facility that did not seem to bother about her condition. She thanked God that had the right intervention not come in, she would have been part of the statistics of those who died in the attack.

Many participants took issue with the timing of the interventions by government. Many participants had expected that the government would be on cite to rescue them. Participants noted with concern that the police and military barracks were not far removed from Garissa University College. David Mutiso had expected the government to be on site before the attackers invaded his room. This was never to be as the attackers were in the men's hostel hours before the siege ended. This poor timing made David perceive government as one not concerned about its citizens now that such citizens were in "*vulnerable states such as those in educational institutions.*" David was shocked that security forces were waiting for "orders from above" to rescue the hostages.

On her part, Angela Mutinda was frustrated when the military contingent threatened to bring down the entire institution since they could not differentiate students from terrorists. In a detailed account, Angela narrated how attackers tricked students into

their death at about 10am and so in having the Recce squad fly in 14 hours later, most of the victims had died by that time. Angela wondered why the government opted to dispatch the interior cabinet secretary to give speeches in Garissa when the first team to arrive would have been the elite Recce squad. Government coordination efforts were skewed since victims were dying as the cabinet secretary assured the nation that government was on top of things.

Participant remarks seem to agree that coordination was tied to communication. Whatever the action the government took, it communicated something to the victims. A lethargic workforce and poor timing created a perception among participants that poor coordination was linked to poor communication.

DISCUSSIONS

Political socialization orients individuals into the society so that they can accept a political establishment (Scott, 2014). This study established the influence of several institutions of political socialization including family, the school, peers, religion, mass media and government. The findings revealed that the interactions with government was based on the orientations that the participants had received from family, school, peers, religion and mass media. This finding resembles that of Robert, Foehr and Rideout (2005). Similarly, Strach and Sullivan (2011) argue the place of family in governance. The family brings up citizens and teaches children about authority, obedience and obligations. Family is thus one of the basic agents of socialization. Political culture includes norms, values and symbols that legitimizes a political power. The way a people are oriented into the political culture will help shape their attitudes. In this study, there was a uniform understanding of what government ought to do. Participant held that government needed to protect the citizens. Anything happening contrary to the belief that people have in government, paints a bad picture of the government. Indeed, Scott (2014:571) argues that "*scandals, revelations, failures and political disasters can quickly undermine citizen's faith in the whole system.*" Therefore, government communication, coordination and operations were instrumental in the perception terror victims had of government.

At the core of the study finding was the mixed nature perceived of the government. Government was strong and weak at the same time. This finding spoke to the capacity and availability of the government to act. In other instances, government messages seemed to show the willingness of government to act but government seemed to lack capacity. This finding was supported by four sub-clusters explicated from the data. The sub-clusters showed that participants expected the government to protect lives and property of citizens (Locke, 2014), yet the government did not act as expected.

The credibility of sources of information showed a preference to traditional media. This finding resonates with Wilcox, Cameron and Reber (2014) postulations. While there is a liking for social and new media, Wilcox, Cameron and Reber (2014) urge government publicists not to ignore traditional media such as radio, television and newspapers. They advance three reasons why government publicists should not write off traditional media and to which the study findings can relate to: much as world has taken to new and social media, a good number of their audiences still watch television, listen to radio and read

newspapers. Secondly, traditional forms of media provide fodder for analysis and interpretations where audiences can reflect, distil and analyze news stories. Thirdly, there is a component of credibility associated with traditional media. Before we read, listen or hear a story, that very story has been taken through the editing and consideration of the newsworthiness of the story. This conferral role of the media lacks in news generated via social and new media. Indeed, as observed by Wilcox, Cameron and Reber (2014), there is an inverse relationship between the use of internet and trust associated with the news carried therein.

The clandestine support from the foreign government spoke of a government that could not support citizens neither inform nor stop positive interference from foreign governments. Some parts of Kenya which were deemed to be insecure were never considered as Kenya. Such parts were neglected, and concerns of citizens were never attended to. Poor coordination seen during the rescue operations and this did not portray well communication from government.

CONCLUSIONS
This study was contextualized on Garissa University College terror attack with a view of weaving perceptions that victims of the attack had of government actions and communication. Having interacted with government, participants revealed that government acted and communicated as one that had mixed capacities, often sending mixed signals. Government exists to ensure law and order in a state and government communication should help speak to actions that show that government performs this cardinal role with alacrity. The findings of this study go a long way in helping policymakers incorporate a culture of soliciting feedback from the audiences and incorporating the view of the audiences in subsequent communication.

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