ISSN (O): 2320-5407
ISSN (P): 3107-4928

Journal Homepage: -www.journalijar.com

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/24050
DOI URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/24050

RESEARCH ARTICLE

ON TIME, OUT OF TOUCH: INDIGO'S CRISIS OF SILENCE: A CASE STUDY

Prathyaksh Janardhanan

Manuscript Info

Manuscript History
Received: 16 June 2026
Final Accepted: 18 July 2026
Published: August 2026

Abstract

Executive Summary:- In December 2025, IndiGo — the dominant player in India's domestic aviation market, long defined by its promise of operational reliability—faced an unprecedented disruption when new pilot-rest regulations exposed vulnerabilities in its tightly optimised scheduling system. Within days, cascading crew shortages led to thousands of flight cancellations, stranding hundreds of thousands of passengers nationwide and triggering a nationwide service crisis. Altho ugh the operational breakdown was significant, the airline's muted and delayed communication quickly escalated the situation into a reputation al crisis. Passengers received little timely information, frontline staff lacked clear guidance, and leadership remained largely absent from public view. As frustration mounted, social media amplified customer anger, shifting the narrative from a logistical failure to perceived indifference.

Introduction:-

The case follows Meera Sharma, Vice President of Customer Communications, as she confronts a critical leadership dilemma at the height of the crisis. Positioned between an operations-driven leadership team focused on restoring flight schedules and a finance function wary of additional expenditure, Meera must decide whether to push for an assertive, transparent, and resource-intensive communication strategy—one that challenges IndiGo's deeply ingrained culture of efficiency and control. Her decision carries significant implications. A proactive communication response could help rebuild trust, but it risks exposing internal failures and straining already stretched resources. Conversely, maintaining a limited communication approach may preserve short-term operational focus, but it may deepen long-term reputational damage. The case highlights the interplay between operational resilience and stakeholder communication, raising broader questions about organisational culture, leadership visibility, and the trade-offs between efficiency and empathy in times of crisis.

Case:-

At 10:00 PM on December 4, 2025, Meera Sharma paused outside the glass doors of IndiGo's Operations Control Centre in Gurugram. Through the panels, she could see the room in motion—heads bent over screens, voices clipped, tension contained but unmistakable.
She didn't move immediately.
Her phone buzzed again.
Another video. Another passenger. Another accusation.
She didn't open it.

Corresponding Author:- Prathyaksh Janardhanan

Across India, airport display boards had synchronised into a single message: CANCELLED. Inside terminals, passengers sat on floors, charging dying phones, refreshing apps that told them nothing new. Some argued at the counters. Others had gone quiet.

Meera had spent 15 years building her reputation as someone who could control a narrative before it spiralled out of control. Tonight, there was no narrative to control.

Only silence.And it was no longer holding.

Forty-eight hours earlier, this had been an operations issue.

IndiGo had always believed that precision was its greatest strength. The airline's promise—"on time, every time"—was not aspirational; it was engineered. Aircraft utilisation was pushed to its limits, turnaround times compressed, and redundancies eliminated. The system worked because it had to.

There was no room for inefficiency.

There was also no room for error.

When the revised Flight Duty Time Limitation regulations came into force, the warning signs were visible. Tighter pilot rest rules meant tighter scheduling margins. But adjusting the system meant sacrificing utilisation, and sacrificing utilisation meant sacrificing profitability.

So the adjustments were partial. Managed. Deferred.

Until they were no longer manageable.

By early December, the network began to unravel. Crew shortages triggered delays; delays triggered cancellations; cancellations triggered more cancellations. Within days, the airline's operational backbone—once its greatest advantage—became its Achilles' heel.

Still, Meera had assumed communication would catch up.

It always had before.

She pushed open the glass doors.

Inside, the COO was already speaking."We need aircraft moving by morning," he said, pointing at a screen filled with disrupted routes. "Everything else is secondary."

The CFO leaned back, arms crossed. "We stay disciplined. No reactive spending. This is temporary."

Meera took her seat, aware that she was entering the conversation late—and on weaker ground.She waited for a pause."It's not temporary for the passengers," she said.The COO didn't look at her. "We'll communicate once we have clarity."

Meera felt the familiar resistance rise in her chest. She had heard this before—wait until we know more. But crises did not wait for clarity. They filled the gaps themselves.

"With respect," she said, more firmly now, "we've already lost that window."The CFO turned toward her. "What exactly are you proposing?"

This was the moment she had been rehearsing in her head.

"Real-time updates across channels. Dedicated support lines. Clear explanation of the issue. Visible leadership communication."

A pause.Then a faint, almost tired smile from the CFO.

"At what cost?"There it was.Not disagreement. Not dismissal.A calculation.

Meera knew that look. She had spent years learning how to translate communication into numbers, reputation into risk, trust into something that could survive a budget discussion.

But tonight, the numbers felt insufficient.

"At the cost of not doing it?" she said quietly. "We're already paying that."

No one responded.And in that silence, she understood something she had been avoiding all evening:She was not just arguing for a strategy.She was arguing against the company's instincts.

Back in her office, she closed the door and sat down without turning on the lights.Her reflection stared back at her from the dark screen.

She had built her career at IndiGo by adapting—by understanding when to push and when to align. She knew how decisions were made here. Efficiency first. Control always. Visibility only when necessary.It had made the airline successful.It had also made her successful.Now, that same system was asking her to stay within its limits.

And for the first time, she wasn't sure she could.Her phone buzzed again.This time, she opened the video.

A middle-aged man, speaking directly into the camera. Calm, but exhausted. Behind him, an airport floor crowded with passengers.

"They won't tell us anything," he said. "We just want to know what's happening."

Meera watched it twice.

Then she set the phone down.

For years, she had believed that good communication meant protecting the organisation—framing, timing, managing exposure. But tonight, the question felt different.

Who was she protecting now?

The next morning, the crisis had deepened.

Regulators intervened. Media coverage intensified. Internally, the pressure shifted from containment to accountability.

Still, the external messaging remained controlled. Limited statements. No detailed explanation. No visible leadership.

It was a deliberate choice.

And it was one Meera could no longer quietly support.

She began acting.

A crisis hotline was activated. Airport teams were given structured update protocols. A centralised information dashboard was drafted. Messaging templates were rewritten to include an acknowledgement, not just an apology.

Each step pushed slightly beyond what had been approved. Each step carried risk.She knew it would be noticed.

By afternoon, the confrontation came.The CFO called her in.

“I’ve seen the escalation,” he said, measured but direct. “You’re expanding beyond the agreed scope.”

Meera held his gaze.

“We’re behind,” she said. “This is what catching up looks like.”

“And if operations slip further because of resource diversion?”

She didn’t answer immediately.

Because that was the question she had been asking herself all day.

If she were wrong—if communication efforts strained an already fragile system—she would not just lose credibility.

She would own part of the failure.

But if she was right, and stayed silent—

The damage would be harder to measure.

And impossible to undo.

“We’re already exposed,” she said finally. “This doesn’t create risk. It acknowledges it.”

The CFO studied her for a moment, then nodded once.

“Be careful,” he said.

It was not approval.

But it was not a stop.

Late that night, Meera sat alone again, the building quieter now but not calm.

On her screen was the draft she had been working toward all day: a statement for the CEO.

She read it slowly.

Every sentence is balanced between honesty and consequence.

She imagined how it would be received internally—too revealing, too vulnerable, too far from the company’s usual voice.

She imagined how it would be received externally—too late, too little, or perhaps, finally, enough.

For the first time that day, she allowed herself to think beyond the immediate crisis.

If she pushed this through—if the CEO stepped forward, if the airline spoke openly—it would not just resolve this moment.

It would change expectations.Inside the company. Outside it.There would be no easy return to silence.

Her role, her credibility, even her place in the organisation—none of it would remain untouched.

She leaned back, closing her eyes briefly.Somewhere in the distance, a phone rang. Then another.The system was still straining and still recovering. Still uncertain.

She opened her eyes and looked again at the first line of the statement.It felt safe.Too safe.Slowly, she deleted it.For a few seconds, the screen was blank.

Then she began to type again—this time without the filters she had learned to rely on, without the careful distance that had once defined her work.She wrote as if the passengers were reading.

As if the silence had already done enough damage.

As if this was not just about managing a crisis, but choosing what kind of organisationIndiGo would be when control was no longer possible.

She paused after the first paragraph, reading it back.It was riskier.Clearer.Harder to defend.

And, for the first time in days, it felt true.

Meera rested her hands on the keyboard, aware that what she did next would not just determine the tone of a message—but the boundaries of her role within the company.

Then, without overthinking it, she moved the cursor to the top of the document and continued writing.

References:-

1. Al Jazeera. (2025, December 7). IndiGo chaos: Why is India's largest airline cancelling hundreds of flights?
2. Dwivedi, V. (2025). When silence becomes the crisis: IndiGo's communication breakdown. Reputation Today.
3. Exchange4Media. (2025). The IndiGo crisis: A breakdown in communication and the lessons it left behind.
4. Press Information Bureau. (2025). Government response to IndiGo scheduling disruptions. Government of India.
5. Risk Management Association of India. (2025). IndiGo crisis risk analysis: Scheduling crisis and nationwide disruptions.
6. Skift. (2025). IndiGo meltdown: What went wrong, what's next.
7. The PR Post. (2025). IndiGo crisis: When delays and silence turned into distrust.
8. The Times of India. (2025, December). IndiGo crisis: CEO admits operational failures in letter to staff.
9. Harvard Business School Digital Initiative. (n.d.). IndiGo Airlines: On time, every time.