

# **Cruise Control?**

Exploring the role of new media in crisis management:

The influence of medium, new media usage and consumer characteristics on publics' crisis perception

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## **ABSTRACT**

The influence that new media has obtained in the last years has altered organizational communication as well as crisis communication. Using a case from the cruise industry, this thesis extends the perspective on organizational crisis communication by examining crisis perception from the audience viewpoint. It has built on the groundwork of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), but it has expanded its scope by including analysis on medium and message effect. Specifically, this thesis analyses whether there exists a relation between medium exposure and the perception of a crisis. Moreover, it provides insight in *which* elements of the rebuilding strategy are most important for the public receiving the message (message effect), *how* certain new mediums are used and perceived for corporate communication purposes, and how consumer characteristics such as age, gender and cruise experience impact both medium usage and crisis perception. Hence, by focusing on the audience perspective, this thesis departs from existing scholarship that has privileged the organizational voice, providing an insightful take on the 'other' side of crisis communication.

**Keywords: Crisis communication, crisis management, medium effect, new media, new media usage, consumer crisis perception, cruise industry.**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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As a result of the evolving media landscape in which new media are becoming increasingly important, the nature of communication is changing. The supply of communication and information channels has grown considerably. Today, people have access not only to traditional media channels such as television, radio, and newspapers, but also to new media outlets such as blogs, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, podcasts, etcetera. This evolution of technologies also transforms crisis communication, as it changes how crisis managers interact with affected stakeholders and how they communicate information (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011).

Crises can have a negative effect on the reputation of a company (Coombs, 2007). To protect and repair reputational loss, organizations have to communicate with their stakeholders via various media channels to shape their beliefs about the crisis. The existence of new media can be advantageous for companies, as this allows them to quickly disseminate information as well as helps them to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the affected communities. However, new media can also bring forward challenges, of which the fragility of corporate reputation – as a result of empowered consumers voicing their dissatisfaction – is a crucial one. Hence, image building is not just created by the company, but also by bystanders on new media before official statements are made. This development has necessitated a *proactive* (instead of a *reactive*) stance of corporations, one that discards the assumption that crisis communication is a linear process.

Problematic, however, is that scholars often refer to social networking sites (SNS) and new media as if they are all the same. Doing so diverges from relevant research that assesses different new media platforms as unique tools. It is critical to differentiate not only between traditional media and new media, but also *among* the different new mediums that exist. Because audiences indeed use new media to engage with corporations (Austin, Liu, & Jin, 2012), the multicuity of the mediums that can be used for crisis communication and reputation recovery makes it valuable to separate these mediums to see which are most effective for this goal. To clarify, because of the abundance of mediums that are now used by corporations to communicate with their consumers, it is more important than ever to analyze *how* these people actually use

these new mediums, and whether specific platforms are perceived differently by consumers in terms of medium effect and message effect.

Therefore, using a case from the cruise industry, the goal of this study is to develop insight into whether a relationship exists between medium exposure and the perception of a crisis. Specifically, it will be examined whether people who are exposed to a crisis communication response via YouTube, Facebook or corporate blogs perceive this communication *and* the corporation in crisis differently than those exposed to an alternative medium. Moreover, it will be analyzed *which* elements of Coombs' (1995, 2007) crisis communication strategy of rebuilding – apology, compensation, repentance, and rectification – are most important for the public receiving the message (message effect), providing insight into which aspects of crisis communication messages are deemed most essential. Furthermore, it asks how certain new mediums are used and perceived for corporate communication purposes, and how consumer characteristics such as age, gender and cruise experience impact both medium usage and crisis perception. Accordingly, this thesis provides a holistic perspective of crisis communication in the cruise industry and the dynamics and interaction of the medium and message effect. Hence, the first research question that is central in this study is: *How does crisis communication on different mediums influence consumer perception of an organization's reputation?*

The focus on the *consumer perception* of crisis communication aims to develop a greater understanding of how consumers construct their opinion about the response of an organization in crisis, and consequently about that organization as a whole. By focusing on the audience viewpoint, this thesis departs from existing scholarship that has privileged the organizational voice and thereby provides an insightful take on the 'other' side of crisis communication. Wang, Berens and Van Riel (2012) confirm that this differentiation is appropriate, as these authors posit that there is a difference between the perception of a crisis by consumers and other stakeholders, such as the investors of the organization. Additionally, Waymer and Heath (2007) also critique that existing crisis research often does not separate these two 'sides.'

This thesis, however, will make this differentiation, implementing what Lee (2008) argues should be done more in crisis communication research, namely focus on the perspective of the consumer. Lee (2004) states that it is crucial to assess how

audiences react on crises because, first, audiences are believed to construct their symbolic reality partly from the perceptions of “other public member’s evaluations,” and second, because audiences are fundamental stakeholders of every organization (p. 601). Thus, in this study, crisis communication will be analyzed from the consumer perspective by researching what the influence is of different mediums on the way individuals perceive crisis communication.

This audience perspective is also reflected in the other two research questions that are central to this thesis. The second question – *how do consumers perceive and use new media for corporate communication purposes?* – assesses how people perceive new media for corporate communication purposes, how people use it, and how they discern it in relation to various factors such as trust, reliability, credibility, etcetera. The third research question – *how do consumer characteristics impact medium preference and crisis perception?* – investigates how age, gender and cruise experience impacts both medium usage and crisis perception. In other words, this question examines whether and how these characteristics can be a determining factor in the way people regard crisis communication on different new mediums.

To answer these research questions, this thesis has conducted an experiment that uses a crisis of a fictional cruise company. This scenario, however, is based on an actual crisis that occurred on February 11, 2013, when the cruise ship Carnival Triumph – owned by Carnival Cruise Lines – was adrift at sea for five days after an engine room fire. This crisis was abundantly covered in the news for months and spurred discussions about the right crisis response by companies, safety in the cruise industry, and the influence that new technologies have in spreading information about a crisis situation. This thesis will add to these discussions and provide further insight into various aspects of crisis communication and crisis management that could be relevant for real-life crisis situations such as these.

### **1.1. RESEARCH OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE**

As stated, this thesis will use a case from the cruise industry to examine crisis perception from the audience viewpoint when crisis communication is communicated on three different mediums. It extends the situational crisis communication theory by including analysis on medium and message effect. Whereas the medium effect is analyzed by

assessing whether a relation exists between medium exposure and perception of crisis, the message effect is examined by looking at which elements of the rebuilding strategy are most important for the public receiving the message. Furthermore, *how* certain new mediums are used and perceived for corporate communication purposes, and how consumer characteristics such as age, gender and cruise experience impact both medium usage and crisis perception is also determined. Correspondingly, this thesis is built around the following research questions:

- RQ1.** How does crisis communication on different mediums influence consumer perception of the organization?
- RQ2.** How do consumers perceive and use new media for corporate communication purposes?
- RQ3.** How do consumer characteristics impact medium preference and crisis perception?

## **1.2. RELEVANCE**

In existing crisis communication research, there are five tiers of crisis communication interest, namely crisis definition, separation between crises, disasters and issues, crisis frameworks, crisis response strategies, and research on particular crises in case studies (Carroll, 2009). This study is unique in that it combines one existing tier – crisis response strategies – with a new and developing one, namely crisis communication with new media. Though research on new media and crisis communication is growing, there is nevertheless little existing research that investigates how medium type might affect consumer perception of the crisis response and the organization's reputation (Claeys, Cauberghe & Vyncke, 2010). Only recently, some scholars have started to investigate this interplay, which led to valuable results (Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011; Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013).

Moreover, though new media in practice is playing an increasingly important role in public relations and crisis communications, empirical research on new media in combination with crisis communication remains limited (Jin, Liu & Austin, 2011). For example, a limitation is that none of the articles in this domain have included YouTube in



their analysis. This thesis is unique in that it *will* include YouTube, in combination with corporate blogs and Facebook. Because YouTube is a new medium that is used incredibly much all over the world, by both the general public as well as by corporations, insight in how this medium is perceived for corporate communication purposes could lead to valuable insights. In general, research on new media and crisis communication perception is imperative in order to get a better understanding of how new media could best be used in crisis situations according to the publics' preference for crisis response. Not only is this of benefit to the public, but also to organizations, as fitting crisis communication can elevate reputational assets.

Unlike the majority of previous scholarship on crisis communication, this study will conduct an experiment instead of a qualitative case study, argued by Coombs and Schmidt (2000) to be key in making valuable contributions to crisis management theory. With this, it will circumvent a weakness of qualitative case studies, namely that its findings are harder to generalize than quantitative data (Carroll, 2009). Thus, this study will not only use a more innovative methodology in crisis communication research, (i.e., an experiment) it will also address a research gap inherent in this field, as it investigates how communication strategies on scarcely researched mediums might have a different impact on consumers than using these strategies via other mediums. With the exception of a few studies (Coombs, 2009; Schultz, Utz & Göritz, 2011), experiments are yet under-utilized in crisis communication research.

Furthermore, Faulkner (2001) argues that there is a dearth in research on crisis management and crisis communication in the tourism and leisure industry. In particular, there exists a gap in literature on crisis communication in the *cruise industry*, as very few articles have connected crisis communication with cruises. Notably, the only two articles that could be found on this topic were both written on the Costa Concordia crisis of 2012 (Alexander, 2012; Gantt, 2013). Nevertheless, the billion-dollar cruise-industry is incredibly important to analyze, as it is the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry, expanding from 7,2 million people cruising in 2000 to an estimated 20.9 million in 2013. Hence, in just 13 years, worldwide passenger growth has increased by 290 percent (Cruise Lines International Association, 2014).

Furthermore, because cruise-line companies offer a luxury-good – which can be easily replaced by other leisure products such as all-inclusive resorts or other vacation

deals – these companies are overly dependent on excellent communication, customer relations, crisis management and public relations, in order to stay ahead of fierce competition. Exactly because of this, cruise-lines do not have the luxury of engaging in bad PR and communication failures, as this makes them incredible vulnerable for damaging reputation loss. It is because of this that cruise corporations must react as adequately as possible to each incident and crisis to prevent consumers to shift to other related leisure products.

Lastly, because this study will analyze how consumers perceive the crisis response strategy on three different mediums, the findings of this study about medium effects are potentially generalizable to all other business sectors independent of the cruise industry. Whereas each crisis case study has to be placed in its context to derive results, experiments are not associated with this methodological weakness (Carroll, 2009).

### **1.3. CARNIVAL CRISES: AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE**

A company that has recently been affected by multiple corporate crises is Carnival Cruises. Carnival Cruises is the largest-cruise line company of the world, as its market share in 2013 marked 48.4%, compared to the second-largest, Royal Caribbean Cruises, with 23.3% (cruisemarketwatch.com).

However, over the past four years, Carnival experienced the following crises: In November 2010, the ship Carnival Splendor endured technical failures when a fire created generator problems, leading to a power outage. The ship had to be towed back to shore. A second, more serious crisis occurred on February 10, 2013, with the Carnival Triumph ship, when a fire in the engine room resulted in a power outage. Consequently, the ship was adrift for four days off the coast of Mexico and had 3,143 passengers aboard. Sanitary problems arose as a result of the ship's lack of power. Aside from this incident, the Carnival Legend also had emergency generator problems in March 2013, which led to a cancelled cruise and passengers that were flown home instead. Also in March 2013, the Carnival Dream was reported to have a mechanical problem. This cruise ship had to cruise back to its main port at slow speed and the remaining journey had to be cancelled.

Several tangible effects of these incidents soon emerged, such as the stepping down of the CEO Mickey Arison. Also, Carnival's September results showed a 30% drop in earnings, and below estimates for its fourth-quarter (Melby, 2013). Besides financial damage, these crises also affected the company's reputation. According to Harris polling before and after the Carnival Triumph crisis, American consumers' trust, perceptions of quality, and purchase intent steeply decreased across the cruise industry when the news of the ship's breakdown became official. In addition, Carnival Cruise Lines' scores in these specific categories dropped 25% on average, sending it to the bottom of the industry (Ibid).

Beside these crises with Carnival Cruise Lines, Carnival Corporation also suffered additional crises with its daughter companies, the largest of these being the Costa Concordia incident on 13 January 2012. However, to limit the scope of this thesis, the crisis scenario used in this thesis will only be based on the Carnival Triumph ordeal. Because the Carnival Triumph crisis resulted in multiple lawsuits, lengthy media coverage reporting on the safety of Carnival and cruising in general, this situation best fits Coombs (2007) definition of a crisis as an unforeseen event that leads to negative perceptions of the organization by stakeholders, which can have negative repercussions for the organization. Therefore, this study will use the Carnival Triumph case as the basis of the crisis scenario used in this thesis.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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The next section will provide findings of previous research committed to crisis communication and theories on the concepts provided in the introduction. Also, this theoretical review will elucidate the research gaps that this thesis aims to fill. First, this part begins by explaining what defines a crisis, and how corporations can respond to crises. Thereafter, the concept of reputation is explicated, and how reputation repair is of crucial importance for corporations in crisis. Lastly, this chapter will touch upon the role of new media in crises and crisis communication, and how different consumer groups adopt new media. This literature section will simultaneously connect these central topics to the research questions that guide this thesis.

### **2.1. CRISIS AND CRISIS RESPONSE**

A crisis is defined by Coombs (2007) as “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative consequences” (pp. 2-3). In Coombs (1999), an additional valuable definition is provided, namely a crisis as “an event that is an unpredictable, major threat that can have a negative effect on the organization, industry, or stakeholders if handled improperly” (p. 2). This second definition refers to a crisis as an event that not only affects the organization, but possibly also the whole industry. Indeed, the crises of multiple cruise lines have affected the whole cruise industry, as demand lowered significantly after numerous incidents (Tuttle, 2012). Crises are separated from incidents, as the former harms the whole organization whereas the latter does not (Coombs, 1999).

How organizations respond to crises has been the subject of a large body of scholarship. Crisis response is absolutely crucial in crisis situations, as it can shape or break an organization. Coombs (2010) has addressed this importance, stating, “the critical component in crisis management is communication” (p. 17). Arguing the centrality of image restoration during crises, Benoit (1995, 2005) analyzed several crisis response strategies that were used in the particular crises that he examined. He

delineated five responses, namely denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification. Whereas Benoit mostly focused on the identification of crisis response strategies, the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) by Coombs (1995, 2007) delineates what the appropriate crisis response strategies are according to particular crisis characteristics. These two authors represent the two development stages of crisis communication literature (Lee, 2004).

Coombs' SCCT asserts that when choosing a crisis response strategy, it is imperative to first identify the crisis threat. In order to do this, it must first be assessed which frame stakeholders use to qualify the crisis. Three crisis frames/types are delineated by Coombs, (1995, 2007, 2010) namely a crisis in which the organization is the *victim*, a crisis that is *preventable* or *intentional* due to a human error, and a crisis as a result of an *accident* (e.g. technological problems). Every crisis type has its own attribution of responsibility. Whereas a victim crisis frame accords a low crisis responsibility to the organization and therefore presents a mild reputational threat, the intentional crisis frame poses a strong reputational threat, as the organization is greatly responsible. An accident crisis frame has a higher attribution of responsibility than the victim type, but is less threatening than the intentional frame. This frame poses a moderate reputational threat.

Second, "intensifying factors" must be identified which might change how stakeholders attribute responsibility (Coombs, 2004). For example, when an organization has a similar *crisis history* to the current crisis, stakeholders accord greater responsibility to the organization (Ibid). Another intensifying factor is *prior reputation* of the organization. If stakeholders have been unsatisfied about the performance of the company and the way stakeholders have been handled, then the attributed responsibility is also increased (Coombs, 2002, 2007).

Because Coombs' SCTT provides a connection between crisis type and crisis response strategy, this theory facilitates advice on how organizations should behave following a crisis, yet also provides knowledge on which strategies are most effective in case of reputation repair. These guidelines afford a constructive framework in the assessment of any organization's crisis communication management. In particular, crisis managers first need to assess the threat level and consequently establish a fitting crisis response. SCCT advises that every crisis strategy should start with two elements, which

are instructing and adjusting information. The former constitutes informing stakeholders how they should deal with the crisis and gives practical information on which steps to take. The latter refers to the need of the organization to voice concern and to express basic information about the crisis, such as which actions are taken.

The importance of providing an effective crisis response is also important in relation to behavioral intentions (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). These authors found that the emotion *anger* directly influences negative word-of-mouth and leads to a declining intention to purchase goods from the organization in crisis. Effective crisis communication, however, can decrease this anger. Hence, crisis managers need to realize that effective crisis management also leads to behavioral intentions that are more beneficial to the organization, as people that are less angry are both more likely to purchase the product or engage with the company and less likely to spread negative publicity. According to this literature, accommodative crisis messages are predicted to result in the least anger. As this thesis will use the accommodative rebuilding strategy, it is valuable to assess whether these findings of Coombs and Holladay (2007) can be replicated to see whether anger indeed affects the perception of the organization.

Furthermore, Coombs' SCCT delineates four main crisis response strategies, namely deny, diminish, rebuild en reinforce. The crisis scenario used in this thesis has adopted the rebuilding strategy, which is used when the organization wants to present positive information or some form of aid to improve the organization's reputation. There are four sub strategies of rebuilding, of which the first is apology. With an apology, the organization takes responsibility for the event, which softens stakeholders' attitudes and feelings towards an organization and in turn decreases reputational damage (Wiener et al., 1991). The second is compensation, in which an organization offers a financial or nonfinancial reimbursement to the affected people involved. Repentance is used when the organization asks for forgiveness, and rectification is used when the organization takes action to make sure the crisis will not happen again in the future (Coombs, 1995, 2007). The rebuilding strategy is appropriate for both intentional as well as accidental crisis as long as the crisis is considered severe and harms a company's reputation.

In all, the situational crisis communication theory provides a valuable groundwork to assess how crisis can be framed in a way that best fits the situation and

the organization. The rebuilding strategy can be considered as the most important crisis strategy, because of two reasons. First, research found that when people do not know whether the organization is a victim or the originator of the crisis, they attribute responsibility to the organization as if it was fully responsible, which necessitates a rebuilding strategy (Coombs, 2007). Second, in severe crises, the rebuilding strategy is advised. Because the rebuilding strategy is paramount for crisis communication in general, and this thesis in particular – as it is expected that the crisis scenario is deemed severe – more in-depth analysis of the rebuilding strategy can be considered valuable and appropriate.

SCCT, however, does not discuss how medium form (new media, traditional media, word-of-mouth) affects crisis communication and crisis perception. In particular, this theory does not examine how mediums might impact the way that publics evaluate the crisis response. Coombs (2012) does admit this, stating that social media make crisis communication more complicated. However, the current literature on SCCT has offered only little additional insight on this matter. Therefore, this thesis will extend the SCCT focus on organizations by shifting the perspective to audience perception, public evaluation of the crisis response, and the four sub rebuilding strategies. This extension of analysis is guided by the following research question:

*RQ1: How does crisis communication on different mediums influence consumer perception of the organization?*

## **2.2. REPUTATION**

As the previous paragraphs already revealed, crisis communication is closely attached to corporate reputation. Heath (2010) argues that the amount of reputational damage to a company is the leading variable in measuring the failure or success of crisis communication. Moreover, the centrality of reputation in the realm of crisis communication is further sustained through Barton's (2001) definition of crisis, which claims that a crisis is a threat to the reputation of a company in which crisis communication functions to repair the damage of this reputation.

Reputation is a crucial resource for organizations, as it increases market shares, attracts investors, spurs financial growth, motivates employees, and improves customer

loyalty (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004). Corporate reputation is characterized here as “the collective representation of multiple constituencies’ images of a company, built over time and based on a company’s identity program, its performance, and how constituencies have perceived its behavior” (Ibid, p. 396). Phrased differently, reputation is the result of the stakeholders’ perception of a certain company. Reputations can be shaped in three ways, namely through direct contact – such as using a product of the organization – through mediated contact, and via word-of-mouth. All these contacts shape how a stakeholder discerns the corporation (Coombs, 2012). Hence, when the brand promise is kept and stakeholders get what they expect, reputation is bolstered.

Important to note, however, is that all stakeholders do not perceive reputation identically. Because of this, Zyglidopoulos (2009) justly notes that “stakeholder specificity” needs to be applied when referring to reputation. This author presents that the way in which people are familiar with the company or its service determines how reputational aspects are perceived, such as the perception of the company, its performance and its behavior. He claims that “people tend to construct overall images by generalizing from attributes they are familiar with to attributes they know nothing or very little about” (p. 419). Also, he states that because stakeholders have different cognitive filters, “different stakeholder groups should be expected to exhibit different biases, not only in the information they review but also in the way they process this information” (Ibid).

However, what is missing from this article as well as other literature on reputation perception is not just claiming this difference for stakeholder groups, but also investigating this difference inside one stakeholder group, namely consumers. In fact, *consumer specificity* could just as well be explained by Zyglidopoulos’ arguments pertaining to stakeholder difference. This thesis will investigate whether consumers are indeed also a stakeholder group that needs specification by assessing whether consumer characteristics lead to differences in perception of corporate reputation. This specific analysis will be guided by the research question posed at the end of this section.

Moreover, crises and incidents of all sorts are a threat to corporations because they can threaten their positive reputation. Barton (2001) argues that organizations can only repair and protect this reputational loss by engaging in effective crisis communication. However, an ineffective crisis response can further harm the



reputational assets of an organization (Coombs, 2012). Because crisis communication is such an important asset in the protection of corporate reputation, there is a strong link between reputation management, crisis management and crisis communication. Howell and Miller (2010) support the connection between crisis management and reputation, demonstrating in their study that effective crisis management is the determinant of how successful a corporation is after a crisis, measured by market shares. Crisis management is defined here as “a set of factors designed to combat crises and to lessen the actual damages inflicted” (Coombs, 2010, p. 20).

However, it is important to acknowledge here that crises do not always harm organizations, as a crisis can also act as a spark to improve corporate processes and present an opportunity to improve corporate reputation (Ulmer et al., 2010). The discourse of renewal emphasizes that crises can increase organizational learning and corporate processes (Ibid). For instance, Denny’s restaurants gained much negative media attention in the early 1990s when the company was proved to engage in practices of racial discrimination. Consequently, Denny’s was caught in a public relations crisis. However, due to a change in leadership, a diversity program for its employees and new laws against discrimination, Denny’s rebranded its corporate image and strengthened its identity for the better (Kanso et al, 2010).

Whether crises result in positive or negative consequences, the operationalization of crisis management is nevertheless dependent on the reputation of the organization prior to the crisis. When a corporation already has a damaged reputation before a crisis occurs, the reputational damages are intensified (the velcro effect) and crisis responsibility is greater, leading to increased damage in corporate reputation (Holladay, 2010). However, a halo effect occurs when a favorable prior reputation shields the organization from damaging reputational loss. Which communication strategy to choose, consequently, is thus dependent on the prior crises and reputation of the organization.

Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the prior reputation of an organization, as well as the crisis type and its history, determine which crisis response strategy best suits an organization to repair its reputational damage (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). The crisis types that the authors delineated – crisis as accident, crisis as victim, and crisis as preventable – influence which crisis communication strategies should be

implemented, which lead to different results in reputation repair (Coombs & Holladay, 2009).

The effects of having a certain reputation are demonstrated by Wang, Berens and Van Riel (2012), who found that a positive reputation leads to a better corporate performance. In particular, this is made possible as a result of a favorable reputation having the power to reduce uncertainty about an organization's motive and capability, for both the general public as investors. Furthermore, positive affect makes consumers more willing to purchase products, which leads to greater financial health for the corporation. In all, this confirms that even though reputation is relatively intangible – since perception and belief of a corporation exist in the minds of the stakeholders – it nevertheless contributes to significant tangible results.

Finally, corporate reputation can also be impacted by the personal relationship that consumers have with a brand or a service. For example, scholars (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Dawar & Lei, 2009) have shown that “factors that indicate a favorable disposition for consumers in the marketing research” (e.g. positive consumer expectations, brand commitment, and familiarity) “have proven to protect post-crisis evaluations of organizational reputations and brands” (Coombs & Holladay, 2013, p. 45). Related are Lau and Lee's findings (1999) that shakeouts and losses in reputation can have less of an impact on consumers that are committed to a brand than consumers who are not (Lau & Lee, 1999). Specifically, when people have more brand experience, “the likelihood of passing through shakeout periods in the relationship increases” (p. 350). Also, they state that repeated contact with a brand or service increases risk-taking and cooperation with the brand. This potentially means that there is a chance that crises have a less negative impact on the perception of reputation for consumers with more experience with the product/service in question (e.g. cruising) than persons who have not had the opportunity to engage with this. Hence, the amount of brand experience and brand commitment can have positive reputational implications.

### **2.3: CRISIS COMMUNICATION VIA NEW MEDIA**

When a corporation is involved in a crisis, it is of crucial importance for that organization to maintain a positive functioning relationship with the media, as stakeholders receive their information of a crisis via various mediums, such as television, radio and

newspapers, but also increasingly via new mediums such as blogs, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. Carroll (2004) has added to this, stating that stakeholders adopt the same crisis frame of the media. For example, if the media frames a crisis as the result of a human error made by the organization, audiences adopt this frame as real. Heath (2010) reinforces the importance of medium effects, as “media reporting not only define, but make salient the conditions of crisis” and “crisis prevention can be seen as working to avoid negative media attention” (p. 1).

Though new media does not have the traditional gatekeeping function as television and radio, scholars stress that corporations are often not using new media platforms to their full advantage (Bortree & Setzer, 2009; Cho & Huh, 2010; Del Vecchio, Laubacher, Ndou, & Passiante, 2011). Instead of engaging in one-to-one communication, new media is often used without incorporating elements of interactivity, which Jo and Kim (2003) state is the most important element for relation building. In their study about interactivity on corporate websites, Guillory and Sundar (2008) found that there is a strong connection between website interactivity and positive perception of that website. This conclusion is important, as this might be an additional factor in why scholars found that the medium matters more than the message (Schultz, Utz & Göritz, 2011).

The term ‘new media’ is used here instead of ‘social media,’ as social media is defined by Boyd and Ellison (2008) as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (p. 211). Apart from this, ‘social media’ has also become an umbrella term that refers to “sites that integrate technology, social interaction and user-generated content” (Siapera, 2012, p. 202). Though the definition by Boyd and Ellison (2008) is often used in academic literature, an inconsistency occurs in this literature concerning the usage of the word social media. Scholars (Coombs & Holladay, 2013) refer to blogs and corporate blogs as platforms of social media. However, this thesis will use the term ‘new media’ to relate to the three mediums assessed here. Though Facebook and YouTube *do* fall under the category of social media, corporate blogs do not, since these blogs often do not allow people to construct a public profile that can be linked with other users. Since the term ‘new

media' includes social media as well as corporate blogs, *and* the meaning of the phrase social media officially excludes one of the medium conditions used in this experiment, this thesis posits that using the term new media is more appropriate here.

In close connection to new media management is reputation management, as new media permits every individual to post negative information about a corporation. Jenkins (2008) contributes to this with the argument that new media has shaped opportunities for citizens to create and share information, which leads companies to have less of a say in what is being contributed and thus have less opportunity to control the message. Hence, since people are able to quickly spread information, it is important that companies react timely when a crisis hits. Thus, new media has altered the dynamics of crisis communication since it requires and demands more immediate information (Jacques, 2007).

### *2.3.1. Crisis Communication and Message Effect*

Stephens and Malone (2009) examined which crisis message strategy stakeholders desire when affected by a crisis, and via which medium they prefer to receive these messages. The findings show that most stakeholders prefer to receive emotional support (27.3%) to information (23.8%). This further justifies the choice of this thesis to construct a message that is emotionally supportive. As most stakeholders prefer this strategy, creating a message that includes four types of emotionally supportive strategies make it possible to investigate the importance of these *individual* strategies. The study by these two authors indicate that only two of Coombs' (1999) message strategies were requested, namely remediation (11.2%) and rectification (5.1%). Interestingly, these authors found that the message strategy of apology was minimally requested (less than 1%). Blogs were the preferred medium in 72.7% of the time.

### *2.3.2. Crisis Communication and Medium Effect*

A start has been made by scholars analyzing how new media can play a role in crises. Sweetser and Metzgar (2007) have examined how blogs impact relationship management during a crisis, and discovered that crisis perception can change after people read blogs. Specifically, these authors found that as crisis communication on

blogs increased, the perceived severity of the crisis decreased. Also, they observed that blogs that were written by the organization in a conversational human voice led to the lowest perceived level of crisis. People who were not exposed to the blog reported the highest level of crisis. This finding manifests that adopting an open communication style with stakeholders on blogs plays an important role in diminishing the crisis threat.

Another scholar that has written a scholarly essay on blogs is Kent (2008), who examined how blogs can be used in public relations. Most interestingly, Kent argued that people who are already following an organization most often read blogs. Therefore, he says that blogs offer “the power to reach the choir,” supporting this by stating that blog readers actively seek out these blogs, which consequently shows that they share the same views as the organization (p. 36). Coombs and Holladay (2013) offer an interesting thought on this perspective, claiming that this “logic holds that people who follow a corporation’s blog are likely to view the organization favorable and be supportive” (p. 41). What is missing from these articles on blogs is that none of them address whether reading corporate blogs *in general* leads these individuals to find crisis messages and crisis communication more credible or not.

Furthermore, medium credibility is fundamental for crisis communication, as “credibility judgments are critical to bring out positive post crisis outcomes” (Yang, Kan & Johnson, 2010, p. 476). A high medium credibility (as well as source and message credibility) can reduce the suspicion that the public may feel towards the crisis message. Therefore, mediums with a high credibility are expected to lead to more positive perception of crisis communication (Ibid). Credibility links to a valuable finding by Sweetser and Metzgar (2007), who discovered that active new media users think that new media is a more credible source of crisis coverage than non-active users.

A further example of a crisis in which new media played a large role was the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010. Muralidharan, Dillistone and Shin (2011) have examined how corporations try to augment their image after a crisis on new media, and established that BP’s use of corrective action was not the effective crisis response strategy to change the perception of the audience. This study presents valuable insights into the worthiness of the different new media platforms and argues that Twitter, Flickr, Facebook and YouTube are all used by audiences for different purposes, which demands that corporations adapt their communication strategy according to the particular

platform. Unfortunately, these specific uses of these mediums are not shared in this article. Nevertheless, this article is insightful in light of this thesis, as it will be examined whether YouTube and Facebook lead to differentiated results in perceived reputation when the communication strategy *is* the same, as advised against in this article.

This connects to Schultz, Utz and Göritz' (2011) finding that in crisis communication, the medium used – Twitter, blogs and newspapers – has a greater effect on participants' perception of reputation than the content of the message, which incorporated crisis communication strategies of information, apology and sympathy. Though Schultz et al. (2011) have initiated research on the effects of divergent crisis communication messages via media on reputation, many questions about the influence of mediums on the perception and reaction of stakeholders remain unanswered. For example, the new medium YouTube is not researched yet in combination with Facebook and corporate blogs.

Along the same line, Utz, Schultz and Glocka (2013) have researched the effect of different mediums and crises on corporate reputation while also examining secondary crisis communication. Here, the medium effects of Twitter, Facebook and online newspapers were juxtaposed with the victim and intentional crisis type. The authors found that the medium is a more important factor in shaping reputation than the crisis type. Also, crisis communication via Facebook especially was reported to lead to a higher positive reputation of the company than via online newspapers. However, traditional media was deemed more credible. This finding seems contradictory; as one might assume that credibility of the medium is connected to the way audiences perceive corporate reputation. The authors did not provide sufficient explanation on this paradox. However, the experiment conducted in this thesis might be able to provide a justification for this, as people have been asked to rate the credibility of the medium they received, which can be cross-examined with the score that people gave on reputation. Finally, the authors found that crisis type only influences secondary crisis communication, as intentional crises leads to an increased negative perception among respondents.

Jin and Liu (2010) state that social media is most used during crisis for “issue relevance, information seeking/sharing, and emotional venting/support” (p. 439). These scholars also address how the form and source of crisis communication affects the

success of organizational crisis response strategies. Liu, Austin and Jin (2011) test this model and found that audiences mostly accept crisis response strategies from traditional media, followed by new media and word-of-mouth. Also, they discovered that the source and the form of crisis communication shape public emotions and acceptance of crisis strategies. The authors, however, test this by surveying college students about a college crisis, thus making use of an *internal* public. In this study, an external public will be examined, which might lead to different results.

Which factors inspire people to use social media instead of traditional media in times of crisis is elucidated by Austin, Liu and Yin (2012). They discovered that social media was most frequently used for insider information while traditional media was used most for educational reasons. Also, functionality and humor were key factors in preferring social media. An important finding made again here was that credibility is reported highest with traditional media use. This discovery might explain the tendency of corporations to mostly present their crisis communication via traditional media. Additionally valuable is the result that source and form affects the incentive of audiences to seek more information, since they were least likely to search for additional information when the corporation itself spread the crisis communication.

Hence, what can be delineated from this is that corporations that are dealing with a crisis benefit the most in terms of positive reputation when they provide crisis communication information *themselves*, instead of letting third parties spread information. However, this finding seems to contrast Utz et al's (2013) result that traditional media is deemed more credible, because third parties are presenting the information on traditional media instead of corporations. It is expected that traditional media has a higher credibility in part because the information does not directly come from the affected organization. In any case, these scholars allow conditional conclusions to be drawn about trustworthiness of third parties and corporations, and about the credibility of traditional media vs. social media.

Schroeder et al. (2013) studied more drivers of social media use during crises and studied whether nationality plays a role here. These authors found that nationality is "not a driver of the likelihood to use social media to seek information in the event of a crisis" (p. 136). These scholars explained this finding by stating that they only examined countries that have a high gross domestic product (GDP), which are also countries in

which “the overall prevalence of social media use [...] has been noted” (Ibid). In fact, GDP has a direct positive correlation with social media usage (Kohut et al, 2011). This thesis also relies on this justification, as most participants for this study came from high GDP countries. Therefore, nationality differences were not considered to be a factor affecting the results.

Furthermore, the American Red Cross has also investigated the motive for people to use social media when both *seeking* and *sharing* crisis information (Schroeder, Pennington-Gray, Donohoe & Kiousis, 2013). The organization found that television news, radio and online news were turned to first in case of crisis information seeking. However, they found that Facebook placed fourth, which signifies that Facebook is the number one social media platform used when seeking crisis information (Ibid). Also, they found that social media adoption during crisis is influenced by demographic factors, as younger people (18-34) not only use social media more frequently, they also were reported to be more active on social media in times of crisis (Ibid). In all, this leads to the following research question:

*RQ2: How do consumers perceive and use new media for corporate communication purposes?*

#### **2.4: SOCIAL MEDIA CONSUMPTION**

The above-made finding points to an interesting dearth in research in new media and crisis communication; namely not acknowledging how age can affect crisis perception when the message is delivered via new media. When testing communication response strategies in new and traditional media, it is imperative to consider that age might influence the perception of the message, the organization and its reputation. Though it is a persistent finding (Siapera, 2012) that in all countries, older people use Internet and new media less than younger generations, crisis communication research ignores the effect that age can have on crisis perception.

To support this, Prensky (2001) argues that there is a great difference between digital natives and digital immigrants, as immigrants might be able to learn to use these new technologies, but they will not go to the Internet first when seeking information. In fact, digital immigrants will first use traditional mediums such as newspapers, as



opposed to digital natives (Prensky, 2001). This finding is relevant for this study, as it supports the importance of acknowledging age when analyzing audience perceptions on different mediums.

In order to diminish the digital divide, it is imperative that new media websites are “universally accessible and people of all ages can benefit from them” (Pfeil, Arjan & Zaphiris, 2009, p. 643). According to these authors, exploring age difference and new media use can help us understand what age means for user behavior and user preference. This insight in behavior and preference “can inform successful design of SNS [social networking sites] for this population” (p. 644). Other research has also shown that people’s offline characteristics influences their identity and behavior online. Most interestingly, Zaphiris and Sarwar (2006) found that the amount of Internet experience and age determines online behavior and communication. The 2009 Pew Internet and American Life Project on generations found that “older generations were more inclined to use the internet in an instrumental way, as a tool for shopping, banking, getting information and so on, while younger generations use it more for entertainment purposes, downloading music, sharing videos, et cetera” (Siapera, 2012, p. 74). This discovery demonstrates the relationship between age, online behavior and user preference.

However, Selwyn (2004) argues against the above-presented argument that access automatically leads to new media use, which can consequently close the digital divide. He states that this is a flawed assumption, as new media use is not just a matter of access. Selwyn constructed a concept of the digital divide that consists of stages, going from formal access (stage 1) to actual engagement with new media in a way that shows participation to society (stage 4). He argues that people can move through these stages by acquiring economic, social and/or cultural capital. The latter refers to – amongst other things – training that people receive in new media, and the exposure that a person has through family, friends and other contacts. This more nuanced perspective – connecting new media use not merely with access – could also used to explore consumption of media use, and in particular, the role that age plays in media usage.

Apart from age, gender can also be a predictor of media inequality, meaning that gender can play a role in determining new media use. However, the difference between men and women is considerably smaller in high diffusion countries than in countries that

have less Internet access. Though the overall gender gap is slowly shrinking in terms of access, Siapera (2012) argues that “there are still significant differences in the extent and kind of use of the Internet” (Siapera, 2012, p. 76). This connects to the findings of the OxIS (Oxford Internet Surveys), which found that the gaps are largest in leisure and entertainment. According to OxIS, “men are more likely than women to listen to and download music and videos” (Ibid). Moreover, it was found that “men use the Internet for recreation more than women, they look for more kinds of information compared to women. Women, on the other hand, are more likely [...] to pursue personal relationships in online contexts” (Ibid, p. 77). Apparently, it was also established that men prefer business-like social media (Linkedin) to women, who prefer social media that allow them to connect with friends and family.

In this thesis, it will be analyzed what the role is of age, gender, and cruise experience on medium preference, crisis perception, and the crisis communication messages on different mediums. In relation to the latter characteristic –as explained in the reputation section – crisis perception can be impacted by the personal relationship that consumers have with a brand or a service. Cruisers, therefore, have a potentially different perception of the crisis and the organization in crisis than non-cruisers, since the amount of experience with a service can have positive reputational implications. This is addressed with the following research question:

*RQ3: How do consumer characteristics impact medium preference and crisis perception?*

In all, this literature review has provided insight into existing theories and concepts in crisis communication research and presented relevant findings from new media literature.

### III. METHODOLOGY

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#### **3.1: EXPERIMENTS**

According to Yin (2014), research questions that start with ‘how’ are often exploratory in nature and rely on the use of experiments, case studies or histories. In this case, an experiment was conducted to generate knowledge on how the general audience perceives the crisis communication strategy of apology of three diverging mediums. Elliot (2012) argues that in public relations scholarly literature, “the experimental method is too often overlooked” (p. 209). Wimmer and Dominic (2003) confirm that experiments are hardly used in mass media research, but do provide ample opportunity to “provide a wealth of information for researchers and critics of the media” (p. 210).

Experiments in mass media research are very useful, as experiments have several advantages over other methods. First, experiments help to establish causal effects since a “cause-and-effect link between two variables” can be proven (Wimmer & Dominic, p. 210). Second, experiments allow the researcher to have control over the environment, the subjects, and the variables. Third, the costs are relatively low, whereas fourth, experiments allow replication. However, experiments are also claimed to have an artificial nature, as “much behavior of interest to mass media researchers is altered when studied out of its natural environment” (p. 211). Nevertheless, the authors claim that this is mostly so in the case of laboratory experiments, which this study does not rely on. In fact, the experiment in this study is not taken outside of the “real” world but instead taken in more natural surroundings, namely people’s own environment. Hence, the problem of artificiality is less applicable here.

In the simplest terms, experiments consist of manipulation and observation. Specifically, in experiments, “researchers manipulate the independent variable and then observe the responses of subjects on the dependent variable” (Wimmer & Dominic, p. 212). The independent variables here – the medium messages – are manipulated with the use of ‘straightforward manipulation,’ meaning that written texts, verbal messages or other stimuli are shown to the subjects.

### **3.2: DESIGN**

In this study, a single factor, 3x1 between-subjects design is adopted in which the crisis scenario is the fictional New Horizons crisis. (Medium: Facebook, YouTube, corporate blog) x (crisis response: rebuilding strategy). The research questions are answered with the use of this experimental set-up and a self-completion survey (See Appendix E). To prevent potential confounds, the medium messages – using the rebuilding crisis response strategy – were identical in the Facebook text, the corporate blog, as well as in the YouTube clip. To make sure that each group is equivalent, participants were randomly assigned to one of the three stimuli. This randomization means that “each subject has an equal chance of being assigned to each treatment group” (Wimmer & Dominic, p. 214). Also, randomization makes sure that each group has a relatively even distribution of men and women as well as people from all ages.

### **3.3. UNITS OF ANALYSIS**

170 respondents (approximately 56 respondents per group) answered several closed questions and an optional open question in this experiment. The respondents were randomly assigned to one of the three stimuli. The participants are people with a wide range of cruise experience, from people who have never cruised before to people who have taken multiple cruises. Because this study investigates whether there is a difference in perception of reputation and crisis response between cruisers and non-cruisers, it was imperative that the sample contained a relatively even amount of both experienced cruisers and people who had not cruised before. Therefore, a quota was set on every condition and cruise experience to maintain a balanced sample.

### **3.4. PRACTICALITIES**

The online survey tool SurveyGizmo was used to construct the survey, as this tool allowed participants to be branched to one of the three mediums and easily enabled embedded video, texts and photos. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, 2014, a pilot study was conducted with a small number of participants in order to reveal potential problems with the experiment. No pre-test was conducted, as with fictional crisis case studies, “the lack of pre-test is not a concern. Since the crisis scenarios used were fictional, it was impossible that subjects’ preexisting attitudes could have contaminated the results” (Elliot, 2012, p. 210). The language used for the survey questions and the conditions was

English.

After some final adjustments and changes to the questionnaire, the final survey was opened on April 11, 2014, and closed 8 days later, on April 19, 2014. The online experiment closed after this period of time because the majority of respondents completed the questionnaire in the first four days, after which the forums attempted to delete the survey link and expressed disapproval for the use of the forum to collect data. Eventually, the forums ‘banned’ the researcher from collecting additional data.

### **3.5. RECRUITMENT**

To recruit participants, the link to the survey was spread through Facebook, but also through various forums, such as:

Cruise critic.com	Cruiseclubforum.com
Tripadvisor.com	Cruiselinefans.com
Cruiseaway.com.au (Facebook)	Cruisetravel.nl/forum
LinkedIn (corporate communication channel)	Cruisers.co.uk
Cruisersforum.com	

The cruise forum of cruises.co.uk successfully led to a recruitment of around 35 participants. Moreover, the forum of cruise critic.com also provided numerous American cruisers. Cruise critic is a brand owned by TripAdvisor. The website is stated to be the market leader in providing cruise information to consumers, having the largest online cruise community consisting of non-cruisers and experienced cruisers. Monthly, the website generates over three million views (cruise critic.com/aboutus). The community page of cruise critic has an extensive forum containing many threads, for example one called “new cruisers.” Because Cruise critic attracts more than three million people each month from all over the world – from non-experienced cruisers to cruise fans – this platform was ideal to get a wide range of participants. Because the participants are from a wide range of countries and the experiment tests how consumers in general perceive a crisis communication strategy on three different mediums, the nationality of the participants was found to be of lesser importance in this particular study.

#### *3.5.1. Challenges*

Various problems occurred with disseminating the survey, as some forums deleted the

post asking for respondents. For example, cruisersforum.com quickly deleted the post, sending a message explaining this action, arguing that the post was deleted “since it is designed to tempt our members to post their expertise in a location other than our own (which is against the rules that you read when you signed up!!!).” Also, this forum said “we do not welcome you tempting them [other users] off to other quiz sites to post them. Otherwise what would be the point of us running a forum, if only you reap the benefits?” This animosity was also noted in other cases, most notably with Cruise critic.com. The first time a message was posted on cruise critic, a user alleged that the researcher was a spammer under a different name than a person who had also posted a message asking for respondents in previous weeks. After reacting that this was not the case – stating that this thesis uses different questions, which would be illogical if it would be the same person – the researcher’s post was deleted, meaning that the user in question had reported the post. The day later, the researcher again posted a message on Cruise critic, which stayed online for approximately 10 hours. Then, again, it was deleted, without a statement why. A few days later, a message was again posted, which again was quickly deleted without notification. Quickly afterwards, the researcher received an email which indicated she was banned from the forum, without any reasons provided.

However, there were also positive experiences, most notably with cruisers.co.uk. People on this forum were helpful, and the post remained online for the full period without any problems. Also, the administrator of Cruiseaway.com.au was very supportive after the researcher inquired about possible ways to distribute the survey. He said “the best forum for you is LinkedIn.com. I can spread it from there I have about 250 cruise industry contacts there.” Consequently, the researcher emailed with this person about the specifics of the study. Afterwards, he distributed it on the official Facebook page of CruiseAway and he said to distribute it via LinkedIn. Whether he actually did the latter cannot not confirmed since the researcher did not have access to this. Finally, the survey was also made public in the corporate communication group on LinkedIn. The post was not deleted, and eight persons responded that they had filled it in.

In the end, a total of 341 people filled in the survey, of which 171 were partials and 170 were completed. Hence, 49,9% of all respondents completed the experiment.

### **3.6. OPERATIONALIZATION**

The online experiment presented to the participants had several sections. First, an introduction was given about the survey and its topic (See Appendix B). Then, a question was asked whether people had cruised before. If so, people were automatically redirected to a page which asked people questions concerning their cruise experience and the criteria that they deemed most important for selecting a cruise. If the participant selected “no,” the person was automatically directed to the page that introduced the crisis scenario. Immediately after reading this scenario, every participant had to rate the severity of the crisis. To effectively collect participants’ preferences and perceptions, this thesis used several 7-point Likert scales, with options ranging from totally agree to totally disagree. Likert scales are “widely used in instruments measuring opinions, beliefs and attitudes” (DeVellis, 2003, p. 79). After the question on severity of the crisis, each person was branched into a page that contained one of the three mediums:

Condition 1:	YouTube video
Condition 2:	Facebook message
Condition 3:	Corporate blog

Though every condition has a different medium, each medium incorporated the same crisis response strategy, namely the strategy of rebuilding. This strategy included compensation, apology, repentance and rectification. Hence, the YouTube video, the Facebook message and the corporate blog all shared the same rebuilding strategy from the fictional company New Horizons Cruises.

### **3.7. CRISIS SCENARIO**

All participants received the following crisis scenario before they were subjected to the crisis response (See Appendix C).

On Tuesday, February 25, 2014, the New Explorer cruise ship, owned by New Horizons, set sail from Galveston, Texas to Mexico for a five day cruise. On Friday morning, however, a large fire in the engine room resulted in a loss of power and propulsion on board the ship. As a result of its loss of power, the

ship was adrift for five days off the coast of Mexico, before it was towed back to Mobile, Alabama. Emergency generators provided minimal power, and supplies such as water and food was delivered by other New Horizons ships passing by.

Though none of the 3,123 passengers and 1,040 crew members were injured, nor in danger, the lack of power led to unsanitary conditions. For five days, passengers slept on deck, as they moved their mattresses to the decks as a result of non-functioning air-conditioning. Passengers have also reported on running sewage in hallways, scarce food and panicked people. Because the toilets did not work, sewage bags were collected in the hallways of the ship. On Tuesday, March 4, the New Explorer arrived in Mobile, Alabama, where passengers were further assisted to arrive home. Whether the fire is the result of a human error caused by New Horizons, or by a technical failure, is not yet known.

### **3.8. CRISIS RESPONSE**

The following crisis reaction was provided by the organization in crisis – New Horizons – and included all rebuilding elements (apology, rectification, compensation, repentance). The crisis response is added in Appendix D.

First, New Horizons Cruises wants to apologize to our guests and their families, as they are affected by this very difficult situation. At this moment, the New Explorer is still adrift off the coast of Mexico. The situation on board the ship is very challenging, and we are obviously very sorry about what is taking place. We are not happy about the situation and we are working as hard as we can to get our guests home as quickly as possible. New Horizons is always proud to say that it provides a carefree and relaxing holiday for our guests, but today, we are sad to admit that we have failed our guests by not being able to fulfill this promise.

We sincerely hope that our guests are willing to forgive us for this unfortunate situation.

Furthermore, as soon as the ship has docked, it will be towed to a shipyard where an internal investigation team will assess how the fire started, and what we can do to make sure this will not happen again.

In terms of compensation, all guests onboard the New Explorer will receive a full refund of the cruise and all transportation costs. Additionally, each guest will receive 500\$ per person to relief any additional inconveniences.



### **3.9. INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

The independent variables used in this study are the manipulated mediums. Participants either received a screenshot of a corporate Facebook post, a screenshot of a corporate blog message, or a YouTube video that contained the exact same message as the other two mediums through the means of the New Horizons' press officer. All the conditions contained the rebuilding crisis response in which the company took full responsibility for the crisis.

### **3.10. DEPENDENT VARIABLES**

There are several dependent variables in this study, most of which are scales, delineated below. The reliability of these scales was measured with the Cronbach coefficient alpha, ranging from 0 to 1. Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) allows measuring the reliability of the scale by calculating its internal consistency, which refers to "the degree to which the items that make up the scale are all measuring the same underlying attribute" (Pallant, 2011, p. 6). According to Nunnally, (1978) a reliable scale has a Cronbach alpha of minimally 0.7.

Different kinds of variables are used, such as affective variables (related to emotions), cognitive variables (information processing, for example the perception of reputation), and behavioral variables (actions, such as willingness to cruise with the organization in crisis) A seven point likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree was used to record the answers. The first dependent variable asked participants to rate the severity of this crisis on a scale from 1 to 10.

#### *3.10.1 Emotion scale*

A scale was constructed which measured participants' perception about the crisis *response* of the company. Respondents had to rate their agreement to two statements that tested their emotions after receiving the crisis message. The following two questions have created insight into which emotions are triggered after being exposed to the crisis response:

1. This response makes me feel positive towards New Horizons.
2. This response makes me feel negative towards New Horizons.

The second question was reverse coded in order to construct a reliable scale ( $\alpha=0.87$ ).

### *3.10.2. Perception of response scale*

After these statements, participants were presented five statements that measured people's perception of the response. Of these five questions a reliable scale was constructed ( $\alpha=0.86$ ). This scale consists of the following statements:

1. I feel that New Horizons provided an adequate response to the crisis.
2. I feel that New Horizons did everything in its power to resolve the crisis.
3. This response makes me feel angry.
4. I feel disappointed by New Horizons response to the crisis.
5. I feel that New Horizons should have done more in response to the crisis.

The last three questions were reverse coded.

### *3.10.3. Organizational reputation scale*

Consequently, after the participants were subjected to the rebuilding strategy on different mediums, the reputation of New Horizons was tested with the use of Coombs and Holladay's five-point organizational reputation scale ( $\alpha=0.87$ ) (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, p. 174). The five point organizational reputational scale is especially relevant since other studies (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Elliot, 2012) have used this scale to construct a composite reputation score. Elliot (2012) states that the organizational reputational scale can be "summed to compute a new variable called the composite reputation score for each subject" in which a higher score relates to a better reputation (p. 212). The following questions composed the section on reputation:

1. The organization is concerned with the well being of its publics.
2. The organization is basically dishonest.
3. I do not trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident.
4. Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says.
5. The organization is not concerned with the well being of its publics.

In the survey, question 2, 3, and 5 were reverse coded in order to calculate a total score for the reputation scale.

### *3.10.4. New Horizons perception scale*

The next scale tested how participants perceive New Horizons with two questions

( $\alpha=0.86$ ).

1. I feel it is safe to cruise with New Horizons.
2. I would be willing to cruise with New Horizons in the future (purchase intention)

### *3.10.5. Recommending New Horizons*

Just as the New Horizons perception scale above, the following question also examined the audience' viewpoint towards the organization in crisis. Because this question was asked using the net promoter scale, (ranging from a scale from 0 to 10) it was assessed separately.

1. How likely are you to recommend New Horizons to friends/family members/colleagues?

### *3.10.6. Cruise commitment scale*

The next section asked questions on attitude to cruising. These questions can give insight in whether participant' attitude and commitment to cruising in general influences perception of the organization in crisis, its reputation and the crisis response. Specifically, with this scale, it can be analyzed whether people that are (highly) committed to cruising perceive this differently that those who are not committed to cruising. ( $\alpha=0.84$ ).

1. How likely are you to recommend cruising to friends/family members/colleagues?
2. I consider cruising to be my first choice when I am planning a vacation.

### *3.10.6. Cruise apprehension*

The following question can give insight in whether apprehension towards cruising affects the perception of the organization in crisis, its reputation and the crisis response. It can also be tested whether cruisers have less apprehension towards cruising than non-cruisers. This question provided participants a wider, more in-depth choice of options that accords a more qualitative insight into risk perception.

1. I am apprehensive about cruising and the cruise industry.

### **3.11. MESSAGE EFFECT**

Aside from these scales, questions on message effects were also asked. A ranking question on message effect asked people to rank the elements of the rebuilding strategy that they found most important in a crisis response message (apology, asking for forgiveness, ensuring the incident will not happen again, and providing compensation) from 1 (most important) to 4 (least important). This examination of the distinctive crisis response elements can provide an understanding of which crisis response message people prefer to receive in a crisis communication situation.

### **3.12. MEDIUM PERCEPTIONS**

How people view the new mediums that they were exposed to in terms of usability and trustworthiness was assessed with the following questions.

1. How often do you use X to read corporate posts/messages?
2. Do you trust X as a tool for receiving corporate messages and information?
3. When I need information about a company, I go to the company's X  
(corporate blog, Facebook page, YouTube page)
4. I find corporate information that I read on X reliable
5. I find X a credible source of information

Aside from these questions, two ordinal questions asked respondents to rank the medium that they are most likely to use in the case of a crisis, and which medium they prefer to get updates from in case a crisis occurs.

1. Rank the medium that you are most likely to use when searching for corporate information.
2. If a crisis occurs, would you prefer getting updates via Facebook, a corporate blog, or via its YouTube channel?

Finally, the experiment ended with questions on demographics; asking age, gender and nationality. The complete questionnaire can be assessed in Appendix E.

### **3.13. DATA ANALYSIS**

This study utilized SPSS to interpret the collected data. Subsequently, this thesis juxtaposed the subgroups assigned to a particular media platform with each other to comment on audience perception of the rebuilding crisis response strategy on organizational reputation.

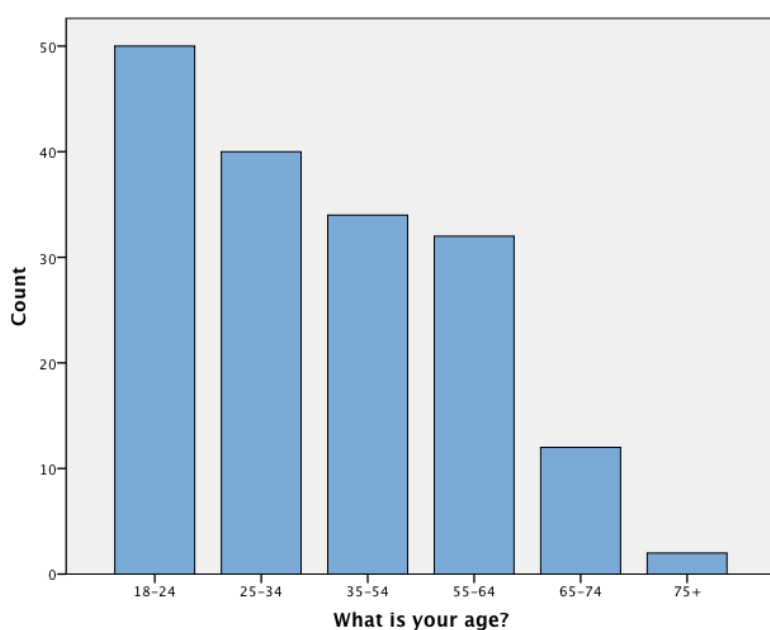
Aside from this, SPSS was used to analyze the difference in perception of crisis communication on the three different media platforms to provide some additional insight into the relationship between demographical factors and perceived effectiveness of crisis communication. Moreover, analysis on how many times a person has cruised and how this person perceives crisis message strategies on a specific medium, may provide knowledge on whether there is a specific relationship between cruising and perception of a crisis in the cruise industry.

## IV. FINDINGS

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### 4.1. PARTICIPANTS

A total of 170 participants participated in the study (N=170). Of these participants, 38.8% were male (N=66) and 61.2% were female (N=104) (See Appendix A for a graph of this data). The average age is 34 years (SD=16.3). Figure 1 displays the age distribution.



**Figure 1: Age distribution**

From the 170 participants, the largest group came from the Netherlands (N=77, 45,3%), followed by the United Kingdom (N=38, 22,4%) and the United States (N=32, 18.8%). The remaining 13.3% (N=23) came from fifteen other nationalities, such as Canada (N=4, 2.4%), Italy (N=3, 1.8%) and Australia (N=2, 1.2%) (See Appendix A for a graph on this data).

Of the 170 respondents, 46,5% has cruised before (n=79), 40,6% have not cruised before (n=69) and 12.9% said they have not cruised before but intend to do so in the future (n=22) Hence, in total, 46,5% have cruised before (n=79) and 53,5% have not (n=91), providing a balanced sample (See Appendix A). The average amount of cruises taken of the 79 cruisers is 10.4, with a minimum of 1, a maximum of 70 and a standard

deviation of 11.3. Royal Caribbean International is the cruise line that most people have cruised with, as 44.9% of all cruisers have had experience with this cruise line. The second is 'Other' and the third P&O cruises. AIDA cruises scored 0%.

#### 4.2. SEVERITY OF CRISIS

The first question that participants received after reading the crisis scenario – but before the medium condition – was how they would rate the severity of the crisis. On a scale from 1 to 10, (1 being very low and 10 very high) the mean score of all 170 participants for severity was 7.0, with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 10 (SD=1.73). As figure 2 shows, the mode (N=51) was 8. 67,6% of all people rated the crisis 7 or higher, which indicates that the crisis was perceived as high in severity.

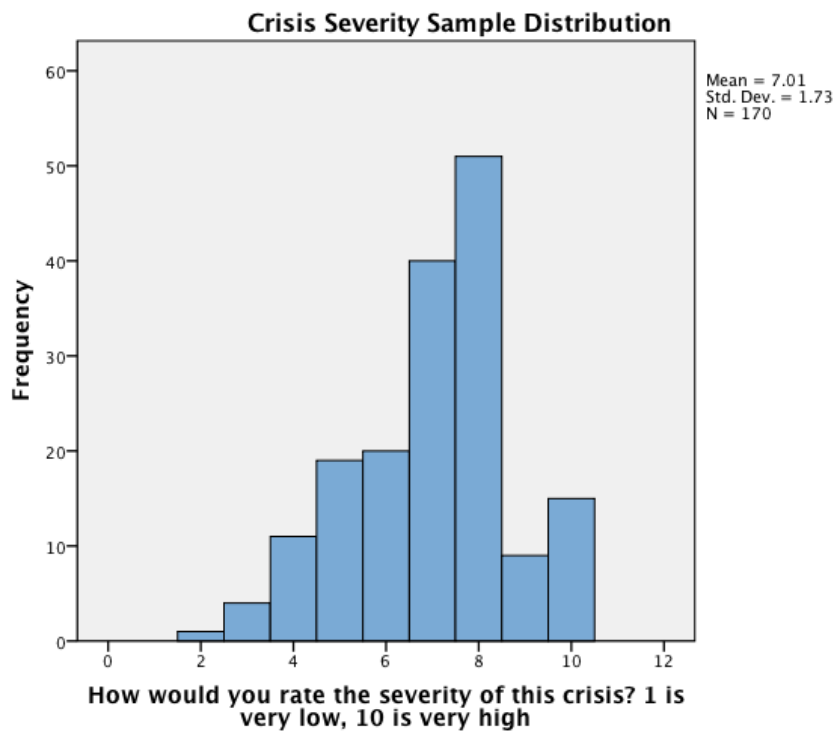


Figure 2: Crisis severity sample distribution

Because the question on severity was asked before participants received the medium condition, there is no insight that shows the crisis severity variation across the 3 mediums. However, a significant relationship was found using the Pearson product-moment correlation test between the variables severity of crisis and perception of *safety* of New Horizons, meaning that there is an association between ranking the crisis

more severe and perceiving the company as less safe [ $r = -0.24$ ,  $n = 170$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ]. There is no relationship between severity of crisis and willingness to cruise with the organization in crisis.

Next, in order to assess whether medium exposure influences crisis communication perception and perception of the organization in crisis, participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups – Facebook, YouTube, or corporate blogs – that featured an identical message from the organization in crisis. This is addressed with the following research question:

#### **4.3. RESEARCH QUESTION 1:**

*How does crisis communication on different mediums influence consumer perception of the organization?*

##### **4.3.1 MEDIUM GROUPS AND PERCEPTION OF ORGANIZATION**

With various one-way between subjects ANOVA tests, insight is given in how the rebuilding crisis communication strategy influences consumer perception of the New Horizon's organization when this strategy is presented on three different conditions, namely Facebook, YouTube and corporate blogs. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of the medium on all the dependent variables related to the perception of the organization mentioned in the method section.

First, a one-way between subjects ANOVA compared the effect of the medium on emotions. For this, the emotion scale was used which consisted of the statements "this response makes me feel positive towards New Horizons" and "this response makes me feel negative towards New Horizons." A non-significant effect was measured at the  $p < 0.05$  level of the three conditions (the three mediums) on the emotions towards New Horizons [ $F(2, 167) = 0.45$ ,  $p = 0.64$ ]. Though insignificant, the mean score of corporate blogs ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ) was higher than that of YouTube ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ) and Facebook ( $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ). On average, the response makes people either neutral or slightly positive towards New Horizons ( $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ). When splitting the two statements, it shows that the mean for "this response makes me feel positive towards New Horizons" ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ) is higher than for "this response makes me feel negative" ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ). A paired t-test showed that these differences are indeed significant



$t(169) = -3.98, p = 0.000$ . This suggests that the response makes people more positively inclined towards the organization.

Apart from this scale, a perception of response scale was constructed which included positive and negative statements on New Horizons' response to the crisis ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ). Again, an ANOVA test was conducted but no significant effect was measured of condition on perception of response [ $F(2, 167) = 0.13, p = 0.88$ ].

Consequently, a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to see whether a certain medium condition influenced the perception of New Horizon scale ("I feel it is safe to cruise with New Horizons," "I would be willing to cruise with New Horizons in the future"). No significant difference was found between the conditions and perception of New Horizons. To measure whether medium exposure influenced cruise attitude and commitment, the cruise commitment scale was used ("How likely are you to recommend cruising to friends/family members/colleagues," "I consider cruising to be my first choice when I am planning a vacation"). There was no significant difference measured between the condition and the commitment people reported to cruising [ $F(2, 167) = 0.60, p = 0.55$ ].

In all, these findings indicate that overall, medium conditions do not have a direct influence on the way participants perceived the crisis response and the organization in crisis.

#### **4.3.2 MEDIUM CONDITION ON PERCEPTION OF REPUTATION**

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of the medium on organizational reputation. Coombs and Holladay's five point organizational reputational scale was used. This test showed that YouTube exposure led to the most positive score in reputation ( $M=24.13, SD=6.58$ ) and corporate blog to the lowest score ( $M=22.9, SD=5.70$ ). However, there was not a significant difference between conditions and the reputation that people ascribe to the organization in crisis. [ $F(2, 167)=0.60, p=0.55$ ].

Further analysis, however, showed an interesting finding. Specifically, a regression analysis revealed that the impact of the media condition on reputation depends on the frequency of which people use new media for corporate communication

purposes. In particular, after standardizing the new media frequency measure, a regression analysis was performed on participants' average evaluation of New Horizon's reputation with media condition, new media frequency, and their interaction as predictors. This analysis showed a main effect for new media frequency ( $B=2.95$ ,  $t(166)=2.09$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), indicating that, the higher participants' frequency of new media use, the higher their average evaluation of New Horizon's reputation. There was no main effect of media condition ( $B=-0.76$ ,  $t(166)=-1.30$ , NS), indicating that, with average levels of new media frequency, media condition has no significant effect on the average evaluation of New Horizon's reputation.

Importantly, the interaction between media condition and new media frequency was significant ( $B=-1.42$ ,  $t(166)=-2.12$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Following recommendations in the literature (Aiken and West, 1991; Fitzsimons, 2008; Hayes 2012), regression lines were estimated at one standard deviation above and below the mean of the scores on the new media frequency scale (labeled high frequency and low frequency users respectively). These simple slopes analyses indicated that high frequency users in the YouTube condition evaluated New Horizon's reputation higher (i.e., better) than high frequency users that were exposed to the corporate blog (LSD [least significant difference],  $p < 0.05$ ). High frequency users in the Facebook condition did not differ from the YouTube (LSD, NS) or corporate blog condition (LSD, NS). For low frequency users, media condition did not affect participant's average evaluation of New Horizon's reputation ( $B = 0.66$ ,  $t(166)=0.79$ , NS; see Figure 3).

In conclusion, the choice for YouTube, Facebook or a corporate blog to communicate crisis information only impacts New Horizon's reputation among high (versus low) frequency users of new media for corporate communication purposes. Among high frequency users, New Horizon's reputation is significantly better after communicating via YouTube rather than via a corporate blog.

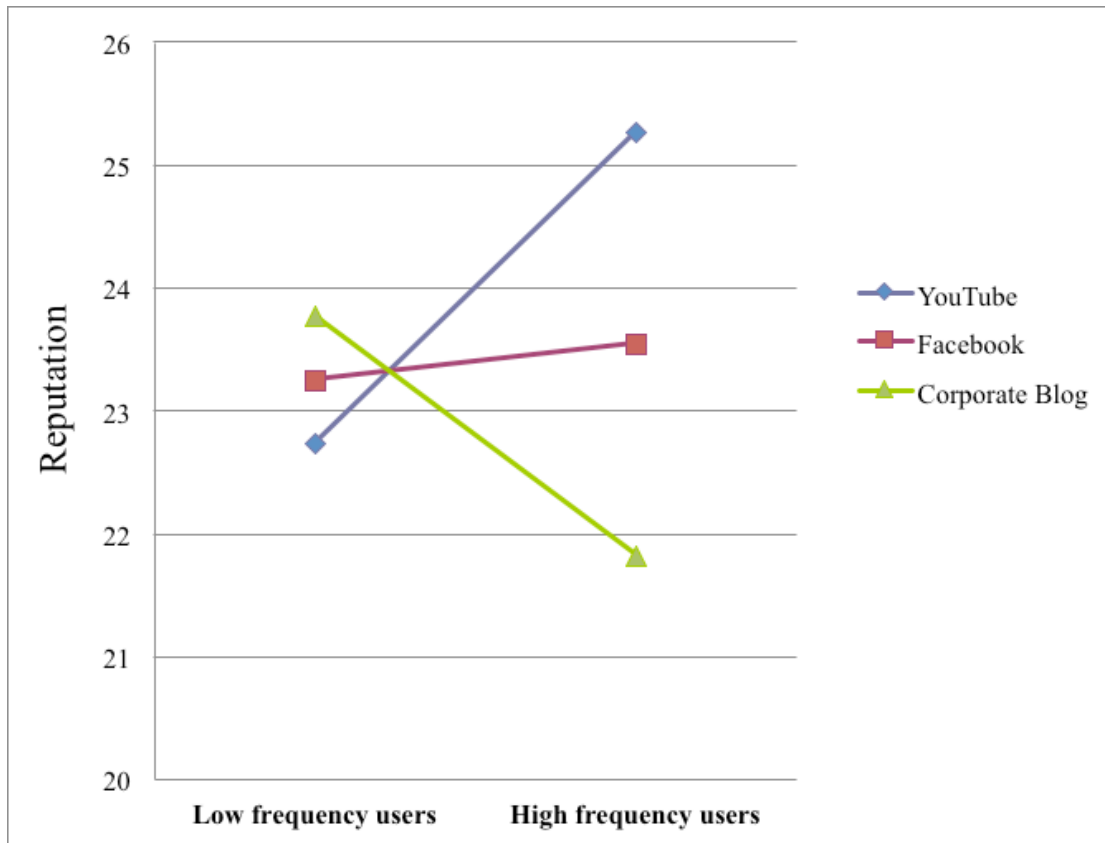


Figure 3: Average evaluation of New Horizon’s reputation as a function of new media frequency and media condition.

#### 4.3.3. REPUTATION AND NEW MEDIA CREDIBILITY

Furthermore, with the use of the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, an additional interesting relationship was found between the credibility that people assign to new media in general, and the overall reputation of the organization in crisis. There was a moderate, positive correlation (Cohen, 1998, pp. 79-81) found between the two variables [ $r = 0.37$ ,  $n = 170$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ], with high scores on the credibility that people attribute to new media associated with higher scores for the reputation that is given to the organization in crisis. Separate correlation analysis were performed to get insight into which medium specifically has the highest relationship between credibility and reputation. It was found that all three mediums have a significant correlation between these variables. However, YouTube has the highest, positive correlation between ascribed credibility and reputation [ $r = 0.52$ ,  $n = 55$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ] in comparison to corporate blogs [ $r = 0.40$ ,  $n = 51$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ] and Facebook [ $r = 0.27$ ,  $n = 64$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ].

#### **4.3.4. REPUTATION CORRELATIONS**

With the use of the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, a key finding emerged that confirmed a correlation between perception of response (“I feel that New Horizons provided an adequate response to the crisis”, “I feel that New Horizons did everything in its power to resolve the crisis”, “This response makes me feel angry, I feel disappointed by New Horizons response to the crisis”, “I feel that New Horizons should have done more in response to the crisis”) and reputation scores.

**Table 1: Correlation perception of response and reputation**

		Perception of response	Reputation
Perception of response	Pearson	1	<b>.722**</b>
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<b>.000</b>
	N	<b>170</b>	<b>170</b>
Reputation scale	Pearson	<b>.722**</b>	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<b>.000</b>	
	N	<b>170</b>	<b>170</b>

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As table 1 shows, there is a strong, positive correlation between the two variables, [ $r = 0.72$ ,  $n = 170$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ] with a more positive perception of New Horizons’ response to the crisis associated with higher levels of reputation.

Furthermore, emotion scores are also found to be correlated to reputation, as a strong, positive correlation was identified [ $r = 0.58$ ,  $n = 170$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ], with an increased score in emotion (when the response makes the participant feel more positive) associated with higher reputation scores.

Finally, a moderate, positive correlation was found between higher reputation scores and higher scores in likeliness of recommending New Horizons [ $r = 0.45$ ,  $n = 170$ ,

$p = 0.000$ ]. Hence, there is an association between according a higher reputation to the organization in crisis and recommending this organization.

#### **4.3.5. CORRELATIONS CRISIS RESPONSE AND PERCEPTION OF NEW HORIZONS**

Several additional analyses were performed to assess whether there is a relationship between effective crisis communication and consumers' perception of the organization in crisis. With the use of the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, a positive, moderate to strong effect was found between the perception of response scale and recommending New Horizons [ $r = 0.47$ ,  $n = 170$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ].

A strong relationship was found between the perception of response scale and the cruise commitment scale, i.e. feeling it is safe to cruise with the organization in crisis and willingness to cruise with the organization [ $r = 0.53$ ,  $n = 170$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ]. This means that crisis communication efforts by organizations have a strong impact on perceptions of safety and willingness to engage with the organization in the future.

Finally, a positive, moderate to strong correlation was found between the emotion scale ("This response makes me feel positive towards New Horizons," "This response makes me feel negative towards New Horizons") and recommending New Horizons. Just as the perception of response scale, it was found that feeling more positive towards the organization in crisis has a positive relation to recommending it [ $r = 0.48$ ,  $n = 170$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ].

#### **4.4. RESEARCH QUESTION 2:**

*How do consumers perceive and use new media for corporate communication purposes?*

##### **4.4.1. PERCEPTION AND USAGE OF FACEBOOK**

Medium effects were assessed with questions pertaining to people's perception of the medium that they were assigned to in the experiment. For the question "how much do you use Facebook to read corporate posts/messages," the majority of the group that received Facebook as the condition ( $N=64$ ) said "never" ( $N=25$ , 39.1%). From a scale from 1 (never) to 7 (several times a day), the mean was 2.66, signifying that people on average read corporate posts on Facebook between several times a year and once a

month. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to analyze whether age affects frequency of use, and found a significant effect [ $F(2, 61)=3.3, p=0.04$ ]. The younger age group (18-34) has a mean of 2.94, the middle age group (35-54) 3.25, and the oldest group (55+) a mean of 1.72.

The majority of the people ( $N=37, 57.8\%$ ) do not trust Facebook as a tool for receiving corporate messages and information, whereas 27 people do trust this platform (42.2%). Trust is significantly related to age, as the younger age group (18-34) is more likely to trust Facebook for receiving corporate messages than the oldest group [ $F(2, 61)=4.0, p=0.02$ ]. This was found with a post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test, comparing the younger participants ( $M=1.44, SD=0.50$ ) with the older participants ( $M=1.83, SD=0.38$ ).

On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being never and 5 always), most people reported that they either never ( $N=22, 34.4\%$ ) visit Facebook when they need information about a company, followed by rarely ( $N=19, 29.7\%$ ) or sometimes ( $N=18, 28.1\%$ ). Only 4 persons reported often, and one person said always. Again, there is no difference between the answers of the age groups 18-34 and 35-54, but there is a significant difference between age group 1 (18-34) and age group 3 (55+), shown by a one-way between subjects ANOVA [ $F(2, 61)=5.2, p=0.008$ ] and a post hoc comparison Tukey HSD test, in which the mean of age group 1 was ( $M=2.35, SD=0.95$ ) and that of age group 3 was ( $M=1.50, SD=0.79$ ).

With regards to reliability, participants were on average neutral ( $M=4.00$ ), as 34% also reported to be neutral to the statement whether they find Facebook a reliable source of corporate information. As expected, age again influenced perception of reliability [ $F(2, 61)=4.67, p=0.01$ ]. As with trust and frequency of using Facebook for corporate information, there is only a significant value measured between the youngest ( $M=4.56, SD=1.48$ ) and the oldest age groups ( $M=3.28, SD=1.27$ ).

Participants find Facebook only slightly less credible than reliable ( $M=3.78$ ), with the two highest groups reporting to be neutral (21.9%) to the statement "I find Facebook a credible source of information" and slightly in agreement (20.3%). As found in the other tests, there is a significant age difference between age groups and Facebook credibility [ $F(2, 61)=5.3, p=0.008$ ], in particular, between the youngest age group (18-34) ( $M=4.24, SD=1.69$ ) and the oldest age group (55+) ( $M=2.72, SD=1.44$ ).

#### **4.4.2 PERCEPTION AND USAGE OF YOUTUBE**

The same questions on medium use, frequency of use, trust, reliability and credibility were asked for the group that received the YouTube condition. The question “how much do you use YouTube to receive corporate posts/messages,” scored a mean of 2.25, in which 40% said “never.” This low mean signifies that on average, people look at corporate posts on YouTube a little over several times a year. Interestingly, as opposed to Facebook, there was *no* significant effect found between age and the frequency of which people use YouTube to read corporate posts [ $F(2, 52)=0.38, p=0.68$ ]. The mean differences of the three age groups were not as divergent as the differences between the age groups in the Facebook condition (18-34:  $M=2.40$ , 34-54:  $M=2.18$ , 55+:  $M=2.00$ ).

A large majority of the people reported they trust YouTube as a tool for receiving corporate messages and information (63.6%), as opposed to participants who state they do not trust YouTube (36.4%). In the case of YouTube, trust is *not* significantly related to age, as a one-way between subjects ANOVA found no significant effect between age and trust [ $F(2, 52)=1.95, p=0.15$ ].

From a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being never and 5 always), most people reported that they never (50.9%) visit YouTube when they need information about a company. In total, 80% of all participants who got YouTube as condition reported either to never or rarely use YouTube as a corporate communication channel. There is no significant influence of age on whether people go to YouTube when they need information about a company [ $F(2, 52)=0.72, p=0.49$ ].

On average, people are neutral about whether they find YouTube information reliable ( $M=4.04$ ). 47.3% of all participants stated to be neutral about this. Age does not influence perception of reliability, as a one-way between subjects ANOVA found no significant effect [ $F(2, 52)=0.58, p=0.56$ ].

The mean score for whether people find YouTube a credible source of information is  $M=3.87$ . The largest group reported to be neutral (34.5%) and slightly in agreement (23.6%). As with the other questions, there was no significant difference found between credibility scores of younger generations and older participants [ $F(2, 52)=0.59, p=0.56$ ]. Though the youngest group (18-34) did have the highest mean score, followed by the middle age group and the oldest group, the mean differences were very small.

#### **4.4.3. PERCEPTION AND USAGE OF CORPORATE BLOGS**

45.1% of all participants that received the condition corporate blogs reported that they never use this platform to receive corporate posts or messages. The mean score was  $M=2.16$ , which is the lowest score of the three mediums. Hence, on average, people use corporate blogs several times a year to receive corporate information. Similar to YouTube, age did not play a role in frequency of use [ $F(2, 48)=1.78, p=0.18$ ].

A minimal majority stated they trust corporate blogs as a tool for receiving corporate messages and information (51%) over those who do not trust this platform (49%). Again, no significant relationship was found between age and trust [ $F(2, 48)=2.06, p=0.14$ ].

23.5% of the people reported to never use corporate blogs when they need information about a company. 42.2% said they “rarely” use this tool, and 21.6% “sometimes.” There is no significant influence that age has on whether people go to YouTube when they need information about a company [ $F(2, 48)=0.66, p=0.52$ ].

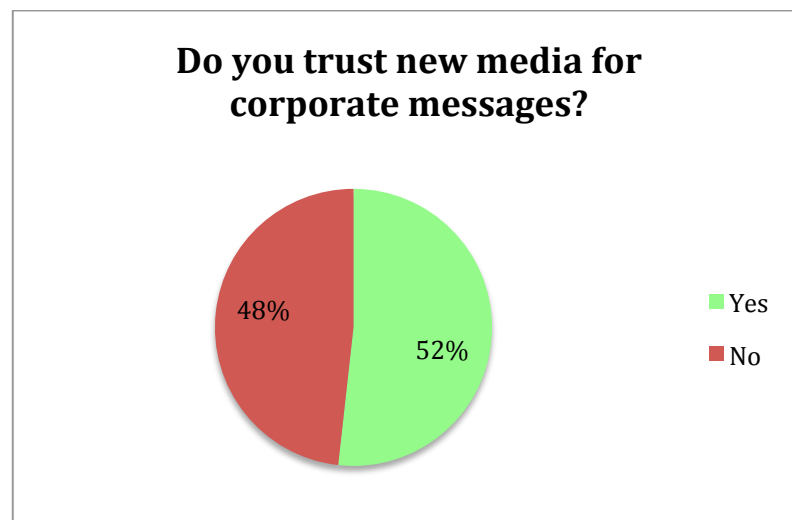
With regards to reliability, the average mean for corporate blogs is slightly higher than Facebook and YouTube ( $M=4.33$ ). 86.3% answered the statement “I find corporate information that I read on corporate blogs reliable” with neutral (47.1%), slightly agree (23.5%) or moderately agree (15.7%). Hence, 39.2% slightly agrees or moderately agrees, as opposed to 13.7% who strongly disagree, moderately disagree or slightly disagree. A one-way between subjects ANOVA found no significant effect between age and scores of reliability [ $F(2, 48)=0.63, p=0.54$ ].

Finally, for the statement “I find corporate blogs a credible source of information” the mean score was  $M=4.31$ , which is the highest score of the three mediums. Whereas 19 people reported to be neutral (37.3%), 18 people reported to slightly agree (35.3%), and 11.8% (the third highest group) reported to moderately agree. Thus, whereas 15.7% disagrees with this statement and does not find corporate blogs reliable, 47.1% agrees with this statement and thus finds corporate blogs reliable. Again, age did not influence people’s perception of the reliability of corporate blogs.



#### **4.4.4. COMPOSITE SCORES USAGE AND PERCEPTION NEW MEDIA**

When merging the results from the question whether people trust the medium they received as a tool for receiving corporate messages, a new variable emerged, namely trust in new media. Overall, 51,8% (N=88) reported that they trust new media, and 48.2% (N=82) reported that they do not.



**Figure 4: Trust in new media**

##### *4.4.4.1. New Media Credibility and Recommending New Horizons*

With the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, an interesting relationship was found between specific medium credibility and recommending the company in crisis. Specifically, a moderate, positive correlation was found between assigning credibility to YouTube, and reporting a higher score in recommending the company [ $r = 0.40$ ,  $n = 55$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ]. While there is a small to moderate correlation between corporate blog credibility and perceived reputation [ $r = 0.29$ ,  $n = 51$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ], there is *not* a significant correlation between Facebook credibility and recommending New Horizons [ $r = 0.08$ ,  $n = 64$ ,  $p = 0.52$ ].

#### **4.4.5. MEDIUM PREFERENCE**

In the survey, the question "if a crisis occurs, would you prefer getting updates via Facebook, a corporate blog or via its YouTube channel?" was constructed to provide

insight into the medium that people prefer in times of crisis. Out of a total of 170 respondents, corporate blogs are preferred, as 55.3% (n=94) of all participants rated corporate blogs first out of three. Second is Facebook with 37.1% (n=63). Interestingly, only 7.6% ranked YouTube first (n=13). This result is similar to the data collected from the question “Rank the medium that you are most likely to use when searching for corporate information.” Here, the majority of the people, 55.3% (n=94) ranked corporate blogs as the medium that they are most likely to use when searching for corporate information. Facebook is used for corporate information by 32.4% of the people (n=55). YouTube is used the least, by only 12.4%. (n=21). Hence, corporate blogs are both the preferred channel for receiving crisis updates and also is the medium that is most likely to be used in times of crisis.

There is a slight shift between the preferred medium during crisis and the most likely to use medium. Whereas Facebook decreases in likelihood of use when searching for corporate information as compared to preferred channel to receive information, YouTube is used more as the first platform when searching for corporate information than it is preferred as the channel to receive updates on. Though these are minor differences, this might indicate that YouTube is seen more as a medium having a ‘pull’ effect (whereby users prefer to search on this medium) as compared to the ‘push’/information dissemination effect of corporate blogs.

#### **4.4.6 MESSAGE EFFECT**

Aside from these scales, questions on message effects were also asked. A ranking question on message effect asked people to rank the elements of the rebuilding strategy that they found most important in a crisis response message (apology, asking for forgiveness, ensuring the incident will not happen again, and providing compensation). As a result, 48.8% (n=83) of all respondents reported that they find an apology most important in a crisis response. For 30.6% (n=52) of the people, rectification – ensuring that the incident will not happen again – is most important, followed by compensation at 19.4% (n=33). Interestingly, only 1.2% (n=2) of all respondents ranked asking for forgiveness as most important. Figure 5 presents a bar chart as an overview of these findings.

Furthermore, a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of medium condition on ranking crisis messages. To clarify, do people find different crisis messages most important when they are exposed to a different medium? It was found that there is a non-significant difference in mean scores between the condition groups.

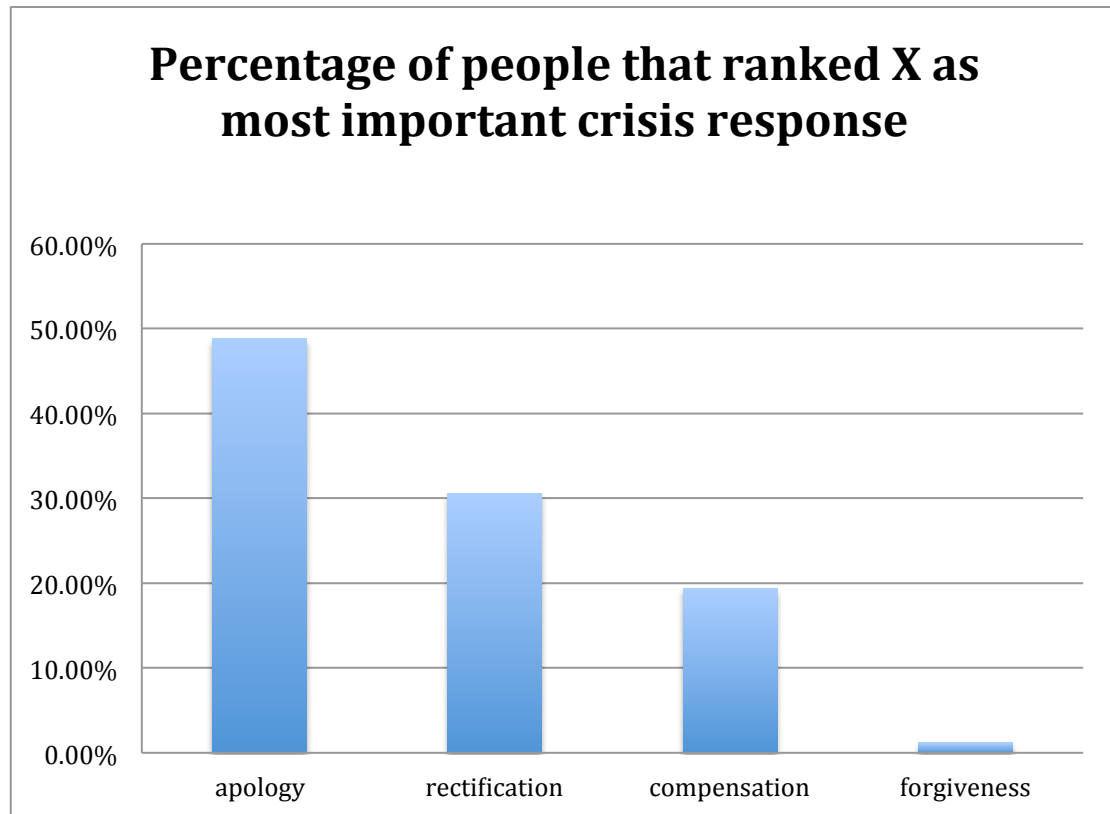


Figure 5: Preferred rebuilding crisis response

#### **4.5. RESEARCH QUESTION 3:**

*How do consumer characteristics impact medium preference and crisis perception?*

##### **4.5.1. CONSUMER CHARACTERISTICS AND PERCEPTION OF CRISIS SEVERITY**

As delineated before, the mean score of all 170 participants for severity was 7.0 on a scale from 1 to 10, in which the mode (N=51) was 8. Because participants had to rate the crisis *before* they were exposed to the conditions, it could not be analyzed which group rated the crisis highest with this particular question. However, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the severity scores for gender, age, and cruise experience. Though gender does not make a difference in perceiving severity, age does make a great difference [F (5, 164) = 4.71, p = 0.000]. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the age group 55-64 (M=7.94, SD=1.65) was significantly different from two age groups, namely 18-24 (M=6.42, SD=1.46) and 25-34 (M=6.58, SD=1.50). Moreover, whereas 18 to 24 year olds rate the crisis on average 6.42, respondents aged 55+ rate it between 7.8 and 8.0. This shows that there is a large divergence between how different age groups perceive the severity of the crisis. Figure 6 demonstrates this development graphically.

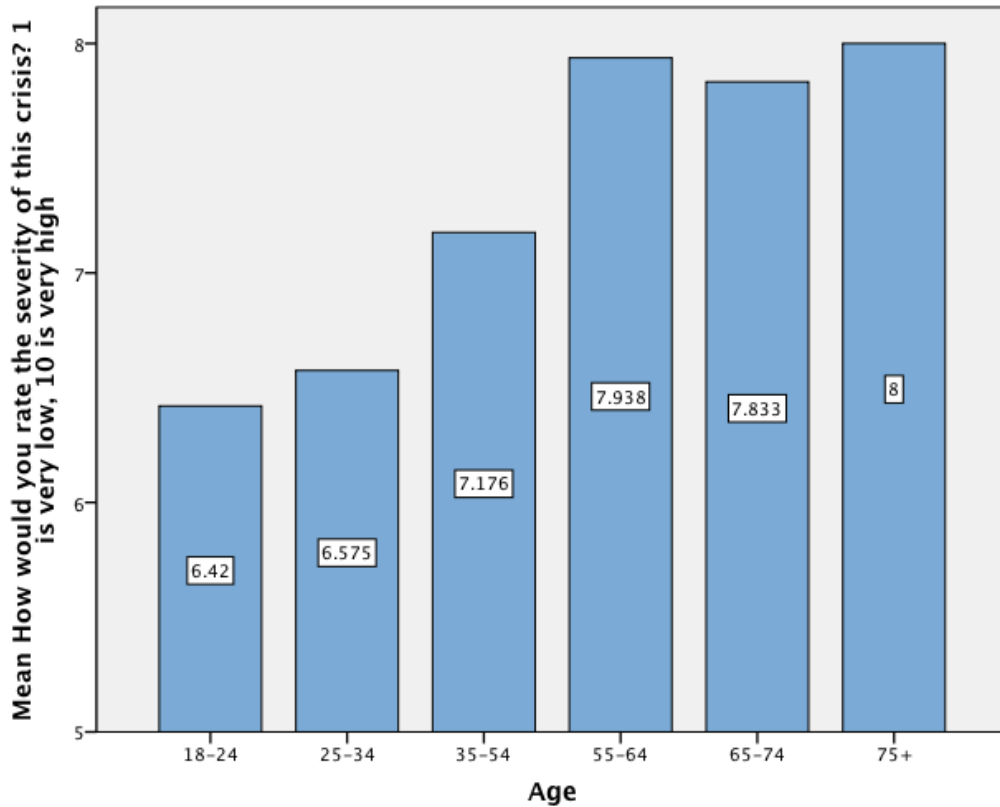


Figure 6: Bar chart: Age and perception of crisis severity

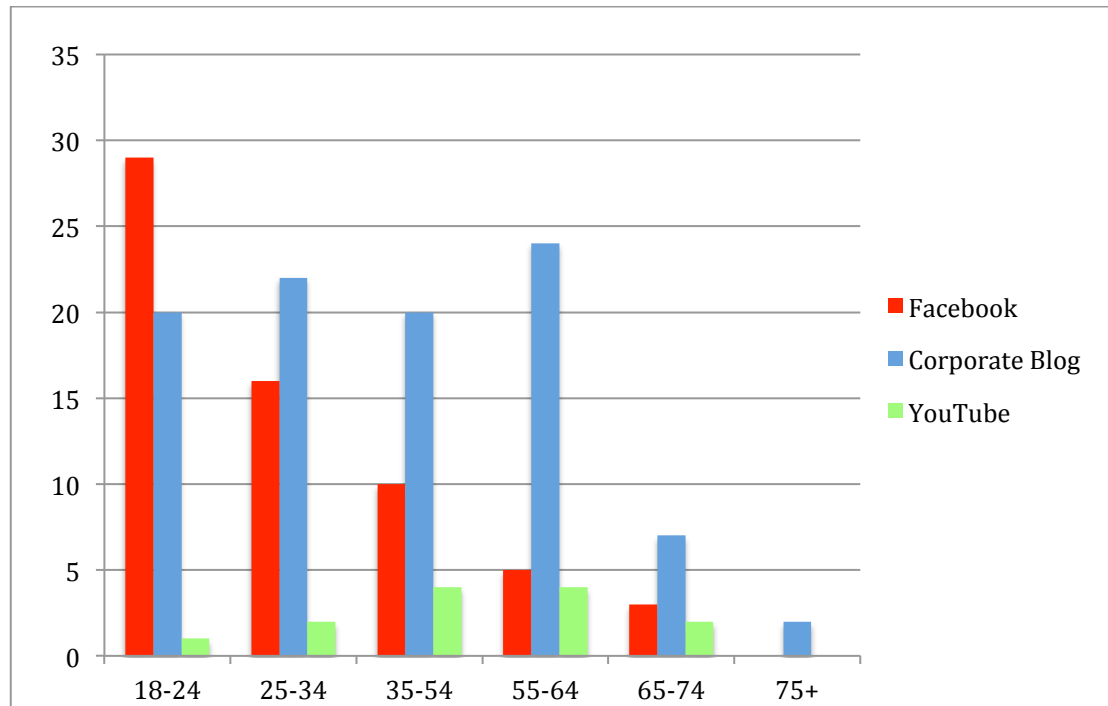
Moreover, a significant difference in scores was found between cruisers ( $M=7.42$ ,  $SD=1.69$ ) and non-cruisers ( $M=6.66$ ,  $SD=1.69$ ;  $t(168) = 2.91$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). The effect size was calculated to measure the magnitude of the differences between these two groups. The magnitude of the differences was moderate ( $\eta^2=0.05$ ) according to Cohen (1988, p. 284-7). In other words, this finding suggests that people who have cruised before find the crisis significantly more severe than people who have not cruised before.

#### **4.5.2 CONSUMER CHARACTERISTICS AND MEDIUM PREFERENCE**

##### *4.5.2.1. Age and medium preference*

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to see whether age has an effect on the medium preference (“if a crisis occurs, would you prefer getting updates via Facebook, a corporate blog or via its YouTube channel?”). This test found a significant effect [ $F(5, 164) = 4.2$ ,  $p=0.001$ ], which means that age has an influence on which

medium people prefer to get updates about a crisis. A post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the age group 18-24 (M=1.44, SD = 0.54) was significantly different compared to the 35-54 age group (M=1.82, SD=0.63) and the 55-64 age group (M= 1.97, SD=0.54).



**Figure 7: Age and medium preference**

Figure 7 shows which medium each age group prefers in times of crisis. It is clearly visible here that Facebook preference is steeply decreasing when age increases. Corporate blogs are relatively evenly distributed, but are most popular in the 55 to 64-age range. YouTube is least popular for the youngest generation. It must be noted, however, that the two oldest age groups (65-74, 75+) were least represented in this study (see figure 1: Age distribution).

#### 4.5.2.2. Gender and medium preference

Furthermore, a significant difference was also found between medium preference and gender [ $F(2, 167) = 5.6, p=0.004$ ]. A post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test indicated that this significant difference was found between Facebook (M= 1.75, SD = 0.44) and YouTube (M=1.31, SD = 0.48). Females prefer corporate blogs (51.9%, N=55) followed by Facebook (44.3%, N=47) and YouTube (3.8%, N=4), whereas males more

convincingly prefer corporate blogs (61.2%, N=41), followed by Facebook (24.2%, N=14) and YouTube (13.6%, N=9). Thus, men and women differ significantly in medium preference when it concerns Facebook (women: 44.3% versus men 24.2%) and YouTube (women: 3.8% versus men 13.6%). Hence, though both sexes do not have a significant difference in preference for corporate blogs, women are significantly less content to receive crisis information via YouTube than men, and have a significantly stronger preference for Facebook.

### **4.5.3 CONSUMER CHARACTERISTICS AND MEDIUM PERCEPTION AND USAGE**

#### *4.5.3.1. Age and medium perception and usage*

As shown in the 'age and medium preference' section, age determines whether people prefer Facebook for corporate communication purposes. However, further interesting and significant findings were found when testing age to all questions related to Facebook usage and perception of Facebook. Specially, the oldest age group significantly uses Facebook less for corporate communication, trusts this particular medium less than the other age groups, visits Facebook significantly less when they seek corporate information and find it significantly less reliable as well as credible. The findings were only significant between the oldest age group (55+) and the youngest age group (18-34). Interestingly, these findings relating to Facebook were not found for YouTube or corporate blogs, meaning that age did not impact the usage of these two mediums, nor the perception on trust, reliability and credibility.

However, when analyzing the composite score – measuring trust in new media for corporate communication in general – age does make a significance difference in the way people trust new media. A one-way between subjects ANOVA found a significant effect between age and scores of new media trust [ $F(2, 167)=8.09, p=0.000$ ]. A post hoc comparison Tukey HSD test showed that the age group 18-35 ( $M=1.37, SD=0.49$ ) has significantly more trust in new media than people who are 55 and older ( $M=1.72, SD=0.46$ ). A significant difference was also found in age groups and reliability [ $F(2, 167)=4.32, p=0.02$ ]. A post-hoc showed that younger people (18-35:  $M=4.40, SD=1.38$ ) found corporate information on new media significantly more reliable than the oldest age group (55+:  $M=3.67, SD=1.29$ ). The same significance was found for credibility [ $F$

(2,167) = 4.91,  $p=0.008$ ]. Specifically, the youngest age group found new media a more credible source of information ( $M=4.22$ ,  $SD=1.51$ ) than the oldest age group ( $M=3.39$ ,  $SD=1.47$ ). The age group in the middle (35-54) found new media more reliable and credible than the oldest age group, but less so than the youngest age group.

#### *4.5.3.2. Gender and medium perception and usage*

Multiple independent t-tests were conducted to assess whether gender influences how people perceive and use Facebook. A significance difference was found for trust and Facebook frequency of use for corporate communication. Whereas men ( $M=1.74$ ,  $SD=0.45$ ) trust Facebook for corporate communication significantly more than women ( $M=1.49$ ,  $SD=0.51$ ), women are using Facebook significantly more for these purposes ( $M=3.00$ ,  $SD=2.03$ ) than men ( $M=2.04$ ,  $SD=1.58$ ).

For YouTube, only one significant effect was found in the comparison between the scores of YouTube frequency of use for corporate communication purposes between men and women. It was found that men ( $M=2.67$ ,  $SD=1.62$ ) use YouTube for this purpose significantly more than women ( $M=1.86$ ,  $SD=1.11$ ).

For corporate blogs, no significant differences in scores were found between men and women. When looking at composite scores for trust, reliability, credibility, frequency of use and visiting the medium when needing information, no significant differences were found between the scores of both genders.

#### **4.5.4. CONSUMER CHARACTERISTICS AND PERCEPTION OF CRISIS REPUTATION, CRISIS RESPONSE AND ORGANIZATION**

##### *4.5.4.1 Age*

A variance of one-way between subjects ANOVA were conducted to see how age impacts people's reactions on the crisis, on the crisis response, the reputation and the organization. All the dependent variables were cross-examined with age as an independent variable. Participants were divided in three age groups (18-34; 35-54; 55+). There was a statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level for the emotion scale and the perception of response scale. A post-hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test



indicated that for emotions, the mean score for the youngest group (18-34) ( $M=4.79$ ,  $SD=1.40$ ) was significantly higher than that of the oldest group (55+) ( $M=4.00$ ,  $SD=1.84$ ). Hence, the response of New Horizons made the youngest group feel significantly more positive than the oldest group. Similarly, a post-hoc test also showed this difference in perception of response, as the youngest group was significantly more positive about the response ( $M=4.53$ ,  $SD=1.19$ ) than the oldest group ( $M=3.87$ ,  $SD=1.47$ ).

Significant differences between the oldest age group and the youngest group were also found for severity of crisis, apprehension towards the cruise industry, and commitment to cruising. Older people found the crisis significantly more severe ( $M=7.91$ ,  $SD=1.53$ ) than the youngest group ( $M=6.49$ ,  $SD=1.47$ ). Older people, however, were significantly less apprehensive towards the cruise industry ( $M=4.22$ ,  $SD=0.63$ ) than the youngest age group ( $M=3.53$ ,  $SD=1.04$ ).

#### 4.5.4.2 Gender

Multiple independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the scores on the dependent variables for males and females. Several significant differences were found, namely in the perception of response scale, the emotion scale, and apprehension towards the cruise industry. Women ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ) were significantly more positive about the response of the organization in crisis than men ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ;  $t(168) = -3.15$ ,  $p = 0.002$ , two-tailed). The emotion scales also differed significantly. Again, women ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ) scored significantly higher on the emotion scale, meaning that the response made them feel more positive towards the organization in crisis than men ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ;  $t(168) = -3.48$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , two-tailed). Finally, men ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ) were found to be significantly less apprehensive towards the cruise industry than women, as higher scores were connected to perceiving less risk and apprehension ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ;  $t(168) = 2.33$ ,  $p = 0.02$ , two-tailed).

#### 4.5.4.3 Cruisers and non-cruisers

There were no significant results found between cruisers and non-cruisers in their answers to the emotion scale, the perception of response scale, nor in the reputation scale. Interestingly, there is a significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level in the way cruisers and non-cruisers have reacted to the question “I would be willing to cruise with New Horizons in the future.” Cruisers are significantly more willing to cruise with the fictional cruise line ( $M=4.25$ ,  $SD=1.72$ ) than people who have not cruised before ( $M=3.56$ ,  $SD=1.80$ );  $t(168)=2.55$ ,  $p=0.01$ . However, cruisers are not significantly more likely to recommend New Horizons to friends and family than non-cruisers.

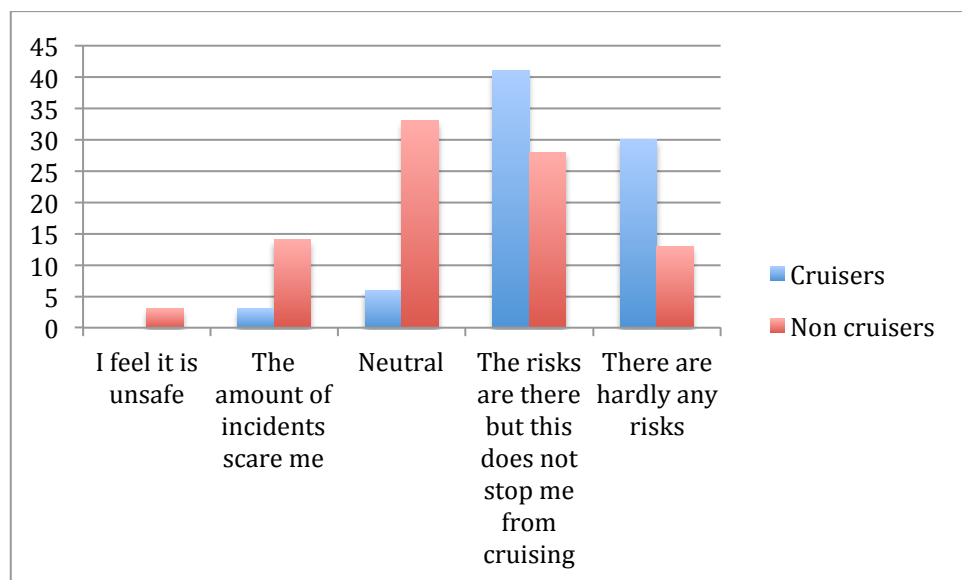
With the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, these findings were also examined. A small, positive correlation was found between commitment to cruising and the New Horizons perception scale (combining both “I feel it is safe to cruise with NH” and “I would be willing to cruise with NH in the future”), [ $r = 0.29$ ,  $n = 170$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ] with high scores in commitment to cruising associated with an improved perception of New Horizons. However, as also found with the t-test conducted above, no correlation was found between commitment to cruising and the reputation that people attribute to the organization in crisis. A very high, positive correlation was found between feeling it is safe to cruise with New Horizons and willingness to cruise with New Horizons in the future [ $r = 0.76$ ,  $n = 170$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ]. This shows that perceiving safety is of utmost importance for purchase intention.

Willingness to cruise with New Horizons, however, is also found to be negatively and moderately correlated to anger. A higher score for “this response makes me feel angry” is associated with a decreased willingness to cruise with the organization in crisis [ $r = -0.33$ ,  $n = 170$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ].

Furthermore, people who have cruised before are significantly more likely to recommend *cruising in general* to friends, family members and colleagues ( $M=8.51$ ,  $SD=2.30$ ) than non-cruisers ( $M=4.52$ ,  $SD=2.56$ );  $t(168)=10.62$ ,  $p=0.000$ . A one-way between subjects ANOVA showed that people who said they had not cruised before but intend to in the future are significantly more likely to recommend cruising ( $M=6.36$ ,  $SD=1.73$ ) than people who report that they have not cruised before, nor intend to do so ( $M=3.93$ ,  $SD=2.51$ ). The net promoter score was used for this question, which classifies scores between 0-6 as detractors, 7-8 as passives, and 9-10 as promoters. Hence, with a

score of 8.5, cruisers are classified between passives and promoters, and non-cruisers, with a notably lower score of 4.5, as detractors. This high score of cruisers might be explained by the fact that most cruisers came from cruising forums, which are mostly visited by people who already are very involved in cruising. Cruisers (M=5.41, SD=2.18) also significantly differ from non-cruisers (M=1.81, SD=1.39) in their reaction to the question “I consider cruising to be my first choice when I’m planning a vacation.” (t(168)=12.99, p=0.000). On average, it can be stated that practically all cruisers are promoters, and that cruisers are between slight and moderate agreement with the statement of considering cruising the first choice when planning a vacation.

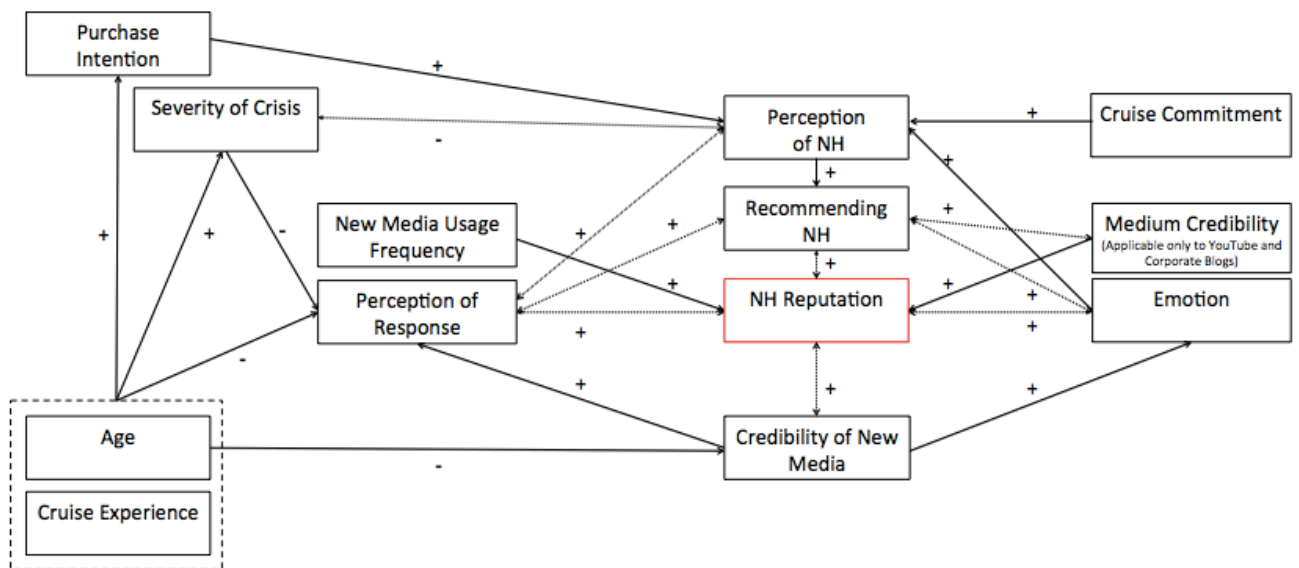
The question “I am apprehensive about cruising and the cruise industry” also exposes a significant difference between cruisers (M=4.22, SD=0.75) and non-cruisers (M=3.37, SD=1.09); t (168)=6.07, p=0.000). However, the group that *intends* to cruise is not significantly less apprehensive (p=0.8) about cruising than the group that has *not* cruised. As figure 8 displays, non-cruisers perceive more risk than cruisers when it concerns cruising. Whereas only 9 cruisers have chosen “I feel it is unsafe,” “the amount of cruise incidents scare me,” and “neutral,” 50 non-cruisers have done so. 71 cruisers picked the last two categories – the risks are there but it does not stop them, and that there are hardly any risks – as opposed to 41 non-cruisers.



**Figure 8: Cruise apprehension of cruisers and non-cruisers**

#### 4.6. MODEL

Considering these findings, it is possible to construct the model presented below in figure 9. The relationship scheme presented in the model serves as a visual summary and integration of the findings discussed above. As such, the constructed model aims to provide insights into the impact of factors of crisis communications on different new media platforms on the ultimate reputation of the firm in crisis. Subsequently, linear correlation analysis in SPSS revealed that the estimated regression model has a relatively high explanatory power, as more than 80% of the variation in the reputation of New Horizons Cruises can explained by this model (R Square = 0.808). In order to assess the model’s explanatory power, dummy variables were created in SPSS for the independent variables age and cruise experience (with the number of dummy variables = possible outcomes -1).



**Figure 9: Model: How people make sense of crisis communication on new media channels. Note: The dashed lines indicate a correlation.**

#### **4.7. ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS: CRUISE CRITERIA**

The criteria that cruisers found most important in selecting a cruise line is delineated in table 2, which presents data that SurveyGizmo presented in the report. SurveyGizmo made a weighted calculation in which the items ranked first are valued higher than the following ranks, and the score is the sum of all weighted rank counts (N=76). As shown in the table, people find itinerary, price and safety most important, followed by reputation. This shows that safety and reputation could be considered as very important for consumers making brand choices.

**Table 2: Preference in cruise criteria.**

*Note:* Score is a weighted calculation. Items ranked first are valued higher than the following ranks, the score is the sum of all weighted rank counts.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Total Score</b>	<b>Overall Rank</b>
Itinerary (destinations)	528	1
Price	469	2
Safety	438	3
Reputation of cruise line	403	4
Previous experience with cruise line	392	5
Quality of food	360	6
Luxury on board	319	7
Reviews	261	8
Referrals of friends and family	177	9

Since SPSS reported each ranking in a separate variable, it was possible to test whether there is a correlation between the scores of people who ranked safety as number one and the dependent variables that evaluated people's perception of the organization, the reputation, and their reaction to the message. This allowed getting a deeper insight into the extent to which people really follow through on the importance they ascribe to these criteria. The same test was conducted for people who ranked reputation of cruise line as most important.

First, the relationship between safety as the most important factor in choosing a

cruise line and various dependent variables was tested (such as severity, reputation scale, positive perception of response, negative perception of response) using a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. No significant correlations emerged, which means that even when people had safety as number one, this did not lead to a difference in rating the crisis more or less severe, nor in differences in reputation, response, perception of the response and the organization.

A similar test was conducted for those who reported that they found reputation of a cruise company most important. A correlation test did not find a significant correlation at the  $p < 0.05$  level, but did find a small significance at the  $p < 0.1$  level, namely between ranking reputation of the cruise line as number one in importance and the response to “this response makes me feel negative towards New Horizons” ( $r = -0.20$ ,  $n = 72$ ,  $p = 0.09$ ) This means that there is a minimal association between ranking reputation high on importance and feeling more negative towards New Horizons.

## V. DISCUSSION

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This thesis has examined whether crisis communication on different mediums influenced audience perception of the crisis, the organization in crisis and the crisis response. It has built on the groundwork of SCCT, but it has expanded its scope by including analysis on medium and message effect. It has provided insight into *which* elements of the rebuilding strategy are most important for the public receiving the message (message effect), as well as *why* certain mediums are more effective than others in the eyes of the audience (medium effect). In terms of consumer perception, a key contribution of this thesis is that it has surveyed cruise consumers and not just students. This particularity has added to the value of the results as a wider population was assessed. Finally, it was found that the use of the rebuilding strategy was indeed appropriate for the crisis scenario since the crisis was considered severe, as the majority (67,6%) rated the crisis 7.0 or higher on a 10-point scale.

The first research question asked how crisis communication on different mediums influences consumer perception of the organization. The results in this thesis show weak medium effects, as opposed to the findings made in the works by Schultz et al. (2011) and Schultz et al. (2012). This study did not find that mediums have a significant effect on the way the organization is perceived, nor on the way the crisis response is identified. People's response to all the tested dependent variables were not significantly different between the three medium conditions. Therefore, Schultz' et al (2011) claim that the medium is the message could not be replicated.

Nevertheless, this study made an important discovery on medium effects and reputation that has not been found in previous literature. It was found that people's reaction to the organizational reputation scale (which tested how the organization deals with the crisis) is not directly dependent on one medium, but instead on the *frequency* with which an individual uses new media for corporate communication purposes. This effect was only found for high frequency usage and not for an average use of new media. In particular, people who received the YouTube condition and use new media frequently to view corporate messages regard the organization's reputation much better than the people in the same condition who use new media infrequently. It was found

that corporate blogs have the opposite effect: frequent new media users reported significantly lower evaluations of New Horizons after seeing a corporate blog message compared to participants who also saw this blog but use new media only occasionally for corporate communication. Hence, a significant difference in corporate reputation was identified between frequent new media users that were exposed to YouTube and those who were shown a corporate blog.

These findings could be very relevant for corporations who are aware of how their stakeholders tend to receive corporate information. For low frequency new media users, it does not matter on which medium corporations spread their crisis communication messages. In today's new media age, however, an increasing number of people make more use of new media platforms. If an organization knows that their stakeholders – or consumers in particular – use new media frequently for corporate communication, it is likely that the perceived reputation of the organization is considerably lower when the crisis message is communicated on corporate blogs compared to YouTube or Facebook. It is recommended that corporations engage in market research that creates more insight into their consumers' habits, since adapting crisis communication strategies to new media usage might lead to more favorable reputational attitudes.

However, since most organizations will not know the media usage of their consumers, it is advisable to use a medium that leads to a positive reputation perception and has no negative consequences related to disseminating crisis messages on this medium. Based on the results in this thesis, it is suggested to always *also* use YouTube as a corporate communication channel, because YouTube had the highest reputation score overall (albeit insignificantly different to the other mediums), and the significantly highest reputation for frequent new media users. Though the findings here cannot be generalizable, no negative consequences were found that are related to communicating crisis communication messages on YouTube. As opposed to corporate blogs, being exposed to a crisis message on YouTube while being a frequent new media user actually significantly increases the reputation score of an organization in crisis.

The above-mentioned discovery is meaningful and highlights that YouTube should be researched more. As stated in the literature review, contemporary scholarly literature that focuses on medium effects and crisis communication has not yet



incorporated YouTube into the equation. Instead, Twitter, Facebook, blogs and (online) newspapers are often compared. The findings made in this thesis show that it is valuable for future research to also compare YouTube with the mediums that were not included in this thesis, such as Twitter and (online) newspapers.

Further research could assess *why* YouTube is such a valuable corporate communication channel. One explanation could be provided by the media richness theory by Daft and Lengel (1986). These authors posited that media can be categorized according to a media richness scale. Rich media has certain characteristics that allow feedback, verbal and non-verbal cues, dialogue, and reduce uncertainty and equivocality in complex messages. Daft and Lengel (1986) argue that for simple situations, mediums low in richness are most appropriate, and for complex situations, rich mediums are most effective for communication. As Benoit (1997) defines crises as complex situations, crisis communication is considered most effective when disseminating it via a rich medium. Since YouTube allows verbal and non-verbal cues and presents a personal message, YouTube can be considered a rich medium. Justifiably, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) categorized YouTube as the second richest medium next to online games. While Facebook was also classified relatively high, corporate blogs were classified as low in media richness because they mostly consist of plain text and are often seen as an extension of a corporate website (Ibid). Indeed, Cho et al (2009) also found that people judge an organization more positively when they receive communication via a rich medium. This could be an explanation for the results found in this study, namely, that exposure to YouTube leads to the highest reputation *and* that frequent new media users report corporate reputation significantly higher when subjected to a message on YouTube.

This discovery has another interesting implication, namely that corporate blogs are not as advantageous as some scholars contend (Sweetser & Metzgar, 2007). This thesis has found that using corporate blogs is not beneficial for corporations in *all* situations. When testing for medium effects and the way people rated the response, corporate blogs was not the medium that led to the most positive perception of the response (Instead, YouTube was). Also, blogs were found to be less beneficial to corporations, as frequent new media users rate the reputation of the tested company significantly lower when subjected to a corporate blog than frequent new media users

exposed to YouTube. Since people of all age groups were divided in the three conditions (and therefore new media usage was also mixed) it is improbable that age is the reason why this is the case. It is also unlikely that the lower score in reputation for corporate blogs is the result of the nature of the cruise industry, because the cruise industry *does* use corporate blogs, and second, people who have cruised were also divided in the three medium conditions.

Just as captivating is this particular finding in comparison with the claim made by Kent (2008), who posited that blogs just preach to the choir, as blog readers often share the same view of the organization. Though these statements were about specific blog followers of an organization, the arguments made in this article can be challenged based on the findings here. Corporate blogs are not offered only as ways to “reach the choir,” which is shown by the fact that the majority of all participants (55.3%, N=94) prefer to get updates via corporate blogs rather than via Facebook or YouTube, and are also most likely to use this medium. This means that blog users are not per se already supportive of the organization. What this shows is that corporate blogs are preferred and most used, but do not lead to the highest reputation, as discussed in the previous paragraph.

This discrepancy could be accounted for by the fact that corporate blogs are most appropriate for relatively simple information but least appropriate for complex crisis information, which is a better fit for a richer platform (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Potentially, people are most likely to use and prefer corporate blogs, but do report lower reputational scores as a result of the textual, low rich content. Also, as argued by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), blogs are often seen as an extension of the corporate website, which could be why most people prefer this platform, as it is very accessible and credible.

In all, it can be said that there *is* a medium effect, only not in the way that Schultz et al. (2012) have found it. Though medium exposure *does* matter, this does not solely depend on the medium *itself*, but on the way the perceiver of the crisis – the consumer – uses this medium, i.e. how frequently that person uses new media for corporate communication purposes.

Apart from reputation being impacted by new media frequency of usage, another key finding was that reputation is also largely related to how consumers perceive the crisis response. Specifically, it can be assumed that when people were more

satisfied about New Horizons' crisis response, a higher reputation was awarded to the company. In other words, this shows that effective crisis communication impacts reputation. This justifies the importance of providing excellent crisis communication, as it indicates that a positive crisis response can lead people to perceive an organization that is more honest and believable, as well as more concerned with the well being of its public (reputation). This finding supports Heath's claim (2010) that the success of crisis communication can be measured by assessing the amount of reputational damage. Indeed, this discovery also supports Barton's (2001) statement that (effective) crisis communication can repair reputational damages.

In addition to this, when the perception of response is better, people are significantly more likely to recommend the organization in crisis, aka New Horizons, *and* are more committed to the organization (feeling more safe, and more likely to cruise with the organization). This finding is closely connected to the result that when people feel more *positive* about the response of the organization (emotion scale), the reputation score increases. Similarly, positive emotion also impacts the score in recommending New Horizons. Again, this demonstrates how important it is for corporations to have a crisis response that satisfies the public.

Reputation scores were also related to the credibility that people ascribed to new media as a corporate communication channel in general. In particular, there is a significant association between according a higher credibility to new media and giving a higher score on the overall reputation of the organization in crisis. This demonstrates the importance for corporations to spread crisis communication on mediums that are considered credible, as credible mediums "are critical to bring out positive post crisis outcomes" and can reduce the suspicion that the public may feel towards the crisis message (Yang, Kang & Johnson, 2010, p. 476). The relationship between new media credibility and reputation is by far the strongest for YouTube, as there is a strong correlation between credibility and reputation. This again shows that YouTube has potential as a corporate communication channel and that it could be incorporated more in the process of crisis dissemination. Finding YouTube a credible source also relates to recommending New Horizons far more than corporate blogs. This effect was not existent for Facebook.

The second research question asked how consumers perceive and use new

media for corporate communication purposes. It was found that people only use Facebook, YouTube and corporate blogs between a few times a year and once a month. Whereas Facebook is used most (having scored between a few times a year and once a month), YouTube and corporate blogs are used least (on average, only a few times a year). Coombs and Holladay (2014) provide a potential explanation for this finding, as they state that receiving corporate information “requires an active search for information that could include any number of internet messages related to the organization,” such as online newspapers (p. 44). Another reason why new media usage overall was measured as relatively low for crisis communication purposes could be explained by the argument that only people that actually *follow* a blog/YouTube channel, or have *liked* a Facebook page, are immediately subjected to the crisis message of an organization. Though in theory, corporate messages can be read by anyone, (also by those who do not have a Facebook profile) it is plausible that when people need corporate information, they will first go to other sources such as online news outlets.

From the three mediums, YouTube is the platform that is trusted most (63,6%) as a tool for corporate messages and information, compared to Facebook (57,8%) and corporate blogs (51%). Interestingly, however, is that blogs were the preferred medium to receive corporate information, the most used to receive corporate communication, found most credible *and* most reliable. Hence, there is an inconsistency between these results and the fact that blogs are least trusted. This suggests that trust in a medium is something different from finding a medium reliable and credible. Possibly, this contradiction could have emerged from the way that people understood ‘trust’ and the way trust was operationalized, namely without presenting a broken down definition of the term.

In addition, as the results from the first research question showed, when people use new media frequently and are exposed to blogs, a lower reputation to the company in crisis is rewarded. What this demonstrates is that new media trust does not necessarily accompany new media usage and preference. Hence, this particular finding suggests that trust is not one of the most important factors that shape medium use and preference, as low trust does not keep people from preferring and using corporate blogs most. This is also the case the other way around, as most people trust YouTube, but this platform is used least and preferred least. Hence, it can be noted that seemingly, there

is a contradiction at place here. It would be logical to assume that when trust in a medium is highest, use of that medium and preference towards the medium would also be highest. Which factors *are* shaping preference and usage in relation to corporate blogs, and *why* YouTube is trusted most as a tool for corporate communication is worthy of further research.

Nevertheless, the high trust in YouTube potentially means that there is an opportunity for YouTube to partly rebrand itself as a trustworthy channel for corporate information. To circumvent the problem of low YouTube usage and low preference scores, it is advisable for corporations to embed a YouTube video on a Facebook page to maximize the benefits that these particular new media platforms hold. This way, the YouTube video is seen more than when only posted on YouTube, and this allows the crisis message to be disseminated on a medium that people trust most. This exposure to YouTube also leads to a significantly higher reputation than when the same message is read on Facebook.

Moreover, the low score on whether people trust new media *in general* (52% does not, 48% does) is telling. Based on this results, a daring point of discussion that can be made is whether new media is an appropriate crisis communication tool in the first place, as only half of the participants trusts it for corporate communication purposes. As trust is closely related to credibility of a *message* (not credibility of the medium) (Metzer & Flanagin, 2013), it would be beneficial for corporations if new media tools are considered more trustworthy.

In the literature review, the finding of Utz, Schultz and Glocka (2013) – that reputation scores were highest for new medium exposure and credibility was highest for traditional media – were addressed. In this review, it was stated that this specific finding of these authors seemed contradictory, as one would assume that credibility of the medium is connected to perceived reputation of a message. This thesis cross-examined whether this finding could be replicated, and whether a higher reported credibility of the medium coincides with a higher reputation. Just as these authors, however, it was found that the medium that scored highest on credibility (corporate blogs) did not score highest on reputation (YouTube). In this way, this finding supports Utz, Schultz and Glocka's claim.

In addition, this thesis has extended the SCCT focus by analyzing the audience

perception of the four rebuilding strategies used. No medium effect was found, meaning that a medium does not influence the preference of a certain rebuilding strategy. An overwhelming result was found, however, that substantiates the demand to include more apologies in crisis responses and thus making crisis reactions more accommodative (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). The data identified that from the four rebuilding strategies, people prefer to receive an apology from the corporation in crisis. This also connects to Stephens and Malone's study (2009) that found stakeholders mostly prefer emotional support in crisis messages. From the four rebuilding strategies – apology, rectification, compensation and forgiveness – it can be argued that apologizing and asking for forgiveness are most likely to provide emotional support. Hence, when arguing that apology provides most emotional support from the four message strategies, the result that apology is preferred most indeed connects to the findings of these authors. Strange, however, is these authors' construction of a category named "apology," which was preferred in less than 1% of the time. This discrepancy is hard to explain, and necessitates further research in message strategies. Though other strategies such as providing information and sympathy are also key, the arguments made by Coombs and Holladay (1996) and Coombs and Schmidt (2000) – in addition to the findings here – suggest that apology is much more important for consumers than this 1% preference indicates. A critique here is that Stephens and Malone's work did not clarify what constitutes messages of "emotional support." Clarification on this concept is needed to see how this finding connects to the data found in this thesis.

The third and final research question that was posed in this work is how consumer characteristics impact medium preference and crisis perception. Since crises and negative publicity are a common threat to corporations, a better understanding and knowledge of consumer reactions to crises may help companies and marketers to better deal with these situations. In this study, it was found that consumer attitudes, perceptions of negative publicity and crisis differ significantly across consumer groups. First, the research on the consumer characteristic of age resulted in stimulating findings, as it was found that age has a large effect on the way crisis severity is perceived. In particular, 55 to 64 year olds rate the crisis significantly higher than the two younger age groups. However, it must be noted that whether this is the result of age alone or

because older people were more likely to be cruisers and therefore know the whole story of the real crisis is not known.

First, it was found that age is an important factor when analyzing crisis perception and medium preference. Linking age and user behavior, this thesis discovered that the preference for Facebook, its usage, trust towards Facebook, and finding Facebook reliable and credible as a platform to keep people up to date with crisis information decreases eminently when people are older. Specifically, people of 55 and over differ significantly in these scores compared to the youngest age group (18-34). The preference for YouTube and corporate blogs (corporate blogs are preferred by the older generation) was also influenced by age. The argument by Prensky (2001) can explain this, as he argued that older generations are digital immigrants who use different mediums for information seeking than the younger, more digitally native generation. This finding indicates that using a certain medium for corporate communication processes should acknowledge age as a factor. When corporations know the age group of its consumers, it is recommended to use a medium that speaks most to the organizations' audience.

Interestingly, in preference, usage, trust, reliability and credibility, the middle age group (35-54) scored between the youngest and the oldest. This might be explained by the fact that this age group could be placed between a 'digital native' and a 'digital immigrant.' Also, this age group is more likely to adapt to new mediums as their working life could expose them to new medium usage. Interestingly, these age-related findings on trust, reliability and usage of the medium were only found for Facebook and not for corporate blogs or YouTube. This could possibly be explained by the fact that in order to use Facebook as it is intended – creating a social network – it is required to register and make a profile. Corporate blogs and YouTube, on the other hand, are mediums that do not necessarily have this threshold.

New media in general was also least trusted for corporate communication purposes by the oldest age groups compared to the youngest one. Again, the middle age group (35-54) was identified to find new media more trustworthy, credible and reliable than the oldest groups, but less so than the 18 to 34 year olds. This discovery raises some interesting points of discussion of *why* this could be the case. Could this mean that younger people are less critical all around, or that they just trust more easily? A

plausible potential explanation is that growing up with computer mediated communication has given younger people the ability to shift through the vast quantity of online information and therefore are more adapt at recognizing credible sources. Though this is just speculation, it nevertheless provides valuable impetus for further research.

This thesis also found that age affects how the crisis, the organization, its reputation and the crisis message are perceived. Specifically, the crisis response made the older group (55+) feel significantly more negative than the youngest group (18-34), as the response made them angrier, more disappointed, more inclined to report that the organization should have done more and less content about the response than the younger participants. Also, they scored lowest in adequacy of response, and were less in accordance with the statement that the organization did everything in its power to resolve the crisis. This finding reiterates the importance to acknowledge in research that age can affect crisis perception when the message is delivered via new media. *Why* older generations are significantly less pleased with the response of New Horizons is very interesting, and could be explained by the fact that all three responses were communicated through new media, as older generation prefer traditional media to receive important information (Prensky, 2001). However, deeper insight in this matter warrants additional investigation.

Considering the findings related to apprehension and risk perception, older people were clearly more negative about the crisis and the crisis response than younger generations, as the variables that tested this all showed significant differences. However, older people's apprehension and risk perception was significantly lower and their attitude towards cruising was more positive. This might be explained by the fact that older people have cruised more and therefore have more knowledge and personal experience related to cruising, which might lessen their apprehension and increase their likelihood to recommend it.

The next consumer characteristic that was analyzed was gender. A significant difference was discovered between medium preference of Facebook and YouTube. Though both genders have the same preference overall (corporate blogs first, followed by Facebook and YouTube), men and women differ significantly when it concerns YouTube and Facebook. Whereas women prefer Facebook significantly more than men,



men prefer YouTube decidedly more. This finding supports Siapera (2012), who contended that women are more likely to “pursue personal relationships in online contexts” that connect them with friends and family. Indeed, Facebook is a medium platform that allows this more so than YouTube (p. 77). According to Siapera, men use the Internet more for recreational purposes and looking for information. The finding that YouTube is preferred more by men and Facebook by women fits this observation.

Furthermore, the data analysis showed that significant differences arose in purchase intention and consumer attitude between cruisers and non-cruisers. Specifically, this thesis found that willingness to cruise with the organization (in the model, named “purchase intention”) in crisis heightened significantly when the consumers already had individual relationships with the service (in this case, cruising). This finding supports Lau and Lee’s findings (1999) that shakeouts and losses in reputation can have less of an impact on consumers that have experience with a brand or service than on people who do not have this connection. Further research could analyze whether this is generalizable, e.g., if experience with the brand or service in general has a moderating effect on the way people perceive this brand and want to engage in purchasing behavior.

Interestingly – and slightly surprising – was the finding that cruisers perceived the crisis significantly more severe than people who had not cruised before. In combination with the discovered higher purchase intention of cruisers, and the lower scores in perceiving risk in cruising, tentative conclusions can be drawn about the increased clemency of people who already have experience with the product/service in crisis. Though they do find the crisis more severe, they are also more likely to cruise with the brand in the future. This is a valuable finding that provides insight into the way certain consumers are more likely to forgive shakeouts, and perfectly connects with Lau and Lee’s finding (2009) that repeated contact with a particular service or brand increases risk-taking and cooperation.

Also, the identification that a better perception of cruising in general (the cruise commitment scale) is positively associated with the New Horizons perception scale (perception of safety and willingness to cruise with the organization in the future) is indicative. Positivity towards cruising suggests that people find cruise companies in crisis safer and are more willing to cruise with such an organization than people who are less

'committed' to cruising. Hence, this data indicates that brand and/or service experience can lead to significant differences in behavioral intentions. Also, this commitment may lead people to be more forgiving on a few stances, namely towards safety and willingness to cruise with a cruise line in crisis in the future.

However, very important to note is that commitment to cruising (thus having a positive attitude towards cruising) does *not* influence how a person perceives the *reputation* of the company. Hence, this thesis could not justify that increased likelihood to pass through shakeout periods and increased consumer risk-taking could lead to a less harmful perception of reputation. No significant differences emerged between how cruisers and non-cruisers perceived the reputation of the organization and the crisis response. Hence, having had experience with a service that endured a crisis does not have direct positive reputational implications. Therefore, the claim of scholars that positive consumer expectations and familiarity (Ahluwalia et al, 2000; Dawar & Lei, 2009) "protect post-crisis evaluations of organizational reputations" cannot be supported (Coombs & Holladay, 2013, p. 45).

In all, the results in this thesis show that consumer characteristics indeed significantly impact medium preference and crisis perception. This confirms that not all stakeholders perceive crises and corporate reputation identically, and that "stakeholder specificity" veritably needs to be applied when referring to reputation (Zyglidopoulos, 2009). However, this thesis posited that not only stakeholders should be differentiated, but that *consumer specificity* should be applied as well, as consumer groups also differ in their cognitive filters that "exhibit different biases, not only in the information they review but also in the way they process this information" (p. 419). Since cruisers perceived the crisis and organization in crisis differently than non-cruisers, Zyglidopoulos' argument that "people tend to construct overall images by generalizing from attributes they are familiar with" is also supported (Ibid).

Finally, the additional analyses that were performed also provided some valuable insights in crisis perception, new media attitudes, and viewpoints towards the organization in crisis. First, it was found that safety and reputation are indeed very important factors for consumers making brand choices, but not as influential as the more tangible factors price and itinerary. It was discovered that people were not consistent in the importance they ascribed to reputation and safety, as it was tested

whether people who reported safety or reputation as most important are also more negative towards the crisis, the crisis response and the organization. However, this was not the case. Nevertheless, it could be argued that unconsciously, safety is of greater importance for people than they reported, since a high, positive correlation was found between feeling safe to cruise with New Horizons and willingness to cruise with New Horizons. This underlines that perceiving safety is of utmost importance for purchase intention. Finally, as Coombs and Holladay (2007) rightly posited, anger reduces purchase behavior, as participants that were angry as a result of the crisis response were less likely to cruise with New Horizons. This again supports the importance for corporations to provide a satisfactory crisis response.

## VI. CONCLUSION

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This thesis has examined the influence of medium exposure on crisis perception, how consumers perceive and use new media for corporate communication purposes, and which consumer characteristics impact both medium preference as well as crisis perception. The research conducted in this study carries substantial future promise since the results of this thesis provide some new perspectives on new media usage and perception in crisis communication. It also created an impetus for more detailed and in-depth analysis of the conditions and their impact on the operationalized variables.

### *6.1. Strengths & Limitations*

Distinctive of this research is that it has not compared oppositional crisis frames to infer conclusions about medium effects. To clarify, many empirical studies have done exactly this; comparing the victim crisis type with the oppositional intentional frame (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Schultz, Utz, & Glocka, 2012; Utz, Schultz & Glocka, 2013). However, researching oppositional crisis frames are not only less valuable to organizations in crisis in real life, (as crisis messages will either be framed as intentional or victim, not both) often, the responsibility of the crisis is unknown, resulting in crisis messages that do not explicitly mention who is to blame. This thesis has not taken this much-used approach, but instead has used a crisis scenario from a more unique angle, namely, one that incorporates no specific crisis frame but keeps the crisis message – as well as the crisis itself – constant in all three conditions.

Moreover, the experiment conducted in this thesis is not victim to one of the weaknesses inherent in non-empirical studies on crises. For example, certain crisis communication case studies analyze multiple crises at once, making it less transparent to what extent differences of perception are influenced by the medium, the crisis type, or the crisis. Having just one crisis scenario, one crisis frame, and one identical crisis message allows one to draw more direct conclusions about medium effect without possible confounds.

However, this study also has limitations. First, participants were only subjected to information at one point in time, which reasonably could only communicate a limited

amount of information. In real crisis situations, crisis responses and stakeholder perceptions can shift over time, as more information about the crisis becomes available. Also, the crisis scenario presented to the participants was short in order to keep people interested and not overload them with information. Some participants also noted this limitation when they had the opportunity to share comments at the end of the survey: "New Horizons didn't mention what they were doing to assist passengers onboard." Another participant said that he wanted to know "what alternative actions the company may have been able to make." Additionally, a participant stated that "one of the elements missing from your scenario: interaction of captain/crew with pax [passengers] during crisis?" Because the constructed crisis scenario and message was short, it could not include all details and thus made a relatively artificial crisis fragment. Logically, in real crisis situations, a regular communication flow is recommended to maintain transparency.

Second, this study only assessed new media platforms and did not investigate how people perceive crisis communication on these platforms *in relation to* crisis communication via traditional media outlets, such as television and newspapers. Furthermore, there are much more new mediums than the three examined here. Future studies could expand these three platforms and also include others, such as Twitter and online news applications.

## 6.2. Future research

Future research could construct messages that focus on different response elements to get a more complete overview of crisis communication and its role. It is also interesting to assess how the *source* of the communicated message might affect audience perception. In this thesis, the press officer of New Horizons communicated the message. Future research could examine whether the public prefers a CEO to deliver the message or a public relation officer.

Also, interesting to analyze but which was beyond the scope of this thesis is how consumers perceive the reputation of an organization through different stages of the crisis. The New Horizons crisis was based on the real-life Carnival Triumph crisis. This crisis did not end when the ship was docked, but in fact, lingered on for almost a year after the incident occurred, as new information showed that Carnival was aware of the

risks with the engines that caught fire. How the public changes its perception of organizations as more information emerges merits further examination.

Additionally, this thesis provided a model of the relations found between the variables tested, giving insight in how people make sense of crisis communication on new media channels. It is interesting for future research to use this model to examine whether the discovered relationships found are generalizable and transferable to other crisis scenarios in different business sectors.

### *6.3. Concluding remarks*

While additional empirical verification is needed, this thesis has shown that when the crisis message is similar, the medium in itself is not strong enough to influence consumers' perception of crisis. However, promising was the discovery that the perception of crisis communication disseminated via new media *is* influenced by a factor that has not been touched upon before, namely the frequency of which the person uses the medium that carries the message for corporate communication purposes. This result could be very valuable, as corporations could potentially decrease their reputational damages when tailoring their crisis communication messages to specific audiences.

In terms of consumer perception and usage of new media for corporate communication purposes, interesting findings have been made that can spark critical debate on the use of new media for this goal. For example, the low scores on trust in new media for corporate and crisis communication warrants a critical stance towards new media and affirms that it is indeed still 'new,' in the sense that older people specifically are wary to find it credible, reliable and trustworthy. Hence, that new media is far from accepted for crisis communication is a result that is worthy of acknowledgement.

This connects to the importance in crisis communication to recognize various consumer groups. Instead of just identifying consumers as one stakeholder group, it is advisable that organizations appreciate that consumers are greatly divergent. This thesis found that consumer characteristics (and individual medium use) lead to significantly different crisis- and organization perceptions. It was found that age, gender and brand/service experience significantly changes how people see the crisis and how likely people are to engage with the organization in crisis. The findings on secondary crisis

reactions – namely purchase behavior – have shown that people who are satisfied with the service or brand in general are more likely to engage with the organization in the future. In all, this research has exposed the role of new media in crisis management and demonstrated the influence of medium, new media usage, and consumer characteristics on publics' crisis perception.

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## Appendix A: Additional Figures

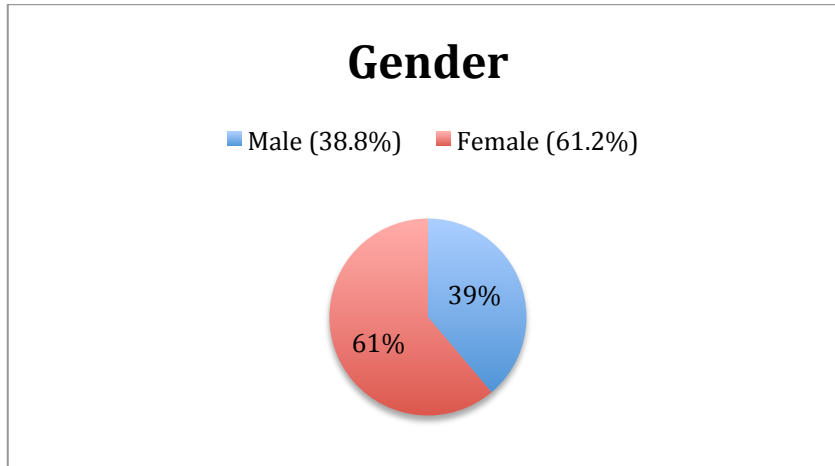


Figure A1: Gender of participants

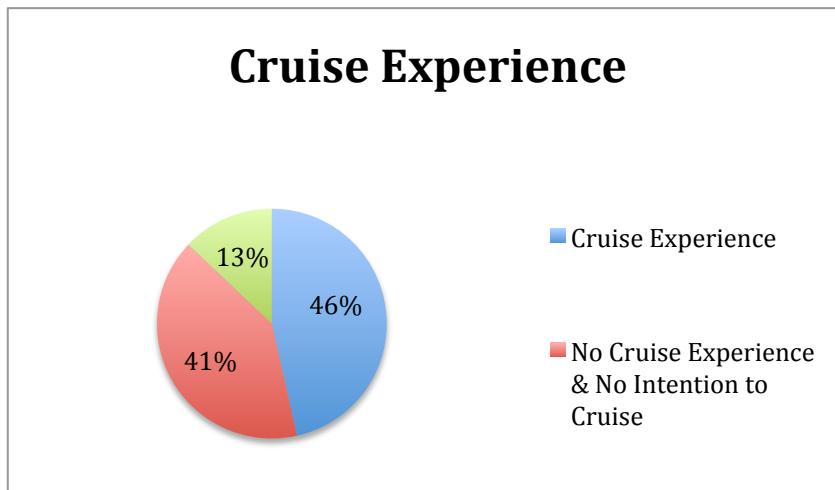


Figure A2: Cruise experience of participants

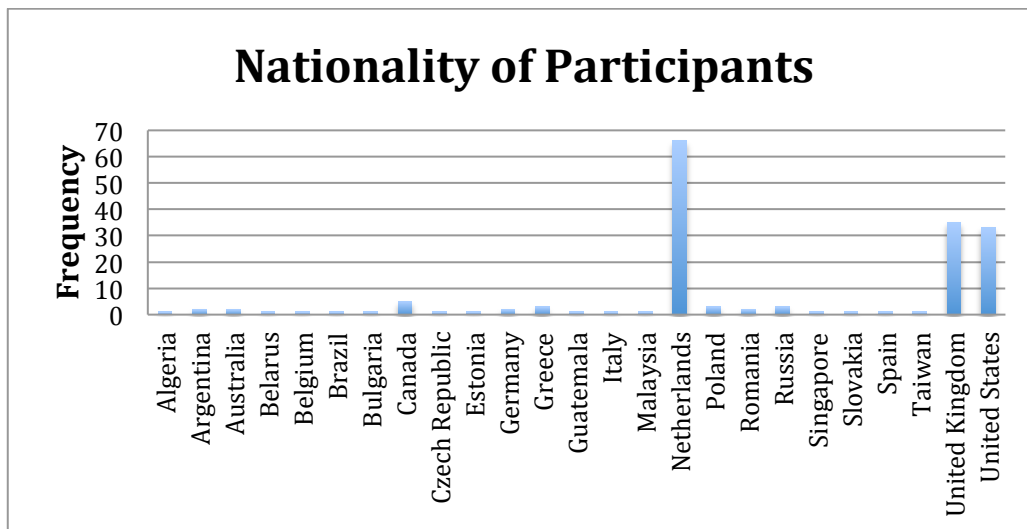


Figure A3: Nationality of participants.

## Appendix B: Introductory texts

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Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in this master thesis research project. In this project, you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire. This questionnaire is about crisis communication in the cruise industry in today's new media age.

Your answers will be completely anonymous and remain so. All responses you provide for this study will remain confidential. When the results of the study are reported, you will not be identified by name or any other information that could be used to infer your identity.

For more information about this research project or when you have any questions, please contact Emilia de Vries via [385134ev@student.eur.nl](mailto:385134ev@student.eur.nl)

Thank you beforehand for your cooperation,

Emilia de Vries  
Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands

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Next



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## Appendix C: Crisis Scenario

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Dear participant,

In the following part of this survey, you are given a crisis scenario that has confronted the cruise organisation New Horizons Cruises. In order to answer these questions, please read the information about this crisis carefully.

On Tuesday, February 25, 2014, the New Explorer cruise ship, owned by New Horizons, set sail from Galveston, Texas to Mexico for a five day cruise. On Friday morning, however, a large fire in the engine room resulted in a loss of power and propulsion on board the ship. As a result of its loss of power, the ship was adrift for five days off the coast of Mexico, before it was towed back to Mobile, Alabama. Emergency generators provided minimal power, and supplies such as water and food was delivered by other New Horizons ships passing by.

Though none of the 3,123 passengers and 1,040 crew members were injured, nor in danger, the lack of power led to unsanitary conditions. For five days, passengers slept on deck, as they moved their mattresses to the decks as a result of non-functioning air-conditioning. Passengers have also reported on running sewage in hallways, scarce food and panicked people. Because the toilets did not work, sewage bags were collected in the hallways of the ship. On Tuesday, March 4, the New Explorer arrived in Mobile, Alabama, where passengers were further assisted to arrive home. Whether the fire is the result of a human error caused by New Horizons, or by a technical failure, is not yet known.

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## Appendix D: Conditions and crisis response

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### C.1. Condition: Corporate Blog

Corporate News

**CORPORATE  
BLOG NEW  
HORIZONS  
CRUISES**

### Statement regarding New Explorer Incident

2 March, 2014

Statement regarding New Explorer Incident.

First, New Horizons Cruises wants to apologise to our guests and their families, as they are affected by this very difficult situation. At this moment, the New Explorer is still adrift off the coast of Mexico. The situation on board the ship is very challenging, and we are obviously very sorry about what is taking place. We are not happy about the situation and we are working as hard as we can to get our guests home as quickly as possible. New Horizons is always proud to say that it provides a carefree and relaxing holiday for our guests, but today, we are sad to admit that we have failed our guests by not being able to fulfil this promise.

We sincerely hope that our guests are willing to forgive us for this unfortunate situation.

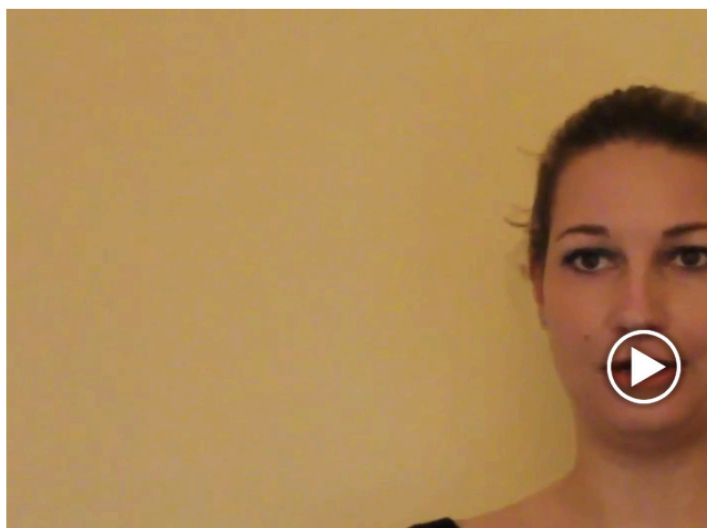
Furthermore, as soon as the ship has docked, it will be towed to a shipyard where an internal investigation team will assess how the fire started, and what we can do to make sure this will not happen again.

In terms of compensation; all guests onboard the New Explorer will receive a full refund of the cruise and all transportation costs. Additionally, each guest will receive 500\$ per person to relief any additional inconveniences.

- Elisabeth Carson, Press Officer [New Horizons Cruise](#)

### C.2. Condition: YouTube

The following part of this survey is about the response of New Horizons Cruises to the crisis that you just read about. Please listen to this message carefully.



### C.3. Condition: Facebook

facebook



New Horizons Cruises  
5 minutes ago

2 March, 2014

Statement regarding New Explorer Incident.

First, New Horizons Cruises wants to apologise to our guests and their families, as they are affected by this very difficult situation. At this moment, the New Explorer is still adrift off the coast of Mexico. The situation on board the ship is very challenging, and we are obviously very sorry about what is taking place. We are not happy about the situation and we are working as hard as we can to get our guests home as quickly as possible. New Horizons is always proud to say that it provides a carefree and relaxing holiday for our guests, but today, we are sad to admit that we have failed our guests by not being able to fulfil this promise.

We sincerely hope that our guests are willing to forgive us for this unfortunate situation.

Furthermore, as soon as the ship has docked, it will be towed to a shipyard where an internal investigation team will assess how the fire started, and what we can do to make sure this will not happen again.

In terms of compensation; all guests onboard the New Explorer will receive a full refund of the cruise and all transportation costs. Additionally, each guest will receive 500\$ per person to relief any additional inconveniences.

– Elisabeth Carson, Press Officer New Horizons Cruises

Like · Comment · Share

## Appendix E: Survey

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### Page One

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Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in this master thesis research project. In this project, you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire. This questionnaire is about crisis communication in the cruise industry in today's new media age.

Your answers will be completely anonymous and remain so. All responses you provide for this study will remain confidential. When the results of the study are reported, you will not be identified by name or any other information that could be used to infer your identity.

For more information about this research project or when you have any questions, please contact Emilia de Vries via [385134ev@student.eur.nl](mailto:385134ev@student.eur.nl)

Thank you beforehand for your cooperation,

Emilia de Vries  
Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands

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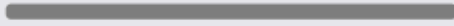
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1. Have you ever cruised before? \*

- Yes
- No
- No, but I intend to in the future

Action: Percent Branch  
Branching messages

2. How many cruises have you taken? (Please slide the bar to the right)



3. Please select the cruise lines that you have taken cruises with

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Costa Cruises	<input type="checkbox"/>
Royal Caribbean International			Holland America Line			Costa Cruises	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	AIDA cruises	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disney Cruise Line			Carnival Cruise Lines			AIDA cruises	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	MSC Cruises	<input type="checkbox"/>
Norwegian Cruise Line			Princess Cruises			MSC Cruises	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	P&O Cruises	<input type="checkbox"/>
Celebrity Cruises			Cunard Cruise Line			P&O Cruises	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other							

4. What is your favorite cruise line?

- Royal Caribbean International
- Holland America Line
- Costa Cruises
- Disney Cruise Line
- Carnival Cruise Lines
- AIDA Cruises
- Norwegian Cruise Line
- Princess Cruises
- MSC Cruises
- Celebrity Cruises
- Cunard Cruise Line
- P&O Cruises
- Other

5. Please rank the factors/criteria that are most important for you in selecting a cruise line from most important to least important

Drag items from the left-hand list into the right-hand list to order them.

- Safety
- Luxury on board
- Itinerary (destinations)
- Price
- Reputation of cruise line
- Reviews
- Previous experience with cruise line
- Referrals of friends and family
- Quality of food

Comments

Dear participant,

In the following part of this survey, you are given a crisis scenario that has confronted the cruise organisation New Horizons Cruises. In order to answer these questions, please read the information about this crisis carefully.

On Tuesday, February 25, 2014, the New Explorer cruise ship, owned by New Horizons, set sail from Galveston, Texas to Mexico for a five day cruise. On Friday morning, however, a large fire in the engine room resulted in a loss of power and propulsion on board the ship. As a result of its loss of power, the ship was adrift for five days off the coast of Mexico, before it was towed back to Mobile, Alabama. Emergency generators provided minimal power, and supplies such as water and food was delivered by other New Horizons ships passing by.

Though none of the 3,123 passengers and 1,040 crew members were injured, nor in danger, the lack of power led to unsanitary conditions. For five days, passengers slept on deck, as they moved their mattresses to the decks as a result of non-functioning air-conditioning. Passengers have also reported on running sewage in hallways, scarce food and panicked people. Because the toilets did not work, sewage bags were collected in the hallways of the ship. On Tuesday, March 4, the New Explorer arrived in Mobile, Alabama, where passengers were further assisted to arrive home. Whether the fire is the result of a human error caused by New Horizons, or by a technical failure, is not yet known.

6. How would you rate the severity of this crisis? 1 is very low, 10 is very high. \*

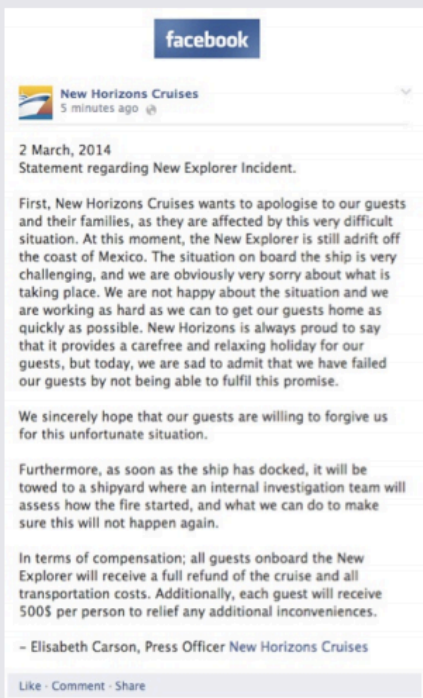
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

The following part of this survey is about the response of New Horizons Cruises to the crisis that you just read about. Please listen to this message carefully.



(untitled)

The following part of this survey is about the response of New Horizons Cruises to the crisis that you just read about. Please read the following message carefully.



The following part of this survey is about the response of New Horizons Cruises to the crisis that you just read about. Please read the following message carefully.



Corporate News

**NEW HORIZONS CRUISES >> CORPORATE BLOG**

## Statement regarding New Explorer Incident

**2 March, 2014 - Corporate Blog**  
Statement regarding New Explorer Incident.

First, New Horizons Cruises wants to apologise to our guests who are affected by this very difficult situation. At this moment the ship is adrift off the coast of Mexico. The situation on board the ship is obviously very sorry about what is taking place. We are working as hard as we can to get our guests home safely and we are working as hard as we can to get our guests home. New Horizons is always proud to say that it provides a carefree vacation for our guests, but today, we are sad to admit that we have failed to fulfil this promise.

We sincerely hope that our guests are willing to forgive us. Furthermore, as soon as the ship has docked, it will be towed to port and an internal investigation team will assess how the fire started, and ensure this will not happen again.

In terms of compensation; all guests onboard the New Explorer will be offered a full refund of the cruise and all transportation costs. Additionally, each guest will be offered a complimentary cruise to relieve any additional inconveniences.

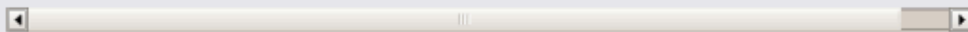
- Elisabeth Carson, Press Officer [New Horizons Cruise](#)

7. Please indicate your first reaction to the response you just received.

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
This response makes me feel positive towards New Horizons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This response makes me feel negative towards New Horizons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Please indicate your response to the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
I feel that New Horizons provided an adequate response to the crisis. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This response makes me feel angry. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that New Horizons did everything in its power to resolve the crisis. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel disappointed by New Horizons response to the crisis. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that New Horizons should have done more in response to the crisis. *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Please indicate your response to the following statements:

9. The organisation is concerned with the well-being of its publics \*

Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(untitled)

---

10. The organisation is basically dishonest. \*

Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(untitled)

---

11. I do NOT trust the organisation to tell the truth about the incident.

Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(untitled)

---

12. Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organisation says. \*

Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. The organization is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics \*

- |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Strongly disagree     | Moderately disagree   | Slightly disagree     | Neutral               | Slightly agree        | Moderately agree      | Strongly agree        |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

(untitled)

---

14. Please rank what you find most important in the crisis response by New Horizons, ranking from MOST important to least important.

Drag items from the left-hand list into the right-hand list to order them.

Apologising for the incident	<input type="text"/>
Asking passengers for forgiveness	
Ensuring incident does not happen again	
Providing compensation	

(untitled)

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In the next section, please provide information about your media use preferences.

15. How often do you use Facebook to read corporate posts/messages? \*

- Never
- Several times a year
- Once a month
- 2-3 times a month
- Every week
- Once a day
- Several times a day

16. How often do you use corporate blogs to read corporate posts/messages? \*

- Never
- Several times a year
- Once a month
- 2-3 times a month
- Every week
- Once a day
- Several times a day

17. How often do you use YouTube to view videos posted by companies? \*

- Never
- Several times a year
- Once a month
- 2-3 times a month
- Every week
- Once a day
- Several times a day

**(untitled)**

---

18. Do you trust Facebook as a tool for receiving corporate messages and information? \*

- Yes
- No

19. Do you trust YouTube as a tool for receiving corporate messages and information? \*

- Yes
- No

20. Do you trust corporate blogs as a tool for receiving corporate messages and information? \*

- Yes
- No

21. When I need information about a company, I go to their Facebook page

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

22. When I need information about a company, I go to their YouTube page

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

23. When I need information about a company, I go to their corporate blog

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

24. Rank the medium that you are most likely to use when searching for corporate information. 1 is for most likely, 3 is for least likely. \*

	1	2	3
YouTube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Corporate blogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

25. I find corporate information that I read on Facebook reliable \*

Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

26. I find corporate information that I read on corporate blogs reliable \*

Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

27. I find corporate information that I receive from YouTube reliable \*

Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**(untitled)**

---

28. I find Facebook a credible source for corporate information \*

Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

29. I find YouTube a credible source for corporate information \*

- |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Strongly disagree     | Moderately disagree   | Slightly disagree     | Neutral               | Slightly agree        | Moderately agree      | Strongly agree        |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

30. I find corporate blogs a credible source for corporate information \*

- |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Strongly disagree     | Moderately disagree   | Slightly disagree     | Neutral               | Slightly agree        | Moderately agree      | Strongly agree        |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**(untitled)**

---

31. If a crisis occurs, would you prefer getting updates via Facebook, a corporate blog or via its YouTube channel? \*

- Facebook
- Corporate blog
- YouTube



32. After just receiving the information on New Horizon's incident, please indicate your response to the following statement. \*

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
I feel it is safe to cruise with New Horizons *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would be willing to cruise with New Horizons in the future *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



33. How likely are you to recommend New Horizons to friends/family members/colleagues? (on a scale of 0 to 10) \*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**(untitled)**

---

34. How likely are you to recommend CRUISING to friends/family members/colleagues? (on a scale of 0 to 10) \*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

35. I consider cruising to be my first choice when I'm planning a vacation

- |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Strongly disagree     | Moderately disagree   | Slightly disagree     | Neutral               | Slightly agree        | Moderately agree      | Strongly agree        | Not Applicable        |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

36. I am apprehensive about cruising and the cruise industry

- Yes, I feel it is unsafe
- Yes, the amount of cruise incidents scare me
- Neutral
- No, I think the risks are there but it does not stop me from going on a cruise
- No, I think there are hardly any risks

untitled)

---

37. What is your age?

- under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75+

38. What is your country of nationality? \*

39. What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

40. If you have any additional comments that you would like to share, please do so here.

41. Would you be willing to be contacted with some additional open questions that allow me to gain additional information about the data received in this survey? If so, please provide your e-mail address.

**Thank You!**

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I thank you very much for taking this survey. If you have any questions, you can contact me by email: [385134ev@student.eur.nl](mailto:385134ev@student.eur.nl)