

Organizational Crisis and Bolstering: Underrated Strategy or Puffery?

An experiment into the effect of the Bolstering strategy in mitigating negative reputation fallout during initial crisis communications responses on social media.

Student Name: Noud Leeftang

Student Number: 359167

Supervisor: Dr. Yijing Wang

Media Studies: Media & Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master Thesis Media & Business

22 June 2017

MA Media Studies: Media & Business
Master Thesis

ABSTRACT

The use of the bolstering strategy was identified by Kim et al. (2009) as the most prevalent crisis response strategy amongst practitioners. This is in contrast with what the Situational Crisis Communication Theory states: that bolstering is a minimal effect strategy only to be used in certain situations. This study used an online experiment ($N=146$) to determine how effective the incorporation of bolstering is in combination with the denial or corrective action initial crisis response strategies for a company of good prior reputation facing a preventable crisis. Four different crisis response strategies (with/ without bolstering X denial/ corrective action) were tested following a fictional article accusing Sony of negligence, resulting in dangerous product malfunction. Conditions were presented randomly to our respondents. Our crisis responses were framed as Facebook posts, as social media has evolved to an important initial crisis communication tool.

Bolstering was found to have little effect on the three factors crisis communication attempts to minimize the negative effects on: Post-Crisis Reputation (reputation held after the crisis), Secondary Crisis Communication (intention to spread the crisis) & Secondary Crisis Reactions (negative word-of-mouth and purchase intentions). Response strategy (denial/ corrective action) was also found to have little effect on these factors. We found that the biggest asset in minimizing negative reputational fallout is Pre-Crisis Reputation, as is confirmed in existing theory. Our results indicate the most important aspect of initial crisis management is the reputation held by the company before the crisis and that a positive pre-crisis reputation helps 'shield' the organization from negative crisis fallout on all three of our factors.

KEYWORDS: *SCCT, Crisis, Communication, Reputation, Bolstering*

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
1. Introduction	6
2. Theoretical Framework	13
2.1 Pre-Crisis Reputation	15
2.2. Reputation History, Relationships and Threats	17
2.3. Corporate Crisis types & Responses	18
2.4. Secondary Crisis Responses: Bolstering Strategy	22
2.5. Social-Mediated Crisis Communication	24
2.6. Secondary Crisis Reactions	26
3. Methodology	29
3.1. Research Design	29
3.2. Experimental Scenarios	30
3.3. Data Collection	31
3.4. Operationalization	32
3.4.1. Pre-Crisis Reputation	32
3.4.2. Attribution of Guilt, History & Relation	33
3.4.2. Post- Crisis Reputation	33
3.4.3. Secondary Crisis Communication	34
3.4.4. Secondary Crisis Reactions	34
3.5. Manipulation Check	34
3.6. Computed Variables: Reliability & Factor Analysis	35
3.6.1. Pre-Crisis Reputation	35
3.6.2. Relation	35
3.6.3. Attribution	36
3.6.4. Post Crisis Reputation	36
3.6.5. Secondary Crisis Communication	37
3.6.6. Secondary Crisis Reactions	38
3.7. Description & Demographics	38
4. Results	41
4.1. Hypotheses 1: The effect of Bolstering on Post-Crisis Reputation	41
4.2. Hypotheses 2: The effect of Bolstering on Secondary Crisis Communication	42
4.3. Hypotheses 3: The effect of Bolstering on Secondary Crisis Reactions	44
4.4. Additional Results on Post-Crisis Reputation	46
4.4.1. Pre-Crisis Reputation	46
4.4.2. Level of Attribution	47
4.4.3. Age	47
4.4.4. Gender, Bolstering, Response Strategy & Facebook	47
4.5. Additional Results on Secondary Crisis Communications	48
4.5.1. Pre-Crisis Reputation	48
4.5.2. Bolstering Strategy	48
4.5.2. Attribution, Age, Gender & Response Strategy	49
4.5.3. Facebook & Secondary Crisis Communications	49
4.6. Additional Results on Secondary Crisis Reactions	50
4.6.1. Pre-Crisis Reputation	50
4.6.1. Attribution	50
4.6.3. Response Strategy	51
4.6.4. Facebook Use	51

4.6.5. Age, Gender, Bolstering & FB News	51
4.7. Robustness Check	52
4.7.1. H1: Post Crisis Reputation	52
4.7.2 H2: Secondary Crisis Communications	54
4.7.3 H3: Secondary Crisis Reactions	55
4.7.3. Additional Results from the Robust Data	55
5. Discussion	58
5.1. H1: Bolstering & Post-Crisis Reputation	59
5.2. H2: Bolstering & Secondary Crisis Communications	60
5.3. H3: Bolstering & Secondary Crisis Reactions	61
5.4. Pre-Crisis Reputation Shields Organizations from Negative Reputation Fallout	62
5.5. Other Findings	63
5.6. Conclusion	63
5.7. Limitations & Future Research	64
References	66
Appendix A- experiment conditions	72
A1- Fictional News Post	72
A2- Fictional Facebook Posts	73
A2.1- Denial:	73
A2.2- Denial+ Bolstering	73
A2.3- Corrective Action	73
A2.4- Corrective Action + Bolstering	73
Appendix B- Experiment Survey	74

1. Introduction

It has become increasingly important for businesses, and especially those of considerable size, to attend, manage and build their corporate reputations amongst stakeholders in the globalized, interconnected world. Social media has empowered stakeholder groups to create, find or share information on organizations and their conduct in the form of secondary crisis communications on social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Where in the past, people were reliant on the mainstream media and information from spokespeople, they now have the ability to connect and engage with companies online but can also learn of misconduct or faults quicker and react more effectively. Individuals have become the police, jury and judge when it comes to correct corporate business conduct. The dreaded 'media shitstorm', traditionally reserved to major crises, has become an increasingly common occurrence with businesses being scrutinized and investigated by their stakeholders. This can result in negative effects, the secondary crisis reactions, like stakeholders spreading negative messages or even adapting their purchase intentions.

Power dynamics have shifted as companies have seen the high level of control they had in the traditional integrated marketing communication hierarchy diminished in favor of consumer empowerment (O'Brien, 2011). Corporate Communication is no longer a one-way street, but a myriad of overlapping roads dispersing in all directions. This has opened an unprecedented level of dialogue between organizations and stakeholders that is unique to our time. As such, many organizations have successfully integrated this online presence and reputation management into their strategies and even use social media as a first communication point during crises (Schultz, Utz & Goritz, 2011).

This connection to the stakeholder comes at a price as consumers are more aware of their rights, wishes and opinions and will happily point out any mistake the company makes or inform their peers of misconduct (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; O'Brien, 2011). The digital era, with all its sharing capabilities, has made crises more numerous, visible and disastrous with a larger group of victims and a wider impact (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 1998; 2003) Small mistakes are easily handled, but the real challenge is to manage corporate

reputation in times of organizational crisis. Corporate reputation is an intangible asset of the organization formed by evaluations of the stakeholders about the organization (Coombs, 2007a). Organizational crises are specific, unexpected and non-routine events, often with high levels of uncertainty, which threaten an organization's reputation and goals. These crises affect the interaction with stakeholders and often diminish the organization's reputation, credibility and legitimacy (Schultz, Utz & Goritz, 2011). Stakeholders might even adapt their purchasing habits or the way they talk about an organization, the secondary crisis reactions, based on its reputation and crises (Coombs & Holladay, 2014; Stockmyer, 1996).

One of the most well-known corporate crises ever is the Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis of 1982. It is a case often cited as an exemplary guide on how an organization should respond to a crisis. The crisis itself was, without a doubt, one of the more serious ones with seven people dying of cyanide-laced Tylenol tablets. An extremely troubling event that could have cost Johnson & Johnson their reputation, had it not been for their swift and correct response. The moment it became clear that Tylenol tablets had been laced, Johnson & Johnson immediately pulled all stock, halted production, got involved in the investigation and offered a \$100,000 reward for finding the killer. After the crisis Johnson & Johnson introduced tamper-resistant packaging and offered discounts. The crisis had cost them in excess of \$100 million but their reaction, cooperation and transparency had put the company in a favorable light and the brand was able to recover quickly (Kaplan, 2005). Johnson & Johnson displayed how effective crisis management can not only minimize a corporation's negative reputation fallout following a crisis, but how effective crisis management can also help improve reputation post-crisis.

When Toyota faced a crisis in 2009 pertaining to their floor-mats getting stuck behind the accelerator, a product fault that resulted in a fatal accident, it was the catalyst for a series of customer complaints. As a result, more than 8 million vehicles were recalled worldwide and Toyota faced the biggest crisis in its history. However, Toyota did not respond to the crisis until 6 months after the crash (Davey, 2010; Verschoor, 2014). Toyota had failed to take appropriate action in time and only when the traditional media picked the story up did they

go into 'crisis mode', even though there were already definite signs of a crisis online. Companies should thus monitor their reputation online and 'assume the worst' when it comes to crises and respond before speculation and rumor take over (Davey, 2010; Schultz, Utz & Goritz, 2011). Bad crisis management results in worse crises, and in the case of Toyota cost the company millions of dollars and a significant blow to their reputation. Nonetheless, Toyota's prior good reputation protected them in part and they were able to rebuild their reputation in the following years.

Even when monitoring, it is still possible for an organization to be oblivious to the corporate crisis ensuing. Take for example Pepsi, a multinational beverage conglomerate, who recently launched a new ad in which an Instagram celebrity appears to be mocking political protest and the growing political division and discontent found amongst many people in society. By trying to make a very serious topic 'fun & whimsical', they effectively angered many stakeholders and were put to heavy scrutiny by civil rights groups and the media. Pepsi had tried to 'hook-in' on a current affair but failed miserably, and in the end appeared to be mostly mocking some very serious societal issues. Such a corporate blunder, resulting in a full-blown crisis, is not uncommon and often stems from internal issues or mismanagement in said company.

What makes this case interesting is that following the Pepsi Ad Crisis, international beer company Heineken launched an ad in which they did what Pepsi was trying to do, but did it right. Instead of mocking political differences and protest, they put two people with widely different viewpoints across one another. Only when they had built a rapport did Heineken reveal the widely different views each person had. Would they stay and discuss their differences over a beer or walk away? Obviously they stayed and shared a 'Heiny'. What this teaches us is that corporate crises can appear suddenly, that many companies are internally oblivious to the ways they might start a corporate crisis, that even the best intentions are void when executed wrongly and that one companies' crisis is another companies opportunity. What is also interesting to note is that there was even outrage towards the Heineken ad by the 'progressive' media. It is hard to appease all the stakeholders as an organization.

Appeasing everyone might be difficult, but there are also cases in which companies blatantly place their priorities in the wrong ballpark. The 2009 financial crisis was harsh for the financial industry, but considerably harsher for the people who were afraid to lose their home, income or living as a result of it. When JP Morgan decided to invest 138 million dollars into a few private jets and a new hangar after having just received a 25 billion bailout, it was not surprising that critics were quick to highlight the hypocrisy of this (Sarstedt, 2009). This was consequently used as an example to condemn the whole banking industry for its irresponsible and lavish spending, effectively spreading the crisis to involve parties who had no direct guilt in the matter. A similar feat occurred during the Volkswagen emissions crisis, after which the whole automobile industry was scrutinized and investigated after it was discovered VW had placed 'tampering software' in their diesel cars. This means that crises that start in one company, can spread to the whole industry when mismanaged.

To help professionals in overcoming crises, and to better understand them, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory was developed (Coombs, 2007a). This theoretical guide helps in assessing the reputational threat, identifying the type of crisis and offers advice on the correct type of response to be given by the organization to minimize negative reputational fallout from the crisis. Due to the extensive testing and research on which it was built, the SCCT is considered a cornerstone of corporate reputation management and will act as a theoretical guide throughout this thesis.

The SCCT offers three overarching response strategies to corporate reputation crises (Coombs, 2007a). These three crisis responses are denial of the accusation, rebuild of the reputation and diminish of the attribution. These strategies are each applicable to a different type of crisis and crisis guilt attribution. One of the least studied aspects of the SCCT is the practice of bolstering- to strengthen or support the corporate reputation by highlighting the good practices of an organization, praising stakeholders or victimization (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007a). Bolstering is generally considered an additional crisis response strategy to be used in combination with another strategy, but as such limited attention has been given in academics to this strategy that does not focus on attributing responsibility (Ma & Zahn, 2016). Nonetheless, research has

shown that bolstering is indeed a useful tool in minimizing reputational damage (Brinson & Benoit, 1999; Sheldon & Shalot, 2009).

This becomes apparent when looking at the crisis management Citibank employed during the 2009 financial crisis. The bailout of the financial industries, and resulting loss of trust, was a serious tarnish to Citibank's reputation. Unlike JP Morgan, Citibank adapted to the crisis and by using crisis response strategies, the bank was able to recover a large part of their reputation and re-instill faith from the consumers. In these responses, Citibank used bolstering most often in response to the crisis and government bailout (Weber et al, 2011). Bolstering is best used in combination with another crisis response strategy as previous research has proven, and was also the case with Citibank (Coombs, 2007a; Kim et al, 2009; Weber et al, 2011).

Due to the lack of experimental research dealing with bolstering specifically, this research will focus on the value of bolstering as a supplement to crisis responses in times of corporate crisis and how this affects post-crisis reputation. It will also study the way in which online audiences might engage in secondary crisis communications (sharing/ commenting) on social media or perform secondary crisis reactions (recommending or condemning to peers), which also includes purchasing behavior. The research question that this thesis will aim to answer will thus be:

To what extent, if any, does the bolstering strategy affect post crisis reputation, secondary crisis communications and secondary crisis reactions during times of organizational crisis?

To answer this question, an online experiment was designed in which a fictional crisis was introduced and the respondents were consequently presented with different conditions at random. These conditions presented different crisis responses that either incorporated bolstering or did not. Another aim of the study was to distinguish the influence of bolstering on secondary crisis communications and secondary crisis reactions, which were operationalized using previous research models and theory.

Bolstering has previously been studied mainly in a case-study design, from which the results indicate that it is a widely used and effective crisis response strategy (Kim, Avery & Larissa, 2009; Sheldon & Sallot, 2008; Weber et al, 2011). The SCCT, however, claims bolstering is a 'minimal opportunity' to increase reputational assets in time of corporate crisis (Coombs, 2007a). Limited research has dealt with the question if the bolstering strategy makes crisis response strategies more effective or not in limiting negative post crisis fallout compared to strategies that do not incorporate bolstering (Ma & Zhan, 2016).

This study will attempt to discover the true effect of the bolstering strategy on corporate reputation and stakeholder reactions using an experimental research design. Such a research might help us better understand how bolstering works on corporate reputation in times of crisis, and offer academics as well as practitioners important insight into the real value of bolstering as a secondary crisis response strategy. Hopefully it will fill an important gap in the theory of crisis communication.

The implication that many practitioners of corporate crisis communication are indeed using the bolstering strategy to protect their reputations indicates a gap between what is found in the 'real world' and society, and what researchers have incorporated into models and theory (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2016). This research will attempt to fill this gap and provide the corporate world, society and academics with an answer to the question if bolstering is an effective supplement to the primary crisis response strategies, as indicated in the real world, or that it is minimal asset as is indicated in academic theory. The results of this study could have an impact on both the societal; the way bolstering is used in corporate communication, as on the academic, in the form of an updated theory or at least the insinuation that more research is required.

Implications for corporate crisis communication could be that they are either correct in using the bolstering strategy and that it is an underrated tool in minimizing negative reputation fallout following a crisis. Or, it is merely a 'fluff' piece used by practitioners because they are reluctant to only communicate negative information like admitting guilt and apologizing. This would mean that

the bolstering strategy might not be anything more than a psychological crutch, making it slightly easier to admit guilt and take appropriate action. Alternatively, using bolstering while denying guilt might be a strategy to divert attention from the negative crisis unfolding.

Before mentioned potential implications for crisis communicators, that bolstering is indeed a very effective strategy in minimizing negative reputation fallout would mean that academics have consistently underestimated the effectiveness of the strategy. If this were the case, the academic field of crisis communication would be wise to re-investigate the matter of bolstering and if it were indeed possible that the bolstering strategy has been underestimated in the SCCT, the theory would need to be adapted.

This research will attempt to dissect the effectiveness of the bolstering strategy on the three main factors the SCCT attempts to minimize the negative reputational crisis fallout on. These factors are the reputation after the crisis (post-crisis reputation), willingness to spread the crisis (secondary crisis communications) and behavioral actions taken after the crisis (secondary crisis communications)

2. Theoretical Framework

Corporate reputation is the accumulation of opinions, expectations and evaluations made by stakeholders, anyone who has a stake or interest in the company, about an organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, ch2.). These evaluations make up the corporate reputation of an organization and can result in either favorable outcomes, such as attractiveness, credibility and improved financial performance, or negative outcomes such as loss of business, distrust and sometimes even protests or boycotts of the organization (Coombs, 2007a, Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, ch2.). These reputations are constantly being renegotiated in society, are always changing and need to be managed continuously (Fombrun & van Riel, 2004, ch1.). Due to the benefits of a good reputation organizations will thus aim to maintain a positive reputation amongst its stakeholders, but will lose said good reputation when they neglect to properly manage it.

Positive reputational capital, or a 'reservoir of goodwill', can also act as a defense against negative publicity, meaning that an organization with a prior good reputation will experience less harm during a crisis than an organization with a negative or even neutral reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Decker, 2012). This is supported by both case studies as experimental research (Decker, 2012; Fombrun & Foss, 2004; Mahon & Wartick, 2003; Tucker & Melewar, 2005; Turk et al, 2012). The public will be more receptive of the corporation's crisis response and handling if, up until then, the corporation has been held in high esteem. Furthermore, a positive reputation can be used as a defensive 'weapon', for instance by bolstering about past good deeds, to maintain and protect the market position and relationship with stakeholders and recover more rapidly (Coombs, 2007a; Decker, 2012; Mahon & Wartick, 2003). Because of this, bolstering is generally only recommended in the SCCT when there is a good prior reputation. One way of measuring a corporation's prior reputation is through the RepTrak system, which annually ranks corporate reputations based on worldwide surveys (Ponzi, Fombrun & Gardberg; 2011).

According to Fombrun & Van Riel (2004, ch5) the foundation of a strong reputation are five principles that separate winning reputations from the rest. These principles are visibility, distinctiveness, authenticity, transparency, and

consistency. Visibility refers to the willingness and capability of an organization to communicate with its stakeholders, the media and release information about itself. Distinctiveness refers to being unique, or at least being perceived as unique, and using this feat in communication and marketing. Authenticity is how believable a company is. Faking authenticity is hard, and something stakeholders can find out quickly in today's connected and informed world. Authenticity is related to trust and credibility: you need to be good, not just appear good. Transparency means being open about how you work and what your goals are. Companies that do not shy away from communicating with the public and opening their doors to them have higher reputations because they can show the world they are more than a faceless corporation. Consistency in actions and message builds winning reputations. Choose what your organization stands for and stick with it. Finally, Van Riel & Fombrun (2007) add a sixth factor in a later publication: responsiveness. Companies that are able to quickly and adequately respond to situations, negative or positive, build more trust and can often prevent a crisis in its infancy.

Maintaining a positive reputation becomes considerably more difficult when the organization faces a crisis. Corporate crises are events that are unexpected, disruptive and have the potential to negatively influence the stakeholder relationship (Coombs, 2007a; Bundy, Pfarrer, Short & Coombs, 2016; Kahn, Barton & Fellows, 2013). This means most organizations will aim to avoid crises, and if that is not possible attempt to minimize the negative fallout from the crisis. To minimize this crisis fallout, the organization must take prior reputation, crisis responsibility, crisis history and prior relations into account when determining how to respond to a crisis (Chiciudean & David, 2013; Coombs, 2007a). Some of the main negative reputational fallouts crisis communication attempts to minimize are post-crisis reputation, secondary crisis communications and secondary crisis reactions. Post-crisis reputation hereby refers to the evaluations given by stakeholders about the organization after the crisis. Secondary crisis communications are the actions taken by the stakeholder following a crisis; does he or she share, comment or inform peers about the crisis? Finally, secondary crisis reactions refer to the opinions and action a stakeholder might take after the crisis, like spreading negative word-of-mouth or

even adapting purchase intentions.

One of the cornerstones of crisis management theory is the Situational Crisis Communication Theory developed by Timothy Coombs (2007a). This theory offers a framework that can be used to protect reputational assets during a crisis. The SCCT attempts to predict how stakeholders will react in a certain crisis situation by assessing the level of reputational threat (based on attribution, crisis history and prior relationship) and what response strategy is best suited to reduce loss of reputation. The SCCT draws on two previous theories of corporate reputation crises, and incorporates these to create a theory that aims to identify and restore corporate reputation after crises.

The first theory is the Attribution theory, which explains that people will search for the cause of events and attribute responsibility (positive or negative) of said event to a person or organization (Weiner, 1985). The most common attributions in the SCCT are anger and sympathy (Coombs, 2007a). Attribution can also influence behavioral responses, negative ones for anger attribution and positive ones for sympathy attribution (Weiner, 1985; Coombs 2007a, 2007b). The second theory is the Image Restoration theory, which aims to offer guidelines to restore corporate reputation when faced with a (negative) crisis (Benoit, 1997). The Situational Crisis Communication Theory offers communication strategies for denying, evading and reducing reputational threats during a crisis, many of which were adapted or based on the two previous theories, and as such will be used as the overarching theory in this paper.

2.1 Pre-Crisis Reputation

A corporate crisis has the potential to inflict reputational damage, which can result in an increased unfavorable view of the organization. One way of protecting an organization against negative crisis fallout is by building and maintaining a positive reputation before a crisis occurs (pre-crisis reputation) (Coombs, 2007a). We have already discussed the merits of a positive reputation for organizations: attractiveness, trust, credibility and improved financial gains (Coombs, 2007a, Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, ch2.). This means maintaining a positive reputation is an asset to an organization that will aid it in appeasing

stakeholders and improving business. On the other hand, a negative reputation will (generally) negatively affect business and cause stakeholders to choose alternative organizations when possible.

A positive reputation can help aid a company in minimizing negative reputation fallout following a crisis. A favorable pre-crisis reputation acts as a buffer of 'reputational capital' during crises and allows the organization to suffer less damage and rebound quicker (Coombs, 2007a; Fombrun & van Riel, 2004; Knight & Pretty, 1999; Gregory, 1999). Companies that have a higher pre-crisis reputation will also have a higher post-crisis reputation than their counterparts with a lower pre-crisis reputation (Decker, 2012, Fombrun & Foss, 2004; Tucker & Melewar, 2005) Research into the effectiveness of pre-crisis reputation on negative reputation fallout following a crisis confirms this and indicates that those who have a better pre-crisis reputation will have a more favorable post-crisis reputation than organizations that had an unfavorable pre-crisis reputation (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015; Coombs & Holladay, 2001; 2002; 2006; Decker, 2012; Sheldon & Sallot, 2009). This could be explained by a reluctance of the stakeholders to change their pre-existing attitude about an organization, even attributing less responsibility, and going as far as that a positive pre-crisis reputation can protect the organization against negative publicity and external allegations following a crisis (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015).

Coombs and Holladay (2006) call this the 'Halo effect'. This refers to the power of pre-crisis reputation in deterring negative reputation fallout: the organization is basically so good it reaches a level of 'sainthood'. They state this halo effect acts as a shield rather than a 'benefit-of-the-doubt' factor, meaning the stakeholder will be less likely to change their own cognition or expectation bias due to a crisis (deflected off the shield). This does not mean that pre-crisis reputation can completely omit the negative fallout from a crisis. Volkswagen had a positive reputation before their emissions crisis but due to improper management and response to the crisis, lost a large portion of their positive reputation. A study by the Reputation Institute (2016b) found that people were initially not that fazed by the crisis and it did not damage VW's reputation greatly, but at a later point reported a loss of trust and willingness to purchase VW's products due to the way VW responded to the crisis.

Strong reputations might thus protect an organization during initial crisis responses but mismanagement at a later level can still result in reputational damage. We can therefore say that a strong reputation protects an organization by giving it a reservoir of goodwill, but that that reservoir does run out at some point when no actions are taken to reduce the offensiveness of the crisis. Such an asset of positive reputation is therefore of prime importance for organizations who, besides the usual benefits outside of times of crisis, will also be better protected when a crisis does arise.

2.2. Reputation History, Relationships and Threats

Every crisis has its own level of reputational threat. The level of reputational threat posed by a crisis is influenced by three different factors. The first is the initial crisis responsibility. This is related to the attribution theory that states that when an event happens, people will attribute responsibility about the cause of a crisis in varying degrees to an organization (Kelley & Michela, 1980; Coombs, 2007b & 2006). More attribution thus means that a greater reputational threat is formed because stakeholders think the company is to blame and guilty of the crisis. The second and third factors are the organization's crisis history and prior relational reputation. Crisis history refers to past crises that might have been similar in shape, form and attribution and prior relational reputation refers to the past interactions between the stakeholders and the organization.

When positive, these factors can help reduce the organizations' crisis and even help prevent them, much like a positive pre-crisis reputation can (Bundy et al, 2016; Coombs, 2007a; Kahn et al, 2013; Ulmer et al, 2011) On the other hand, when negative, these situation factors act as intensifiers for reputational threats and crisis attribution and thus can thoroughly escalate the situation (Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Coombs, 2006; 2007a). Every crisis is an accumulation of different situational factors, actions and results and it is therefore impossible to devise a uniformity of 'best practices' or to even predict with assurance if a crisis will be severe or not (Coombs, 2015).

Level of reputational threat is an important aspect of crisis communication and, as mentioned before, is strongly tied to Weiner's attribution

theory (1985). During a reputational crisis it is thus important to first assess the level of attribution and reputational threat an organization might be subject to from said crisis. Human response when faced with a negative event is to seek out the cause of said event (Weiner, 1985). Causality is thus generally the first question raised when a crisis arises (Kelley, 1967). High levels of attribution indicate an internal causality (it is the organizations fault for deviating behavior) while low levels indicate an external attribution (the organization behaved normally but was influenced by outside situational factors). Higher levels of crisis attribution are placed on organizations that caused the crisis internally and will therefore experience a more severe crisis threat (Bundy 2016; Coombs, 2007a; 2004; Kim et al, 2009).

Research has shown that crisis history also has an influence on the reputational threat, and that past crises can intensify the current level of reputational threat (Bundy et al, 2016; Coombs, 2004; Jeong, 2009; Sisco et al, 2010). A negative relationship can also make stakeholders less forgiving because they will already have a negative opinion of the organization and the crisis might help reinforce this belief (Bundy et al, 2016; Coombs, 2004; 2007a). On the other hand, a positive history or relationship will act as an asset to the organization in times of crisis, cause the public to be more accepting of the crisis response and minimize the long-term fallout (Decker, 2012). An organization must therefore first understand how the public perceives the crisis based on their reputation history and the level of attribution before choosing a response strategy (Coombs, 2007a; Choi & Chung, 2013).

2.3. Corporate Crisis types & Responses

The SCCT aims to offer guidelines for practitioners based on empirically tested evidence. Coombs (2007a) identifies three different types of reputational crisis that are based on the image restoration theory (Benoit, 1995) and which are supported in empirical research (Coombs & Holladay, 2004). In the victim cluster, the organization is also the victim of the crisis and experiences a weak attribution of responsibility and thus a mild reputational threat. In the accidental cluster, the crisis was unintentionally caused by the organization and thus minimal attributions can be made and a moderate reputational threat is

experienced. The final cluster, and the one that poses the severest reputational threat and attribution of crisis responsibility, is the preventable cluster. In this type of crisis, the organization knowingly took inappropriate actions or could at least have avoided them.

Once the level of reputational threat and type of crisis has been identified, the SCCT offers different crisis response strategies aimed at reducing the negative affect and prevent negative behavioral intentions (Coombs, 2007a). The central theme in this is responsibility, which in turn requires accountability for the crisis-attribution placed on the organization by the stakeholders. The type of response strategy the organization uses can greatly influence the resulting stakeholder evaluations (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Bundy et al, 2016; Coombs, 2007a).

The SCCT's crisis response strategies can be divided into primary and secondary crisis response strategies. The primary strategies are based on denial, diminish and rebuild (Coombs, 2006; 2007a). The secondary response strategy is the Bolstering strategy and will be discussed later on. The denial strategy attempts to remove any connection between the crisis and the organization. This strategy is most useful in the victim cluster, when the connection between the organization and the crisis is untrue or at least can not be proven. The diminish strategy aims to convince stakeholders that the crisis is 'not that bad' or that it occurred outside of the organizations control. Finally, the rebuilding strategy aims to minimize the reputational damage by showing sympathy or offering compensation.

<i>Crisis Type</i>	Victim	Accidental	Preventable
<i>Attribution</i>	Low	Medium	High
<i>Examples</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural disasters • Workplace violence • Rumors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accidents • Product errors • Disputes with stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human caused accidents • Human caused product errors • Misdeeds
<i>Crisis Response (Primary)</i>	Denial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attack the accuser • Deny • Scapegoat 	Diminish <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excuse • Justification 	Rebuild <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apology • Corrective action

Figure 1: SCCT crisis types, attributions and responses overview

Research into the use of these different crisis responses has largely confirmed the SCCT. One research attempted to empirically prove the validity of the SCCT by studying the effectiveness of the three different crisis types matched with different crisis responses in an experiment research design (Claeys, Cauberghe & Vyncke, 2010). It was found that corporate reputation is most under threat when faced with a preventable crisis and that the rebuild strategy is most effective in mitigating negative reputation fallout following a crisis. Surprisingly, it was also found that crises in the accidental or victim cluster were treated the same by their respondents and resulted in similar reputational effects. Finally, they found that the deny strategy was only marginally less effective than the rebuild strategy and that personal traits of respondents might be an important factor in this.

Other research has also dealt with the SCCT, and it was also found that the rebuild strategy was the most effective in mitigating negative reputation fallout, regardless of crisis type, while the denial or diminish strategies elicited the most negative responses (McDonald, Sparks & Glendon, 2010). Results also showed that the crisis-cause and crisis-responsibility appeared to be more important than response. This means response strategy is less important than if the organization (willingly) caused the crisis or not. The response that attributes the most responsibility to the organization, the rebuild strategy, actually results in the stakeholder thinking the organization is less responsible, or at least the

stakeholder thinks they are less guilty. The vice-versa effect can be observed for the strategies that aim to reduce the perception of responsibility and actually increase the attribution reported by respondents. It seems that taking responsibility, displaying transparency and remorse are the most effective crisis-response strategies. Organizations that try to correct mistakes made no matter what, like how Johnson & Johnson reacted to the Tylenol crisis with the public in mind and not their profits, are considerably less affected by crises.

Similar results were found in other research. Cultural, personal or relational attributes were found to be important factors in crisis communication response effectiveness (Verhoeven et al, 2014; Luoma-aho, Moreno & Verhoeven, 2017). Responses with a low level of accommodation (denial) are generally regarded as less ethical than responses with a moderate (diminish) or high (rebuild) level of accommodation towards the stakeholder (Coombs, 1999; Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Coombs, Holladay & Claeys, 2016; Decker, 2012). Another study in Taiwan found that timely, consistent and active responses to a crisis are more important than the actual response strategy used (Huang, 2008). This is generally supported in other research that found that one of the most detrimental responses to a crisis for organizational reputation is giving no response at all (Coombs et al, 2016; Park & Reber, 2010; Coombs, 2006). Decker (2012) also mentions that the denial strategy is better than no response, but only when there is a positive pre-crisis reputation that can help shield the organization.

It is not surprising that we find discrepancies between studies and the SCCT. The SCCT was developed as a guide based on empirical research, which could be applied into every crisis situation. This does not account for situational factors like culture, geography or specific crises or crisis histories. Nonetheless, the SCCT remains to date the most inclusive and complete theory for crisis communication and remains valid due to its extensive testing and inclusion into multiple empirical studies for which it laid the groundwork.

2.4. Secondary Crisis Responses: Bolstering Strategy

The secondary crisis response strategy, which is generally considered an addition to the primary strategies, consists of the Bolstering response strategy (Coombs, 2007a; Weber, et al, 2011). Bolstering is understood to be the practice of stressing good past deeds and traits of an organization in times of crisis to (re) build the image and reputation (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007a; Weber et al, 2011). Coombs (2007a) says the bolstering strategy offers a 'minimal opportunity to develop reputational assets' while other research has indicated that bolstering is not just one of the most used crisis response strategies, but possibly also one of the most effective (Kim et al, 2009; Sheldon & Sallot, 2008; Weber et al, 2011). This past research and indications from the real-world crisis management practices could be an indication of bolstering being underplayed within the SCCT, and therefore further research is required.

Benoit's (1995) image restoration theory, on which the SCCT is built, claims the bolstering strategy is best used when an organization is accused of wrongful actions and wants to reduce the offensiveness of the crisis. We can find an example in this in the response from an Exxon chairman after the *Valdez* oil spill: 'Exxon has moved swiftly and competently to minimize the effect this oil will have on the environment, fish and other wild-life' (Benoit, 1997). Although this was one of the most disastrous oil spills in human history, Exxon still thought that the bolstering strategy would protect their reputation.

The SCCT claims the bolstering strategy is best used to support one of the three primary crisis response strategies (deny, diminish, rebuild). It is therefore not a valid response strategy by itself, and should always be used in combination with one of the three primary strategies. Bolstering strategies are strategies of an opportunistic nature because they can only be used when an organization has done past good work (Coombs & Holladay, p. 41, 2011). This means that a company that has done no good work simply has nothing genuine to bolster about while a company that, for instance, has kept a high service standard, won awards or adapted a CSR strategy, can bolster about any or all of these past good deeds. Bolstering works by offsetting the negative information by adding positive information and therefore requires the presence of positive information (good pre-crisis reputation) to be present (Coombs, 2015).

In crisis communication practice, it was found that bolstering was the most often used first crisis response and that it was used most often in combination with the denial strategy, followed by the corrective action strategy. It was also found that bolstering was most often adopted in the preventable cluster, meaning in situations with a high level of internal attribution (Kim et al, 2009). This indicates that bolstering is a prevalent strategy in real-life crisis communication, as also becomes clear when looking at other case study orientated research, and could be explained by the organizations' reluctance to share (only) negative information about themselves (Kim & Jung, 2014; Sheldon & Sallot, 2008; Wan, 2004; Weber et al, 2011). This is unsurprising as the incorporation of bolstering can reduce perceptions of guilt and wrongdoing and increased trust and truthfulness (Kazoleas, 2008) Furthermore, the implication that bolstering is used most often in combination with the denial strategy directly counters the recommendations made in the SCCT that bolstering works best with the diminish and rebuild strategies, although it is not directly stated it should not be used with denial (Coombs, 2007a; Kim et al, 2009).

As the prevalence of the strategy amongst practitioners insinuates, bolstering might thus be an important tool in crisis communication. It appears bolstering is an almost natural reaction for many corporations when faced with a crisis. It has, despite its prevalence amongst practitioners, not been studied sufficiently in academic literature, and therefore its effectiveness remains largely unproven (Ma & Zahn, 2016). Other research has indicated that a two-sided response that combines a negative aspect (the crisis) with a positive one (bolstering) is more successful than one-sided ones (Kim & Sung, 2014). Furthermore, it is interesting that practitioners use the strategy of bolstering most in combination with denial, while this is in direct contrast to the SCCT (Coombs, 2007a). Considering the use of bolstering in practice this research will aim to discover bolstering's value in crisis communication further by looking at the use of bolstering in combination with the two most used crisis responses by practitioners, the corrective action strategy which is recommended by the SCCT and the denial strategy which is theoretically advised against in the SCCT.

We hypothesize that an organization that incorporates bolstering into their crisis response will have a higher level of post crisis corporate reputation

for both strategies than organizations that do not incorporate a bolstering strategy.

H1a: *Organizations that incorporate the denial+ bolstering strategy will have a higher level of positive post crisis reputation after a preventable crisis scenario than organizations that only use the denial strategy.*

H1b: *Organizations that incorporate the corrective action+ bolstering strategy will have a higher level of positive post crisis reputation after a preventable crisis scenario than organizations that only use the corrective action strategy.*

2.5.Social-Mediated Crisis Communication

The Internet has become increasingly important for crisis communicators. Monitoring and reacting to crises unfolding online is an effective strategy in identifying and managing crises. The Social-Mediated Crisis Communication Model deals with the influence of media type on crisis communication, which was not included in the SCCT, and highlights the importance of social media during a crisis (Austin, Fisher & Jin, 2012). The model identifies the way in which (young) adults seek out social media after a crisis for insider information and use them to communicate with friends or family. The model was originally named the Blog Mediated Crisis Communication Model, but was renamed after research indicated an increase of importance for platforms like Facebook and Twitter, and a decrease in the use of blogs (Austin et al, 2012; Jin et al, 2010; 2011).

In the SMMC Austin, Fisher & Jin (2012) posit that individuals with little stake in the organization initiate and fulfill PR activities through online interactivity. Normally, getting other people to talk about your organization positively is a much sought-after PR tool. However, during times of crisis this also means that anyone on social media can become an influential in times of crisis by spreading messages online (secondary crisis communications) to their followers. Research has indicated that online behavior in a crisis is often replicated in offline behavior, meaning that online opinions are reproduced and repeated in offline word-of-mouth, and vice-versa (Dutta-Bergman, 2006). Furthermore, during crisis the public will look towards organizations' social

media channels for information, in combination with traditional media that is still favored and trusted over an organizations social media channel (Austin et al, 2012, Jin et al, 2010; 2011). Other results have indicated that social media use amongst stakeholders and the organization increases during a crisis, further highlighting its importance in crisis communication (Bi et al, 2014; Schultz et al, 2011; Macais et al, 2009; Veil et al, 2011)

This study will further explore the use of social media as a tool for reputation management by focusing on crisis responses on social media, in specific Facebook. In contrast to face-to-face interaction, social media has changed the communication activity into a dynamic and real-time process in which one user can share their opinions with many with the single click of a button and without interference of journalists or other gatekeepers (Bi et al, 2014; Veil et al, 2011). By studying crisis responses on social media, we will attempt to find out what type of online secondary crisis communication- commenting, sharing or informing- is elicited by different crisis response strategies. Secondary Crisis Communications are thus understood as the willingness of stakeholders to spread a 'message of crisis'. Ideally, an organization would prefer to not see messages about their crisis spread. The tone of the message (negative or positive) and following behavioral actions are discussed in the next chapter about Secondary Crisis Reactions.

We hypothesize that organizations that use the bolstering strategy in combination with another crisis response strategy will experience less negative secondary crisis communications. Incorporation of the bolstering strategy will result in lower willingness to engage in secondary crisis communication on social media towards the organization due to bolstering's crisis-diminishing attributes (Benoit, 1995, Coombs, 2007a; Sheldon & Sallot, 2008; Weber et al, 2011).

H2a: *Organizations that incorporate the denial+ bolstering strategy will experience less negative secondary crisis communication after a preventable crisis scenario than organizations that only use the denial strategy.*

H2b: *Organizations that incorporate the corrective action+ bolstering strategy will experience less negative secondary crisis communication after a*

preventable crisis scenario than organizations that only use the corrective action strategy.

2.6. Secondary Crisis Reactions

The SCCT is built to offer guidelines that could be used to repair the reputation and reduce the negative effects for an organization after a crisis. These aspects have been discussed in the previous section of this essay, but there is one more aspect the SCCT attempts to reduce the negative fallout of, namely the secondary crisis reactions caused by a crisis (Coombs, 2007a; Schultz et al, 2011; Weber et al. 2011; Stockmyer, 1996). The main behavioral intentions that crisis communication attempts to influence are minimizing reputational damage, maintaining purchasing intention and preventing negative word-of-mouth (Coombs & Holladay, 2014; Stockmyer, 1996).

Research into secondary crisis reactions following crises on social media has gained in numbers as crises are publicly displayed in an open dialogue form on social media sites (Coombs & Holladay, 2014; Schultz et al. 2011; Sweetzer & Metzgr, 2007). The ease of online word-of-mouth communication makes social media a facilitator in growing crises, but also a tool for identifying, managing and communicating about crises (Coombs, 2008; Coombs & Holladay, 2014; Schultz et al. 2011). Organizations might receive support or condemnation from publics online and from those opinions might hypothesize if their crisis management strategy is rejected or accepted (Coombs, 2007a & 2008; Coombs & Holladay, 2014).

Indicators of the acceptance or rejection of the crisis account could be found in online word-of-mouth (Secondary crisis communication, as discussed previously) and the tone of said word-of-mouth or offline purchasing intentions (Secondary crisis reactions) (Coombs, 2008). One example of a secondary crisis reaction is boycotting the organization and persuading others to do the same or by spreading negative word-of-mouth about the organization (Schultz et al, 2011). Another aspect of the secondary crisis reactions is purchase intention, which entails the motivation or intent to do business with the organization in the future. Secondary crisis reactions are thus distinct from secondary crisis

communication in that the reactions are intended behaviors in the form of purchase intent and tone of word-of-mouth (recommending or condemning) while the secondary crisis communications are about how the stakeholder uses social media directly following a corporate crisis. Secondary crisis communications are thus the actions of commenting, sharing or informing peers on social media, how the message is spread, while secondary crisis reactions are the actions taken by the stakeholder to either support or condemn the organization in the form of their purchasing intentions and tone of word-of-mouth, what is said in the message.

Secondary crisis reactions will be researched in this paper in presence or absence of the secondary crisis response strategy bolstering. We hypothesize that incorporating bolstering with one of the other crisis response strategies will result in less negative secondary crisis reactions. Meaning that respondents presented with the bolstering responses will be less likely to talk negatively about the organization.

H3a: *Organizations that incorporate the denial+ bolstering strategy will experience less negative secondary crisis reaction after a preventable crisis scenario than organizations that only use the denial strategy.*

H3b: *Organizations that incorporate the corrective action+ bolstering strategy will experience less negative secondary crisis reaction after a preventable crisis scenario than organizations that only use the corrective action strategy.*

Below is the conceptual model for this paper.

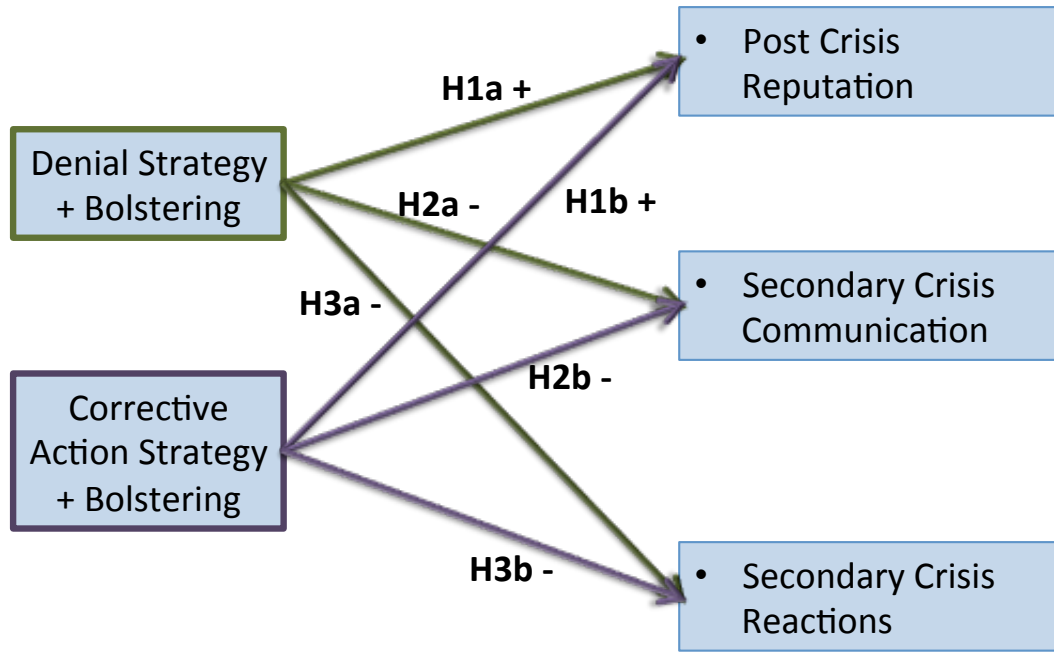


Figure 2: Research overview

3. Methodology

This study consisted of an online experiment designed using Qualtrics and aimed at investigating the effect of the bolstering strategy on post crisis reputation, secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reactions. Participants were presented with a fictional crisis for an existing company (Sony) with a good prior reputation, as this is when bolstering is most effective. Respondents' were then randomly assigned to one of our four crisis response conditions. Questions related to their prior relationship and reputational perception of Sony were included, as well as an attribution of guilt check. Other questions related to the measures of this study, like post-crisis reputation, secondary crisis communication & reactions were operationalized as written below.

3.1. Research Design

Academic research into crisis communication can generally be divided into two main methods, the case study that examines real past crises, and experiments (surveys) in which subjects are presented with slightly different scenarios (conditions) from which their opinions and intentions are asked (Avery et al. 2010). Because this study will examine behavioral intentions, under the influence of different stimuli, of stakeholders on social media, we will use an experiment design in the form of an online survey. The choice for an experimental design was made because experiments offer us the opportunity to study causality, in this case the influence of a (secondary) crisis communication strategy, in a controlled and relevant design (Avery et al, 2010).

This research is designed based on a **1 crisis type** (Preventable crisis) X **2 primary crisis response strategies** (Denial/ Corrective action) X **2 the use of secondary crisis response strategies** (using bolstering/ not using bolstering) between-subject design, as shown in the figure below.

	Denial	Corrective Action
No Bolstering	<i>Condition1</i>	<i>Condition3</i>
With Bolstering	<i>Condition2</i>	<i>Condition4</i>

Figure 3: Research Conditions

3.2. Experimental Scenarios

The experiment consisted of one fictional crisis scenario introduced in a short news article, followed by a short Facebook post from the company, the initial crisis response. The company 'Sony' is a Japanese producer of consumer electronics that operates worldwide. The 2016 RepTrak report places Sony as number 9 in the world's most reputable companies (Reputation Institute, 2016a). We used an existing company because reputation is a construct built over time and constantly changing, something we could not adequately simulate in our experimental setting (Fombrun, Gardberg & Sever, 2000). Sony's good prior reputation and lack of any similar crisis histories is an essential aspect of the bolstering strategy, and as such we have decided to use Sony as our company of focus.

The fictional crisis that we introduced is based upon the crisis recently experienced by Sony's competitor, Samsung, who had issues with the battery exploding in one of their phone models. For this research, we introduced a similar crisis in which Sony launched their new laptop, but after which consumer reported the batteries were exploding. The report also mentioned that Sony knowingly did not test their new product enough because they wanted to launch it together with the new Apple computer, making it a preventable crisis with internal attribution (see Appendix A1).

After reading the report, respondents were presented with one of the four possible responses by Sony on Facebook. These responses were 'denial', 'denial+bolstering', 'corrective action' and 'corrective action+bolstering' (see appendix A2). The denial responses denied the internal attribution of the crisis, while the corrective-action response attempted to solve the issue by offering replacement parts to stakeholders as well as an apology. All responses included words of sympathy and information, as recommended in the SCCT for crisis responses (Coombs, 2007a).

The bolstering aspect of the crisis responses was constructed based on three fields. Bolstering the product by highlighting that Sony produces 'award winning' laptops. Bolstering the company by highlighting that Sony is dedicated to its Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives and finally, a generic corporate

statement in which Sony bolsters that they have always provided good service and will continue to do so in the future.



Sony

We regret the stories that are circulating the Internet and can guarantee our customers that we are investigating the matter. Our management full heartedly denies the accusations that they were informed of the malfunction prior to release.

Our laptops are of award-winning quality and we have continuously worked to increase our corporate responsibility efforts. We at Sony have always aimed at providing our customers with high end products and services, and will continue to do so in the future.

Like · Comment · 9 minutes ago · 🌐

Figure 4: Example of FB post- Denial+ Bolstering

3.3. Data Collection

Prior to distribution, a Pre-test was conducted to ensure clarity of the research design and highlight any points of confusion. The Pre-test was conducted on a small sample of 10 respondents and based on their experience the experiment was adapted. These results were not included in the final dataset. No major changes were needed and the experiment was distributed.

This experiment was distributed online in the researchers own social media network (Facebook) using a non- probability convenience sampling technique in which respondents on social media were asked to partake in a short experiment (Fricker, 2008; Heckathorn, 2011). This part of the data collection took place between April 5th 2017 and April 21st 2017 and the request was posted on three separate occasions within this time period. Since this study largely concerned social media, distributing our experiments on social media ensured that we received respondents that are social media users, thus guaranteeing they are familiar with the medium.

The second method of data collection was through the Amazon Mechanical Turk program. This only took place on April 21st and all data was collected within a few hours. Mechanical Turk is an automatized service in which researchers can easily collect respondents for their survey or experiment by offering a small monetary compensation for every 'hit'. Mechanical Turk has

been used by many researchers and is generally considered a valid and reputable source for data collection (Lowry et al, 2016). Mechanical Turk participants are generally demographically more diverse and the collected data can be treated as at least as reliable as traditional methods (Buhrmester, Kwang & Gosling, 2011).

The experiment was designed in such a way that the respondent received one of the four conditions at random. Each condition required anywhere between 30-40 respondents, putting the total respondents at around 140, as is recommended for experiments (Box, 1980).

A total of 121 respondents were collected through the convenience sampling on social media method over the period 5-21 April 2017. The researcher posted a request to fill in the survey on three separate occasions on his own social media profile. After cleaning the data for incomplete responses, this resulted in a total of 102 valid responses.

60 responses were collected through the Amazon Mechanical Turk Program on 21st of April 2017. Respondents were asked to fill in the survey in exchange for a monetary reward of 0.25 euro. After correcting for invalid responses, this resulted in 45 valid responses. The total number of valid responses and our final sample size is thus ($N=$) 147.

3.4. Operationalization

The independent variables in this study that were manipulated in the experiment were the primary response strategies and the secondary response strategy of bolstering.

This study operationalized multiple concepts into dependent variables, namely post crisis reputation level, secondary crisis communication, secondary crisis reactions. Furthermore, the level of prior reputation will be determined amongst the respondents as well as a test to determine the level of guilt they attributed to the organization and their own history and relationship with the company.

3.4.1. Pre-Crisis Reputation

Pre-Crisis Reputation was measured with four questions from RepTrak. These questions aim to assess the public's opinion of a company and measure how much the public likes, trusts and admires a company (Fombrun; Ponzi &

Newburry, 2015; Ponzi, Fombrun & Gardberg, 2015). These were measured using a seven-point Likert scale and are: 'I have a good feeling about the company', 'I trust the company', 'I admire and respect the company' and 'the company has a good overall reputation'. Ponzi, Fombrun and Gardberg (2015) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.96 for these measures based on 4 separate studies. This indicates a high reliability for this measure.

3.4.2. Attribution of Guilt, History & Relation

Respondents were asked three questions related to the level of perceived organizational responsibility based on the study performed by Lee (2004). These questions were measured on a 7-point Likert scale and were: 'To what degree do you think the organization is to blame', 'Sony could have avoided the crisis' and 'the crisis was caused by a problem inside the organization'. In her research Lee (2004) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, making this a reliable scale.

The measure for crisis history was one question relating to if respondents know of any past similar crises. As there are none we could find, we expect respondents to not know of any similar crises.

Relation will be measured through three questions, namely: 'I own(ed) Sony products', 'Sony has always offered good service to me' and 'I am satisfied with the Sony products I own(ed)'. These will be measured on a 7-point Likert scale.

3.4.2. Post- Crisis Reputation

Coombs & Holladay (2002) offer five measures on organizational reputation. We will use these measurements to assess the reputation after the crisis response on a 7-point Likert scale to determine the different influences of the stimuli. These five measures are: 'The organization is concerned with the well-being of its publics', 'The organization is basically dishonest', 'I do not trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident', 'Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says' and 'The organization is not concerned with the well-being of the publics'. These five measures were reported to have Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 by Coombs & Holladay (2002).

3.4.3. Secondary Crisis Communication

Secondary crisis communication was measured using three indicators developed by Schultz et al (2011) but was adapted slightly for our focus on Facebook. Subjects were asked how likely they are on a seven-point Likert scale to share the message on Facebook, inform their peers on Facebook and to leave a reaction or comment on Facebook. Note that this section does not concern the opinion of the stakeholder but merely their reaction and willingness to take certain actions. So the action of informing, reacting or sharing and not the reflection of their own opinions. Schultz et al (2011) did not report a Cronbach's alpha for this measure.

3.4.4. Secondary Crisis Reactions

Secondary crisis reactions measurements were adapted from Coombs & Holladay (2008). They offer three measurements of crisis reactions: 'I would encourage others not to buy from organization X', 'I would say negative things about Organization X to other people' and 'I would recommend Organization X to someone who asked my advice'. These questions thus aim to distinguish the respondents' opinion on the company following the crisis. These measures were also measured using a seven-point Likert scale. Reported Cronbach's alpha for these measures was 0.86.

Purchase intentions were measured using three measures. These measures have been adapted from Stockmyers' (1996) purchase intention measures. Stockmyers' measures deal with future behavioral intent, and focus on 'would purchase again', 'likelihood of purchase' and 'continuation of purchase in the future'. These were also measured on a seven-point Likert scale. Stockmyer (1996) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91

3.5. Manipulation Check

As a manipulation check we asked a question that relates to if the participant noticed the bolstering act in the crisis response of the organization. This question was asked after the respondent had been presented with the condition at the end of the survey to avoid priming the subjects (Kidd, 1976) Hereby, it was logical if respondents that had a condition with no bolstering answered that they did not notice any bolstering, while the ones who did fill in

one of the bolstering conditions will likely have noticed it. Based on this manipulation check, we formed a 'robust dataset' ($N=53$) from which we compared the result with our full dataset.

3.6. Computed Variables: Reliability & Factor Analysis

Once our data was collected we proceeded to compute our overarching measures based on the operationalized questions found in the previous section. A reliability analysis was conducted on each measure to check for internal consistency of the scales. Hereby an alpha of >0.7 could be considered satisfactory (Bland & Altman, 1997).

After our reliability analysis we conducted a Principal Component Factor Analysis (Varimax) to determine the underlying dimensions and help us construct our overarching measures.

3.6.1. Pre-Crisis Reputation

The measure '*Pre-Crisis Reputation*' was based on the four questions derived from the RepTrak system of measuring reputation (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.889$). Our Factor analysis on these four measures found that one component had an eigenvalue of 3.022 and explained 75.6% of the variance. The other components were negligible (eigenvalue <1).

Table 3.6.1: Pre-Crisis Reputation Factor Loadings

I have a good feeling about Sony as a company	0.819
I trust Sony	0.881
I admire and respect Sony	0.884
I think Sony has a good overall reputation	0.890

Based on this analysis we computed a new overarching measure: *Pre-Crisis Reputation*. From our questions that make up this measure we can treat '*Pre-Crisis Reputation*' as a scale in which 1= most negative, 4= neutral and 7=most positive.

3.6.2. Relation

The measure '*Relation*' was based on the three operationalized questions relating to the past relationship of the respondent with Sony (Cronbach's $\alpha=$

0.861). Our factor analysis of the three measures found that one component had an eigenvalue of 2.349 and explained 78.3% of the variance. The other components were found to be negligible (eigenvalue<1).

Table 3.6.2: Relation Factor Loadings

Sony has always offered good service to me.	0.884
I am satisfied with the Sony products I own.	0.875
Sony offers good value for my money	0.895

Based on this analysis we computed a new overarching measure: *Relation*. From our questions that make up this measure we can treat '*Relation*' as a scale in which 1= most negative, 4= neutral and 7=most positive.

3.6.3. Attribution

The measure '*Attribution*' was based on three questions derived from Lee's (2004) questions to assess the perceived level of guilt (attribution) (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.794$). Our factor analysis of these three measures found that one component had an eigenvalue of 2.128 and explained 71% of the variance. The other components were found to be negligible (eigenvalue <1).

Table 3.6.3: Attribution Factor Loadings

To what degree do you think Sony is to blame for the crisis?	0.876
Sony could have avoided the Crisis.	0.820
The crisis was caused by a problem inside the organization	0.830

Based on this analysis we computed a new overarching measure: *Attribution*. From our questions that make up this measure we can treat '*Attribution*' as a scale in which 1= internal guilty, 4= neutral and 7= not internal guilty.

3.6.4. Post Crisis Reputation

'*Post Crisis Reputation*' was measured according to 5 questions derived from research by Coombs & Holladay (2002) (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.815$). Our factor analysis of these five measures found that one component had an eigenvalue of 2.890 and explained 58% of the variance. The other components were found to be negligible (eigenvalue <1).

Some questions had their scale reversed in our data because they were themselves already reversed questions. All five questions had to follow the rule that 1= most negative and 7= most positive. Questions that were reversed have been marked as such in the below table and were included in their reversed form in the reliability and factor analyses.

Table 3.6.4: Post Crisis Reputation Factor Loadings

Sony is concerned with the well-being of its consumers	0.759
Sony is basically being dishonest. (REVERSED)	0.761
I do not trust Sony to tell the truth about the situation. (REVERSED)	0.832
Under most circumstances I would be likely to believe what Sony says.	0.602
Sony is not concerned with the Well-being of its consumers (REVERSED)	0.824

Based on this analysis we computed a new overarching measure: *Post Crisis Reputation*. From our questions that make up this measure we can treat ‘*Post-Crisis Reputation*’ as a scale in which 1= most negative, 4= neutral and 7=most positive.

3.6.5. Secondary Crisis Communication

The measure *Secondary Crisis Communication* was based on three questions derived from the study by Schultz (et al, 2011) about actions on social media (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.862$). Our Factor analysis of the three measures found one component with an eigenvalue of 2.352 that explained 78.41% of the variance. The other components were found to be negligible (eigenvalue <1).

Table 3.6.5: Secondary Crisis Communication Factor Loadings

I would share the post on Facebook	0.910
I would inform my friends or peers on FB	0.897
I would comment under Sony’s FB post	0.849

Based on this analysis we computed a new overarching measure: *Secondary Crisis Communication*. From our questions that make up this measure we can treat ‘*Secondary Crisis Communication*’ as a scale in which 1=unlikely to communicate, 4= neutral and 7=most likely to communicate.

3.6.6. Secondary Crisis Reactions

The measure *Secondary Crisis Reactions* was based on three measures introduced by Coombs & Holladay (2008) and aimed to measure what people might communicate about the crisis. The reliability analysis for this measure resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.674$. In addition, deleting any item does not help improve the alpha to the 0.7 thresholds. According to our previously stated cutoff of $\alpha = 0.7$ for a satisfactory number, we could therefore say the reliability of this measure is questionable (Bland & Altman, 1997). Considering the proximity to our 'satisfaction' number and research that indicates an alpha of 0.6 could be seen as acceptable, we will however accept our lower Cronbach's alpha but have to note the reliability is 'questionable' (Loewenthal, p: 60, 2001; Lance, Butt & Michels, 2006).

We continued to perform our factor analysis on the three measures and found one component with an eigenvalue of 1.836 that explained 61.2% of the variance. The other components were found to be negligible (eigenvalue < 1).

Some questions had their scale reversed in our data because they were themselves already reversed questions. All three questions had to follow the rule that 1= most negative and 7= most positive. Questions that were reversed have been marked as such in the below table and were included in their reversed form in the reliability and factor analyses.

Table 3.6.6: *Secondary Crisis Reactions Factor Loadings*

I would recommend Sony to someone who asked my advice.	0.561
I would encourage others not to buy Sony products. (REVERSED)	0.851
I would say negative things to others about Sony. (REVERSED)	0.892

Based on this analysis we computed a new overarching measure: *Secondary Crisis Reactions*. From our questions that make up this measure we can treat '*Secondary Crisis Reactions*' as a scale in which 1= negative reaction, 4= neutral and 7=positive reaction.

3.7. Description & Demographics

The data we collected consisted of ($N=$) 146 respondents of which 52% was male and 46.5% was female (Gender: $M=1.49$, $SD=0.528$). 31% of

respondents were from the Netherlands followed by 19% from the USA and 13% from India. The remaining 27% of respondents were from other countries. 85% had bought or owned Sony products in the past ($M=1.15, SD= 0.359$) and 71% of our respondents claimed to use Facebook on a daily basis ($M=4.35, SD= 1.154$). 33% of respondents also reported that Facebook is an important source of their news 'most of the time' ($M= 2.89, SD= 1.3$). The median age of the respondents was 25 years old ($M=28.84, SD= 10.032$).

Table 3.7.1. Demographic Descriptives

	AGE	GENDER	FB USE	FB NEWS	OWNED SONY
Mean	28.84	1.49	4.35	2.89	1.15
Median	25.00	1.00	5.00	3.00	1.00
Std. Deviation	10.032	.528	1.154	1.293	.359

Table 3.7.2. Correlation Matrix

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	DENIAL_OR_CORRECTIVE	1										
2	BOLSTERING_WITH_OR_WITHOUT	0.013	1									
3	PRE_CRISIS_REPUTATION	0.053	0.016	1								
4	RELATION_SONY (N=124)	0.021	-0.01	.756**	1							
5	ATTRIBUTION_CRISIS	0.097	-0.085	0.011	0.028	1						
6	POST_CRISIS_REPUTATION	-0.095	0.023	.327**	.251**	-.198*	1					
7	SECONDARY_CRISIS_COMMUNICATIONS	-0.01	-0.124	.166*	.214*	-0.08	.191*	1				
8	SECONDARY_CRISIS_REACTIONS	0.203*	0.113	.281**	.338**	-0.112	.491**	-0.138	1			
9	Age	0.009	0.082	0.037	-0.013	0.123	.168*	0.106	0.141	1		
10	Gender	0.065	-0.118	-0.1	-0.028	0.16	-0.054	-0.034	0.024	0.076	1	
11	Facebook_Use	0.07	-0.16	0.088	-0.004	0.126	0.004	-0.059	0.12	-0.099	0.111	1
12	FB_as_News_Source	-0.076	-0.089	0.055	0.02	-0.051	0.083	.290**	-0.067	-0.106	.211*	.308**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

Our correlation matrix shows that 'Relation Sony' is correlated with 'Pre-Crisis Reputation' at the $p < .01$ level and with a strong strength of $r = 0.756$. 'Post-Crisis Reputation' is correlated with 'Pre-Crisis Reputation' and 'Relation' at the $p < .01$ levels with a medium relation ($r = 0.327$; $r = 0.252$). Post Crisis Reputation is negatively correlated with Attribution at the $p < .05$ levels with a small negative relation ($r = -0.198$). Secondary Crisis Communications is correlated with Pre-Crisis Rep, Relation and Post Crisis Reputation at the $p < .05$ levels. A weak relation was

observed ($r=0.166$; $r=0.214$; $r=0.191$). *Secondary Crisis Reactions* is correlated with *Response Strategy* at the $p<.05$ level with a weak relation ($r=0.203$). *SCR* is also correlated with *Pre Crisis Reputation, Relation* and *Post Crisis Reputation* at the $p<.01$ level and with a weak-to-medium relation ($r=0.281$; 0.338 ; 0.491). *Age* was found to be correlated with *Post-Crisis Reputation* at the $p= .05$ level with a weak relation ($r=0.168$). *Facebook as News Source* was related to *Secondary Crisis Communications* and *Facebook Use* at the $p<.01$ level with a medium relation ($r=0.290$; $r=0.308$). *Facebook as News Source* was also related to *Gender* at the $p<.05$ level with a weak relation ($r=0.211$).

To adjust our six computed variables for variances in the scales, we used SPSS to standardize our variables. These standardized (*z-score*) variables will be used in the following analysis chapter for the regressions.

4. Results

By asking participants to correctly identify each of the conditions, we are able to assess the success of the manipulations. This was done with two questions towards the end of the experiment. One question asked the respondent to identify the correct response strategy out of four options of which two were not used in any condition. The second question asked respondents if they noticed any Bolstering in the response by Sony. A chi-square test confirmed that the manipulation of Response Strategy was successful, $\chi^2(4) = 34.513, p < .001$. Success of the Bolstering Strategy was tested in the same way, $\chi^2(2) = 37.111, p < .001$.

4.1. Hypotheses 1: The effect of Bolstering on Post-Crisis Reputation

To analyze if the use or not use of Bolstering (Fixed Factor 1) in combination with either one of our two response strategies (Fixed Factor 2) has an effect on Post-Crisis Reputation (DV) we performed two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Levene's test indicated equal variances ($F = 0.031, p = .993$). The interaction between bolstering and response strategy on Post-Crisis Reputation was not found to be significant at the $p < .05$ level: $F(1, 142) = 0.661, p = .417$. Our results also indicated that *Bolstering/No Bolstering* ($p = .767$) and *Denial Strategy/Corrective Action Strategy* ($p = .269$) all have no significant effect on *Post-Crisis Reputation*.

Table 4.1: Results of two-way ANOVA Post-Crisis Reputation (N= 146)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
DENIAL_OR_CORRECTIVE	1.240	1	1.240	1.232	.269	0.009
BOLSTERING_WITH_OR_WITHOUT	.089	1	.089	.088	.767	0.001
DENIAL_OR_CORRECTIVE * BOLSTERING_WITH_OR_WITHOUT	.666	1	.666	.661	.417	0.005
Error	142.942	142	1.007			
Total	145.000	146				

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

This would mean that the difference between using Denial with ($M=3.213, SD=0.922$) or without ($M=3.046, SD=0.948$) bolstering or Corrective Action with ($M=3.258, SD=0.852$) or without ($M=3.335, SD=0.907$) bolstering is statistically insignificant on Post-Crisis Reputation. Because of this, we accepted our null Hypothesis1 that states there is no difference of the effect between the response strategies and the use or no use of bolstering on Post-Crisis Reputation. We thereby also rejected both our H1a and H1b as the results from this analysis indicated that using corrective action+ bolstering or denial+ bolstering to minimize the negative effects of a preventable crisis on organizations post-crisis reputation do not yield significant results compared to the same strategies without bolstering.

4.2. Hypotheses 2: The effect of Bolstering on Secondary Crisis Communication

We performed another two-way analysis of variance to assess if there is an effect of the use of Bolstering or No Bolstering (Fixed Factor 1) and our two Response Strategies (Fixed Factor 2) on Secondary Crisis Communications (DV). Levene's test indicates equal variances ($F=0.150, p=.929$). Our results for this analysis also indicated that there is no interaction between the use of *Bolstering /No Bolstering* and *Denial/ Corrective Action Strategies* on *Secondary Crisis Communication* at the $p<.05$ significance level: $F(1,142) = 0.022, p=.882$. The results also indicated the separate *Bolstering / No Bolstering* condition was insignificant ($p=.140$), as well as the *Denial /Corrective Action strategies* ($p=.916$).

Table 4.2.1: Results of two-way Secondary Crisis Communications (N= 146)

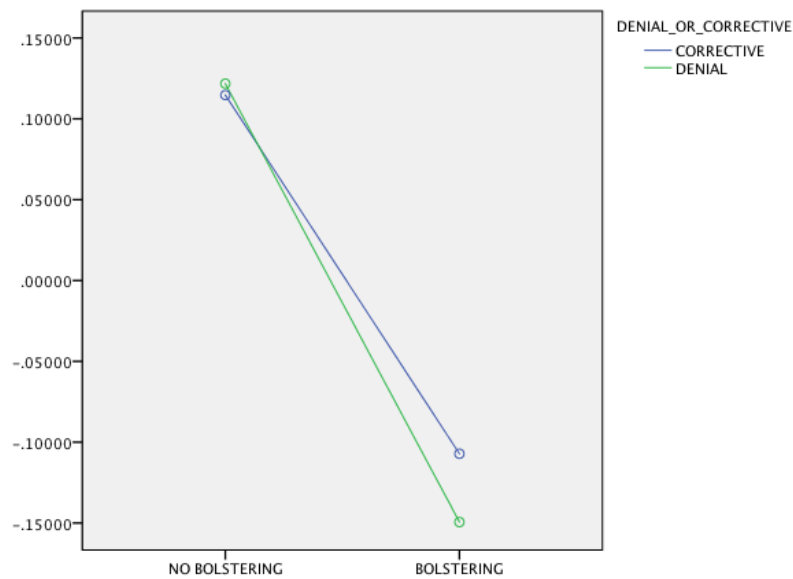
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
DENIAL_OR_CORRECTIVE	0.11	1	0.11	0.11	0.916	0.00
BOLSTERING_WITH_OR_WITHOUT	2.213	1	2.213	2.201	0.140	0.015
DENIAL_OR_CORRECTIVE * BOLSTERING_WITH_OR_WITHOUT	0.022	1	0.022	0.022	0.882	0.00
Error	142.756	142	1.005			
Total	145.000	146				

* $p < .1$, ** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$

This would mean that the difference between using Denial with ($M = 2.344$, $SD = 1.557$) or without ($M = 2.772$, $SD = 1.705$) bolstering or Corrective Action with ($M = 2.411$, $SD = 1.475$) or without ($M = 2.761$, $SD = 1.578$) bolstering is statistically insignificant on Secondary Crisis Communications. Our results indicated the effect of Bolstering and Response Strategy on Secondary Crisis Communications is insignificant. We therefore accepted the null Hypothesis2 and assumed there no difference of the effect between the response strategies and the use or no use of bolstering on Secondary Crisis Communications. This means we also rejected our H2a and H2b as the results indicated that using corrective action+ bolstering or denial+ bolstering to minimize the negative effects of a preventable crisis in the form of Secondary Crisis Communications do not yield significant results compared to the same strategies without bolstering.

However, we also noted that the incorporation of the bolstering strategy is close to significant at the $p < .1$ levels ($p = .14$). When omitting the type of response strategy, we can see that using the Bolstering strategy ($M = 2.377$, $SD = 1.506$) is slightly less efficient in reducing the likelihood of Secondary Crisis Communication than not using Bolstering ($M = 2.766$, $SD = 1.63$). According to this result, bolstering actually increases the likelihood of stakeholders engaging in Secondary Crisis Communications compared to when not using bolstering. We reported the plot below to highlight this and show the difference in height between the two conditions.

Table 4.2.2: Bolstering Plot



4.3. Hypotheses 3: The effect of Bolstering on Secondary Crisis Reactions

A final two-way analysis of variance was performed with the use or no use of bolstering (Fixed Factor 1) and response strategies (Fixed Factor 2) on Secondary Crisis Reactions (DV). Levene's test indicated equal variances ($F=0.371, p=.774$). The results told us there is no significant interaction of the use of *Bolstering/ No Bolstering* and *Denial/ Corrective Action* on *Secondary Crisis Reactions* at the $p<.05$ significance level: $F(1, 142) = 0.23, p= .632$. The separate *Bolstering/ No Bolstering* condition was also found to be insignificant ($p= .178$) but, surprisingly, the *Denial/ Corrective Action* conditions were found to be significant for this analysis ($p= .016$).

Table 4.3.1: Results of two-way Secondary Crisis Reactions (N= 146)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
DENIAL_OR_CORRECTIVE	5.769	1	5.769	5.769	.016**	0.040
BOLSTERING_WITH_OR_WITHOUT	1.765	1	1.765	1.829	.178	0.013
DENIAL_OR_CORRECTIVE * BOLSTERING_WITH_OR_WITHOUT	0.222	1	0.222	.230	.632	0.002
Error	137.039	142	0.965			
Total	145.000	146				

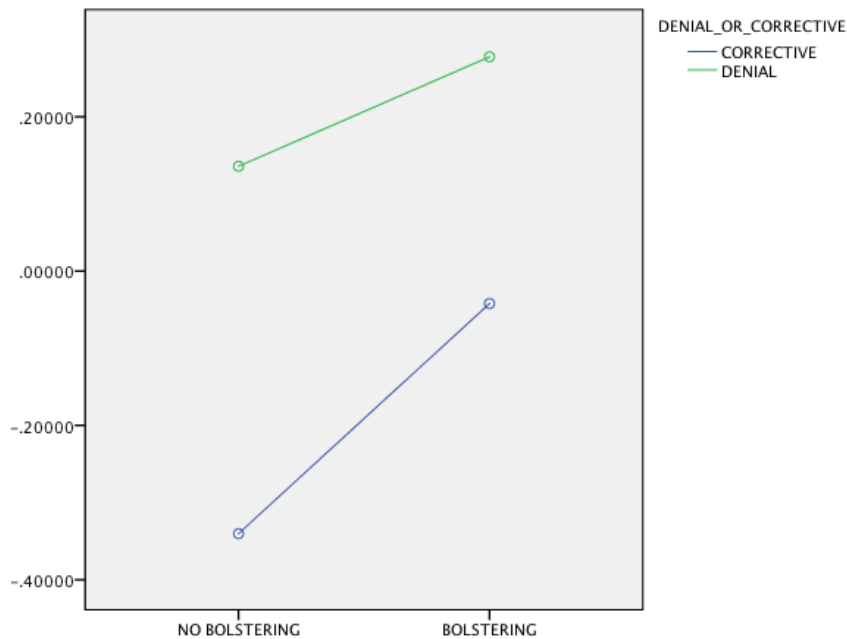
* $p < .1$, ** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$

This would mean that the difference between using Denial with ($M = 3.776$, $SD = 1.063$) or without ($M = 3.621$, $SD = 1.09$) bolstering or Corrective Action with ($M = 3.428$, $SD = 0.992$) or without ($M = 3.103$, $SD = 1.119$) bolstering is statistically insignificant on Secondary Crisis Reactions. These results indicated the effect of Bolstering and Response Strategy on Secondary Crisis reactions is insignificant. The null Hypothesis3 is therefore accepted and we can assume there is no difference of the effect between the response strategies and the use or no use of bolstering on Secondary Crisis Reactions. This means we also rejected our H3a and H3b as the results indicated that using corrective action+ bolstering or denial+ bolstering to minimize the negative effects of a preventable crisis in the form of Secondary Crisis Reactions does not yield significant results compared to the same strategies without bolstering. What is interesting to note from this analysis is that, although bolstering and bolstering in combination with our response strategies is insignificant, it appears that the effect of the response strategy on Secondary Crisis Reactions is significant. Even more interesting is the finding that it appears as if the Denial Strategy ($M = 3.696$, $SD = 1.072$) is more effective than the Corrective Action strategy ($M = 3.257$, $SD = 1.066$) in minimizing negative Secondary Crisis Reactions.

However, we also noted that the incorporation of the bolstering strategy is close to significant at the $p < .1$ levels ($p = .178$). When omitting the type of response strategy, we can see that using the Bolstering strategy ($M = 3.602$, $SD = 1.036$) is slightly more efficient in reducing the likelihood of Secondary Crisis

Reactions than not using Bolstering ($M= 3.355, SD= 1.128$). According to this result, bolstering decreases the likelihood of stakeholders engaging in Secondary Crisis Communications compared to when not using bolstering. We report the plot below to highlight this and show the difference in height between the two conditions.

Table 4.3.2: Bolstering Plot



4.4. Additional Results on Post-Crisis Reputation

To investigate the effect on Post-Crisis Reputation (DV) by other factors, we performed a Linear Regression analysis. We wanted to discover how Pre-Crisis Reputation, Level of Attribution, Bolstering, Response Strategy, Age, Gender, FB Use and FB News (IV's) influence the Post-Crisis Reputation and in what way. The Pre-Crisis Reputation, Attribution, FB Use and FB news IV's for this regression analysis and the ones following are standardized variables. The same goes for the Post-Crisis Reputation DV in this analysis and the SCC and SCR variables in the next analyses. A significant regression equation was found ($F(8, 145) = 4.117, p=.00$) with an R^2 of 0.194.

4.4.1. Pre-Crisis Reputation

Pre-Crisis Reputation was a significant predictor of Post-Crisis Reputation ($\beta= 0.321, t= 4.126, p= .00$). *Post Crisis Reputation* increased with 0.321 (on a 7-point

scale from 1= negative to 7= positive) for every point increase in *Pre-Crisis Reputation*. This means a stronger Pre-Crisis Reputation will minimize the negative effects of a crisis on Post-Crisis Reputation.

4.4.2. Level of Attribution

Level of attribution (how guilty the organization is perceived) was a significant predictor of Post-Crisis Reputation ($\beta = -0.213$, $t = -2.666$, $p = .009$). This means that for every increase in perceived *Attribution* of the crisis, *Post-Crisis Reputation* decreases with -0.213. This means that the more attribution (guilt) can be ascribed to an organization, the lower the organization's reputation will be Post-Crisis.

4.4.3. Age

Age of the respondent appears to be another significant predictor of Post-Crisis Reputation ($\beta = 0.19$, $t = 2.466$, $p = .016$). *Post-Crisis Reputation* increased 0.019 for every extra year (*Age*) of the respondent. This means that older people, those with more years, appear to be more lenient when it comes to judging a company during a crisis, as we can see from the relationship with Post-Crisis Reputation

4.4.4. Gender, Bolstering, Response Strategy & Facebook

Gender ($p = .875$), the use or no use of *Bolstering* ($p = .9$), the type of *Response Strategy* ($p = .264$) and the amount of *Facebook Used* ($p = .934$) or the importance of *FB as a News Source* ($p = .42$) were all not found to be significant predictors of Post-Crisis Reputation. Gender thereby seems to not matter at all with both males and females behaving similarly. Interesting is that *Bolstering* and *Response Strategy* seem to have no effect, which we already knew from our previous analysis.

Table 4.4: Post-Crisis Reputation Influencers

	Unstandardized B (Effect)	Standard Error	Standardized B	t- value	p (sig.)
Pre-Crisis Rep	0.321	0.078	0.321	4.126	0.00 ***
Attribution	- 0.213	0.080	-0.213	-2.666	0.009 ***
Age	0.019	0.008	0.192	2.446	0.016 **
Gender	- 0.024	0.154	-0.013	-0.158	0.875
Response Strategy	- 0.174	0.155	-0.034	-1.121	0.264
(No) Bolstering	-0.020	0.157	-0.087	-0.125	0.9
FB Use	0.007	0.083	0.007	0.082	0.934
FB News	0.068	0.084	0.068	0.809	0.420
R-Square	0.194				
F-Test	4.117				0.000

* $p < .1$, ** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$

4.5. Additional Results on Secondary Crisis Communications

To investigate the effect on Secondary Crisis Communication (DV) by other factors, we performed a Linear Regression analysis. We wanted to discover how Pre-Crisis Reputation, Level of Attribution, Bolstering, Response Strategy, Age, Gender, FB Use and FB News (IV's) influence Secondary Crisis Communications and in what way. A significant regression equation was found ($F(8, 137) = 3.783, p = .000$) with an R^2 of 0.181.

4.5.1. Pre-Crisis Reputation

Pre-Crisis Reputation was a significant predictor of Secondary Crisis Communications ($\beta = 0.147, t = 1.877, p = .063$), but only when we adjust the significance level to $p < .1$. *Secondary Crisis Communications* increased with 0.147 (on a 7-point scale from 1= Unlikely to 7= Likely) for every point increase in *Pre-Crisis Reputation*. This means a stronger Pre-Crisis Reputation will actually increase the likelihood of sharing, commenting or informing following a crisis.

4.5.2. Bolstering Strategy

The use of the Bolstering strategy was a significant predictor of Secondary Crisis Reactions ($\beta = -0.302, t = -1.912, p = .58$), but only when we adjust the significance

level to $p < .1$. *Secondary Crisis Communications* decreased with 0.302 (on a 7-point scale from 1= Unlikely to 7= Likely) when using the *Bolstering* strategy. This means using the Bolstering strategy will decrease the likelihood of sharing, commenting or informing following a crisis. This is contrary to our previous analysis, which proved the bolstering strategy has no effect on Secondary Crisis Communications.

4.5.2. Attribution, Age, Gender & Response Strategy

Our regression analysis found no significant effect for *Attribution* ($p = .453$), *Age* ($p = .127$), *Gender* ($p = .241$) and *Response Strategy* ($p = .661$). It appears as if the chosen elements do not predict *Secondary Crisis Communications*.

4.5.3. Facebook & Secondary Crisis Communications

The amount the respondent used Facebook ($\beta = -0.176$, $t = -2.098$, $p = .038$) and the importance of Facebook as their news source ($\beta = 0.358$, $t = 4.247$, $p = .00$) were both significant predictors of Secondary Crisis Communications. FB Usage and News Source were coded as a frequency ranging from daily to never. Likelihood of *Secondary Crisis Communications* decreased -0.176 the more frequent the respondent was on FB (*FB Use*) and increased with 0.358 the more important FB was as a news source (*FB News*) to the respondent. This means that the more frequent a respondent was on FB, the less likely to share, comment or inform. Vice-versa is true for FB as News Source as the results indicate the more important FB was a news source to our respondents, the more likely they were to share, comment or inform.

Table 4.5.1: Secondary Crisis Communications Influencers

	Unstandardized B (Effect)	Standard Error	Standardized B	t- value	p (sig.)
Pre-Crisis Rep	0.147	0.079	0.147	1.877	0.063*
Attribution	- 0.61	0.080	-0.061	-0.753	0.453
Age	0.015	0.008	0.148	1.869	0.064*
Gender	- 0.183	0.155	-0.096	- 1.178	0.241
Response Strategy	- 0.069	0.157	-0.034	0.439	0.661
(No) Bolstering	-0.302	0.158	-0.151	-1.912	0.058*
FB Use	-0.176	0.084	-0.176	-2.098	0.038**
FB News	0.358	0.084	0.358	4.247	0.00***
R-Square	0.181				
F-Test	3.783				0.000

* $P < .1$, ** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$

4.6. Additional Results on Secondary Crisis Reactions

To investigate the effect on Secondary Crisis Reactions (DV) by other factors, we performed a Linear Regression analysis. We wanted to discover how Pre-Crisis Reputation, Level of Attribution, Bolstering, Response Strategy, Age, Gender, FB Use and FB News (IV's) influence Secondary Crisis Reactions and in what way. A significant regression equation was found ($F(8, 137) = 4.08, p = .000$) with an R^2 of 0.192.

4.6.1. Pre-Crisis Reputation

Pre-Crisis Reputation was a significant predictor of Secondary Crisis Reactions ($\beta = 0.266, t = 3.416, p = .001$). *Secondary Crisis Reactions* increased with 0.266 (on a 7-point scale from 1= negative to 7= positive) for every point increase in *Pre-Crisis Reputation*. This means a stronger Pre-Crisis Reputation will minimize the negative effects of a crisis on Secondary Crisis Reactions.

4.6.1. Attribution

Attribution of guilt was a significant predictor of Secondary Crisis Reactions ($\beta = -0.179, t = -2.249, p = .026$). *Secondary Crisis Reactions* increased with 0.179 (on a 7-point scale from 1= negative to 7= positive) for every point

increase in *Attribution* of guilt. This means more attribution of guilt will increase the negative effects of a crisis on Secondary Crisis Reactions.

4.6.3. Response Strategy

Type of Response Strategy (Denial or Corrective Action) was a significant predictor of Secondary Crisis Reactions ($\beta = 0.355$, $t = 2.281$, $p = .024$). *Secondary Crisis Reactions* increased with 0.355 (on a 7-point scale from 1 = negative to 7 = positive) when using the Denial Strategy (*Response Strategy*). This means the Denial strategy will minimize the negative effects of a crisis on Secondary Crisis Reactions. This also became clear from our previous analysis

4.6.4. Facebook Use

The frequency of Facebook use was a significant predictor of Secondary Crisis Reactions ($\beta = 0.166$, $t = 1.997$, $p = .048$). *Secondary Crisis Reactions* increased with 0.166 (on a 7-point scale from 1 = negative to 7 = positive) when frequencies of *FB use* increases. This means people who frequently use Facebook are less likely to spread the negative effects of a crisis on Secondary Crisis Reactions.

4.6.5. Age, Gender, Bolstering & FB News

Age ($\beta = 0.014$, $t = 1.787$, $p = .076$) could be considered significant when adapting our significance level to $p < .1$. *Age* displays a small prediction, meaning likelihood of *SCR* actions increases by 0.014 for every year older the respondent was. *Gender* ($p = .348$), *FB as News Source* ($p = .152$) and the use or no uses of *Bolstering* ($p = .185$) were all not found to be significant predictors of Secondary Crisis Reactions.

Interesting is that *Attribution* (guilt of organization) was found significant and negatively related to SCR. This means more guilt results in a higher likelihood of stakeholders spreading negative messages about the organization. Gender seems to not matter at all with both males and females behaving similarly. Interesting is that Bolstering seems to have no effect while type of response strategy does seem to matter for Secondary Crisis Reactions.

Table 4.6: Secondary Crisis Reactions Influencers

	Unstandardized B (Effect)	Standard Error	Standardized B	t- value	p (sig.)
Pre-Crisis Rep	0.266	0.078	0.266	3.416	0.001 ***
Attribution	- 0.179	0.080	-0.179	-2.249	0.026 **
Age	0.014	0.008	0.141	1.787	0.076 *
Gender	0.145	0.154	0.077	0.942	0.348
Response Strategy	0.355	0.155	0.178	2.281	0.024 **
(No) Bolstering	0.209	0.157	0.105	1.333	0.185
FB Use	0.166	0.083	0.166	1.997	0.048**
FB News	-0.121	0.084	-0.121	-0.121	0.152
R-Square	0.164				
F-Test	4.549				0.00

* P <.1 , ** P< .05 , ***P<.01

4.7. Robustness Check

The results in the previous sections indicate our assumptions (hypotheses) appear to be rejected. To control our results, we will perform a robustness check in which we only include results in which the respondent got our attention check right. This means that we only include data for which a respondent who, for example, had Denial+ Bolstering as a condition also answered the attention check about the type of response strategy and the question about the presence of bolstering right. These types of robustness checks are a common practice in empirical research and aim to distinguish evidence of structural validity by omitting certain influencers that might have compromised the dataset (Xu & White, 2014). In this case, we omit responses for which we are not sure if the respondent paid enough attention by filtering for correct attention checks. This resulted in a dataset of 53 ($N=53$) respondents.

4.7.1. H1: Post Crisis Reputation

We performed the same type of analysis (two-way ANOVA) on this corrected dataset as in section 4.1. The interaction between *response strategies*, *use of bolstering* and *post crisis reputation* was once again found insignificant at

the $p > 0.05$ level: $F(3, 49) = 2.396, p = .079$. Levene's test indicated equal variances ($F = 0.272, p = .845$). No other significant results were found.

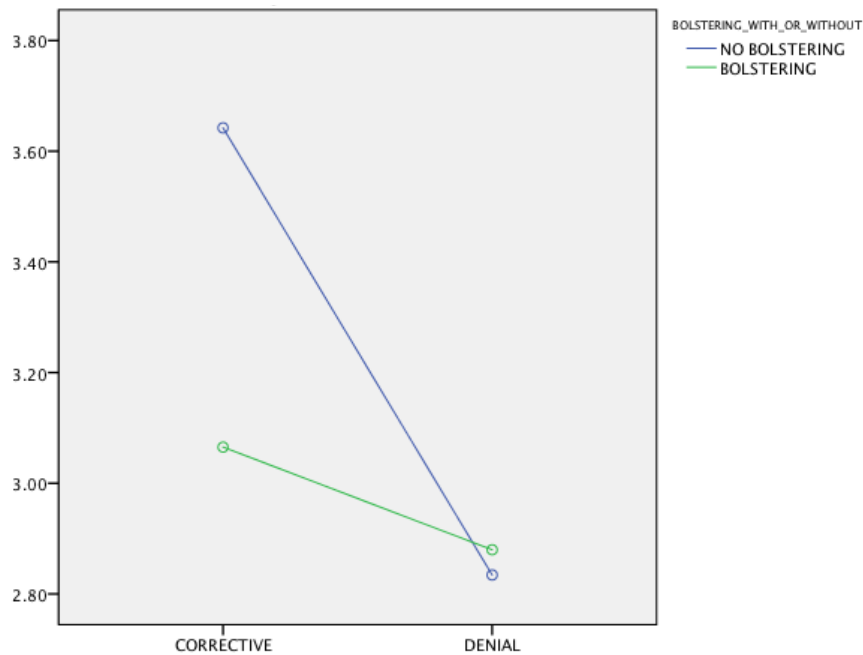
Table 4.7.1: Results of two-way ANOVA Post-Crisis Reputation (Robust N= 53)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
DENIAL_OR_CORRECTIVE	3.837	1	3.837	3.721	.060*	0.071
BOLSTERING_WITH_OR_WITHOUT	1.098	1	1.098	1.065	.307	0.021
DENIAL_OR_CORRECTIVE * BOLSTERING_WITH_OR_WITHOUT	1.506	1	1.506	1.461	.233	0.029
Error	50.522	49	1.031			
Total	58.093	53				

* $P < .1$, ** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$

However, we can also note that different response strategies are close to significant at the $p < .1$ levels ($p = .06$). When omitting the Bolstering strategy conditions, we can see that using the Denial strategy ($M = 2.766, SD = 1.007$) is less efficient in reducing negative Post-Crisis Reputation fallout than using the Corrective Action Strategy ($M = 3.381, SD = 0.869$). According to this result, Corrective Action as a response strategy results in a higher Post-Crisis Reputation level than when an organization would use the Denial strategy. We report the plot below to highlight this and show the difference in height between the two conditions.

Table 4.7.2: Response Strategy Plot (Robust N=53)



4.7.2 H2: Secondary Crisis Communications

We performed the same type of analysis (two-way ANOVA) on this corrected dataset as in section 4.2. The interaction between *response strategies*, *use of bolstering* and *Secondary Crisis Communications* was once again found insignificant at the $p > .05$ level: $F(3, 49) = 1.460, p = .237$. Levene's test indicated equal variances ($F = 0.698, p = .558$). No other significant results were found, although we could note a similar result for the Bolstering strategy as in section 4.3 in which the significance of this finding is near to the $p < .1$ levels and displays the same kind of interaction: Bolstering responses results in a lower likelihood of engaging in Secondary Crisis Communications.

Table 4.7.2: Results of two-way ANOVA Secondary Crisis Com. (Robust N= 53)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
DENIAL_OR_CORRECTIVE	0.990	1	0.990	1.571	.216	0.031
BOLSTERING_WITH_OR_WITHOUT	1.511	1	1.511	2.398	.128	0.047
DENIAL_OR_CORRECTIVE * BOLSTERING_WITH_OR_WITHOUT	0.018	1	0.018	0.028	.867	0.001
Error	30.863	49	0.630			
Total	35.923	53				

* $P < .1$, ** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$

4.7.3 H3: Secondary Crisis Reactions

We performed the same type of analysis (two-way ANOVA) on this corrected dataset as in section 4.3. The interaction between *response strategies*, *use of bolstering* and *Secondary Crisis Reactions* was once again found insignificant at the $p > .05$ level: $F(3, 49) = 0.156, p = .926$. Levene's test indicated equal variances ($F = 2.762, p = .052$). No other significant results were found.

Table 4.7.3: Results of two-way ANOVA Secondary Crisis Reactions (Robust $N = 53$)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
DENIAL_OR_CORRECTIVE	0.006	1	0.006	0.006	.940	0
BOLSTERING_WITH_OR_WITHOUT	0.01	1	0.01	0.01	.920	0
DENIAL_OR_CORRECTIVE * BOLSTERING_WITH_OR_WITHOUT	0.468	1	0.468	0.462	0.5	0.009
Error	49.647	49	1.013			
Total	50.864	53				

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

4.7.3. Additional Results from the Robust Data

A similar linear regression as in section 4.4 was performed. A significant regression was found: $F(8, 52) = 3.632, p = .03$ with an R^2 of 0.398.

Post Crisis Reputation was once again a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.492, t = 2.75, p = .009$). *Post Crisis reputation* increased with 0.492 (on a 7-point scale from 1 = negative to 7 = positive) for every point increase in *Pre-Crisis Reputation*. This is in line with results from our previous regression although the effect is larger in our controlled dataset (0.492 vs 0.321).

Attribution (of guilt) also seems to be a significant predictor when assuming $p < .1$ ($\beta = -0.295, t = -2, p = .052$). This means that for every increase in perceived *attribution* of the crisis, *Post-Crisis Reputation* decreases with -0.295. This means that the more attribution (guilt) can be ascribed to an organization, the lower the organization's reputation will be Post-Crisis. This effect is once again larger in our controlled data (-0.295 vs -0.213).

The other variables were all not significant.

Table 4.7.3.1: Post-Crisis Reputation Influencers (Robust $N = 53$)

	Unstandardized B (Effect)	Standard error	Standardized B	t- values	p (sig.)
Pre-Crisis Rep	0.492	0.179	0.355	2.75	0.009 ***
Attribution	- 0.295	0.148	-0.266	- 2	0.052 *
Age	0.005	0.019	0.039	0.283	0.799
Gender	-0.312	0.274	-0.149	-1.136	0.252
Response Strategy	- 0.285	0.268	-0.134	-1.062	0.285
(No) Bolstering	-0.398	0.282	-0.19	-1.410	0.146
FB Use	-0.004	0.152	-0.004	-0.27	0.979
FB News	0.024	0.158	0.023	0.151	0.88
R-Square	0.397				
F-Test	5.055				0.00**

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

A similar regression as in section 4.5 was also performed (secondary crisis communications). No significant regression was found: $F(8,52) = 1.85$, $p = .093$ with an R^2 of 0.252. The regression could however be considered significant at the $p < .1$ level.

Facebook Use proved to be the only significant variable from this regression ($p = .033$). This means likelihood of SCC decreases by 0.285 the more the respondent *used Facebook*. This is in line with our previous result that the likelihood of Secondary Crisis Communications decreases the more frequent a person is on Facebook. This effect was also larger in our controlled data (-0.285 vs -0.17).

Table 4.7.3.2: Secondary Crisis Communication Influencers (Robust N=53)

	Unstandardized B (Effect)	Standard error	Standardized B	t-values	p (sig.)
Pre-Crisis Rep	0.046	0.152	0.044	0.304	0.762
Attribution	- 0.137	0.125	-0.162	-1.094	0.280
Age	0.013	0.016	0.129	0.849	0.4
Gender	-0.187	0.233	-0.117	-0.803	0.426
Response Strategy	- 0.202	0.228	-0.125	-0.888	0.379
(No) Bolstering	-0.287	0.240	-0.18	-1.2	0.236
FB Use	-0.285	0.129	-0.354	-2.203	0.033**
FB News	0.141	0.134	0.175	1.048	0.3
R-Square	0.252				
F-Test	1.85				0.093*

* $P < .1$, ** $P < .05$, *** $P < .01$

Finally, a similar regression as in section 4.6 was performed (secondary crisis reactions). No significant regression was found: $F(8,52) = 1.456, p = .102$ with an R^2 of 0.209. No significant results were found in this regression and they are therefore not reported here.

5. Discussion

This research was grounded in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007a), which is a theory that aims to provide practitioners in the reputation industry with guidelines on how to respond to organizational crises based on academic research. This theory implies that the bolstering strategy (a secondary crisis response) is a supplemental strategy to be used with one of the primary crisis responses that offers a “minimal opportunity to develop reputational assets”. (Coombs, 2007a) This statement was contrary to indications we received from other research. Most notable was an extensive study of case studies in crisis communication that indicated that, in practice, the most used response strategy was in fact bolstering. Bolstering was used most often in combination with the denial or corrective action strategies (Kim et al, 2009). Other research into the matter also indicated that bolstering might have been underplayed in the SCCT but did not study the strategy or its effectiveness in minimizing negative reputation fallout following a crisis specifically (Sheldon & Sallot, 2008; Wan, 2004; Weber et al, 2011). The premise of this study was therefore to study the bolstering strategy as theory and practice seemed to display a difference in ascribed effectiveness.

Our research set out to investigate the influence of the use of bolstering as a supplementary crisis response technique on three different factors that might be influenced by a crisis. These factors were Post-Crisis Reputation, Secondary Crisis Communications and Secondary Crisis Reactions. The effect of the bolstering strategy was measured using an experimental research design with four conditions in which two initial crisis responses (denial and corrective action) in combination with bolstering (using bolstering or not using bolstering) were presented to respondents randomly ($N=146$). Our results indicate that there is no significant effect of type of response strategy and the incorporation of bolstering on any of the three factors. We did find confirmation of existing research that indicates (a positive) Pre-Crisis Reputation is the most important factor in minimizing negative reputation fallout directly following a crisis. Our research question was:

To what extent, if any, does the bolstering strategy affect post crisis reputation, secondary crisis communications and reactions during times of organizational crisis?

Based on the findings from this research we can answer our research question and say that there is none, or negligible, effect of the bolstering strategy on post-crisis reputation, secondary crisis communications and secondary crisis reactions.

The SCCT incorporates a number of factors related to reputation for which it aims to minimize the negative: Post-Crisis Reputation, Secondary Crisis Communications and Secondary Crisis Reactions. Hypotheses were constructed around these factors and these will be discussed below, as well as other findings, based on our results and analysis.

5.1. H1: Bolstering & Post-Crisis Reputation

The recommendations made in the SCCT are aimed at minimizing the negative effects of a crisis on post crisis reputation (Coombs, 2007a). This means that using the right strategy will result in more forgiving stakeholders with better opinions of the organization than when using the wrong strategy. The design of our research somewhat challenged these recommendations as we based our conditions on what practitioners in the field of crisis communication use most often (Kim et al, 2009). We choose denial (not recommended to be used with bolstering in the SCCT) and corrective action (recommended in the SCCT) as our two primary response strategies and tested these in combination or absence of bolstering as a secondary crisis response strategy (supplement).

Based on the prevalence of bolstering amongst practitioners, most used during preventable crises, we hypothesized that incorporating bolstering with either of our primary response strategies would result in less reputational damage after the crisis: a higher post-crisis reputation than when not incorporating the bolstering strategy. Based on our findings we rejected our first hypotheses and can therefore state that the incorporation of bolstering has no significant effect on Post-Crisis Reputation. It was found that the type of primary response strategy and the incorporation of bolstering do not help in limiting negative fallout onto the post-crisis reputation factor.

We did find a result significant at the $p < .1$ levels in our robust dataset that only included correct answers from our manipulation checks. This result indicated that using the corrective action response strategy causes higher Post-Crisis Reputation than when using the denial strategy. This could be due to the fact that these respondents paid better attention, hence they got the manipulation checks right, and as a result were more aware of the internal guilt of the organization which as a consequence made the denial strategy less effective than the strategy that aims to admit and correct a fault by an organization. This is also in line with recommendations made in the SCCT (Coombs, 2007a).

5.2. H2: Bolstering & Secondary Crisis Communications

The second thing the SCCT aims to minimize is the intent to communicate about the crisis (Coombs, 2007a). However, the SCCT is limited in this incorporation, as it does not specifically deal with media type. Social media is an increasingly important source of news and communication tool, and offers the opportunity to easily react to or spread, amongst others, organizational crises. To supplement this, we used the Social Mediated Crisis Communication Model that deals with how stakeholders communicate on social media following a crisis (Austin et al, 2012).

We hypothesized that the incorporation of the Bolstering secondary crisis response strategy would minimize the likelihood of our respondents to share, comment or inform peers about the crisis, effectively helping to contain the crisis. Our results however indicate that the type of (primary) response strategy and the incorporation of absence of bolstering have no effect on secondary crisis communications. We therefore rejected our second hypotheses and, based on this study, can state that response strategy and bolstering do not influence the likelihood of our respondents to engage in secondary crisis communications.

We did however find a result that could not be considered significant at the $p < .1$ levels, but comes close to it. We also found a similar significance level in the robust dataset analysis for SCC. This result indicated that using Bolstering in the initial crisis response results in a lower likelihood of stakeholders engaging in Secondary Crisis Communications than strategies that do not use Bolstering in

the crisis response. This could indicate the bolstering strategy is effective, but remains unproven and could therefore warrant future research.

5.3. H3: Bolstering & Secondary Crisis Reactions

The final factor the SCCT aims to minimize the negative fallout on following a crisis is the secondary crisis reactions (Coombs, 2007a). Secondary Crisis Reactions refer to the behavioral intentions a stakeholder might have following a crisis and include the way they might talk about an organization (negative or positive word-of-mouth) or adapt their purchase intentions following a crisis (Schultz et al, 2011; Stockmyer, 1996). The SCCT aims to minimize the spread of negative opinions about an organization and also to ensure people keep on buying the organizations products.

Our hypothesis assumed the incorporation of the Bolstering strategy would result in less negative secondary crisis reactions amongst our respondents but was found to be incorrect. We therefore rejected our third hypotheses and can state that, based on our research; incorporating bolstering does not help reduce the negative effects of a crisis on secondary crisis reactions. We did however find a significant result for the response strategy on secondary crisis reactions. The denial strategy proved to be (slightly) more effective than the corrective action strategy in reducing secondary crisis reactions. A surprising result as this would mean denying attribution during a crisis helps to reduce the intent to spread negative word-of-mouth or adapt purchase intentions. This result was also found during further analysis. This is a counter-intuitive result and could warrant future research into the matter.

In this analysis we also found a result that could not be considered significant at the $p < .1$ levels, but comes close to it. This result also indicated that using Bolstering in the initial crisis response results in a lower likelihood of stakeholders engaging in Secondary Crisis Reactions than strategies that do not use Bolstering in the crisis response. This result was not replicated in our robust analysis, however. As we have now found two results that are close to significant that indicate Bolstering might be effective in at least minimizing the likelihood of stakeholders engaging in SCC or SCC, we highly recommend future research to further explore this interaction.

5.4. Pre-Crisis Reputation Shields Organizations from Negative Reputation Fallout

Research into the importance of Pre-Crisis Reputation, the reputation held by an organization prior to a crisis, indicated that having a positive pre-crisis reputation can help minimize the negative effects of a crisis on the reputation held by and organization after a crisis (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015; Coombs, 2007a; Coombs & Holladay, 2001; 2002; 2006; Sheldon & Sallot, 2009). This so called 'Halo- Effect' (Coombs & Holladay, 2006) states that a positive pre-crisis reputation ('being good') can act as a shield in reflecting negative fallout onto the post-crisis reputation because stakeholders are reluctant to change their own cognition or expectation bias.

Our research confirms this on multiple levels. Pre-Crisis Reputation was found to be a significant predictor ($p < .05$) of Post-Crisis Reputation and Secondary Crisis Reactions. This means that a higher (more positive) pre-crisis reputation will minimize the negative effects of a crisis on post-crisis reputation (perception of the company post-crisis) and secondary crisis reactions (tone of communication). A significant effect was also found at a lower significance level ($p < .1$) for the predictive power of Pre-Crisis Reputation on Secondary Crisis Communications. This means that a higher Pre-Crisis reputation also reduces the likelihood of our respondents to share, comment or inform peers on the crisis and effectively aids in containing the crisis.

These findings are in line with previous research and we can confirm with almost certainty that the most important factor in reducing the initial negative effects of a corporate crisis is having a positive reputation prior to said crisis. Pre-Crisis Reputation does indeed act as a shield against corporate crises and, as our results indicate, will result in a higher reputation after the crisis, less likely stakeholders who might share negative information and a lower likelihood of communicating about said crisis to their peers.

These implications are not novel for both academics or professionals but do confirm that it is important, if not vital, for organizations to maintain a positive reputation as it will protect the organization from negativity following a crisis and also result in benefits for the company when not in crisis (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, ch2).

5.5. Other Findings

We found multiple other effects besides pre-crisis reputation of our measures on Post-Crisis Reputation. Attribution, the level of guilt ascribed by our respondent to the organization, was a predictor of post-crisis reputation. The main finding here was that the guiltier the respondent thought the organization was, the less positive they would be about the organization after the crisis. This is in line with the SCCT, which states that a higher level of attribution results in a greater reputational threat for the organization's post-crisis reputation (Coombs, 2007a).

Another factor found to be a significant predictor of post-crisis reputation was the age of the respondent. It was found that the older respondents appeared to be more lenient towards the company and ascribed them with a higher post-crisis reputation than their younger counterparts. This is something that has not been studied yet in the field of reputation management, and therefore we cannot give a validated reason for this finding. We can, however, imagine an older respondent might have become more 'jaded' than the younger ones due to possibly being exposed to more crises in their life.

In relation to secondary crisis communications and secondary crisis reactions we found that our respondents were less likely to spread information or opinion during a crisis when they were on Facebook more than the respondents who reported being on Facebook less. This is again a counter-intuitive finding as we might have expected people who are on the platform more to also be more likely to express themselves in one way or another on it. We also found that the more important Facebook is as a source of news, the more likely our respondents were to share, comment or inform peers about a crisis. This last result was only found for SCC and not for SCR.

5.6. Conclusion

Based on this research we can answer our research question and state that the effect of the bolstering strategy on post-crisis reputation, secondary crisis communications and secondary crisis reactions is negligible, if not non-existent. We can thereby confirm the SCCT is right when it states bolstering is a minimal opportunity for reputational gains and would recommend practitioners

in crisis communication to consider this when responding to crises. This research implies that bolstering has little effect besides allowing practitioners to put some positive information next to the negative one, but in reality has very little effect on the respondents' opinions and actions towards the organization following the crisis response. Bolstering is therefore more 'puffery' and not so much a 'underrated strategy'.

What we did find, and this is important for academics but especially for practitioners, is that the most effective way of reducing negative fallout following a crisis is the reputation an organization holds before said crisis. This finding reconfirms existing literature that states a positive reputation will act as a 'shield' during organizational crises and is in line with what is incorporated in the SCCT and other reputation or crisis communication research. What is interesting to note is that the use of different response strategies did not seem to matter greatly either in our initial crisis-response research, although it is stated in the SCCT that it should.

5.7. Limitations & Future Research

This research was subject to a few limitations that, while not detrimental, do limit the impact of this study slightly. One of the main limitations was the scope and size of this study. Our sample of 146 respondents is enough for an experimental study of this nature, but a higher sample would increase the validity and possibly give us different results. Our respondents are also from a variety of nationalities and cultures. Future research might want to focus on specific regions to account for cultural and personal factors when studying crisis communication. Another limitation we could note is the absence of any novel findings in this study. Our results re-confirm the theory that Pre-Crisis Reputation shields organizations during crises.

We did find that the incorporation of the Bolstering strategy had an almost significant effect on both Secondary Crisis Communications and Secondary Crisis Reactions. Because of the proximity to a significance level, we recommend future research further explore the effect of bolstering in crisis containment, possibly in a different research design.

While we do not know if a different research design might give us different results, it could be that our design and conditions were not refined enough for this research. Our focus on only two crisis response strategies, one single company with a good reputation and a crisis in the preventable cluster in combination with the bolstering strategy is a limited scope and future research would benefit from a more extensive study that incorporates all possible aspects and responses in the SCCT. Our use of only one company with an (near) impeccable pre-crisis reputation is a limitation of this study as it might be that this high level of reputation ‘shielded’ our company. Future research might replicate this study with a company of low prior reputation or incorporate a comparative design between high and low pre-crisis reputations.

Ideally, future research would also look at the use of the bolstering strategy during crisis communication over time. Our research was based on a ‘snapshot’ of a crisis and the initial crisis response strategy. It might be that bolstering works better over time by continuously repeating positive facts to contrast the negative ones, thereby reducing the offensiveness of a crisis in light of past good deeds. As this is hard to replicate in an experimental setting, it could be interesting to study a real life crisis as it unfolds by presenting a survey at different intervals to a selection of respondents. Such a research might reveal how a crisis unfolds, comes to the public’s attention, what the company does to reduce negative reputational fallout, how the public reacts to it and how public opinion can change over time.

Other recommendations for future research we could make are an investigation into the relationship between age and organizational crisis, why our results indicate the denial strategy positively influences secondary crisis reactions and the relationship between Facebook use and secondary crisis communications and reactions. Finally, considering the use of bolstering by practitioners, future research might benefit from a qualitative design aimed at understanding said practitioners’ motivations and experience with the bolstering strategy.

References

- Austin, L., Fisher Liu, B., & Jin, Y. (2012). How audiences seek out crisis information: Exploring the social-mediated crisis communication model. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 40(2), 188-207. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2012.654498>
- Avery, E. J., Lariscy, R. W., Kim, S., & Hocke, T. (2010). A quantitative review of crisis communication research in public relations from 1991 to 2009. *Public Relations Review*, 36(2), 190-192. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.01.001>
- Benoit, W. L. (1997). Image repair discourse and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 23(2), 177-186. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111\(97\)90023-0](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(97)90023-0)
- Bi, G., Zheng, B., & Liu, H. (2014). Secondary crisis communication on social media: The role of corporate response and social influence in product-harm crisis. In *PACIS* (p. 93). <http://aisel.aisnet.org/pacis2014/93>
- Bland, J. M., & Altman, D. G. (1997). Statistics notes: Cronbach's alpha. *Bmj*, 314(7080), 572. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.314.7080.572>
- Box, J. F. (1980). RA Fisher and the design of experiments, 1922–1926. *The American Statistician*, 34(1), 1-7. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00031305.1980.10482701>
- Bundy, J., & Pfarrer, M. D. (2015). A burden of responsibility: The role of social approval at the onset of a crisis. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(3), 345-369. doi:10.5465/amr.2013.0027
- Bundy, J., Pfarrer, M. D., Short, C. E., & Coombs, W. T. (2016). Crises and crisis management Integration, interpretation, and research development. *Journal of Management*, doi.org/10.1177/0149206316680030
- Buhrmester, M., Kwang, T., & Gosling, S. D. (2011). Amazon's Mechanical Turk a new source of inexpensive, yet high-quality, data?. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6(1), 3-5.
- Brinson, S. L., & Benoit, W. L. (1999). The tarnished star restoring Texaco's damaged public image. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 12(4), 483-510. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318999124001>
- Chiciudean, I. & David, G. (2013). Considerations on using the situational crisis communication theory in the crisis communication planning activities of Romanian armed forces' information and public relations structures. *Journal of Defense Resources Management*, 4(1), 159-167.
- Choi, J., & Chung, W. (2012). Analysis of the interactive relationship between apology and product involvement in crisis communication: Study on the toyota recall crisis. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651912458923>
- Claeys, A. S., & Cauberghe, V. (2015). The role of a favorable pre-crisis reputation in protecting organizations during crises. *Public Relations Review*, 41(1), 64-71. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.10.013>
- Claeys, A. S., Cauberghe, V., & Vyncke, P. (2010). Restoring reputations in times of crisis: An experimental study of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory and the moderating effects of locus of control. *Public Relations Review*, 36(3), 256-262. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.05.004>
- Claeys, A. S., & Opgenhaffen, M. (2016). Why practitioners do (not) apply crisis communication theory in practice. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 1-16. <http://dx.doi.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/1062726X.2016.1261703>

- Coombs, W. T. (1999). Crisis management: Advantages of a relational perspective. In J. A. Ledingham, & S. D. Bruning (Eds.), *Relationship management: A relational approach to the study and practice of public relations* (pp. 75–93). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Coombs, W. T. (2004). Impact of past crises on current crisis communication insights from Situational Crisis Communication Theory. *Journal of Business Communication*, 41(3), 265-289.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/0021943604265607>
- Coombs, W. T. (2006). The protective powers of crisis response strategies: Managing reputational assets during a crisis. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 12(3-4), 241-260.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J057v12n03_13
- Coombs, W. T. (2007a). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(3), 163-176. DOI: 10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550049
- Coombs, W. T. (2007b). Attribution theory as a guide for post-crisis communication research. *Public Relations Review*, 33(2), 135-139. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.11.016>
- Coombs, W. T. (2008). Crisis communication and social media. *Essential Knowledge Project*, Institute for Public Relations. Retrieved on February 19, 2017, from http://www.instituteforpr.org/essential_knowledge/detail/crisis_communication_and_social_media/
- Coombs, W. T. (2015). The value of communication during a crisis: Insights from strategic communication research. *Business Horizons*, 58(2), 141-148.
<http://dx.doi.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2014.10.003>
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2001). An extended examination of the crisis situations: A fusion of the relational management and symbolic approaches. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 13(4), 321-340. Retrieved from: <https://goo.gl/BgVlFF>
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2002). Helping crisis managers protect reputational assets initial tests of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 16(2), 165-186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089331802237233>
- Coombs, T.W., & Holladay, S. J. (2005). *An exploratory study of stakeholder emotions: Affect and crises. In The effect of affect in organizational settings* (pp. 263-280). Bradford: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Coombs, W.T., & Holladay, S. J. (2006). Unpacking the halo effect: Reputation and crisis management. *Journal of Communication Management*, 10(2), 123-137.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13632540610664698>
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2007). The negative communication dynamic: Exploring the impact of stakeholder affect on behavioral intentions. *Journal of Communication Management*, 11(4), 300-312. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13632540710843913>
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2008). Comparing apology to equivalent crisis response strategies: Clarifying apology's role and value in crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 34(3), 252-257. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2008.04.001>
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (Eds.). (2011). *The handbook of crisis communication* (Vol. 22). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2014). How publics react to crisis communication efforts:: Comparing crisis response reactions across sub-arenas. *Journal of Communication Management*, 18(1), 40-57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-03-2013-0015>

- Coombs, W. T., Holladay, S. J. & Claeys, A. S. (2016). Debunking the myth of denial's effectiveness in crisis communication: context matters. *Journal of Communication Management*, 20(4), 381-395. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-06-2016-0042>
- Decker, W. H. (2012). A firm's image following alleged wrongdoing: Effects of the firm's prior reputation and response to the allegation. *Corporate Reputation Review* 15(1), 20-34. DOI: 10.1057/crr.2011.27
- Davey, N. (2010). Implosion of a brand: What can we learn from Toyota's crisis mismanagement? March, 10, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.mycustomer.com/topic/customer-experience/implosion-brand-what-can-we-learn-toyotacrisis-mismanagement/103652>
- Dutta-Bergman, M. J. (2006). Community participation and Internet use after September 11: Complementarity in channel consumption. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(2), 469-484. DOI: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00022.x
- Fombrun, C., & Foss, C. (2004). Business ethics: Corporate responses to scandal. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 7(3), 284-288. DOI: 10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540226
- Fombrun, C. J., Gardberg, N. A., & Sever, J. M. (2000). The Reputation QuotientSM: A multi-stakeholder measure of corporate reputation. *Journal of Brand Management*, 7(4), 241-255. DOI: 10.1057/bm.2000.10
- Fombrun, C.J. and van Riel, C.B.M. (2004) *Fame & Fortune: How Successful Companies Build Winning Reputations*, New York: Prentice-Hall Financial Times,
- Fombrun, C. J., Ponzi, L. J., & Newbury, W. (2015). Stakeholder tracking and analysis: The RepTrak[®] system for measuring corporate reputation. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 18(1), 3-24. doi:10.1057/crr.2014.21
- Fricker, R.D., Jr. (2012). Sampling methods for web and e-mail surveys, In: J. Hughes, ed., *SAGE Internet Research Methods*, London: SAGE Publications. Reprinted from *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods*, N. Fielding, R.M. Lee and G. Blank, eds., chapter 11, London: SAGE Publications, 195-216. <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/38713>
- Gregory, J. R. (1998). Does corporate reputation provide a cushion to companies facing market volatility? Some supportive evidence. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 1(3), 288-290. doi:10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540050
- Heckathorn, D. D. (2011). Comment: snowball versus respondent-driven sampling. *Sociological Methodology*, 41(1), 355-366. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9531.2011.01244.x
- Huang, Y. H. (2008). Trust and relational commitment in corporate crises: The effects of crisis communicative strategy and form of crisis response. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 20(3), 297-327. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10627260801962830>
- Jeong, S. H. (2009). Public's Responses to an oil spill accident: A test of the attribution theory and situational crisis communication theory. *Public Relations Review*, 35(3), 307-309. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.03.010>
- Jin, Y., & Liu, B. F. (2010). The blog-mediated crisis communication model: Recommendations for responding to influential external blogs. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 22(4), 429-455. DOI: 10.1080/10627261003801420
- Jin, Y., Liu, B. F., & Austin, L. L. (2011). Examining the role of social media in effective crisis management: The effects of crisis origin, information form, and source on publics' crisis responses. *Communication Research*. 41 (1). 74-94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650211423918>

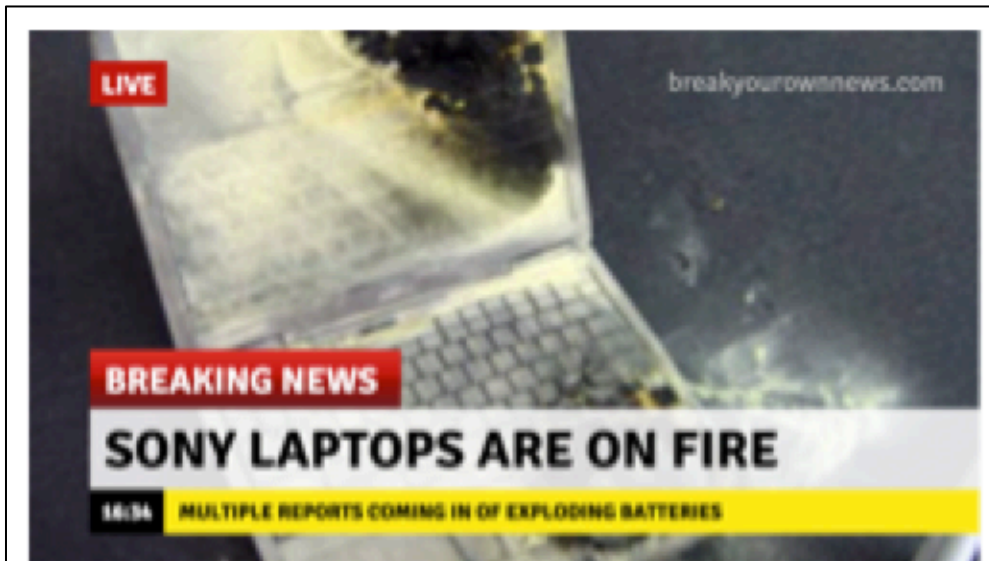
- Kahn, W. A., Barton, M. A., & Fellows, S. (2013). Organizational crises and the disturbance of relational systems. *Academy of Management Review*, 38(3), 377-396. doi:10.5465/amr.2011.0363
- Kaplan, T. (2005). The Tylenol crisis: How effective public relations saved Johnson & Johnson. URL: <http://www.grif.com.au/Tylenol-Poisonings.79.0.html>
- Kazoleas, D. (2008). Testing crisis response strategies: A comparative quantitative investigation of the impact of reputational bolstering on perceptions of wrongdoing and trust during organizational crises. *Pedagogy Posters* 108, pp 49- 58. <https://goo.gl/T7Hfqc>
- Kelley, H. H. (1967). Attribution theory in social psychology. In *Nebraska symposium on motivation*. Vol 15, 192-238. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press. <https://goo.gl/R7ES1n>
- Kelley, H. H., & Michela, J. L. (1980). Attribution theory and research. *Annual review of psychology*, 31(1), 457-501. DOI: 10.1146/annurev.ps.31.020180.002325
- Kidd, R. F. (1976). Manipulation checks: advantage or disadvantage?. *Representative Research in Social Psychology*. 7, 160- 165. <https://goo.gl/z9BaMi>
- Kim, S., Avery, E. J., & Lariscy, R. W. (2009). Are crisis communicators practicing what we preach?: An evaluation of crisis response strategy analyzed in public relations research from 1991 to 2009. *Public Relations Review*, 35(4), 446-448. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.08.002>
- Kim, S., & Sung, K. H. (2014). Revisiting the effectiveness of base crisis response strategies in comparison of reputation management crisis responses. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 26(1), 62-78. <http://dx.doi.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/1062726X.2013.795867>
- Knight, R. F., & Pretty, D. J. (1999). Corporate catastrophes, stock returns, and trading volume. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 2(4), 363-378. doi:10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540092
- Lance, C. E., Butts, M. M., & Michels, L. C. (2006). The sources of four commonly reported cutoff criteria what did they really say?. *Organizational Research Methods*, 9(2), 202-220.
- Lee, B. K. (2004). Audience-oriented approach to crisis communication: A study of Hong Kong consumers' evaluation of an organizational crisis. *Communication research*, 31(5), 600-618. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650204267936>
- Luoma-aho, V., Moreno, A., & Verhoeven, P. (2017). Crisis response strategies in Finland and Spain. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*. DOI: 10.1111/1468-5973.12163
- Loewenthal, K. M. (2001). *An introduction to psychological tests and scales*. London: Psychology Press.
- Lowry, P. B., D'Arcy, J., Hammer, B., & Moody, G. D. (2016). "Cargo Cult" science in traditional organization and information systems survey research: A case for using nontraditional methods of data collection, including Mechanical Turk and online panels. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 25(3), 232-240.
- McDonald, L. M., Sparks, B., & Glendon, A. I. (2010). Stakeholder reactions to company crisis communication and causes. *Public Relations Review*, 36(3), 263-271. 10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.04.004
- Ma, L., & Zhan, M. (2016). Effects of attributed responsibility and response strategies on organizational reputation: A meta-analysis of situational crisis communication theory research. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 1-18. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2016.1166367>
- Macias, W., Hilyard, K., & Freimuth, V. (2009). Blog functions as risk and crisis communication during Hurricane Katrina. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 15(1), 1-31. DOI: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2009.01490.x

- Mahon, J. F., & Wartick, S. L. (2003). Dealing with stakeholders: How reputation, credibility and framing influence the game. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 6(1), 19-35. DOI: 10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540187
- Mangold, W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009). Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix. *Business Horizons*, 52(4), 357-365. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.03.002>
- O'Brien, C. (2011). The emergence of the social media empowered consumer. *Irish Marketing Review*, 21(1/2), 32. Retrieved from: <https://goo.gl/Nt0RbA>
- Park, H., & Reber, B. H. (2010). Using public relations to promote health: A framing analysis of public relations strategies among health associations. *Journal of Health Communication*, 15(1), 39-54. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10810730903460534>
- Ponzi, L. J., Fombrun, C. J., & Gardberg, N. A. (2011). RepTrak™ pulse: Conceptualizing and validating a short-form measure of corporate reputation. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 14(1), 15-35. DOI: 10.1057/crr.2011.5
- Reputation Institute. (2016a). *2016 Global RepTrak Report*. Retrieved February 4, 2017, from Reputation Institute website: <https://goo.gl/bvonPN>
- Reputation Institute (2016b). *How vw lost the public's trust*. Retrieved May 24, 2017, from <https://www.reputationinstitute.com/volkswagen.aspx>
- Sarstedt, M. (2009). Reputation management in times of crisis. *Journal of Brand Management*, 16, 499-503. DOI: 10.1057/bm.2009.7
- Schultz, F., Utz, S., & Göritz, A. (2011). Is the medium the message? Perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via twitter, blogs and traditional media. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), 20-27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.12.001>
- Sheldon, C. A., & Sallot, L. M. (2008). Image repair in politics: Testing effects of communication strategy and performance history in a faux pas. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 21, 25-50. doi: 10.1080/10627260802520496
- Seeger, M. W., Sellnow, T. L., & Ulmer, R. R. (1998). Communication, organization, and crisis. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 21(1), 231-276. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1998.11678952>
- Seeger, M. W., Sellnow, T. L., & Ulmer, R. R. (2003). *Communication and Organizational Crisis*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Sisco, H. F., Collins, E. L., & Zoch, L. M. (2010). Through the looking glass: A decade of Red Cross crisis response and situational crisis communication theory. *Public Relations Review*, 36(1), 21-27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.08.018>
- Stockmyer, J. (1996). Brands in crisis: Consumer help for deserving victims. *NA-Advances in Consumer Research Volume 23*. Retrieved from: <https://goo.gl/9CbWqd>
- Tucker, L., & Melewar, T. C. (2005). Corporate reputation and crisis management: The threat and manageability of anti-corporatism. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 7(4), 377-387. DOI: 10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540233
- Turk, J. V., Jin, Y., Stewart, S., Kim, J., & Hipple, J. R. (2012). Examining the interplay of an organization's prior reputation, CEO's visibility, and immediate response to a crisis. *Public Relations Review*, 38(4), 574-583. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2012.06.012>

- Van Riel, C. B., & Fombrun, C. J. (2007). *Essentials of corporate communication: Implementing practices for effective reputation management*. London: Routledge.
- Veil, S. R., Buehner, T., & Palenchar, M. J. (2011). A work-in-process literature review: Incorporating social media in risk and crisis communication. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 19(2), 110-122. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-5973.2011.00639.x
- Verhoeven, P., Tench, R., Zerfass, A., Moreno, A., & Verčič, D. (2014). Crisis? What crisis?: How European professionals handle crises and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 40(1), 107-109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.10.010>
- Verschoor, L.(2014) *Crisis communication: How to respond to the public*. (Master thesis), Tilburg University, Tilburg. Retrieved from: <https://goo.gl/dNz5hv>
- Wan, H. H. (2004). Inoculation, Bolstering, and Combined Approaches in Crisis Communication. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 6(3), 301-328. Retrieved from: <https://goo.gl/dYRhul>
- Weber, M., Erickson, S. L., & Stone, M. (2011). Corporate reputation management: Citibank's use of image restoration strategies during the US banking crisis. *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communication and Conflict*, 15(2), 35. Retrieved from: <https://goo.gl/eR2g8f>
- Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychological Review*, 92(4), 548. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.92.4.548>

Appendix A- experiment conditions

A1- Fictional News Post



TOKIO — A ubiquitous source of power in most modern technology, lithium-ion batteries keep cellphones, laptops, electric cars and airplanes running. They are also the source of many problems, with some overheating, catching fire and even exploding.

In a potentially damaging episode, Sony, one the world's biggest maker of laptops, announced on Friday that it would recall its new VAIO 7 model after discovering a flaw in the battery cell that could result in fires.

Multiple reports have flooded in with one customer explaining: "Came home after work, put it to charge for a little bit before I had class, went to put it in my bag, and it caught fire. Yep, brand new laptop, not even two weeks old."

Since the new Macbook's launch date was set in December, Sony gave itself an impossible deadline that engineers would have worked around the clock to meet. Moreover, such an adrenaline-driven approach to product development can downplay the boring but very necessary stage of testing.

An undisclosed source claims that some employees had tried to sound the alarm, but were silenced by the management.

A2- Fictional Facebook Posts

A2.1- Denial:

We regret the stories that are circulating the Internet and can guarantee our customers that we are investigating the matter. Our management full heartedly denies the accusations that they were informed of the malfunction prior to release.

A2.2- Denial+ Bolstering

We regret the stories that are circulating the Internet and can guarantee our customers that we are investigating the matter. Our management full heartedly denies the accusations that they were informed of the malfunction prior to release. Our laptops are of award-winning quality and we have continuously worked to increase our corporate responsibility efforts. We at Sony have always aimed at providing our customers with high end products and services, and will continue to do so in the future.

A2.3- Corrective Action

We regret the reports that are circulating the Internet and can guarantee our customers that we are investigating the matter. Anyone who has bought a VAIO 7 Laptop can exchange his or her battery for a new one through our site.

A2.4- Corrective Action + Bolstering

We regret the reports that are circulating the Internet and can guarantee our customers that we are investigating the matter. Anyone who has bought a VAIO 7 Laptop can exchange his or her battery for a new one through our site. Our laptops are of award-winning quality and we have continuously worked to increase our corporate responsibility efforts. We at Sony have always aimed at providing our customers with high end products and services, and will continue to do so in the future.

Appendix B- Experiment Survey

Q1.1 Dear participant, This survey will ask you a few questions. Please review all texts before answering the questions. The estimated time to finish this survey will be no longer than 12 minutes and all answers will be kept confidential and anonymous. Please take your time to answer these questions. There are no right or wrong answers. If you have any questions regarding the survey, please contact me via e-mail: 359167nl@eur.nl Thank you for your participation.

Q2 Are you familiar with the consumer electronics company Sony?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Q5 Please indicate to what degree you agree with the following statements:

Q3 I have a good feeling about Sony as a company.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q4 I trust Sony.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q6 I admire and respect Sony as a company.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q7 I think Sony has a good overall reputation.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q8 Have you bought any Sony products in the past?

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:

If Have you bought any Sony products in the past? Yes Is Selected

Q9 Sony has always offered good service to me.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Display This Question:

If Have you bought any Sony products in the past? Yes Is Selected

Q10 I am satisfied with the Sony products I own(ed).

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Display This Question:

If Have you bought any Sony products in the past? Yes Is Selected

Q50 Sony offers good value for my money.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q51 Corporate Crises are sudden and significant events that can have a negative impact on an organizations reputation.

Q11 Are you aware of any corporate crises Sony has had in the past?

- Yes
- No

Display This Question:

If Are you aware of any corporate crises Sony has had in the past? Yes Is Selected

Q12 Can you very briefly describe the past crisis you are aware of (max 140 characters).

Q13 You will now be presented with a news report about a crisis experienced by Sony. Please read this short article carefully and proceed to the next questions. The image may take a few seconds to load.



TOKIO — A ubiquitous source of power in most modern technology, lithium-ion batteries keep cellphones, laptops, electric cars and airplanes running. They are also the source of many problems, with some overheating, catching fire and even exploding.

In a potentially damaging episode, Sony, one the world's biggest maker of laptops, announced on Friday that it would recall its new VAIO 7 model after discovering a flaw in the battery cell that could result in fires.

Multiple reports have flooded in with one customer explaining: "Came home after work, put it to charge for a little bit before I had class, went to put it in my bag, and it caught fire. Yep, brand new laptop, not even two weeks old."

Since the new Macbook's launch date was set in December, Sony gave itself an impossible deadline that engineers would have worked around the clock to meet. Moreover, such an adrenaline-driven approach to product development can downplay the boring but very necessary stage of testing.

An undisclosed source claims that some employees had tried to sound the alarm, but were silenced by the management.

Q14

Q15 To what degree do you think Sony is to blame for the crisis?

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q16 Sony could have avoided the crisis.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q56 The crisis was caused by a problem inside the organization.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q19 Do you have a Facebook account?

- Yes
- No

Q21 Next you will be presented with the response from Sony on the social media site Facebook. Please treat this as if you had just read the news article and came across this post from Sony on your Facebook timeline.

Q20



Sony

We regret the stories that are circulating the Internet and can guarantee our customers that we are investigating the matter. Our management full heartedly denies the accusations that they were informed of the malfunction prior to release.

[Like](#) · [Comment](#) · 9 minutes ago ·

Q17



Sony

We regret the stories that are circulating the Internet and can guarantee our customers that we are investigating the matter. Our management full heartedly denies the accusations that they were informed of the malfunction prior to release.

Our laptops are of award-winning quality and we have continuously worked to increase our corporate responsibility efforts. We at Sony have always aimed at providing our customers with high end products and services, and will continue to do so in the future.

[Like](#) · [Comment](#) · 9 minutes ago ·

Q22



Sony

We regret the reports that are circulating the Internet and can guarantee our customers that we are investigating the matter. Anyone who has bought a VAIO 7 Laptop can exchange his or her battery for a new one through our site.

[Like](#) · [Comment](#) · 9 minutes ago ·

Q23



Sony

We regret the reports that are circulating the Internet and can guarantee our customers that we are investigating the matter. Anyone who has bought a VAIO 7 Laptop can exchange his or her battery for a new one through our site.

Our laptops are of award-winning quality and we have continuously worked to increase our corporate responsibility efforts. We at Sony have always aimed at providing our customers with high end products and services, and will continue to do so in the future.

[Like](#) · [Comment](#) · 9 minutes ago ·

Q24 Please indicate to what degree you agree with the following statements after having read the news article and response post from Sony.

Q27 Sony is concerned with the well-being of its consumers.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q28 Sony is basically being dishonest.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q29 I do not trust Sony to tell the truth about the situation.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q30 Under most circumstances I would be likely to believe what Sony says.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q31 Sony is not concerned with the well-being of its consumers.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q32 Please indicate the likelihood of you undertaking any of the following actions after having read Sony's response.

Q33 I would share the post on Facebook.

- Extremely unlikely
- Moderately unlikely
- Slightly unlikely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Slightly likely
- Moderately likely
- Extremely likely

Q34 I would inform my friends and peers on Facebook.

- Extremely unlikely
- Moderately unlikely
- Slightly unlikely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Slightly likely
- Moderately likely
- Extremely likely

Q35 I would comment under Sony's post on Facebook.

- Extremely unlikely
- Moderately unlikely
- Slightly unlikely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Slightly likely
- Moderately likely
- Extremely likely

Q38 Please indicate how likely you would be to undertake the following actions.

Q39 I would encourage others not to buy Sony products.

- Extremely unlikely
- Moderately unlikely
- Slightly unlikely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Slightly likely
- Moderately likely
- Extremely likely

Q40 I would say negative things to others about Sony.

- Extremely unlikely
- Moderately unlikely
- Slightly unlikely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Slightly likely
- Moderately likely
- Extremely likely

Q41 I would recommend Sony to someone who asked my advice.

- Extremely unlikely
- Moderately unlikely
- Slightly unlikely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Slightly likely
- Moderately likely
- Extremely likely

Q43 The likelihood of me purchasing Sony products in the future is high.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Q52 In the post by Sony, which of the following types of responses did you notice?

- Denial
- Corrective Action
- Justification
- Attack the Accuser

Q45 Please read the following definition of bolstering: Bolstering: Used to mitigate the negative effects of a crisis by strengthening the audience's positive idea of the accused. They may remind the audience of previous good deeds or good reputation.

Q46 Did you notice any bolstering in the Facebook post by Sony?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Q45 How old are you?

Q46 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Rather not say

Q55 What is your nationality?

Q47 How often are you on Facebook?

- Never
- Once a week
- 2-3 times a week
- 4-6 times a week
- Daily

Q48 Is Facebook an important source of your news?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

Q53 How did you come across this survey?

- A friend
- Social Media
- Website
- Email
- Other _____

Q47 Thank you for your help, it is much appreciated. All answers recorded in this survey are treated with confidentiality. The crisis and responses brought forward in this survey are entirely fictional. No such situation has ever occurred with Sony that we could find.