



# Crisis communication: How to respond to the public

The effect of crisis response strategy and familiarity with the information source on the publics' perception of and reactions to crisis communication

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## Abstract

This study investigated the effect of crisis response strategy and familiarity with the information source on (a) the organizational reputation, (b) secondary crisis communication, (c) secondary crisis reactions and (d) behavioural intention. Besides, we investigated whether there is any difference in credibility and competence of the information source as a result of familiarity with the sender. We conducted an online survey with a response rate of 280 participants. The findings were partly in line with our hypotheses. The results have shown a main effect of familiarity with the information source on all dependent variables. Participants who read the Facebook post of the Facebook friend were more likely to be influenced than participants who read the post of the lobby group. A possible explanation for this phenomenon is the matter of trust. This corresponds with our findings concerning the credibility of the information source. The Facebook friend was considered as more credible than the lobby group. However, the lobby group was considered as more competent than the Facebook friend. Apparently, participants value credibility over competence in their judgment of an organization. In contrast, there was no main effect found of crisis response strategy on all dependent variables. Finally, there was no interaction effect found between crisis response strategy and familiarity with the information source on all dependent variables.

## 1. Introduction

In August 2009, the improper installation of an all-weather floor mat into a Lexus Sedan led to problems with the accelerator, causing a fatal accident (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2012). It was the beginning of a series of incidents and consumer complaints about unintended acceleration and brake faults, launching the most challenging crisis in Toyota's history. By February 2010, Toyota recalled about 8.5 million vehicles worldwide (McCurry, 2010). Suddenly, Toyota was a trending topic on Twitter and Google, but for the wrong reasons. Consumers and media were harshly critical, and Toyota brand's reputation took a serious battering. According to critics, the biggest mistake of the management was the slow public response. It wasn't until February 2010, six months after the fatal crash, that Toyota held the first press conference (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2012).

Toyota broke the cardinal rule in crisis management: assume the worst. Companies often don't realise they have a problem until it hits the media fan – and nowadays, Twitter, bloggers and YouTube beat most lumbering corporations to it. From a disgruntled employee to toxic waste: assume the worst (Davey, 2010).

It is a nightmare scenario for any organization: a crisis threatening their brand, reputation and customers' trust. In the digital era, where information is easily shared, crises become even more numerous, visible and disastrous (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 1998). This results in a larger group of victims, more attention in the media and a wider impact on dynamic and complex social-technical systems (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2003). Effective communication is an indispensable part of surviving an organizational crisis. Failure can result in serious harm to stakeholders, economic losses for the organization or even the end of its very existence (Coombs, 2007). Organizations need to be aware of the effects of crises, especially in this information age.

Previous research shows that social media are often being used as efficient tools for 'repairing' the organizational reputation (Schultz, Utz & Göritz, 2011). However, the effects of social media on the public during crisis situations are still understudied. Social media are all about sharing information to a wide network of known and unknown actors. This feature makes it possible, not only for organizations but also for the public, to respond to all types of events, including crises. Previous research has mainly focused on the organization's

perspective; the relationship between crisis response strategies and crisis perceptions. However, these studies have not included the effect of the publics' online behaviour during crisis situations. Even more important, the literature does not prescribe how organizations can effectively respond to these third parties' messages. This study contributes to fill these gaps in the literature, by conducting an online survey. But first, we will define the important concepts, and discuss the main findings of previous research.

### 1.1 Organizational crisis

An *organizational crisis* can be defined as a 'specific, unexpected and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten, or are perceived to threaten, an organization's high priority goals' (Seeger et al, 1998, p. 8). Other definitions include a sense of urgency, major media attention, potential economic loss and decrease in credibility (Williams & Treadaway, 1992). An organizational crisis affects people on two fronts: the core organizations, including managers and employees and stockholders, as well as customers, suppliers, members of the community and even competitors (Seeger et al, 1998). Examples of organizational crises are product malfunction and recall, rumours about child labour, inhuman work conditions and fraud. The effects of these crises pose a serious threat to the image, legitimacy, profitability and even survival of an organization (Seeger et al, 1998). Therefore, it is important to protect the *organizational reputation* during a crisis situation.

### 1.2 Organizational reputation

Organizational reputation refers to the stakeholders' evaluation of an organization, based on its past behaviours (Wartick, 1992). Another definition includes 'a particular type of feedback, received by an organization from its stakeholders, concerning the credibility of the organization's identity claims' (Whetten & Mackey, 2002, p. 401). Organizational reputation is strongly intertwined to the organizational identity: the central, stable and characteristic image of an organization (Whetten & Mackey, 2002).

Identity constrains what actions a company takes, how it makes decisions, how it treats its employees, how it reacts to crises. Managers and employees tend to act in ways consistent with the company's identity. Identity is therefore the backbone of reputation (Fombrun, 1996, p. 111).

Crises are a potential threat for the organizational reputation, including the credibility and legitimacy of the organization. There is almost complete agreement in the literature that not responding to a crisis is not an option (e.g. Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Liu, Austin & Jin, 2011; Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2003). Careful and responsible crisis communication is an important aspect for organizations in order to protect the organizational reputation. Managers in all types of organizations need to be aware of the fact that they might face a crisis. They must be ready to serve as crisis managers, and know how to respond to a crisis in order to reduce uncertainty and risks (Lerbinger, 2012).

### 1.3 The situational crisis communication theory

The situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) is one of the dominant theories in crisis communication research (Coombs, 2007). SCCT offers a framework to categorize crisis types in order to integrate them with crisis response strategies. Coombs (2007) distinguishes three main factors, crisis history, crisis responsibility and prior relational reputation, to determine the threat of the crisis. Crisis history refers to the likelihood that the organization has faced similar situations in the past. Crisis responsibility refers to the extent to which stakeholders believe the organization is responsible for the crisis. Finally, prior relational reputation describes the organizational behaviour in previous crises. Crisis managers need to match their response strategies to the threat in order to protect the organizational reputation.

The situational crisis communication theory is an important theory in crisis communication research. However, there are important variables missing which makes it incomplete. The main problem is the one-sided perspective, namely from the organization. SCCT does not include the role of the public as a communicator during crisis situations. In this study, we investigate how crisis managers can effectively respond to publics' reactions in order to protect the organizational reputation, reduce negative secondary crisis communication and reactions and maintain the behavioural intention. The organizational reputation refers to the public's perception of an organization. As secondary crisis communication we assess people's intention to tell friends about the crisis, share the information and to leave comments. The behavioural intention refers to the willingness to boycott the organization and its products. Secondary crisis reactions are negative messages about the organization in order to persuade other people to boycott the organization (Schultz, Utz & Görritz, 2011).

In addition to the crisis response strategy, we focus on the credibility and competence of the information source. More specifically, we investigate whether there are any differences between Facebook posts from an information source which is known or unknown to the public. Therefore, we can formulate the following research questions.

*RQ1: How, if at all, does crisis response strategy affect (a) the organizational reputation, (b) secondary crisis reactions, (c) secondary crisis communication and (d) behavioural intention?*

*RQ2: Which effects, if any, do we find as a result of familiarity with the information source (the sender of a critical Facebook post), on (a) organizational reputation, (b) secondary crisis communication (c) secondary crisis reactions and (d) behavioural intention?*

## 1.4 Relevance

This study contributes to crisis managers' need to understand how to best strategically optimize their tools for (online) crisis communication. Firstly, the experiment gives insight into effective response strategies to publics' online behaviour during crisis situations. Secondly, this study investigates whether people value crisis information from a friend differently than an unknown lobby group. Thirdly, the study extends previous research by focusing on Facebook as the medium of communication. Public relations professionals are using the site more and more to communicate to the public (Hong, 2013). However, the social networking site receives little attention in crisis communication research. Finally, this study focuses on a broad target group, with a great variety of age and education level. Previous studies included mostly students in their experiments (e.g. Liu, Austin & Jin, 2011; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000).

## 2. Theoretical framework

In this section we will discuss different theories and studies in order to formulate the hypotheses for our study.

### 2.1 The situational crisis communication theory

The situational crisis communication theory is a theoretical approach to crisis communication, developed by Coombs (2004). He describes a two-step process for crisis managers in order to

estimate the threat of a crisis, as shown in figure 1. The first step is determining the *crisis responsibility*, the extent to which stakeholders believe the organization is responsible for the crisis. The second step in the process is determining two factors, which describe the organizational behaviour in previous crises: *consistency* and *distinctiveness*. Consistency refers to the crisis history; the likelihood that the organization has faced similar situations in the past. Distinctiveness reflects the relationship between history and reputation, how adequately the organization has dealt with its stakeholders in similar crisis situations.

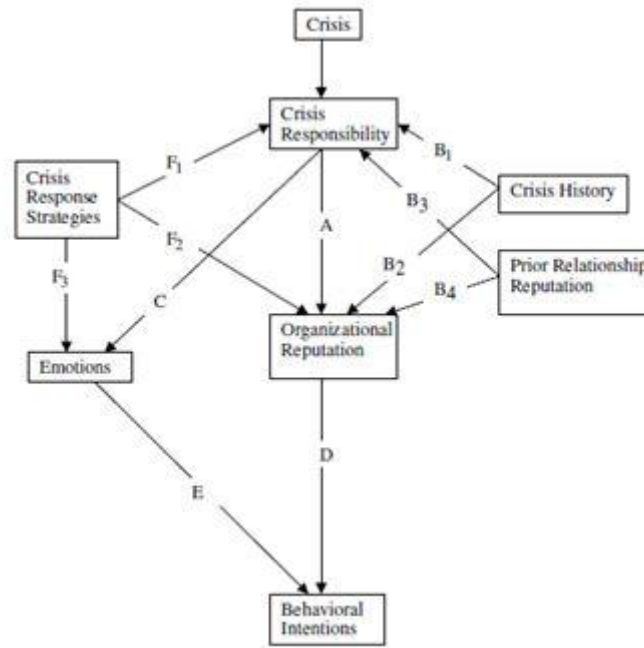


Figure 1: Conceptual model of SCCT

Crisis responsibility, crisis history, and prior relational reputation determine which crisis response strategy should be used (Chiciudean & David, 2013). Coombs (2004) differentiates three types of response strategies, namely denial, diminish and rebuild. Denial should be used when there is a low crisis responsibility (e.g. a rumour). Diminish should be used when there is evidence of crisis responsibility. In that way, the organization tries to reduce the negativity in order to protect the organizational reputation. Finally, rebuild should be used when there is high crisis responsibility. By offering help to the victims and asking for forgiveness, the organization tries to take the focus off the crisis. These crisis response strategies, in turn, affect different crisis communication outcomes including organizational reputation, and negative word-of-mouth (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2009). The situational crisis

communication theory (SCCT) is an important theory in crisis communication research, but there are important variables missing.

## 2.2 Social media and crisis communication

Firstly, the situational crisis communication theory does not include the effect of medium type on organizational reputation. In this digital era, it is impossible to neglect the differences between traditional and social media. The effects of social media can be devastating, as online issues can be more unpredictable, and ‘go viral’ more quickly than issues that emerge offline. On the other hand, social media can be used for immediate response and interactive communication during crises (Coombs, 2007). Even though Coombs (2004) argued that social media make the channels used to deliver crisis responses more complex, he did not incorporate this complexity into SCCT.

## 2.3 Secondary crisis communication and reactions

The second gap in the situational crisis communication theory is intertwined with medium type, namely secondary crisis communication and reactions. One of the most important characteristics of social media, as the term ‘social’ already implies, is interaction. Conversations, in terms of reactions and sharing, have a big influence on the range and distribution of a crisis. The situational crisis communication theory includes organizational reputation, behavioural intentions (purchase intentions), and negative word-of-mouth intentions as dependent variables. Word-of-mouth refers to comments stakeholders make about an organization, and poses a threat to the organizational reputation (Tucker & Melewar, 2005). Spreading negative information about an organization and/or product might affect the purchase intentions of the consumer (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). However, the effects of different response strategies on various forms of communication and reactions by stakeholders need to be analyzed in more detail.

## 2.4 The social-mediated crisis communication model

One theory that includes medium type, and secondary crisis communication as dependent variables, is the social-mediated crisis communication model (SMCC). In addition to the two variables from SCCT, this model takes medium type and different types of media users into account. Liu, Austin and Jin (2011) examined the role of social media in effective crisis management, by using SMCC, as shown in figure 2. The findings indicate the key role of crisis origin, whether the cause of the crisis is internal or external, in affecting the publics’

preferred medium type and source. In turn, this influences how the organization should respond to a crisis and what emotions the public is likely to feel (Liu et al, 2011).

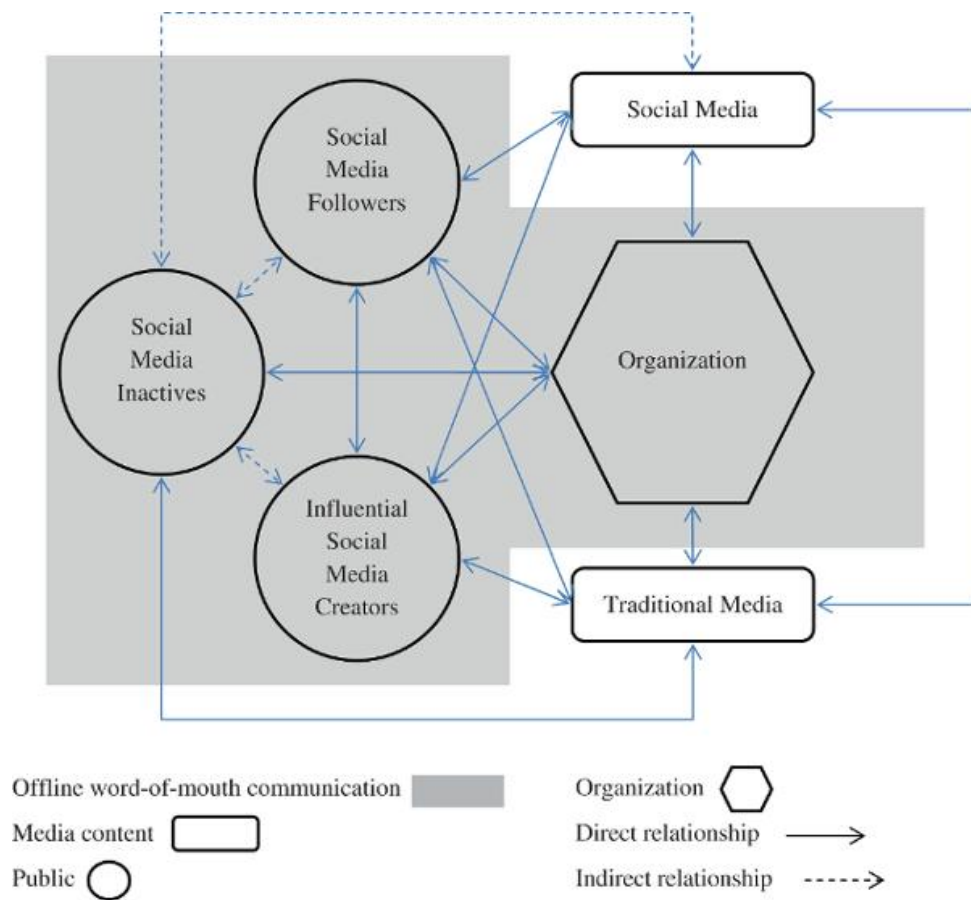


Figure 2: Conceptual model of SMCC

Schultz et al (2011) also took medium type into account in their crisis communication research. They examined the combined effect of medium type (traditional or social media) and communication strategy on the organizational reputation, secondary crisis communication and reactions. The results show a main effect of medium type for all three dependent measures, whereas the message had only a significant main effect on secondary crisis reactions. The medium turned out to be more important than the message, indicating that the medium *is* the message. In other words, the crisis response strategy seems to be less important than the medium type for effective crisis communication.

## 2.5 The public as a communicator

Recent research emphasizes the importance of medium type in effective crisis communication (Schultz et al, 2011). However, there is one major flaw in existing crisis communication

theories: the one-sided perspective from the organization. They neglect the role of the public as a communicator, while its 'power' and reach is getting bigger. Since the presence of companies on social networking sites, it has become a lot easier for consumers to get in touch with (large) brands. Social networking sites, like Facebook and Twitter, have become a platform for interaction between the public and organizations (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). This results in positive feedback but also negative messages, which are read by many people. Previous research has shown that spreading unfavourable information may affect present and future purchase intentions (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). However this new phenomenon, especially on Facebook, has not received much attention yet. What are the effects of negative messages on the Facebook wall of an (well-known) organization? And what is the most effective way to respond to these messages?

In this study, we include variables from existing theories, to study the role of the public in (online) crisis communication. More specifically, we investigate how organizations should respond to third party messages in order to protect the organizational reputation and reduce negative secondary crisis reactions. Besides, we investigate whether there are any differences between messages from a known person and an unknown lobby group.

## 2.6 Crisis response strategy

One of the aspects of the situational crisis communication theory is *crisis response strategy*. Different crisis response strategies affect important communication outcomes, including the organizational reputation and secondary crisis communication (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2009). This experiment contains three crisis response strategies, apology, sympathy and information, based on the strategies as described in the situational crisis communication theory. Apology refers to the strategy whereby the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and acknowledges its mistakes. Sympathy describes the strategy whereby the organization shows feelings of pity and sorrow for the victims. Information refers to the strategy whereby the organization provides information about (the circumstances surrounding) the crisis. Schultz et al (2011) used the same response strategies in a similar study, to examine the perceptions of and reactions to crisis communication via social and traditional media. In our study, we investigate the effect of crisis response strategy on a Facebook post from the public.

Coombs & Schmidt (2000) argue that an organization that takes the responsibility or expresses sympathy with the victims is regarded as more honourable and sympathetic. They conducted an empirical study in order to test claims about the effectiveness of different image restoration strategies. The results showed that organizations that placed victim concerns over organizational concerns and demonstrated regret for the victims had a higher organizational reputation than organizations that did not (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). In contrast, recent research has shown that providing information does not positively influence the organizational reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2008).

According to this assumption, we would expect that apology and sympathy will lead to a higher reputation of the organization than information. However, Schultz et al (2011) did not find a main effect of crisis response strategy on the organizational reputation. In other words, there was no difference between apology, information and sympathy on the estimation of the organizational reputation. This study will clarify whether there is any difference in the effect of crisis response strategy on the organizational reputation. Based on the similar study by Schultz et al (2011), we can formulate our first hypothesis.

*H1: There is no effect of crisis response strategy on the organizational reputation*

Again, Coombs and Holladay (2008) argue that apology and sympathy less often produce negative secondary crisis reactions. They say that people are more likely to respond to messages when they feel indignant about the incident. Therefore, apology and sympathy do not only lead to less negative feelings but also to less secondary crisis reactions. However, Schultz et al (2011) found completely different results in their experiment. With regard to secondary crisis reactions, the information strategy turned out to be the most successful response strategy. Therefore, we can formulate the following hypotheses.

*H2: Information will less often produce negative secondary crisis reactions than apology and sympathy*

*H3: Information will less often lead to negative behavioural intentions than apology and sympathy*

Thirdly, Coombs and Holladay (2008) argue that apology and sympathy less often produce negative secondary crisis communication. In contrast, Schultz et al (2011) did not find any

effects of crisis response strategies on secondary crisis communication. Based on the similar study by Schultz et al (2011), we can formulate our fourth hypothesis.

*H4: There is no effect of crisis response strategy on secondary crisis communication*

Schultz et al (2011) also focused on media use, which turned out to be a strong predictor of secondary crisis communication. Twitter users were more likely to share the message than blog users and non-users of social media. In our experiment, we will measure media use by questioning whether the participant has a Facebook profile, and how much time he/she spends on the medium. Therefore, we can formulate our fifth hypothesis.

*H5: Media use is a positive predictor of secondary crisis communication*

## 2.7 Credible information sources

Credibility refers to the possession of expertise and the quality of being believable (Belch & Belch, 1994). The term is closely related to the concepts 'reliability', 'honesty' and 'trustworthiness'. The issue of credibility is a popular item in marketing and advertising research. Marketers need to know which factors determine whether someone believes a certain person or not, in order to adapt their strategies. Different studies have shown that the issue of trust is a crucial aspect in determining the credibility of the information source. Trust in the salesperson influences the consumers' anticipated future interaction with the firm (Doney & Cannon, 1997). Another generalization is that experts and trustworthy sources are more persuasive than sources that are perceived as less competent and trustworthy (McGuire, 1969). These findings are used in practice, for example by casting celebrities for advertising campaigns. In the case of marketing, this means that affiliate or referral marketing are seen as effective strategies.

However, little is known about the credibility of the information source in the case of crisis communication. In this study we will compare the credibility and expertise of a Facebook friend and an unknown lobby group. Based on previous research, that emphasises the issue of trust, we expect people to consider a Facebook friend as more credible and competent than an unknown lobby group. Therefore, we can formulate our final hypotheses.

*H6: The Facebook friend will be considered as more credible than the lobby group*

*H7: The Facebook friend will be considered as more competent than the lobby group*

### 3. Methodology

This study consists of an online experiment to investigate the effect of familiarity with the information source and response strategy on (a) reputation, (b) secondary crisis communication (c) secondary crisis reactions and (d) behavioural intention. Participants rated an organization after reading the organization's reaction to a public's post. In this section we will describe the design, stimuli, participants and procedure.

#### 3.1 Design

The research design is a 2 **information source** (friends/lobby group) x 3 **crisis response strategy** (apology/sympathy/information) between-subject design, as shown in figure 3.

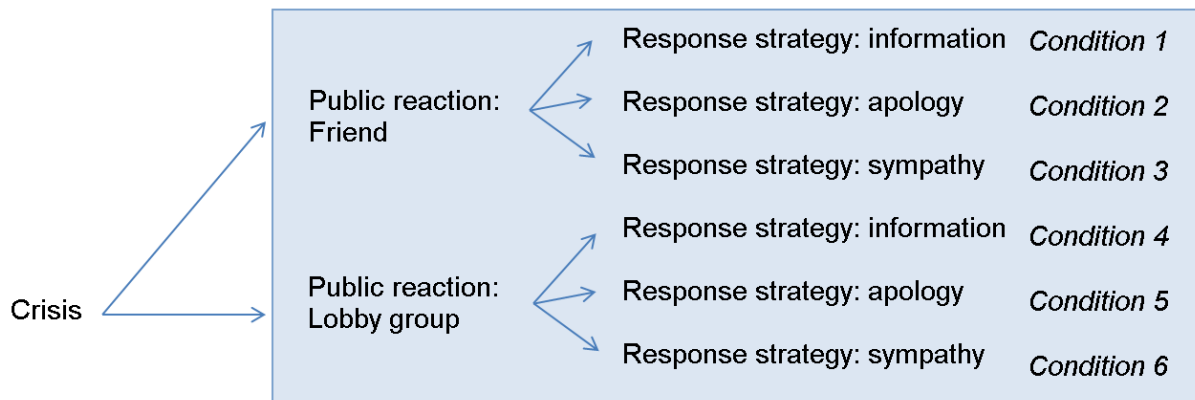


Figure 3: Conceptual model of the study

#### 3.2 Independent variables

The independent variables, which were manipulated in the stimuli, are information source, and crisis response strategy.

#### 3.3 Stimuli

The experiment consisted of one fictional crisis situation, which was manipulated into six conditions. In order to design a realistic scenario, we searched for different Facebook posts from third parties to companies. The Facebook page of H&M, the famous retail-clothing company, contains various complaints and reactions to crises, as shown in figure 4.

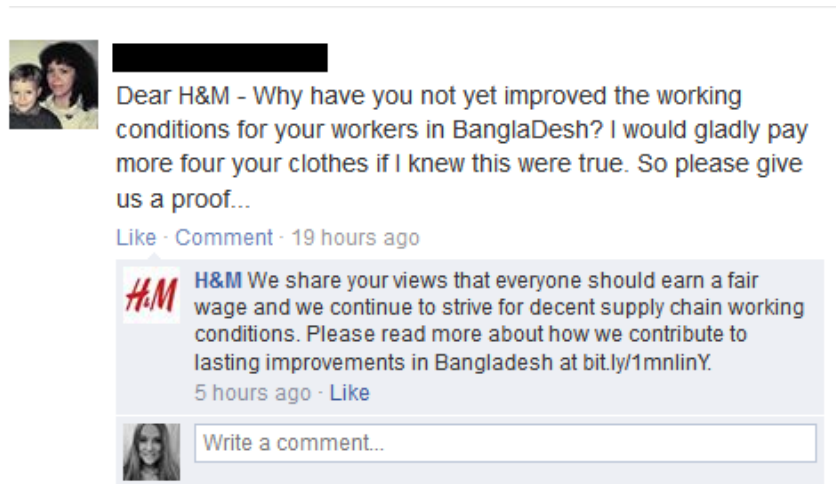


Figure 4: An example of a critical question from a consumer on the official H&M Facebook

The main issue is the inhuman work conditions in the factories in Bangladesh, where the H&M goods are produced. Based on this information, we have designed the following scenario.

Fictional scenario:

*Wow... Today, I saw this documentary about child labor in Indian factories. The clothing factories are producing all the goods for H&M. Children are working in dangerous and unhealthy conditions, for just a few cents. It's horrible to see these children getting exploited! Yet, there's still no official response from H&M.*

There is a special page on the website of H&M with FAQ about ethical issues such as child labour, low factory workers' wages and animal testing. Figure 5 shows the official response from H&M to the FAQ on child labour. Based on this information and the crisis response strategies developed by Schultz et al (2011), we have designed three crisis response strategies. Schultz et al (2011) also included apology, information and sympathy in their experimental design. We have tried to make the strategies about the same length. Besides, we have only included text and no image or video. In that way, we have tried to control the effect of the response strategy, instead of other factors.

**How do you ensure that no child labour is used in the production of your clothes?**  
H&M's auditors carry out regular checks to ensure that there are no underage workers at the factories. It is extremely rare for child labour to be used by H&M's suppliers or their subcontractors. If, contrary to expectations, child labour is found to be used, H&M requires the supplier to take responsibility and work together with H&M and the families to find a solution in the best interests of the children in question. An investigation is then carried out which looks at how best to resolve the situation based on the interests of the children.

In many instances the solution will involve the supplier contributing financially to give the children access to education, while also compensating the families for loss of income. If H&M discovers that a supplier or any of its subcontractors is repeatedly breaching this ban on child labour, the contract is simply terminated.

We have been working with UNICEF since 2004 to protect the rights of some of the poorest children in the world. At present, we are reaching out to more than two million children and the adults around them as part of two projects in India and Bangladesh, known as All for Children. 25% of the sales price of our annual All for Children collection and additional donations from H&M fund these projects to the tune of around USD 12.5 million to date.

Figure 5: The official response from H&M to the FAQ on child labour

Crisis response strategies:

*Information condition:* Hi ..., we are still investigating the case. In the meanwhile you can find all the information on our website [www.hm.com](http://www.hm.com)

*Apology condition:* Hi ..., together with the supplier, we take full responsibility for the incident. We acknowledge that there are children working in the factories, where H&M goods are being produced.

*Sympathy condition:* Hi ..., we express our sympathy with the aggrieved parties. We feel very sorry for the children who are working in these factories.

### 3.4 Information source

To manipulate the information source, participants either viewed a screenshot of a Facebook post from a friend or a lobby group. The Facebook friend is called Molly Whitestone, which is not an existing person on Facebook. The profile picture we used was collected from Shutterstock, as shown in figure 6. The lobby group is called 'Equality', which is not an existing lobby group on Facebook. The profile picture for this group was also collected from Shutterstock, as shown in figure 7.



Figure 6: Stimuli for the Facebook friend condition (example sympathy)



Figure 7: Stimuli for the lobby group condition (example apology)

The credibility of the information source was measured by four antonyms developed by Ohanian (1990) (e.g. reliable/unreliable and trustworthy/untrustworthy). The items have a high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Competence of the information source was measured by five antonyms developed by Ohanian (1990) (e.g. an expert/not an expert and skilled/unskilled). The internal consistency of these items was high ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

### 3.5 Dependent variables

The dependent variables are reputation, secondary crisis communication, secondary crisis reactions and behavioural intention. Organizational reputation was measured by six items from Schultz et al (2011) concerning credibility and legitimacy, such as 'The organization

delivers high quality products and services'. The items have relatively high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .75$ ). Secondary crisis communication was measured by three indicators, developed by Schultz et al (2011). Respondents were asked how likely they are to (1) share the message with other people, (2) to tell their friends about the incident and (3) to leave a reaction. The answer options were adapted to the medium ('Share the Facebook post'). The internal consistency of these items is relatively high ( $\alpha = .75$ ). To assess secondary crisis reactions, four items from Coombs and Holladay (2008) were taken (e.g. 'I would tell negative things about the organization and their products'). The items have relatively high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .70$ ). Finally, behavioural intention was measured by three items from a scale developed by Stockmyer (1996). One of the items is 'I will continue to buy products from H&M in the future'. Participants indicated their agreement on all these statements on a seven-point Likert scale. The internal consistency of these items is relatively high ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

### 3.6 Participants

The experiment was conducted online in order to reach a high(er) participation rate. The target group consisted of 280 participants of whom 99 were male and 181 were female. The participants varied in age from 15 to 72 years, with a mean age of 26. The education levels varied between no school completed to a University Master's degree. The majority (69%) of the participants had finished either a Bachelor or Master's degree. Finally, almost 98% of the participants had an active profile on Facebook. Overall, we have tried to create a representative reflection of the society. The participants were randomly assigned to a condition.

### 3.7 Procedure

Participants received an invitation with a link to the online experiment. After a short introduction and instruction, respondents were presented with one of the Facebook posts. After viewing the screenshot, the participants filled in the questions about the information source, organizational reputation, secondary crisis communication, secondary crisis reactions and behavioural intention. Finally, the respondents filled in their demographics. Firstly, the questionnaire with the Facebook friend as the information source was launched (appendix 1). When there were enough participants, we have launched the second questionnaire with the lobby group as the information source (appendix 2). In other words, we first collected the data for conditions 1-3 and then for conditions 4-6.

## 4. Results

In this section we will describe the results of our study, in order to accept or reject our hypotheses. Visual inspection of the p-plots and histograms showed that all dependent variables were fairly normally distributed. Results of Levene's test turned out to be only significant for credibility  $F(1, 278) = 4.17, p = .04$ . For all other dependent variables, the assumption of homogeneity was not violated.

### 4.1 Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis proposed that there would be no effect of crisis response strategy on the organizational reputation. In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted a Multivariate Analysis of Variances. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the reputation scores for each response strategy and both information sources. Figure 8 shows the interaction effect between information source and reaction type on the organizational reputation.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of the reputation score (scale 1-7) for each response strategy and both information sources

	Facebook friend	Lobby group	Overall
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Sympathy	4.40 (0.91)	4.04 (0.97)	4.22 (0.95)
Information	4.08 (0.88)	4.15 (0.93)	4.11 (0.90)
Apology	4.25 (0.84)	3.73 (0.95)	3.97 (0.93)
Overall	4.24 (0.88)	3.96 (0.96)	4.10 (0.93)

Analysis of the results showed no significant main effect of response strategy on the organizational reputation  $F(2, 274) = 1.48, p = .229$ . Crisis response strategy has no influence on the estimation of the organizational reputation. According to these results, hypothesis 1 was supported. Subsequently, the results showed a significant main effect of information source on the organizational reputation  $F(1, 274) = 6.04, p = .015$ . The Facebook post of the Facebook friend led to a lower estimation of the organizational reputation than the post of the lobby group. Finally, there was no interaction effect found between response strategy and information source on organizational reputation  $F(2, 274) = 2.52, p = .082$ .

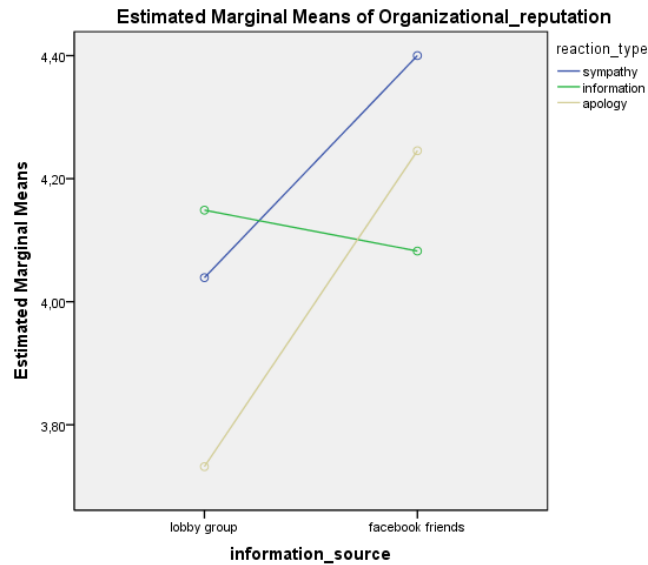


Figure 8: Interaction effect between the crisis response strategy and familiarity with the information source (X=information source, Y=score 1-7 on organizational reputation)

## 4.2 Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis proposed that information would less often produce negative secondary crisis reactions than apology and sympathy. In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted a Multivariate Analysis of Variances. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of the secondary crisis reactions scores for each response strategy and both information sources. Figure 9 shows the interaction effect between information source and reaction type on secondary crisis reactions.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of the secondary crisis reactions (scale 1-7) for each response strategy and both information sources

	Facebook friend	Lobby group	Overall
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Sympathy	4.31 (1.13)	4.20 (0.77)	4.26 (0.96)
Information	4.24 (0.82)	3.88 (1.03)	4.07 (0.93)
Apology	4.36 (0.90)	4.01 (0.99)	4.36 (0.90)
Overall	4.30 (0.95)	4.03 (0.94)	4.30 (0.95)

Analysis of the results showed no significant main effect of response strategy on secondary crisis reactions  $F(1, 274) = 1.01, p = .364$ . There is no difference in secondary crisis reaction as a result of response strategy. According to these results, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

However, the results showed a significant main effect of information source on secondary crisis reactions  $F(1, 274) = 5.72, p = .017$ . Participants who read the Facebook post from the Facebook friend were more likely to tell negative things about the organization than participants who read the post from the lobby group. Finally, there was no interaction effect found between response strategy and information source on secondary crisis reactions  $F(2, 274) = .51, p = .601$ .

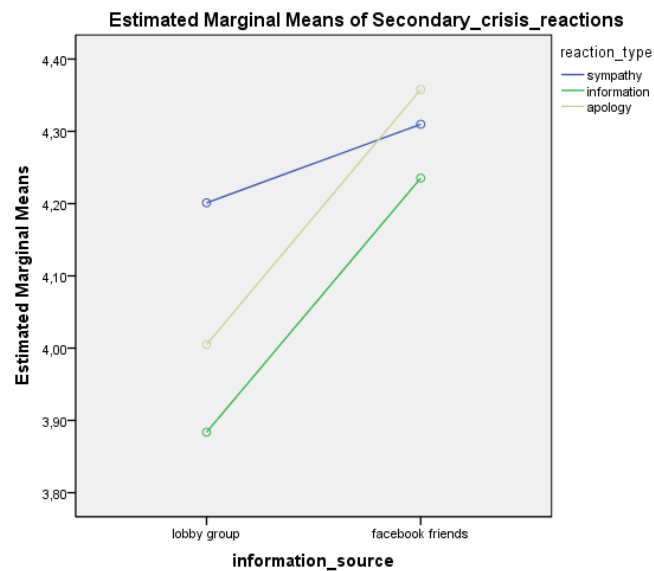


Figure 9: Interaction effect between the crisis response strategy and familiarity with the information source (X=information source, Y=score 1-7 on secondary crisis reactions)

### 4.3 Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis proposed that information would less often lead to negative behavioural intentions than apology and sympathy. In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted a Multivariate Analysis of Variances. Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations of the behavioural intention scores for each response strategy and both information sources. Figure 10 shows the interaction effect between information source and reaction type on the behavioural intention.

Table 3: Means and standard deviations of the behavioural intention (scale 1-7) for each response strategy and both information sources

	Facebook friend	Lobby group	Overall
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Sympathy	3.14 (1.22)	2.83 (0.96)	2.99 (1.10)
Information	3.09 (1.06)	2.86 (1.10)	2.99 (1.08)
Apology	3.21 (1.08)	2.76 (1.09)	2.97 (1.10)
Overall	3.15 (1.11)	2.82 (1.04)	2.98 (1.09)

Analysis of the results showed no significant main effect of response strategy on behavioural intention  $F(2, 274) = .01, p = 0.99$ . There is no difference in behavioural intention as a result of response strategy. According to these results, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

However, the results showed a significant main effect of information source on behavioural intention  $F(1, 274) = 6.52, p = .011$ . Participants who read the Facebook post from the Facebook friend were more likely to (negatively) change their behaviour than participants who read the post from the lobby group. Finally, there was no interaction effect found between response strategy and information source on behavioural intention  $F(2, 274) = .25, p = .780$ .

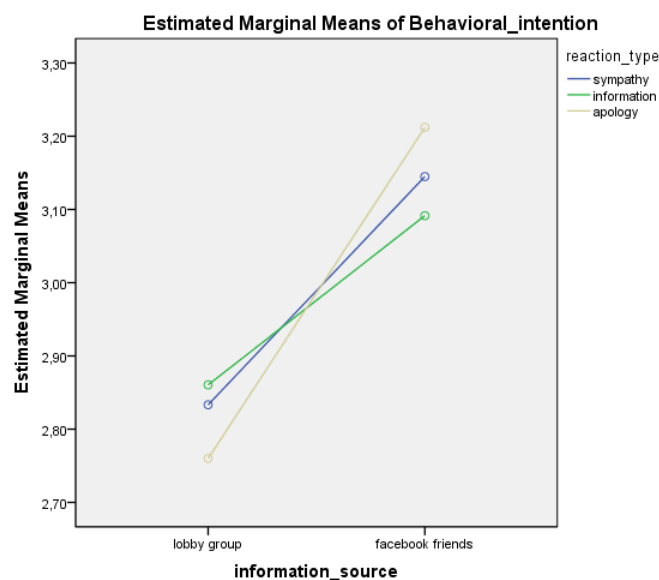


Figure 10: Interaction effect between the crisis response strategy and familiarity with the information source (X=information source, Y=score 1-7 on behavioural intention)

#### 4.4 Hypothesis 4

The fourth hypothesis proposed that there would be no effect of crisis response strategy on secondary crisis communication. In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted a Multivariate Analysis of Variances. Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations of the secondary crisis communication scores for each response strategy and both information sources. Figure 11 shows the interaction effect between information source and reaction type on secondary crisis communication.

Table 4: Means and standard deviations of the secondary crisis communication (scale 1-7) each response strategy and both information sources

	Facebook friend	Lobby group	Overall
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Sympathy	4.80 (1.40)	5.51 (1.10)	5.15 (1.30)
Information	5.00 (1.42)	5.57 (1.12)	5.26 (1.32)
Apology	5.17 (1.18)	5.63 (1.27)	5.41 (1.24)
Overall	4.99 (1.34)	5.57 (1.16)	5.28 (1.29)

Analysis of the results showed no significant main effect of response strategy on secondary crisis communication  $F(2, 274) = .90, p = 0.407$ . There is no difference in secondary crisis communication as a result of response strategy. According to these results, hypothesis 4 was supported. Subsequently, the results showed a significant main effect of information source on secondary crisis communication  $F(1, 274) = 14.58, p = < 0,01$ . Participants who read the Facebook post of the Facebook friend were more likely to share the message, leave a reaction and tell their friends about the incident than participants who read the post from the lobby group. Finally, there was no interaction effect found between response strategy and information source on secondary crisis communication  $F(2, 274) = .24, p = .784$ .

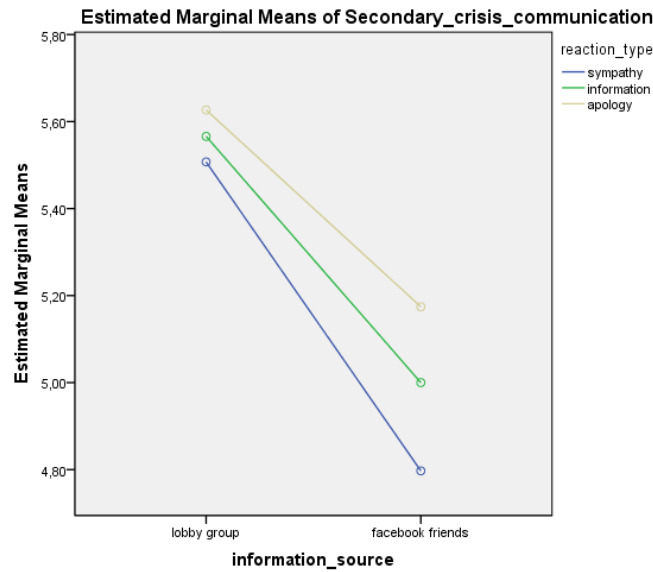


Figure 11: Interaction effect between the crisis response strategy and familiarity with the information source (X=information source, Y=score 1-7 on secondary crisis communication)

#### 4.5 Hypothesis 5

The fifth hypothesis proposed that media use would be a positive predictor of secondary crisis communication. To assess media use, participants answered a question about the time they spent on Facebook. However, we have found a bias in the responses of this question. The majority of the participants (75%) answered that they spend less than an hour or 1-2 hours on Facebook. In that way, we were not able to compare high and low media use. Therefore, it would not be reliable to make an assumption about the relationship between media use and secondary crisis communication.

#### 4.6 Hypothesis 6 and 7

The sixth hypothesis proposed that the Facebook friend would be considered as more credible than the lobby group. The seventh hypothesis proposed that the Facebook friend would be considered as more competent than the lobby group. In order to test these hypotheses, we conducted a Multivariate Analysis of Variances. Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations of the credibility and competence of the information sources.

Table 5: Means and standard deviations of the credibility and competence (scale 1-7) of the information sources

	Facebook friend	Lobby group	Overall
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Credibility	2.54 (1.02)	3.39 (1.13)	2.96 (1.16)
Competence	4.28 (1.15)	3.95 (1.16)	4.11 (1.16)

The results showed that the Facebook friend was considered as more credible than the lobby group  $F(1, 278) = 43.87, p < 0.01$ . On the other hand, the lobby group was considered as more competent than the Facebook friend  $F(1, 278) = 5.73, p = .017$ . According to these results, hypothesis 6 was supported and hypothesis 7 not supported.

Summarizing, there were no main effects of crisis response strategy found on any of the dependent variables. In contrast, information source has a significant main effect on all the dependent variables. Participants who read the Facebook post of the Facebook friend rated the organizational reputation lower (H1), were more likely to tell negative things about the organization (H2), were more likely to change their behaviour (H3) and more likely to share the message, leave a reaction and tell their friends about the incident (H4) than participants who read the post from the lobby group. Subsequently, there were no interaction effects found between information source and reaction type on any of the dependent variables. Finally, there was a significant main effect found of information type on credibility and competence. The Facebook friend was considered as more credible than the lobby group. On the other hand, the lobby group was considered as more competent than the Facebook friend.

## 5. Discussion

In this study, we have examined the effects of crisis response strategy and familiarity with the information source on the organizational reputation, secondary crisis reactions, secondary crisis communication and behavioural intention. In order to answer our research questions, we have conducted an online survey. In this section, we will explain the main results based on existing theories.

### 5.1 Familiarity with the information source

The results have shown a main effect of information source on all dependent variables. Participants who read the Facebook post of the Facebook friend were more likely to be influenced than participants who read the post of the lobby group. This resulted in a lower estimation of the reputation and a greater willingness to change the buying behaviour, share the post, leave a reaction and tell friends about the incident. A possible explanation for this phenomenon is the matter of trust. The participants in the 'friend condition' were asked to imagine that the post was written by a Facebook friend. On the other hand, the participants in the 'lobby group condition' were asked to imagine that the post was written by a lobby group that was unknown to them. This distinction between familiarity with the information source appears to be of great importance. It seems to be more likely to share a message, leave a reaction and tell friends about the incident if the information source is known to you. This effect does not only become visible in the participants' behaviour (secondary crisis communication and reactions), but also in its opinion about the organizational reputation.

The issue of trust corresponds with our findings concerning the credibility of the information source. The Facebook friend was considered as more credible than the lobby group. In that way, one could argue that people are more likely to be influenced by someone they trust. However, the lobby group was considered as more competent than the Facebook friend. It is a remarkable finding that participants appear to value credibility over competence in their judgment.

### 5.2 Crisis response strategy

On the other hand, no main effect of crisis response strategy was found on all dependent variables. These results are partly in line with our hypotheses, based on the study by Schultz et al (2011). They also did not find a main effect of crisis response strategy on the organizational reputation and secondary crisis communication. However, this was in contrast with previous findings by Coombs and Holladay (2008). Their results have shown that apology and sympathy lead to a higher reputation of the organization and produce less (harmful) secondary crisis communication and reactions than information. Schultz et al (2011) call the 'halo effect' as a possible explanation for their findings. This halo effect means that the selected organization, in our case H&M, has a highly positive reputation which may protect the organization during a crisis. In other words, participants were familiar with the organization and had a positive image of it which influenced their answers. They were biased

in advance, whereby the crisis seemed to have no effect. This could also explain why there was no main effect found of crisis response strategy on secondary crisis reactions and the behavioural intention.

### 5.3 Interaction effect

Thirdly, there were no interaction effects found between crisis response strategy and information source for all dependent variables. In other words, it does not matter if an organization responds with apology, sympathy or information to a Facebook friend or a lobby group. This was in line with our expectations, as the crisis response strategy and information source are two different independent variables. The response strategy is related to the organization, while the information source relates to the sender of the initial Facebook post.

### 5.4 Limitations

Strengths of this study are that the experiment was conducted online and not in an artificial laboratory setting. In that way, we have tried to protect the external validity. Secondly, there was a large group of participants involved in the experiment. This contributes to the generalizability of our results. However, there are also some limitations in our study. We have tried to provide a representative reflection of the society, but one group was a clear majority. The participants turned out to be mostly students between 20 and 24 years. Future research should include a more diverse group of participants to protect the external validity. Secondly, we have found a bias in the question concerning media use. In that way, we were not able to test our fifth hypothesis. Future research should include multiple questions concerning media use and pretest them.

### 5.5 Future research

This study provides insight into the effect of public's crisis messages on the organizational reputation, secondary crisis communication and reactions, and behavioural intention. It appeared that familiarity with the information source, the sender of the message, is an important variable in determining people's opinion and behaviour. This information can be valuable for organizations in designing their social media policies. However, this study did not discover how organizations can best cope with public's messages during crisis situations. The results have shown that there is no effect of crisis response strategy on all dependent variables. Future research should investigate whether this is the result of the halo effect. This could be done by using a fictive company for the experiment. Another possibility is

questioning the participants' opinion about the organization in advance and afterwards. In that way, one can measure the effect of the crisis and the organizations' response to it. Secondly, one could investigate which variables, like familiarity with the information source, do determine the publics' opinion and behaviour. Finally, as mentioned before, future research could focus on the effect of media use on the perception of the organization and behavioural intention.

## 6. Conclusion

We have examined the effects of crisis response strategy and familiarity with the information source on the organizational reputation, secondary crisis reactions, secondary crisis communication and behavioural intention. Our research questions were as follows:

*RQ1: How, if at all, does crisis response strategy affect (a) the organizational reputation, (b) secondary crisis reactions, (c) secondary crisis communication and (d) behavioural intention?*

*RQ2: Which effects, if any, do we find as a result of familiarity with the information source (the sender of a critical Facebook post), on (a) organizational reputation, (b) secondary crisis communication (c) secondary crisis reactions and (d) behavioural intention?*

After the data analysis, we can now answer both research questions. The results have shown a main effect of familiarity with the information source on all dependent variables. The public is more likely to produce negative secondary crisis communication and reactions, change its buying behaviour and have a lower estimation of the organizational reputation if the information source is known. Therefore one could argue that trust is an important variable in determining someone's opinion or behaviour according to crisis communication. This corresponds with our findings concerning the credibility of the information source. The Facebook friend was considered as more credible than the lobby group. However, the lobby group was considered as more competent than the Facebook friend. Apparently, participants value credibility over competence in their judgment of the organization. On the other hand, the results did not show a main effect of crisis response strategy. A possible explanation for this finding is the so-called 'halo effect'. This means that the selected organization, in our case H&M, has a highly positive reputation which may protect the organization during a crisis. Future research should reveal whether this is indeed the case. Finally, there were no

interaction effects found between crisis response strategy and information source for all dependent variables.

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## Appendix 1: Questionnaire Lobby group

### Introduction

Dear participant,

Thank you for your participation in my study, I really appreciate it. The results of the survey will be used for my thesis for the master Communication- and Information Sciences. The survey will take about 5-10 minutes of your time, and is completely anonymous. Please remember, it is about your opinion so there are no right or wrong answers.

Best,

Lisanne Verschoor

### Introduction screenshot

On the following slide you will see a screenshot of a Facebook post. It is a message from the lobby group 'Equality' to the official page of H&M. Imagine that the lobby group 'Equality' is unknown to you. **So, you should read the post as an unknown organization has send it.** Please, take your time to **read the post and reaction carefully**. After the screenshot, you will be asked several questions.

### Block 1: Sympathy

Note: The image may take a few seconds to load




## Block 2: Information

Note: The image may take a few seconds to load


[Write Post](#) | [Add Photo/Video](#) | [Ask Question](#) | [Add File](#)


Write something...

 **Equality** ▶ **H&M** 45 mins

Wow... Today, I saw this documentary about child labour in Indian factories. The clothing factories are producing all the goods for H&M. Children are working in dangerous and unhealthy conditions, for just a few cents. It's horrible to see these children getting exploited! Yet, there's still no official response from H&M.

[Like](#) · [Comment](#)

 **H&M** Hi Equality, we are still investigating the case. In the meanwhile you can find all the information on our website [www.hm.com](http://www.hm.com). 14 mins · [Like](#)

Write a comment... 

## Block 3: Apology

Note: The image may take a few seconds to load

[Write Post](#) | [Add Photo/Video](#) | [Ask Question](#) | [Add File](#)

Write something...

 **Equality** ▶ **H&M** 45 mins

Wow... Today, I saw this documentary about child labour in Indian factories. The clothing factories are producing all the goods for H&M. Children are working in dangerous and unhealthy conditions, for just a few cents. It's horrible to see these children getting exploited! Yet, there's still no official response from H&M.

[Like](#) · [Comment](#)

 **H&M** Hi Equality, together with the supplier, we take full responsibility for the incidents. We acknowledge that there are children working in the factories, where H&M goods are being produced. 14 mins · [Like](#)

Write a comment... 

#### Block 4: Information source

Imagine that this post was written by a lobby group, which is unknown to you. Please respond to the following statements:

I consider the lobby group to be...									
Honest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Dishonest	
Reliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unreliable	
Sincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Insincere	
Trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Untrustworthy	

Imagine that this post was written by an unknown lobby group. Please respond to the following statements:

I consider the lobby group to be...									
An expert	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Not an expert	
Experienced	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Inexperienced	
Knowledgeable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unknowledgeable	
Qualified	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unqualified	
Skilled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unskilled	

#### Block 5: Organizational reputation and communication

Please respond to the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
"I am familiar with the organization H&M."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"H&M is concerned with the well-being of its publics."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"H&M is basically dishonest."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I do not trust H&M to tell the truth about the incident."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what H&M says."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"H&M is not concerned with the well-being of its publics."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please answer the following questions:

	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Undecided	Somewhat Unlikely	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
How likely are you to share this Facebook post with your friends?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How likely are you to tell your friends about the incident?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How likely are you to react on this Facebook post?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Block 6: Secondary crisis reactions

Please respond to the following statements:

Please respond to the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
"I would tell negative things about H&M and their products."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I would encourage friends to buy products from H&M."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I would encourage family members or relatives to buy products from H&M."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I would recommend H&M's products to someone who asked my advice."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please respond to the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
"I will continue to buy products from H&M in the future."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"The likelihood of me buying this product again is high."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"Because of the incident, I'll switch to another brand."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Block 7: Demographics

What is your gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

What is your age in years?

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- ☐ No school completed
- ☐ Nursery school (8th grade)
- ☐ High school (VMBO/HAVO/VWO)
- ☐ MBO
- ☐ University Bachelor/ HBO
- ☐ University Master

Do you have a Facebook account?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Average time spent on Facebook per day:

- ☐ I don't have a Facebook account.
- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ 1-2 hours
- ☐ 2-3 hours
- ☐ 3-4 hours
- ☐ 4-5 hours
- ☐ More than 6 hours

**End**

This is the end of the survey. For your record, the Facebook post was fictional. The lobby group 'Equality' doesn't exist on Facebook, and H&M has nothing to do with the post.

If you have any questions, or if you're interested in the results, feel free to contact me.  
Thanks again for your participation!

Best,  
Lisanne Verschoor

NOTE: Please press the blue arrows (>>>) one more time to submit your answers.

OPMERKING: Druk nog één keer op de blauwe pijltjes (>>>) om je antwoorden op te slaan.

## Appendix 2: Questionnaire Facebook friend

### Introduction

Dear participant,

Thank you for your participation in my study, I really appreciate it. The results of the survey will be used for my thesis for the master Communication- and Information Sciences. The survey will take about 5-10 minutes of your time, and is completely anonymous. Please remember, it is about your opinion so there are no right or wrong answers.

Best,  
Lisanne Verschoor

### Introduction screenshot

On the following slide you will see a screenshot of a Facebook post. It is a message from Molly Whitestone to the official page of H&M. Imagine that Molly Whitestone is one of your Facebook friends. **So, you should read the post as one of your Facebook friends has send it.**

Please, take your time to **read the post and reaction carefully**. After the screenshot, you will be asked several questions.

### Block 1: Sympathy

Note: The image may take a few seconds to load




## Block 2: Information

Note: The image may take a few seconds to load


[Write Post](#) | [Add Photo/Video](#) | [Ask Question](#) | [Add File](#)


Write something...

**Molly Whitestone** ▶ **H&M** 45 mins

Wow... Today, I saw this documentary about child labour in Indian factories. The clothing factories are producing all the goods for H&M. Children are working in dangerous and unhealthy conditions, for just a few cents. It's horrible to see these children getting exploited! Yet, there's still no official response from H&M.

[Like](#) · [Comment](#)

**H&M** Hi Molly, we are still investigating the case. In the meanwhile you can find all the information on our website [www.hm.com](http://www.hm.com). 14 mins · [Like](#)

Write a comment... 

## Block 3: Apology

Note: The image may take a few seconds to load

[Write Post](#) | [Add Photo/Video](#) | [Ask Question](#) | [Add File](#)

Write something...

**Molly Whitestone** ▶ **H&M** 45 mins

Wow... Today, I saw this documentary about child labour in Indian factories. The clothing factories are producing all the goods for H&M. Children are working in dangerous and unhealthy conditions, for just a few cents. It's horrible to see these children getting exploited! Yet, there's still no official response from H&M.

[Like](#) · [Comment](#)

**H&M** Hi Molly, together with the supplier, we take full responsibility for the incidents. We acknowledge that there are children working in the factories, where H&M goods are being produced. 14 mins · [Like](#)

Write a comment... 

## Block 4: Information source

Imagine that this post was written by one of your Facebook Friends. Please respond to the following statements:

I consider my Facebook friend to be...								
Honest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Dishonest
Reliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unreliable
Sincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Insincere
Trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Untrustworthy

Imagine that this post was written by one of your Facebook Friends. Please respond to the following statements:

I consider my Facebook friend to be...								
An expert	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Not an expert
Experienced	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Inexperienced
Knowledgeable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unknowledgeable
Qualified	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unqualified
Skilled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unskilled

## Block 5: Organizational reputation and communication

Please respond to the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
"I am familiar with the organization H&M."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"H&M is concerned with the well-being of its publics."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"H&M is basically dishonest."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I do not trust H&M to tell the truth about the incident."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what H&M says."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"H&M is not concerned with the well-being of its publics."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please answer the following questions:

	Very Likely	Likely	Somewhat Likely	Undecided	Somewhat Unlikely	Unlikely	Very Unlikely
How likely are you to share this Facebook post with your friends?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How likely are you to tell your friends about the incident?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How likely are you to react on this Facebook post?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Block 6: Secondary crisis reactions

Please respond to the following statements:

Please respond to the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
"I would tell negative things about H&M and their products."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I would encourage friends to buy products from H&M."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I would encourage family members or relatives to buy products from H&M."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I would recommend H&M's products to someone who asked my advice."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please respond to the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
"I will continue to buy products from H&M in the future."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"The likelihood of me buying this product again is high."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"Because of the incident, I'll switch to another brand."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Block 7: Demographics

What is your gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

What is your age in years?

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- ☐ No school completed
- ☐ Nursery school (8th grade)
- ☐ High school (VMBO/HAVO/VWO)
- ☐ MBO
- ☐ University Bachelor/ HBO
- ☐ University Master

Do you have a Facebook account?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Average time spent on Facebook per day:

- ☐ I don't have a Facebook account.
- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ 1-2 hours
- ☐ 2-3 hours
- ☐ 3-4 hours
- ☐ 4-5 hours
- ☐ More than 6 hours

**End**

This is the end of the survey. For your record, the Facebook post was fictional. Molly Whitestone doesn't exist on Facebook, and H&M has nothing to do with the post.

If you have any questions, or you're interested in the results, feel free to contact me.  
Thanks again for your participation!

Best,  
Lisanne Verschoor

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