Crisis Communication in the Age of Influencers

Protecting Corporate Reputation amidst an Influencer Social Media Firestorm

Geertje Kandelaars

SNR: 2107875

Master's Thesis

MSc Communication and Information Sciences

Business Communication and Digital Media

Department Communication and Cognition

School of Humanities and Digital Sciences

Tilburg University, Tilburg

Supervisor: Dr. Pytrik Schafraad

Second reader: Dr. Joost Verhoeven

June 2024

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Abstract

Influencer marketing has become an important and often used strategy for companies to reach their target audience through people that are trusted by the public, the influencers. However, this strategy also exposes companies to the risk of reputational damage if an influencer they collaborate with ends up in a scandal and ignites a social media firestorm. This study examines how different crisis communication strategies, apology, rectification, and ignore, affect a company's corporate reputation in such scenarios, with the message credibility of the influencer's apology as moderator. The study is a quantitative between-subject design, conducted with an online experiment with 128 participants who were exposed to a fictional case involving the Dutch company HEMA and influencer Anna Nooshin. The findings indicate that the rectification strategy was most effective in protecting the corporate reputation, contradicting previous literature, which often favors the apology strategy. Additionally, while a credible influencer apology positively influenced corporate reputation, it also diminished the effectiveness of the company's apology. These insights contribute to a more extensive addition to the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) for the age in which influencer marketing is widespread.

Keywords: crisis communication, influencer marketing, social media firestorm, influencer scandal, corporate reputation, message credibility

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Introduction

The digital marketing field has changed a lot. Influencer marketing has grown exponentially in the last few years, with a global influencer marketing value of 24 billion U.S. dollars in 2024 (Dencheva, 2024), it has more than tripled since 2019 (Dencheva, 2023). This means that many companies collaborate with influencers to market their products and services. With influencer marketing, individuals, from here on called influencers, are being compensated by companies for posting about a product or service on their social media pages (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). An influencer is someone who is well known and has a good reputation in a certain niche, e.g. fashion, cars, or fitness. They share the knowledge they have on social media platforms e.g. Instagram and TikTok (Fernandes et al., 2022). Influencers are often used in marketing campaigns because they build an emotional bond with their followers, which causes them to have an influence on their followers (Ki et al., 2020). Influencers share authentic and relatable content, that a company itself cannot, because they lack the emotional bond with their followers. The target audience is already engaged with the influencer (Ye et al., 2021). This makes influencer marketing a useful marketing tool for companies to reach their target audience in an organic and engaging way. Influencers have a contract with the company in which the details of that partnership are stated, one-time or long-term, but the influencer is not connected to the company in any other way because the influencer shares the content for the company on their own social media page (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). The risk of working with influencers for companies is that they have less control because of this. There needs to be a balance between the authenticity of the influencer to benefit from the emotional bond and the control of the company to lower the risk of the collaboration (Borchers, 2023).

In the online world, social media firestorms are a simultaneous development. A social media firestorm is when, all of a sudden, there is a lot of mostly negative, social media content against a person or company (Hansen et al., 2018). These social media firestorms can have short- and long-term effects on brand perceptions, depending on the cause of the firestorm, the strength of the firestorm (i.e. amount of social media content) and the length of the crisis (Hansen et al., 2018). With the growth of both influencer marketing and the phenomenon of social media firestorms, there have been a lot of

cases of influencers caught in a social media firestorm. Chrissy Teigen, Myka Stauffer, Lizzo and Anna Nooshin, among others, can talk about their experiences of being the topic of a social media firestorm because of a scandal. Most of them are still big names in the influencer world and did not suffer long-term consequences, but some influencers did (e.g. Myka Stauffer quit influencing totally (Stauffer, 2020)). But not only the influencers suffered the consequences of the social media firestorms. The companies that the influencers work(ed) for are also held accountable for the scandal due to their association with the influencer, so they also become part of the firestorm. They suffered the effects of scandal spillover because of their association with the influencers in a scandal (Kintu & Ben-Slimane, 2020). The use of influencers in commercials to enhance corporate reputation has a positive effect on perceived corporate reputation (Kim et al., 2021), which is why it is assumed that this effect also occurs vice versa.

In 2011, Chrissy Teigen was cyberbullying model Courtney Stodden (they/them/theirs) publicly and privately on Twitter, because Stodden was married to a 51-year-old actor, when they were only 16-years old. Teigen's tweets surfaced again in 2021, when Teigen announced she would quit Twitter because it was a negative space. To which Stodden responded by confronting Teigen with her own negative tweets back in 2011. As a response Teigen apologized for her actions and took responsibility (Perry, 2021). Multiple brands that worked with Teigen, responded by distancing themselves from Teigen and they dropped deals they had with her (Trujillo, 2021). But was that a response with which they protected their reputation?

There has been a lot of research on crisis communication and how companies should respond in case of a crisis. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Coombs (2007) is an evidence-based framework that is commonly used in crisis communication to protect the reputation of a company during and after a crisis. The SCCT suggests multiple strategic crisis responses that match the level of crisis responsibility and the reputational threat posed by the crisis. The crisis responsibility is divided into three different clusters: the victim cluster (low responsibility), the accidental cluster (minimal responsibility) and the preventable cluster (high responsibility). The reputational threat is based on three factors: initial crisis responsibility, crisis history and prior relational reputation. In the

case of Teigen, there was a crisis in the preventable crisis cluster if the companies knew or could have known about the bully messages, and in the victim or accidental crisis cluster if they could not have known about the bully messages. The crisis for Teigen personally was in the preventable crisis cluster because she intentionally posted those bullying messages. The crisis history and reputational reputation are dependent on the company itself. A gap in this theory is that it has a focus on crises within the company, while a crisis with an influencer is not a crisis in the company, although it has an influence on the company because the influencer is associated with the company through their collaboration (Kintu & Ben-Slimane, 2020). The SCCT does not address this situation.

Hence, little is known about crisis communication by a company concerning someone who is outside the company but is a representative of the company, in this case, an influencer. The purpose of this study is to find out how companies can respond in the case of an influencer that is associated with the company in a scandal to protect their reputation using three different strategies. Two strategies advised by the SCCT and one frequently used strategy in practice. The SCCT strategies are based on the perception of crisis responsibility. The influencer that is used for the fictional case in this study, Anna Nooshin, has a crisis history because she has been in multiple crises before (Blanken, 2020; Grazia, 2020; Sluis, 2017). If the company, in this case HEMA, did research before their collaboration it would become clear that she has a crisis history, which is why the crisis can be perceived as a preventable crisis (Coombs, 2007). Coombs (1995, 2007) advises to use the rebuild cluster in that case. The strategies that go with this strategy are apology, rectification and compensation (Coombs, 2007). Compensation is not a feasible option because the case has to do with online bullying, and everyone can be affected by this crisis. This is why the *apology* and *rectification* strategy are advised in this case. The rectification strategy is also commonly used in practice (see appendix A). In this case, the rectification response will be the company sharing that they will not work with the influencer from then on. The third strategy used in this study is ignore, which is not advised but is commonly used in practice. With the ignore strategy the company does not reply at all. Because a higher message credibility results in a more positive perceived corporate reputation (Eberle et al., 2013), the message credibility of the influencer's apology is included in this study as a moderator.

This information results in the following research question:

What is the impact of different crisis response strategies—apology, rectification, and ignore—on social media, communicated by a company in collaboration with an influencer in response to a scandal caused by the influencer, on the corporate reputation of the company, considering the message credibility of the influencer's apology?

Theoretical Framework

Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing is a form of marketing in which individuals get compensated for sharing content about a product or service on social media (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). The individuals compensated for posting about a product or service are called 'influencers'. Influencers typically have a larger audience on social media and they influence the decision-making of their audience (Aslam, 2018). There are different kinds of influencers, which can be categorized according to the number of followers; mega-influencer (<1m), macro-influencer (100k-1m), micro-influencer (5k-100k), and nano-influencer (>5k) (Brewster & Lyu, 2020). They can be used for different purposes, e.g., mega-influencers have more affect directed at them and micro-influencers have more intimate, emotion-based interpersonal connections (Britt et al., 2020). That is why followers of micro-influencers show higher levels of product knowledge and have higher purchase intentions after a post with a certain product and/or service (Kay et al., 2020).

Besides various kinds of influencers, there are also different strategies of influencer marketing, gifting and paid collaborations, and one-time or long-term collaborations. First off, influencer gifting, in this case the company is gifting the influencer their product and/or service, besides the gift there is no payment. The agreements in this kind of influencer marketing may differ, it can be earned or bought exposure (Nilsson et al., 2023). Gifting is seen as earned exposure when the influencer is gifted the product and/or service, and nothing is expected back from them. The gift is sent as a real gift. The exposure is earned because the influencer chooses to share about the product and/or service on their platform (Nilsson et al., 2023). Gifting is seen as bought exposure when the influencer gets a product and/or service, but it has explicit expectations for reciprocation. E.g., the influencer gets free products and shipping in exchange for an Instagram story and post. In this case, the gift is not a real one because work is expected in return (Nilsson et al., 2023). Besides influencer gifting, there is paid collaboration, in which influencers get paid money for their work. They get paid to share about the product and/or service with their own followers and with the brand's target audience (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In a benchmark with more than 3000 marketing agencies and marketers in other companies

(Geyser, 2022), 41% of them use paid influencer collaboration and 31% of them use influencer gifting. Another distinguishing feature of influencer marketing is the distinction between a one-time collaboration and a long-term relationship with influencers. In the one-time collaboration, the company and the influencers made agreements to work together for one collaboration, and after that collaboration, their relationship is finalized (McCormick, 2020). With a long-term relationship, the company and influencer work together for a longer period of time and have established a relationship, the influencer can be seen as an ambassador for the company (McCormick, 2020).

The use of influencer marketing creates a unique, third party relationship between the influencer and the company (Childers et al., 2018). The influencer is not employed by the company but collaborates with it or has contractual obligations to it. This dynamic can be best described as the relationship between a marketing agency and the company they work for. However the relationship is defined by the company's choices in the contract with the influencer. They can give more (creative) control to the influencer, which leads to more believable and authentic content, but less control from the company, which makes the collaboration more risky (Kapitan et al., 2021). Influencers positively affect their followers' trust in marketing posts, which leads to increased brand awareness and purchase intentions, reaching new or potential audiences, and expanding their brand reach (Childers et al., 2018; Lou & Yuan, 2019). This effect can be explained by the parasocial relationships between the influencers and their followers (Farivar et al., 2021). A parasocial relationship is a perceived relationship by the follower with the influencer (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Parasocial relationships are common with influencers because these relationships have a strong correlation with factors like interpersonal relationships, involvement, and likeness, which are strongly present with influencers (Tukachinsky et al., 2020; Yuan & Lou, 2020).

Influencer marketing is a popular form of marketing for companies; the global influencer marketing value has more than tripled since 2019 (Dencheva, 2023). As a result, many companies use influencers in their marketing strategy. According to the benchmark (Geyser, 2022), 60% of the respondents who have a budget for influencer marketing, are planning to increase the influencer marketing budget in 2024. Also 85% of the respondents think influencer marketing is an effective

form of marketing (Geyser, 2022). Concluding, influencer marketing is growing, and many marketers are planning to, or are using influencers in their media mixes (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

Social Media Storms

Social media firestorms occur when, all of a sudden there is a lot of, mostly negative, social media content against a person or company (Hansen et al., 2018). It is a form of negative word-of-mouth on social media, that causes waves of anger within just a few hours (Pfeffer et al., 2014). Social media firestorm messages differ based on different purposes and tones (Matook et al., 2022). The rise of social media firestorms is due to the upcoming power of the digital consumer, which is a result of the shift from traditional media to social media. This shift led to the shift from one-to-many schemes to many-to-many schemes, and because of this, the power went from companies to consumers (González-Herrero & Smith, 2008).

There are different causes for a social media firestorm: product or service failure, social failure, and communications failure. A product failure is a product that is not working like it is supposed to (e.g. The Samsung Galaxy Note 7 with battery issues that caused some to catch fire or explode) (Lopez, 2017) and a service failure is that they do not provide the promised service (e.g. several incidents with Cruise the driverless taxi service, not providing safe transportation) (Regalado, 2023). The product of service failure causes doubt about the companies' ability to provide basic functional advantages, so consumers perceive them as serious issues (Hansen et al., 2018). A social failure is a failure that goes against social norms and values (e.g. the data from Facebook users being collected without consent for political advertising) (Confessore, 2018). A communication failure is caused by offensive communication from a company (e.g. the Pepsi commercial where Kendall Jenner "fixes" the tension between demonstrators and the police by handing out a can of Pepsi) (Victor, 2017). These different causes have different levels of personal relevance, and the higher the personal relevance, the higher the increased motivation of consumers to process the information from the social media firestorm when they are forming their brand perceptions (Hansen et al., 2018).

When companies are affected by social media firestorms, they can experience short- and long-term effects. 58% of the affected companies experience short-term brand perception decreases and

long-term negative effects (Hansen et al., 2018). An example of a social media firestorm concerning a company is the Balenciaga scandal because of which consumers boycotted them. In November 2022 Balenciaga released a campaign in which children were holding teddy bears in bondage costumes. Another ad posted a few weeks later was a Supreme Court document about child pornography (Cohen & Issawi, 2024; Gárgoles & Ambás, 2023). Both campaigns caused a social media firestorm and the hashtags #cancelbalenciaga and #burnbalenciaga were used a lot, those hashtags together got more than 300 million views, and all hashtags related to the Balenciaga scandal combined had more than 600 million views (Cohen & Issawi, 2024; Gárgoles & Ambás, 2023). Besides the firestorm on social media, two of their flagship stores were also vandalized (Gárgoles & Ambás, 2023). Boycotts have the goal of abstaining yourself and other consumers from buying from a certain store. Still, because of social media it can also affect the reputation of the company that is being boycotted (Gárgoles & Ambás, 2023). The first reaction of Balenciaga regarding the crisis was to put the blame on others and file a lawsuit against the production company of the campaign (Gárgoles & Ambás, 2023). 2,5 weeks after the release of the campaign and 7 days after it exploded on social media, Balenciaga and Balenciaga's director apologized for this matter on Instagram, but it took a lot more for them to recover after the damage, because the crisis got a lot of attention because of social media users, media outlets, celebrities and the lawsuit (Gárgoles & Ambás, 2023). Since this firestorm Balencia has been quit on social media and in public. It took more than a year to get back to a more public appearance, but because it is still a quite recent crisis little is known about the long-term consequences (Cohen & Issawi, 2024; Gárgoles & Ambás, 2023).

Social media firestorms also affect influencers. There is no research on the effects of social media firestorms on influencers yet. An example of multiple influencers in a social media firestorm is the 'Blockout 2024' in response to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. This blockout consisted of mass unfollowing and blocking influencers who did not speak out against violence against Palestine and/or supported Israel. The goal was to take away their platforms if they were not using them to help those in need, and in the end, to affect their ad revenue, business sales, social media engagement, and

more (Sloss, 2024). This resulted in multiple influencers losing hundreds of thousands of followers and getting a lot of criticism (Muzaffar, 2024). The long-term effects are not yet known.

Corporate Reputation

Corporate reputation is how a company is perceived by internal and external groups and is based on earlier work (Bromley, 2001; Chun, 2005; Coombs, 2006). A company's reputation is seen as a valuable, intangible asset, that is worth protecting in a crisis. (Coombs, 2006; Fombrun & Riel, 1997; Roberts & Dowling, 2002). It is also an asset that can help protect the company during a crisis, provided that it has a strong, positive reputation (Coombs, 2006). A positive reputation is linked with positive results for companies, including financial performance, sales, attracting customers, attracting employees, government influence, and creating a competitive advantage (Argenti et al., 1998; Carmeli & Tishler, 2005; Davies et al., 2003; Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & Gardberg, 2000; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Nakra, 2000).

Corporate reputations are formed through the information the public gets about the company (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004). This information can be received by interacting with the company, receiving reports about the company and receiving second-hand information from other people (Coombs, 2007). Reputations are based on what people expect from a company and the company's ability to meet those expectations. A gap in which expectations cannot be met is problematic for corporate reputation (Coombs, 2007).

Crisis Communication

Crisis communication is a form of communication carried out by companies during and after a crisis to influence the opinion of stakeholders (Sturges, 1994). A crisis is an unexpected event that can be a threat to the company, both financially and reputationally (Coombs, 2007). Communication has a central role in crisis sensing, avoidance, development, intervention, post-crisis and recovery (Malone & Coombs, 2009; Seeger et al., 1998). As a result, crisis communication is required in all phases of a crisis. Crisis communication can be internal and external communication, and both have different strategies because employees both receive and send crisis communication (Ruck & Men, 2021). Crisis

communication is important for building trust and creating transparency in both internal and external situations (Greeter & Reiboldt, 2022).

In a crisis, different crisis communication models can be used on social media. Commonly used crisis communication models are: situational crisis communication theory (SCCT)(Coombs, 2007), social-mediated crisis communication (SMCC)(Jin & Liu, 2010), and integrated crisis mapping (ICM)(Pang et al., 2009). All of which are studied, to try to identify effective and ineffective response strategies during a crisis (Coombs, 2015). In this study, the SCCT is used because it focuses on protecting reputation and is the most dominant theory in social media crisis communication (Bukar et al., 2020; Coombs, 2007). The SCCT is an effective model for crisis communication if it is properly executed (Santos-Price, 2021). The SCCT is an evidence-based framework for understanding how crisis communication can protect the company's reputation in a crisis, after having addressed the physical and psychological concerns, and provides a framework for effective crisis communication (Coombs, 2007).

The key to SCCT is attribution of crisis responsibility. The Attribution Theory explains the relationship between multiple variables used in the SCCT (Coombs, 2007). When a crisis occurs, a person will attribute responsibility for the crisis and will experience emotions (Coombs, 2007). Attribution is stating what the origin or cause of the crisis is. The SCCT offers three factors that shape the threat to reputation: initial crisis responsibility, crisis history, and prior relational reputation (Coombs, 2007). The treat is the damage that the crisis could inflict if no action would be taken (Coombs, 2007). The first step is assessing what kind of crisis it is, the initial crisis responsibility: victim crisis type (low company responsibility or threat), accidental crisis type (minimal company responsibility or threat), or preventable crisis type (strong company responsibility or threat)(Coombs, 2007). The initial crisis responsibility is also assessed according to the severity of the damage of the crisis. This damage can be financial, physical, environmental, or emotional (Coombs, 2006). The other two factors are intensifying factors; these are factors that, when they are present, intensify the crisis. The intensifying factors are crisis history and prior relational reputation. If companies have had many similar crises before, consumers attribute higher crisis responsibility to the company, because it

suggests an ongoing problem (Coombs, 2007). Also, companies with a negative prior reputation will be assessed with a higher level of crisis responsibility than companies experiencing the same crisis with an unknown or positive prior reputation (Coombs, 2007).

The SCCT offers response strategies to use in a crisis according to attribution. The strategies consist of three objectives to protect the reputation: to shape the attribution of the crisis, to change the perceptions of the company, and to reduce the negative impact (Coombs, 1995). There are three main crisis response clusters under which the strategies are divided: deny, diminish, and rebuild (Coombs, 2007). In the deny cluster, companies attempt to remove any involvement in the crisis, this can be done by telling they are not involved or by telling there is no "real" crisis (Coombs, 2007). At first, Balenciaga used the scapegoat strategy from this cluster by blaming the whole crisis on the production company of the campaign (Gárgoles & Ambás, 2023). In the diminish cluster the companies communicate that the crisis is not as bad as the public thinks or they lacked control over the crisis. In the rebuild cluster, material and/or symbolic forms of help are offered to victims (Coombs, 2007). In the end, Balenciaga used the apology strategy from this cluster (Gárgoles & Ambás, 2023). In addition to the three main crisis response clusters, there is also the bolstering cluster. This cluster can be used when the company has a positive prior relational reputation and as an addition to the other three main clusters (Coombs, 2007). Under the four clusters of crisis response clusters, there are different strategies as explained in Table 1.

Table 1

SCCT crisis response strategies (Coombs, 1995, 2007)

Group	Strategy	Explanation
Deny	Attack the accuser	Confronting the person or group who claim there is something wrong.
	Denial	Claiming there is no crisis.

	Scapegoat	Blaming a person or a group outside of the company for the crisis.
Diminish	Apology	Minimizing responsibility of the company by denying intent to harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.
	Justification	Minimizing the perceived damage that the crisis caused.
Rebuild	Compensation	Offering money or other gifts to victims.
	Apology	Taking full responsibility for the crisis and asking stakeholders for forgiveness.
	Rectification	Preventing a recurrence of action.
Bolstering	Reminder	Telling stakeholders about past good work.
	Ingratiation	Praising stakeholders and/or reminding them of past good work.
	Victimage	Reminding stakeholders that the company is a victim of the crisis too.

Based on the SCCT and examples in the practice of crisis communication, this study focuses on the crisis communication strategies: apology, rectification, and ignore. Coombs (2007) advises a rebuild strategy in case of a preventable crisis, meaning a strong attribution of crisis responsibility regardless of the crisis history or prior relationship reputation. Because the influencer used in this study, Anna Nooshin, has had multiple scandals in the past (Blanken, 2020; Grazia, 2020; Sluis, 2017), HEMA could have known the risks of working with her, so the crisis was preventable. Preventable crises cause the most negative effects on corporate reputation, of all crisis types. In the case of a preventable crisis, the rebuild strategy is advised because it leads to the most positive reputation restoration (Claeys et al., 2010). Because of that, based on Coombs (2007), the rebuild cluster was chosen. In the rebuild cluster, there are the compensation, apology, and rectification strategies. In this crisis of online bullying in the past, compensation is not a feasible option because everyone can be (emotionally) affected by this crisis. As a result, this study uses apology and rectification. In real-life crisis situations, you see that rectification is an often-used strategy (see Appendix A). Besides these two advised strategies, in practice, it is often seen that companies do not respond at all. Because of this, this ignore strategy is also included in this study. When a crisis is ignored and not responded to, the threat becomes reality (Coombs, 2007).

The apology and rectification strategy are both in the advised rebuild cluster, but they have thorough differences (Coombs, 2007). In the apology strategy, the company expresses their regret and asks their stakeholders for forgiveness (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Communication about their emotions has a positive impact on corporate reputation because it reduces anger and increases acceptance of the company's message (van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). In the rectification strategy, the company accepts responsibility and is implementing changes to avoid future incidents (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). There is little research on the rectification strategy compared to the apology strategy. Through all the changes in the SCCT the apology strategy stayed in the theory and the rectification strategy did not. Besides that, the apology strategy is proven to be a strong crisis response strategy for protecting reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Kiambi & Shafer, 2016; Wang et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2017). Lastly, the apology strategy is a strategy that can be used in an array of different types of

crises, so if the crisis is perceived as anything else than a preventable crisis by the public, it is probably still perceived as an appropriate strategy (Chung & Lee, 2021; Coombs, 2015). That is why it is expected that the apology strategy protects the corporate reputation more effectively than the rectification strategy or ignore strategy.

H1a: The apology strategy communicated by the company protects its corporate reputation more effectively than the rectification strategy or the ignore strategy.

A crisis has a certain reputational threat, which can be changed by executing a crisis response strategy. If no crisis response strategy is used, the reputational threat becomes reality; this is the case when the crisis is ignored (Coombs, 2007). Because the rectification strategy is also part of the advised rebuild strategy (Coombs, 2007), it is expected that the rectification strategy is better at protecting the corporate reputation than the ignore strategy.

H1b: The rectification strategy communicated by the company protects its corporate reputation more effectively than the ignore strategy.

Influencer Message Credibility

Credibility can also be called believability; it is the fact that someone or something can be believed or trusted (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.; Wathen & Burkell, 2002). In this study the credibility of the message from the influencer is measured. The source credibility (perceived credibility of the influencer) will likely also have an impact on the message credibility, but this only has an effect if the message is perceived as credible (Smink, 2013). That is why only the message's credibility is measured in this study. In crisis and influencer communication, messages are perceived as more credible when they have low levels of sadness, high levels of sincerity, are specific, concrete, detailed, and have a positive-tone of voice (Balaji et al., 2021; Stephens et al., 2019). Higher message credibility in online media results in a more positive perceived corporate reputation (Eberle et al., 2013). It is expected that because of the spillover effect, the message credibility of the influencer's apology has a positive effect on the corporate communication of the company (Kim et al., 2021; Kintu & Ben-Slimane, 2020). In this study, the crisis is a preventable crisis, preventable crises have the most

negative impact on corporate reputation (Claeys et al., 2010). Because of that, it is expected that a higher message credibility of the influencer's apology will cause less damage to the corporate reputation of the company in comparison with a lower message credibility.

H2: The higher the message credibility of the influencer's apology, the smaller the damage to the corporate reputation of the company.

An apology is most persuasive when it is offered by the one who did actually wrong, the influencer in this case (Benoit, 2024). If the influencer's apology is perceived as credible, it is expected that it will strengthen the positive impact of the company's apology on the corporate reputation.

H3: The higher the message credibility of the influencer's apology, the stronger the positive effect of the company's apology strategy on protecting its reputation.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model
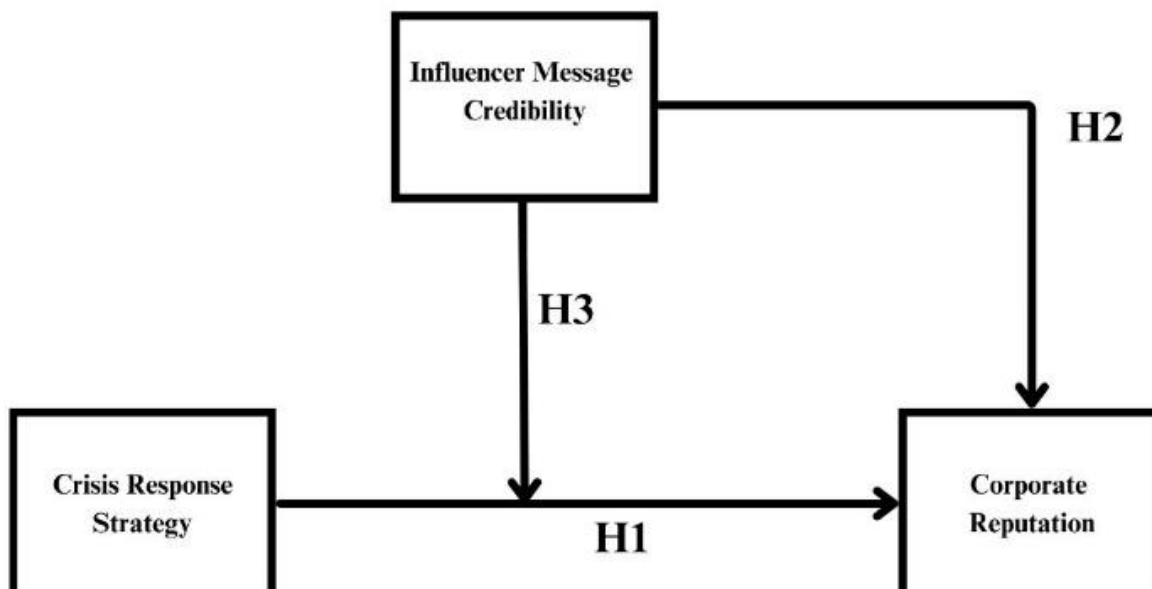
Method

Research Design

This study is a quantitative between-subject design conducted with an online experimental study to examine the effect of three different strategies of crisis communication, as stated by the SCCT: apology, rectification, and ignore, on the reputation of a company. This design provides the possibility to randomize and use a manipulation, and both are necessary to conduct this study. The dependent variable is the change in reputation of the company measured as the difference between the pre-manipulation and post-manipulation scores. The independent variable is the crisis communication strategy, with three conditions: apology, rectification, and ignore. The moderator is the credibility of the apology of the influencer. The online experiment has been created in Qualtrics XM.

Participants

A total of 171 participants started this experiment, of whom 128 finished the online experiment. Participants were mostly in the category of 18-24 years old (91 participants, 71,1%) and consisted of 44 males, 81 females, and 3 who preferred not to say/non-binary/third gender (34,38% male, 63,28% female). 32% (41 participants) of the participants finished their bachelor at the university, 25% (32 participants) finished their master at the university, and 22,7% (29 participants) finished their bachelor at the university of applied sciences. 93,8% (120 participants) of the participants use social media multiple times per day. 76,6% (98 participants) of the participants knew Anna Nooshin, the influencer used in the experiment, before the experiment, and 23,4% (30 participants) follow her or have followed her in the past on social media. The participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: apology, rectification, or ignore (see Table 2). The participants were collected via the personal network, social media (i.e. Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn), SurveySwap.io, and SurveyCircle.com.

Tabel 2

Participants per condition

Condition	Amount
Apology	43
Rectification	43
Ignore	42
Total	128

Materials

The stimulus consisted of self-made fictitious news articles and social media posts. The stimulus the participants all saw the same are: a news article about the scandal (see Figure 2) and the apology of Anna Nooshin in an Instagram story (see Figure 3). After they saw these stimuli, they saw one of the three different crisis responses of the company based on the SCCT strategies, apology, rectification and ignore in an Instagram post by HEMA or a news article (see Figures 4, 5, and 6). The participants were informed before and after the experiment that the case that was portrayed was fictional, but they were asked to empathise with the story as if it were real. For this fictitious case, HEMA was chosen because it had to be a company that as many participants as possible had knowledge about because they needed to know the company to have a perception of their reputation. Because HEMA is one of the biggest companies in the Netherlands (Veerman, 2022), where the sample was collected, HEMA was chosen as the company for this fictitious case. Because Anna Nooshin has been in crises before (Blanken, 2020; Grazia, 2020; Sluis, 2017), she was chosen as the influencer to make the case more believable. A pre-test was conducted with 5 people to assess the materials.
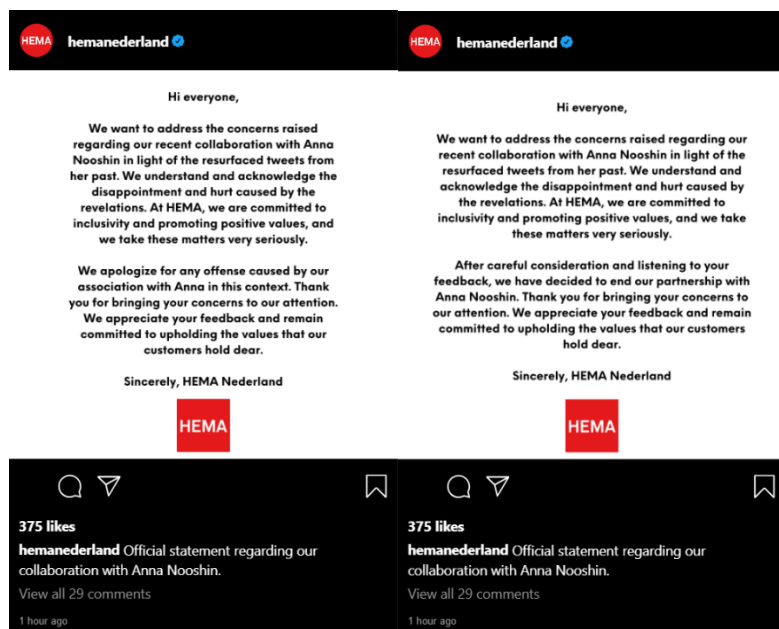
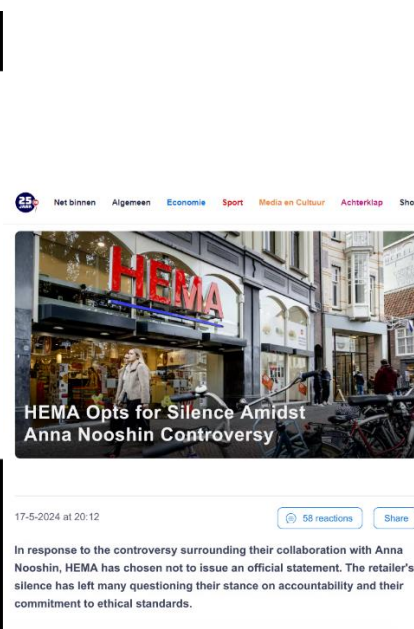**Figure 2**
News article about the scandal
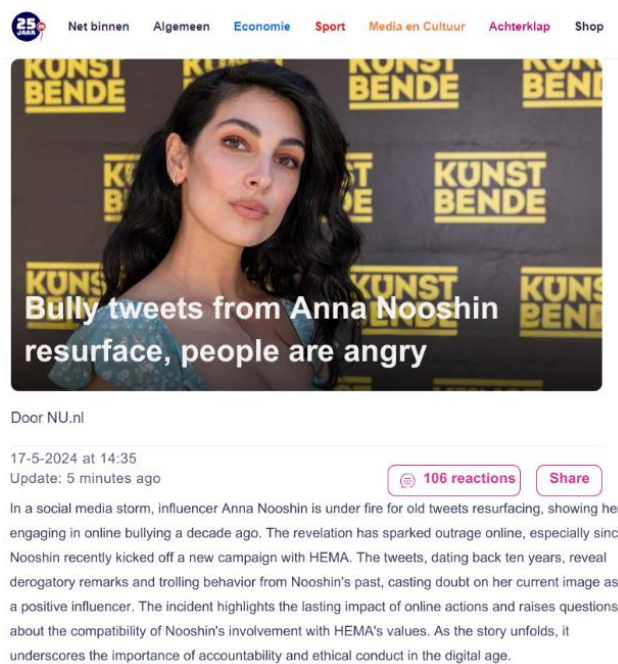
Figure 3
Apology Anna Nooshin

Figure 4
Apology condition

Figure 5
Rectification condition

Figure 6
Ignore condition

Measures

To measure the message credibility of the influencer apology, the self-report measure by

Appelman & Sundar (2016) to measure message credibility was used. This scale was chosen because

it is the only scale that exclusively measures message credibility; others also measure source credibility and media credibility (Appelman & Sundar, 2016). Participants get the question: "How well do the following adjectives describe the content you just read? (from 1 = describes very poorly to 7 = describes very well)" With the following adjectives: accurate, authentic, and believable. Before creating the message credibility variable, a reliability analysis was conducted. The Cronbach's α for this scale is 0.89.

To measure the participants' perception of the reputation of the company, the self-report measure used is the customer-based corporate reputation short scale (CBCRS) (Walsh et al., 2009). In which the eleven questions are divided into three categories, loyalty, trust, and patronage intentions. For this study, ten relevant questions are used (see Appendix B). The CBCRS is proven to be a valid scale to measure corporate reputation (Cintamür & Yüksel, 2018; Terblanche, 2014). The answers needed to be given on a 7-point Likert scale that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree (see Appendix B). Before creating the pre-manipulation and post-manipulation reputation variables, a reliability analysis was conducted. The Cronbach's α for the pre-manipulation is 0.93, and for the post-manipulation it is 0.95.

Procedure

Before the study started, the participants were provided with an introduction to the study, and after that, informed consent was obtained from all the participants. In the introduction, it was stated that the case is fictional but must be looked at as if it were real. The study started with the question if the participants know HEMA; if they did not know HEMA, they were excluded from the study. After that, the reputation pre-manipulation was measured with CBCRS to see what the reputation perception of the participants was before they saw the manipulation materials. After that, the participants saw the news article in which is told about the influencer scandal. In this news article, it became clear to the participants that Anna Nooshin works together with HEMA. After this news article, they saw the apology by Anna Nooshin. Participants were asked if they think the apology is credible, according to the measure by Appelman & Sundar (2016). Then the group of participants were divided randomly into one of the three conditions; in the condition, they saw one of the three crisis responses of HEMA.

After this manipulation, they answered the questions of the CBCRS to measure their perception of the reputation of the company after the manipulation. After this, the participants answered demographic questions. The study was finished after this, and participants got a debriefing regarding the study including the message that the news article and social media responses were fictional.

Efforts were made to control for potential confounding variables that could affect participants' perception of the company's reputation, by using a fictional scandal and measuring the baseline of the participants' perception of the company's reputation.

Figure 7
Study Timeline

Baseline measurement reputation → Newsarticle scandal influencer → Apology influencer → Measurement credibility → Response commpany (3 conditions) → Follow-up measurement reputation

Analyse

The data is analysed with the repeated measures ANOVA, the linear regression, and the multiple regression analysis in Jamovi (version 2.3.28). Before every test, assumptions were checked.

Ethical considerations

This study adhered to the ethical guidelines set forth by Tilburg University, by ensuring participant confidentiality, informed consent, and debriefing procedures.

Results

Hypothesis 1

H1A: The apology strategy communicated by the company protects its corporate reputation more effectively than the rectification strategy or the ignore strategy.

H1B: The rectification strategy communicated by the company protects its corporate reputation more effectively than the ignore strategy.

A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to compare the effectiveness of the apology strategy, rectification strategy, and ignore strategy on the change in corporate reputation. Visual inspection of Q-Q plots indicated that the residuals were approximately normally distributed, with most data points lying close to the reference line and minor deviations at the tails. The repeated measures have only two levels, so the assumption of sphericity is met. The study design ensured that the observations were independent.

The results showed a significant main effect of time ($F(1, 124) = 10.71$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .079$), indicating that corporate reputation changed after the manipulation. However, the interaction effect between time and strategy was not significant ($F(2, 124) = 1.40$, $p = .250$, partial $\eta^2 = .022$). This indicates that the type of strategy did not have a significant effect on the change in corporate reputation after the manipulation. The post-hoc comparisons using the Ptukey correction indicated that the apology strategy ($M_{\text{PreCrisis}} = 4,80$, $SD = 1.18$; $M_{\text{PostCrisis}} = 4.73$, $SD = 1.19$) was significantly less effective in protecting corporate reputation than the rectification strategy ($M_{\text{PreCrisis}} = 5.29$, $SD = 0.87$, $M_{\text{PostCrisis}} = 5.29$, $SD = 1.07$) ($Mdif = -0.52$, $t(124) = -2.48$, $p < .005$) and not significantly different from the ignore strategy ($M_{\text{PreCrisis}} = 5.20$, $SD = 0.84$; $M_{\text{PostCrisis}} = 4.95$, $SD = 1.09$) ($Mdif = -0.32$, $t(124) = -1.51$, $p = .403$). The difference between the rectification strategy and the ignore strategy was also not significant ($Mdif = 0.20$, $t(124) = 0.95$, $p = .607$).

The data indicate that the apology is not more effective than the rectification or ignore strategy in protecting the corporate reputation; it is significantly less effective than the rectification strategy.

Besides that, there is no significant difference between the rectification strategy and the ignore strategy in protecting the corporate reputation. Hence, that hypotheses 1a and 1b are not supported.

Figure 8
The effect of crisis response strategies on the corporate reputation
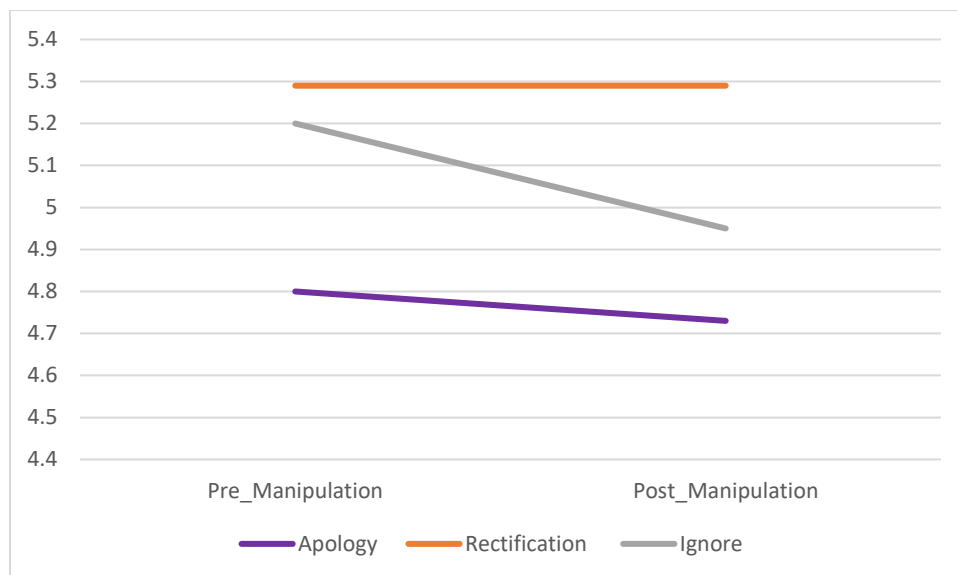
Hypothesis 2

H2: The higher the message credibility of the influencer's apology, the smaller the damage to the corporate reputation of the company.

A linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between message credibility and the change in corporate reputation. The predictor variable was message credibility, and the dependent variable was the change in corporate reputation (corporate reputation post manipulation – corporate reputation pre manipulation). The assumption of linearity was assessed by examining a scatterplot of the independent variable (message credibility) and the dependent variable (change in corporate reputation). The scatterplot did not indicate a clear linear relationship, suggesting that the relationship between the two variables may not be strictly linear. The Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.60, suggesting that the residuals were independent. The plot of residuals against the predicted values indicated homoscedasticity, as the residuals were evenly spread across the predicted values. The normality of residuals was assessed using a Q-Q plot and the Shapiro-Wilk test. The Q-Q plot showed some deviation from normality, indicating that the residuals were not perfectly normally distributed.

However, the Shapiro-Wilk test was significant ($W = 0.820$, $p < .001$), and the linear regression is robust to deviations from normality, so this was not considered a severe violation.

The regression results indicated that message credibility significantly predicted the change in corporate reputation, ($\beta = 0.096$, $t(126) = 2.65$, $p < .05$), explaining 5.26% of the variance this indicates a small to medium effect size ($R^2 = 0.0526$, $F(1, 126) = 7.00$, $p < .05$). Higher message credibility was correlated with a smaller negative change in corporate reputation. Hence, hypothesis 2 is supported by the data.

Hypothesis 3
H3: The higher the message credibility of the influencer's apology, the stronger the positive effect of the company's apology strategy on protecting its corporate reputation.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of message credibility of the influencer's apology and the company's apology strategy on the change in corporate reputation, as well as the interaction between these variables. The assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were assessed and met. The scatterplots of the predictors and the dependent variable indicated linear relationships. The Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.61, suggesting that the residuals were independent. The plot of residuals against the predicted values indicated homoscedasticity, as the residuals were evenly spread across the predicted values. The Q-Q plot of the residuals suggested some deviation from normality, but the linear regression is robust to deviations from normality, so this was not considered a severe violation. The Shapiro-Wilk test was significant ($W = 0.83$, $p < .001$). Multicollinearity was assessed by examining the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. All VIF values were below 10, indicating no multicollinearity among the predictors.

The overall regression model was significant ($F(5, 122) = 3.62$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .13$), indicating that the model explained 13% of the variance in the change in corporate reputation, this is a medium effect size. The main effect of message credibility was significant ($\beta = .14$, $t(122) = 2.39$, $p < .05$), indicating that higher message credibility was associated with a greater positive change in corporate reputation. The main effect of the apology strategy (dummy coded) was also significant ($\beta = .995$, $t(122) = 2.46$, $p < .05$). Importantly, the interaction between message credibility and the apology

strategy was significant (β = -.21, $t(122)$ = -2.30, p < .05), suggesting that the positive effect of the apology strategy on the change in corporate reputation was moderated by the message credibility of the influencer's apology, such that higher message credibility was associated with a reduced positive effect of the apology strategy on the change in corporate reputation. This indicates that the higher the message credibility of the influencer's apology, the weaker the effect of the company's apology strategy on protecting its reputation. Hence, hypothesis 3 is not supported by the data.

Because H1 showed that the rectification strategy was significantly better than the apology in protecting the corporate reputation, the effect of the message credibility of the influencer's apology on the company's rectification strategy is also tested. The main effect of the rectification strategy (dummy coded) was not significant (β = .080, $t(122)$ = 0.21, p = 0.83). The interaction between message credibility and the apology strategy was also not significant but showed a positive number (β = 0.029, $t(122)$ = 0.34, p = 0.73). This indicates that a higher message credibility of the influencer's apology does not significantly strengthen the positive effect of the company's rectification strategy on protecting the corporate reputation.

Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of different crisis communication strategies from a company on the change of their corporate communication with the message credibility of the influencer's apology as moderator, in which the crisis was a scandal from an influencer the company has a collaboration with. This resulted in the following research question: What is the impact of different crisis response strategies, apology, rectification, and ignore, on social media, communicated by a company in collaboration with an influencer in response to a scandal caused by the influencer, on the corporate reputation of the company, considering the message credibility of the influencer's apology?

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the apology strategy would be a better strategy than rectification and ignore in protecting the corporate reputation, and rectification would be better in protecting the corporate reputation than the ignore strategy. The results indicate a different effect: the rectification strategy is a significantly better strategy to protect the corporate reputation than the apology strategy. But it does not show a significant difference with the ignore strategy. These findings were against expectations based on the found literature, which proved that the apology strategy is a strong strategy for protecting the corporate reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Kiambi & Shafer, 2016; Wang et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2017). However, this study found no significant difference between the apology strategy and the ignore strategy. This effect may be explained by the crisis attribution. The type of communication strategy used in crisis communication is based on the perceived attribution of the crisis (Coombs, 2007). For the fictional crisis for this study, a preventable crisis with high attribution was assumed (Coombs, 2007), assuming a lot of people know Anna Nooshin and her past with scandals (Blanken, 2020; Grazia, 2020; Sluis, 2017). 76,6% of the participants knew Anna Nooshin before the experiment, but it is not known if they knew about her crisis history. If the participants attributed the crisis, to someone or something else and/or categorized the crisis in the victim or incidental cluster, other strategies than apology may work better in protecting the corporate reputation (Coombs, 2007).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the higher the message credibility of the influencer apology, the lower the damage to the corporate reputation of the company. The results indicate that this is true.

Although the proportion of variance ($R^2 = 0.0526$) explained by message credibility is modest, the significant positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.096$) indicates that message credibility has a meaningful impact on reducing negative changes in corporate reputation. This finding is in line with the literature that shows that higher message credibility in online media results in a more positive perceived corporate reputation (Eberle et al., 2013). This finding indicates a (positive) spillover effect because the message credibility of the influencer causes a positive effect on the corporate reputation of the company. This supports the literature that found that companies could have negative spillover effects because of influencer scandals (Kintu & Ben-Slimane, 2020), but influencers could also help them enhance their corporate reputation (Kim et al., 2021). The factors that make the message perceived as credible or not are not studied in this experiment, but other studies show that a message can be perceived as credible when it shows low levels of sadness, high levels of sincerity, and if it is specific, concrete, detailed, and has a positive-tone of voice (Balaji et al., 2021; Stephens et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that if the message credibility were higher, the positive effect of the apology strategy by the company on the corporate reputation would be stronger. The data indicates that it is a reverse effect; the higher the message credibility of the influencer's apology, the weaker the effect of the apology strategy from the company. This is against expectations and the findings from Hypothesis 2, because this indicated the positive effect of the message's credibility from the influencer's apology on the corporate reputation of the company. This effect may occur because of the order in which the participants saw the crisis communication messages. Anna Nooshin's apology is the first crisis response the participants are presented with. It could be that when the participants perceived the message as credible, they perceived the crisis to be over, because Anna Nooshin apologized, and they believed it. But after that, HEMA makes their apology as well, which can be seen as unnecessary because they perceived the crisis to be over and/or caused the negative spillover effect of the crisis from Anna Nooshin to HEMA by which they drew negative attention to themselves. As a result, the interaction between Anna Nooshin's apology and HEMA's apology does not have the intended effect.

Because hypothesis 1 showed that the rectification strategy is significantly better at protecting the corporate reputation than the apology strategy, this effect is also tested with the rectification

strategy. The prediction was that if the message credibility were higher, the positive effect of the rectification strategy would be stronger. The results showed a positive number, indicating the hypothesis's effect, but they were not significant. This may be explained by three things. First, the rectification strategy is a commonly used strategy in influencer crisis communication (see Appendix A), so people see this as a customary practice. Second, rectification in this case was stopping the collaboration with the influencer; this is a vigorous decision. The public probably does not expect HEMA to solve the bullying issue, but by making this vigorous decision, they exceed their expectations, which makes the rectification strategy more effective in protecting the corporate reputation than the apology strategy (Schafraad & Verhoeven, 2019), because the apology strategy is more noncommittal. Third, the apology strategy may be the right strategy according to Coombs (2007), but it may not be fitting because of the distance HEMA has from the scandal of Anna Nooshin. But they are close with Anna Nooshin herself because of the collaboration, so rectification is better suited to the relationship that HEMA has with the scandal and Anna Nooshin.

Theoretical implications

This study is the first step into research in the relationship between influencers and companies in crisis communication, more specifically, influencers in a scandal that is associated by the public with the company they collaborate with. The growth in influencer marketing, social media firestorms, and the significant effect of the message credibility of the influencer's apology on corporate reputation indicate a need to integrate crisis communication from influencers into existing models, like the SCCT. The study shows that the message credibility of an influencer can strengthen or weaken the company's response, so it is important to add this information to crisis communication models.

Practical implications

Companies should consider using the rectification strategy when dealing with influencer scandals, especially if the influencer has a crisis history. This strategy appears to be more effective in protecting the corporate reputation, probably due to the decisiveness and perceived commitment to resolving the issue.

Companies should also set up clear contracts regarding behaviour and communication during crises. This can help reduce the likelihood of negative spillover effects, because the results show that the communication of the influencer during the crisis has an effect on corporate communication. In addition, they should establish communication plans that consider the influencer's communication and the effect it has on how the company needs to respond.

Limitations

This study is designed with possible limitations in mind, but despite that, there are some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the sample is not representative of society, mainly in terms of age, education, and gender. 71,1% of the participants were in the age range of 18-24 years old; 63,28% of the participants were female and 34,38% were male; and 82% of the participants finished their bachelor at a university of applied sciences or higher. These numbers are not a true reflection of society, which makes it hard to generalize the findings.

The participants' previous knowledge about Anna Nooshin and HEMA could have influenced the results. Anna Nooshin was known before the experiment by 76,6% of the respondents. This may have an influence on the perceived source credibility, which in turn influences the message credibility (Smink, 2013). Besides that, HEMA is a strong brand and company, with almost no crisis history. This fact probably had an influence on the change in perceived corporate reputation, because they won't be affected as badly as a company with a lot of crisis history.

The last limitation is the substantial difference in perceived corporate reputation prior to manipulation. It is expected that before the manipulation the corporate reputation would be almost the same in all conditions because there is no difference between the groups yet. Maybe with a bigger sample, this effect would not have been there.

Future research recommendations

There are two methodological recommendations for future research, a larger and more diverse sample and conducting a longitudinal study. First, having a sample with more diversity in age, gender, and education will help to generalize the findings. Second, short-term studies may not capture the

lasting effects and changes in public perception on reputation over time, but longitudinal research will provide insight into the long-term impact of the influencer's apology and the company's crisis communication response. This will help develop more effective long-term crisis communication plans.

Future studies should also study the potential tilting point between responding with an apology strategy and responding. At some point, it appears that it is not beneficial for the company to respond with an apology when the apology of the influencer is already perceived as credible. Future research should try to find significant results to support this hypothesis and try to explain how it works. Another possible explanation for the findings is the difference in crisis attribution from the participants than intended when the study was designed. Because of that, future research could do this study with different crisis types with different levels of attribution. In this case, the participants should be asked who they think is responsible for the crisis, so the crisis type is not assumed by the researchers but also confirmed by the participants.

Conclusion

This study examined how different crisis communication strategies, apology, rectification, and ignore, affect the corporate reputation of a company when an influencer they collaborate with is involved in a scandal, considering the message credibility of the influencer's apology as a moderator. The findings indicate that the rectification strategy was more effective in protecting the corporate reputation than the apology strategy, which contradicts previous literature. This may be due to a variety of possible scenarios. Additionally, while a higher message credibility of the influencer's apology did positively affect the corporate reputation, it weakened the effectiveness of the company's apology strategy. This may suggest that if the influencer's apology is perceived as credible by the public, an apology by the company might be seen as unnecessary, highlighting the importance of choosing the appropriate crisis response strategy in crisis communication when an influencer is involved.

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Appendix A

Response strategies in real-life social media firestorms

Company	Influencer	Scandal	Response strategy company	Source
Shell	Anna Nooshin	Water bottle Shell	- Bolstering (reminder) "We are doing a lot of good things" - Deny – scapegoat "She didn't post on our behalf"	(Sluis, 2017)
CTV	Jessica Mulroney	Racism	Drop (rectification)	(Boucher, 2020)
YouTube	Shane Dawson	Online hate	Drop (rectification)	(Grossbart, 2023)
The Safilio Group	Chiara Ferragni	Not donating money she promised to donate	Drop (rectification)	(C, 2024)
Doritos	Samantha Hudson	Violence and sexism	Drop (rectification)	(TMZ, 2024)
Adidas + GAP	Kanye West	Antisemitic comment	Drop (rectification)	(Twohey, 2023)
Nike, Porshe, Tag Heuer	Maria Sharapova	Drug use	Drop (rectification)	(Bradley, 2022)
Royal Air Maroc	Sonia Ngadi	Fire on plane	Ignore	(Kasraoui, 2024)
Multiple TV shows	Nicholas Caeyers	Lawsuit rape	Drop (rectification)	(Het Nieuwsblad, 2023)
Bloomingdales, Macy's, Target	Chrissy Teigen	Online bully	Drop (rectification)	(Trujillo, 2021)

Appendix B

Online experiment

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this online experiment. Your input is crucial for my study into crisis management and its effects on corporate reputation for my master thesis.

In this study, we aim to understand how companies' reactions to crises, influence public perception of the reputation of the company. You will be presented with a hypothetical scenario involving a crisis related to an influencer collaborating with a company. It's important to note that this scenario is fictional, but your responses should be based on the assumption that it's a real-life situation. Your participation will involve reading the scenario and providing your opinion. The study will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Your responses will be anonymous and treated with utmost confidentiality. The data collected will be utilized solely for research purposes.

Should you have any questions or require further information about the study, please don't hesitate to contact me at g.a.kandelaars@tilburguniversity.edu.

Thank you for your valuable contribution!

Kind regards,
Geertje Kandelaars

Please read the following consent form carefully before proceeding with the survey. If you agree to participate, kindly indicate your consent by clicking the "I agree" button at the bottom of the page.

Consent Form:
• I have read the introduction and understand the nature of the study.
• I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.
• I understand that the information I provide will be used for research purposes only and will be kept confidential.
• I understand that the scenario presented in this study is fictional, and I am expected to respond as if it were a real-life situation.
• I consent to participate in this study.

By clicking "I agree" and proceeding with the survey, you indicate your consent to participate in this study.

- o   I agree
- o   I don't agree

HEMA is a Dutch company and has physical stores and a webshop.

Do you know HEMA?

- o   Yes
- o   No

Answer the statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am a loyal customer of HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I trust HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to remain a customer of HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have developed a good relationship with HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have great confidence in HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I plan to shop at HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am loyal to HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can depend on HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to shop at HEMA in the future	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
HEMA can be relied upon	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Read the news article (you can continue after 20 seconds).

Bully tweets from Anna Nooshin resurface, people are angry

Door NU.nl

17-5-2024 at 14:35
Update: 5 minutes ago

106 reactions   Share

In a social media storm, influencer Anna Nooshin is under fire for old tweets resurfacing, showing her engaging in online bullying a decade ago. The revelation has sparked outrage online, especially since Nooshin recently kicked off a new campaign with HEMA. The tweets, dating back ten years, reveal derogatory remarks and trolling behavior from Nooshin's past, casting doubt on her current image as a positive influencer. The incident highlights the lasting impact of online actions and raises questions about the compatibility of Nooshin's involvement with HEMA's values. As the story unfolds, it underscores the importance of accountability and ethical conduct in the digital age.

Read the Instagram Story (you can continue after 10 seconds).

18:05

annanooshin ✔ 8u   ⋯   ✕

Hi everyone,

I want to address the old
tweets that resurfaced
recently. I'm truly sorry for the
hurtful language and behavior.
It's not who I am today.

I apologize to those I've
disappointed. I'm committed
to learning and doing better.

Thank you for holding me
accountable. I promise to be
more mindful in the future.

Sincerely,
Anna Nooshin

♥

chatbericht sturen   ♡   ⊲

Q7

How well do the following adjectives describe the apology of Anna Nooshin you just read?

	Describes very poorly	Describes poorly	Describes somewhat poorly	Neutral	Describes somewhat well	Describes well	Describes very well
Authentic	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Accurate	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Believable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Read the statement of HEMA (you can continue after 20 seconds).

Read the statement of HEMA (you can continue after 20 seconds).


HEMA hemanederland ✓

Hi everyone,

We want to address the concerns raised regarding our recent collaboration with Anna Nooshin in light of the resurfaced tweets from her past. We understand and acknowledge the disappointment and hurt caused by the revelations. At HEMA, we are committed to inclusivity and promoting positive values, and we take these matters very seriously.

After careful consideration and listening to your feedback, we have decided to end our partnership with Anna Nooshin. Thank you for bringing your concerns to our attention. We appreciate your feedback and remain committed to upholding the values that our customers hold dear.

Sincerely, HEMA Nederland

HEMA

375 likes

hemanederland Official statement regarding our collaboration with Anna Nooshin.

View all 29 comments

1 hour ago
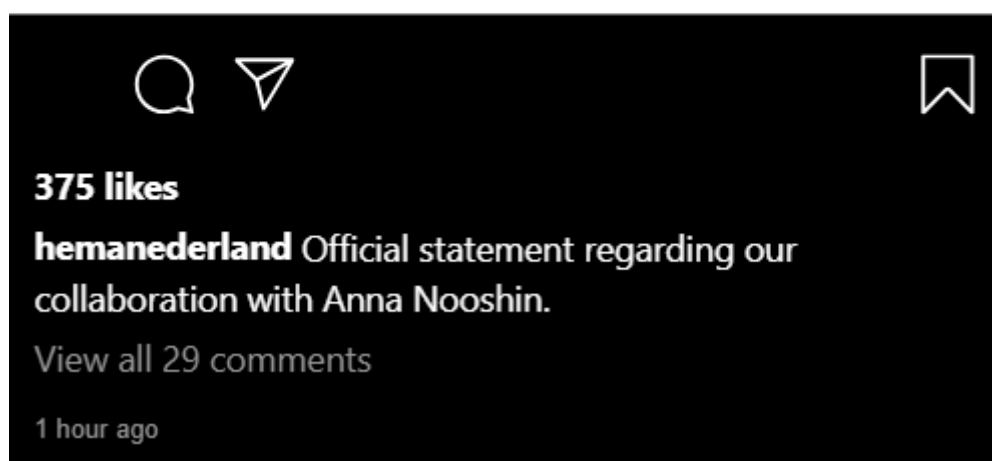
Read the news article (you can continue after 10 seconds).

Net binnen   Algemeen   Economie   Sport   Media en Cultuur   Achterklap   Shop

HEMA Opts for Silence Amidst Anna Nooshin Controversy

17-5-2024 at 20:12   58 reactions   Share

In response to the controversy surrounding their collaboration with Anna Nooshin, HEMA has chosen not to issue an official statement. The retailer's silence has left many questioning their stance on accountability and their commitment to ethical standards.

Answer the statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am a loyal customer of HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I trust HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to remain a customer of HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have developed a good relationship with HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have great confidence in HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I plan to shop at HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am loyal to HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can depend on HEMA	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to shop at HEMA in the future	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
HEMA can be relied upon	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

These are the last few questions.

With what gender do you identify?

- o Male
- o Female
- o Non-Binary / Third gender
- o Prefer not to say
- o Other… (type here)

What is your age?

- o Under 18
- o 18-24
- o 25-34
- o 35-44
- o 45-54
- o 55-64
- o 65-74
- o 75-84
- o 85 or older

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- o Primary school
- o High school
- o Mbo
- o Associate degree
- o Hbo bachelor
- o University bachelor
- o Hbo master
- o University master
- o University Phd
- o Other… (type here)

How often do you use social media?

- o Multiple times a day

o   Once a day
o   A few times a week
o   Once a week
o   A few times a month
o   Rarely
o   Never

How many social media influencers do you follow?

o   None
o   1-5
o   6-10
o   More than 10

How often do you engage with content from social media influencers? (e.g., liking, commenting, sharing, or clicking on links)

o   Multiple times a day
o   Once a day
o   Multiple times a week
o   Once a week
o   A few times a month
o   Rarely
o   Never

Are you familiar with Anna Nooshin?

o   I know who she is, but I do not follow her
o   I know who she is, I followed her in the past, but not anymore
o   I follow her
o   I don't know who she is

Click on the arrow at the bottom to submit the survey.

Dear Participant,

Please note that the whole scenario regarding Anna Nooshin and HEMA is fake. The scenario was created as fiction just for the purpose of this study.

Thank you very much for participating in this study. I would like to provide you with more information about the purpose of this experiment.

In this research, I investigate how companies respond to crises and how these responses affect the perception of their reputation. The scenario you read was fictional and specifically designed to measure your reactions to different crisis response strategies. There were three different response strategies in the experiment, and you were shown one of these strategies. The strategies were randomized for each participant.

Your responses help us better understand which strategies are most effective in maintaining or improving corporate reputation.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to ask. Your participation and the information you provided are highly appreciated and will remain strictly confidential.

If you have any further questions or would like to learn more about the research, you can contact me at g.a.kandelaars@tilburguniversity.edu.

Thank you again for your valuable contribution!

Kind regards,
Geertje Kandelaars