

**Consumers' responses to crisis: The effects of accounts in  
organisational crisis communication**



**Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen**

Master Thesis

Carolijn Visscher

S4799127

Supervisor: J. Baranova

Assessor: L.A. Morano

Master International Business Communication, Faculty of Arts

Radboud University Nijmegen

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## **Abstract**

Accounts are often utilised to explain the untoward behaviour of an individual. However, accounts are also used by companies to explain an organisational crisis. It is essential for a company to use an adequate crisis response as it may reduce the damage a crisis can do to the corporate reputation and the negative effect a crisis can have on stakeholders' behavioural intentions, such as their purchase intention. The accounts "excuses" and "justifications" are frequently used by both individuals and organisations to explain an untoward situation. However, it is important to take into account that an organisation could choose to not react to a crisis as it buys time to collect proper information or avoid listening to the inquiries of certain stakeholders. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to examine the effects of the use of the excuse strategy, the justification strategy, and the no account strategy in crisis communication on perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention. In an online experiment, consumers reacted to three organisational crises. The participants read three news articles and three companies' reactions to the corresponding crisis, which either consisted of an excuse, a justification or no account. The results showed that type of account does not have an effect on perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention. However, the findings should be interpreted carefully since the manipulation check showed that the participants did not perceive significant differences between the conditions. This study underlines the importance of future research on general and situational factors that could influence consumers' perceptions in crisis communication.

**Keywords:** *Accounts, crisis communication, crisis response strategies, perceived organisational reputation, purchase intention*

## **Introduction**

Explanations play an important part in daily conversations between interlocutors, as they are used to explain actions, feelings, thoughts, events and utterances. For example, when an individual asks if his friend wants to grab a coffee, but the friend has a meeting in a minute, this friend could be inclined to answer with the reason why it is not possible. Another example is when a person asks his friend which pair of shoes fits her better and the friend explains why one pair of shoes is preferred. Thus, there are many situations in which this linguistic phenomenon can be used. Explanations can be given when, for example, an individual makes a request (Baranova & Dingemanse, 2016), when giving advice to someone (Waring, 2007) or

even when a doctor instigates treatment actions for his patients (Parry, 2009). In addition, explanations are often used to explain untoward actions. This particular type of explanation is called an account (Baranova & Dingemanse, 2016; Buttny & Morris, 2001). There are two main types of accounts, namely excuses and justifications (Scott & Lyman, 1968). Accounts are often used in a conversation when an out-of-the-ordinary or delicate event occurred. For instance, when an individual is late for a meeting due to the fact that the car broke down or there was slow traffic, the person can explain the untoward behaviour. It may prevent interlocutors from thinking negatively about the individual as it explains behaviour.

Accounts are not only used in conversations to explain unpleasant actions, but also in institutional settings. Similar to an individual, an organisation can show unacceptable behaviour which can result in an organisational crisis. Nowadays, many organisations face crises, which can have negative effects on the organisation's reputation (Coombs, 2007) and on behavioural intentions of the stakeholders (e.g., Lyon & Cameron, 2004). For example, the pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca faced a delivery crisis in the beginning of 2021 as the EU accused the company of breaching its COVID-19 vaccine contract and subsequently, the EU announced that it will sue AstraZeneca (Frater & Dewan, 2021). The accusation can form a serious threat to the organisation. Due to the arrival of social media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube, news can be distributed rather fast as it has become easier to access content online and individuals can continuously interact with each other. In order to reduce the damage a crisis can do to an organisation, it is essential for the company to react in an adequate way. An account can be given in order to explain the crisis situation and it may diminish the harm a crisis can cause. The company can opt to use an excuse or a justification, however, it can also choose not to give an account. Therefore, the current study examined to what extent consumers' responses to organisational crisis communication differ depending on the type of account provided by an organisation.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **The effectiveness of accounts**

An explanation tends to answer an interlocutor's information seeking question in order to make an utterance more understandable by providing missing information, making something probable, or making abstract issues concrete (Faye, 1999). Thus, explanations are an essential

part of the conversation as they elaborate on an event that happened and they clarify the meaning of certain actions. As an explanation is a broad concept, researchers have made a distinction between the general phenomenon that involves causal statements for any behaviour and the subtype of reason that is used in the context of an untoward action, which is often referred to as an account (Baranova & Dingemanse, 2016; Buttny & Morris, 2001). The original definition of an account is “a statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behaviour- whether that behaviour is his own or that of others, and whether the proximate cause for the statement arises from the actor himself or someone else” (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 46). The concept of “explanation” is often distinguished from the term “account”, as an explanation does not necessarily involve a statement of an untoward action in an event that happened and does not have an effect on a relationship.

Various types of accounts have been identified in the literature (e.g., Buttny & Morris, 2001; Schönbach, 1980). The main types are considered to be excuses and justifications, originally conceptualised by Scott & Lyman (1968). Excuses are used to deny full responsibility by connecting the negative behaviour to various external circumstances. For example, a soldier admits that he is wrong by killing, but claims he could not do anything about it since he is “under orders” (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 47). Hence, excuses tend to diminish the speaker’s responsibility for the problematic behaviour. Justifications are used to take responsibility for the action, however, justifications deny that the event is inappropriate. For example, a soldier admits that he killed men, but denies that he did act immorally as he killed the enemies and they deserved their fate (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 47). Thus, justifications tend to deflect the problematic nature of behaviour while retaining responsibility for it.

Research has shown that accounts are given in a variety of conversational contexts, for example, in daily conversations (Baranova & Dingemanse, 2016; Waring, 2007). Additionally, accounts are used in institutional settings, such as in healthcare communication (Parry, 2009) and marketplace interactions (Dunning, Pecotich & O’Cass, 2004). Accounts are given when an out-of-the ordinary or a delicate event happens in a conversation. For example, requests involve imposition on the recipient (Baranova & Dingemanse, 2016), while giving advice involves intrusion in personal matters and may suggest that the speaker knows more than the recipient. The reason why these situations are often accompanied by accounts is because they threaten the speakers’ and recipients’ face, which is referred to as ‘face-threatening acts’ (FTAs) (Brown & Levinson, 1987). A “face” is the public self-image that an individual desires to have for himself-or herself based on approved social attributes (Goffman, 1955). According to

Politeness Theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), individuals have a face which they desire to maintain and protect. Therefore, using politeness strategies can mitigate or avoid an FTA and providing an account is such a strategy. Confirmatively, research has shown that an account can indeed save an individual's face (Waring, 2007).

From the psychological perspective, the appeal of using accounts is captured in Attribution Theory, which suggests that individuals tend to explain the causes of their actions and behaviour in order to make sense of the social world around them (Heider, as cited in Weiner, 2006). Weiner (2006) argues that individuals specifically tend to use accounts when the situation or action is perceived as negative or unexpected. The reason for the use of accounts in an untoward situation is that individuals attribute responsibility to an event or action. Responsibility is attributed when an individual examines the behaviour of another individual in a social context, which is based on control and intention. If a person failed to live up to expectations and it is due to lack of effort to behave adequately, the person can be seen as responsible, because he/she has control over the situation. Additionally, an individual is held more responsible for an intentional action than for an accidental action (Weiner, 2006). Thus, when a person has control over a certain event or does perform a certain action intentionally, more responsibility is attributed than when the situation is uncontrollable or accidental. When the attributed responsibility is high, the behaviour of an individual can be perceived as more negative than when the attributed responsibility is low. Higgins & Snyder (1991) argued that if the untoward behaviour is more severe and an actor can be considered responsible for the behaviour, the untoward event is more likely to damage the actor. Subsequently, the actor is more likely to offer accounts for his/her behaviour. An account helps to maintain a positive image and a sense of control (Higgins & Snyder, 1991). Since a person using an account accepts the responsibility for an untoward action, recipients perceive the person as more honest and trustworthy than when he/she denies or does not react to the occurred situation (Weiner, Graham, Peter & Zmuidinas, 1991).

### **The use of accounts in crisis communication**

In the same way as participants in interaction find themselves in delicate situations where their face is threatened, an organisation can also experience a crisis of similar kind. A crisis is “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders related to health, safety, environmental, and economic issues, and can seriously impact an

organisation's performance and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs, 2014, p. 3). The unexpected event forms both a reputational and a financial threat to the organisation's operations (Coombs, 2007). A reputation serves as the 'face' of an organisation as it facilitates economic transactions by providing incentives to behave in acceptable ways, and functions as a performance bond and a signal of probity (Dowling, 2016). Therefore, it is important to maintain a good reputation, especially in times of crisis. If a reputation changes from good to bad, it can change how stakeholders interact with the organisation (Coombs, 2007). Stakeholders, such as consumers, employees and investors, are important for a company, as stakeholders can be affected by the company or can affect the company (Freeman, 1984). A crisis can influence the behavioural intentions of stakeholders, such as their purchase intention. Several studies showed that crises have negative effects on purchase intention (e.g., Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Siomkos & Kurzbard, 1994). If a company does not sell its product, this may lead to low stock prices and a low market share. Thus, a crisis can do severe harm to an organisation. In order to minimise the damage of a crisis, the organisation requires an effective crisis communication strategy, including the proper use of accounts as to why and how the crisis occurred. In addition to the fact that accounts have an important function of maintaining relationships in casual interactions, they are also essential in a delicate situation. Just like casual interaction, accounts provided by an organisation can help to save its public face or in this case, its reputation. For example, Shaw, Wild & Colquitt (2003) showed that when a company gives an adequate account in an undesirable situation, employees are less likely to respond negatively towards the organisation. Thus, the use of accounts could positively affect the way a company is perceived by the employees, customers and other stakeholders.

When a company encounters a crisis, it is important to have an effective crisis communication strategy as it is used as a defence mechanism to deal with the negative outcomes of a crisis. Especially in today's society it is important to react rapidly as news is distributed quickly due to social media. Nowadays, companies embrace the use of social media as means of communication as it is the direct route to the corporate reputation (Coombs, 2015). In order to diminish the negative outcomes a crisis can cause, Coombs (2006) developed the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which is composed of three elements: the crisis situation, the crisis response strategies and a system for matching the crisis situation and the crisis response strategies. Determining the cause of the crisis is an essential part of choosing the adequate crisis communication strategy, because if the cause of the crisis attributes a high level of responsibility to the company, it could negatively affect stakeholders' perceptions

(Coombs, 2007). When stakeholders assign a high level of attributed responsibility to a company, it may affect the company more than when stakeholders assign a low level of attributed responsibility as it may lead to negative behavioural intentions due to negative stakeholders' perceptions. Therefore, the roots of the SCCT originate from Attribution Theory. The SCCT developed three crisis situation clusters corresponding with different levels of responsibility attributed to the failure event: 1) the victim cluster, 2) the accidental cluster, and 3) the preventable cluster (Coombs, 2006). In the victim cluster, the company is also a victim of the crisis due to natural disasters, rumours, workplace violence or product tampering/malevolence. When the actions of an organisation caused an unintentional crisis, for example by technical breakdown accidents or technical breakdown recalls, the crisis is categorised in the accidental cluster. In the preventable cluster, the organisation did know about the risk they exposed individuals to as they took inappropriate actions or violated a law/regulation.

It is essential that the company reacts in a way that fits with the severity and nature of the crisis. Therefore, the SCCT provides several crisis response options which can be used to protect the organisational reputation and rebuild legitimacy (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Coombs (2006) defines three basic crisis response options for using the crisis response strategy, namely the "deny" response option, the "diminish" response option and the "deal" response option. Coombs (2006) identified various strategies that correspond with a specific crisis response option. If a company opts to use the "deny" response option, the company will declare that the crisis did not exist for the organisation. This can be done by the following strategies: attacking the accuser (i.e., confronting the party accusing the organisation of the wrongdoing), denial (i.e., asserting that there is no crisis), and scapegoat (i.e., blaming a party outside the organisation of the wrongdoing). When using the "diminish" response option, the company will accept that the crisis occurred, but it will attempt to alter the attributions in order to make the crisis appear less negative and less important. The appropriate strategies corresponding with the "diminish" response option consist of excuse (i.e., denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the crisis) and justification (i.e., minimising the perceived damage caused by the crisis). The "deal" response option attempts to change how the stakeholders perceive the organisation, which can be done by the following strategies: ingratiation (i.e., praising stakeholders and reminding them of the company's past good works), concern (i.e., expressing concerns for the victims), compassion (i.e., offering money or other gifts to victims),

regret (i.e., indicating that the organisation feels bad about the crisis) and apology (i.e., asking the stakeholders for forgiveness).

Furthermore, a company chooses a crisis response strategy within a crisis response option based on the level of responsibility that it accepts for a crisis. Therefore, Coombs (2006) suggests that the “deny” response option should be used in the victim cluster, the “diminish” response option in the accident cluster, and the “deal” response option in the intentional cluster. If a company selected the crisis response option that fits with the attributed level of responsibility, the company can choose one of the crisis response strategies that fall within the corresponding crisis response option. The crisis response strategies can be used to repair reputation, reduce negative effects and prevent negative behavioural intentions (Coombs, 2007). Coombs (2006) suggestion of using the adequate crisis response strategy in response to a particular crisis situation was confirmed by a meta-analysis of Ma and Zahn (2016) as the researchers showed that when the level of attributed responsibility matches the crisis response strategy, the organisation’s reputation is less damaged.

Previous research examined the effectiveness of the crisis response strategies on consumer perceptions. For instance, Mattila (2009) focused on the extreme ends of responsibility, namely deny (i.e., taking no responsibility) or apologise (i.e., taking full responsibility) strategies for the crisis. The former is part of the “deny” response option, while the latter is part of the “deal” response option. The results showed that taking no responsibility led to a more negative attitude and behavioural intentions than when the company took responsibility (Mattila, 2009). Similar to Mattila (2009), Lyon and Cameron (2004) examined the defensive (i.e., “deny” response option) and the apologetic (i.e., “deal” response option) approach of crisis communication. The scholars found that apologising (i.e., taking full responsibility) for the crisis had a more positive effect on consumer’s attitudes towards the company and purchase intention than when the organisation denied the crisis, i.e., took no responsibility. Thus, both studies showed that taking responsibility by using an adequate crisis response strategy leads to better consumers’ responses than taking no responsibility.

Although Coombs (2006) discussed the importance of matching the adequate response option to the crisis cluster, both previous mentioned studies did not take into account the crisis cluster. In a rare case, Claeys, Cauberghe and Vynkce (2010) examined the differences between the crisis clusters and found that a crisis within the preventable cluster had more negative effects on corporate reputation than a crisis within the accidental cluster or victim cluster. The possible cause is that individuals attribute more responsibility to a preventable crisis than an accidental

or victim crisis as the company knew about its untoward behaviour. However, no difference was found between the accidental crisis and the victim crisis. It may seem logical that in a preventable crisis situation, recipients blame the company more than in another crisis situation as the company knew about the untoward behaviour (Coombs, 2006). Therefore, taking responsibility is a good strategy of a company, because if the company denies being responsible for the crisis even though it is guilty, it will intensify the damage to the organisation and its reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). For a victim cluster, it seems plausible that there are no negative effects on corporate reputation as the company was also a victim of the crisis (Coombs, 2006). In this case, there is no reason to take responsibility for the crisis as a company could not do something about it. However, a crisis within the accidental cluster could go both ways, as the organisation does not have control over the untoward action that has happened, however, the company is responsible. It is especially essential to use the adequate crisis response option and the corresponding crisis response strategies in this case, as it may influence whether the crisis would lead to negative effects on corporate reputation and behavioural intentions. Little research has been done focusing on the crisis clusters, specifically the accidental crisis cluster. Therefore, this study focused on crisis situations that fall within the accidental cluster.

### **The “diminish” response option and its crisis response strategies**

As mentioned earlier, when a crisis falls within the accidental cluster, the crisis was unintentional and uncontrollable (Coombs, 2006). Responsibility is still attributed as the company can be seen as accountable, but not fully responsible as the organisation did not expect the crisis situation. For example, when the computer system of an organisation has a technical error and as a result, private data of its customer has become accessible for hackers, the company can be held accountable as it is the company’s responsibility to keep the private data safe. However, the technical error can be seen as unforeseeable and thus, unintentional and uncontrollable. In order to minimise the attributed responsibility that stakeholders assign to the company for the crisis, it is essential that the company explains the situation by using the adequate response option. The appropriate crisis response option corresponding to the accidental cluster is the “diminish” response option (Coombs, 2006; Ma & Zahn, 2016).

When using the “diminish” response option, the company will accept that the crisis occurred, but it will attempt to alter the attributions in order to make the crisis appear less severe and less important (Coombs, 2006). As proposed by Coombs (2006), the appropriate strategies corresponding with the “diminish” response option consist of the account types excuses and

justifications as they both attempt to limit the organisation's responsibility for the crisis. In the SSCT, excuses are utilised as a way for crisis managers to minimise organisational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the event that triggered the crisis (Coombs, 2006). This means that the untoward action was not intended to occur, however, accidents are portrayed to be a natural part of the operation of any company. In line with Scott & Lyman's (1968) definition of excuses, an excuse is utilised to admit the wrongdoing, but the wrongdoing is something that happens in external circumstances. Hence, the company cannot be considered responsible for or having caused the crisis intentionally. In addition, justifications are used as a way for crisis managers to minimise the perceived damage caused by the crisis by stating that the crisis is minor and irrelevant, for example, by claiming that there was no serious damage (Coombs, 2006). The definition of justifications by Scott & Lyman (1968) in conversational analysis corresponds with the justification strategy in the SCCT as justifications can admit to the wrongdoing, however, the wrongdoing was acceptable.

Despite the fact that both justifications and excuses are used to explain a crisis within the accidental cluster, there are differences between the two crisis response strategies in their nature and this may lead to stakeholders perceiving them differently. Kiambi and Shafer (2016) studied three crisis response strategies that are used for a preventable crisis, namely apology, sympathy and compensation. The results showed that an apology is preferred over a compensation and thus, it would be better to use an apology instead of a compensation in the crisis response of an organisation. Both apology and compensation are part of the "deal" response option. Thus, this study showed that there could be a difference between the crisis response strategies that are positioned in the same crisis response option by Coombs (2006). There could also be a difference between the use of excuses and justifications. Nevertheless, little research studied the differences between crisis response strategies that are categorised in one specific crisis response option, specifically for the "diminish" response option. Therefore, the present study examined the efficacy of the justification strategy and the excuse strategy separately.

While providing a response to a crisis can be beneficial for a company's reputation, not providing a response is also an option. An organisation can always opt to give no account for a crisis situation. However, responding with no account is not linked to a crisis cluster or a crisis response option. There are several reasons why a company chooses to not give an account nor reaction. Silence allows an organisation to avoid listening to the inquiries of certain stakeholders, hides relevant information from stakeholders and buys time to collect proper information about the occurred crisis (Le, Teo, Pang, Li & Goh, 2019). Park (2017) found that

providing “no account” leads to a lower perceived organisational reputation, a lower attitude towards the company and behavioural intentions, including purchase intention, compared to a “base” response in which the company provides information about the crisis. Additionally, Stieglitz, Mirbabaie, Kroll and Marx (2019) explored the Tweets of Volkswagen after its well-known Dieselgate crisis. The company decided to not respond to the accusation and as a result, the researchers found that Volkswagen’s reputation was harmed. Hence, using the “no account” strategy may lead to lower perceived organisational reputation, attitude towards the company and behavioural intentions.

In a rare case, McDonald, Sparks and Glendon (2010) researched the justification strategy, the excuse strategy and the no account strategy, as well as two other strategies: denial and confession. In this study, the no account strategy consisted of the company refusing to comment on the crisis, while the excuse strategy shifted the responsibility to external circumstances and the justification strategy downplayed the severity of the crisis. In the study of McDonald et al. (2010), participants read a news article about an airplane crash. They found that both the excuse and justification strategy increased the level of responsibility that the participants gave to the crisis situation and thus, leading to negative stakeholders’ reactions towards the organisation. In addition, the scholars showed that the no comment strategy significantly lowered the attributed responsibility compared to the excuse strategy. No comment mitigated anger and negative word-of-mouth, while the strategy increased sympathy, loyalty and positive attitude towards the company (McDonald et al., 2010). Nevertheless, McDonald et al. (2010) did not define in which cluster the chosen crisis fell. Therefore, these results may not be representative for using these response strategies in the accidental cluster. Given the different results amongst the crisis response strategies, this research explored each crisis response strategy separately to determine its effect.

### **Research question and hypotheses**

To summarise, literature on crisis communication did not yet examine the effectiveness of the use of accounts in crisis communication when a crisis within the accidental cluster occurred. Therefore, the current study researched the effectiveness of the excuse strategy, the justification strategy and the no account strategy when an accidental crisis occurred separately.

An organisational crisis creates both a reputational and financial threat. The corporate reputation is important to a company, because it serves as the ‘face’ of the company and subsequently, functions as a performance bond and a signal of probity, as well as a way to

behave adequately as it facilitates economic transactions (Dowling, 2016). Reputation is often measured via perceived organisational reputation or attitude towards the company. Nevertheless, research showed that perceived organisational reputation is better than attitude scales (Ma & Zahn, 2016). In addition, purchase intention may have an indirect effect on the financial performance of an organisation. Therefore, the present study examined the use of accounts in crisis communication on perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention. Ultimately, the following research question was formulated:

*To what extent has the use of accounts (no account vs excuse vs justification) an effect on consumers' reaction to organisational crisis communication, in terms of perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention?*

Despite the fact McDonald et al. (2010) showed that excuses and justifications lead to negative stakeholders' reactions towards an organisation, while no account leads to a more positive response, Park (2007) and Stieglitz et al. (2019) found that the no account strategy generates a low perceived organisational reputation. Additionally, research showed that taking responsibility is better than denying the accusation or not giving a response, i.e., not taking responsibility (Mattila, 2009; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Park, 2007). Therefore, the following hypothesis was constructed:

*H1: The use of excuses and justifications in crisis communication leads to a better perceived organisational reputation compared to giving no account.*

Furthermore, Lyon and Cameron (2004) showed that if a company offers an account for the occurred crisis, which means that the company took responsibility, the consumer's purchase intention was higher than when the organisation did not take responsibility. In contrast, the no account strategy led to a lower purchase intention compared to the "base" response strategies (Park, 2017). Hence, the following hypothesis was proposed:

*H2: the use of excuses and justifications in crisis communication leads to a higher level of purchase intention compared to giving no account.*

## **Method**

### *Materials*

The independent variable in the present study was the type of account. In order to make the experiment more generalisable, these accounts were provided for three fictional public statement issues by three fictional companies. The reason why the companies and its crises were fictional is due to the fact that participants may recognise a company and subsequently, this may affect the consumers' perceptions. The experiment consisted of three news articles that each reported a unique fictional crisis situation that fell within the accidental cluster (Appendix A). Each news article corresponded to one of three fictional companies. After each news article, the participants were shown the response of the fictional company to the crisis situation on Facebook, in which they either used no account, an excuse or a justification (Appendix B).

All participants read the three news articles. An example of one of the news articles is given. The news article about the fictional online shop AllesInHuis.nl started with a brief description of the company, which stated that AllesInHuis.nl is an online shop that offers a wide range of products. To shop on the website, an account must be made by the customer. Therefore, the company possesses a lot of private information, such as bank account numbers, addresses and telephone numbers. AllesInHuis.nl is known for being one of the most trustworthy companies. After the explanation of the fictional company, the following fictional crisis situation was described. The company experienced a data leak that was caused by a power outage at the AllesInHuis.nl office. The cybersecurity of the website could not guarantee the safety of private information. As a result, hackers found a way through the system and leaked the private data of thousands of people. The fictional crisis is meant to be an accidental crisis as designed by Coombs (2006) and thus, this crisis was formed in a way that resembles an unintentional and uncontrollable event. The cause of the crisis in this case was a power outage, which is an unforeseeable event and as a result, the company could not control the system being hacked. The other two accidental crises by the fictional cosmetics company RawCosmetics and the fictional supermarket Dagelijks Vers were designed with similar criteria. All three news articles that discussed the crises of the fictional organisations can be found in appendix A.

After each news article, a Facebook post that consisted of the response of the company towards the crisis situation followed. The Facebook post included no account, an excuse or a justification. An example of the design of the Facebook messages is given for the fictional

company AllesInHuis.nl. For the no account condition, AllesInHuis.nl stated that it could not react to the accusation yet. Thus, no account was given for the crisis that occurred. For the excuse condition, AllesInHuis.nl explained that it could not prevent the power outage as there was a short circuit at the power company that provides power to AllesInHuis.nl. As proposed by Coombs (2006), and Scott and Lyman (1968), the excuse condition explains that the organisation could not control the untoward event and thus, blaming the wrongdoing on external circumstances. For the justification condition, AllesInHuis.nl reacted that even though the hackers tried to steal as much data as possible, only a small part of the customer base was affected, because the organisation was able to guarantee safety for the majority of private data. In the justification condition, the company portrayed the crisis as being minor due to the lack of damage it caused (Coombs, 2006) and therefore, it is acceptable (Scott & Lyman, 1968). The accounts used in the crisis responses of the other two fictional companies RawCosmetics and Dagelijks Vers were constructed based on similar criteria. The Facebook messages of all fictional organisations can be found in appendix B.

### *Subjects*

A total of 153 responses was collected. However, 44 participants that did not complete the questionnaire were excluded from the analyses. Subsequently, 109 participants took part in the experiment. The respondents were shown one of the three conditions, leading to 35 participants being exposed to the no account condition, 36 participants to the excuse condition and 38 participants to the justification condition. All participants were fluent in Dutch as the language of the questionnaire was in Dutch. There were no requirements in terms of educational level and gender. For age, the participants were required to be older than 18 years old. The average age of the subjects was 28.86 years old ( $SD = 12.17$ ), ranging from 18 to 61 years old. A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of condition (no account, excuse, justification) on age  $F(2, 67.81) = 1.82, p = .169$ . This analysis has been reported with the Welch  $F$ -statistic since the Levene's test of equality of error variance turned out to be significant ( $p = .007$ ).

Furthermore, a total of 72 females (66%) and 37 males (34%) participated in the experiment. A Chi-square analysis showed a significant relation between gender and condition ( $\chi^2(2) = 6.18, p = .045$ ). There were more female participants (74.3%) in the no account condition than male participants (25.7%). There were also more female participants (73.7%) in the justification condition than male participants (26.3%).

The educational level of the participants consisted of high school (6%), MBO (8%), HBO (32%), WO Bachelor (19%) and WO Master (35%). A Chi-square analysis showed no significant relation between educational level and condition ( $\chi^2(8) = 5.96, p = .651$ ).

Furthermore, it was investigated whether participants regularly utilise a product or service that is similar to the products or services the fictional companies offer. Participants used cosmetic products once a week on average ( $M = 4.72, SD = 2.53$ ). In addition, participants indicated that they regularly do online shopping, namely more than once a month on average ( $M = 4.03, SD = 1.33$ ). Respondents reported that they do their groceries more than one time a week on average ( $M = 5.68, SD = .84$ ). Thus, participants utilise the products or services that the fictional companies offer on a regular basis. Based on these results, the crisis situations used in this study were relevant for the respondents, which contributed to the ecological validity of this study.

### *Design*

The study had a one-factorial between subject design with type of account as the factor. Participants were split into three groups. The independent variable was account and had three levels: no account, excuse and justification. The participants were randomly assigned to the different conditions. There were two dependent variables: perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention. They were quantitatively measured. Figure 1 shows how the independent variable relates to the dependent variables.

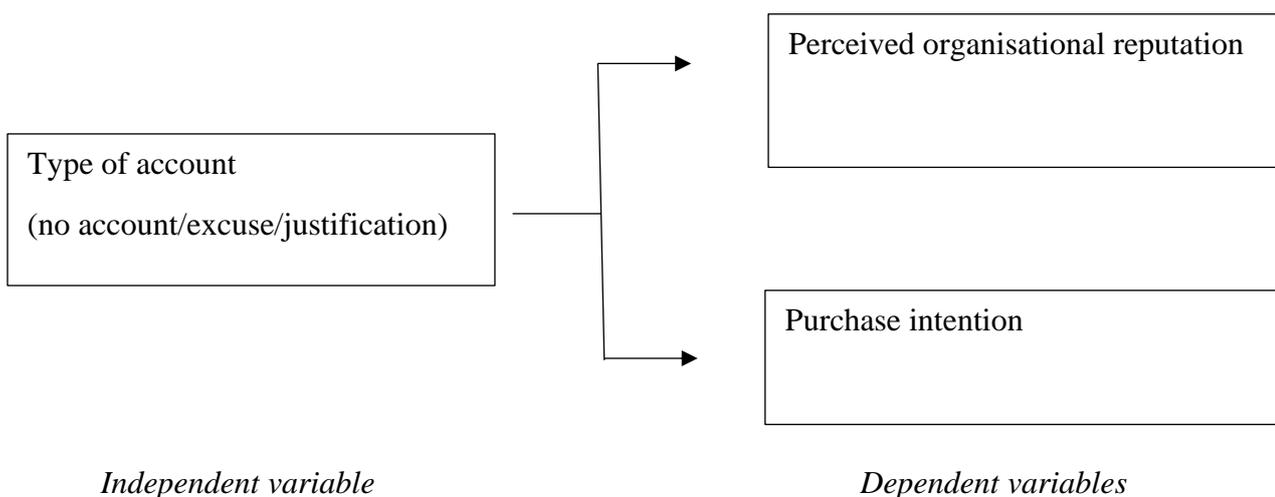


Figure 1. Analytical model

### *Instruments*

The respondents filled in an online questionnaire to measure the effects of type of account on perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention (Appendix C). The questionnaire was in Dutch. At the beginning of the questionnaire, questions about the participant's background were asked, including questions about their gender, age and educational level.

The dependent variable perceived organisational reputation was measured with five 7-point Likert scale items based on Sung and Yang (2008). The following statements were given: 'This organisation looks like an organisation with strong prospects for future growth', 'This organisation is socially responsible', 'This organisation puts customer service as top priority', 'This organisation is well-managed' and 'This organisation is financially sound', anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability of 'perceived organisational reputation' comprising five items was good:  $\alpha = .84$ . Consequently, the mean of all five items was used to calculate the compound variable 'perceived organisational reputation', which was used in further analyses.

The dependent variable purchase intention was measured with three 7-point Likert scale items, adapted from Coombs and Holladay (2007). The following statements were given: 'The probability that I will buy a product made by the organisation is high', 'I would continue to buy products made by the organisation in the future' and 'When I need a this product, I will buy a product of this organisation', anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability of 'purchase intention' consisting of three items was excellent:  $\alpha = .93$ . Consequently, the mean of all three items was used to calculate the compound variable 'purchase intention', which was used in further analyses.

Lastly, the participants were asked how often they use a product or service that is similar to what every fictional company offers. The respondents could indicate whether they used similar products or services either never, less than once a month, once a month, more than once a month, once a week, more than once a week or daily. Additionally, the participants gave the level of responsibility they attributed to the companies based on the corresponding crisis. The manipulation of attributed responsibility was checked using a 7-point Likert scale and the following statement was given: 'Please indicate to what extent you consider the company responsible for the crisis', anchored by 1 (Completely responsible) to 7 (Completely not responsible).

### *Procedure*

The online survey tool Qualtrics was used to administer the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed via social media as participants were recruited online via personal circles in the first weeks of May 2021. The experiment was done anonymously. After clicking on the Qualtrics link, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions for each of the companies. Participants were presented with a brief description of the study and were informed that consent was secured. In addition, contact information was given for possible questions or remarks about the experiment and it was checked whether participants fit the requirements for this study. Subsequently, demographic questions were asked. In the experiment, the participants read three fictional news articles with a fictional crisis situation of a fictional company. Each fictional news article was followed by a fictional Facebook message which consisted of the fictional company's response to the crisis. The respondents were exposed to one of the three conditions as they either read the Facebook posts with no account, an excuse or justification. Subsequently, the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire to measure perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention. Finally, the participants were thanked for their participation. The average time respondents took to fill in the questionnaire was 2472 seconds which equals 41 minutes ( $SD = 8862.90$ , range 154-57802). It seemed that a few participants clicked on the link, but did not immediately fill in the questionnaire or did not finish it in one sitting, which explains the high average time till completion. As these respondents did properly fill in the questionnaire, they were not excluded from the experiment. The expected time participants took to complete the questionnaire was approximately seven minutes. No incentives were given to the participants for taking part in the study.

### *Statistical treatment*

A MANOVA was run in order to examine the possible main effects of the independent variable type of account on the dependent variables perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention.

## **Results**

The main purpose of this study was to examine whether type of account has an effect on perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention.

### Manipulation check

In order to check whether the manipulation was successfully established, a one-way univariate analysis for the effect of condition on attributed responsibility was carried out. A one-way univariate analysis of variance showed no significant effect of type of account on responsibility ( $F(2, 106) < 1$ ). Thus, the manipulation was not successful. All means and standard deviations for the one-way univariate analysis are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations (between brackets) and  $n$  for attributed responsibility (1 = low attributed responsibility, 7 = high attributed responsibility) in function of type of account.

	Attributed responsibility
	$M$ (SD)
No account ( $n = 35$ )	3.00 (.98)
Excuse ( $n = 36$ )	2.88 (1.08)
Justification ( $n = 38$ )	3.04 (1.16)

### The effects of type of account on perceived reputation and purchase intention

A one-way multivariate analysis for perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention, with type of account (no account, excuse, justification) as factor, found no significant multivariate effect of type of account ( $F(4, 210) < 1$ ). All means and standard deviations for the one-way multivariate analysis are shown in table 2.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations (between brackets) and *n* for perceived organisational reputation (1 = low perceived organisational reputation, 7 = high perceived organisational reputation) and purchase intention (1 = low purchase intention, 7 = high purchase intention) in function of type of accounts.

	Perceived organisational reputation	Purchase intention
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
No account ( <i>n</i> = 35)	3.87 (.77)	3.49 (1.01)
Excuse ( <i>n</i> = 36)	3.87 (.73)	3.71 (.87)
Justification ( <i>n</i> = 38)	3.71 (.81)	3.38 (1.05)

## Conclusion and discussion

The present study examined the effects of the use of accounts in crisis communication messages on Facebook on perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention (RQ). Results showed that there was no effect of the use of accounts on perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention. The first hypothesis (H1), which predicted that the use of excuses and justifications in crisis communication led to lower perceived organisational reputation than when no account was given, was not supported. The second hypothesis (H2), which expected that the use of excuses and justifications in crisis communication led to a lower purchase intention than when no account was given, was not supported.

The results of this study are not in line with previous research. Park (2017) showed that the no account strategy led to lower perceived organisational reputation than one of the crisis response strategies (e.g., excuse or justification). In addition, Stieglitz et al. (2010) showed that when a company did not respond to a crisis, its reputation was damaged. In contrast, when an organisation did take responsibility and thus, provided an account for the occurred crisis, the attitude towards the company (i.e., perceived organisational reputation) was higher than when the company did not take responsibility (Mattila, 2009; Lyon & Cameron, 2004). Therefore, the use of excuses and justifications in crisis communication may lead to a higher perceived organisational reputation than giving no account. Although McDonald et al. (2010) showed in

an exceptional case that no account led to a positive attitude towards the company (i.e., perceived organisational reputation) and that the excuse and justification strategy may lead to negative reactions towards the organisation, these findings cannot explain the results of the current study as this study showed there was no effect of type of account on perceived organisational reputation. Thus, the use of the excuse strategy and the justification strategy did not lead to a better perceived organisational reputation than the no account strategy. A possible reason for the absence of significant differences on perceived organisational reputation resides in how the types of accounts were developed. The excuse strategy, justification strategy and no account strategy may have been perceived as indistinguishable. In addition, Mattila (2009), Lyon and Cameron (2004), and McDonald et al. (2010) did not take into account a specific crisis cluster, while in the present study all crisis situations were accidental. For instance, McDonald et al. (2010) discussed an airplane crash, which may be perceived as more severe than an accidental crisis which was due to, for example, power outage. This may explain why the current study did not find differences in the use of different account strategies on perceived organisational reputation.

Similar to the perceived organisational reputation, Park (2017) showed that purchase intention was lower when a no account strategy was used than when a crisis response strategy was utilised (e.g., excuse or justification). However, Lyon and Cameron (2004) showed that taking responsibility and thus, providing an account, led to a higher purchase intention than when no responsibility was taken. Hence, it was expected that the use of excuses and justifications leads to a higher purchase intention than when no account was given. Nevertheless, the findings of the present study showed that there was no effect of type of account on purchase intention. Therefore, the use of the excuse strategy and the justification strategy did not lead to a higher purchase intention than when no account was provided. A possible explanation is that the excuse strategy, justification strategy and no account strategy were not perceived as different from each other. As previously discussed, another plausible explanation could be that the crisis situation in the study of Lyon and Cameron (2004) was perceived differently than the accidental crises in the present study as the scholars did consider the different crisis clusters.

In addition, the present study expected that there may not only be a difference between the no account strategy, and the justification and the excuse strategy, but also a difference between the excuse strategy and the justification strategy in terms of perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention. The definitions of excuse and justification by Scott and Lyman (1968), and Coombs (2006) seemed to indicate differences in its use. However, the

results showed that there were no differences between the different crisis response strategies on perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention.

Overall, a possible explanation for the inconsistent results could be that the manipulation of the type of account was not strong or clear enough. The manipulation check showed that there was no effect of type of account on attributed responsibility. Therefore, the manipulation was not carried out correctly as no differences between the types of accounts for attributed responsibility were measured. In all conditions, the described crisis situations fell within the accidental cluster. When an accidental crisis happens, the crisis is unintentional and uncontrollable (Coombs, 2006). Therefore, individuals may attribute a minimal level of responsibility to the organisation as it was unforeseeable for the company, however, the organisation is still held accountable. Using an adequate account is essential, because when the account corresponds with the crisis situation, it can damage the corporate reputation and behavioural intentions less than when no corresponding account is given. As the no account strategy is not the adequate crisis response strategy when an accidental crisis occurred, it was expected that participants would attribute more responsibility to the companies when the no account strategy was presented than when the adequate crisis response strategies (i.e., excuse or justification) were utilised. Nevertheless, there were no differences between the types of accounts in terms of perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention. Thus, it is possible that the differences between the accounts were not strong enough or there may be other factors that need to be considered.

As previously discussed, another plausible explanation is that the different types of account were perceived as similar in their formulation, while it was expected that the no account strategy would have been evaluated lower in perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention than the justification strategy and excuse strategy. Both the excuse strategy and the justification strategy fall within the “diminish” response option (Coombs, 2006) and therefore, these crisis strategies may be perceived as similar despite their differences in the definitions. Although the no account strategy should have differentiated from the excuse strategy and justification strategy as no account does not belong to a certain response option, the results showed that there were no differences between the strategies. These findings may indicate that the stimulus of the experiment was manipulated insufficiently. Specifically, the no account strategy did not provide an account for the occurred crisis, however, it did communicate that the company would give an account in the future moment. Although the company does not directly react to the crisis, the organisation states that it will come with a reaction. Therefore, future research may construct the stimuli differently. Specifically, future research may

formulate the no account strategy differently. McDonald et al. (2010) formulated the no account strategy as the company refusing to comment on the crisis. Therefore, future research could opt to use a “no comment” strategy, in which the organisation does react to the crisis, however, the company states that it will not provide an account for the crisis situation. Individuals may perceive this strategy as more different from the excuse and justification strategies than the no account strategy, which subsequently may lead to different findings.

### **Limitations and future research**

Several limitations were found while carrying out the present study. First of all, aforementioned the manipulation check for type of accounts on attributed responsibility was not found to be significant. Thus, this suggested that the different levels of the independent variable were not distinguished as intended. This could explain the lack of significant effects found in this study. Hence, it is recommended to pre-test the manipulations for future studies.

Another limitation is that the male and female participants were not equally distributed and thus, there were significantly more females in the no account condition and the justification condition than males. This may have affected the results of the current study. In an organisational setting, research has shown that women tend to utilise more mitigating accounts in conversations to explain untoward behaviour than men (Tata, 2000). The reason is that women concern more about individuals' face than men. Tata (2000) also found that women perceive mitigating accounts as more effective than men. As an excuse and a justification are used to mitigate (i.e., diminish) responsibility that is attributed to a company in times of crisis, women may evaluate the use of excuses or justifications in crisis communication as more effective than men. Therefore, the effect of gender can not be excluded. Little research has been done on the effects of gender in crisis communication. Future research could include gender as an independent control variable.

Furthermore, the crisis situations could have been perceived differently as anticipated. All crises should have been part of the accidental cluster. Nevertheless, it is possible that the described crisis situations in the experiment were perceived differently as it was not investigated whether the crises were indeed perceived as accidental. In order to make this study more generalisable, three different scenarios were shown about a cosmetic company, online shop and supermarket. The three fictional companies experienced three different crises. This was done to make the current study more applicable. However, there could have been differences in the consumers' responses to a crisis situation. Future studies could opt to measure the differences in consumers' perceptions to the different crisis situations in a preliminary study.

The last limitation is that the experiment utilised fictional crises and companies instead of real crises and companies. Fictional organisations and crises were chosen to ensure that participants did not have a prior perception of the companies, however, the respondents might not have felt affected by the crisis as much as they would when they had prior knowledge of the companies. Although the participants indicated that they use cosmetics products, shop online and go to the supermarket on a regular basis, they might not have experienced a crisis of similar kind before. This may have affected the findings of this study. In future studies, the crises may be pre-tested in order to select crises in which participants can place themselves.

### **Theoretical and practical implications**

To conclude, this study contributed to research on crisis communication. Specifically, it attempted to fill the gap of the effect of type of account on perceived organisational reputation and purchase intention. In terms of theoretical implications, the present study endured on the SCCT of Coombs (2006) with practical examples. The current study did not find significant results in terms of the effects of type of account on consumers' responses in crisis communication. Hence, this study suggests that there may be more factors to organisational crises than other studies have described, such as type of crisis situation and the way in which an account is formulated. Thus, future studies might need to look deeper into situational and general factors influencing crisis communication. Furthermore, in terms of practical implications, the present study showed that it is difficult for companies to design adequate crisis response messages as the present study found inconsistent results. The findings of this study showed that there were no differences in the use of the different accounts. Both researchers and communication specialists should remain to critically reflect on assumptions as this study showed that the practical outcomes do not always align with results based on theory, even established ones.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A. News articles

#### **RawCosmetics blijkt toch niet diervriendelijk te zijn**

20 april 2021, 11:30

AMSTERDAM - Het internationale bedrijf RawCosmetics heeft de afgelopen maanden naamsbekendheid gekregen, doordat het make-up en huidverzorgende producten verkoopt die niet getest worden op dieren. De producten zijn over de hele wereld te vinden. Naast dat het bedrijf beweert diervriendelijk te zijn, bevatten de producten van dit duurzame cosmetica bedrijf ook geen schadelijke stoffen. Om de kosten te drukken, besteedt RawCosmetics zijn productie uit aan een fabriek in China. In korte tijd hebben ze al een groot klantenbestand opgebouwd, omdat ze goedkoper zijn dan de rest van de duurzame cosmeticabedrijven. Echter is gebleken dat de producten van RawCosmetics op dieren getest worden in de Chinese fabriek. Een activistengroep ontdekte dat hier onder andere op honden, ratten en konijnen wordt getest. De dieren leven in erg slechte leefomstandigheden. Hoewel het verboden is om op dieren te testen in Europa, wordt het nog vaak gedaan in China en is het daar zelfs vaak nog verplicht.

*Figure 1.* News article about RawCosmetics

#### **AllesInHuis.nl houdt privégegevens niet privé binnen het huis**

20 april 2021, 11:30

UTRECHT - De webshop AllesInHuis.nl verkoopt allerlei producten van elektronica en meubels tot kleding en tuingereedschap. Om te kunnen bestellen, moet elke klant een account aanmaken. Hierdoor beschikt het bedrijf over veel privégegevens van de klanten, zoals bankrekeningnummers, adressen en telefoonnummers. Het bedrijf bevindt zich op het internet en daarom is het belangrijk om de privacy van de klanten te waarborgen. Het staat bekend als één van de meest betrouwbare bedrijven in haar sector. Echter heeft een datalek bij AllesInHuis.nl ervoor gezorgd dat de privégegevens van duizenden Nederlanders openbaar zijn gemaakt. Hierdoor zijn privégegevens in handen gekomen van criminelen die de gegevens op een hackersforum te koop aanbieden. De mogelijke oorzaak van het datalek is dat er een tijdelijke stroomstoring was bij het kantoor van AllesInHuis.nl, waardoor de cybersecurity tijdelijk niet kon worden gewaarborgd en hackers een doorgang vonden.

*Figure 2.* News article about AllesInHuis.nl

## Supermarkt Dagelijks Vers blijkt toch niet zo vers

20 april 2021, 11:30

NIJMEGEN - Supermarktketen Dagelijks Vers staat bekend om zijn dagelijks verse producten voor een vriendelijke prijs. Elke dag worden er op twee momenten nieuwe, verse producten geleverd. Bovendien is het personeel erg klantvriendelijk. De Dagelijks Vers vestiging in de buurt heeft echter last gehad van een computerstoring, waardoor de koelcellen 's nachts niet meer aan stonden. Door de computerfout waren de koelcellen uit van 22:00 tot 5:00, maar zijn ze daarna weer aangegaan. Hierdoor heeft het personeel de fout niet opgemerkt en zijn de producten uit de koelcellen verkocht. Nu zijn er een aantal klanten ziek geworden, doordat ze vleesproducten hebben gekocht die tijdens deze storing zijn bedorven. Een enkele klant moest zelfs naar het ziekenhuis.

Figure 3. News article about Dagelijks Vers

## Appendix B. The companies' responses in Facebook posts



Figure 4. No account condition RawCosmetics



Figure 5. No account condition AllesInHuis.nl



Figure 6. No account condition Dagelijks Vers



**RawCosmetics** 20 april om 13:15 • 🌐

Zoals jullie wellicht hebben gehoord wordt RawCosmetics ervan beschuldigd dat haar producten op dieren worden getest. We betreuren dat de fabriek waarin wij onze producten produceren inderdaad test op dieren. Helaas waren wij hiervan niet op de hoogte. De fabriek wordt ingehuurd door RawCosmetics voor de productie en hierdoor kunnen we niet controleren wat er in de fabriek gebeurt. We zullen dit intern verder bespreken.

👍 353 135 Comments 12 Shares

Like Comment Share

Write a comment... 🗨️ 📷 📺 🗑️

Figure 7. Excuse condition RawCosmetics



**AllesInHuis.nl** 20 april om 13:00 • 🌐

Afgelopen week was er een stroomstoring op het kantoor van AllesInHuis.nl. Hierdoor konden hackers bij het klantenbestand en hebben zij de privégegevens van onze klanten online gezet. We vinden het jammer dat dit heeft kunnen gebeuren. De waarschijnlijke oorzaak is een kortsluiting die plaatsvond bij het energiebedrijf dat de stroom op ons kantoor verzorgt. Helaas konden wij dit niet voorkomen.

👍 139 34 Comments 6 Shares

Like Comment Share

Write a comment... 🗨️ 📷 📺 🗑️

Figure 8. Excuse condition AllesInHuis.nl

**Dagelijks Vers** 20 april om 13:30 · 🌐

Helaas zijn afgelopen week onze koelcellen tijdelijk uitgevallen door een computerstoring. Onze producten waren hierdoor niet meer even vers. Wij betreuren dat hierdoor enkele klanten ziek zijn geworden. Ons computersysteem functioneerde niet naar behoren, waardoor de koelcellen tijdelijk uit waren. Echter zijn de koelcellen voor openingstijd weer aangegaan, waardoor de medewerkers van Dagelijks Vers het probleem niet hebben ontdekt.

👍 76 23 Comments 2 Shares

Like Comment Share

Write a comment... 🗨️ 📷 GIF 🎭

Figure 9. Excuse condition Dagelijks Vers

**RawCosmetics** 20 april om 13:15 · 🌐

Zoals jullie wellicht hebben gehoord wordt RawCosmetics ervan beschuldigd dat haar producten op dieren worden getest. Dit is in sommige gevallen waar. RawCosmetics is namelijk een internationaal bedrijf met klanten in meer dan honderd landen. In een aantal landen is het nog verplicht om op dieren te testen, zoals in China, waar onze producten worden geproduceerd. Echter, in de landen waar dit niet hoeft en soms zelfs verboden is, worden onze producten op dieren getest en wordt hier ook streng op gecontroleerd.

👍 353 135 Comments 12 Shares

Like Comment Share

Write a comment... 🗨️ 📷 GIF 🎭

Figure 10. Justification condition RawCosmetics



The screenshot shows a Facebook post from the page 'AllesInHuis.nl'. The profile picture is a house icon. The post is dated '20 april om 13:00' and is public. The text of the post describes a power outage at the office, which led to hackers accessing customer data. The company expresses regret and states that their security measures prevented a larger breach. The post has 139 likes, 34 comments, and 6 shares. Below the post are buttons for 'Like', 'Comment', and 'Share'. At the bottom, there is a comment input field with the placeholder text 'Write a comment...' and icons for emojis, photos, GIFs, and stickers.

Figure 11. Justification condition AllesInHuis.nl



The screenshot shows a Facebook post from the page 'Dagelijks Vers'. The profile picture is a green circle with the letters 'DV'. The post is dated '20 april om 13:30' and is public. The text of the post describes a temporary cooling system failure, which caused some products to be spoiled. The staff at Dagelijks Vers checks products every morning, but the failure was not noticed. The staff expresses regret and states that the products were spoiled, but it was not the usual case. The post has 76 likes, 23 comments, and 2 shares. Below the post are buttons for 'Like', 'Comment', and 'Share'. At the bottom, there is a comment input field with the placeholder text 'Write a comment...' and icons for emojis, photos, GIFs, and stickers.

Figure 12. Justification condition Dagelijks Vers

## Appendix C. Questionnaire

### Instructie en informed consent

Beste deelnemer,

U bent uitgenodigd om deel te nemen aan een onderzoek. Deelname is vrijwillig. Als u wilt deelnemen, moet u uw toestemming geven. Neem de tijd om de volgende informatie aandachtig door te lezen. Is iets niet duidelijk of wilt u meer informatie, neem dan contact op met de onderzoeker.

Dit onderzoek maakt deel uit van de Master Thesis van Carolijn Visscher, student International Business Communication aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen. De thesis gaat over crisis communicatie. Dit duurt ongeveer 5 minuten. Er zijn geen foute antwoorden.

Uw deelname is geheel vrijwillig. Dit betekent dat u uw deelname en toestemming op elk moment tijdens het onderzoek kunt intrekken, zonder daarvoor een reden op te geven. De data die tijdens dit onderzoek wordt verzameld, zal door wetenschappers gebruikt worden voor datasets, artikelen en presentaties. Alle gegevens worden geanonimiseerd verzameld. Hierdoor zijn de gegevens niet naar u te herleiden. Daarnaast moet u 18 jaar of ouder zijn om deel te kunnen nemen.

Voor vragen over gegevensverwerking in dit onderzoek kunt u contact opnemen met:

*Carolijn Visscher*  
*c.visscher@student.ru.nl*

Door te klikken op 'Ja, ik stem in met deelname' geeft u aan dat u:

- Bovenstaande informatie heeft gelezen
- Vrijwillig meedoet aan het onderzoek
- 18 jaar of ouder bent

Als u niet mee wilt doen aan het onderzoek, kunt u op de knop 'Nee, ik stem niet in met de deelname' klikken.

Ik stem in met deelname aan dit onderzoek zoals hierboven beschreven.

- Ja ik stem in met deelname
- Nee, ik stem niet in met deelname

### **Demographical questions**

Met welk geslacht identificeert u zich het meest?

- Man
- Vrouw
- Anders
- Zeg ik liever niet

Wat is uw leeftijd?

Wat is uw huidige of hoogst afgeronde opleiding?

- Middelbare school (mavo/havo/vwo)
- MBO
- HBO
- WO Bachelor
- WO Master
- PhD

### **Procedure**

Hierna krijgt u drie korte krantenartikelen te lezen over drie fictieve bedrijven die zich alle drie in een unieke crisissituatie bevinden. Na ieder krantenartikel krijgt u ook een fictief Facebookbericht te lezen dat afkomstig is van het bijhorende bedrijf.

In dit bericht reageert het fictieve bedrijf op de crisissituatie. Vervolgens wordt u gevraagd een aantal stellingen te beoordelen.

*See Appendix A. News articles*

[Het bedrijf] reageerde op de beschuldiging met het volgende Facebookbericht:

*See Appendix B. The companies' responses in Facebook posts*

*Perceived organizational reputation*

Deze organisatie ...

	Helemaal mee oneens	Mee oneens	Een beetje mee oneens	Neutraal	Een beetje mee eens	Mee eens	Helemaal mee eens
ziet eruit als een organisatie met sterke vooruitzichten voor toekomstige groei	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
is maatschappelijk verantwoord	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
wordt goed beheerd	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
stelt klantenservice als topprioriteit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
is financieel gezond	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*Purchase Intention*

	Helemaal mee oneens	Mee oneens	Een beetje mee oneens	Neutraal	Een beetje mee eens	Mee eens	Helemaal mee eens
De kans dat ik een product koop dat door deze organisatie is gemaakt, is groot	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik zou in de toekomst producten van de organisatie blijven kopen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Als ik een schoonheidsproduct nodig heb, koop ik een product van deze organisatie	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*Background frequencies*

	Nooit	Minder dan één keer per maand	Eén keer per maand	Meer dan één keer per maand	Eén keer per week	Meer dan één keer per week	Dagelijks
Hoe vaak doet u zelf boodschappen?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*Responsibility manipulation check*

Geef aan in hoeverre u het bedrijf verantwoordelijk acht voor de crisis

	Helemaal verantwoordelijk	Verantwoordelijk	Een beetje verantwoordelijk	Neutraal	Nauwelijks verantwoordelijk	Niet verantwoordelijk	Helemaal niet verantwoordelijk
Ik vind het bedrijf ...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Appendix D. Declaration plagiarism and fraud

(You can download this form from the [STIP site](#))

The undersigned

[first name, surname and student number],

**Carolijn Visscher, s4799127**

Master's student at the Radboud University Faculty of Arts,

declares that the assessed thesis is entirely original and was written exclusively by himself/herself. The undersigned has indicated explicitly and in detail where all the information and ideas derived from other sources can be found. The research data presented in this thesis were collected by the undersigned himself/herself using the methods described in this thesis.

Place and date:

**Nijmegen, 21-06-2020**

Signature:

