

# **Language choice in international crisis communication**

An experimental study on the effects of language choice in crisis communication on Italian and Dutch consumers' anger, emotionality, behavioural intentions, and attitudes

Master Thesis

Eva M. W. Hofsteede

Radboud University

Supervisor: Dr. B.C. Planken | Assessor: Dr. W. Nejari

December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### Abstract

With the rise of globalization, the likelihood of international crises has increased. Therefore, multinational corporations (MNCs) have to be able to communicate effectively with a variety of consumers with different linguistic backgrounds. To do so MNCs can standardize their crisis response and make use of a so-called *lingua franca*, e.g. English. However, little is known about how the use of a native language (L1) versus a *lingua franca* (L2) may impact how consumers perceive the crisis response. Therefore, by applying findings from the field of psycholinguistics about the emotionality of an L1 versus an L2 and studies about the Foreign Language Effect (FLE) in moral decision making, this study aimed to investigate the effect of language choice, using a native language (L1) or foreign language (L2), on 157 Dutch and Italian consumers' anger, emotionality, behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude towards the crisis response. Additionally, this study investigated whether consumers' L2 proficiency moderated this effect. The findings revealed that language choice (L1 vs L2) had no effect on Dutch and Italian consumers' anger, emotionality, behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude towards the crisis response and that L2 proficiency does not moderate this effect. The findings seem to suggest that language choice may not be a relevant factor in crisis communication. However, further research is needed to understand how language may affect consumers during a global crisis.

**Keywords:** *international crisis communication, language choice, foreign language effect, L2 proficiency*

### Introduction

An organizational crisis is defined as “a specific, unexpected, and nonroutine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organization's high-priority goals” (Seeger et al., 1998, p. 233). With the rise of globalization, multinational corporations (MNCs) going through a crisis have had to adapt their crisis response strategies to suit a more international context (An et al., 2010). This means that MNCs often may have to consider a multitude of different external factors, such as language and culture, and adapt their strategies accordingly, as “what worked for crisis management in the home country may not work well in other countries” (Coombs & Laufer, 2018, p. 203). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) had to face several linguistic and cultural challenges to efficiently communicate with national health authorities all over the world (Piller et al., 2020). According to Coombs and Laufer (2018), the number of international crises will only increase as organizations continue to expand beyond their borders and into new markets. However, up until now, organizational crisis communication research remains limited and extremely lacking, with some arguing that the field is in a near state of emergency (Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Diers-Lawson, 2017; Lehmberg & Hicks, 2018). The existing research regarding organizational crisis communication has also mainly been dominated by single-country studies (Coombs & Laufer, 2018). Therefore, more cross-national research that investigates how external factors related to globalization (e.g. language) affect organizational crisis communication is needed.

An important choice that MNCs often face during an international crisis is how to effectively communicate with consumers with a variety of different linguistic backgrounds. MNCs can either go for a localized approach and communicate with consumers in their native language or a standardized approach and communicate with consumers in a *lingua franca* (Louhiala-

Salminen et al., 2005). The use of a *lingua franca* (e.g. English), however, may influence how consumers react to and perceive the crisis response as for the majority of consumers it might be a foreign language. In fact, according to Pavlenko (2005), people perceive the emotionality of their languages differently, with a foreign language (L2) commonly perceived as being less emotional than a native language (L1). Additionally, the Foreign Language Effect (FLE) posits that the use of an L2 can reduce the emotional bias in people during decision-making processes, meaning that people are more likely to make a more rational choice when an L2 is used (Keysar et al., 2012). A study by Puntoni et al. (2008), in which marketing slogans were perceived to be more emotional by bilinguals in their L1 than in their L2, supported the findings of Pavlenko (2005) and Keysar et al. (2012) and indicated that the two linguistic phenomena hold in the field of advertising. The question then arises if the findings of Pavlenko (2005) and Keysar et al. (2012) also come into play in other corporate communication contexts, such as crisis communication. If this were the case it could have serious implications on how consumers may perceive organizations' crisis responses. If a crisis response in the consumers' L2 is perceived as less emotional, then MNCs could strategically use a *lingua franca* (e.g. English) not only because its financially more beneficial, but also because it may minimize consumers' negative emotions, which have been found to negatively impact an organization's reputation, and help them make more rational decisions (Coombs & Holladay, 2004; Kim & Cameron, 2011; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012). However, no research to date has examined the effect of language choice (L1 vs L2) and the FLE on consumers in the field of crisis communication.

With respect to the effects of an L2, Čavar and Tytus (2018) found that language proficiency in the L2 moderated the perceived emotionality of the L2. The study revealed that higher L2 proficiency increased the perceived emotionality of the L2. In the context of crisis

## LANGUAGE CHOICE IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

communication, this could lead to consumers that are highly proficient in the L2 perceiving the crisis response as more emotionally laden compared to consumers that are less proficient in the L2. Therefore, the benefit of using a *lingua franca* (L2) to minimize consumers' negative emotions associated with a crisis and increase rational decision making would not hold for consumers who are highly proficient in the *lingua franca*. The possible moderating role of language proficiency in the L2 has yet to be investigated in crisis communication. To explore how L2 proficiency may play a role, this study recruited Dutch and Italian consumers. In fact, according to an international index that ranks countries by the equity of English language skills (the L2 selected for this study), the Dutch are on average more proficient than Italians (EF, 2020).

The current study aimed to explore the effects of language choice (L1 vs L2) in organizational crisis communication on Italian (low L2/English proficiency) and Dutch (high L2/English proficiency) consumers' anger, emotionality, behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude towards the crisis response. It also investigated the moderating role of L2 proficiency. This study may help in better understanding the role of language choice in crisis communication aimed at consumers from different language backgrounds and provide practical implications on how to handle crises in an international context.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Organizational crisis communication**

Reputation is an organization's most valuable and intangible corporate asset and any threat or damage to it can have serious financial consequences (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Roberts & Dowling, 2002). Organizational reputation is a result of the relationship between the organization and its stakeholders (Fombrun & Gardberg, 2000). A crisis threatens an organization's reputation because it gives stakeholders reasons to think negatively of the organization (Coombs, 2007). Organizational crisis communication, therefore, is critical in repairing and maintaining an organization's reputation by limiting possible damages to the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders (Coombs, 2007; Coombs, 2008; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Stakeholders are defined by Freeman (1984) as any group who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives. Of the wide array of stakeholders, including community members, employees, suppliers, and stockholders, consumers are often viewed as the most important as they are seen as the primary generators of revenue (Coombs, 2007; Walsh et al., 2009). An organization's financial performance is largely seen as a result of consumers liking the organization and its products (Walsh et al., 2009). Therefore, during a crisis, organizations - to rebuild legitimacy, protect their reputation, and address stakeholders' concerns - must not only set up an adequate crisis response but also effectively communicate with all of its consumers (Coombs, 2008; Coombs & Holladay, 1996).

When an organization operates in a global marketplace, communicating effectively with all its consumers from a variety of different countries, cultures, and languages can be challenging. However, doing so during an international crisis that affects consumers from the multitude of different countries can be even more challenging. In fact, due to globalization, a crisis can not only

affect consumers in the home country but also consumers in the host countries (Coombs, 2008). Failing to effectively communicate with global consumers can seriously damage the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders (Taylor, 2000). Therefore, Coombs (2013), when reflecting on the future of research on crisis communication in the light of the rise of globalization, highlighted the importance of conducting experimental studies across multiple of countries. Hence, the current study included potential consumers from two different countries, Italy and the Netherlands.

To better understand stakeholders' reactions to crisis responses and help in selecting the most appropriate one, Coombs (2006; 2007) developed an evidence-based framework that anticipates how stakeholders will react to a crisis response, also referred to as the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). SCCT is not the only theory developed to analyse how stakeholders react to a crisis response. However, most studies exploring crisis communication tend to employ it. SCCT is rooted in the Attribution Theory developed by Weiner (1986) that posits that people tend to search for the causes of events (attributions), especially for those events that are negative. According to Coombs (2006; 2007) these attributions of responsibility influence emotions and stakeholders' perceptions, which in turn affect stakeholders' future interactions with the organization. While most studies employing the SCCT focus on the role that the perceived crisis responsibility plays during a crisis, the current study focused on the emotions evoked by the organization's crisis response. Stakeholders' emotional reactions are said to play an important role during a crisis as the stronger the negative emotions the less likely it is that consumers view the organization in a positive light, therefore negatively affecting the organization's reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2004; Kim & Cameron, 2011). As was previously mentioned, reputation is the most valuable asset of an organization as it has the potential to attract new customers and retain

existing customers, generate new investments, improve the financial performance of the company, and attract new employees (Coombs, 2007).

### **The effect of language choice in organizational crisis communication**

When reflecting on the future of crisis communication in the context of globalization, Coombs (2013) not only called for more cross-national studies to be carried out, but also for the need to identify and develop research that incorporates promising new variables that vary across cultures and that could influence how crisis responses are received by consumers across the globe. The new variable that the current study introduced is language, or when contextualized in the context of crisis communication, the language chosen for the crisis response (L1 vs L2). Language choice is an interesting external factor to investigate as findings from previous research in the field of psycholinguistic (Dewaele, 2004; Harris, 2004; Harris et al., 2003; Harris et al., 2006; Pavlenko, 2005) and studies investigating decision-making processes (Costa et al., 2013; Costa et al., 2014; Keysar et al., 2012) suggest that it may influence how an L1 versus L2 crisis response may be perceived.

Several studies in the field of psycholinguistics have shown that an L1 can bring about a higher degree of emotionality compared to an L2 (Dewaele, 2004; Harris, 2004; Harris et al., 2003; Harris et al., 2006; Pavlenko, 2005). Degner et al. (2012, p. 181) stated that “although they [bilinguals] perfectly *know* the emotional meaning of words in L2 – they do not *sense* it as with words in L1”. In the field of psycholinguistics, Dewaele (2004) explored the emotional response of 1039 bilinguals to taboo words and swearwords. The study showed that the emotional force of swearwords and taboo words was perceived to be highest in the L1 and gradually decreased when presented in languages learned subsequently. Likewise, other studies in the same field (Harris,



2004; Harris et al., 2003; Harris et al., 2006), showed that physiological arousal measured by skin conductance responses was higher for L1 swearwords compared to L2 swearwords. Pavlenko (2005) suggested that the lesser emotionality of an L2 is due to it being less grounded in the emotion system than an L1 is. Additionally, according to Marian and Kaushanskaya (2004), the difference in the degree of emotionality of an L1 versus an L2 might be due to the autobiographical memories that are linked to the L1. This was supported by a study conducted by Harris et al. (2003) that found that Turkish-English bilinguals reported that they reacted more emotionally to the Turkish (L1) reprimands because it reminded them of the reprimands they would hear during their childhood.

In the context of corporate communication, the possible effect of using an L1 or an L2 has rarely been investigated. However, the globalization of businesses has meant that organizations often communicate with consumers from a variety of different linguistic backgrounds and have to decide whether to employ a localized (native language) or a standardized (*lingua franca*, e.g. English) communication strategy (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). If, as previous findings have suggested (Dewaele, 2004; Harris, 2004; Harris et al., 2003; Harris et al., 2006; Pavlenko, 2005), the use of an L1 or L2 can affect an individuals' emotional responses, then the role of language choice may be relevant to investigate in the context of crisis communication where emotions play an important role. To date, no study has explored how language choice may have an effect on consumers in the context of crisis communication. However, in the field of advertising, Puntoni et al. (2008), through a series of experiments, found that bilingual participants perceived marketing slogans in their L1 as being more emotionally loaded than marketing slogans in their L2. The findings of Puntoni et al. (2008), in support of the effects of language choice, may indicate that the phenomenon may also hold in other corporate communication contexts, namely crisis

communication. In the context of crisis communication, this may correspond to a crisis response in the L1 evoking stronger emotions, and therefore be perceived as being more emotionally intense, than an L2 crisis response.

In the current study, the emotion which was measured was anger as it is one of the most common emotions experienced during a crisis according to McDonald and Härtel (2000). Anger was also chosen as it is a negative emotion and is more likely to be evoked during a crisis. The consumers' perceived emotional intensity of the crisis response was also measured. Therefore, the first two hypotheses of the current study were formulated as follows:

**H1a:** *Consumers will exhibit more anger when they are exposed to an L1 crisis response than when they are exposed to an L2 crisis response.*

**H1b:** *Consumers will perceive an L1 crisis response as being more emotionally intense than an L2 crisis response.*

According to the Foreign Language Effect (FLE), the use of a foreign language (L2) can not only influence one's emotions but also one's decision-making processes (Costa et al., 2013; Costa et al., 2014; Keysar et al., 2012). Keysar et al. (2012), through a series of experiments about the impact of using an L2 on decision making, found that the lower degree of emotionality associated with an L2 (vs an L1) can "diminish the influence of affective processes and allow people to rely more on analytic processes when they make decisions" (p. 661). The authors argued that, when making a decision, there are two types of processes that seem to be involved, one that is more rational and objective and one that is more emotional and intuitive. The use of an L2, according to Keysar et al. (2012), may make people rely more on rational decision-making

processes, therefore reducing the decision bias (making use of heuristics to make shortcuts). Conversely, Costa et al. (2014) found that when bilingual participants from several different countries were faced with a moral decision, they were more likely to make the more rational choice when using their L2 compared to when they were using their L1. According to the authors when faced with a moral dilemma the use of an L2 promotes less emotionally driven responses in bilinguals. Lastly, Cipolletti et al. (2016) further supported these findings as they found that English-Spanish bilinguals when faced with a moral decision, were more likely to make rational judgments when the dilemma was presented in their L2.

While these findings are relegated to the context of moral decision-making, it does not exclude the possibility of the FLE occurring in the field of crisis communication. In fact, consumers are also called to make decisions when faced with an organization that potentially caused them harm (e.g. product harm). In the context of crisis communication, the FLE may lead to consumers making more rational decisions when they are exposed to an L2 crisis response. For example, when confronted with the decision of *lashing out at the organization* (less rational) or *waiting for more information to come out* (more rational), based on previous research on the FLE (Costa et al., 2013; Costa et al., 2014; Keysar et al., 2012), consumers might choose the latter when faced with an L2 crisis response. The more analytical the decision-making is the more likely it is that consumers might be less critical in evaluating the organization and its response to the crisis. If consumers are less critical when exposed to a response in their L2, then they are also more likely to have positive behavioural intentions and attitudes towards the organization and its response. These dependent variables (behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude towards the crisis response) have never been investigated in relation to studies about the FLE and

therefore add to the existing research on the FLE. Hence, the second and third hypotheses read as follows:

**H2:** *Consumers will exhibit less positive behavioural intentions when they are exposed to an L1 crisis response compared to an L2 crisis response.*

**H3:** *Consumers will exhibit fewer positive attitudes towards the organization and towards the crisis response when they are exposed to an L1 crisis response compared to an L2 crisis response.*

### **The role of L2 language proficiency in organizational crisis communication**

When MNCs are evaluating whether to localize (L1) or standardize (L2) their crisis response, it might be important for them to keep in mind that not all of their consumers may have the same level of proficiency in the L2. For example, an MNC may decide to standardize their crisis response by communicating with all of its global consumers in English, the most commonly used international corporate language (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). However, English is an L2 for many consumers and therefore the level of language proficiency can vary greatly (EF, 2020). This might play an important role as, according to Pavlenko (2005), language proficiency in the L2 can affect the perceived emotional intensity of the L2. According to the author, language proficiency contributes to the “L2 detachment effect”, whereby the low proficiency in the L2 makes the speakers more anxious in terms of performance and thereby detract them from being emotionally involved (Pavlenko, 2005). Mägiste (1986) in their study found that bilinguals that were highly proficient in the L2 showed similar emotional responses in both the L1 and L2. This may mean that high proficiency in the L2 eliminates the emotional difference between the L1 and L2. These

findings seem to suggest that there is a general decline in the emotional force of the L2 language as L2 proficiency decreases.

Regarding the FLE, studies by Čavar and Tytus (2018) replicated the experimental design of Keysar, et al. (2012) and found that higher levels of proficiency in the L2 increase the emotionality of the L2, which in turn leads to a more emotional and less rational response to moral dilemmas. For example, when participants were asked whether it was morally appropriate to push a man off a bridge to stop a train that would kill five people on the tracks, the participants with higher L2 proficiency were less likely to choose the more rational option, to save five people by killing one. Costa et al. (2014) also noted that language proficiency in the L2 influenced the rational choices. In fact, according to the authors “the more proficient the participants considered themselves in the foreign language the more their decision patterns resembled that of the native speakers” (Costa et al., 2014, p. 6). Overall, these studies seem to indicate that the FLE may not apply to bilinguals who have a high level of proficiency in the L2 and provide evidence that when the L2 proficiency increases the impact of the FLE decreases.

While the findings by Pavlenko (2005), Mägiste (1986), Čavar and Tytus (2018), and Costa et al. (2014) about the moderating role of L2 proficiency relate to the fields of psycholinguistics and moral decision making, they may also carry over to other research fields. For example, in the field of advertising Puntoni et al. (2008) found that the increased perceived emotional intensity of L1 marketing slogans depended on the frequency with which the words are encountered and used in the L1 versus the L2. Frequency of use and proficiency are clearly two different linguistic concepts. However, they are close enough to warrant the possibility that L2 language proficiency may play a moderating role in the effect of language choice on consumers’ emotions, behaviours, and attitudes in crisis communication. If this were the case, consumers that are highly proficient

in the L2 might have a stronger emotional response and more negative behaviours and attitudes to an L2 crisis response compared to consumers that are less proficient in the L2. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis states as follows:

**H4:** *High proficiency (vs low proficiency) in the L2 will lead to higher levels of anger and emotionality, less positive behavioural intention, and fewer positive attitudes towards the organization and attitudes towards the crisis response in consumers exposed to an L2 crisis response.*

As the current study aimed at investigating the moderating role of L2 proficiency it was crucial to select participants who were more likely to have varying levels of proficiency in English, the L2 chosen for this study. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (EF, 2020), the Dutch are on average the most proficient non-native English speakers in the world, while the Italians place 30<sup>th</sup>. This is quite a considerable gap, as it means that Italy is one of the worst EU countries, only second to Spain, when it comes to proficiency in the English language. Furthermore, the Dutch are generally more exposed to the English language as, for example, in the Netherlands, there is a tendency to prefer subbing foreign films (Mera, 1999). Meanwhile, Italy has a long history of dubbing (Mera, 1999). This means that Italians tend to have limited access to English-language media (Aiello, 2019, p. 27). The Dutch language is also, from a syntactic and lexical point of view, closer to the English language than Italian (Finegan, 1987; Posner, 1996). Finally, some argue that the English language is so integrated into the Dutch society to the point that it has become the most important language, after Dutch, in business, advertising, entertainment, and politics (Edwards, 2016; Gerritsen et al., 2016). Some even go as far as stating that English is

“steadily becoming nativized” in the Netherlands (McArthur, 1996, p. 13). Therefore, including Dutch and Italian consumers in the study not only added to existing research on international crisis communication by including potential consumers from different countries with different linguistic backgrounds, but it also potentially provided this study with participants with varying levels of English (L2) proficiency to investigate the moderating role of L2 proficiency.

### **The current study**

The current study, by investigating how language choice (L1 vs L2) affects consumers’ perceptions and reactions to a crisis response expands on the existing research in the field of international crisis communication. In fact, while other factors, such as cross-cultural differences (individualistic vs collectivistic, see An et al., 2010) have been extensively researched, no study to date, to the knowledge of the researcher, has investigated how language might play a role in how consumers may react to and perceive a crisis response. Not only in international crisis communication but in the field of corporate communication the role of language has often been overlooked, even though several studies have stressed its importance and shown that language should not become a “forgotten issue” (Marschan et al., 1997, p. 597). Furthermore, by including Italian and Dutch consumers the study also adds to the literature available on cross-national crisis communication effects, which to date is very limited (Coombs & Laufer, 2018).

There seems to be quite a significant gap in the literature regarding the theory of language emotionality in regards to corporate communication. To date, only one study by Puntoni et al. (2008) has applied the theory of language emotionality to the context of corporate communication. Therefore, this study may help to shed more light on whether the theory can successfully be applied to other contexts outside of the field of psycholinguistics.

The findings of this study will also be able to advise MNCs on the best approach (standardization vs localization) to implement when formulating an international crisis response aimed at various countries with different linguistic backgrounds (high and low L2 proficiency). The increased number of international crises calls for the need to improve the current understanding of how language influences consumers' perceptions of crisis response strategies.

### **Research questions**

In order to fill the gap in the research surrounding the role of language choice in organizational crisis communication the two central research questions of the current study read as follows:

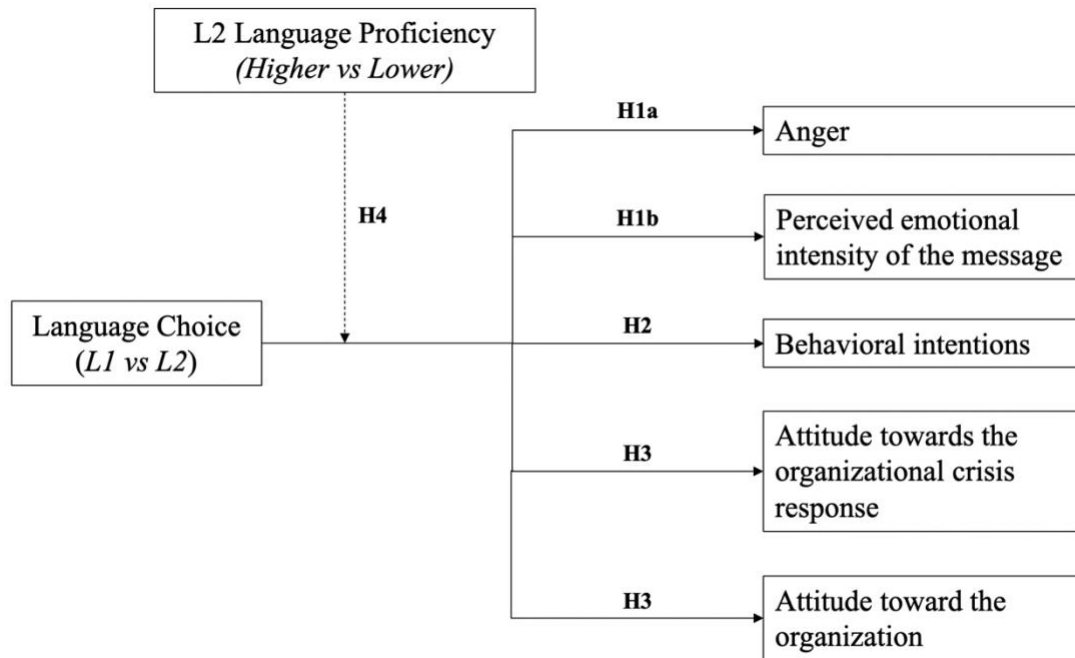
**RQ1:** *To what extent does the language choice (L1 vs L2) in a crisis response have an effect on consumers' anger, emotionality, behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude towards the crisis response?*

**RQ2:** *To what extent does L2 proficiency moderate the effect of language choice (L1 vs L2) in a crisis response on consumers' anger, emotionality, behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude towards the crisis response?*

To answer these two central research questions, an analytical model was developed (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Analytical model.



### **Method**

The purpose of the current study was to explore the effects of language choice (L1 vs L2) on Dutch and Italian consumers' anger, emotionality, behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude towards the crisis response in the context of organizational crisis communication.

Furthermore, this study explored the possible moderating role of L2 proficiency (higher vs lower) on the effect of language choice on the dependent variables (anger, emotionality, behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude and towards the crisis response). Initially, this was supposed to be analysed by comparing Dutch and Italian participants as it was anticipated, based on the EF English Proficiency Index (EF, 2020), that Dutch participants would be more proficient in the L2, English, compared to Italian participants. However, this was not the case and the participants were rearranged into two new groups based on their L2 proficiency (higher vs lower), regardless of nationality (see further below).

The present study, to explore the effect of language in crisis communication, employed an experiment in the form of an online questionnaire.

### **Materials**

The main independent variable of this study was the language of the crisis response, which could either be in the L1 or L2 of the participants. L2 proficiency, which could either be higher or lower, was treated as a moderator.

The current study focused on emotionality, but specifically on the emotion of anger as it is one of the most common emotions experienced during a crisis (McDonald & Härtel, 2000). To do so, a preventable internal crisis in which the MNC denies all responsibility and is caused by human

error was utilized as the crisis case in the experiment. This combination has been found, by previous studies (Coombs & Holladay; 2005), to elicit considerably high amounts of emotionality, especially anger, in the consumers. This study adopted a cell phone battery explosion incident previously used by An et al. (2010) and Kim and Cameron (2011). A smartphone was chosen as it is a product that most participants own and therefore would feel more emotionally invested.

To present the crisis to the participants an online news article titled *The M600 from QuRo Catches Fire* was created (see Figure C1 and C2 in Appendix C). The article reported a cell phone battery accident involving the M600 smartphone model from QuRo that had to be recalled. The news article was presented to the participants in their L1 as the aim of this study was to investigate how language choice can influence how a crisis response is perceived. In the news article, a fictitious phone company and smartphone model were created, named QuRo and M600 respectively. This was done to not influence the participants' possible pre-existent bias towards an existing phone company and smartphone model. In the article, it was reported that a dozen smartphones of QuRo (the M600 model) unexpectedly caught fire while being charged and that these fires caused severe injuries. In the article, it was also reported that it was a mistake made by the director of quality control at QuRo that led to the smartphones catching fire. The fictitious was modelled after existing online newspapers like *The New York Times*. The news article was first written in English and then translated into Dutch and Italian using the translation-back-translation method. To make sure the translations were accurate the texts were translated back into English by Dutch and Italian native speakers and compared to the original English text and between each other to check if they were correctly translated.

The news article was followed by the experimental stimulus text, the organization's crisis response in the form of a statement released on QuRo's company website (see Figure C3, C4, C5,

and C6 in Appendix C). In the response, the CEO of the company denied any responsibility for the accident by stating “we do not believe that QuRo is to blame for the M600 catching fire”. By denying any responsibility, even though the before-mentioned newspaper article clearly stated that QuRo’s director of quality control was thought to be responsible, the statement would elicit anger in the participants. The response was presented to the participants either in their L1 (Dutch or Italian) or L2 (English). Like the news article, the response of the CEO was translated to Dutch and Italian by using the translation-back-translation method. The statement was modelled on a real CEO statement released by the phone company Samsung and published on their corporate webpage (Samsung Newsroom US) about their Galaxy Note7 model exploding<sup>1</sup>. The statement included a title, a date, and social media links.

The news article and the statement of the CEO were pre-tested to ensure that they were realistic and clear to the participants. The statement was pre-tested to ensure that it elicited anger. In total 14 participants took part in the pre-test. The average age of the participants was 23 ( $M = 23.14$ ,  $SD = 2.82$ ; range 19–30) and there was an equal amount of female (50%) and male participants (50%). The variables that were measured were comprehensibility, realism, perceived emotional intensity, and the type of emotional response evoked (sympathy, anger, or *schadenfreude*). For the materials that were pre-tested see Figure A1 and A2 in Appendix A and for the pre-test questionnaire see Appendix B.

Comprehensibility was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, anchored by *strongly disagree* - *strongly agree* and introduced by the statement “I believe the newspaper article/statement of the

---

<sup>1</sup> See <https://news.samsung.com/us/official-statement-samsung-galaxy-note7/>

CEO is comprehensible” (adapted from Hendriks et al., 2015). Both the news article ( $M = 5.93$ ) and the statement of the CEO ( $M = 5.57$ ) were deemed to be clear by the participants.

Realism was measured by using three 7-point Likert scales, anchored by *strongly disagree* - *strongly agree* and introduced by the statements “I consider this newspaper article/CEO statement realistic”, “I believe this newspaper article/CEO statement is a good example of a newspaper article/CEO statement”, and “I could see this newspaper article/CEO statement appearing in an online newspaper/on a company's website” (adapted from van Meurs et al., 2015). The reliability of the realism scale for the newspaper article ( $\alpha = .80$ ) and CEO statement was good ( $\alpha = .83$ ). The newspaper article was found to be realistic ( $M = 5.12$ ). However, the statement made by the CEO was found to be less realistic ( $M = 4$ ). Therefore, a few minor changes were made to the way the statement was presented. However, no changes were made to the text itself.

The perceived emotional intensity of the CEO statement was measured on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by *Unemotional* – *Emotional* and introduced by the statement “I found that the statement was” (based on Puntoni et al. 2008). The CEO statement did not seem to evoke a lot of emotions ( $M = 2.64$ ). For this reason, in the newspaper article used in the main experiment “severe injuries” was used instead of just “injuries”.

Lastly, the type of emotional response evoked by the statement of the CEO was measured by using three items anchored by *strongly disagree* - *strongly agree* and introduced by the statement “The statement of QuRo's CEO regarding the exploding M600 model made me feel:”. The three items were sympathy (“Sympathy for QuRo and the CEO”), anger (“Feel angry towards QuRo and the CEO”), and *schadenfreude* (“A little happy that something bad happened to the QuRo, the company deserves it”). The scale was based on Coombs and Holladay (2005). The

statement was found to elicit more anger ( $M = 3.29$ ) in the participants compared to sympathy ( $M = 3.07$ ) and *schadenfreude* ( $M = 2.21$ ).

Overall, based on the findings of the pre-test only minor alterations were made to the materials. Specifically, the statement of the CEO was made more realistic by basing it on a real statement (see Materials) and in the newspaper article “severe injuries” was used instead of just “injuries”.

### Subjects

In total 157 participants<sup>2</sup> took part in the experiment. Eighty-four participants were native speakers of Dutch, and 73 participants were native speakers of Italian. Of the 157 participants 80 were exposed to the L1 condition and 77 were exposed to the L2 condition. Most of the participants were female (63.7%) while the remaining 36.3% were male. The average age of the participants was 38 ( $M = 37.88$ ,  $SD = 15.74$ ; range 18–85). Most of the participants completed either a higher education (19.7%), bachelor’s (49.0%), or master’s degree (25.5%), followed by primary education (1.3%) and PhD (4.5%).

Gender ( $\chi^2(3) = 2.48$ ,  $p = .479$ ) and educational level ( $\chi^2(12) = 11.65$ ,  $p = .474$ )<sup>3</sup> were equally distributed across all four conditions. Regarding the age of the participants, a one-way ANOVA<sup>4</sup> showed that it was not equally distributed across all four conditions ( $F(3, 84.83) = 2.95$ ,

---

<sup>2</sup> Two participants were omitted from the final dataset. The first was eliminated because their mother tongue was German, while the second participant was eliminated because they took almost five days to complete the questionnaire.

<sup>3</sup> The expected cell counts of primary education and PhD were smaller than 5. However, further analyses were beyond the scope of this paper.

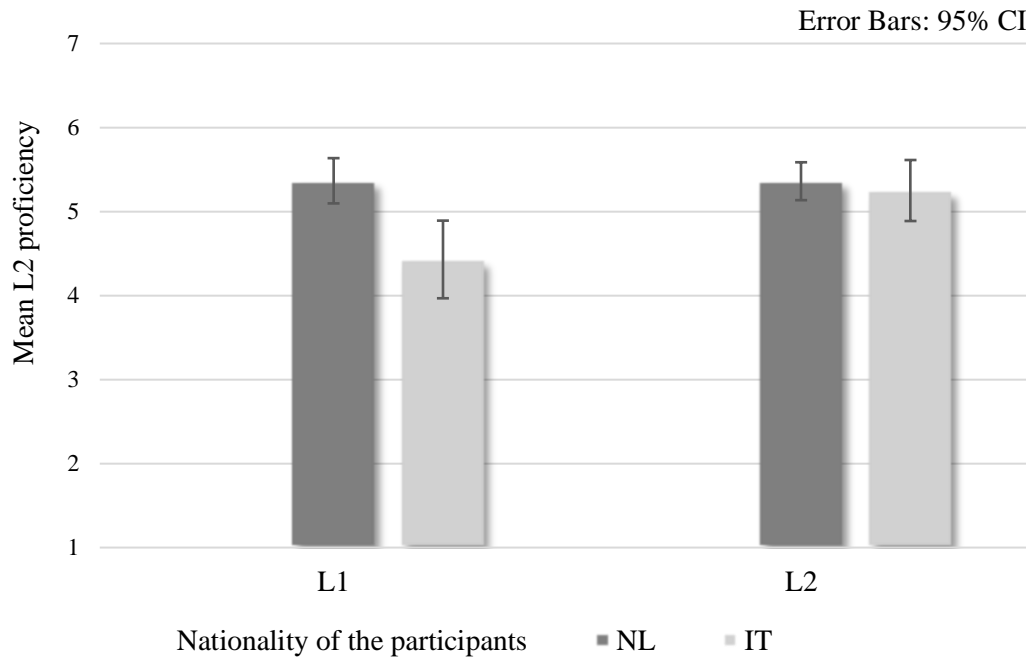
<sup>4</sup> This analysis has been reported with the Welch  $F$ -statistic since Levene’s test of equality of error variance turned out to be significant.

$p = .037$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.05$ ). However, Games-Howell posthoc tests showed that there was no significant difference between individual groups.

An independent samples t-test found a significant difference in self-assessed English language proficiency between the Dutch and Italian participants, ( $t(114.18) = 3.12$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta^2 = 1.07$ ), independent of the language choice conditions (L1 vs L2). In fact, the Dutch participants ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) regarded themselves to be, on average, more proficient in English than the Italian participants ( $M = 4.81$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ). This means that the assumption that Dutch participants would, on average, be more proficient in English (L2) than Italian participants was correct. However, an independent samples t-test (see Figure 2) for the difference in self-assessed English language proficiency between the Dutch and Italian participants in the L2 condition found no significant difference ( $t(57.04) = 0.52$ ,  $p = .602$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.881$ ). In fact, Dutch participants in the L2 condition ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ) were as proficient in English as the Italian participants in the L2 condition ( $M = 5.25$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ). Due to the lack of difference in L2 proficiency the comparison between the Dutch and Italian participants would not reveal anything about the moderating role of L2 proficiency. Therefore, a new variable was created based solely on the L2 proficiency of the participants (see Statistical treatment).

**Figure 2** *L2 proficiency means (1 = very poor; 7 = excellent) for language of the crisis response (L1 and L2) per nationality (Dutch and Italian).*

## LANGUAGE CHOICE IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION



### Design

The experiment used a 2 (language choice: L1 vs L2)  $\times$  2 (L2 proficiency: higher vs lower) between-subjects design. The dependent variables of the study were: anger, emotionality, behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude towards the crisis response. The Dutch and Italian participants were randomly assigned to one of the two language conditions (L1 and L2).

### Instruments

There were two versions of the questionnaire as they had to be in the participants L1, Dutch and Italian. The two versions were identical in structure and content and were translated from an initial English version of the questionnaire by using the translation-back-translation method. For the full questionnaires see Appendix D (Dutch version) and Appendix E (Italian version). In the questionnaires, the participants were asked several questions to measure the effect of language



choice and the moderating role of L2 proficiency on consumers' anger, emotionality, behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude towards the crisis response.

Anger was measured using three 7-point Likert scales anchored by *strongly disagree* – *strongly agree* and introduced by the statement: “The organization’s response...” and followed by “...makes me feel angry”, “...makes me feel irritated”, and “...makes me feel aggravated” (adapted from Dillard et al., 1996; Kim & Cameron, 2011). The reliability of the scale was excellent ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

The perceived emotional intensity of the crisis response was measured using three 7-point Likert scales anchored by *strongly disagree* – *strongly agree* and introduced by the statements “I think that the statement of the CEO is emotional”, “The statement of the CEO makes me emotional”, “The statement of the CEO touches me” (adapted from Puntoni et al., 2008; Speulman, 2014). The reliability of the three items however was questionable ( $\alpha = .67$ ). Therefore, the first item of the scale was omitted, and the composite mean for perceived emotional intensity was calculated based on the two remaining items (“The statement of the CEO makes me emotional” and “The statement of the CEO touches me”), bringing the reliability up to an acceptable level ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

Behavioural intentions were measured by using three 7-point Likert scales anchored by *strongly disagree* – *strongly agree* and was made up of three items: purchase intention (“I would purchase the products of QuRo if I have the opportunity in the future”), investment intention (“I would invest in QuRo if I have the opportunity in the future”), and WOM (“I would recommend QuRo’s products to a friend if I have the opportunity in the future”) (taken from Kim & Cameron, 2011). The reliability of the scale was excellent ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

## LANGUAGE CHOICE IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Attitude towards the organization was measured by using six 7-point Likert scales anchored by *strongly disagree* – *strongly agree* and introduced by the statements: “My impression of the company is positive”, “I don’t like the company” (reverse coded), “The company’s overall image is favourable to me”, “I evaluate the company negatively” (reverse coded), “I am disappointed with the company” (reverse coded), and “I have a negative impression of the company” (reverse coded) (based on Lee, 2004; 2005). The reliability was acceptable ( $\alpha = .76$ ).

Attitude towards the crisis response was measured by using three 7-point Likert scales anchored by *strongly disagree* – *strongly agree* and introduced by the statements: “I support what the company says”, “I agree with what the company says”, and “I’m favourable toward what the company says” (based on Shen & Dillard, 2007). The reliability of the scale was excellent ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

### *Background information and L2 proficiency*

Participants were asked background information, such as gender, age, mother tongue, and education level. Furthermore, participants were also asked about their self-assessed English language proficiency by asking them to evaluate their skills on four 7-point Likert scales anchored by *very poor* – *excellent* and introduced by the statement: “Please indicate how you would assess your English for the following skills”: “Speaking”; “Writing”; “Reading”; and “Listening” (adapted from Krishna & Alhuwalia, 2008). The reliability of this scale was excellent ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

## **Procedure**

The online questionnaire was administered through Qualtrics, a global survey software. At the start of the questionnaire, participants were introduced to the study and asked for their consent. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were thanked for taking part in the experiment. Participants

were recruited through the personal connections of the researcher and were sent the link to the Qualtrics questionnaire by email, personal message, or shared on social media. Participants were not compensated for taking part in this study and participation was completely voluntary. The questionnaire on average took 11 minutes to fill in ( $M = 11.22$ ;  $SD = 24.52$ ).

### **Statistical treatment**

To investigate the effect of language choice (L1 vs L2) on Dutch and Italian consumers' anger, emotionality, behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude towards the crisis response and whether L2 proficiency (higher vs lower) moderated this effect, multiple two-way ANOVAs were performed.

When designing this experimental study, it was predicted, based on EF English Proficiency Index (EF, 2020), that the Dutch participants would be more proficient in English (L2) than the Italian participants. By comparing these two groups of consumers this study would then reveal more on the moderating role of L2 language proficiency. However, as was shown in the Subjects section of this study, the expected difference in L2 proficiency between Dutch and Italian participants was not observed for the L2 condition of this study. Therefore, the participants were regrouped into two separate groups, not based on their nationality (Dutch and Italian) but based on their general proficiency in the English language (L2) and the main analysis (see Results) were conducted with this new variable, lower/higher L2 proficiency.

To create the new variable several statistical steps were necessary. Firstly, the median score of the L2 proficiency of all the participants that took part in the study was computed ( $Mdn = 5.00$ ). Secondly, the participants were then divided into two groups: those that had an L2 proficiency below 5.00 (lower) and those that had an L2 proficiency above 5.00 (higher). Thirdly, a new

variable was created called L2 proficiency. Consequently, in the analyses that were carried out to investigate whether L2 proficiency moderated the effect of language choice the new variable, L2 proficiency (higher vs lower), was used instead of the variable nationality (Dutch vs Italian).

Gender ( $\chi^2 (3) = 3.03, p = .387$ ) and educational level were equally distributed across all new four conditions ( $\chi^2 (12) = 12.21, p = .429$ ). The age of the participants, however, was not equally distributed ( $F (3, 79.33) = 9.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = .151$ )<sup>5</sup>. In fact, a post-hoc comparison revealed that the higher L2 proficient participants in the L2 condition ( $M = 30.74, SD = 10.52$ ) were on average younger than the lower L2 proficient participants in the L1 ( $p = .004$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 41.54, SD = 16.35$ ) and L2 conditions ( $p < .001$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 45.94, SD = 16.96$ ). The higher L2 proficient participants in the L1 condition ( $M = 32.94, SD = 13.83$ ) were on average younger than lower L2 proficiency participants in the L2 condition ( $p = .002$ , Bonferroni-correction).

---

<sup>5</sup> This analysis has been reported with the Welch  $F$ -statistic since Levene's test of equality of error variance turned out to be significant.

### Results

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of language choice (L1 vs L2) on Dutch and Italian consumers' anger, emotionality, behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude towards the crisis response in the context of organizational crisis communication. Furthermore, whether L2 proficiency (higher vs lower) moderated the effect of language choice on the dependent variables was investigated.

#### **Effect of language choice (L1 vs L2) and L2 proficiency (Higher vs Lower) as a moderator**

##### *Anger*

A two-way ANOVA (see Table 1) for anger evoked by the crisis response with as between subject language choice (L1 and L2) and L2 proficiency (higher vs lower) showed no significant main effect language choice ( $F(1, 153) < 1, \eta^2 = .006$ ), and L2 proficiency ( $F(1, 153) < 1, \eta^2 = .005$ ) on participants' anger. The interaction between language choice and L2 proficiency was also found to be not significant proficiency ( $F(1, 153) < 1, \eta^2 = .001$ ).

##### *Perceived emotional intensity*

A two-way ANOVA (see Table 1) for the perceived emotional intensity of the crisis response evoked by the crisis response with as between subject language choice (L1 and L2) and L2 proficiency (higher vs lower) showed no significant main effect language choice ( $F(1, 153) < 1, \eta^2 = .001$ ), and L2 proficiency ( $F(1, 153) = 2.36, p = .127, \eta^2 = .005$ ) on participants perceived emotional intensity of the crisis response. The interaction between language choice and L2 proficiency was also found to be not significant ( $F(1, 153) < 1, \eta^2 = .003$ ).

##### *Behavioural intentions*

A two-way ANOVA<sup>6</sup> (see Table 1) for behavioural intentions evoked by the crisis response with as between subject language choice (L1 and L2) and L2 proficiency (higher vs lower) showed no significant main effect language choice ( $F(1, 153) < 1, \eta^2 = .005$ ), and L2 proficiency ( $F(1, 153) = 2.77, p = .098, \eta^2 = .018$ ) on participants' behavioural intentions. The interaction between language choice and L2 proficiency was also found to be not significant ( $F(1, 153) < 1, \eta^2 = .004$ ).

## *Attitude towards the organization*

A two-way ANOVA (see Table 1) for attitude towards the organization evoked by the crisis response with as between subject language choice (L1 and L2) and L2 proficiency (higher vs lower) showed no significant main effect language choice ( $F(1, 153) < 1, \eta^2 = .003$ ), and L2 proficiency ( $F(1, 153) = 1.03, p = .313, \eta^2 = .007$ ) on participants' attitude towards the organization. However, the interaction between language choice and L2 proficiency was found to be significant ( $F(1, 153) = 4.71, p = .032, \eta^2 = .030$ ). To disentangle the interaction effect between language choice (L1 vs L2) and L2 proficiency (higher vs lower) separate one-way ANOVA were carried out for the L1 and L2 language conditions.

The one-way ANOVA for the L1 condition (Dutch/Italian) for attitude towards the organization evoked by the crisis response with only L2 proficiency as between subject factor showed a significant main effect of L2 proficiency ( $F(1, 78) = 4.89, p = .030, \eta^2 = .059$ ). In fact, consumers who were less proficient in the L2 ( $M = 3.67, SD = 1.01$ ) had more positive attitudes towards the organization than consumers who were more proficient in the L2 ( $M = 3.17, SD = .96$ ). However, while L2 proficiency may statistically have an effect on the participants' attitude towards

---

<sup>6</sup> The Levene's test of equality of error variance turned out to be significant ( $p = .032$ ).

the organization in the L1 condition, the effect is not relevant to the focus of the current research as proficiency in the L2 cannot have an effect in the L1 condition.

The one-way ANOVA for the L2 condition (English) for attitude towards the organization evoked by the crisis response with only L2 proficiency as between subject factor showed no significant main effect of L2 proficiency ( $F(1, 75) = 4.89, p = .030, \eta^2 = .059$ ).

*Attitude towards the crisis response*

Lastly, a two-way ANOVA (see Table 1) for attitude towards the crisis response evoked by the crisis response with as between subject language choice (L1 and L2) and L2 proficiency (Higher and Lower) showed no significant main effect language choice ( $F(1, 153) = 1.29, p = .257, \eta^2 = .008$ ), and L2 proficiency ( $F(1, 153) = 1.22, p = .271, \eta^2 = .008$ ) on participants' attitude towards the crisis response. The interaction between language choice and L2 proficiency was also found to be not significant ( $F(1, 153) < 1, \eta^2 = .006$ ).

**Table 1** *Means and standard deviations for anger, perceived emotional intensity, behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude towards the crisis response in function of language choice and L2 proficiency (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).*

	L1		L2	
	Higher L2 proficiency	Lower L2 proficiency	Higher L2 proficiency	Lower L2 proficiency
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Anger	4.45 (1.43)	4.35 (1.58)	4.32 (1.58)	3.99 (1.48)
Perceived emotional intensity	2.39 (1.34)	2.88 (1.35)	2.48 (1.37)	2.67 (1.51)
Behavioural intentions	2.09 (0.93)	2.57 (1.30)	2.42 (1.13)	2.59 (1.35)

## LANGUAGE CHOICE IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

	L1		L2	
Attitude towards the organization	3.17 (0.96)	3.67 (1.01)	3.61 (1.00)	3.43 (0.89)
Attitude towards the response	2.75 (1.13)	3.21 (1.46)	3.22 (1.30)	3.25 (1.53)



### **Conclusion and discussion**

The aim of the current study was to investigate whether using an L1 or an L2 during an international crisis response could influence Italian and Dutch consumers' anger, emotionality, behavioural intentions, attitude towards the organization, and attitude towards the crisis response. Furthermore, this study also explored whether consumers' proficiency in the L2 moderated the effect of language choice on the dependent variables.

#### **The effect of language choice**

The findings of the current study revealed that Dutch and Italian consumers were found to feel the same amounts of anger and emotionality, have the same behavioural intentions, and have the same attitudes towards the organization and its response when they were confronted with the crisis response in their L1 or L2. Therefore, the first three hypotheses of this study (H1, H2, and H3), stating that the language (L1 vs L2) in which the crisis response is presented has an effect on consumers' response, were rejected.

The first three hypotheses of this research were based on previous findings in the field of psycholinguistics regarding the lower degree of emotionality associated with an L2 (Dewaele, 2004; Harris, 2004; Harris et al., 2003; Harris et al., 2006; Pavlenko, 2005; Puntoni et al., 2008) and the Foreign Language Effect (FLE) that states that an L2 allows for more emotional distance during the decision-making process (Cipolletti et al., 2016; Costa et al., 2013; Costa et al., 2014; Keysar et al., 2012). In contrast to earlier findings, the present study found no evidence of language choice having an impact on consumers' perceptions. However, it is important to take into account the differences between the current study and earlier ones, as this could explain the conflicting results.

Firstly, the studies by Dewaele (2004), Harris (2004), Harris et al. (2003), and Harris et al. (2006) all primarily explored the perceived emotional force of swearwords and the physiological reaction to swearwords in bi- and multilinguals. Swearwords, as pointed out by Jay and Janschewitz (2008), are “well suited to express emotion as their primary meanings are connotative” (p. 267). Therefore, swearwords are unique linguistic devices as they can be used to express and evoke strong emotions. So, while the difference in the emotional reaction to L1 and L2 swearwords might have been in part due to the language in which they were presented to the participants, the findings of Dewaele (2004), Harris (2004), Harris et al. (2003), and Harris et al. (2006) might be unique only to swearwords. Meanwhile, the current research did not include any swearwords in the design of the experimental stimulus text. This could partly explain why there were no differences found in the emotional reaction of participants that read the L1 and L2 crisis responses.

Secondly, Puntoni et al. (2008) yielded similar results to Dewaele (2004), Harris (2004), Harris et al. (2003), and Harris et al. (2006) in the field of advertising. The authors found that across the five experiments they conducted L1 marketing slogans tended to be perceived as more emotionally loaded than L2 marketing slogans. However, contrary to the stimuli text used in the current research, which focused primarily on negative emotions (anger), five out of the six slogans used by Puntoni et al. (2008, p. 7) in the first study had all positive emotional connotations (e.g. “Where a kid can be a kid and the magic never ends. The happiest place on Earth”). Furthermore, the participants that took part in the experiments were trilinguals (French/Dutch/English) from the capital city of Belgium, Brussels, which is characterised by a unique linguistic history that has led to tensions between the native Dutch speakers and the native French speaker (Treffers-Daller, 2002). These linguistic tensions could have possibly contributed to the higher perceived emotionality of the L1 in the study conducted by Puntoni et al. (2008). Therefore, the findings of

the current study might deviate from those of Puntoni et al. (2008) not only because of the contrasting emotions investigated but also because of the specific societal tensions that exist between the languages chosen for Puntoni et al.'s (2008) study.

Lastly, the FLE states that the use of an L2 language can influence the decision-making process as people are more likely to rely on analytical processes, as opposed to more affective processes, to make decisions (Cipolletti et al., 2016; Costa et al., 2013; Costa et al., 2014; Keysar et al., 2012). The current research, based on the findings of previous studies, hypothesized (H2 and H3) that the use of an L2 could lead to consumers being less critical when evaluating an organization's crisis response and therefore having more positive behavioural intentions and attitudes. In contrast to earlier findings, however, no evidence of the FLE was detected in the present study. The two groups of consumers, with higher and lower L2 proficiency, were found to be as likely to purchase the smartphone, invest in the company, and recommend the smartphone to friends and to have similar attitudes to the organization and its response. One possible explanation for this could be the different types of decisions that participants were asked to make. The decision-making process for the participants in the current research was relatively simple, as they only had to judge how bad they thought the actions of the organization were and then form their behaviours and attitudes accordingly. However, in the previous studies, the decisions were far more complex. For example, in Keysar et al.'s (2012) study participants were told that "a dangerous new disease has been going around" and that "without medicine, 600,000 people will die from it" (p. 662). Participants were then asked to choose between a medicine that would save 200,000 people and one that would have a 33.3% chance that 600,000 people would be saved and a 66.6% that no people would be saved. Costa et al. (2014) asked participants to imagine themselves standing on a footbridge overlooking a train that is about to kill five people and told that the only way to save

them is to push a man off the footbridge. The participants were then asked to choose between pushing the man and therefore killing him or not pushing him and therefore killing the five people. These decisions are clearly complicated as they address extreme ethical and moral dilemmas. The FLE could therefore not be as pronounced in this study as it was in previous ones that related to moral decision making.

Overall, it seems that the findings of previous studies in the field of psycholinguistics and moral decision-making studies are not relevant in the context of crisis communication as language choice and the FLE did not have an effect on consumers' emotionality, behaviours, and attitudes. The lack of an effect may be because other factors may have more of an impact on how consumers react to an organization's crisis response (e.g. cultural differences, see An et al., 2010). The lack of an effect of language choice may also partly be explained by the rather high L2 proficiency of the participants ( $M = 5.11$  on a 7-point Likert scale, 1 = *very poor* and 7 = *excellent*). In fact, while L2 proficiency was not found to moderate the effect of language choice in the present study, previous research has found that high proficiency in the L2 can lead not only to a decrease in the perceived emotionality but also that it can eliminate the emotional difference between the L1 and L2 (Čavar & Tytus, 2018; Costa et al., 2014; Pavlenko, 2005; Mägiste, 1986). Therefore, the high L2 proficiency of the participants may in part explain why no effect of language choice was found in this study.

### **L2 proficiency as a moderator**

The last hypothesis of the present study (H4) stated that L2 proficiency moderates the effect of language choice on consumers' emotions, behaviours, and attitudes. The hypothesis was based on previous findings in the field of psycholinguistics (Pavlenko, 2005; Mägiste, 1986) and findings

from studies researching moral decision making (Čavar & Tytus, 2018; Costa et al., 2014). Čavar and Tytus (2018), for example, found that German and Croatian bilingual participants with high proficiency in the L2 showed no increase in analytical decision making when presented with a moral dilemma in the L2 (vs L1), suggesting that the FLE is eliminated when the L2 proficiency is high. To investigate this, two consumer groups, one with higher L2 proficiency and one with lower L2 proficiency, were compared. The findings of the present study, however, did not corroborate this and the hypothesis was rejected.

The lack of a moderating effect of L2 proficiency may be due to the differences between the previous studies and the present study, and simply indicate that L2 proficiency does not moderate the effect of language choice in the field of crisis communication. However, it may also be because the differences between the high L2 proficient consumers and low L2 proficient consumers was not very pronounced and therefore the difference in effect was less pronounced. It may be that if the difference in L2 proficiency were to be more pronounced that the moderating effect would come into play.

### **Limitations and suggestions for future research**

The current study presented several limitations that warrant suggestions for future research. Firstly, the crisis and the organization presented to the participants in the study were fictitious. An organization's reputation prior to the crisis plays, according to the SCCT model developed by Coombs (2007), an important role. By incorporating a real organization with a positive or negative pre-crisis reputation and measuring how the reputation was affected could bring more validity to the study. Additionally, the crisis that was designed for this study was a cell phone battery explosion incident where only a few people were injured. The emotions it evoked in the

participants of the experiment were generally quite low and may have impacted the lack of significant results. Future research may want to use a crisis with more emotional impact in order to see the effect of language choice on consumers' emotional response better.

Secondly, Dutch and Italian consumers were chosen for two reasons. On one hand, it was done to add to the international aspect of this study. On the other hand, according to the EF English Proficiency Index (EF, 2020), it would provide the study with two consumer groups with varying degrees of L2 proficiency (higher vs lower). However, when recruiting participants for the study, the Italian participants (assumed to be less proficient in the L2) who were asked to fill out the questionnaire with the L2 (English) crisis response were hesitant, with some not finishing the questionnaire. This was especially true for those Italian participants with low proficiency in the L2 as they reported to the researcher that they did not know English well enough and that they would not be able to understand it. Therefore, future research may want to include a disclaimer for the participants to assure them that they are not expected to understand the L2 crisis response perfectly and that being proficient in the L2 is not a prerequisite for taking part in the study. Moreover, it may be interesting for future research investigating the moderating role of L2 proficiency, especially if English is the L2, to include countries from the Middle East. In fact, English proficiency in the Middle East is by far the lowest of any region in the world (EF, 2020). Comparing consumers from Western countries and Middle Eastern countries may reveal more about L2 proficiency and add more to the research on international crisis communication than simply comparing two Western countries.

Thirdly, the present study only explored how consumers' L2 proficiency may moderate the effect of language choice. Other studies in the field of psycholinguistics, however, may suggest that other linguistic factors such as attitude towards the L2, comprehension of the L2, and context

of L2 acquisition may play a role in the effect of language choice. For a complete overview of these factors see Dewaele (2010) and Pavlenko (2005). For example, Dewaele (2010) found that participants who had learnt an L2 only in an instructed context (e.g. in the classroom) were less likely to use an L2 to express feelings compared to participants who had learnt the L2 in a naturalistic (e.g. at home) or mixed context. Including these factors may give more insight into how various linguistic factors that can vary across consumers may influence crisis communication.

Lastly, the measurement employed in the current study to measure L2 proficiency was a 7-point Likert scale where participants were asked how they would rate their skills in the English (L2) language. As the scale was not an objective measurement of their proficiency, the results may not be completely representative of participants' actual proficiency. Therefore, research may want to use the LexTALE scale instead which has been found to be a good measure of general English proficiency (Lemhöfer & Broersma, 2012). The scale was not employed for the current study as it is time-consuming and respondents might suffer from fatigue and not complete the questionnaire.

### **Practical and theoretical implications**

The present study showed that language choice does not affect how Dutch and Italian consumers react to and perceive an organization's crisis response. Therefore, MNCs, when faced with an international crisis, can choose whether to adapt to each country (L1) or use a *lingua franca* (e.g. English) in all countries (L2). However, it may still be more beneficial to adapt to the host countries and use the native language (L1) as not all consumers may be proficient in the *lingua franca*. In fact, even though this study found no conclusive effects of language choice, it did reveal that a handful of participants did not even attempt to read the English (L2) crisis response because of their lack of English proficiency. Being able to be understood by all its consumers should be a

high-priority goal for any organization that operates internationally and is going through a crisis (McDonald et al., 2010). The study also revealed that the older participants were relatively less proficient in the L2 than younger participants. Therefore, if the target group of the organization or the consumers affected by the faulty product is older, MNCs may be even more compelled to adapt to the local market and use the L1 to reach all segments of their consumer group.

This study has several theoretical implications. Firstly, by including Italian and Dutch consumers the current study adds to the research on international crisis communications. Secondly, this study introduced a novel factor in Coombs' (2007) SCCT, language, which up until now had been left unresearched. Lastly, this exploratory study raised important questions of whether language choice and the FLE may be relevant in the context of crisis communication by providing insight into their effect on Dutch and Italian consumers. Overall, by providing insights into the effects of using a foreign language (e.g. English) in an organization's crisis communication response, this study addresses the very relevant factor of globalization, which cannot be overlooked anymore.



### References

- Aiello, J. (2018). *Negotiating Englishes and English-speaking identities: A study of youth learning English in Italy*. Routledge.
- An, S. K., Park, D. J., Cho, S., & Berger, B. (2010). A cross-cultural study of effective organizational crisis response strategy in the United States and South Korea. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 4(4), 225-243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2010.515543>
- Čavar, F., & Tytus, A. E. (2018). Moral judgement and foreign language effect: When the foreign language becomes the second language. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 39(1), 17-28.
- Cipolletti, H., McFarlane, S., & Weissglass, C. (2016). The moral foreign-language effect. *Philosophical Psychology*, 29(1), 23-40.
- Coombs, W. T. (2006) The protective powers of crisis response strategies: Managing reputational assets during a crisis. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 12, 241-259.
- Coombs, W. T. (2007). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory. *Corporate Reputation Review* 10(3), 163-176.
- Coombs, W. T. (2008) The Future of Crisis Communication from an International Perspective. In Nolting, T., Thießen, A. (Eds.), *Krisenmanagement in der Mediengesellschaft*. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-91191-5\\_19](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-91191-5_19)
- Coombs, W. T. (2013) Future of Crisis Communication. In Thießen, A. (Ed.), *Handbuch Krisenmanagement*. Springer VS. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-19367-0\\_23](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-19367-0_23)
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (1996). Communication and attributions in a crisis: An experimental study in crisis communication. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 8(4), 279-295.
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2002). Helping crisis managers protect reputational assets: Initial tests of the situational crisis communication theory. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 16, 165-186.
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2004). Reasoned Action in Crisis Communication: An Attribution Theory-Based Approach to Crisis Management. In Millar, D., & Heath, R.

- (Eds.), *Responding to Crisis: A Rhetorical approach to Crisis Communication*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2005). An exploratory study of stakeholder emotions: Affect and crises. *Research on Emotion in Organizations*, 1(5), 263-280.
- Coombs, W. T., & Laufer, D. (2018). Global crisis management – Current research and future directions. *Journal of International Management*, 24(3), 199-203.
- Costa, A., Foucart, A., Arnon, I., Aparici, M., & Apesteguia, J. (2013). “Piensa” twice: On the foreign language effect in decision making. *Cognition*, 130(2), 236-254. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2013.11.010>
- Costa, A., Foucart, A., Hayakawa, S., Aparici, M., Apesteguia, J., Heafner, J., & Keysar, B. (2014). Your morals depend on language. *PloS One*, 9(4). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0094842>
- Crystal, D. (2012). *English as a global language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Degner, J., Doycheva, C., & Wentura, D. (2012). It matters how much you talk: On the automaticity of affective connotations of first and second language words. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 15(1), 181-189.
- Dewaele, J. M. (2004). The emotional force of swearwords and taboo words in the speech of multilinguals. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 25(2-3), 204-222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630408666529>
- Dewaele, J. M. (2010). *Emotions in multiple languages*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-28950-5>
- Diers-Lawson, A. (2017). A state of emergency in crisis communication: An intercultural crisis communication research agenda. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 46(1), 1-54.
- Dillard, J. P., Plotnick, C. A., Godbold, L. C., Freimuth, V. V., & Edgar, T. (1996). The multiple affective outcome of AIDS PSA: Fear appeals do more than scare people. *Communication Research*, 23, 44-32.
- Edwards, A. (2016). *English in the Netherlands: Functions, forms and attitudes*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- EF. (2020). *EF EPI: EF English Proficiency Index*. Available from <https://www.ef.com/assetscdn/WIBIwq6RdJvcD9bc8RMd/legacy/~/media/centralefcom/epi/downloads/full-reports/v10/ef-epi-2020-english.pdf>
- Finegan, E. (1987). English. In Bernard, C. (Ed.), *The World's Major Languages* (77–109). Croom Helm.
- Fombrun, C. J., & Gardberg, N. (2000). Who's tops in corporate reputation? *Corporate Reputation Review*, 3(1), 13-17. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540095>
- Freeman, R.E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Marshfield.
- Gerritsen, M., Van Meurs, F., Planken, B., & Korzilius, H. (2016). A reconsideration of the status of English in the Netherlands within the Kachruvian three circles model. *World Englishes*, 35(3), 457-474. <https://doiorg.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/weng.12206>
- Harris, C. L. (2004). Bilingual speakers in the lab: Psychophysiological measures of emotional reactivity. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 25, 223-247.
- Harris, C., Ayçiçeği, A. & Gleason, J. (2003). Taboo words and reprimands elicit greater autonomic reactivity in a first than in a second language. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 24, 561–579.
- Harris, C. L., Gleason, J. B., & Ayçiçeği, A. (2006) When is a first language more emotional? Psychophysiological evidence from bilingual speakers. In Pavlenko, A. (Ed.), *Bilingual minds: Emotional experience, expression, and representation* (257–283). Multilingual Matters.
- Hendriks, B., van Meurs, F., & van der Meij, E. (2015). Does a foreign accent sell? The effect of foreign accents in radio commercials for congruent and non-congruent products. *Multilingua*, 34(1), 119–130. <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2013-0048>
- Jay, T., & Janschewitz, K. (2008). The pragmatics of swearing. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 4, 267–288.
- Keysar, B., Hayakawa, S. L., & An, S. G. (2012). The foreign-language effect: Thinking in a foreign tongue reduces decision biases. *Psychological Science*, 23(6), 661-668.
- Kim, H. J., & Cameron, G. T. (2011). Emotions matter in crisis: The role of anger and sadness in the publics' response to crisis news framing and corporate crisis response. *Communication Research*, 38(6), 826–855.

- Krishna, A., & Ahluwalia, R. (2008). Language choice in advertising to bilinguals: Asymmetric effects for multinationals versus local firms. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(4), 692–705.
- Lee, B. K. (2004). Audience-oriented approach to crisis communication: A study of Hong Kong consumers' evaluation of an organizational crisis. *Communication Research*, 31(5), 600–618.
- Lee, B. K. (2005). Hong Kong consumers' evaluation in an airline crash: A path model analysis. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 17(4), 363–391.
- Lehmberg, D., & Hicks, J. (2018). A 'glocalization' approach to the internationalizing of crisis communication. *Business Horizons*, 61(3), 357–366. <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2018.01.002>
- Lemhöfer, K., & Broersma, M. (2012). Introducing Lextale: A quick and valid lexical test for advanced learners of English. *Behavior Research Methods*, 44(2), 325–43. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-011-0146-0>
- Louhiala-Salminen, L., Charles, M., & Kankaanranta, A. (2005). English as a lingua franca in Nordic corporate mergers: Two case companies. *English for Specific Purposes*, 24(4), 401–421.
- Louhiala-Salminen, L., & Kankaanranta, A. (2012). Language as an issue in international internal communication: English or local language? if English, what English? *Public Relations Review*, 38(2), 262–269. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.12.021>
- Mägiste, E. (1986). Selected issues in second and third language learning. In Vaid, J. (Ed.), *Language Processing in Bilinguals: Psycholinguistic and Neurolinguistic Perspectives* (97–122). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Marian, V., & Kaushanskaya, M. (2004). Self-construal and emotion in bicultural bilinguals. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 51, 190–201. doi:10.1016/j.jml.2004.04.003
- Marschan, R., Welch, D., & Welch, L. (1997). Language: The forgotten factor in multinational management. *European Management Journal*, 15(5), 591–598. [https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/S0263-2373\(97\)00038-8](https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/S0263-2373(97)00038-8)
- McArthur, T. (1996). English in the world and in Europe. In Reinhard, R. H. (Ed.), *The English language in Europe* (3–15). Intellect.


- McDonald, L. M., Sparks, B., & Glendon, A. I. (2010). Stakeholder reactions to company crisis communication and causes. *Public Relations Review*, 36(3), 263–271. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.04.004>
- McDonald, L. & Hartel, C. E. J. (2000). *Applying the involvement construct to organizational crises*. Proceedings of the Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference, Visionary Marketing for the 21st Century: Facing the Challenge, Griffith University, Department of Marketing, Gold Coast, pp. 799–803.
- Mera, M. (1999). Read my lips: Re-evaluating subtitling and dubbing in Europe. *Links and Letters*, 73-85.
- Pavlenko, A. (2005). *Emotions and multilingualism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Piller, I., Zhang, J., & Li, J. (2020). Linguistic diversity in a time of crisis: language challenges of the covid-19 pandemic. *Multilingual: Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*, 39(5), 503–515.
- Posner, R. (1996). *The romance languages*. Cambridge University Press.
- Puntoni, S., De Langhe, B., & Van Osselaer, S. M. (2008). Bilingualism and the emotional intensity of advertising language. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(6), 1012-1025.
- Roberts, P. W., & Dowling, G. R. (2002). Corporate reputation and sustained superior financial performance: reputation and persistent profitability. *Strategic Management Journal*, 23(12), 1077–1093. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.274>
- Seeger, M. W., Sellnow, T. L., & Ulmer, R. R. (1998). Communication, Organization, and Crisis. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 21(1), 231-276, DOI: 10.1080/23808985.1998.11678952
- Shen, L. & Dillard, J. P. (2007). The influence of BIS/BAS and message framing on the processing of persuasive health messages. *Communication Research*, 34, 433-467.
- Speulman, S. (2014). “Nice Beat, but Those Dutch Vocals Are like a Red Shirt on Yellow Pants” - *An Experimental Study on the Effectiveness of Dutch and English in Pop Music in the Netherlands* (Master’s thesis, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen).
- Taylor, M. (2000). Cultural variance as a challenge to global public relations: a case study of the Coca-Cola scare in Europe. *Public Relations Review*, 26(3), 277–93.

- Treffers-Daller, J. (2002). Language use and language contact in Brussels. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 23(1-2), 50–64.
- Van Meurs, F., Korzilius, H., & Bergevoet, L. (2015). English words and phrases in Dutch job advertisements: Do they function as peripheral persuasion cues? *Dutch Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4, 21–38.
- Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychological Review*, 92(4), 548.
- Walsh, G., V. W., Mitchell, Jackson, P.R., & Beatty, S. (2009). Examining the antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation: A customer perspective. *British Journal of Management*, 20(2), 187-203. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2007.00557.x>

Appendix A – Stimulus material for the pre-test questionnaire

Figure A1 Online news article for pre-test questionnaire.

# THE INDEPENDENT DAILY




TECHNOLOGY

Most Popular

Want Your Kid to Learn Something New?

Europe Proposes Strict Rules for Artificial Intelligence

The Future of the Automotive Industry



## The QuRo M600 Catches Fire

Written by Clark Morrison

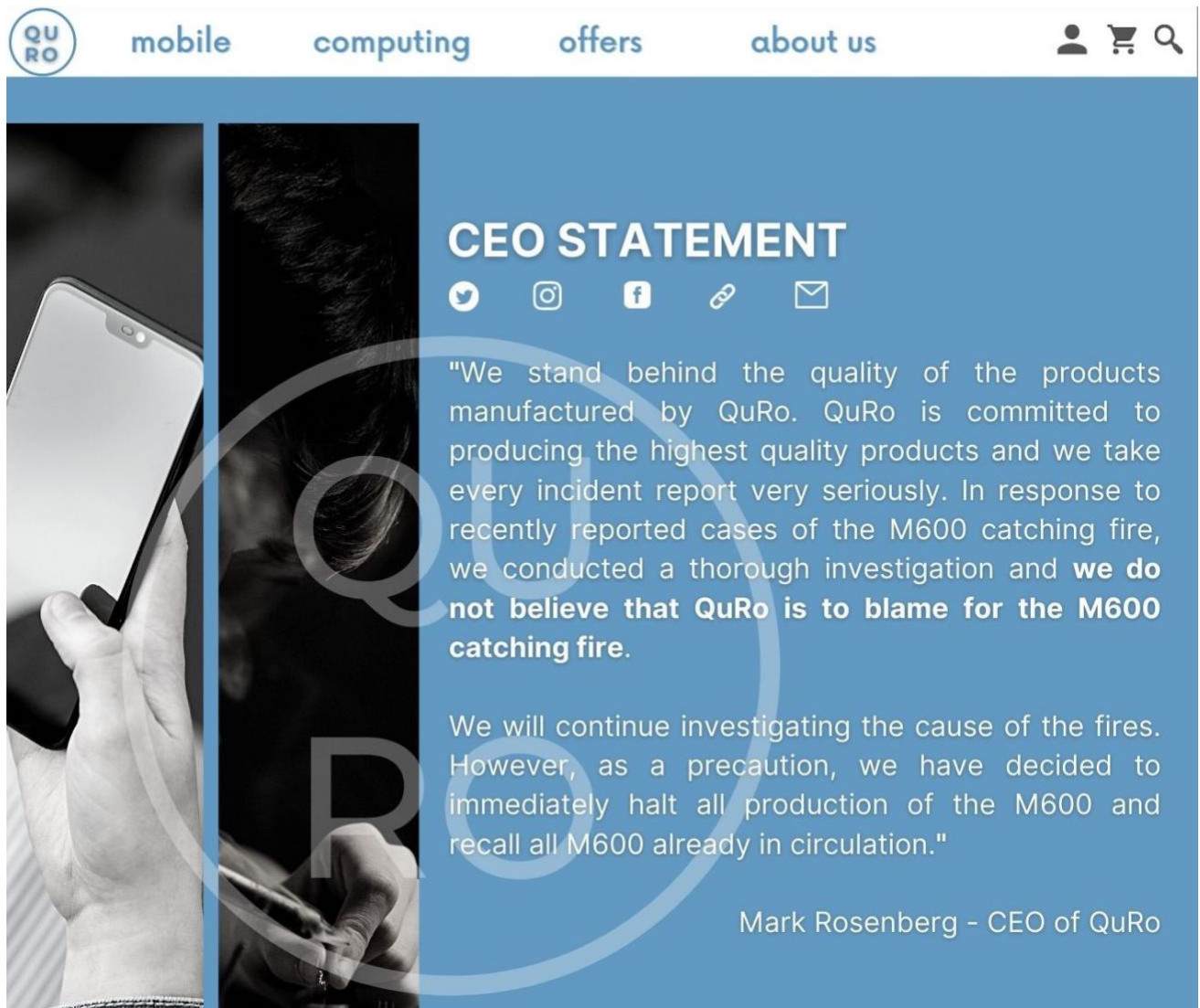
Jan. 18, 2021

In the past two weeks, more than a dozen customers reported that their [QuRo M600 smartphones unexpectedly caught fire](#) while charging in their homes, causing injuries. The CEO of QuRo, Mark Rosenberg, is said to release a statement later in the week addressing the overheating issues of the M600.

According to the US Consumer Product Safety Commission, the fires are due to a design flaw of the M600 that leads to the overheating of the batteries. The Commission reported that this might have been caused by a mistake of QuRo's director of quality control.

The number of M600 smartphones prone to overheating and the number of victims is still unknown. We urge anyone in possession of QuRo's M600 smartphone to be careful and to contact customer service.

**Figure A2** *CEO statement for pre-test questionnaire.*





## **Appendix B – Pre-test questionnaire (Administered to the participants in English)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Dear participant,

We would like to invite you to participate in a research study. Participation is voluntary. If you want to participate, we will ask you to sign a consent form. Before you decide whether or not to take part, we will give you information about the study. Please take time to read the following information carefully. If something is not clear, or you would like more information, please ask the researcher.

In this research study, we want to investigate an organization's communication in times of crisis. Please read these instructions carefully, as they provide information about the coming materials.

During this survey, we will ask you to read a news article and a statement made by the CEO of the company. Afterward, you will be asked to answer a number of questions. It will take approximately 5 minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. This means that you can withdraw your participation and consent at any time during the research, without giving a reason. Even up to two weeks after participating you can have your research data and personal data removed, by sending a request to Eva Hofsteede (eva.hofsteede@student.ru.nl).

The research data we collect during this study will be used by scientists as part of data sets, articles, and presentations. The anonymized research data is accessible to other scientists for a period of at least 10 years. Personal data collected remain confidential. When we share data with other researchers, these data cannot be traced back to you. All research and personal data are safely stored following the Radboud University guidelines.

Should you want more information on this study or file a complaint, please contact Eva Hofsteede (eva.hofsteede@student.ru.nl).

Thank you for your participation!

### **CONSENT**

By clicking on the 'Yes, I want to participate' button below you indicate that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are at least 18 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in this study, please decline participation by clicking on 'No, I do not want to participate'.

## LANGUAGE CHOICE IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

- Yes, I want to participate
- No, I do not want to participate

On the next page, you will be shown an online news article from The Independent Daily about the QuRo M600 smartphones catching fire. The news article was posted on the 18th of January.

We ask you to *carefully* read the article.

### NEWS ARTICLE

#### COMPREHENSABILITY

Please read the following statement and indicate your opinion:

I believe the newspaper article is comprehensible  
Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

#### REALISM

Please read the following statements and indicate your opinion:

I consider this newspaper article realistic  
Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

I believe this article is a good example of a newspaper article  
Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

I could see this article appearing in an online newspaper  
Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

Now we ask you to read the statement of the CEO of QuRo that was posted on their website a few days after the publication of the article reporting the M600 smartphones catching fire.

Again, we ask you to kindly read it *carefully*.

### CEO STATEMENT

#### COMPREHENSABILITY

Please read the following statement and indicate your opinion:

I believe the statement of the CEO is comprehensible  
Strongly disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly agree

#### REALISM

## LANGUAGE CHOICE IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Please read the following statements and indicate your opinion:

I consider this CEO statement realistic  
Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

I believe this CEO statement is a good example of a CEO statement  
Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

I could see this CEO statement appearing on a company's website  
Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

### EMOTIONAL RESPONSE 1

After reading the statement made by the CEO of QuRo, I found that the statement was:

Unemotional ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Emotional

### EMOTIONAL RESPONSE 2

The statement of QuRo's CEO regarding the exploding M600 model made me feel:

Sympathy for QuRo and the CEO  
Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

Feel angry towards QuRo and the CEO  
Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

A little happy that something bad happened to the QuRo, the company deserves it  
Strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly agree

### COMMENTS

If you have any comments please feel free to leave them in the box below

---

### GENDER

Please indicate the gender you associate yourself with:

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Do not want to say

### AGE

Please indicate your age:



---

## Appendix C – Stimulus material for the main questionnaire

**Figure C1** *Online news article in Italian (L1).*




**Figure C2** *Online news article in Dutch (L1).*






---

# NIEUWS COURANT

---



TECHNOLOGIE




**Meest gelezen**

*Wil je kind iets nieuws leren?*

*Europa stelt strikte regels voor artificiële intelligentie*

*De toekomst van de automobiellindustrie*



## *De M600 van QuRo vliegt in brand*

*Door by Clark Morrison*  
Jan. 18, 2021

In de afgelopen twee weken hebben talloze klanten gemeld dat hun [QuRo M600 smartphones onverwachts in brand vlogen](#) tijdens het opladen, met ernstige verwondingen tot gevolg. De CEO van QuRo, Mark Rosenberg, zal later in de week een verklaring uitgeven over de oververhitting problemen van de M600.

Volgens de Amerikaanse Commissie voor de Veiligheid van Consumentenproducten zijn de branden te wijten aan een ontwerpfout van de M600 die leidt tot de oververhitting van de batterijen. De commissie meldde dat dit mogelijk te wijten is aan een fout van de directeur kwaliteitscontrole van QuRo.

Het aantal M600 smartphones dat gevoelig is voor oververhitting en het aantal slachtoffers is nog onbekend. De potentiële problemen (brand- of explosiegevaar) kunnen zeer ernstige schade veroorzaken.

**Figure C3** *Experimental stimulus text: statement of the CEO of QuRo in Dutch (L1).*

< Officiële Verklaringen



"Wij staan achter de kwaliteit van de producten die door QuRo geproduceerd worden. QuRo zet zich in om producten van de hoogste kwaliteit te produceren en we nemen elk incident rapport zeer serieus. Als respons op de recente gemelde gevallen waarin de M600 in brand vloog, hebben we een grondig onderzoek uitgevoerd en **geloven we niet dat QuRo verantwoordelijk is voor het in brand vliegen van de M600.**

We zullen verder onderzoek doen naar de oorzaak van de branden. Uit voorzorg hebben we echter besloten om de productie van de M600 onmiddellijk stop te zetten en alle M600's die al in omloop zijn terug te roepen. "

Mark Rosenberg - CEO van QuRo



**Figure C4** *Experimental stimulus text: statement of the CEO of QuRo in Italian (L1).*

< Dichiarazioni ufficiali



"Crediamo nella qualità dei prodotti realizzati da QuRo. QuRo si impegna a produrre prodotti della massima qualità e prendiamo molto sul serio tutti gli incidenti segnalati. In risposta ai casi recentemente segnalati sui M600 che hanno preso fuoco, possiamo rivelare che abbiamo condotto un'indagine approfondita e che **non crediamo che QuRo sia colpevole per gli incendi dei M600.**

Continueremo a indagare sulla causa degli incendi. Per precauzione, abbiamo deciso di interrompere immediatamente la produzione dell'M600 e di richiamare tutti i M600 già in circolazione."

Mark Rosenberg – Amministratore delegato di QuRo

**Figure C5** *Experimental stimulus text: statement of the CEO of QuRo in English (L2) for Italian participants.*

< Dichiarazioni ufficiali



"We stand behind the quality of the products manufactured by QuRo. QuRo is committed to producing the highest quality products and we take every incident report very seriously. In response to recently reported cases of the M600 catching fire, we conducted a thorough investigation and **we do not believe that QuRo is to blame for the M600 catching fire.**

We will continue investigating the cause of the fires. However, as a precaution, we have decided to immediately halt all production of the M600 and recall all M600 already in circulation."

Mark Rosenberg – Amministratore delegato di QuRo



**Figure C6** *Experimental stimulus text: statement of the CEO of QuRo in English (L2) for Dutch participants.*

< Officiële Verklaringen



"We stand behind the quality of the products manufactured by QuRo. QuRo is committed to producing the highest quality products and we take every incident report very seriously. In response to recently reported cases of the M600 catching fire, we conducted a thorough investigation and **we do not believe that QuRo is to blame for the M600 catching fire.**

We will continue investigating the cause of the fires. However, as a precaution, we have decided to immediately halt all production of the M600 and recall all M600 already in circulation."

Mark Rosenberg - CEO van QuRo

## Appendix D – Main questionnaire (Dutch version)

### INTRODUCTION

Beste deelnemer,

U bent uitgenodigd om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek. Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd als onderdeel van mijn masterthesis voor de opleiding International Business Communication aan de Radboud Universiteit. Voor deelname is uw toestemming nodig. Neem dus de tijd om de volgende informatie aandachtig door te lezen.

In dit onderzoek willen wij de communicatie van een organisatie in tijden van een crisissituatie onderzoeken. Tijdens het onderzoek, zullen wij u vragen om een krantenartikel en een verklaring van een CEO te lezen. Daarna willen wij u verschillende vragen stellen. Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden. Het invullen van deze vragenlijst kost u circa **10 minuten** van uw tijd.

Uw deelname in dit onderzoek is vrijwillig. U kan uw deelname en toestemming op ieder moment intrekken zonder hier een reden voor op te geven. De data die tijdens dit onderzoek worden verzameld, zijn anoniem. Uw antwoorden kunnen dus niet naar u herleid worden en zullen vertrouwelijk worden verwerkt. De geanonimiseerde data zijn voor andere onderzoekers toegankelijk voor een periode van ten minste 10 jaar. Alle gegevens worden veilig opgeslagen volgens richtlijnen van de Radboud Universiteit.

Mocht u meer informatie willen over dit onderzoek of klachten hebben, dan kunt u contact opnemen met Eva Hofsteede (eva.hofsteede@student.ru.nl).

Hartelijk bedankt voor uw medewerking!

### CONSENT

Bij het klikken van het '**Ja, ik bevestig dit en wil deelnemen aan dit onderzoek**' knopje geeft u aan dat:

- U bovenstaande informatie heeft gelezen
- U vrijwillige meedoet aan dit onderzoek
- U 18 jaar of ouder bent

Als u niet wilt deelnemen aan dit onderzoek klik dan op '**Nee, ik bevestig dit niet en wil niet deelnemen aan dit onderzoek**'.

- ☐ Ja, ik bevestig dit en wil deelnemen aan dit onderzoek
- ☐ Nee, ik bevestig dit niet en wil niet deelnemen aan dit onderzoek

Hieronder, krijgt u een nieuwsartikel te zien van het online krant *Nieuws Courant* over de M600 smartphones van QuRo die spontaan in brand zijn gevlogen.

Wij vragen u het artikel *aandachtig* door te lezen.

## LANGUAGE CHOICE IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

News article displayed here (L1)

Nu vragen wij u de verklaring van de CEO van QuRo, Mark Rosenberg te lezen, die een paar dagen na de publicatie van het artikel op hun website werd geplaatst.

Lees deze *aandachtig* door en beoordeel de stellingen onder de verklaring op basis van uw persoonlijke mening. U kunt bij het invullen van de vragen altijd terug naar boven scrollen om de verklaring van de CEO van QuRo nogmaals door te lezen.

CEO statement (crisis response) displayed here (L1/L2)

### PERCEIVED EMOTIONAL INTENSITY

Lees de onderstaande stellingen aandachtig door en geef uw mening:

Ik vind de verklaring van de CEO emotioneel

Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

De verklaring van de CEO maakt mij emotioneel

Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

De verklaring van de CEO raakt mij

Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

### ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE ORGANIZATIONAL CRISIS RESPONSE

Lees de onderstaande stellingen aandachtig door en geef uw mening:

Ik ondersteun wat QuRo zegt

Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

Ik ben het eens met wat QuRo zegt

Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

Ik sta positief tegenover wat QuRo zegt

Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

### ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE ORGANIZATION

Lees de onderstaande stellingen aandachtig door en geef uw mening:

Mijn indruk van QuRo is positief

Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

Ik vind QuRo niet leuk

Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

## LANGUAGE CHOICE IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Het algemene imago van QuRo komt gunstig op mij over  
Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

Ik beoordeel QuRo negatief  
Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

Ik ben teleurgesteld over QuRo  
Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

Ik heb een negatieve indruk van QuRo  
Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

### BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS

Lees de onderstaande stellingen aandachtig door en geef uw mening:

Ik zou producten van QuRo kopen als ik in de toekomst de kans zou krijgen  
Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

Ik zou in QuRo investeren als ik de kans zou krijgen in de toekomst  
Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

Ik zou de producten van QuRo een vriend aanbevelen als ik in de toekomst de kans zou krijgen  
Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

### ANGER

De verklaring van de CEO

Irriteert mij  
Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

Maakt mij boos  
Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

Ergert mij  
Helemaal mee oneens ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Helemaal mee eens

### GENDER

Geef het geslacht aan waar u zich mee identificeert:

- ☐ Man
- ☐ Vrouw
- ☐ Anders
- ☐ Wil ik niet zeggen

## LANGUAGE CHOICE IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

### AGE

Wat is uw leeftijd?

---

### MOTHER\_TONGUE

Wat is uw moedertaal?

---

### EDUCATION

Wat is uw hoogst afgeronde opleiding?

- ☐ Basisonderwijs
- ☐ MBO, VMBO, HAVO, VWO
- ☐ Bachelor
- ☐ Master
- ☐ PhD

Hier zijn enkele uitingen over de Nederlandse en Engelse talen. Vul alstublieft in tot in welke mate ze overeenkomen met uw kijk op deze talen

### SELF-ASSESED L2 LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Geef aan hoe u uw Engelse vaardigheden op de volgende onderdelen beoordeelt:

Spreken

Extreem Slecht O O O O O O O Extreem Goed

Schrijven

Extreem Slecht O O O O O O O Extreem Goed

Lezen

Extreem Slecht O O O O O O O Extreem Goed

Luisteren

Extreem Slecht O O O O O O O Extreem Goed

## Appendix E – Main questionnaire (Italian version)

### INTRODUCTION

Caro partecipante,

La invitiamo a prendere parte in questa ricerca. Questa ricerca farà parte della mia tesi di laurea per il Master in International Business Communication presso l'Università della Radboud. Per la vostra partecipazione abbiamo bisogno del vostro consenso. Si prenda perciò il tempo di leggere attentamente le informazioni date di seguito.

L'obiettivo di questa ricerca è investigare come un'azienda comunica durante una situazione di crisi. Durante il sondaggio, le chiederemo di leggere un articolo di giornale e la dichiarazione di un amministratore delegato. Dopodiché, le verranno chieste delle domande. Non esistono risposte giuste o sbagliate. Per completare il sondaggio ci vorranno all'incirca **10 minuti**.

La vostra partecipazione a questa ricerca è volontaria. Può ritirarsi in qualsiasi momento senza dover dare una motivazione. I dati che verranno raccolti durante questa ricerca sono anonimi. Questo significa che i dati non potranno essere ricondotti a voi e saranno trattati in modo confidenziale. I dati anonimizzati saranno accessibili ad altri ricercatori per un periodo minimo di 10 anni. Tutti i dati verranno salvati in modo sicuro seguendo le direttive dell'Università della Radboud.

Per maggiori informazioni o se avete reclami, le preghiamo di contattare Eva Hofsteede (eva.hofsteede@student.ru.nl).

La ringraziamo per la vostra partecipazione!!

### CONSENT

Cliccando l'opzione '**Sì, confermo ciò e voglio partecipare a questa ricerca**' dichiara che:

- Ha letto le informazioni sopra indicate
- Prende volontariamente parte a questa ricerca
- Ha più di 18 anni

Se non vuole fare parte di questa ricerca clicchi l'opzione '**No, non confermo ciò e non voglio partecipare a questa ricerca**'.

- ☐ Sì, confermo ciò e voglio partecipare a questa ricerca
- ☐ No, non confermo ciò e non voglio partecipare a questa ricerca

Di seguito, le faremo vedere un articolo del giornale online Cronache in Diretta sui smartphone M600 di QuRo che hanno improvvisamente preso fuoco.

## LANGUAGE CHOICE IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Le chiediamo di leggere *attentamente* l'articolo.

News article displayed here (L1)

Adesso le chiederemo di leggere una dichiarazione dell'amministratore delegato di QuRo, Mark Rosenberg, che è stato pubblicato sul loro sito ufficiale qualche giorno dopo la pubblicazione dell'articolo di giornale.

Le chiediamo di leggere *attentamente* e di rispondere alle domande sotto alla dichiarazione sulla base della vostra opinione personale. Se avete qualche dubbio mentre state rispondendo alle domande e volete rileggere la dichiarazione potete sempre tornare all'inizio di questa pagina.

CEO statement (crisis response) displayed here (L1/L2)

### **PERCEIVED EMOTIONAL INTENSITY**

Le preghiamo di leggere le seguenti affermazioni e di dare il vostro parere:

Penso che la dichiarazione dell'amministratore delegato sia emotiva  
In completo disaccordo O O O O O O O In completo accordo

La dichiarazione dell'amministratore delegato mi emoziona  
In completo disaccordo O O O O O O O In completo accordo

La dichiarazione dell'amministratore delegato mi tocca  
In completo disaccordo O O O O O O O In completo accordo

### **ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE ORGANIZATIONAL CRISIS RESPONSE**

Le preghiamo di leggere le seguenti affermazioni e di dare il vostro parere:

Io supporto quello che QuRo dice  
In completo disaccordo O O O O O O O In completo accordo

Io sono d'accordo con quello che QuRo dice  
In completo disaccordo O O O O O O O In completo accordo

Io sono favorevole a quello che QuRo dice  
In completo disaccordo O O O O O O O In completo accordo

### **ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE ORGANIZATION**

Le preghiamo di leggere le seguenti affermazioni e di dare il vostro parere:

La mia impressione di QuRo è positiva

## LANGUAGE CHOICE IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

In completo disaccordo ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ In completo accordo

Mi piace QuRo

In completo disaccordo ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ In completo accordo

Sono favorevole all'immagine generale di QuRo

In completo disaccordo ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ In completo accordo

Io valuto QuRo negativamente

In completo disaccordo ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ In completo accordo

Sono deluso da QuRo

In completo disaccordo ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ In completo accordo

Ho un'impressione negativa di QuRo

In completo disaccordo ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ In completo accordo

## BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS

Le preghiamo di leggere le seguenti affermazioni e di dare il vostro parere:

Se ne avessi la possibilità in futuro comprerei i prodotti di QuRo

In completo disaccordo ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ In completo accordo

Investirei in QuRo se ne avessi la possibilità in futuro

In completo disaccordo ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ In completo accordo

Consiglierei un prodotto di QuRo ad un amico se ne avessi la possibilità in futuro

In completo disaccordo ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ In completo accordo

## ANGER

La dichiarazione dell'amministratore delegato

Mi irrita

In completo disaccordo ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ In completo accordo

Mi fa' arrabbiare

In completo disaccordo ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ In completo accordo

Mi infastidisce

In completo disaccordo ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ In completo accordo



## LANGUAGE CHOICE IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

### GENDER

Indica il genere con cui vi identificate:

- ☐ Uomo
- ☐ Donna
- ☐ Diversamente
- ☐ Non lo voglio dire

### AGE

Qual'è la vostra età?

---

### MOTHER\_TONGUE

Qual'è la vostra lingua madre?

---

### EDUCATION

Qual'è il più alto livello di istruzione completato?

- ☐ Istruzione primaria
- ☐ Istruzione secondaria
- ☐ Laurea
- ☐ Laurea magistrale
- ☐ Dottorato di ricerca

Di seguito vi sono alcune affermazioni che riguardano la lingua inglese e italiana. La preghiamo di indicare in che misura corrispondono alla vostra opinione su queste lingue.

### SELF-ASSESED L2 LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Indica come valuteresti il tuo inglese per le seguenti abilità:

Parlare

Estremamente scarse O O O O O O O Estremamente buone

Scrivere

Estremamente scarse O O O O O O O Estremamente buone

## LANGUAGE CHOICE IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Leggere

Estremamente scarse O O O O O O O Estremamente buone

Ascoltare

Estremamente scarse O O O O O O O Estremamente buone

**Appendix F – Declaration of plagiarism**

The undersigned

Eva Hofsteede s1047411, 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, 10/12/2021

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Hofsteede', with a stylized flourish at the end.