"We are deeply ashamed and sad, or aren't we?"

The effects of expressed emotions in the organisational statement on the organisation's reputation and perceived integrity in various types of crises

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Abstract

To date, the effects of expressed emotions in crisis communication have received little attention, despite the established link between the expression of emotions and the subsequent impact on the effectiveness of the message in other fields of communication. Until now, crisis communication research has mostly focused on the emotional experience of stakeholders post crisis, and has failed to acknowledge that a crisis is also an emotional event for the organisation. One way to express emotion is through the direct statement of feeling. It has not been examined whether such expressions of emotions in various types of crisis impact on an organisation's reputation and perceived integrity. Through literature review, it was hypothesised that expressing emotions in a preventable crisis would lead to a more favourable reputation and a higher level of perceived integrity of an organisation than when emotions were absent, whereas the absence of emotions in an unpreventable crisis would lead to a more favourable reputation and higher level of perceived integrity than when emotions were expressed. In a 2x2 between-subjects experiment, the effects of the expression or absence of emotions in two types of crises, preventable crisis and unpreventable crisis, on the organisation's reputation and perceived integrity were investigated. In total 175 German participants took part in the experiment, by reading one of four randomly assigned fictional Facebook posts by the organisation, a fictitious airline 'Ferialas Airline', and answering questions regarding organisational reputation and perceived integrity. Results showed no significant difference between the expression or absence of emotions in the two types of crises on reputation and perceived integrity. Therefore the hypotheses cannot be supported. Based on the findings, the current study's main conclusion is that no additional attention needs to be paid to expressing emotions in the organisational statement after a crisis when releasing a statement on Facebook.

Keywords: Crisis communication, emotions, crisis type, preventable crisis, unpreventable crisis, reputation, perceived integrity

Introduction

Reputation, perceived integrity and crisis communication

An organisational crisis is an unexpected event, which can harm stakeholders not only financially and/or physically, but also emotionally (Coombs, 2007). Fearn-Banks (2016) argued that a crisis not only disturbs normal business actions, but can also threaten the organisation's existence, regardless of the organisation's size. In addition, a crisis can disturb the organisation's relationship with its stakeholders and consequently damage the organisation's legitimacy and reputation (e.g. Coombs, 2007; Schultz, Utz, Görtiz, 2011).

Reputation can be defined as "the beliefs or opinions that are generally held about someone or something" (Oxford University Press, 2017). The reputation of an organisation is established through the information stakeholders gain through a diversity of sources (e.g. stakeholders' interaction with the organisation, the media or word-of-mouth) (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004). Therefore, Gray and Balmer (1998) described organisational reputation as a conglomeration of value judgements stakeholders make about the organisation's attributes, which generally mature in the course of time as a product of constant performance supported by efficient communication. In addition, the reputation is often seen as a valuable asset that is crucial for the organisation's financial success (Fombrun & Gardberg, 2000).

A favourable reputation can be supported and even improved by the way stakeholders perceive the organisation's integrity (Worden, 2003), as prior research found that the perceived integrity has an impact on the organisation's reputation (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). Even though the organisation's perceived integrity is linked to its reputation, as it is one of the core elements of trustworthiness (Xie & Peng, 2009), there is a clear distinction. Whereas organisational reputation is defined as general beliefs about the organisation, the perceived integrity of an organisation can be depicted as more specific as it describes the observed consistency between words and actions, in line with a set of accurate and responsible principles (e.g. being honest and sincere) (Simons, 1999; Yukl & Van Vleet, 1992). Especially in times of an organisational crisis, a high level of perceived integrity becomes crucial as the way stakeholders observe the organisation can only be protected if stakeholders trust the organisation being honest and sincere, even after organisational wrongdoing (Thießen, 2009).

A crisis can threaten the reputation and the way stakeholders perceive the organisations' integrity, as it creates a potential area of concern to stakeholders. If the way

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stakeholders think about an organisation shifts from favourable to unfavourable, stakeholders could potentially change how they cooperate with an organisation (Coombs, 2007). In other words, a crisis might lead to enraged stakeholders, which potentially results in negative word-of-mouth or even reduced interest in the company. The severity of reputational damage is, among others, determined by the amount of responsibility stakeholders attribute to the organisation, which is in turn determined by the type of crisis (Coombs, 1998; 2007).

To prevent or diminish larger damages organisations and public relations practitioners make use of crisis communication, which can not only preserve, enhance and restore the organisation's reputation, but also uphold a high level of perceived integrity (Fearn-Banks, 2016). Fearn-Banks (2016, p.2) defined crisis communication as "the dialog between the organization and its public(s) prior to, during and after the negative occurrence. The dialog details strategies and tactics designed to minimize damage to the image of the organization". It is claimed that crisis communication requires that the organisations use the most persuasive method containing the best outlined message to the directed public (Fearn-Banks, 2016). According to Fearn-Banks (2016) effective crisis communication involves critical reflection on the organisation to an extent that it cannot only be beneficial to the reputation in times of crisis, but even improve the way stakeholders perceive the organisation in general.

Even though crisis communication has been researched extensively (e.g. Coombs, 1998; 2007; Choi & Lin, 2009), researchers started investigating the use and expression of emotions in a crisis only a decade ago. In addition to the stakeholder's emotions in response to a crisis (e.g. McDonald, Sparks & Glendon, 2010; Jin, Pang & Cameron, 2012; Liu, Austin & Jin, 2011), researchers also examined the effects of emotions expressed by organisations on the organisation's reputation (Clayes & Cauberghe, 2015; Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014), which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. It has however not been determined whether the expression of emotions has an effect during various types of crises on the organisation's reputation and perceived integrity. Therefore, the current study aims to fill this gap by investigating whether the expression of emotions in organisational crisis communication in different types of crises, such as high attributed crisis responsibility and low attributed crisis responsibility to the organisation, has an effect on the organisation's reputation and perceived integrity by the stakeholders. Furthermore, to date, prior research has not examined organisations' reputations together with perceived integrity, even though it has

been established that both are crucial for organisational success. Hence, by investigating both, the current study could add an important contribution to this field of research.

Crisis communication and emotions

Although extensive research has been performed on the effects of crisis communication in relation to organisational reputation (e.g. Coombs, 1998; 2007), the effects of emotions in organisational crisis communication have received little research attention to date. While other fields of research in communication have established that emotions are a crucial component in terms of the effectiveness of the message, for example in advertising (Poels & Dewitte, 2006), crisis communication research has mainly focused on the stakeholders' emotions in response to an organisational crisis (e.g. McDonald et al., 2010; Jin et al., 2012). An organisation may want to restrain its feelings surrounding an issue and only communicate a professional response to protect their image. However, a crisis is not only an emotional experience for the stakeholders and public involved, but also for the organisation itself (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014).

An emotion is a mental state, which arises in response to an evaluative judgment about a behaviour or event that one experiences (Bagozzi, Gopinath & Nyer, 1999). Emotions can also function as a form of communication, since they can indicate information about the sender, in this case the organisation (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). This information, which can be expressed through language, can include how the sender is feeling in a certain situation and what their evaluative judgment is. This can be done in a direct form by exactly stating which emotions are experienced through words (e.g. "We are ashamed") (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). Since the use of emotional language in a message can not only affect the way "messages are shaped, managed, delivered and responded to" (Read, 2007, p. 345), but also elicit certain behaviour (Clayes & Cauberghe, 2015), it is vital to take into consideration when constructing crisis communication messages towards the stakeholders. Therefore, the expression of emotions in an organisational crisis could be an innovative asset in crisis communication.

One of the few studies that have been conducted in the research field of expression of emotions in crisis communication, showed that the use of emotions in an organisational crisis led to more beneficial perceptions towards the sender (Kim & Cameron, 2011). This study by Kim and Cameron (2011) revealed that emotional messages in an organisational crisis

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impacted upon the stakeholders' perceptions of the organisation's corporate credibility but also determined the reactions by the stakeholders, in terms of more favourable, behavioural intentions towards the organisation. This notion was supported by another study (Legg, 2009), which showed that the conveyance of an emotion in stakeholder communication during a crisis also led towards a more forgiving public.

Furthermore, prior research examined the expression of emotions in the organisational statement after a crisis on the organisation's reputation (Clayes & Cauberghe, 2015; Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014) investigated the expression of an emotion, such as shame, in the organisational statement after a crisis and the response strategy. Results showed that the expression of emotions led to a more favourable reputation than when emotions were absent. Alternatively, the absence of expressed emotions by the organisation implied lack of involvement and honesty, which may cause the organisation to be perceived as indifferent and insincere. An experiment by Clayes and Cauberghe (2015), in which the effects of expression of emotions, such as sadness, in the response after a crisis and the timing of the response were investigated, supported these results. The timing of the response contained two conditions; the stealing thunder strategy, when the crisis was published by the organisation itself, and the thunder strategy, when the crisis was published by another party. Findings showed that the expression of emotions in a statement by the organisation (i.e. stealing thunder) let the organisation not only appear as more sincere but also led to a more favourable reputation than when no emotions were expressed. Furthermore, the expression of an emotion gave participants the impression that the organisation would take over responsibility for the crisis, which in turn led to a more favourable reputation (Clayes & Cauberghe, 2015).

In sum, prior research showed that the expression of emotions in crisis communication in combination with the timing of the response as well as the response strategy had an effect on the organisation's reputation (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014; Clayes & Cauberghe, 2015). However, it has not been investigated whether there is an effect of the expression or absence of emotions on the organisation's reputation in various types of crises. In addition, even though it has been established that the organisation's perceived integrity is crucial for the organisation's success, as it can contribute to a favourable reputation, it has received little research attention in this specific field of research, which makes it crucial to investigate both. Therefore, the current study also aims to investigate whether there is an effect of the

expression or absence of emotions on the organisation's perceived integrity in various types of crises.

Types of crises

Although the expression of emotions appears to be an influential, beneficial factor in terms of the organisation's reputation, organisational crisis communication is a complex field whereby different aspects of the crisis need to be taken into consideration to improve effective crisis communication. According to Coombs (2007), the type of crisis at hand is such an important aspect. The types of crises are determined by the responsibility stakeholders attribute to the organisation (Coombs, 2007). This is based upon the attribution theory (Weiner, 1985), which states that because individuals have the need to explain their own behaviour and the behaviour of others, they tend to look for causes for particular occurrences. Especially in the case of negative events, individuals need to determine a reason for the cause and tend to hold someone responsible (Weiner, 1985). A crisis is such a negative event where stakeholders need to identify to what extent the organisation is responsible (Coombs, 2007). Therefore, the attribution theory predicts that stakeholders tend to punish an institution, or in this case, organisation that caused the crisis when the stakeholders make higher internal attributions (i.e. blame the organisation) and lower external attributions (i.e. blame the situation) (Weiner, 1995). In this case, the organisation is seen as more responsible for the crisis. However, in an organisational crisis where the stakeholders make lower internal attributions and higher external attributions, the organisation is seen as less responsible for the crisis. Hence, in this case the attribution theory predicts that stakeholders tend to be more forgiving towards the organisation (Weiner, 1995). Not only does prior research support the attribution theory (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Coombs, 1998; Choi & Lin, 2009; Schultz et al., 2011), in addition, findings showed that the extent of reputational damage of an organisation depends on the level of responsibility stakeholders attribute to the organisation. In other words, when the organisation is seen as more responsible for the crisis, the reputational damage is higher than when the organisation's crisis responsibility is considered as low.

The crisis responsibility stakeholders' attribute to the organisation as well as the possible reputational damage is determined by various types of crisis (Coombs, 2007). Coombs (2007) distinguished three crises clusters, specifically victim cluster, accidental

cluster and preventable cluster, based on the crisis type. In the victim cluster, the organisation can be considered a victim of the crisis as well, since the crisis was unpreventable (Coombs, 2007). Examples of such situations are natural disasters or a hoax that was wrongly brought in circulation. In this cluster the attributions of crisis responsibility are weak and the reputational threat is considered small. In the accidental cluster, the crisis is considered uncontrollable and unintentional (Coombs, 2007). Examples of such situations are a technology or equipment failure that caused the crisis. The attributions of crisis responsibility in this cluster are minimal and the reputational threat is moderate. In the preventable cluster, the organisation is considered responsible for the crisis, since it consciously places stakeholders at risk or takes inappropriate actions that could have been prevented (Coombs, 2007). Examples of such situations are incidents that were caused through human error or organisational wrongdoing. The attributions of crisis responsibility in this cluster are strong and the reputational threat is considered severe. The crises types that are relevant for the current study are a crisis with a low attributed responsibility to the organisation, that can be categorized as a crisis that fits the criteria of the victim cluster (unpreventable crisis) and a crisis with a high attributed responsibility to the organisation, that can be categorized as a crisis that fits the criteria of the preventable cluster (preventable crisis). These two types of crisis were selected since both form the two extremes of Coombs' (2007) suggested clusters.

Crisis communication, emotions and types of crises in the current study

As previously stated, prior research found that the use of emotions in a crisis implied that the organisation is concerned for the stakeholders' well-being (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014), which gives the stakeholders the impression that the organisation is taking responsibility for the incident (Clayes & Cauberghe, 2015). Existing research concerning emotions within crisis response did not investigate expressed emotions across various types of crises, but instead dealt strictly with crises that can be categorized as preventable crises (e.g. a product recall due to technical problems). These studies (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014; Clayes & Cauberghe, 2015; Legg, 2009) showed that the expression of emotions, in other words, implying to take responsibility for the crisis, in the organisational statement after a crisis led to a more favourable organisational reputation than in the conditions where no emotions were expressed. In these cases, the absence of expressed emotions in the organisational statement let the organisation appear indifferent, which led to a less favourable

reputation (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). Therefore, in the current study it is expected that the expression of emotions in a preventable crisis, will lead to a more favourable reputation than the absence of the expressed emotions. Alternatively, expressing emotions in an unpreventable crisis, could falsely imply that the organisation is taking responsibility for the crisis, even though the crisis was unpreventable and the organisation can be considered a victim of the crisis as well. As a result, this could lead to a larger attribution of responsibility by the stakeholders than the organisation factually has, possibly resulting in larger reputational damage. Therefore, it can be expected that the expression of emotions in the organisational statement after an unpreventable crisis will lead to a less favourable reputation than when no emotions are expressed. From this reasoning, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: *In a preventable crisis, the expression of emotions in the organisational statement leads to a more favourable reputation of the organisation than the absence of emotions; whereas in an unpreventable crisis, the absence of emotions in the organisational statement leads to a more favourable reputation of the organisation than the expression of emotions.*

In a crisis, the congruence between words and actions becomes even more important, when trying to restore trust in the organisation, as the reputation can only be preserved if stakeholders believe the organisation to tell the truth (Thießen, 2006). Therefore, it is important to not only investigate the organisations reputation but also the organisations perceived integrity after the organisational statement following a crisis. As previously stated, prior research showed that the expression of an emotion, such as sadness, after a preventable crisis let the organisation come across as more sincere (Clayes & Cauberghe, 2015), hence, the actions and words were perceived to be consistent. Alternatively, the absence of an emotion, in the organisational statement after a preventable crisis implied insincerity (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). In other words, the actions and words were perceived to be inconsistent. Since the aforementioned studies tested the effects of emotions in a preventable crisis, the current study assumes that the expression of emotions, such as sadness and shame, in a preventable crisis, leads to a higher level of perceived integrity than when emotions are not expressed. Alternatively, when the organisation expresses emotions in an unpreventable crisis, and where it falsely implies to take responsibility (Clayes & Cauberghe, 2015) even though the crisis was unpreventable, the organisation may come across as dishonest and

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deceptive. Therefore, the current study assumes that the expression of emotions in an unpreventable crisis, leads to a decreased level of perceived integrity, while the absence of emotions leads to a higher level of perceived integrity. From this reasoning, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: *In a preventable crisis, the expression of emotions in the organisational statement leads to a higher level of perceived integrity of the organisation than the absence of emotions; whereas in an unpreventable crisis, the absence of emotions in the organisational statement leads to a higher level of perceived integrity of the organisation than the expression of emotions.*

As previously stated, research has been done on the expression of emotions in relation to response strategy on the organisation's reputation (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014) and on the expression of emotion in relation to the timing of the organisation's response statement on the organisational reputation (Clayes & Cauberghe, 2015). However, it has not been studied whether the effects of the expression or absence of emotions in the organisational response on the organisation's reputation and perceived integrity differ in various types of crises. Furthermore, even though it has been established that perceived integrity of an organisation is important for organisational success, it has received little research attention to date. Although the perceived integrity and the reputation of an organisation are linked, there is a clear distinction, which makes it important to investigate both. Hence, the results of the current study could contribute to not only fill the scientific gap, but also offer helpful implications for public relations and crisis communication practitioners, to improve organisational crisis communication by adapting the crisis response, in terms of adjusting the expression of emotions to the crisis type to enhance and restore a favourable reputation and a high level of perceived integrity.

Method:

Materials

The current study tested the hypotheses through the conduction of an experiment in which the communicated emotions within a statement and the type of crisis were manipulated.

To avoid any possible pre-existing opinions about the organisation and any potential influence these feelings could have on the participant's answers, the organisation involved in the crisis was a fictitious airline 'Ferialas Airline'. The airline had encountered a recent crisis in the form of a plane crash, and a statement was written to communicate the incident to the stakeholders. The statement was published as a Facebook post by the company itself. Publishing the statement as a Facebook post was selected, to ensure that the participants would know instantly who the source of this statement was. The statement contained a description of the crisis and the organisation's thoughts on the matter.

Firstly, the communicated emotion was manipulated by adjusting the statement of the organisation; hence a condition contained emotions whereas the other condition did not contain emotions. To ensure that the manipulation was apparent, two emotions, shame and sadness, were combined in the conditions containing emotions. The manipulation of the message containing the emotions was taken over by two studies. To express that the company was ashamed, the manipulation of the message was based on a study by Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014) ("*We feel deeply ashamed*") and to express that the organisation was sad, the manipulation was based on a study conducted by Clayes and Cauberghe (2015) ("*We are extremely upset*"). Both of these statements were included in the emotional conditions, whereas the conditions without emotions did not contain either of these expressions.

Secondly, the type of crisis was manipulated. This manipulation was based on the victim cluster and preventable cluster suggested by Coombs (2007). In the current study, the crisis highlighted was a plane crash. As the severity of the crisis could have influenced participants' answers, to reduce emotional impact, it was communicated that the plane was able to land on water. Furthermore, there were no passenger casualties, only injuries. In the preventable crisis, the cause of the plane crash was that of a human error, since it was an overlooked defect in the engine. In this condition the organisation was portrayed to be responsible for the crisis. In the unpreventable crisis, the cause of the plane crash was a severe storm. In this condition, the organisation is portrayed to be a victim and thus perceived as carrying a low level of responsibility for the incident. All conditions of the experiment were kept the same except the manipulations of the aforementioned two independent variables, the expression or absence of emotion and the type of crisis. This resulted in four conditions with

(1) a statement containing no emotions in an unpreventable crisis
(2) a statement containing emotions in an unpreventable crisis

(3) a statement containing no emotions in a preventable crisis

(4) a statement containing emotions in a preventable crisis

An example of the manipulations is in table 1. All conditions of the four statements can be found in Appendix A. The average word count of all four conditions was 99 words (least: (3) 89 words; most: (2) 105 words).

Table 1.   Examples of manipulation

(1) No emotions and unpreventable crisis	(4) Emotions and preventable crisis
Due to an *unexpected, severe storm*, our Airbus A280-257 on the route Frankfurt – Mallorca had to perform a forced landing. Apart from light to medium-heavy injuries, all 145 passengers and the six crew members are doing well under the circumstances. At around 2:00 pm local time, the problem was identified, whereupon the pilot and his co-pilot were forced to land. The pilots were able to land the Airbus on the coast of Mallorca. All passengers were safely rescued and are taken care of in hospital. Despite the incident, we always strive to enable our passengers with a smooth flight.	Due to an *overlooked error in the engine*, our Airbus A280-257 on the route Frankfurt – Mallorca had to perform a forced landing. Apart from light to medium-heavy injuries, all 145 passengers and the six crew members are doing well under the circumstances. At around 2:00 pm local time, the problem was identified, whereupon the pilot and his co-pilot were forced to land. The pilots were able to land the Airbus on the coast of Mallorca. All passengers were safely rescued and are taken care of in hospital. It is very important for us to emphasize that <u>we are extremely ashamed and sad because of the incident</u>, as we always strive to enable our passengers a smooth flight.

Note: *Manipulation of crisis* and <u>manipulation of emotions</u>

Subjects

A total of 220 German participants took part in the experiment. The answers of 45 participants were not taken into consideration, since 44 participants indicated that they did not read the Facebook post and one participant was under the age of 18 and therefore under the age range that was beforehand selected to investigate. Of the remaining 175 valid participants 69.70% were female. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 62 years ($M = 27.57$, $SD =$

6.92). The highest level of education of the participants was University (55.40%; range: secondary school – University). To test whether the participants were equally distributed on the four conditions concerning their gender a Chi-Square test was executed. The Chi-square test showed no significant relation between condition and gender (χ^2 (3) = 4.34, p = .227). To test whether the participants were equally distributed on the four conditions concerning their highest level of education another Chi-Square test was executed. The Chi-Square test showed no significant relation between condition and highest level education (χ^2 (15) = 17.62, p = .303). To test whether the participants were equally distributed on the four conditions concerning their age a one way ANOVA was executed. A one way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of condition on age (F (3,171) < 1). Hence, the participants were equally distributed on each condition.

Design

  The independent variables each consisted of two levels. The experimental design was a 2 (emotion vs. no emotion) x 2 (type of crisis: preventable cluster vs. victim cluster) between-subjects design. This resulted in four experimental conditions.

Instruments

  The participants were requested to answer various questions measuring both dependent variables 'reputation' and 'perceived integrity'. To measure the dependent variable 'reputation' regarding the organisation five items were adapted from Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014), based on Coombs and Holladay (2002) (e.g. "The organisation is concerned with the well-being of its public") and three items were adapted from Clayes and Cauberghe (2015), based on Fombrun, Gardberg and Sever (2000) (e.g. "I have a good feeling about the organisation"). On a 7-point Likert scale participants indicated whether they agreed with each of the statements, ranging from 'disagree' to 'agree'. To measure the dependent variable 'perceived integrity' seven items were adapted from Gardner (2003) (e.g. "The organisation is manipulative" (reversed)). On a 7-point Likert scale participants indicated whether they agreed with each of the statements, ranging from 'disagree' to 'agree'. The measuring scales were translated from English and Dutch to German, since all participants were German.

  Since some items measuring 'reputation' and 'perceived integrity' were similar to a

certain extent, a principal component analysis was carried out with all three scales to ensure that they did not measure the same factor. A principal component analysis with oblimin rotation revealed a two factor solution, explaining 64.17%. Three of the original items were deleted, since two items loaded equally on two factors (e.g. "The organisation is honest") and one item did not load on either of the factors ("Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organisation says"). After the principal component analysis, as one factor contained items about general opinions and beliefs about the organisation, it was identified as dependent variable 'reputation' regarding the organisation. On a 7-point Likert scale respondents indicated whether they agreed with each of the statements (e.g. "The organisation is concerned with the well-being of the public"), ranging from 'disagree' to 'agree'. The reliability of 'reputation' comprising eight items was good: $\alpha = .90$. After the principal component analysis, as the other factor contained items about the consistency between words and actions of the organisation, it was identified as dependent variable 'perceived integrity'. On a 7-point Likert scale respondents indicated whether they agreed with each of the statements (e.g.: "The organisation is deceptive"(reversed)), ranging from 'disagree' to 'agree'. The reliability of 'perceived integrity' comprising four items was good: $\alpha = .85$.

For the manipulation check of the crisis situation, adapted from a study conducted by Utz, Schultz and Glocka (2013), participants indicated on a 7-point Likert whether they agreed with each of the statements (e.g.: "Circumstances, not the organisation, are responsible for the crisis."), ranging from 'disagree' to 'agree'. The reliability of the manipulation check comprising two items was good: $\alpha = .87$.

Furthermore, the participants were asked to answer questions about their age, gender and highest level of education, and whether they had read the statement. The questionnaire, containing the introduction, measuring scales, demographic questions and closing statement can be found in Appendix B.

Procedure

Participants were invited to voluntarily take part in the experiment via multiple online channels, such as instant messages on social media and e-mail from May 9 until May 16 2017. The participants were provided with an URL link which redirected them to the online questionnaire using Qualtrics. Prior to the statement and questionnaire, the participants were presented with a brief introduction explaining that the experiment was part of a Master thesis

and that participation was anonymous and voluntarily, and that the participants were able to stop at any time. Further, it was stated that the participants were about to read a Facebook post and answer several questions referring to the post. Then, each participant was instructed to read one of the randomly assigned four statements and then answer the question whether they had read the statement or not. Subsequently, the participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire. Then, participants were asked to answer questions about their demographics. At the end of the questionnaire, the participants were thanked for taking part in the experiment. Each participant had experienced the same testing procedure. It took approximately five minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

Statistical treatment

To test the effect of communicated emotions and type of crisis on the reputation and perceived integrity, two-way ANOVAs were executed. All analyses were conducted with the program SPSS.

Results

An independent samples t-test was conducted to check whether the manipulation of the crisis situation was apparent. The independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between the unpreventable crisis and the preventable crisis with regard to the manipulation of the crisis type (t (173) = 4.11, $p < .001$). In the unpreventable crisis ($M =$ 5.08, $SD = 1.15$), participants attributed more responsibility to the circumstances and less to the organization than in the preventable crisis ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.56$). Hence, the manipulation of the crisis type was apparent. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for the organisational reputation and perceived integrity of the type of crisis and the use of emotions.

Table 2.   Means and (standard deviations) for the reputation and perceived integrity of type crisis and use of emotions (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree) (N = 175)

	Unpreventable Crisis		Preventable Crisis	
	No emotions	Emotions	No emotions	Emotions
	n = 43	n = 45	n = 47	n = 40
Reputation	4.76 (0.78)	4.46 (1.12)	3.95 (1.20)	4.07 (1.02)
Perceived Integrity	4.76 (1.12)	4.65 (1.18)	4.19 (1.27)	4.24 (1.02)

Reputation

A two-way analysis of variance with the expression of emotions and the type of crisis as factors showed a significant main effect of type of crisis on the reputation of the organisation (F (1,171) = 14.14, p < .001). The reputation of the organisation was more favourable after an unpreventable crisis (M = 4.60, SD = .97) than after a preventable crisis (M = 4.01, SD = 1.12). The expression of emotions was not found to have a significant main effect on the reputation of the organisation (F (1,171) < 1). The interaction effect between the type of crisis and the expression of emotions was not statistically significant (F (1,171) = 1.80, p = .182). Based on these findings hypothesis 1, which assumed that in a preventable crisis, the expression of emotions leads to a more favourable reputation whereas in an unpreventable crisis the absence of emotions leads to a more favourable reputation, was rejected.

Perceived Integrity

A two-way analysis of variance with the expression of emotions and the type of crisis as factors showed a significant main effect of type of crisis on the perceived integrity of the organisation (F (1,171) = 7.78, p =.006). The level of perceived integrity of the organisation was higher after an unpreventable crisis (M = 4.70, SD = 1.15) than after a preventable crisis (M = 4.21, SD = 1.15). The expression of emotions was not found to have a significant main effect on the perceived integrity of the organisation (F (1,171) < 1). The interaction effect between the type of crisis and the expression of emotions was not statistically significant (F (1,171) < 1). Based on these findings, hypothesis 2, which assumed that in a preventable

crisis, the expression of emotions leads to a higher level of perceived integrity whereas in an unpreventable crisis the absence of emotions leads to a higher level of perceived integrity, was rejected.

Conclusion and Discussion

The current study aimed to examine the effects of expressed emotions in two types of crises, preventable and unpreventable crisis, on the organisation's reputation and perceived integrity in the organisational statement following the crisis. No significant effects between the expression of emotions and the type of crisis on the organisation's reputation and perceived integrity were found. This means that it did not matter whether emotions were expressed or not, regardless of the crisis types.

Based on the literature, the hypothesis expected that the use of emotions in a preventable crisis would lead to a more favourable reputation and higher level of perceived integrity than when emotions were absent, whereas the absence of emotions in an unpreventable crisis would lead to a more favourable reputation and lower level of perceived integrity than when emotions were expressed. Findings of the current study supported neither hypothesis 1 nor hypothesis 2. Therefore, the results of the current study suggest that the expression of emotions in the various types of crises does not have an impact on the organisations reputation nor on the organisations level of perceived integrity.

Interpretation and explanations of results

Findings of the current study showed, contrary to the suggested hypothesis, that the expression or absence of emotions in various types of crises did not have an effect on the organisation's reputation neither on the organisation's perceived integrity. A possible explanation for these results might be that the current study used a different medium than prior research, which showed that the expression of emotions had an effect. In the current study the fictitious organisation, the airline 'Ferialas Airline', published the crisis itself on Facebook by describing the incident to inform the stakeholders and responding to the crisis. In contrast to the current study, the crisis in prior research was published through news article,

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which contained a statement by the organisation's representative. In the emotional condition the emotion was expressed in the organisation's representatives statement (Van der Meer & Verhoeven; 2014, Clayes & Cauberghe, 2015). These contrary results might indicate that stakeholders perceive the organisational response differently when conveyed in different mediums, such as newspaper or social media. Since the current results might suggest that the effects of expressed emotions not only depend on the response strategy and the timing on the response but also on the medium, the present study makes an important contribution to this field of research.

Another possible explanation for the results might be that the current study was the first in this field of research to deal with a plane crash as a crisis situation. Research by Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014), which found an effect on the expression of emotions on the organisation's reputation, focused on a product recall of a bicycle and a car due to technical difficulties. In contrast to a product recall, the crisis situation in the current study was a highly severe and emotional crisis which is not a usual occurrence. This could have influenced participants' answers, since they might have had difficulties imagining the crisis. Hence, the contrary findings of the current study might indicate that the expression of emotions not only depends on the attributed crisis responsibility but also on the crisis situation in terms of severity. This indication makes an important contribution to this field of research.

An additional possible explanation for the not found effect from expressed emotions in various types of crises could be the fact that prior research manipulated the several conditions with only one emotion (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014; Clayes & Cauberghe, 2015), whereas the current study was the first one to combine two emotions in the manipulation of the emotional expression. The emotions that were used for the experiment in the current study, sadness and shame, were selected since both proved to have an impact in prior research. However, it might be possible that various emotions elicit diverse feelings in participants. If, in the case of the current study sadness elicited different reactions in the participants than shame, in other words, the elicited feelings were not corresponding, it could be possible that these two emotions revoked each other. Therefore the current study might indicate that the expression of emotion not only depends on the expression of emotions in general but also on the choice of emotions in specific.

Another possible explanation for this result might be, that the manipulation concerning the emotions, which was taken over from prior studies that did show an effect on reputation,

was translated from Dutch and English into German. Thus, it might be possible that the emotions expressed in these languages have a stronger effect in other countries than in Germany. For instance, even though the noun of the German word 'shame' ('Scham') is quite common, the adjective of it ('beschämt'), which was used in the current study ("We are extremely ashamed", in German "Wir sind extrem beschämt") is rather atypical in the usual language use. In this sense, since the expression of the emotion shame could have led to confusion and since the other emotion, sadness, was only written briefly ("We are extremely ashamed and *sad*", in German "Wir sind extrem beschämt und *traurig*"), the manipulation of the expressed emotions might have been too subtle. Thus, it might have been more apparent if more emotional language would have been used. Since the manipulation of both emotions was adapted from prior studies (Clayes & Cauberghe, 2015; Van der Meer & Verhoven, 2014), which proved to have an effect; and since the translation of the manipulation was not taken into consideration, it was assumed that the manipulation would be apparent. Therefore, a manipulation check would have been suited, to test whether the manipulation of the emotions was apparent.

In addition, findings of the current study showed that after an unpreventable crisis, the organisation's reputation was more favourable than after a preventable crisis regardless of expression of emotion. These findings are aligned with prior research that showed that the level of reputational damage is determined by the responsibility the stakeholders attribute to the organisation (e.g. Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Coombs, 1998; Choi & Lin, 2009; Schultz et al., 2011). This supports prior findings that suggest that individuals need to determine someone to hold responsible for a negative event, such as a crisis (e.g. Weiner, 1985; Coombs, 2007). In addition, findings showed that the level of perceived integrity of an organisation was higher after an unpreventable crisis than after a preventable crisis, which contributes to the existing literature (e.g. Coombs, 2007). Hence, stakeholders attributed less responsibility to the organisation in the unpreventable crisis, which lead to a more favourable reputation and higher perceived integrity than when stakeholders attributed more responsibility to the organisation. The manipulation check supports these findings since it appeared to be significant, and therefore, the manipulation of the crisis type was apparent.

Limitations and further research

Even though the current study was conducted carefully and contributes to the crisis

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communication and public relations literature in the context of organisational crisis communication, it has some limitations that could be improved in further research. Since the experiment was sent to the participants online, it could not be controlled where and when the participants took part in the experiment. Therefore, it might be possible that participants were distracted through their environment. However, this limitation can be an advantage as well, since it is a more realistic setting, which increases the ecological validity of the current study.

The distribution between the highest level of education was not entirely equal, since half of all participants graduated from University. This could have influenced the results as well since graduates from University are more likely to have filled out questionnaires more frequently and therefore were biased when responding, in terms of attempting to give the favoured answer. Further research should try to investigate a broader variety of educational levels to be able to make more accurate generalizations about the population.

Since the two emotions selected for the current study might not be a good combination, it would be interesting for further research to investigate a broader variety of emotions, such as negative and positive emotions, and whether the effects of singularly expressed emotions differ from combined emotions on the organisation's reputation and perceived integrity. However, it would be important to pay attention to the contextual appropriateness of the expressed emotions. In the case of a highly severe crisis positive emotions would probably be considered as inappropriate, respectively expressing negative emotions during a less severe crisis might be seen inappropriate as well.

Moreover, since the emotions that were selected were taken over from studies that were written in other languages, another suggestion for further research would be to investigate whether there are cross-cultural differences in the expression of emotions in the organisational statement after a crisis. A crisis such as a plane crash probably involves people from various nationalities, therefore, it would demand a statement translated in several languages, which makes it a crucial subject to investigate.

Since, as aforementioned, the current study might indicate that the expression of emotions could depend on the medium on which the organisation conveys the statement, as well as on the crisis situation, it delivers crucial suggestions for further research. Thus, further research could investigate the expression or absence of emotions in combination with the medium on which it is conveyed, for example a statement on social media and a press release in the newspaper. In addition, further research could examine the expression or absence of

emotions in combination with not only the attributed crisis responsibility but also crisis situation; as a product recall might be perceived as less severe than a plane crash. Hence, stakeholders might react differently to various crisis situations in terms of severity, which therefore would be an interesting suggestion for further research.

As the current study can be placed in the context of persuasive communication, it is vital to discuss its ethical context. The current study cannot be considered as unethical due to various reasons. First of all, the participants whose answers were taken into consideration were legally of full age. Secondly, the statement was posted by the organisation itself, thus the sender of the statement could be identified, which means that no unknowing persuasion took place. Lastly, in crisis communication stakeholders need to be informed by the organisation and it is probably known that organisations try to prevent possible reputational damages and uphold a high level of perceived integrity after a crisis.

Theoretical and practical implications

Even though the results of the current study are not aligned with prior research, it yields important theoretical contributions, which will be summed up briefly in the following. Firstly, as previously mentioned, the expression of emotions in various types of crises on the organisation's reputation together with the perceived integrity has not been investigated to date. Therefore, the current study is the first initiation in this specific field of research. Further research that aims to investigate both factors can make use of the measuring scales established in the current study. Secondly, the current study is the first to examine the organisational response not only as a Facebook post in particular but also as a social media post in general. As previously mentioned, the findings of the current study that are contrary to prior research, might indicate that the expression of emotions depends on the medium. Thirdly, the current study is the first to investigate a plane crash as crisis situation. Therefore, the findings might indicate that the expression of emotions not only depends on the crisis type (i.e. attributed crisis responsibility) but also on the severity of the crisis situation of the crisis as well. Lastly, the current study is the first to combine two emotions in the organisational statement. The findings thus indicate that the expression of emotions might depend on the specific emotions as well.

Based on the results of the current study, implications for crisis communication and

public relation practitioners would be that the expression or absence of emotions in an organisational statement following various types of crises does not have an impact on the reputation and perceived integrity of an organisation. In other words, the current study lends support for the notion that no additional attention needs to be paid to expressing emotions in crisis communication statements when releasing a statement on Facebook, regardless of the type of crisis. However, the results of the current study did show that there is a difference between preventable crises and unpreventable crises in terms of organisational reputation and perceived integrity after the crisis. Therefore, it is advisable that crisis communication and public relations practitioners focus on how to convey the crisis type through the content of the statement to limit reputational damage and to uphold a high level of perceived integrity. In other words, if the crisis was unpreventable, it should be more stressed than if the crisis was preventable.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Facebook Posts

Condition (1) No emotions and unpreventable crisis

Condition (2) Emotion and unpreventable crisis

Condition (3) No emotion and preventable crisis

Ferialas Airline
Gerade eben · ☺

Aufgrund eines übersehenen Triebwerkfehlers musste unser Airbus A280-257 auf der Strecke Frankfurt - Mallorca notlanden. Bis auf leichte bis mittelschwere Verletzungen geht es allen 145 Passagieren und den sechs Crewmitgliedern den Umständen entsprechend gut. Gegen 2:00 Uhr Ortszeit wurde das Problem festgestellt, woraufhin der Pilot und sein Co-Pilot gezwungen waren, die Landung einzuleiten. Die Piloten konnten den Airbus an der Küste Mallorcas notlanden. Alle Insassen wurden sicher geborgen und werden in einem Krankenhaus versorgt. Trotz des Vorfalls sind wir stets darum bemüht unseren Passagieren eine reibungslose Reise zu ermöglichen.

👍 Gefällt mir   💬 Kommentieren   ➤ Teilen

Condition (4) Emotion and preventable crisis

Ferialas Airline
Gerade eben · ☺

Aufgrund eines übersehenen Triebwerkfehlers musste unser Airbus A280-257 auf der Strecke Frankfurt - Mallorca notlanden. Bis auf leichte bis mittelschwere Verletzungen geht es allen 145 Passagieren und den sechs Crewmitgliedern den Umständen entsprechend gut. Gegen 2:00 Uhr Ortszeit wurde das Problem festgestellt, woraufhin der Pilot und sein Co-Pilot gezwungen waren, die Landung einzuleiten. Die Piloten konnten den Airbus an der Küste Mallorcas notlanden. Alle Insassen wurden sicher geborgen und werden in einem Krankenhaus versorgt. Es liegt uns sehr daran zu betonen, dass wir wegen des Vorfalls extrem beschämt und traurig sind, da wir stets darum bemüht sind unseren Passagieren eine reibungslose Reise zu ermöglichen.

👍 Gefällt mir   💬 Kommentieren   ➤ Teilen

Appendix B. Questionnaire

Introduction

Liebe Teilnehmerin, Lieber Teilnehmer,

vielen Dank, dass Sie sich bereit erklären, an meiner Untersuchung teilzunehmen. Diese Untersuchung ist Teil meiner Masterarbeit im Studiengang Kommunikations- und Informationswissenschaften an der Radboud Universität in Nijmegen.

Im Folgenden werden Sie einen Facebook Post lesen, zu dem ich Sie bitte, eine Anzahl von Fragen zu beantworten. Gerne möchte ich Sie darauf hinweisen, dass es keine falschen Antworten gibt, da ich an Ihrer Meinung interessiert bin.

Wenn Sie Fragen oder Anmerkungen zu dieser Untersuchung haben, können Sie mich gerne unter nele.gehling@student.ru.nl kontaktieren.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

Nele

Condition

Ich habe den Text gelesen
- Ja
- Nein

Reputation

Die Organisation kümmert sich um das Wohlergehen ihrer Kunden.

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Die Organisation kümmert sich nicht um das Wohlergehen ihrer Kunden. (R)

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Ich habe ein gutes Gefühl bei der Organisation.

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Ich bewundere und respektiere die Organisation.

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Ich vertraue dieser Organisation.

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Die Organisation ist moralisch.

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Die Organisation ist vertrauenswürdig.

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Die Organisation ist ethisch.

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Perceived integrity

Die Organisation ist täuschend. (R)

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Die Organisation ist unehrlich. (R)

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Die Organisation ist manipulativ. (R)

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Ich vertraue der Organisation nicht, dass sie die Wahrheit sagt. (R)

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Manipulation Check

Umstände, nicht die Organisation, sind verantwortlich für die Krise.

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Die Organisation, nicht die Umstände, ist verantwortlich für die Krise. (R)

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu

Demographics

Alter

- _____

Geschlecht

- männlich

- weiblich

Ausbildungsstatus

-Hauptschule

-Realschule

-Gymnasium

-Berufskolleg

-Berufsausbildung

-Fachhochschule

-Universität

Closing statement

Vielen Dank noch einmal für Ihre Teilnahme! Sie haben das Ende der Untersuchung erreicht.

Die Organisation, sowie das Statement, welches Sie gelesen haben, sind fiktiv.
Wenn Sie noch Fragen haben, können Sie gerne Kontakt mit mir aufnehmen via
nele.gehling@student.ru.nl

Nele

Sie können diesen Tab nun schließen.