Radboud Universiteit

The effects of (non)-native language choice and (mis)matching response strategy on reputation perceptions and behavioral intentions during an organizational crisis in Romania

By

Sabrina Luca, s1060031

Masters' Thesis

Supervised by Dr. Warda Nejjari; Dr. Borana Lushaj

Submitted to the Department of Communication and Information Studies, Radboud University

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters in Arts

in International Business Communication

June 2021

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to my first supervisor, Dr. Warda Nejjari, who convincingly guided and encouraged me to deliver great results in the process of writing this thesis.

Furthermore, I would like to pay my regards to my second supervisor, Dr. Borana Lushaj, who provided me with thorough and supportive feedback on my research proposal.

Nonetheless, I pay my special regards to the 144 people who took the time to participate in this research. Without their help and benevolence, the goal of this project would not have been realized.

Table of contents

Abstract

Examples of crises affecting international companies are heard of regularly. Despite the significance of this issue, literature on international crisis management is relatively scarce and it is only recently that more attention has been paid to this subject. This study attempts to loosen this gap by testing the foreign language effect (FLE) in the context of crisis communication, as well as testing Coombs's (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The impact of the crisis message language and that of response strategy is tested against reputation perceptions and behavioral intentions (purchase intention and negative word-of-mouth intention) in an accidental crisis and it is measured for 144 Romanian consumers participating in a 2 (language choice: native, non-native) x 2 (response strategy: matching, mismatching) online between-subject experimental design. The results show that a foreign language context did not influence the extent to which the participants regarded the response messages as emotional, nor did it affect their reputation perceptions and behavioral intentions towards the company. This result provides practitioners with evidence that FLE, despite seemingly important for crisis communication, might be irrelevant for this context. Likewise, unexpectedly, the type of response strategy employed also did not influence crisis communication outcomes in an accidental crisis. Nonetheless, there was no interaction effect between the language of the message and response strategy. These findings stress the need for more empirical data into the workings of crisis communication internationally.

1. Introduction

Organizational crises that involve multinationals became ubiquitous in news outlets around the world. These crises pose great challenges for communication management, because people in various cultural contexts may respond differently to the same crisis resolution strategy (Coombs & Laufer, 2018). As Coombs & Laufer (2018) further stress, despite the importance of global crisis management, an overwhelming majority of studies on crisis communication are either US-centric or conducted in developed countries. This leaves emerging economies misrepresented in the corpus of literature on international crisis communication and deprives scholars and practitioners alike of gaining a better understanding of the implications of crisis communication strategies in multinational settings. This thesis addresses this gap by investigating the effects of crisis response strategy (matching vs mismatching) (Coombs, 2007) and that of the language of the response (native vs non-native), on consumer reputation perceptions and behavioral intentions, in Romania.

Romania provides an interesting and opportune context for studying crisis communication. In 2020, FTSE Russell promoted Romania "from frontier to secondary emerging market", at the global level (Chirileasa, 2020, para. 4). This means that Romania is now of interest to a wider category of investors and international firms, which are expected to invest or establish there (Chirileasa, 2020). However, literature on crisis communication in Romania is very scarce. Most academic articles are case studies (see Barbu, 2019; Iacob, 2018; Cmeciu & Coman, 2018), but they provide little empirical insights into the reactions of the stakeholders relative to different communication strategies. This makes it hard for practitioners to design scientifically-based, locally-grounded crisis management plans.

In this thesis, the focus lies on two different communication strategies, (non)-native language choice and (mis)matching response strategy (Coombs, 2007). By addressing language choice as a potentially relevant factor in crisis communication, this thesis becomes an exploratory study, but one with the potential to substantiate post-crisis benefits for the stakeholders and the affected organization alike. Simply put, if a crisis elicits intense, negative emotional reactions, it exposes the stakeholders to environmental stress, to which they may respond by altering their relationship with the organization in crisis (Yi & Baumgartner, 2004). Specifically, strong negative emotions can have direct impacts on crisis communication outcomes, such as reputation and purchase

intentions (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; 2009). Therefore, to ensure minimal damage to the post-crisis business, companies need to develop ways to facilitate stakeholder's effective crisis coping.

One way to do that may be through manipulating the language of the message. For example, Puntoni, Langhe & Van Osselaer (2008) demonstrated that messages communicated in a foreign language can arouse emotional reactions with lower levels of intensity than those in a native language. To further explore this phenomenon, the first aim of this thesis is to investigate the extent to which a foreign language familiar to the stakeholders could be strategically used in crisis communication to minimize reputational damage and negative behavioral intentions. There are no known other studies that have investigated language choice relative to perceptions and behaviors in the context of crisis communication, despite its seeming relevance.

Until now, perceptions and behaviors were most often investigated relative to the type of crisis response strategies employed by organizations (see, e.g., Bowen, Freidankb, Wannowb, Cavallonec, 2018; Coombs & Holladay, 2007; 2009). However, regarding this also, in accidental crises, research on the effectiveness of one strategy over another is mixed, and confusing for communication managers looking to implement empirically-based responses (see, e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Hegner, Beldad & Kraesgenberg, 2016; Claeys, Cauberghe &Vyncke, 2010). Thus, the second aim of this paper is to investigate to what extent a matching, over a mismatching strategy (Coombs, 2007), better protects organizational reputation, maintains purchase intentions – continuing to buy products/ services from a company, and minimizes negative word-of-mouth intention (NWOM) – the spread of negative information about the organization among other consumers (Utz, Schultz & Glocka, 2013). These consumer reactions are known are crisis communication outcomes (Coombs, 2007).

As a result, this thesis adds a three-fold contribution to theory: Firstly, it introduces the language of the crisis message (native vs non-native) as a novel variable to be analyzed to consumer's perceptions and behavioral intentions towards the organization, and it contextualizes it on the genre of crisis communication. Secondly, it adds further empirical evidence to the debate on whether matching or mismatching response strategies (Coombs, 2007) work better for protecting organizational reputation and for minimizing negative behavioral intentions in accidental crises. Thirdly, it offers a different cultural context for studying crisis communication – Romania, to

extend the limited literature on international crisis communication. For practitioners, this thesis seeks to investigate if the language of the response is a relevant concept to be adopted in crisis communication agendas on one hand and to provide an empirical account for the type of response strategy preferred by Romanians in an accidental crisis on the other hand.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Emotions in Crisis Communication – A New Perspective

Organizational crises are events that have the power to elicit (negative) stakeholder emotions, such as, anger, sadness, sympathy (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Jin & Pang, 2010). Research has already proven, on many occasions, that stakeholder emotions are strong predictors for crisis communication outcomes (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Utz et al., 2013; Yi & Baumgarter, 2004). For instance, anger relates to reputational damage and predicts negative purchase intention and negative word-of-mouth (Utz et al., 2013). Although scholars recognize the importance of addressing emotions in crisis communication, research is in this area is mostly focused on how the emotional experiences of stakeholders influence behavioral intentions (see, e.g., Jim & Pang, 2010).

What could be a valuable addition to the field is seeing whether any external factors could alter the impact of a negative emotional experience or could even influence the extent to which people attribute negative reputation and change their behavior towards an organization. This exploratory inquiry is addressed in this thesis, to investigate if the language of the crisis response could, in itself, be that influencing factor. There is no empirical evidence in support of the relationship between language choice and emotional intensity and language choice and perceptions/ behavioral outcomes in crisis communication. Most information available on these subjects derives from psycholinguistic studies and research on decision-making bias. Therefore, input from these fields is used the most when discussing the relevance of this concept to crisis management.

2.2 The Relationship Between (Non)-Native Language and Emotional Reactions

Many psycholinguistic studies using interviews, literary analysis, and experimental methods, demonstrated that messages communicated in one's first language (L1) – the native language or mother tongue, generate stronger emotional reactions (i.e. anger, fear, enjoyment) than those communicated in one's second language (L2) – the non-native language, acquired as a foreign language (Puntoni et al., 2008; Gawinkowska, Paradowski & Bilewicz, 2013; Caldwell-Harris, 2015; Bond & Lai, 1986; Dewaele, 2004; Pavlenko, 2005; Anooshian & Hertel, 1994). Some of these studies are reviewed below.

Using self-reports (Dewale, 2004) and experimental approaches (Gawinkowska et al., 2013), research on taboo words and swearwords illustrated that multilingual people perceived L1 swearwords as more emotionally intense – they made them experience embarrassment and shame more vividly and profoundly – than L2 words, which elicited weaker emotional reactions. Research on code-switching corroborates this finding: After subjecting bilinguals to simulated social interactions, Bon & Lai (1986) argued that switching to L2 enabled the participants to discuss embarrassing topics more shamelessly than in L1. The authors assert it is easier to process content that evokes strong (negative) emotions in a second language. This is because, L2 can have a distancing function as it enables people to detach more, emotionally, from an event; L1 can be too emotionally charging because it can elicit burdensome reactions from those involved in the event. The higher perceived emotional charge of L1 is not limited to research on embarrassing topics or highly emotional settings. Puntoni et al. (2008) illustrated that bilinguals subjected to five experiments evaluating the effects of ad language (native: French/ Dutch vs non-native: English) on ad attitudes, perceived L1 messages, as compared to L2 messages, as more emotionally intense, showing that the phenomenon is generalizable across contexts.

The range of studies revised suggests this phenomenon is not contextually bound. Specifically, it was illustrated in emotional settings of both high and moderate levels, with implications in psycholinguistics, as well as marketing. This indicates that it may also apply to a crisis communication context, which it will be tested against in this thesis. However, the possible occurrence of the phenomenon provides a promising outlook for only one aspect of the inquiry - that a foreign language might, to a certain degree, alter the strength of an emotional reaction. Next,

it needs to be discussed to what extent (non)-native-ness could also influence stakeholder perceptions and behavioral intentions and what implications that would have if: (a) the emotions experienced by the stakeholders are not negative; (b) the potential benefits for organizations and stakeholders are balanced out. These aspects are discussed below.

2.3 The Foreign Language Effect in Crisis Communication - An Exploratory Inquiry

Research shows that a foreign language context can influence how people make choices, mediated by the perceived distancing function of a foreign language (Keysar, Hayakawa & An, 2012). This process is called the foreign language effect (FLE) and it has been illustrated in several studies on decision-making bias (see, e.g., Cipolletti, McFarlane & Weissglass, 2015; Keysar et al., 2012; Costa, Foucart, Hayakawa, Aparici, Apesteguia, Heafner & Keysar, 2014). For example, taking an experimental approach, Keysar, et al. (2012) subjected bilinguals to scenarios of moral dilemmas (i.e., sacrifice one man to save five) and indicated that compared to the respondents in the native language condition, those in the foreign language condition were less prone to make decisions based on their primary emotional reaction – a faster, sometimes non-voluntary reaction. Instead, their decisions were predominantly based on rational logic – a slower, more systematic, and more effortful way of thinking. The value of Keysar, et al.'s (2012) study on the current thesis is the demonstration that being in a foreign language context has the power to stimulate less emotional decision-making in favor of more rational reasoning. However, importantly, the occurrence of FLE is conditioned by people perceiving words in the second language as less emotionally intense. Čavar & Tytus (2018) illustrated this condition in a study which replicated the experimental design of Keysar, et al. (2012) but used a population sample that, comparing to Keysar, et al.'s (2012) sample, was exposed to the type of contexts that allowed them to experience L2 socially and emotionally – participants were long-time immigrants in the country of their L2. As a result, the foreign language effect dissipated.

Although research on FLE has so far been bound to the context of moral decision-making, the possibility that it also occurs in crisis communication should not be excluded. This is because a crisis communication outlet could also stimulate people to think a certain way about a situation and to decide a course of action towards the company (Jin & Pang, 2010). For instance, in a crisis that elicits negative emotions, Yi & Baumgartner's (2004) experimental study shows that people

are often willing to worsen their behavior towards an organization (i.e., stop further purchases), to cope with a stressful emotional experience caused by the crisis. Therefore, assuming that the stakeholders do experience negative emotions and that this motivates them to take a stance towards the event, they may face a dilemma as to what decision is more valuable: 'harm the company to satisfy their negative emotional drive?' or 'contain their negative emotional drive to not further harm the company?'.

To stress anew, this study only addresses companies involved in crises that could create negative emotional impacts. If applied to crises that do not evoke such emotions, it is reasonable to assume that FLE may also alter the strength of a positive emotional reaction, as, for instance, sympathy for the company. In this scenario, it could be argued that a foreign language context may backfire on the prospects of post-crisis business recovery, as it could diminish motivation to engage in reparatory action, such as supporting the company on social media (Yi & Baumgartner, 2004). Thus, it is out of the scope of this research to investigate if FLE can create an opposite effect to what was intended.

To increase the chances of negative emotions occurring in this study, an accidental crisis of technological breakdown product recall is used, as later detailed. According to Jin & Pang (2010), in an accidental crisis generally, the dominant stakeholder emotion is sadness, but, in a technological breakdown specifically, the predominant emotions are anger, followed by anxiety. These claims are included in their Integrated Crisis Mapping Model (ICM), a crisis matrix that highlights the most salient stakeholder emotions during a crisis and matches them on specific crisis types. The model provides a solid base for this argument because its theoretical rigor was empirically validated by Jin, Pang & Cameron (2010) in fourteen real-life crisis case studies and substantiated by further application in research concerned with the role of emotions in crisis communication (see, e.g., Jin, Pang & Cameron, 2012; Cheng, Loh & Pang, 2011).

Therefore, it is argued that the contextual factors necessary for the foreign language effect to occur and to facilitate reparatory crisis action do exist in this study. The assumption is that a foreign language will stimulate less emotional decision-making, mediated by the lower perceived emotional charge of L1. As a consequence, this may alter the motivation of the stakeholders to change their perceptions and behaviors towards the company because, as explained, strong

negative emotions predict an increase in negative crisis communication outcomes (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). Below, it is explained why this could bring a meaningful contribution to practice.

2.4 Stakeholder Benefits of Language Choice Manipulation

Critics may argue that exploring language choice in crisis communication is only an attempt to manipulate the public's emotions for retrieving organizational benefits when the crisis could create a negative impact. When deciding on this exploratory approach, the added value for organizations and stakeholders alike was balanced out. The key argument is, indeed, that using a foreign language may influence the extent to which people react negatively towards the company. However, companies should not view this benefit as an end in itself, but rather as a potential effect of the power of a foreign language to minimize perceptions upon the emotional intensity of a situation. Jin & Pang (2010) and Yi & Baumgartner (2004) argue that being able to process the crisis communication outlet with more emotional detachment might, to a certain degree, help reduce the impact of the public's emotional concerns caused by the crisis, thus providing them with a psychological benefit. They assert that the reactions of the stakeholders to the crisis are reflections of their coping mechanisms – ways to adapt to environmental stress and that they stem from the stakeholders' desire to maintain their well-being throughout the situation. The more intense and negative the stakeholders' emotions, the more motivated they will be to take action, often to the detriment of the company, because they want to "alter a troubled relationship" for their good (Jin & Pang, 2010, p.679). For instance, refusal to make further purchases from the company was found in Yi & Baumgartner's (2004) experimental study as one of the most common coping strategies when participants experienced anger. As a result, although this thesis does seek to aid companies to minimize threats to the post-crisis business, it is the underlying interest for the emotional wellbeing of the stakeholders that guides this exploratory inquiry and that should also guide communication managers when developing a crisis response.

2.5 Matching versus Mismatching Crisis Response Strategies

Alongside the language of the communication outlet, this study investigates crisis response strategies – the actions taken by the organization in the aftermath of the crisis (Coombs, 2007). Similar to language choice, response strategy could also be discussed with emotions. When employing a particular response strategy, the goal is to reduce the negative effects of the crisis for

11

both the stakeholders and the company affected by the event (Coombs, 2006). As mentioned before, to reduce the negative effects for stakeholders means to tailor the responses in ways that would facilitate their coping efforts, as this is what might then foster crisis resolution and reputation repair (Jin & Pang, 2010). As Yi & Baumgartner (2004) suggest, coping well with a crisis, without being motivated to threaten organizational reputation or change purchase behaviors, implies that stakeholders do not experience strong, negative emotions. Therefore, the goal of including both language choice and response strategy in one study is to investigate if these two strategies could also be used together to reduce the extent to which stakeholders experience negative emotional reactions and, implicitly, to facilitate business recovery.

Research has already established that crisis response strategies directly affect the organizational reputation and behavioral intentions (i.e., negative word-of-mouth, purchase intention) (Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2007; Bowen et al., 2018; Choi & Chung, 2013). To offer a systematic account for the type of response strategy selected, Coombs (2007) designed the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), regarded as a reference point in crisis management (Choi & Chung, 2013). SCCT provides guidelines for matching crisis response strategies to the type of crisis an organization had experienced, to ensure minimal damage to the business. Crises are clustered in three main categories: victim (i.e., natural disaster), accidental (i.e., technical product error), and preventable (i.e., organizational misconduct) (Coombs, 2007).

The focus of this study are accidental crises because research on this cluster is mixed and inconclusive with regards to the type of response strategy recommended for minimizing reputational damage and negative behavioral intentions (see, e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Ma & Zang, 2015; Hegner et al., 2016; Claeys et al., 2010; Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014; Grappi & Romani, 2015). Specifically, the study draws on technical breakdown product recall – a type of accidental crisis in which a product is retrieved from the market because of a technical error discovered only after its release (Downey, 2020). These types of accidental crises have become ubiquitous in the marketplace (Laufer & Jung, 2010). More than 300 products were recalled from the global market in 2009 only, hence designing effective product recall messages has become a top priority for companies (Laufer & Jung, 2010).

In accidental crises, people theoretically attribute little responsibility to the organization (Coombs, 2007). SCCT poses that if an accidental crisis occurs and the organization has no history of crises, nor prior reputation damage, then *diminish* strategies are recommended. In a diminish strategy, the company accepts little responsibility and plays down its involvement by offering excuses or justification (Coombs, 2007). Organizations could also employ *rebuild* strategies – take full responsibility by offering apology and compensation. Rebuild strategies are usually employed when a crisis is likely to elicit strong, negative stakeholder emotions and when the company is perceived as highly accountable for the event. This was theoretically associated with preventable crises (Coombs, 2007). Therefore, in the theory of SCCT, for accidental crises, diminish is the matching strategy, while rebuild, the mismatching strategy.

Contradictory findings on the efficacy of matching response strategies for preserving organizational reputation make a weak case for these SCCT guidelines. While some studies illustrate that an accidental crisis is best communicated through a matching strategy (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Ma & Zang, 2015; Hegner et al. 2016), others affirm the opposite (e.g., Claeys et al, 2010; Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014; Grappi & Romani, 2015). The differences may be explained by looking at the response designs of some of these studies. Both Coombs & Holladay (1996) and Hegner et al. (2016), who argue for matching response strategies as optimal, incorporated a single response sub-category in the mismatching strategy – offering an apology, without compensation. Contrarily, in their experimental studies, Claeys et al. (2010), Van der Meer & Verhoeven (2014), used a combination of apology and compensation when designing the rebuild response strategy and argued that it is this combination that led to lower reputational damages in the mismatching, over the matching condition.

Moreover, research shows that, apart from reputation damage, diminish strategies for accidental crises can also foster negative behavioral intentions. This was illustrated in Dejene's (2017) sentiment analysis of online customer opinions of the crisis response of Samsung, following the 2016 Note 7 scandal – a crisis classified as a technology breakdown product recall. The author indicated that employing a diminish, as opposed to a rebuild strategy in the initial response, led to negative customer reactions and instances of refusal to make a further purchase. As he argued, these behavioral outcomes stemmed from criticism for the company's lack of accountability – a trait of diminish response strategies. This seems to indicate that, although in the theory of SCCT,

people may not assign much blame to the company in an accidental crisis, in reality, an accidental crisis may not automatically exempt the company from being regarded as a significant contributor to the event. Such a scenario is particularly sensitive to the type of emotions that the crisis elicits, because, as SCCT poses, stronger attributions of crisis responsibility increase the likelihood of negative emotions developing (Coombs, 2007). Dejene (2017) exemplified this by arguing that, in the first month of the event, the dominant stakeholder reactions were "anger and hostility toward Samsung's mishandling of the Note 7 scandal" (p.46). Therefore, by illustrating, in an accidental crisis, the characteristics that usually determine the implementation of a rebuild strategy, Dejene's (2017) study became a compelling piece for the case that a matching response strategy may not always be effective in an accidental crisis.

However, in an experimental study on the 2009 Toyota recall, also classified as a technology breakdown product recall, Choi & Chung (2013) reported that a rebuild strategy was not effective in maintaining purchase intentions in the first few months of the scandal. Importantly, similar to the rebuild responses in Coombs & Holladay's (1996) and Hegner et al.'s (2016) studies, Toyota's official rebuild response only included an apology, without mentioning compensatory action. Choi & Chung (2013) suggested that further research should incorporate the two factors in one response to analyzing their effect on purchase intention. In response to this call, in this thesis, a combination of apology and compensation is used for the rebuild strategy of the product recall message. The expectation is that mismatching strategies will better protect the organizational reputation and will minimize negative behavioral intentions.

2.6 Research Questions & Hypotheses

Following the literature review, three questions guide the analytic inquiry:

RQ1(a). To what extent are crisis responses in English perceived as less emotional than responses in Romanian?

> RQ1(b). To what extent does the language of the crisis responses (native or non-native) affect consumer reputation perceptions and behavioral intentions (purchase intention, negative word-of-mouth) towards the organization, mediated by the perceived emotional intensity of the response?

RQ2.To what extent does response strategy (matching or mismatching) affect consumer reputation perceptions and behavioral intentions (purchase intention, negative word-of-mouth) towards the organization?

The role of language choice in crisis communication is explored for Romanian non-native speakers of English. English was selected because it is increasingly relevant in the social life of global consumers and is often used by multinationals as the standard language to communicate with their stakeholders (Puntoni et al., 2008).

The foreign language effect is conditioned by people possessing satisfactory L2 skills to understand a text in their second language (Caldwell-Harris, 2015). It also relies on people not having experienced the foreign language in the type of naturalistic contexts where "words and phrases can become emotionally grounded" (i.e., in the family) (Caldwell-Harris, 2015, p.216). Romanians are expected to qualify for these conditions.

Firstly, participants in the study are expected to possess reasonable English skills to understand a text in L2. Romanians are characterized as skilled in English, ranking 17th out of 100 countries in the EF English Proficiency Index (2020). Secondly, participants are expected to have experienced English predominantly through an educational, instead of a naturalistic context. Learning English is mandatory in the academic curricula, all the way from primary, to high school (Education in Romania, n.d). This does not mean words and phrases in English will automatically acquire emotional meanings. This is because, languages learned in an instructional context are associated with less intense emotional reactions than those acquired in a naturalistic context (Puntoni et al., 2008). Based on this information, the following prediction is made:

H1. *Crisis responses conveyed in English will be perceived as less emotional than those conveyed in Romanian.*

Moreover, when people experience strong negative emotions towards an organization in crisis, they could be motivated to respond to the incident, often to the detriment of the company, to cope with the situation (Yi & Baumgartner, 2004) and to demonstrate they had the power to influence it (Utz et al., 2013). The lower the emotional impact, the less motivated people could be to take action against the firm (Utz et al., 2013; Jin & Pang, 2010). It is predicted that the participants will

experience weaker emotional reactions in the second language condition. Mediated by that, it is expected that those exposed to crisis responses in English will be less motivated to attribute a negative reputation to the organization and to engage in negative word-of-mouth, and will intend to make purchases from the affected company in the future.

E1. *The relationship between crisis messages conveyed in English and a decrease in reputational damage* (E1a) *and negative behavioral intentions (negative word-of-mouth and purchase intention)* (E1b) *will be positively mediated by the lower perceived emotional intensity of L2.*

As reviewed, in an accidental crisis, a mismatching strategy, over a matching one, can be more effective at minimizing negative organizational reputation (Claeys et al.,2010; Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014) and negative behavioral intentions (Dijene, 2017). In this thesis, to say a mismatching (rebuild) strategy could be a more effective means to implement it as a combination of apology and compensation (Claeys et al.,2010; Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). Based on the findings of prior literature which adopted similar methodologies to the one in this study (Claeys et al., 2010; Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014) and which analyzed the same genre of accidental crises: technical breakdown product recall (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014; Dijene, 2017; Choi & Chung, 2013; Hegner et al., 2016), the following prediction is made:

H2. *A technical breakdown product recall crisis reported through a mismatching strategy will better preserve organizational reputation* (H2a) *and will minimize negative behavioral intentions (negative word-of-mouth and purchase intention)* (H2b).

To answer these research questions, a conceptual model was developed, as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Proposed Conceptual Model
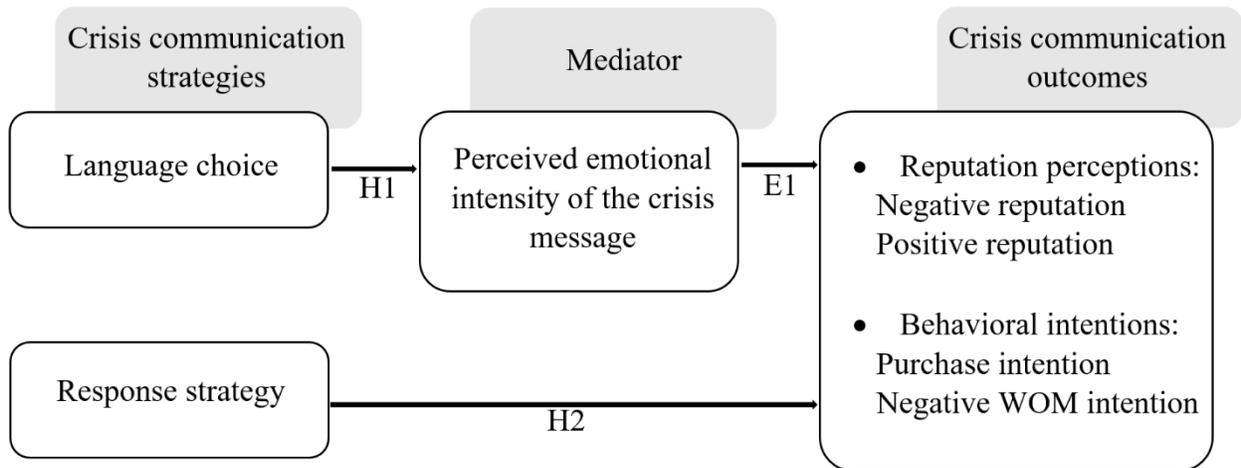
3. Method

3.1 Materials

The stimuli material consisted of four versions of a press release of the fictitious company Ancolia Group, which specialized in technology products. The organization used was fictitious to avoid confounding effects of previous company knowledge (Claeys et al., 2010). The fictional press releases represented the official response of Ancolia, faced with a series of battery explosions of its latest smartphone model. Smartphones were the object chosen for the crisis because they were thought to be a "familiar and involving topic" for participants (Kim & Cameron, 2011, p.838). The fictitious event was inspired by the 2016 Samsung Note 7 scandal. Briefly explained, the Galaxy Note 7 was recalled from the market after instances of phone burnings caused by faults in the batteries were made public (Reuters, 2017). The Note 7 scandal provided a suitable frame for the fictitious scandal because it was ruled out as an accidental technical breakdown product recall (Amaresan, 2019), which coincided with the crisis type chosen for this experiment.

Four versions of the crisis response were created: two in Romanian (native language), two in English (non-native language), with either a matching (diminish) or a mismatching (rebuild) strategy. The response strategies were designed following Coombs' (2007) SCCT guidelines: For the diminish strategy, little responsibility was taken by the company, and excuses and justification were provided; For the rebuild strategy, the company took full responsibility and offered apology

and compensation. The crisis responses were designed in Romanian, translated into English by the researcher, and back-translated by a certified English teacher with L1 Romanian. The first paragraph of each press release contained identical information: The public was informed about the battery explosion reports, the cause of the technical error, and the decision of the company to recall the product from the market. The press releases had similar word counts: matching/ non-native (121); mismatching/ non-native (117); matching/ native (133); mismatching/ native (119). Therefore, it was not expected that responses would be altered by differences in the length of the crisis responses.

3.2 Respondents

144 respondents were included in the study. 24 respondents were excluded due to providing incomplete responses. 97 (67.4%) respondents were exposed to a press release in the native language condition and 47 (32.6%), in the non-native condition. All respondents were native Romanian speakers. The age range was 39 ($M = 25.74$, $SD = 8.81$). The gender distribution looked as follows: 78 (54.2%) females, 64 (44.4%) males; 2 (1.4%) respondents identified with a different gender. Their educational level ranged from high school to postgraduate studies, with most of them indicating to have graduated university-level education – 67 (46.5%) respondents.

The aim was to distribute the survey among people that possess good English skills, to increase the chances of a reasonable understanding of the English press releases. It was reasoned that a sample of a population with generally low English skills would decrease the chances of the foreign language effect appearing, leading to the missed opportunity to explore whether and to what extent FLE was a relevant concept for crisis communication. The respondents' education level suggested that most of them have completed compulsory English classes, given the structure of the Romanian educational system as discussed in the literature review. However, to ensure the selection criteria were met, respondents exposed to the non-native language conditions were asked additional questions regarding their English-language competency and exposure to the English language. As expected, most of them self-rated their English skills as high - 28 (59.6%) respondents. Table 1 indicates the descriptive for English fluency. Out of the 47 respondents in the non-native language condition, 20 (42.6%) possessed an English language certificate, the most prevalent choice being CEA – 8 (40%) respondents. Only 11 (23.4%) respondents have lived in an English-speaking

country, the majority of whom have lived there between 2 and 5 years (45.5%). These characteristics indicated that the selection criteria were, to a large extent, met. Therefore, it was assumed that the percentage of the population which did not conform to the desired English fluency should not raise concerns for the validity of the results.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the self-rating of the respondents' English-language fluency

	Frequency	Percentage
very low	0	0%
low	1	2.1%
average	8	17%
high	28	59.6%
like a native English-speaker	10	21.3%

3.3 Design

The experimental study had a 2 (language: native vs non-native) x 2 (response strategy: matching vs mismatching) between-subject factorial design. This resulted in four experimental conditions. Reputation perceptions (positive; negative); and behavioral intentions (intention to spread negative word-of-mouth; purchase intention) were the dependent variables. The language of the message and response strategy were the independent variables. The perceived emotional intensity (of negative emotions; of positive emotions; of calmness; of indifference) was treated as a mediator.

3.4 Instruments

After reading one of the press releases, the participants completed an online questionnaire. All questions and answer choices were in the participants' native language, Romanian.

The scale for 'perceived emotional intensity' was developed by the researcher and it initially contained eight items, measured on a five-point Likert – scale (1 = not at all; 5 = to a very large extent). The variable was designed to assess the extent to which the message from Ancolia made the participants feel: *emotional; sad; happy; angry; frustrated; touched; indifferent; calm.* However, the reliability for 'perceived emotional intensity' was unsatisfactory for further analysis

(α = .41). Therefore, a principal component analysis with varimax rotation was performed. This revealed a three-factor solution, explaining 70.93% of the variance. Component 1 was named 'perceived intensity of negative emotions' (*sad, angry, frustrated*) (α = .70) and component 2, 'perceived intensity of positive emotions' (*emotional, happy, touched*) (α = .71). 'Calm' correlated with both components 2 and 3. However, it was measured as a separate factor because the scales of these components were not reliable when 'calm' was included: α = .59 (component 2); α = .36 (component 3). As a result, 'perceived indifference' was also analyzed as a separate factor. Table 2 indicates the results of the principal component analysis.

Table 2. Results of the principal component analysis with varimax rotation

Items	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3
	Perceived intensity of negative emotions	Perceived intensity of positive emotions	
angry	.88		
frustrated	.87		
sad	.51		
happy		.84	
touched		.78	
emotional		.63	
indifferent			.83
calm		(.42)	.63
Eigenvalues	2.14	2.02	1.51
% of variance	26.74	25.24	18.95
α	.70	.71	.36
		(.59)	

To measure reputation perceptions, the researcher initially designed one variable of four five-point Likert – scale items, assessing the extent to which participants thought Ancolia was *competent; trustworthy; well-intended; harmful* (1 = not at all; 5 = to a very large extent). However, the

reliability of this scale was very low (α = .35), hence a principal component analysis with varimax rotation was then performed. Only one component was extracted, explaining 65.49% of the variance. That factor was named 'perceptions of positive reputation' (*competent; trustworthy; well-intended*) and it was found to be reliable (α = .84). The perceived potential of the company to produce harm was analyzed as a separate factor, coded as 'perceptions of negative reputation'.

For negative word-of-mouth intention, participants responded to four five-point Likert – scale questions, ranging from '1 = strongly disagree', to '5 = strongly agree'. One of the questions was adapted from Maxham & Netemeyer (2002): *"If my friends were looking for a new company of this type, I would not tell them to try Ancolia.".* The remaining three were adapted from Coombs & Holladay (2008) (i.e., *"I would say negative things about Ancolia and its products to others.".*). As the reliability was satisfactory (α = .85), the mean of all four items was used to calculate the compound variable 'negative word-of-mouth intention', which was used in the further analyses.

To measure purchase intention, only two five-point Likert – scale questions were used (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), adapted from Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman (1996). These were: "*I would buy Ancolia products, despite this event.; I would consider Ancolia when looking to buy technology products.".* This factor was highly reliable (α = .81).

3.5 Procedure

The data was collected through an online experiment, created on the software Qualtrics XM. Most of the respondents were recruited through convenience sampling, from the researcher's network and personal contacts, via direct messages on Facebook Messenger and Instagram. They were given access to the survey via a direct link. The selection was based on factors such as personal knowledge of the participant's English competence. Snowball sampling was also used, in that some of the participants were invited to forward the survey link to their own networks. This technique was used to maximize the completion rate, at the expense of potentially altering the selection criteria. Participation was voluntary and no compensation was awarded. Anonymity and withdrawal rights were guaranteed in an introductory paragraph that the respondents read before starting the experiment. There, respondents were also informed that the objective of the study was to investigate different ways multinational companies communicate with their public during a corporate scandal. Not to influence responses, the specific factors under scrutiny were not

disclosed. Consent and confirmation that Romanian is (one of) the participant's native language(s) were asked for. Failure to conform to these requirements resulted in the impossibility to take part in the study. Following the introductory paragraph, the respondents were randomly allocated to one condition. After reading the press release, they completed the questionnaire. Nonetheless, they were asked for demographics (age, gender, education level) and were thanked for their participation. The completion of the experiment took an average of 23.25 minutes.

3.6 Statistical Treatment

To answer RQ1(a), four independent sample T-tests were run to test for potential differences in the intensity perceptions of various emotions elicited by the crisis message. RQ1(b) was investigated by performing a series of linear regression analyses in conformity to Baron and Kenny's (1986) guidelines for testing mediation effects. For RQ2, four Two-Way ANOVAs were performed. The results of these tests were reported below.

4. Results

The null hypotheses were confirmed for all H1, E1, and H2, thus the proposed conceptual model was not validated.

H1 predicted that crisis messages conveyed in English will be perceived as less emotional than those conveyed in Romanian. In response to H1, four independent sample T-tests showed a non-significant difference between the group exposed to the native and the group exposed to the non-native language condition, with regards to all the variables measuring perceptions of the emotional impact of the message. The results for each variable are as follows: perceived intensity of negative emotions (t (142) = .77, p = .441); perceived intensity of positive emotions (t (142) = -1.08, p = .283); perceived intensity of calmness (t (142) = .27, p = .790); perceived intensity of indifference (t (142) = -.19, p = .853). Despite the non-significant results, a table containing means and standard deviations was included, for informative purposes (Table 3).

Table 3. Means and standard deviations for the language of the response messages on emotionality perceptions

		Romanian crisis messages	English crisis messages
		n = 73	n = 71
		M (SD)	*M (SD)*
Perceived emotional intensity of:	negative emotions	1.96 (.83)	1.86 (.71)
	positive emotions	2.04 (.90)	2.19 (.78)
	calmness	3.19 (1.21)	3.14 (1.07)
	indifference	2.37 (1.23)	2.41 (1.26)

E1 proposed that the relationship between crisis messages conveyed in English and a decrease in reputational damage (E1a) and negative behavioral intentions (negative word-of-mouth and purchase intention) (E1b) will be positively mediated by the lower perceived emotional intensity of L2. Considering the results to H1, it was unlikely that a foreign language context will impact reputation perceptions and behavioral intentions, given that this impact should have been conditioned by a successful manipulation of the emotional experience. This was indeed the case. The perceived emotional intensity of the messages did not mediate the effect of language choice on neither one of the dependent variables: reputation perceptions (positive; negative reputation) and behavioral intentions (purchase intention; negative WOM intention). Therefore, it was concluded there was no difference in the extent to which participants changed perceptions and behavioral intentions towards the company in the two language conditions. These conclusions were reached after testing the mediation through a series of simple regression analyses, using Baron and Kenny's (1986) guidelines. They were meant to establish if a zero-order relationship existed between the language of the messages, perceived emotional intensity, and reputational/ behavioral intentions. The results of these regressions are displayed below.

For step one, four separate simple regression analyses showed that the language of the message, the variable entered in each of the models, could not explain any variance in neither the model for: negative reputation ($F (1, 142) = 1.41$, $p = .237$); positive reputation ($F (1, 142) = 1.13$, $p = .290$); purchase intention ($F (1, 142) = .07$, $p = .796$) and negative WOM intention ($F (1, 142) = 2.31$, p

= .111), since none of the models were significant. As a result, the language of the message was not a significant predictor for neither one of the dependent variables.

For step two, four separate simple regression analyses with the language of the message as the variable entered in each of the models showed that the language of the message was also not a significant predictor for neither the perceived intensity of: negative emotions (F (1, 142) = .60, p = .441); positive emotions (F (1, 142) = 1.16, p = .283); calmness (F (1, 142) = .07, p = .790); indifference (F (1, 142) = .03, p = .853), since none of the models were significant. Given these results, it was concluded that the mediation by emotionality perceptions did not occur and thus it was reasoned as unnecessary to further regress the dependent variables on emotionality perceptions and the language of the message together, as normally required in mediation testing.

These results provided a discouraging outlook towards potential interaction effects between the language of the message and response strategy. However, interaction effects are not strictly bound to the existence of significant main effects (Grace-Martin, n.d.), thus the decision was made to test this possibility. As a result, for H2, four different Two-Way ANOVAs were performed.

H2 predicted that a technical breakdown product recall crisis reported through a mismatching strategy will better preserve organizational reputation and will minimize negative behavioral intentions (negative word-of-mouth and purchase intention). The results are as follows:

The Two-Way ANOVA for perceived positive reputation with as between-subject factors response style (matching, mismatching) and language of the message (native, non-native) showed no significant main effects on either response style (F (1, 140) = .36, p = .548, η^2 = .00) or language of the message (F (1, 140) = 1.10, p = .297, η^2 = .00) and also no significant interaction (F (1, 140) = .55, p = .461, η^2 = .00).

Similar results are indicated by the Two-Way ANOVA for perceived negative reputation, with the same as between-subject factors: response style (matching, mismatching) and language of the message (native, non-native). No significant main effects were found on response style (F (1, 140) = .32, p = .570, η^2 = .00); language of the message (F (1, 140) = 1.37, p = .244, η^2 = .01). There was also no significant interaction (F (1, 140) = 1.46, p = .228, η^2 = .01). This once again confirmed that the groups were similar in the way they evaluated the reputation of Ancolia.

Moreover, the Two-Way ANOVA for intention to spread negative word-of-mouth with as between-subject factors response style (matching, mismatching) and language of the message (native, non-native) showed no significant main effects on either response style (F (1, 140) = 1.15, p = .285, η^2 = .00), or language of the message (F (1, 140) = 2.56, p = .112, η^2 = .02) and also no significant interaction (F (1, 140) = .00, p = .988, η^2 = .00). This attested that intention to spread NWOM did not differ among groups.

Likewise, for purchase intention, the Two-Way ANOVA with the same as between-subject factors: response style (matching, mismatching) and language of the message (native, non-native) also showed no significant main effects on response style (F (1, 140) = .42, p = .516, η^2 = .00) and language of the message (F (1, 140) = .06, p = .809, η^2 = .00) and also no significant interaction (F (1, 140) = 1.50, p = .223, η^2 = .01).

The Two-Way ANOVAs showed that the similarities between groups prevailed among all the crisis communication outcomes analyzed. Moreover, the lack of any interaction effects suggests that the two strategies combined may not provide any benefits for the company affected by the crisis and should hence be studied separately in future academic inquiries. Table 4 contains information regarding the means and standard deviations for the language of the message and response strategy, on all the dependent variables.

Table 4. Means and standard deviations for the language of the messages and response style on reputation perceptions and behavioral intentions

	Romanian crisis messages		English crisis messages	
	Diminish	Rebuild	Diminish	Rebuild
	n = 73		n = 71	
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*
Negative reputation	2.32 (.92)	2.22 (9.3)	1.94 (.86)	2.23 (1.11)
Positive reputation	3.05 (1.00)	3.24 (.81)	3.31 (.81)	3.29 (.88)
Purchase intention	3.03 (1.01)	3.13 (1.06)	3.28 (1.00)	2.96 (1.05)
Negative WOM intention	2.79 (1.03)	2.96 (.82)	2.53 (.92)	2.71 (1.03)

Before drawing final conclusions, four additional independent sample T-tests were run to check if these findings could have been influenced by gender differences. This possibility was ruled out, because the results of these tests showed a non-significant difference between males and females, with regards to all the four dependent variables analyzed: purchase intention (t (140) = 567, p = .572); negative WOM intention (t (140) = -1.13, p = .259; positive reputation (t (140) = -.75, p = .452); negative reputation (t (140) = -1.00, p = .319). Table 5 contains information regarding the means and standard deviations as per gender.

Table 5. Means and standard deviations for gender on reputation perceptions and behavioral intentions

	Males n = 64 M (SD)	Females n = 78 M (SD)
Negative reputation	2.09 (.83)	2.26 (1.06)
Positive reputation	3.17 (.94)	3.28 (.81)
Purchase intention	3.16 (.92)	3.06 (1.11)
Negative WOM intention	2.64 (.85)	2.82 (1.04)

5. Conclusion & Discussion

5.1 General Discussion

In this online experiment, the researcher contributed to the field of international crisis communication by examining the effects of language choice and response strategy on reputation perceptions and behavioral intentions, in a different cultural context, Romania.

In response to RQ1, crisis responses in English were not perceived as less emotional than responses in Romanian. Implicitly, the answer to RQ2 is that the language of the message did not affect consumer reputation perceptions and behavioral intentions towards the organization during a crisis in Romania, given that this relationship should have been mediated by the lower perceived

emotional intensity of the foreign language. Therefore, it seems that Gawinkowska et al.'s (2013) and Dewaele's (2004) research on taboo words, Bond & Lai's (1986) study on embarrassing topics and Puntoni et al.'s (2008) research on advertisement attitudes were not illustrative for the current results. Contrarily to them, this thesis could not demonstrate that a foreign language enables one to detach more, emotionally, from an event. Implicitly, the findings of Keysar, et al.'s (2012) study that a foreign language context could bias decision-making processes were also not corroborated. This suggests that the foreign language effect may not, in fact, be easily generalizable across contexts and that it may remain more relevant for psycholinguistic inquiries and research on moral decision-making, than for crisis communication. An explanation may be that, in crisis communication, factors other than language choice are more important in determining the extent to which people think about and act towards the post-crisis business. As research has already shown, one of the important factors remains the emotions themselves that are elicited by the crisis, with increased negative emotions predicting more reputational damage and negative behavioral outcomes (see, e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Utz et al., 2013; Yi & Baumgarter, 2004). Therefore, communication managers should still focus on minimizing the emotional impact of the crisis, but this study indicates it should not be done by manipulating the language of the message.

Nonetheless, in response to RQ2, there was no difference in the extent to which a matching versus a mismatching response strategy affected consumer reputation perceptions and behavioral intentions towards the company in crisis. Therefore, the current study could not replicate the findings of Claeys et al. (2010) and Van der Meer & Verhoeven (2014), who argued for mismatching response strategies as optimal in accidental crises, nor to contradict those who argued in favor of matching strategies (see, e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Ma & Zang, 2015; Hegner et al. 2016). This shows, again, that the phenomenon behaved unexpectedly. Several explanations may underline these results. Firstly, alongside response strategy, other factors could have played a role in determining the extent to which participants were motivated to make further purchases, to engage in negative WOM, or to change perceptions about the company's reputation. For instance, in SCCT, perceived organizational responsibility – the extent to which stakeholders attribute blame for the crisis to the company, was illustrated as a determinative factor for organizational reputation (Coombs, 2007; Claeys et al., 2010). However, this factor was not controlled for in this study, leaving an open door for future research to address it.

Moreover, response groups may have possessed similar cultural attributes that were not identified. For instance, Romania scores very high on uncertainty avoidance, meaning that generally, Romanians feel uncomfortable with ambiguous situations (What about Romania?, n.d.). In the introductory paragraph of the press release, regardless of the response strategy employed, participants were provided with clear explanations for the cause of the crisis (the overheating of the lithium batteries). This reduced the amount of uncertainty that could have been attributed to the event. Had the participants submitted to the normative cultural attribute, it is possible that, when evaluating the company's crisis response, they were primarily influenced by the explanatory paragraph and not by the phrases that illustrated the diminish versus rebuild strategy. This may have accounted, in part, for the negligible deviation among responses.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The following aspects illustrate the contribution of this study to theory.

Firstly, at the macro-level research, by conducting the study in Romania, this thesis expands our understanding into the workings of crisis communication internationally, thus addressing Coombs & Laufer's (2018) call for the need for more investigation in this field. Used in a meta-analysis, this study could help map out (dis)similarities between the extent to which stakeholders from different cultures submitted to certain behaviors towards an organization after an accidental crisis. This could provide insights for the type response strategy to implement, depending not only on crisis factors but on cultural ones also.

Secondly, at the micro-level research, this study is one of the pioneers in the area of experimental crisis communication research in Romania. Scholars are advised to expand on these results to create an empirical body of crisis communication research in Romania and to help practitioners implement scientifically-based, instead of intuitive, crisis management strategies.

Thirdly, this thesis adds valuable knowledge to the corpus of research on crisis communication by being the first known study to indicate that, despite a promising outlook, the foreign language effect may be irrelevant to this context. Simultaneously, this provides scholars concerned with emotion studies with new insights into the limitations of FLE.

Nonetheless, this research adds evidence to the debate of whether a matching or a mismatching response strategy, as proposed in Coombs's (2007) SCCT, better protects organizational reputation and minimizes negative behavioral outcomes in an accidental crisis. Specifically, it takes a neutral stance towards the matter and it shows that in Romania, one strategy was not preferred over another. Future studies could expand on this discovery to see if any external factors may have played a role in these results, as suggested above.

5.3 Managerial Implications

The study proposes a two-fold contribution to practice:

Firstly, it indicates that a foreign language context may be irrelevant for crisis communication, at least in an accidental crisis scenario. In the lack of a conclusive result, crisis managers of multinational firms located in Romania are encouraged to adapt their crisis responses to the stakeholders' first language instead of employing them in English. The reasoning is that, although English may not influence any perceptions or behavioral intentions for the people already skilled in this language, it may, however, deprive those with lower English competency from comprehending the crisis message. This may lead to frustration on the stakeholders' side and a missed opportunity to clarify the crisis on the company's side.

Secondly, until more information is gathered regarding the optimal response strategy to be implemented in an accidental crisis in Romania, communication managers are advised to stick to the guidelines of Coombs's (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory. This thesis is the only known study that tested SCCT for a Romanian population. However, SCCT is known as "the most frequently tested theory in crisis communication research" (Zhou, Ki, &, Brown, 2019, p. 39). Therefore, in the lack of more empirically and locally-grounded strategies, this framework should provide practitioners in Romania with a good basis for designing an effective crisis response.

5.4 Limitations & Areas for Future Research

Based on the limitations of this study, the following areas for further research were identified:

Firstly, this study used snowball and convenience sampling. Drawing on the snowballing technique may be a limitation for validating the foreign language effect because the inclusion criteria were hard to control. If researchers are interested to further test FLE in crisis communication, they are advised to choose a probability sampling technique for selecting participants. However, inferences about the ecological validity of such studies should be made cautiously. In real life, stakeholders may possess different levels of foreign language skills. It means that, even if the effect occurs, it may only be beneficial for a population that meets specific language competency criteria. This needs to be transparently discussed when drawing the limitations of such studies.

Secondly, this study investigated (mis)matching response strategies in only one country, Romania. This variable, as theorized in SCCT, should be tested in more cultural contexts. Such studies are needed to strengthen our understanding of the workings of crisis communication internationally.

Moreover, to portray the accidental crisis, a technological breakdown product recall was designed. However, technological breakdown product recalls are not illustrative of all the types of accidental crises identified by Coombs & Holladay (2005). For instance, they also consider it accidental if an external stakeholder accuses a company of operating immorally. Therefore, it would be interesting to test if different types of accidental crises differ on the extent to which stakeholders prefer one response strategy over another.

Nonetheless, a fictitious, over a real company, was used for the experiment. Reputation measurements or inquiries regarding further purchases towards a fabricated organization to which respondents were only once exposed, may only resemble temporary attitudes that cannot be linked to any other factors (Claeys et al., 2010). Therefore, future research should draw on a real company with a generally positive reputation and no history of crises, to avoid the effects of negative company knowledge (Coombs, 2007) and to validate the generalizability of the current results.

In conclusion, crisis management in culturally diverse contexts is a complex and challenging procedure for multinationals (Coombs, 2018), hence it continually seeks academic endorsement.

This thesis contributed to our understanding of the effectiveness of different crisis strategies across multinational settings by providing empirical insights into the workings of (non)-native language choice and (mis)matching response strategy in an accidental crisis in Romania. It was concluded that employing a second language in the crisis message should not be a priority for communication managers, as a foreign language context may be irrelevant for a population reasonably skilled in the chosen L2. Likewise, the type of response strategy employed in an accidental crisis did not influence reputation perceptions and behavioral intentions in any way. Future research should develop on these findings by focusing on more cultural contexts and by testing additional factors that may have intertwined with these results.

References

Amaresan, S. (2019, March 19). Situational crisis communication theory and how it helps a business. *HubSpot.* https://blog.hubspot.com/service/situational-crisis-communication-theory.

Anooshian, L., & Hertel, P. (1994). Emotionality in free recall: Language specificity in bilingual memory. *Cognition & Emotion*, *8*, 503–514.

Barbu, R. (2019). Crisis communication in Romania and social media influencers and followers. Case study: patient's death at the Sanador hospital. *Journal of Media Research*, *12*(3), 5-17.

Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *51*(6), 1173-1182.

Bond, M. H., & Lai, T. M. (1986). Embarrassment and code-switching into a second language. *Journal of Social Psychology*, *126*(2), 179-186.

Bowen, M., Freidank, J., Wannow, S., & Cavallone, M. (2018). Effect of perceived crisis response on consumers' behavioral intentions during a company scandal – An intercultural perspective. *Journal of International Management*, *24*(3), 222-237.

Caldwell-Harris, C. L. (2015). Emotionality differences between a native and foreign language: Implications for everyday life. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *24*(3), 214-219.

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.

Cheng, L. C., Loh, Y., & Pang, A. (2011). Culture and emotion in crisis communication: Indigenization of the integrated crisis mapping (ICM) model. In *Proceedings of the 10th Conference on Corporate Communication* (pp. 222-239).

Chirileasa, A. (2020, September 18). A historic moment: Romania officially enters the emerging markets league on Monday. *Romania-Insider.com.* https://www.romania-insider.com/romania-emerging-market-ftse-russell.

Choi, J., & Chung, W. (2013). Analysis of the interactive relationship between apology and product involvement in crisis communication: An experimental study on the Toyota recall crisis. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *27*(1), 3-31.

Cipolletti, H., McFarlane, S., & Weissglass, C. (2016). The moral foreign-language effect. *Philosophical Psychology*, *29*(1), 23-40.

Claeys, A. S., Cauberghe, V., & Vyncke, P. (2010). Restoring reputations in times of crisis: An experimental study of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory and the moderating effects of locus of control. *Public Relations Review*, *36*(3), 256-262.

Cmeciu, C., & Coman, I. (2018). Twitter as a means of emotional coping and collective (re) framing of crises. Case study: The "colectiv" crisis in Romania. *Social communication*, *4*(2), 6-15.

Coombs, W. T. (2006). The protective powers of crisis response strategies: Managing reputational assets during a crisis. *Journal of Promotion Management*, *12*(3-4), 241-260.

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., & 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. (2005). An exploratory study of stakeholder emotions: Affect and crises. In N.M. Ashkanasy, W.J. Zerbe & C.E.J. Hartel (Eds.), *The effect of affect in organizational settings* (pp. 263-280). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2007). The negative communication dynamic. Exploring the impact of stakeholder affect on behavioral intentions. *Journal of Communication Management, 11*(4), 300–312.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2008). Comparing apology to equivalent crisis response strategies: Clarifying apology's role and value in crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, *34*(3), 252-257.

Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2009). Further explorations of post-crisis communication: Effects of media and response strategies on perceptions and intentions. *Public Relations Review*, *35*(1), 1-6.

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., Hayakawa, S., Aparici, M., Apesteguia, J., Heafner, J., & Keysar, B. (2014). Your morals depend on language. *PloS One, 9*(4), e94842.

Dejene, B. (2017). *Samsung's crisis communication response: Ineffective response strategies across traditional and social media platforms* (Doctoral dissertation, Ryerson University).

Dewaele, J. M. (2004). Blistering barnacles! What language do multilinguals swear in?! *Estudios de Sociolinguistica* 5(1), 83-105.

Downey, L. (2020, September 21). *What is a product recall?*. Investopedia. https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/product_recall.asp.

Education in Romania. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Romania.

EF English Proficiency Index. (2020). *The world's largest ranking of countries and regions by English skills.* (2020). Education first. https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/.

Gawinkowska, M., Paradowski, M. B., & Bilewicz, M. (2013). Second language as an exemptor from sociocultural norms. Emotion-related language choice revisited. *PloS One, 8*(12), e81225.

Grace-Martin, K. (n.d.). *Interpreting interactions when main effects are not significant.* The Analysis Factor. https://www.theanalysisfactor.com/interactions-main-effects-not-significant/.

Grappi, S., & Romani, S. (2015). Company post-crisis communication strategies and the psychological mechanism underlying consumer reactions. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 27*, 22–45.

Hegner, S. M., Beldad, A. D., & Kraesgenberg, A. L. (2016). The impact of crisis response strategy, crisis type, and corporate social responsibility on post-crisis consumer trust and purchase intention. *Corporate Reputation Review*, *19*(4), 357-370.

Iacob, R. (2018). Trust and transparency: Perspectives upon the communication of the National Bank of Romania during the financial crisis. *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, *6*(1), 129-144.

Jin, Y., & Pang, A. (2010). Future directions of crisis communication research: Emotions in crisis — The next frontier. In W. T. Coombs & S. J. Holladay (Eds.), *The handbook of crisis communication* (pp. 677-682). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Jin, Y., Pang, A., & Cameron, G. T. (2010). The role of emotions in crisis responses: Inaugural test of the integrated crisis mapping (ICM) model. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. *15*(4), 428-452.

Jin, Y., Pang, A., & Cameron, G. T. (2012). Toward a publics-driven, emotion-based conceptualization in crisis communication: Unearthing dominant emotions in multi-staged testing of the integrated crisis mapping (ICM) model. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *24*(3), 266-298.

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.

Laufer, D., & Jung, J. M. (2010). Incorporating regulatory focus theory in product recall communications to increase compliance with a product recall. *Public Relations Review*, *36*(2), 147-151.

Ma, L., & Zhan, M. (2016). Effects of attributed responsibility and response strategies on organizational reputation: A meta-analysis of situational crisis communication theory research. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *28*(2), 102-119.

Maxham III, J. G., & Netemeyer, R. G. (2002). A longitudinal study of complaining customers' evaluations of multiple service failures and recovery efforts. *Journal of Marketing*, *66*(4), 57-71.

Nejjari, W., Gerritsen, M., van Hout, R., & Planken, B. (2020). Where does a 'foreign' accent matter? German, Spanish and Singaporean listeners' reactions to Dutch-accented English, and standard British and American English accents. *PloS one*, *15*(4), e0231089.

Pavlenko, A. (2005), *Emotions and Multilingualism*, Cambridge: 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.

Reuters. (2017, January 23). *Samsung confirms battery faults as cause of Note 7 fires*. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/business-38714461.

Utz, S., Schultz, F., & Glocka, S. (2013). Crisis communication online: How medium, crisis type and emotions affected public reactions in the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. *Public relations review*, *39*(1), 40-46.

Van der Meer, T. G. L. A., & Verhoeven, J. W. M. (2014). Emotional crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, *40*(3), 526–536.

What about Romania?. (n.d.) Hofstede Insights. https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country/romania/.

Yi, S., & Baumgartner, H. (2004). Coping with negative emotions in purchase-related situations. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *14*(3), 303-317.

Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L., & Parasuraman, A. (1996). The behavioral consequences of service quality. *Journal of Marketing*, *60*(2), 31-46.

Zhou, Z., Ki, E. J., & Brown, K. A. (2019). A measure of perceived severity in organizational crises: A multidimensional scale development and validation. *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research*, *2*(1), 39-60.

Appendix

The appendix only contains the English translation of the experiment and the questionnaire.

1. Introduction

This study aims to investigate ways multinational companies could communicate with the public during a corporate scandal.

You are invited to read a press release of the company Ancolia Group, which specializes in technology products. The statement represents the official response of the company, as a result of a scandal created around one of its products on the market. After reading the press release, you are kindly asked to complete a questionnaire. There is no right or wrong answer.

The answers are completely anonymous and will be processed strictly for the writing of a master's thesis, within the Masters' track in International Business Communication, Radboud University Nijmegen. Participation in the study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. The duration of the experiment is about 5 minutes. Thank you for participating.

For further information, please contact the student researcher at sabrina.luca.1998@gmail.com (Sabrina Luca) or the thesis coordinator at w.nejjari@let.ru.nl (Warda Nejjari).

I give my consent to have my answers processed for academic purposes. (yes/no)

Romanian is my native language or one of my native languages. (yes/no)

2. Crisis Messages

Diminish Response Strategy

Press release – Ancolia Group

Recently, reports of battery explosions of our latest smartphone model, Ancolia ZT+, have been brought to our attention. For safety reasons, Ancolia Group decides to recall all Ancolia ZT+ models from the market. An internal investigation revealed that this was due to the overheating of the lithium batteries.

We want to stress that these issues came to light only after the sale. Therefore, there was little Ancolia Group could have done to prevent these technical problems. Moreover, very few cases were reported in which this technical issue produced physical harm to our customers. Hence, the consequences are less severe than it has been communicated in mass-media.

Our focus now is to make sure such errors will not occur in the future.

Rebuild Response Strategy

Press release – Ancolia Group

Recently, reports of battery explosions of our latest smartphone model, Ancolia ZT+, have been brought to our attention. For safety reasons, Ancolia Group decides to recall all Ancolia ZT+ models from the market. An internal investigation revealed that this was due to the overheating of the lithium batteries.

We want to extend our sincere apologies to our customers. Ancolia Group takes full responsibility for the technical problems and offers to repair or replace all recalled smartphones, free of charge.

We highly value the trust you place in us and we will work hard every day to earn it back. This is why our focus now is to make sure such errors will not occur in the future.

3. Questionnaire

Perceived emotional intensity of the message - 5 Likert – scale (Not al all/ To a small extent/ Moderated/ To a large extent/ To a very large extent)

 To what extent does the message from Ancolia make you feel:

- – emotional
- – sad
- – happy
- – angry
- – frustrated
- – touched
- – indifferent
- – calm

Perceived reputation - 5 Likert – scale (Not al all/ To a small extent/ Moderated/ To a large extent/ To a very large extent)

To what extent do you think the company Ancolia is:

- – competent
- – trustworthy
- – well-intended
- – harmful

Negative WOM intention - 5 Likert – scale (Strongly disagree/ Disagree/ Neither agree, nor disagree/ Agree/ Strongly agree)

- – I would not encourage my friends and family to buy Ancolia products in the future.

- I would not recommend Ancolia products to anyone asking for my advice.
- I would say negative things about Ancolia and its products to others.
- If my friends were looking for a new company of this type, I would not tell them to try Ancolia.

Purchase intention - 5 Likert – scale (Strongly disagree/ Disagree/ Neither agree, nor disagree/ Agree/ Strongly agree)

- I would buy Ancolia products, despite this event.
- I would consider Ancolia when looking to buy technology products.

The language of the press release was:

- Romanian
- English

If English was selected, the following questions were asked:

Language proficiency - 5 Likert – scale (Very low/ Low/ Average/ High/ Like a native English speaker) (Nejjari, Gerritsen, van Hout, & Planken, 2020)

- In general, my English skills are:

English certificate

- I have an English-language certificate. (yes/no)
    - Please indicate the certificate. (CAE/ FCE/ IELTS/ TOFEL/ Other)

English country

- I live or used to live in an English-speaking country. (yes/no)
    - For how long? (Less than 2 years/ Between 2 – 5 years/ More than 5 years)

Demographics

- Please indicate the gender you identify with. (Male/ Female/ Other)
- Please indicate your age. (open answer)
- Please indicate the last level of education you have graduated from. (High school/ Postsecondary education/ Undergraduate education/ Postgraduate education/ Prefer not to say)

Thank you for participating in this study. Your response has been recorded.