

MA Thesis

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*The Effect of Crisis Strategy and Tone of Voice in the Netherlands and  
United States*



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03 – 07 – 2020

11919 words

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand the effect of crisis strategy, tone of voice and culture on Dutch versus American consumers' responses to an organization in the context of a crisis by using a 2 (crisis strategy: apology/compensation) x 2 (tone of voice: human/corporate) x 2 (culture: Dutch/American) between-subject experimental design. 120 Dutch and 120 American respondents were exposed to a fictional online news article describing a fictional organization and the crisis it was facing, as well as an organizational crisis response. The results indicate that crisis strategy, tone of voice and culture do not affect consumers in terms of organizational reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message. The absence of an effect of crisis strategy and tone of voice are in line with the current literature on both crisis strategy and tone of voice in the Dutch context, but do not match with literature on these factors in the American context. By focusing on the Netherlands and the United States, this study contributes to a better understanding of the effect of crisis strategies and tone of voice in cross-cultural communication, thereby enriching the field of prior crisis communication research.

**Keywords:** crisis communication, apology, compensation, conversational human voice, corporate voice, culture.

## Introduction

In March 2018, news broke that a data analytics firm called Cambridge Analytica had harvested personal data of as many as 50 million Americans via Facebook, and used these data for political exploitation (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). Backlash against Facebook ensued, for not only was the data collected without people's consent, Facebook had been aware of the practices of Cambridge Analytica since 2015, but had done nothing to alert its users or secure their private information (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook, initially posted a message on Facebook in which Facebook took responsibility for the Cambridge Analytica scandal (Mark Zuckerberg, 2018), but it did not offer an explicit apology for its actions (Newton, 2018). Several days later, Facebook used a full-page advertisement in several British and American newspapers to apologize for the situation (Statt, 2018). As a result of the scandal, Facebook has suffered from reputational damage even to this day. A week after the scandal was revealed, trust in Facebook's commitment to protect users' personal information had dropped to 27% (compared to 79% in 2017) (Kanter, 2018). A year later, in March 2019, trust in Facebook had not recovered, with one survey showing that 44% of social media users view Facebook more negatively, and that 37% of people use Facebook less often as a result of the scandal (Herhold, 2019).

Considering its relevance for organizations, crisis communication has been extensively studied. Previous research has shown that a crisis can negatively affect an organization's reputation (Coombs, 2007; Ma & Zhan, 2016) as well as the trust consumers have in said organization (Lee, 2005). Research has also found that organizational reputation is negatively affected by an organization's responsibility for a crisis (Ma & Zhan, 2016). Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory argues that the greater the level of perceived organizational responsibility is regarding a crisis, the more accommodative a crisis strategy should be to diminish this reputational damage. However, not much crisis communication research has solely focused on and compared accommodative strategies (e.g. apology and compensation). The research that does focus on these strategies, has shown inconclusive results (e.g. Verhoeven, Van Hoof, Ter Keurs & Van Vuuren, 2012; Kiambi & Shafer, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative that systematic research is done into effective crisis communication (Ye & Ki, 2017), particularly into the effect of accommodative crisis strategies.

It is possible that the tone of voice utilized in a crisis strategy affects the effectivity of said crisis strategy. Some scholars have found that utilizing a conversational human voice (as opposed to a corporate voice) in web-care can result in positive outcomes in terms of reputation (e.g. Park & Cameron, 2014) and trust (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). Contrastingly, other studies on the effect of tone of voice in crisis communication have not found this same positive effect of CHV (Huibers & Verhoeven, 2014), making the literature on the subject inconclusive. As the effect of tone of voice in a crisis context is unclear, more research needs to be done.

Crisis communication research largely neglects culture as a factor of influence. The limited body of research in which culture is taken as a factor of influence has primarily focused on comparing ‘east’ versus ‘west’ (e.g. United States and South Korea: An, Park, Cho & Berger, 2010). Some of these studies generalize their findings (Low, Varughese & Pang, 2011), which leads to neglect of cultural differences that could potentially affect crisis communication. Therefore, this study investigates whether consumers from two culturally ‘similar’ countries, these being the Netherlands and the United States, respond differently to organizational crisis responses depending on the used crisis strategy (apology versus compensation) and the used tone of voice (conversational human voice versus corporate voice).

## **Literature Review**

### **Crisis Communication**

Coombs (2007) defines a crisis as “a sudden and unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organization’s operations and poses both a financial and a reputational threat and which can also cause stakeholders physical, emotional and / or financial harm” (p.164). Examples of crises are natural crises (e.g. earthquakes and fires), intentional disasters (e.g. terrorism or product tampering), and corporate mishaps, accidents, and failures (e.g. data breaches) (Zirpolo, 2019). Based on these different types of crises, scholars on crisis communication have developed models and theories that measure effective crisis management (Cheng, 2018). Of these models, the most used and cited model is the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which was developed by Coombs (2007).

Coombs’ SCCT is based on Benoit’s (1997) Image Repair Theory and Weiner’s (2006) Attribution Theory, and was created with the purpose of exploring what patterns are present

regarding the use of crisis responses (Cheng, 2018). The SCCT posits that the most effective response to a crisis is dependent on the type of crisis, the level of attributed responsibility, and the prior reputation of the organization (Coombs, 2007, as cited in Zirpolo, 2019). Each crisis type generates specific and predictable levels of crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007). The more a crisis type is perceived as preventable rather than accidental, the more the organization is perceived to be responsible for the crisis. In addition, the perceived crisis responsibility can also be indirectly affected by an organization's prior reputation, as either a history of crises or an unfavorable prior relational reputation can increase perceived crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007).

In their meta-analysis of crisis communication research utilizing SCCT, Ma and Zhan (2016) found that the more responsibility the public attributes to an organization for a crisis, the more organizational reputation suffers. Therefore, crises in which the public perceives the organization to be responsible can be regarded as the most threatening to organizational reputation (Ma & Zhan, 2016). Coomb's (2007) SCCT also suggests that the greater the level of perceived organizational responsibility is regarding a crisis, the more accommodative an organization's crisis strategy should be to ensure the least amount of reputational damage. Based on these factors, the SCCT identifies 13 possible crisis communication strategies and places them on a continuum of accommodativeness to victims (Cheng, 2018), with strategies like 'attack the accuser' and 'denial' as least accommodative, and 'compensation' and 'apology' as most accommodative to the victims (Coombs, 2014). These strategies can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. The list of possible crisis strategies for reputation repair according to Coomb’s Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), ranked from least accommodative (no.1) to most accommodative (no.13) (Coombs, 2014).

<b>List of Reputation Repair Strategies</b>		
1	<i>Attack the accuser</i>	The crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization.
2	<i>Denial</i>	The crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis.
3	<i>Scapegoat</i>	The crisis manager blames some person or group outside of the organization for the crisis.
4	<i>Excuse</i>	The crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.
5	<i>Provocation</i>	The crisis was a result of response to someone else’s actions.
6	<i>Defeasibility</i>	The lack of information about events leading to the crisis situation.
7	<i>Accidental</i>	The lack of control over events leading to the crisis situation.
8	<i>Good intentions</i>	The organization meant to do well.
9	<i>Justification</i>	The crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis
10	<i>Reminder</i>	The crisis managers tell stakeholders about the past good works of the organization.
11	<i>Ingratiation</i>	The crisis manager praises stakeholders for their actions.
12	<i>Compensation</i>	The crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims.
13	<i>Apology</i>	The crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.

A great number of studies on crisis communication have utilized SCCT to determine the effects of crisis strategies on organizational reputation, and have found mixed results (Ma & Zhan, 2016). For example, Coombs and Holladay (1996) found that response strategies deemed suitable for the crisis (by the SCCT) better protected organizational image in crises regardless of organizational intentionality (compared to mismatched responses and no responses) (as cited in Ma & Zhan, 2016), whereas studies by Claeys, Cauberghe, and Vyncke (2010) and Kim & Sung (2014) found no evidence that suitable and unsuitable response strategies differed in protecting organizational reputation from damage following crises (as cited in Ma & Zhan, 2016). As literature on crisis communication utilizing SCCT has shown to be inconclusive, it

is relevant to further investigate crisis communication from an SCCT perspective in an attempt to help clarify the theoretical and practical value of SCCT in the field of crisis communication.

Most research on crisis strategies focuses on the apology-strategy. Coombs and Holladay (2008) posit that researchers often compare the apology strategy to less accommodative crisis strategies (e.g. no response, denial, excuse, and justification: Bradford & Garrett, 1995, as cited in Coombs & Holladay, 2008). These strategies do nothing to address the concerns of victims, which causes a biased comparison in which apology (being an accommodative strategy that focuses on victims) to easily “win”, resulting in apology sometimes being referred to as “the best crisis response” (Coombs & Holladay, 2008, p.252). Therefore, Coombs and Holladay (2008) argue that apology should be compared to more equivalent crisis response strategies (i.e. other accommodative crisis strategies, such as compensation). In order to establish a more realistic assessment of the true value of the apology strategy (versus other accommodative strategies) in the field of crisis communication, the scope of this research focuses exclusively on the accommodative cluster of strategies.

### **Apology Versus Compensation**

Apology and compensation are two of the most common options as responses to a crisis (Coombs & Laufer, 2018). Coombs’ (2007) SCCT considers these two crisis strategies to belong in the ‘accommodative’ cluster of crisis strategies. This cluster prioritizes the victims’ needs (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Apology, which is the most widely researched and discussed crisis response strategy (Coombs, Frandsen, Holladay & Johansen, 2010), can be defined as “accepting responsibility and asking for forgiveness” (Coombs & Holladay, 2008, p. 254). Compensation, on the other hand, can be defined as “providing money or other gifts to the victims” (Kiambi & Shafer, 2016, p.129).

Apology and compensation are similar, in that the SCCT recommends both (as accommodative strategies) to be applied to crises in which the organization has been attributed great crisis responsibility (Coombs & Holladay, 2004). The difference between both strategies lies in the acceptance of responsibility: in an apology, an organization acknowledges responsibility of a crisis, exposing itself to legal and financial liability (Tyler, 1997), while with compensation, it is never explicitly stated that an organization has taken responsibility (Coombs & Laufer, 2018), and is thus less likely to attract future lawsuits. In certain circumstances, it could thus be financially more prudent for organizations experiencing a crisis to offer compensation to victims, rather than to apologize, as this may cost less money in the long term.

A study by Verhoeven, Van Hoof, Ter Keurs and Van Vuuren (2012) found evidence that using an apology as crisis strategy is just as effective as doing nothing, which invalidates the statement that the apology strategy is ‘the best crisis strategy’. Verhoeven et al. (2012) looked into the effects of apology (versus no apology) and crisis responsibility on the reputation and trust of both the corporate spokesperson and the corporation as a whole. They had 84 Dutch participants watch a video on a fictitious crisis in a hospital, after which either an apology issued by the CEO or just an expression of regret by the CEO (but no explicit apology) was shown. Verhoeven et al. (2012) found, contrary to their expectations, that apology did not significantly affect people’s responses to the crisis in terms of trust and reputation when compared to no apology. They also found that the difference between mortification (i.e. apology) and non-mortification (i.e. no apology) conditions were unclear for the respondents, as both conditions were perceived as an apology. They argue that this could be due to the delivery of the control message, in that the non-mortification condition may have been interpreted by the participants as equally professional, empathetic and appropriate as the apology. As a result, Verhoeven et al. (2012) emphasized that future research should investigate the effects of apology versus other crisis strategies on reputation and trust, as well as investigate the effect of how the message is formulated.

The study by Kiambi and Shafer (2016) focused on how the apology strategy compares to other accommodative strategies, namely compensation and sympathy. Sympathy is an adjusting information strategy rather than a reputation repair strategy, and therefore not mentioned in the SCCT, but it is considered a highly accommodative (Sturges, 1994). Kiambi and Shafer (2016) examined the effects of accommodative strategies (compensation, apology, and sympathy) as well as prior reputation (good and bad) on the organization’s postcrisis reputation, the anger toward the organization, and the negative word-of-mouth intention about the organization. They had 230 American undergraduate students read a story of a fictitious airline experiencing high attribution of crisis responsibility following the crash of a passenger plane, and found that, for an organization facing high crisis responsibility, the apology strategy lead to more positive results in terms of organizational reputation than the compensation and sympathy strategies. In addition, stakeholders were more likely to get angry toward the organization when the compensation was offered than when apology was offered. Stakeholders were also more likely to positively evaluate the organization when an apology was offered than when victims were compensated. However, this study by Kiambi and Shafer (2016) only had communication students as participants. It is thus unclear whether the apology strategy would

evoke the same response from the general public (who do not have this level of knowledge regarding communications and are more heterogeneous as a group), or whether another accommodative strategy (e.g. compensation) would result in less reputational damage.

As the aforementioned study by Verhoeven et al. (2012) has shown, it is not yet clear empirically whether an apology has an effect on consumer response, whereas the study by Kiambi and Shafer (2016) has shown that it is unclear whether another accommodative strategy (such as compensation) would have (either positively or negatively) changed the general public's response. Verhoeven et al. (2012) have emphasized that future research should focus on the effects of different accommodative crisis strategies on reputation and trust. In addition to that, Coombs and Holladay (2008) have emphasized that more research is needed to compare apology to other victim-centered strategies, such as compensation. To answer the call of both Verhoeven et al. (2012) and Coombs and Holladay (2008), and since no study on accommodative crisis strategies insofar has focused on just the apology and compensation strategies and compared them within the context of one crisis situation, this study therefore focuses on the effect of the accommodative crisis strategies apology and compensation in the context of a crisis in which the organization is responsible. By focusing on these two strategies and comparing their effects, this study contributes to a more realistic assessment of the value of apology and compensation in the field of crisis communication.

### **Tone of Voice**

The way an organization's crisis strategy is worded might be of influence on the reception of the strategy. Most research focusing on the effect of the formulation of a message (the tone of voice) has focused on tone of voice (TOV) in a web-care context. Web-care can be of great importance to organizations during a crisis, because utilizing web-care via social media provides organizations with the opportunity to engage in immediate stakeholder interaction during an unfolding crisis (Formentin, Bortree & Fraustino, 2017), and thus gives organizations the opportunity to influence the crisis reception of stakeholders and decrease the potential damage to organizational reputation (Van Noort, Willemsen, Kerkhof & Verhoeven, 2014; Witte, 2015; Huibers & Verhoeven, 2014). For this reason, many scholars thus consider web-care an essential part of adequate crisis communication (Huibers & Verhoeven, 2014).

Two tones of voice are commonly distinguished in studies on web-care: conversational human voice (CHV) and corporate voice (CV). CHV can be defined as "an engaging and natural

style of organizational communication as perceived by an organization's publics based on interactions as between individuals in the organization and individuals in public" (Kelleher, 2009, p.177). CHV is also expressed through admitting mistakes and treating others humanely (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). In contrast, CV has no clear definition, but is regarded as the 'opposite' of CHV, in that its use conveys an unambiguous corporate identity by more formally communicating via a corporate sender (Christensen, Firat & Cornelissen, 2009). In other words, CV tends to speak from a third-person perspective ("the organization"). Moreover, CV tends to abstain from using words that emote feelings. As a result, CV tends to be described as "cold" (i.e. detached and impersonal) and "a reflection of profit-driven machinery" (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 398).

Research on the effect of TOV in crisis communication on organizational reputation is inconclusive. Most studies on the effect of TOV in blogs seem to show that CHV brings about more positive outcomes than CV. For example, Park and Cameron (2014) researched the effect of CHV (versus CV) in blogs on stakeholders' responses to an organization facing a crisis. They had 117 American students read blog posts on ice cream and cookie dough recalls, and found that blogs with a first-person narrative (i.e. CHV) created a more personal and sociable atmosphere for readers than did the blogs devoid of personal stories and thoughts (i.e. CV) which, in turn, appeared to promote perceived online interactivity with an organization. This perceived interactivity between customers and the organization ultimately resulted in positive organizational reputational outcomes after a crisis.

Kelleher and Miller (2006) investigated the use of CHV in blogs versus websites in relation to trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment. They divided 42 American undergraduate students into three groups, and had one group read website content from Microsoft's corporate website, whereas another group read blog content from Microsoft's corporate blog page. The last group, which acted as a control group, read content from the DuPont website. Results from the questionnaire showed that CHV was significantly greater in the blog condition (group 2) than in the nonblog conditions (group 1 and 3), and that using CHV correlated positively and significantly with the relational outcomes trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment, meaning that CHV was found to be an appropriate relational maintenance strategy in online contexts.

This positive effect of CHV was not only found in blogs, but also in some studies focusing on the effect of TOV in crisis responses. For example, a Dutch study by Van der Meer

and Verhoeven (2014) looked into the effect of emotions communicated by Dutch organizations in a crisis response on corporate reputation. They had 94 respondents read a description of both a bike recall and a car recall, as well as a two written crisis response issued by the organizations. As expected, they found that a ‘rebuild’ crisis response strategy lead to a more positive reputation than a ‘diminish’ crisis response strategy. Corporate reputation was also positively affected by a crisis strategy in which an organization showed signs of shame and regret (i.e. CHV) when compared to a crisis strategy without any communicated emotion (i.e. CV). Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014) also argued that showing emotions after a crisis is important since it shows the organization’s human face, which may decrease feelings of anger stakeholders have towards the organization.

Not all studies on TOV in crisis communication have found a positive effect of CHV. For example, Huibers and Verhoeven (2014) looked into the effects of web-care strategies and tone of voice on corporate reputation for Dutch companies on Twitter, and did not find tone of voice to be a factor of influence. Their study consisted of two parts: a corpus analysis and an experiment. In the experimental part of their study, Huibers and Verhoeven (2014) found that web-care strategies that cater to the individual protect corporate reputation better than collective or defensive web-care strategies. However, the experiment did not find any significant effect of CHV (versus CV) on corporate reputation.

The studies by Park and Cameron (2014), Kelleher and Miller (2006) and Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014) show that CHV, when used in web-care or crisis communication, could potentially lead to positive reputational outcomes. However, the studies by Huibers and Verhoeven (2014) demonstrates that the positive effect of CHV (versus CV) in the context of crisis communication are not always found. By focusing on the usage of TOV (CHV and CV) in an organizational crisis response, this study provides a better understanding of the effect of tone of voice on the field of crisis communication.

## **Culture**

Coomb’s (2007) SCCT suggests that an organizational response strategy should match crisis types, but this does not consider the fact that peoples’ evaluations could vary across cultures (An et al., 2011). Indeed, both the crisis strategy and the TOV used in a crisis response may be perceived differently from culture to culture (An et al., 2011). Culture can be defined as the

“collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (Hofstede, 1984, p.25) and is a factor that, as several authors have pointed out (e.g. Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Dhanesh & Sriramesh ,2018; An, Park, Cho & Berger, 2010), research on crisis communication often does not consider to be of influence. For example, Coombs and Laufer (2018) argue that Benoit's IRT and Coombs' SCCT do not adequately incorporate culture in their frameworks. In addition, Dhanesh and Sriramesh (2018) propose that most case studies in the crisis communication field examine either the organization's or the publics' responses to a crisis, thereby omitting external factors such as culture.

Culture could potentially have an impact on crisis communication. Giri (2006) argues that cultural differences create difficulties in communications, not only because different languages are used, but also because languages and cultures have different mental concepts, such as the representations, the image, of objects or animals which we have in our mind (as cited in Multari, 2016). Applying this potential effect of culture to the context of crisis communication, it is thus possible that a specific crisis strategy which was deemed to be effective in a certain culture, is not necessarily effective or appropriate in another culture (An et al., 2010). Since the onset of globalization, organizations increasingly operate on an international market which encompass many cultures. Were an organization to experience a crisis, it might be important to note whether the culture of the organization's stakeholders affects their reception of the organizational crisis response, and whether this reception differs between cultures. This idea has increasingly gained traction among crisis communication scholars. For example, Coombs and Laufer (2018) argue that future research on crisis communication should focus on the influence of crisis strategies in a global (i.e. cross-cultural) context, for example by comparing the effect of apology in a Chinese and American context, and determining if cultural differences affect the effectivity of this strategy.

While not many studies insofar have taken culture into account, in the rare instance that these have, a pattern becomes visible: either the study is monocultural (e.g. China: Hu & Pang, 2016; Cheng, 2016, or the US: Coombs & Holladay, 2008, or the Netherlands: Verhoeven et al., 2012), or the study compares two countries that are seen as opposite ends of the cultural spectrum, representing 'east versus west' (e.g. US versus South Korea: An et al., 2010; Wertz & Kim, 2010, US versus Taiwan: Low, Varughese & Pang, 2011). For example, An et al. (2010) studied the difference between US and South Korean consumers' perceptions and emotions about organizational crisis response strategies and compared them according to different levels

of crisis responsibility. They found that, compared to the American students, the South Koreans had more anger and negative attitudes towards the crisis response and more negative impressions towards the organization when said organization used the individualistic-level strategy (the employee was assigned crisis responsibility and was punished) compared to organizational-level strategy (the organization was assigned crisis responsibility). Moreover, both the American and South Korean respondents positively evaluated the organizational-level crisis response strategy in terms of anger, attitude and impression towards the organization. As a result of this, An et al. (2010) suggested that organizations could benefit from using a strategy in which the organization accepts the responsibility for a crisis (i.e. an apology).

There is a danger of ‘generalization’ of the effect of culture in crisis communication. An example of such a study is the study by Low, Varughese and Pang (2011), which looked into the differences in image repair strategies that were adopted by the US and Taiwanese governments when experiencing similar crises. They found that, when faced with similar accusations of slow response, the Taiwanese government used predominantly mortification and corrective action strategies, whereas the US government used bolstering and defeasibility strategies, as well as other strategies such as shifting the blame and attack the accuser. Low et al. (2011) argue that these findings are generalizable for the Asian and Western cultures as a whole. This generalization perpetuates the idea that all countries within these cultural clusters are culturally so identical that they can and will use the same crisis strategies, which results in a loss of the nuances and differences in culture that might exist within the groups. Since neither the Western nor the Eastern cultural cluster are culturally homogeneous entities, but rather continents containing dozens of smaller cultural entities, the cultural differences between countries in these culture clusters could still create difficulties in communications, and therefore possibly affect crisis communication as well. Since there is no cross-cultural research on crisis communication that focuses on the influence of crisis strategies in two culturally ‘similar’ countries, this study will take the United States (US) as well as a culture that is deemed ‘similar’ to the US and compare them (i.e. another ‘Western’ country). The 6-D model of Hofstede (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010), which consists of six cultural dimensions: power distance (PDI), individualism (IDV), masculinity (MAS), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), long term orientation (LTO) and indulgence (IVR) (Schneider, 2016) is often used to understand and describe the differences that can be discerned in different cultures (Dhanesh & Sriramesh, 2018). When applying the 6D-model, it can be determined that the Netherlands and the US score

similarly on all but two dimensions (MAS and LTO) (Country Comparison, n.d.), making them culturally very similar countries. Moreover, both countries have not yet been researched and compared within the same study in the context of crisis communication and TOV. As such, this study contributes to the discourse on crisis communication by focusing on the influence of crisis strategies and TOV in a global context.

### **Research question**

This study seeks to determine to what extent crisis strategy and its TOV affect consumers' perceptions in terms of organizational reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message. The study also investigates whether culture moderates these effects, by comparing the responses of Dutch and US respondents.

Literature on crisis strategies has been inconclusive, with one study finding the apology strategy as equally effective as putting forth no crisis response at all (Verhoeven et al., 2012), whereas another study has found apology to result in less reputational damage than compensation and sympathy (Kiambi & Shafer, 2016). As scholars have emphasized the need for more research on the effect of accommodative crisis strategies, and since the effect of apology (versus compensation) on consumer response are still unclear, this study focuses on the two accommodative strategies apology and compensation and compares their effect in the context of a crisis in which the organization is perceived to be highly responsible.

Regarding tone of voice, several studies on blogs and crisis strategies have found a positive effect of CHV on corporate reputation and trust in the organization (Park & Cameron, 2014; Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). However, not all studies on TOV in crisis communication, have found this positive effect of CHV, such as the study by Huibers and Verhoeven (2014). Since the effect of TOV in a crisis context is not yet clear, this study focuses on the effect of TOV (CHV versus CV) used in two crisis strategies (apology versus compensation).

Regarding culture, there is a lack of research that considers culture to have an affect the effectivity of crisis communication, and the little research that does take culture into account, is either monocultural or compares two cultures that are deemed 'Eastern' and 'Western'. These studies on the effect of culture in crisis communication sometimes generalize their findings. For example, Low et al. (2011) compared the image repair strategies that were adopted by the US and Taiwanese governments when experiencing similar crises, and argued that the findings

of their study are representative of the ‘Western’ and ‘Asian’ cultures as a whole. This generalization results in a loss of the nuance, as cultures within these culture clusters could still potentially experience difficulties in crisis communication. Since the Netherlands and the US as Western cultures are deemed to be culturally similar, and have not been studied within one study on crisis communication, this study therefore examines the effects of the two crisis strategies (apology versus compensation), their tone of voice (CHV versus CV) and the culture in which they are used (the Netherlands versus the US).

To test potential differences with other (cross-cultural) studies on the effect of crisis strategy and tone of voice, the current research will use organizational reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message as dependent variables. Most studies on crisis communication tend to focus on what needs to be communicated, and therefore choose organizational reputation and trust in the organization as dependent variables. This is logical, given the fact that in a practical context, this is most important: organizations are generally mainly interested in which crisis strategy should be applied for which crisis and what the effects will be of implementing said crisis strategy. Something that not many effect studies on crisis strategies consider, however, is the wording of a crisis strategy, since this could – either positively or negatively – affect how people will respond to the crisis strategy. To determine whether the wording of crisis strategies affects the reception of said strategies, this study will thus measure attitude towards the message. Taking this dependent variable into account will allow us to determine whether peoples’ evaluation of the message varies based on the type or strategy, the wording of the message as well as the receiver’s culture. Moreover, many of the previous effect studies of crisis communication have taken organizational reputation and -trust into account as dependent variables, but they have not yet explored the possible effects of crisis strategy, TOV and culture on stakeholders’ attitude towards the message. Therefore, examining this variable could lead to new insights into the scope of what is affected by crisis strategy, TOV and culture.

Based on the literature regarding crisis communication strategies, TOV and culture, two research questions are formulated as follows:

*RQ 1: What is the effect of type of crisis response strategy (apology versus compensation) and tone of voice (corporate voice versus conversational human voice) on consumers, in terms of reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message?*

*RQ 2: To what extent does the effect of type of crisis response strategy and tone of voice differ across cultures (Dutch versus American)?*

## Method

### Design

The experimental design was a 2 (types of strategy: apology versus compensation) x 2 (tone of voice: CV versus CHV) x 2 (culture: Dutch vs American) between-subject factorial design. The introduction of the organization and its current crisis was the same for all respondents. The organizational crisis response was created with different combinations of tone of voice and crisis strategy, resulting in four experiment conditions. Both Dutch and American participants were randomly assigned to one of these four conditions. The groups and conditions are visualized in Table 2.

Table 2. The possible combinations of TOV, crisis strategy and nationality in the experiment.

Combinations of crisis strategy and tone of voice for Dutch Participants		Combinations of crisis strategy and tone of voice for American Participants	
	<i>n</i>		<i>n</i>
(1) Apology – CV	28	(5) Apology – CV	32
(2) Compensation – CV	34	(6) Compensation – CV	29
(3) Apology – CHV	30	(7) Apology – CHV	26
(4) Compensation – CHV	28	(8) Compensation –CHV	33

Crisis strategy, TOV and nationality served as independent variables in this experiment, while reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message were the dependent variables.

### Materials

For this study, a crisis for which the organization has high responsibility was chosen, namely a data breach that occurred because the organization did not keep up with its security. In this way,

it was hoped that the maximum amount of potential effect (on reputation, trust, and attitude towards the message) could be elicited from respondents. A data breach was chosen as the crisis case in this study for two additional reasons. Firstly, a data breach is a type of crisis which participants will likely be familiar with as they happen frequently (e.g. Facebook & Cambridge Analytica in 2018: Wong, 2019; Granville, 2018. Sony & PlayStation in 2011: Baker & Finkle, 2011; Ashley Madison in 2015: Lord, 2017; Varandani, 2017). Secondly, participants will probably be more involved in a corporate mishap that might have personal consequences (e.g. identity theft, credit card fraud).

The company and company name (NTG Data) used in the materials were fictional to control for the effect of prior reputation if a real company and name had been used. That is, by using a fictional organization, none of the participants would have a previously existing attitude towards the organization that might act as a confound.

Participants in all groups were first exposed to an online newspaper article about the data breach at the case company (NTG Data). The article stated that this technology company rents out access to servers where companies can store data on customers and employees. The article stated that hackers were able to break into the servers of NTG Data and steal the personal data of its clients. To ensure that the respondents regarded the organization as responsible for the crisis, the breach was said to have been caused by insufficient server security and security maintenance on the organization's part. The article also explained that NTG Data had suffered a similar (albeit much smaller) data breach just last year, after which the organization had promised to improve its server security and -maintenance. There was one point in which the news article differed, depending on which group (Dutch or American) it was to be exposed to in the experiment. In the version that was to be shown to American respondents, the data of 15,5 million people were stolen, whereas in the version that was to be shown to the Dutch, the data of 800.000 people were stolen. These figures constitute roughly 4.7% of the population of the US and the Netherlands respectively. Both the Dutch and English newspaper articles can be found in appendix 1.

Type of strategy was operationalized following Coombs and Holladay (2008) and Multari (2016). Coombs and Holladay defined apology as "accepting responsibility and asking for forgiveness" (2008, p. 254). The apology strategy in this study explicitly used words like 'apologize', 'regret' and 'taking responsibility', which all expressed the organization's feelings of concerns and regrets about the incident (see Multari, 2016, p.21) and show that the

organization accepts responsibility. Compensation can be defined as “providing money or other gifts to the victims” (Kiambi & Shafer, 2016, p.129). It was operationalized by explicitly using the word ‘compensation’ in the organization’s response, clarifying that the organization provided compensation for the victims. Since the compensation strategy implies that an organization does not explicitly state that they take responsibility, the words ‘taking responsibility’ were not used in this strategy.

Tone of voice (CV versus CHV) was operationalized following Park and Cameron (2014). To express CV, information about the crisis was provided from a third person, organizational perspective and formulated using formal, unemotional and straightforward wording. Furthermore, the organization’s target audience was not directly addressed (‘our clients’). The response was signed with just the name of the organization as sender (‘NTG Data’). To express CHV, relatively more informal and everyday language was used and information was presented from a first-person perspective. CHV also used words that emote feelings, such as ‘shame’ and ‘regret’ (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). Moreover, the organization’s target audience was directly and personally addressed (‘you’). Lastly, the response was signed with the name and the signature of the CEO of the organization to add personalization to the crisis response. A message from the CEO was chosen because, in the case of a crisis, the CEO is regarded as ultimately responsible (Kellerman, 2006). The eight different organizational crisis responses (four per language condition) that were created using the operationalizations of both crisis strategy and TOV can be found in appendix 2.

The online newspaper article, the four crisis responses (dependent on crisis strategy and TOV) as well as the questionnaire were all initially written in Dutch. When these were approved, the materials were translated into English and finetuned until the English materials were also deemed to be acceptable. The Dutch materials were offered to the Dutch participants, and the English materials were offered to the American participants.

## **Participants**

A convenience sample of 240 respondents (120 Dutch participants and 120 American participants) participated in this study. Initially, 126 participants filled in the English questionnaire. Six of these participants were found to be not American. Therefore, the data of these participants were removed. The Dutch participants were found through personal connections. The American participants were found by both personal connections and by

placing requests for participants on social media, as well as by using websites specifically meant to help gather respondents for academic studies. The participants were sent an anonymous link to an online Qualtrics questionnaire. All participants were over 18 years of age.

In total, 166 participants were female (69.2%), 73 were male (30.4%) and 1 chose not to answer (.4%). More specifically, of the 120 Dutch respondents, 85 were female (70.8%) and 35 were male (29.2%). Of the 120 American respondents, 81 were female (67.5%) and 38 were male (31.7%), and one respondent chose not to answer this question (.8%). Gender was equally distributed between the four conditions within the Dutch group ( $\chi^2(3) = 2.65, p = .448$ ) and the American group ( $\chi^2(6) = 8.07, p = .233$ ), as well as between the four conditions in general ( $\chi^2(6) = 3.49, p = .745$ ). It was also equally distributed between the two nationalities ( $\chi^2(2) = 1.220, p = .543$ ).

Overall, the participants were between 18 and 75 years of age, with the average age being 31.23 years ( $SD = 13.38$ ). The Dutch participants' age ranged between 20 and 75 ( $M = 31.68, SD = 14.52$ ), whereas the American respondents were between 18 and 68 years old ( $M = 30.38, SD = 12.01$ ). Three one-way analyses of variance showed age was equally distributed between the four conditions within the Dutch group ( $F(3, 116) < 1, p = .507$ ) and the American group ( $F(3, 116) < 1, p = .971$ ), as well as between all four conditions in general ( $F(2, 36) < 1, p = .799$ ). An independent samples t-test showed that age was equally distributed between the two nationalities ( $t(238) = .520, p = .603$ ).

Regarding level of education, of the 120 Dutch participants, the majority indicated that WO (60.0%) was their highest level of education, followed by MBO/HBO level (34.2%), Middelbare School (4.2%) and Other (1.7%). Of the 120 American respondents, the majority indicated that University was their highest level of education (75.8%), followed by High School (13.3%), College (7.5%), and Other (3.3%). Level of education was equally distributed between the four conditions within the Dutch group ( $\chi^2(9) = 5.11, p = .824$ ) and the American group ( $\chi^2(9) = 7.26, p = .594$ ). It was also equally distributed between the four conditions overall ( $\chi^2(9) = 7.07, p = .630$ ). However, level of education was not equally distributed between the two nationalities ( $\chi^2(3) = 29.123, p < .001$ ).

## Instruments

Two manipulation checks were conducted to verify that the participants were exposed to the stimuli as expected. As a manipulation check for the crisis strategies, two statements developed by Kiambi and Shafer (2016) were used to assess whether the participants could identify the used crisis response strategy. These two statements were asked in the questionnaire using a 7-point Likert-scale (1= completely disagree, 7=completely agree). For the apology strategy, this statement was: “the organization takes responsibility for what happened and apologizes to the victims”, while for the compensation strategy, the statement was: “the organization offers compensation to the victims” (Kiambi & Shafer, 2016, p.236).

The second manipulation check measured respondents’ perception of the CV versus CHV stimulus. In their study, Kelleher and Miller (2006) used 11 items on a 7-point Likert-scale to measure CHV (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree). These were reduced and modified to better fit the context of this study. The following four items were used to measure either CHV or CV: (a) ‘The organization uses a personal communication style’; (b) ‘The organization communicates from an organizational perspective’; (c) ‘The organization uses a very factual communication style’; and (d) ‘The organization uses very formal wording.’ The items (b), (c) and (d) were worded in such a way that, when the answer to the statement was low (1-3), this would imply the presence of CHV and a high score (5-7) would imply CV, whereas a low score on item (a) would show the presence of CV, and a high score the presence of CHV. To make all high scores imply CV, item (a) was therefore recoded. The reliability of tone of voice was questionable ( $\alpha = .66$ ), but became acceptable after deleting the recoded item (a) ( $\alpha = .74$ ). This item was therefore deleted.

The questionnaire measured three dependent variables: reputation, trust and attitude towards the message. Reputation was measured using modified versions of the five items used in the study of Sung and Yang (2008), which in turn were modified statements from Fombrun Gardberg and Sever’s (2000) reputation quotient measures. These five items were measured on a 7-point Likert-scale (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree). The items were: (a) ‘This organization puts stakeholder care as the top priority’; (b) ‘This organization looks like an organization with strong prospects for future growth’; (c) ‘This organization is well-managed’; (d) ‘This organization is socially responsible’; and (e) ‘This organization is financially sound.’ The reliability of reputation, comprising of the five aforementioned items, was good:  $\alpha = .86$ .

The dependent variable trust was measured using two word-pairs and two statements on a 7-point Likert-scale (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree), created by Lassar, Mittal and Sharma (1995). The two word-pairs were ‘Misleading – Reliable’ and ‘Doubtful – Believable’, while the two statements were (a) ‘I trust the organization’; and (b) ‘The organization seems reliable’. The reliability of trust, comprising of the two word-pairs and two statements, was good:  $\alpha = .90$ .

The dependent variable attitude towards the message was measured using five items on a 7-point Likert-scale (1 = completely disagree and 7 = completely agree). Three of these items were created used in the study of Van Meurs, Hendriks and Dilek (2019) and altered to fit the context of this study. The used items were: (a) ‘I think the organization’s response is clear’; (b) ‘I think the organization’s response is adequate’; (c) ‘I think the organization’s response is informative’; (d) ‘I think the organization’s response is understandable’; and (e) ‘I think the organization’s response is easy.’ Items (a), (d) and (e) were created by Van Meurs et al. (2019). The reliability of attitude towards the message, comprising of the five aforementioned items, was acceptable:  $\alpha = .76$ .

The questionnaire ended with several demographic questions regarding nationality, age, sex and level of education. The participant’s nationality was determined by asking the question ‘What is your nationality?’, to which the closed answers ‘Dutch’ and ‘American’ and the open answer ‘Other’ could be given. The participant’s age was determined with the question ‘What is your age?’, which participants had to answer by manually answering their age in numbers. Sex was determined with the question ‘What is your sex?’, complemented with four closed options: ‘Male’, ‘Female’, ‘Other’ and ‘I prefer not to answer this question’. The level of education was determined by asking the question ‘What is the highest level of education you have completed?’. For the Dutch respondents, the closed options provided were ‘Middelbare school’, ‘MBO/HBO’, ‘WO’ and ‘Other’, while for the American respondents the options were ‘High school’, ‘College’, ‘University’ and ‘Other’. The Dutch and English versions of the full questionnaire can be found in appendix 3.

## **Procedure**

The experiment was conducted online via a questionnaire created on Qualtrics. The data was collected from May 4, 2020, to May 22, 2020. No incentives were provided to the participants for taking part in the experiment. Prior to the questionnaire, the respondents were given contact information (in case of questions or remarks regarding the experiment) and had to consent to

participating in the experiment. After this, participants were first presented with a short, fabricated news article from either a Dutch or American news website (dependent on the version of the questionnaire), which explained the fictional organization and the crisis it was facing. The participants were then exposed to the company's response to the crisis. They were randomly shown a response either issuing an apology or compensation, using either CV or CHV as tone of voice. Hereafter, participants were sent to either the Dutch or English questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, the participants were thanked for their participation and time.

### **Statistical treatment**

To analyze the effects of crisis response strategy and tone of voice among Dutch and US participants on organizational reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message, three three-way univariate analyses of variance were conducted.

## **Results**

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of crisis strategy and TOV on Dutch and US participants. The dependent variables were organizational reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message.

### **Manipulation checks**

Manipulation checks on crisis strategy and TOV were performed to ensure the effectiveness of the intended manipulations. For the item "the organization takes responsibility for what happened and apologizes to the victims", an independent samples t-test showed no significant difference between the apology condition and compensation condition ( $t(238) = 1.56, p = .120$ ). This means that for the apology manipulation check, the apology condition ( $M = 4.98, SD = 1.61$ ) was not rated significantly higher than the compensation condition ( $M = 4.65, SD = 1.66$ ). Thus, the manipulation for apology was unsuccessful.

For the item "the organization offers compensation to the victims", an independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between the compensation condition and the apology condition ( $t(238) = 6.67, p < .001$ ). For the compensation manipulation check, the compensation condition ( $M = 4.02, SD = 2.00$ ) was rated significantly higher than the apology condition ( $M = 2.48, SD = 1.51$ ), meaning that the manipulation for compensation was

successful. Thus, it can be concluded that the manipulation of crisis strategy was only partially successful.

Regarding TOV, an independent samples t-test showed a significant difference between the conditions with CV and CHV ( $t(238) = 6.67, p < .001$ ). This means that the conditions with CV ( $M = 5.05, SD = 1.04$ ) scored significantly higher on CV than the conditions with CHV ( $M = 4.45, SD = 1.18$ ). Thus, it can be concluded that the manipulation of TOV has been successful.

### Organizational reputation

A three-way analysis of variance with crisis strategy, TOV and nationality as factors showed no significant main effect of crisis strategy on organizational reputation ( $F(1, 232) < 1, p = .597$ ), no main effect of TOV ( $F(1, 232) < 1, p = .552$ ) and no main effect of nationality ( $F(1, 232) < 1, p = .486$ ). None of the two-way and three-way interactions were significant ( $p$ 's  $> .295$ ). The means and standard deviations for organizational reputation are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations (in brackets) of organizational reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message per nationality, crisis strategy and tone of voice (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree).

Nationality	Crisis Strategy	Tone of Voice	<i>n</i>	Organizational reputation	Trust in the Organization	Attitude towards the message
				<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Dutch	Apology	CV	28	3.58 (1.00)	3.53 (1.18)	4.70 (.82)
		CHV	30	3.79 (1.25)	3.83 (1.19)	4.79 (1.00)
		Total	58	3.69 (1.14)	3.69 (1.18)	4.74 (.91)
	Compensation	CV	34	3.56 (1.13)	3.55 (1.35)	4.56 (.90)
		CHV	28	3.49 (1.14)	3.44 (1.22)	4.66 (.89)
		Total	62	3.53 (1.12)	3.50 (1.29)	4.60 (.89)
	Total	CV	62	3.57 (1.06)	3.54 (1.27)	4.62 (.87)
		CHV	58	3.65 (1.20)	3.64 (1.21)	4.72 (.94)
		Total	120	3.61 (1.13)	3.59 (1.24)	4.67 (.90)
American	Apology	CV	32	3.79 (1.26)	3.52 (1.44)	4.42 (1.16)
		CHV	26	3.65 (1.30)	3.43 (1.25)	4.29 (1.06)
		Total	58	3.73 (1.28)	3.48 (1.35)	4.36 (1.11)
	Compensation	CV	29	3.90 (1.48)	3.59 (1.46)	4.56 (1.03)

		CHV	33	3.52 (1.06)	3.41 (1.16)	4.47 (1.16)
		Total	62	3.70 (1.28)	3.49 (1.30)	4.51 (1.10)
	Total	CV	61	3.84 (1.36)	3.55 (1.43)	4.48 (1.09)
		CHV	59	3.58 (1.16)	3.42 (1.19)	4.39 (1.11)
		Total	120	3.71 (1.27)	3.49 (1.32)	4.44 (1.10)
Total	Apology	CV	60	3.69 (1.14)	3.52 (1.31)	4.55 (1.02)
		CHV	56	3.72 (1.26)	3.65 (1.22)	4.56 (1.05)
		Total	116	3.71 (1.20)	3.58 (1.27)	4.55 (1.03)
	Compensation	CV	63	3.72 (1.30)	3.57 (1.39)	4.56 (.96)
		CHV	61	3.51 (1.09)	3.42 (1.18)	4.55 (1.04)
		Total	124	3.62 (1.20)	3.50 (1.29)	4.56 (1.00)
	Total	CV	123	3.71 (1.22)	3.54 (1.35)	4.55 (.98)
		CHV	117	3.61 (1.18)	3.53 (1.20)	4.56 (1.04)
		Total	240	3.66 (1.20)	3.54 (1.28)	4.56 (1.01)

### Trust in the organization

A three-way analysis of variance on trust in the organization, with crisis strategy, TOV and nationality as factors showed no significant main effect of crisis strategy ( $F(1, 232) < 1, p = .628$ ), no main effect of TOV ( $F(1, 232) < 1, p = .920$ ) and no main effect of nationality ( $F(1, 232) < 1, p = .544$ ). Moreover, no significant two-way and three-way interactions were found ( $p$ 's  $> .443$ ). The means and standard deviations for trust in the organization are presented in Table 3.

### Attitude towards the message

A three-way analysis of variance with crisis strategy, TOV and nationality as factors showed no significant main effect of crisis strategy ( $F(1, 232) < 1, p = .934$ ), no main effect of TOV ( $F(1, 232) < 1, p = .949$ ) and no main effect of nationality ( $F(1, 232) = 3.380, p = .067$ ) on attitude towards the message. Moreover, no significant interaction effects were found ( $p$ 's  $> .268$ ). The means and standard deviations for attitude towards the message are presented in Table 3.

### Conclusion and discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effect of crisis strategy and TOV on Dutch and US respondents' perceptions. Two research questions were:

1. *What is the effect of type of crisis response strategy (apology versus compensation) and tone of voice (corporate voice versus conversational human voice) on consumers, in terms of reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message?*
2. *To what extent does the effect of type of crisis response strategy and tone of voice differ across cultures (Dutch versus American)?*

This study found no effect of crisis strategy. Neither apology nor compensation had a significant effect on organizational reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message. Significant effects for TOV and culture were also not found. CV and CHV did not affect the reputation, trust, or the attitude consumers might have towards the message and the Dutch and US respondents did also not differ significantly in terms of the aforementioned dependent variables. Furthermore, for all three independent variables, interaction effects were not present. Therefore, it can be concluded with regard to the first research question that crisis response strategy, TOV and culture do not affect consumers in terms of organizational reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message. With respect to the second research question, it can be concluded that type of crisis response strategy and the tone of voice (in the context of the current research) do not seem to lead to significantly different responses in the Dutch and American cultures, as both respondent groups showed comparable scores in terms of organizational reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message.

From a theoretical point of view, the current research extends the scientific literature regarding crisis communication. Despite the lack of a significant effect of crisis strategy, TOV and culture, the current research did answer the call of Coombs and Laufer (2018) for more cross-cultural research in the field of crisis communication by comparing the effect of apology and compensation in a global (Dutch and American) context, and determining if cultural differences affect the effectivity of these strategies. The current study is also the first study in which both the Dutch and the American culture have been researched and compared with respect to the effects of different crisis strategies, the use of TOV, and these two factors in combination. Moreover, the research investigated these factors in relation to attitude towards the message, a dependent variable that has so far not been addressed in studies on crisis communication or tone of voice.

## **Crisis strategy**

The findings of this study have several implications. The fact that no significant effects for apology and compensation were found to partially corresponds to the findings of earlier research. For example, Verhoeven, Van Hoof, Ter Keurs and Van Vuuren (2012) found that, when compared to no apology (as a control), apology did not significantly affect Dutch people's responses to a crisis in terms of trust and reputation. Thus, the present study's findings are comparable to Verhoeven's results in the Dutch context, despite the study by Verhoeven et al. (2012) and the current study having slightly different experimental setups ("no apology" control group versus no control group).

The studies also faced a similar limitation. In Verhoeven et al.'s study (2012), the difference between the apology- and no apology-conditions was unclear for the respondents in their experiment. This was also the case in the current study: the difference between the two crisis strategy conditions was unclear for both the Dutch and US respondents in this study, since the manipulation check for the apology condition was found to be insignificant. This may potentially explain the lack of significant effects with regard to strategy type in both studies.

Despite the fact that the findings of this study complement literature on crisis strategies in the Dutch context, the absence of a significant effect of crisis strategy, regardless of culture, does not match the findings from studies on the effect of different types of crisis strategies in the American context. For example, Kiambi and Shafer (2016) found that the apology strategy led to higher reputation scores than the compensation strategy for crises in which the organization is highly responsible. The current study did not find similar results for the American group. Despite the fact that corporate responsibility for the crisis was high in both studies, the apology condition in this study did not score significantly higher in terms of corporate reputation than the compensation condition in the American context. It is possible that the results from their study differ from the current study, due to a different experimental setup: Kiambi and Shafer (2016) performed a pretest to ensure that the correct prior reputation and crisis response strategies were identified. Furthermore, they conducted the experiment in a classroom setting, and only used undergraduate students as participants. Had the current study done a pretest to check beforehand whether participants could distinguish between the two strategies, it is possible that a significant effect of crisis strategy would have been found.

A possible explanation for the absence of a significant effect of crisis strategy in this specific study could lie in the operationalization of the crisis strategies. In this study, the

difference between the operationalizations of apology and compensation rested mainly on whether the message explicitly stated that the organization accepted its responsibility and apologized for its shortcomings. This was argued to be an important distinction, for accepting blame and responsibility directly affects an organization's liability, and could potentially lead to lawsuits from victims of the crisis. Since the manipulation of the apology condition was found to be unsuccessful, it is possible that the apology and compensation conditions were too similar for the respondents. Whereas it was clear enough when the organization offered compensation to the victims of the crisis (given the successful manipulation check), apology was deemed more vague. A possibility could be that, based on the current operationalizations of the two crisis strategies, the respondents saw the offering of compensation as a form of apology in itself, but did not necessarily expect to receive compensation when they saw the apology condition.

The absence of an effect of crisis strategy in the present study could potentially have practical implications. The results suggest that organizations facing a crisis with high responsibility could choose either of the two crisis strategies examined in this study to potentially achieve similar results in terms of organizational reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message. If liability is at play, organizations could thus choose the compensation strategy, and thus prevent any lawsuits in the future from happening, which could potentially save the organization more money in the long term. However, it should be kept in mind that the manipulation of crisis strategy was only partially successful, and could therefore have affected the results.

### **Tone of Voice**

The current study found no significant effects of TOV in both the Dutch and American cultural contexts. These findings have several implications. Firstly, since most research on the effect of TOV argues that CHV brings about more positive outcomes when compared to CV, the absence of a direct effect of TOV in this study is in conflict with some of these previous studies, for example those on the effect of TOV in the US. Park and Cameron (2014), for example, found that, for American students, using first-person voice and personal narratives (i.e. CHV) resulted in positive reputational outcomes after a crisis. Similarly, Kelleher and Miller (2006), in a study of the effect of CHV in blogs versus websites, found that CHV correlated positively and significantly with trust, satisfaction, control mutuality and commitment. Contrary to Park and Cameron (2014), the current research did not find similar results for the American respondents

in regards of organizational reputation, whereas the absence of an effect of CHV on organizational trust on the American participants stands in direct contrast to the findings of Kelleher and Miller (2006).

A possible explanation for the different results could lie in the role of the crisis responsibility. In their study, Park and Cameron (2014) looked into ice cream- and cookie dough recalls due to food poisoning (the exact cause of which had yet to be determined), whereas Kelleher and Miller (2016) did not look into any crisis at all. Thus, these two studies looked into different contexts to investigate TOV: one in which an organization is not yet sure it is responsible for a crisis, and one in which there is no crisis. Because of this, it could be possible that the positive effect of CHV on organizational reputation and trust is only absent in a context in which a crisis is present, and in which the organization carries the full crisis responsibility (such as the current research).

Another explanation for the different results could be that both Park and Cameron (2014) and Kelleher and Miller (2006) only used undergraduate students, whereas the current research employed (adult) participants ranging from 18 to 75 years of age. The studies of Park and Cameron (2014) and Kelleher and Miller (2006) found there to be a preference for CHV among students (leading to a better reputation and more trust after a crisis). These students all fall under the ‘millennial’ generation (also known as ‘gen Y’, born roughly between 1980 and 2000). Every generation has several characteristics that are seen as ‘typical’ for the mindset of that particular generation. In general, millennials tend to prefer authenticity (Stackla, 2017), as well as honesty and reliability in organizations (Morning Consult, 2018). Furthermore, content that was created by consumers is also preferred by millennials, rather than content created by an organization (Stackla, 2017). It could be the case that using CHV portrays more ‘authenticity’ and ‘honesty’ on the organization’s part than a message containing CV would portray. Using CHV in a message would also make it appear more as if a consumer had written it, rather than a message written from an organizational standpoint (i.e. CV). A logical consequence would then be that a preference for CHV (over CV) would be found among millennial students, as this falls more in line with their generational morals and preferences. Perhaps if the current research had focused on the same age group as both Park and Cameron (2014) and Keller and Miller (2006), there might have been an effect of CHV (versus CV) present.

Contrary to the findings of Park and Cameron (2014) and Kelleher and Miller (2006) in the American context, the lack of an effect of TOV is somewhat in line with the findings of the

experimental part of the study by Huibers and Verhoeven (2014), who found, that web-care strategies (which are essential for adequate crisis communication, since direct communication between the organization and stakeholders could lead to less reputational damage in a crisis) that cater to the individual protect corporate reputation better for Dutch organizations than collective or defensive web-care strategies. However, they did not find any significant effect of CHV on corporate reputation. Thus, both studies have found somewhat similar results, as the current study also did not find evidence to support the claim that, for Dutch respondents, CHV has a significant effect on organizational reputation (versus CV).

A possible explanation for the absence of significant effects of TOV could lie in the platform on which the crisis response was posted. Huibers and Verhoeven (2014) argue that CHV could be regarded as an intrinsic characteristic of the medium, rather than CHV being a characteristic of an organization's communication style (p.186). Therefore, it can be argued that in the case of Huibers and Verhoeven (2014), Twitter, as a medium with an interpersonal and interactive communicating style, has a high perception of CHV. The study by Park and Cameron (2014) supports this. Rather than a direct effect of TOV (CHV) on corporate reputation, they found a mediating effect for perceived interactivity: TOV had an influence on perceived interactivity (and account acceptance), which in turn affected corporate reputation (p.500). This line of thinking could also be applied to the current study, which utilized the social media platform Facebook to post the crisis response. Similar to Twitter, Facebook is also an interactive platform where interpersonal communication occurs, perhaps making CHV the default TOV in which readers 'read' and interpret the messages. It is possible that, had the current study taken into account perceived interactivity as a mediating factor, a significant effect of TOV would have been found.

The absence of an effect of TOV could have practical implications. If organizations that operate on either the Dutch or American market (or both) habitually tend to communicate in either CV or CHV as TOV, they would not have to alter their TOV during a crisis for which the organization is responsible, and for which the organization wishes to communicate either an apology or compensation. Since the same type of TOV is utilized, this could result in stakeholders regarding the crisis response strategy as more genuine, which could have an impact on the organization's reputation, stakeholder's trust in the organization, or even their attitude towards the message.

## **Culture**

The current study also looked into the effect of the Dutch and American culture, and found no significant effect of either culture on organizational reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message. These findings have several implications. Firstly, as no study has looked into the effect of the Dutch culture on crisis communication or TOV, no comparison of results can be made. For the American cultural context, some research has been done. The study by An, Park, Cho and Berger (2010) on the effectiveness of crisis strategies in the United States and South Korea found that a significant effect of culture, in that South Korean participants were more negative to the crisis response which assigned crisis responsibility to the employee and punished him, than were US respondents. Moreover, they also found that US participants were more likely to agree to punishing individual employees for their mistakes, than were the South Korean respondents. A possible explanation for the different results of An et al. (2010) and the current research could lie in the fact that An et al. (2010) only focused on one aspect of culture, this being the cultural dimension ‘individualism’ of the 6-D model of Hofstede (Hofstede et al., 2010), whereas the current research did not focus on one aspect of culture in which the Dutch and US respondents could differ, but rather on the whole of the Dutch and American cultures in general. Had the current research taken one or multiple cultural dimensions of Hofstede et al.’s (2010) 6-D model as factor, it is a possibility that culture would have had an effect on Dutch and American consumers’ perception organizational crisis response.

The absence of an effect of culture could have practical implications. If an organization operates in both the Dutch and American market, the lack of effect of culture could mean that organizations do not have to worry about one country or culture responding differently to the crisis response (in terms of reputation, trust and attitude). Since the message does not have to be altered in its form (other than perhaps the language), this could mean that an organization could get their response out faster, and thus potentially keep the reputation and attitude more positive and the trust and attitude higher than they would have been after more time had passed.

## **Limitations and future research**

It must be noted that this study has several limitations. Firstly, regarding the participants, level of education was found to be not equally distributed across the two nationalities. A possible reason for this could be the manner in which the data on the Dutch and US respondents were gathered. Both the Dutch and American participants were found through posting the link on

both my personal Facebook-page (for friends and family) as well as in academic survey-exchange groups on Facebook. The English questionnaire for the American respondents was also posted on two academic websites specifically for gathering survey respondents from universities all over the world. Because of this data collection method, a majority of the respondents came from the academic world, and thus filled in WO/University level as their highest level of education. Future research should attempt to minimize this by finding respondents, not only via academic Facebook groups, but via other channels as well, to ensure a more equal distribution of the level of education.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that the manipulation check for the apology condition in the crisis strategy variable was not significant. A possible reason this might not have been significant is the fact that in the questionnaire, participants could agree or disagree (on a Likert-scale) to one statement per crisis strategy. It is a possibility that giving the participants the option to rate both statements when they were only exposed to one crisis strategy was confusing. For this reason, future research should find another way to measure apology as crisis strategy. Rather than letting participants rate both statements, future research could give the participants a multiple-choice question for crisis strategy, so that they are forced to select either apology or compensation as the strategy they were exposed to. In addition, no pretests were carried out before the experiment, so it was not determined whether respondents would recognize the crisis strategies. Thus, future research should either pretest the crisis strategies, or consider other ways to operationalize these variables, or both.

Furthermore, the possibility that any of the participants already had either a positive or a negative attitude towards the organization (or the branch the organization operates in), based on personal experiences, is an important limitation of this study, as this could have influenced the participant's perception and reception of the used tone of voice and the crisis strategy. If any of the respondents had experienced a data breach and its consequences in their personal lives, it is likely that these respondents reacted more negatively to the statements in the questionnaire. Therefore, a future replication study could take experience into account as a control variable, and determine if there are differences in rating of organizational reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message in participants who have experienced the negative consequences of a data breach versus participants who have not experienced this.

The platform on which the organizational crisis response was posted could also have influenced the results of the current study. Future research on crisis strategies could compare

the effects of one crisis response posted to several (social media) platforms (FB, twitter, Instagram, the newspaper or their corporate website) on reputation, trust and attitude towards the message and determine if the platform affects the reception of the crisis response. Future research could also take medium into account as (mediating) factor to determine the effect of CHV (versus CV).

Lastly, a positive effect of CHV on reputation and trust among students was found in prior research, but was absent in this study. Therefore, future research could replicate the current study, but take 'age' or 'generation' into account as factor rather than culture, and determine if CHV has a (more) positive effect on millennials compared to other generations (generation Z, generation X and baby boomers) in terms of organization reputation, trust in the organization and attitude towards the message.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: News article to introduce the crisis case

#### Appendix 1a: News article Dutch questionnaire

## Gegevens 800.000 Nederlanders gestolen door hack bij NTG-Data

**Door Mike Peters**

16 Maart 2020 11:37

AMSTERDAM – NTG-Data meldde gisteren op zowel op haar eigen website als op haar Facebook pagina dat de persoonlijke gegevens van ongeveer 800.000 Nederlanders zijn gestolen.

NTG-Data is een technologiebedrijf dat toegang tot servers verhuurt waarop bedrijven gegevens over klanten en medewerkers kunnen opslaan. Verschillende grote internationale bedrijven maken gebruik van deze servers, zoals H&M, Amazon en Apple. In totaal beschikt NTG-Data over de gegevens van iets meer dan 1 miljoen Nederlandse gebruikers.

Op 15 maart 2020 kondigde NTG-Data aan dat er een beveiligingslek is geweest waarbij hackers de persoonlijke gegevens van ongeveer 800.000 Nederlandse gebruikers hebben gestolen. Deze persoonsgegevens bevatten e-mailadressen, telefoonnummers, adressen en creditcard- en bankpasnummers.

De inbreuk werd volgens NTG-Data veroorzaakt door ondermaatse beveiliging en onderhoud van haar servers. Vorig jaar was er ook al een kleiner datalek bij NTG-Data waarbij de e-mailadressen van 40.000 Nederlandse gebruikers zijn gehackt. Na de ophef toen beloofde NTG-Data om haar servers in de toekomst beter te beveiligen en beter te onderhouden.

## Appendix 1b: News article American questionnaire

# Data 15,5 million Americans stolen in hack attack on NTG-Data

**By Mike Peters**

March 16, 2020 11:37 AM

SAN FRANCISCO – NTG-Data reported yesterday on both its own website as well as its Facebook page that the personal data of approximately 15,5 million Americans have been stolen.

NTG-Data is a technology company that rents access to servers on which companies can store data on customers and employees. Several large international companies use these servers, such as H&M, Amazon and Apple. In total, NTG Data holds data on roughly 20 million American users.

On March 15, 2020, NTG-Data announced that there had been a security breach in which hackers stole the personal data of approximately 15,5 million Americans. These personal data include e-mail addresses, phone numbers, addresses and credit and debit card numbers.

According to NTG-Data, the breach was caused by poor security and maintenance of its servers. Last year, there was also a smaller data breach at NTG-Data in which the email addresses of 800,000 American users were hacked. Following the scrutiny NTG-Data faced at the time, it promised to better secure and maintain its servers in the future.

## Appendix 2: Organizational responses

### Appendix 2a: Organizational response Dutch Apology CV

#### NTG-Data servers offline wegens hackaanval

De servers van NTG-Data zijn momenteel offline en zullen dat ook gedurende een korte periode blijven. Het afgelopen weekend is NTG-Data gehackt en zijn gebruikersnamen, e-mailadressen, telefoonnummers, wachtwoorden en creditcard- en bankpasnummers gestolen. NTG-Data begrijpt dat sommige van haar relaties hierdoor boos en teleurgesteld zijn.

Dit probleem treft een aanzienlijk deel van de gebruikers van NTG-Data: van de 1 miljoen Nederlandse gebruikers zijn 800.000 gebruikersgegevens gehackt. NTG-Data werkt momenteel hard om dit probleem op te lossen en de verwachting is dat alles binnenkort weer normaal functioneert. Tevens doet NTG-Data er alles aan om de serverbeveiliging en het serveronderhoud te verbeteren zodat een datalek van deze omvang in de toekomst niet nogmaals zal voorkomen.

#### De beste stappen om te ondernemen en belangrijke informatie:

1. Wijzig alle wachtwoorden op websites waar dezelfde gebruikersnaam en/of hetzelfde wachtwoord gebruikt wordt als voor NTG-Data.
2. Vraag bij uw bank en andere financiële instellingen waar u klant bent of uw rekeningen nog veilig zijn.
3. Bezoek de Twitter- en Facebook-pagina's van NTG-Data regelmatig. Hier worden updates geplaatst omtrent de huidige situatie.

NTG-Data is zich bewust van de ernst van deze situatie en betreurt de bezorgdheid en het ongemak dat dit probleem veroorzaakt voor haar relaties. NTG-Data neemt de volledige verantwoordelijkheid op zich voor het datalek en biedt gebruikers haar oprechte excuses aan. NTG-Data werkt momenteel de klok rond om dit probleem op te lossen.

NTG-Data



## Appendix 2b: Organizational response Dutch Compensation CV

### NTG-Data servers offline wegens hackaanval

De servers van NTG-Data zijn momenteel offline en zullen dat ook gedurende een korte periode blijven. Het afgelopen weekend is NTG-Data gehackt en zijn gebruikersnamen, e-mailadressen, telefoonnummers, wachtwoorden en creditcard- en bankpasnummers gestolen. NTG-Data begrijpt dat sommige relaties hierdoor boos en teleurgesteld zijn.

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### De beste stappen om te ondernemen en belangrijke informatie:

1. Wijzig alle wachtwoorden op websites waar dezelfde gebruikersnaam en/of hetzelfde wachtwoord gebruikt wordt als voor NTG-Data.
2. Vraag bij uw bank en andere financiële instellingen waar u klant bent of uw rekeningen nog veilig zijn.
3. Bezoek de Twitter- en Facebook-pagina's van NTG-Data regelmatig. Hier worden updates geplaatst omtrent de huidige situatie.

NTG-Data is zich bewust van de ernst van deze situatie en betreurt de bezorgdheid en het ongemak dat dit probleem veroorzaakt voor haar relaties. Om deze reden zal NTG-Data compensatie aanbieden aan gebruikers wiens gegevens zijn betrokken bij de hackaanval, in de vorm van korting op de jaarlijkse hostingkosten.

NTG-Data



## Appendix 2c: Organizational response Dutch Apology CHV

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### NTG-Data servers offline vanwege hackaanval

Beste gebruiker,

Ik wilde contact opnemen om u te laten weten dat de servers van NTG-Data momenteel offline zijn en dat ook voor een korte periode zullen blijven. We zijn het afgelopen weekend gehackt en gebruikersnamen, e-mailadressen, telefoonnummers, wachtwoorden en creditcard- en bankpasnummers zijn gestolen. Ik betreur de situatie waarin we u gebracht hebben ten zeerste en ik begrijp volledig dat u hierdoor boos en teleurgesteld bent.

Niet alle gebruikers van NTG-Data zijn getroffen, maar het is belangrijk om uw account te controleren: van onze 1 miljoen Nederlandse gebruikers zijn 800.000 gebruikersgegevens gehackt. We werken er momenteel hard aan om dit probleem op te lossen en we verwachten dat alles binnenkort weer normaal is. We doen er ook alles aan om onze serverbeveiliging en serveronderhoud te verbeteren, zodat een datalek van deze omvang in de toekomst niet nogmaals zal voorkomen.

#### De beste stappen die u nu kunt nemen en belangrijke informatie voor u:

1. Wijzig alle wachtwoorden op websites waar dezelfde gebruikersnaam en/of hetzelfde wachtwoord gebruikt wordt als voor NTG-Data.
2. Vraag bij uw bank en andere financiële instellingen waar u klant bent of uw rekeningen nog veilig zijn.
3. Bezoek de Twitter- en Facebook-pagina's van NTG-Data regelmatig. Hier worden updates geplaatst omtrent de huidige situatie.

Het spijt me dat dit is gebeurd. Ik beseft dat wij onze verantwoordelijkheid als bedrijf voor wat er is gebeurd moeten nemen en dat doen we ook. Namens iedereen bij NTG-Data bied ik u onze oprechte excuses aan voor wat er gebeurd is. We werken momenteel de klok rond om dit probleem op te lossen.

Martin Sanders, CEO van NTG-Data



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 Leuk

 Opmerking plaatsen

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## Appendix 2d: Organizational response Dutch Compensation CHV

### NTG-Data servers offline vanwege hackaanval

Beste gebruiker,

Ik wilde contact opnemen om u te laten weten dat de servers van NTG-Data momenteel offline zijn en dat ook voor een korte periode zullen blijven. We zijn het afgelopen weekend gehackt en gebruikersnamen, e-mailadressen, telefoonnummers, wachtwoorden en creditcard- en bankpasnummers zijn gestolen. Ik betreur de situatie waarin we u gebracht hebben ten zeerste en ik begrijp volledig dat u hierdoor boos en teleurgesteld bent.

Niet alle gebruikers van NTG-Data zijn getroffen, maar het is belangrijk om uw account te controleren: van onze 1 miljoen Nederlandse gebruikers zijn 800.000 gebruikersgegevens gehackt. We werken er momenteel hard aan om dit probleem op te lossen en we verwachten dat alles binnenkort weer normaal is. We doen er ook alles aan om onze serverbeveiliging en serveronderhoud te verbeteren, zodat een datalek van deze omvang in de toekomst niet nogmaals zal voorkomen.

### De beste stappen die u nu kunt nemen en belangrijke informatie voor u:

1. Wijzig alle wachtwoorden op websites waar dezelfde gebruikersnaam en/of hetzelfde wachtwoord gebruikt wordt als voor NTG-Data.
2. Vraag bij uw bank en andere financiële instellingen waar u klant bent of uw rekeningen nog veilig zijn.
3. Bezoek de Twitter- en Facebook-pagina's van NTG-Data regelmatig. Hier worden updates geplaatst omtrent de huidige situatie.

Het spijt me dat dit is gebeurd. Als hopelijk bevredigende compensatie voor deze situatie ontvangen al onze gebruikers die getroffen zijn door dit datalek korting op hun jaarlijkse hostingskosten. We werken momenteel de klok rond om dit probleem op te lossen.

Martin Sanders, CEO van NTG-Data



## Appendix 2e: Organizational response US Apology CV

### **NTG-Data servers offline due to data breach**

NTG-Data's servers are currently offline and will remain so for a short period of time. NTG-Data was hacked last weekend and usernames, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, passwords and credit and debit card numbers were stolen. NTG-Data understands that some of its customers are angry and disappointed as a result.

This problem affects a significant number of NTG-Data's users: of the 20 million American users, the data of 15,5 million Americans have been hacked. NTG-Data is currently working hard to solve this problem and the expectation is that everything will be functioning normally again soon. NTG-Data is also committed to improving server security and server maintenance so that a data breach of this magnitude will not occur again in the future.

### **The best steps to take and important information:**

1. Change all passwords on websites where the same username and/or the same password is used as for NTG-Data.
2. Contact your bank and other financial institutions you have dealings with to check whether your accounts are still safe.
3. Regularly consult NTG-Data's Twitter and Facebook pages. Updates about the current situation will be posted here.

NTG-Data is aware of the seriousness of this situation and regrets the concern and inconvenience this problem has caused its users. NTG-Data takes full responsibility for the data breach and offers customers its sincere apologies. NTG-Data is currently working around the clock to fix this problem.

NTG-Data



## Appendix 2f: Organizational response US Compensation CV

### **NTG-Data servers offline due to data breach**

NTG-Data's servers are currently offline and will remain so for a short period of time. NTG-Data was hacked last weekend and usernames, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, passwords and credit and debit card numbers were stolen. NTG-Data understands that some of its customers are angry and disappointed as a result.

This problem affects a significant number of NTG-Data's users: of the 20 million American users, the data of 15,5 million Americans have been hacked. NTG-Data is currently working hard to solve this problem and the expectation is that everything will be functioning normally again soon. NTG-Data is also committed to improving server security and server maintenance so that a data breach of this magnitude will not occur again in the future.

### **The best steps to take and important information:**

1. Change all passwords on websites where the same username and/or the same password is used as for NTG-Data.
2. Contact your bank and other financial institutions you have dealings with to check whether your accounts are still safe.
3. Regularly consult NTG-Data's Twitter and Facebook pages. Updates about the current situation will be posted here.

NTG-Data is aware of the seriousness of this situation and regrets the concern and inconvenience this problem has caused its users. Therefore, NTG-Data will offer compensation to all of the users whose data were compromised, in the form of a discount on the yearly hosting fee.

NTG-Data



## Appendix 2g: Organizational response US Apology CHV

### NTG-Data servers offline due to data breach

Dear user,

I wanted to get in touch to let you know that the NTG-Data servers are currently offline and will remain so for a short period of time. We were hacked last weekend, and usernames, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, passwords, and credit and debit card numbers were stolen. I deeply regret the situation you find yourself in and I fully understand that you are angry and disappointed by this.

Not all users of NTG-Data are affected, but it is important to check your account: of our 20 million American users, the data of 15,5 million users have been hacked. We are currently working hard to resolve this issue and expect everything to return to normal soon. We are also committed to improving our server security and server maintenance so that a data breach of this magnitude will not happen again in the future.

#### **The best steps you can take now and important information for you:**

1. Change all passwords on websites where the same username and/or the same password is used as for NTG-Data.
2. Contact your bank and other financial institutions you have dealings with to check whether your accounts are still safe.
3. Regularly consult NTG-Data's Twitter and Facebook pages. Updates about the current situation will be posted here.

I'm sorry that this has happened. I realize that we have to take our responsibility as a company for what happened and we do. On behalf of everyone at NTG-Data, I offer you our sincerest apologies for what has happened. We are currently working around the clock to fix this problem.

Martin Sanders, CEO of NTG-Data



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 Like

 Comment

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## Appendix 2h: Organizational response US Compensation CHV

### NTG-Data servers offline due to data breach

Dear user,

I wanted to get in touch to let you know that the NTG-Data servers are currently offline and will remain so for a short period of time. We were hacked last weekend, and usernames, email addresses, phone numbers, passwords, and credit and debit card numbers were stolen. I deeply regret the situation you find yourself in and I fully understand that you are angry and disappointed by this.

Not all users of NTG-Data are affected, but it is important to check your account: of our 20 million American users, the data of 15,5 million users have been hacked. We are currently working hard to resolve this issue and expect everything to return to normal soon. We are also committed to improving our server security and server maintenance so that a data breach of this magnitude will not happen again in the future.

#### **The best steps you can take now and important information for you:**

1. Change all passwords on websites where the same username and/or the same password is used as for NTG-Data.
2. Contact your bank and other financial institutions you have dealings with to check whether your accounts are still safe.
3. Regularly consult NTG-Data's Twitter and Facebook pages. Updates about the current situation will be posted here.

I'm sorry this happened. As hopefully satisfactory compensation for this situation, all of our users affected by this data breach will receive a discount on their annual fee. We are currently working around the clock to fix this problem.

Martin Sanders, CEO of NTG-Data



## **Appendix 3: Questionnaires**

### **Appendix 3a: Dutch Questionnaire**

#### **Vragenlijst Effect Crisis Strategie en Tone of Voice op NL en VS**

Beste deelnemer,

U bent uitgenodigd om deel te nemen aan een onderzoek naar de invloed van crisis strategie en de toon van de crisis strategie op Nederlanders en Amerikanen. Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd door Laura te Grootenhuis, master student International Business Communication aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen.

Deelname aan deze studie vereist het invullen van een online vragenlijst. U zult gevraagd worden een crisis respons van een bedrijf te evalueren door middel van het beantwoorden van een aantal vragen. Het invullen van de vragenlijst duurt ongeveer 10 minuten.

#### **Vertrouwelijkheid**

De data die voor deze studie zal worden verzameld, zal worden gebruikt voor het schrijven van een MA thesis. De data zijn anoniem en zullen veilig worden opgeslagen volgens de richtlijnen van de Radboud Universiteit.

#### **Deelname**

Deelname aan deze studie is volledig vrijwillig. Tijdens het invullen van de vragenlijst kunt u uw deelname aan deze studie op elk moment beëindigen. Al uw ingevulde gegevens zullen dan permanent verwijderd worden.

#### **Informatie**

Mocht u verdere informatie over deze studie willen ontvangen, neem dan contact op met Laura te Grootenhuis (e-mail: [Laura.teGrootenhuis@student.ru.nl](mailto:Laura.teGrootenhuis@student.ru.nl)).

#### **Toestemming**

Door middel van het klikken op het pijltje rechtsonder in het scherm geeft u aan dat u:

- Bovenstaande informatie heeft gelezen;
- Vrijwillig deelneemt aan deze studie;
- 18 jaar of ouder bent;
- Het eens bent met de voorwaarden.

Alvast bedankt voor uw deelname.

Laura te Grootenhuis

Beoordeel de volgende stellingen op basis van wat u zojuist heeft gelezen:

	Helemaal mee oneens	Oneens	Gedeeltelijk oneens	Neutraal	Gedeeltelijk eens	Eens	Helemaal mee eens
De organisatie neemt verantwoordelijkheid voor wat er is gebeurd en biedt de slachtoffers een verontschuldiging aan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
De organisatie biedt compensatie aan de slachtoffers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

De organisatie:

	Helemaal mee oneens	Oneens	Gedeeltelijk oneens	Neutraal	Gedeeltelijk eens	Eens	Helemaal mee eens
Gebruikt een persoonlijke communicatiestijl	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communiqueert vanuit een organisatorisch perspectief	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gebruikt een zeer feitelijke communicatiestijl	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gebruikt zeer formele bewoordingen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Deze organisatie:

	Helemaal mee oneens	Oneens	Gedeeltelijk oneens	Neutraal	Gedeeltelijk eens	Eens	Helemaal mee eens
heeft zorg voor belanghebbenden hoog in het vaandel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ziet eruit als een organisatie met sterke vooruitzichten voor toekomstige groei	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
wordt goed beheerd	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
is maatschappelijk verantwoord	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
is financieel gezond	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

De organisatie is:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Misleidend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Betrouwbaar
Twijfelachtig	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Geloofwaardig

	Helemaal mee oneens	Oneens	Gedeeltelijk oneens	Neutraal	Gedeeltelijk eens	Eens	Helemaal mee eens
Ik vertrouw de organisatie	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
De organisatie lijkt betrouwbaar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ik vind de reactie van de organisatie:

	Helemaal mee oneens	Oneens	Gedeeltelijk oneens	Neutraal	Gedeeltelijk eens	Eens	Helemaal mee eens
Duidelijk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Toereikend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informatief	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Begrijpelijk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Makkelijk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Wat is uw nationaliteit?

- Nederlands
- Amerikaans
- Anders, namelijk: \_\_\_\_\_

Wat is uw leeftijd?

\_\_\_\_\_

Wat is uw geslacht?

- Man
- Vrouw
- Anders, namelijk: \_\_\_\_\_
- Ik beantwoord deze vraag liever niet

Wat is uw hoogst behaalde opleidingsniveau?

- Middelbare school
- MBO/ HBO
- WO
- Anders, namelijk: \_\_\_\_\_

Dit was de laatste vraag. Bedankt voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek. U kunt nu het venster sluiten.

## Appendix 3b: English Questionnaire

### Questionnaire Effect Crisis strategy and TOV on Dutch & Americans

Dear participant,

You are invited to participate in a study on the influence of crisis strategy and the tone of the crisis strategy on Dutch and American participants. This research is carried out by Laura te Grootenhuis, MA student International Business Communication at Radboud University Nijmegen.

Participation in this study requires the completion of an online questionnaire. You will be asked to evaluate a company's crisis response by answering a number of questions. Completing the questionnaire takes about 10 minutes.

#### **Confidentiality**

The data that will be collected for this study will be used for writing an MA thesis. The data will be stored anonymously and securely according to the guidelines of Radboud University.

#### **Participation**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can end your participation in this study at any time while completing the questionnaire. All your entered data will then be permanently deleted.

#### **Information**

If you would like to receive more information about this study, please contact Laura te Grootenhuis (e-mail: [Laura.teGrootenhuis@student.ru.nl](mailto:Laura.teGrootenhuis@student.ru.nl)).

#### **Permission**

By proceeding with this questionnaire and clicking on the arrow at the bottom right of the screen, you indicate that you:

- have read the information above;
- will voluntarily participate in this study;
- are 18 years or older;
- agree with the terms.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Laura te Grootenhuis

Based on what you just read, rate the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The organization takes responsibility for what happened and apologizes to the victims	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The organization offers compensation to the victims	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The organization:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
uses a personal communication style	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
communicates from an organizational perspective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
uses a very factual communication style	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
uses very formal wording	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

This organization:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
regards taking care of its stakeholder as a top priority	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
looks like an organization with strong prospects for future growth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
is well-managed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
is socially responsible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
is financially sound	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The organization is:

Misleading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Reliable
Doubtful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Credible

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I trust the organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The organization seems reliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I think the organization's response is:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Clear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adequate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understandable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Easy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is your nationality?

- Dutch
- American
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your age?

\_\_\_\_\_

What is your sex?

- Male
- Female
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- I prefer not to answer this question

What is your highest level of education you have completed?

- High School
- College
- University
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

This was the last question. Thank you for your participation in this study. You can now close the window.