

# Strategic International Crisis Communication:

*The influence of crisis response strategy and language choice in non-profits' crisis communication responses on Dutch stakeholders' affective perceptions and behavioural intentions*



**Radboud Universiteit**

MA Thesis (LET-CIWM402)

International Business Communication

Name: Allysha J. Humphrey, MA

Student number: 4532473

Date: 14 July 2021

Primary supervisor: Dr. B.C. Planken

Secondary supervisor: Dr. W. Nejjari

Word count: 11.894 (*excl. tables, references, and appendices*)

## **Abstract**

In a crisis, it is paramount for organisations to communicate with stakeholders in order to dampen reputation damage. A strategically crafted crisis response can help organisations achieve this goal. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) provides a framework for devising such crisis responses. However, prior effect studies which have investigated and applied the SCCT reveal mixed findings in terms of congruence between crisis type and crisis response strategy. Moreover, the role of language choice in crisis response messages in an international context has remained unexamined. To investigate this, this study draws on research on the Foreign Language Effect (FLE) which predicts that people tend to respond more emotionally in their L1 as opposed to their L2. In effect, the present study investigated the influence of crisis response strategy (Diminish vs. Rebuild) and language choice (Dutch vs. English) on Dutch stakeholders' affective perceptions and behavioural intentions in the context of a fictitious non-profit organisation in an accidental crisis cluster. In an online experiment, 163 Dutch participants filled out a questionnaire measuring six dependent variables in a between-subjects design. Firstly, results reveal a significant main effect of crisis response strategy on emotionality, anger, sympathy, organisational reputation, and willingness to boycott. In an accidental crisis cluster, the alternative crisis response strategy recommended by the SCCT (i.e. Rebuild) consistently led to more favourable outcomes than the preferred crisis response strategy (i.e. Diminish). The congruence between crisis type and crisis response strategy, which is recommended by the SCCT, is thus not corroborated in this study. Secondly, there was no significant effect of language choice on any of the dependent variables. The interaction between crisis response strategy and language choice was not statistically significant either. This suggests that the FLE does not persist in this context of L1 Dutch participants who are relatively proficient in the L2 English.

**Keywords:** crisis communication, Foreign Language Effect, crisis response strategies, Situational Crisis Communication Theory, organisational reputation

## **1. Introduction**

In 2018, Oxfam was accused of covering up claims which contended that the charity had paid survivors of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti for sex and exploited them as prostitutes (BBC News, 2018). Oxfam was already aware of these allegations in 2011, yet the charity neither disclosed full details about the misconduct nor did they seek publicity to communicate about these incidents. When word of the allegations got out to the media, Oxfam lost numerous celebrity ambassadors, thousands of donations, and corporate support. Whilst the accusations were widely discussed, senior Oxfam executives remained silent on the issue for weeks before resorting to a formal apology in multiple media outlets (BBC News, 2018). The allegations have taken a considerable toll on Oxfam's reputation which has still not recovered to the charity's pre-crisis reputation levels (Scurlock, Dolsak & Prakash, 2020). Remaining silent in a crisis has thus been counterproductive for Oxfam. Herewith, Oxfam fits in the recent trend of multinational organisations which have not always succeeded in effectively responding to crises in international contexts (An, Park, Cho & Berger, 2010).

Crises are among the most investigated foci of inquiry within research on communications and public relations (Avery, Lariscy, Kim & Hocke, 2010). For an organisation such as Oxfam, it is crucial to rebuild rapport and restore their reputation in case this reputation is compromised. This is especially true in the case of a crisis, as a carefully crafted crisis response can shield an organisation from potential reputation loss and drastically alter their stakeholders' behavioural intentions (Schultz, Utz & Göritz, 2011; Utz, Schultz & Glocka, 2013; Coombs & Holladay, 1996). In addition, perceptions of the organisation's crisis responsibility have been shown to impact stakeholders' affective intentions (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). When stakeholders attribute a high degree of responsibility to the organisation, stakeholders tend to react with negative affect in the form of anger, boycotting the organisation, and potentially generating negative word of mouth (Coombs, 2004). When issued strategically, then, crisis response strategies may dampen or even prevent these negative outcomes. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Coombs (2007) is a theoretical framework which helps organisations craft strategic crisis responses based on the degree of attributed responsibility and crisis type. Whilst the SCCT is a theory, several studies have tested the SCCT in an experimental setting (Sisco, 2012; Claeys, Cauberghe & Vyncke, 2010; Schultz et al., 2011). As these studies have found mixed findings in terms of the recommendations postulated by the SCCT, it remains to be seen precisely how the recommended

crisis response strategies factor in when considering different organisational types and crisis contexts.

Despite the existence of theoretical frameworks which aid in effective crisis communication, only a limited number of studies have considered crisis communication in a broader, internationally-oriented context (An et al., 2010; Coombs & Laufer, 2018). Especially for international organisations operating in countries in which English is not their stakeholders' native language, such as the Netherlands, it is crucial to strategically make use of language choice and decide on whether to communicate in the country's native language or in the standardized language of the organisation, which is often English. (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaaranta, 2005). However, Coombs and Laufer (2018) have justly underscored the need for a broader international scope, especially in terms of the potential linguistic diversity of stakeholders, as much of the experimental studies on crisis communications have focused on an Anglo-American context. For an organisation, re-evaluating its language choice in stakeholder communications is also relevant to consider in light of the effect it may have on stakeholders' perceptions and behavioural intentions (Puntoni, De Langhe & Van Osselaer, 2009). For instance, communicating in one's first language has been found to heighten emotionality and impact decision-making (Hayakawa, Tannenbaum, Costa, Corey & Keysar, 2017). This phenomenon, referred to as the Foreign Language Effect (henceforth FLE), may also have its bearings on international crisis communication, as stakeholders may perceive a message otherwise and have different behavioural intentions when a message is conveyed in their L1 as opposed their L2.

The overarching research objective of this study was to shed light on the effect of crisis response strategy (Diminish vs. Rebuild) and language choice (Dutch vs. English) on stakeholders' affective perceptions and behavioural intentions. The affective perceptions analysed in the present study included consumer emotionality, negative affect (anger), positive affect (sympathy), and organisational reputation. The behavioural intentions which were examined were intention to engage in negative word of mouth and willingness to boycott.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Crisis communication and the SCCT***

To prevent potential reputation damage, the literature on crisis communication has established a number of theoretical frameworks which organisations can refer to when developing their crisis response strategy (Avery et al., 2010). Coombs' (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (henceforth SCCT) is one of the most cited theoretical frameworks within crisis communication, moving beyond post-hoc analyses and case studies (Sisco, 2012). The SCCT is a predictive model which posits that organisations can dampen reputation damage by using communication as a strategic tool in the form of a crisis response strategy (Coombs, 2004). The preferred crisis response strategy that ought to be adopted, according to the model, depends on the crisis cluster the organisation's crisis is in. The SCCT identifies three crisis clusters: the victim cluster, the accidental cluster, and the intentional cluster (Coombs, 2007). For each crisis cluster, the SCCT recommends one super-strategy as the most favourable crisis response strategy to employ in crisis communication and minimise any potential reputational damage (see Table 1). When an organisation is confronted with a crisis in the victim cluster, the organisation itself is a victim of the crisis and is attributed little to no responsibility. As a result, the preferred super-strategy in this cluster, according to the SCCT, is to deny the crisis and explain who is to blame instead. In a crisis in the accidental cluster, the crisis has occurred due to the organisation's own unintentional (mis)conduct. In this crisis cluster, the preferred super-strategy recommended by the SCCT is to diminish the crisis by mitigating it, that is, by saying the crisis is not as severe as may be perceived. Crises in the intentional cluster, finally, have arisen because of deliberate human errors or mismanagement within the organization. Here, the preferred super-strategy according to the SCCT is rebuild, in which the organisation communicates that it takes responsibility and offers apologies as well as compensation to the victims. Whilst these super-strategies are theorised to be the preferred ones, Coombs (2007) also identifies an alternative super-strategy for each crisis cluster (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Preferred super-strategy and alternative super-strategy for each crisis cluster as identified in the SCCT (adapted from Coombs, 2007, p. 173).

Crisis cluster	Preferred super-strategy	Alternative super-strategy
Victim	Deny	Diminish
Accidental	Diminish	Rebuild
Intentional	Rebuild	Diminish

Moreover, the three crisis response super-strategies all have sub-strategies which help give substance to the crisis responses. Examples of permutations of the rebuild strategy, for instance, are providing an apology and expressing sympathy. Table 2 lists all the sub-strategies identified by Coombs (2007) in the SCCT.

**Table 2.** Crisis response super-strategies and sub-strategies as identified by Coombs' (2007) SCCT (adapted from Coombs, 2007, p. 170).

Super-strategy	Sub-strategies
Deny	Attack the accuser
	Denial
	Scapegoat
Diminish	Excuse
	Justification
Rebuild	Compensation
	Apology

## ***2.2 Effects of crisis communication on affective perceptions and behavioural intentions***

Several studies have investigated the effects of the crisis response strategies recommended by Coombs (2007) in the SCCT. Sisco (2012), for instance, has tested all crisis response strategies in the SCCT across all three crisis clusters for a non-profit organisation. To date, the context of non-profit organisations has been relatively underexamined (Sisco, 2012). Non-profits are arguably more vulnerable to crises than for-profit corporations, as their very existence relies on (public) trust, donations, and goodwill. To address this lacuna in research, Sisco (2012) exposed her participants to two experimental conditions, respectively the preferred super strategy and

alternative super-strategy for each crisis cluster as identified by the SCCT (see Table 1). Participants in her study were American university students who read an article about a fictitious American non-profit organisation in the form of a food bank. The results largely confirm the presuppositions of the SCCT in that Sisco (2012) finds evidence for Coombs' (2007) suggestions for a preferred super-strategy for the victim and intentional cluster across all measures: organisational reputation, attributed crisis responsibility, and behavioural intentions. However, in the accidental cluster, Sisco (2012) did not find significant differences between the preferred (i.e. Diminish) and alternative (i.e. Rebuild) super-strategy in terms of organisational reputation and behavioural intentions. This study therefore provides mixed experimental evidence for the SCCT.

In a similar vein, Claeys, Cauberghe, and Vyncke (2010) explored the effect of crisis response strategies and crisis cluster on Belgian consumers' perceptions of corporate reputation. Unlike Sisco (2012), Claeys et al. (2010) only tested the effects of the three super-strategies as recommended by Coombs (2007). Their results show that the rebuild strategy had a significantly more favourable effect on the organisation's post-crisis reputation than did the diminish and deny strategies, regardless of the crisis cluster. This study therefore also provides mixed evidence for the SCCT, as Claeys et al. (2010) show that a match between crisis type and crisis response strategy, as recommended by the SCCT, does not necessarily lead to a more favourable assessment of organisational reputation by consumers. In an accidental crisis cluster, for instance, the preferred strategy (i.e. Rebuild) was found to positively impact organisational reputation as opposed to the preferred strategy (i.e. Rebuild). Therefore, the results by Claeys et al. (2010) also contradict Coombs and Holladay's study (1996) which demonstrated that matching the crisis cluster with the preferred crisis response super-strategy was overall the most favourable strategy.

Schultz, Utz, and Göritz (2011) examined the effects of crisis response strategy and news medium on behavioural intentions and organisational reputation in the context of German new and traditional media platforms. In this study, behavioural intentions were operationalised as secondary crisis reactions (i.e. willingness to boycott, and intention to engage in negative word of mouth), and secondary crisis communications (i.e. sharing behaviour, telling friends about the incident, and leaving a reaction). Contrary to the studies above, Schultz et al. (2011) operationalised their crisis response strategies by testing sub-strategies in the SCCT in the form of apology, sympathy, and providing information. According to Coombs (2015), providing information on the crisis in the form of issuing an investigation of the crisis is advisable across all crisis clusters to prevent

potential reputational damage. Offering an apology and expressing sympathy can be identified as sub-strategies of the overarching rebuild strategy. The authors only found a significant main effect of crisis response strategy on secondary crisis reactions, which was operationalised as willingness to boycott and intention to engage in negative word of mouth. More specifically, the information condition resulted in fewer secondary crisis reactions as opposed to the apology and sympathy condition. These findings are in contrast with the recommendations by the SCCT, as the theory favours the apology condition above all, irrespective of the crisis cluster (Coombs, 2004). The results by Schultz et al. (2011) are also not in line with Coombs and Holladay (2009), who showed that the sympathy, compensation, apology, and information conditions engendered similar levels of anger and negative word of mouth intentions. Coombs and Holladay (2009) also demonstrated that apology and sympathy caused more positive perceptions of the organisation's reputation. Schultz et al. (2011), however, did not find evidence of the effect of crisis response strategy on organisational reputation. Despite this, the study by Schultz et al. (2011) is the first to combine the underexamined dependent measures of secondary crisis reactions with that of secondary crisis communications which had previously been neglected in crisis communication research (Schultz et al., 2011).

In sum, the above studies which have tested the effects of preferred SCCT crisis response strategies on consumer responses have presented mixed experimental evidence, as the recommended crisis response strategies per cluster have not always been confirmed (Sisco, 2012; Claeys et al., 2010; Schultz et al., 2011). Additional research on the role of preferred and alternative crisis response super-strategy is therefore warranted. This is particularly the case for the accidental crisis cluster, since the findings of several studies (e.g. Sisco, 2012; Claeys et al., 2010) have revealed a pattern opposite of what can be expected from the SCCT. It is therefore valuable to re-examine the role of crisis response strategy in an accidental cluster. Since Avery et al. (2010) call for more variance in the type of organisation that is analysed, the present study, like Sisco (2012) considers the organisational context of non-profit organisations. Concurrently, the non-profit sector is one of the largest employers in the Netherlands, which is the context of the present study (Kennis Openbaar Bestuur, 2019). By opting for this context, this study answers the call for more experimental research on international crisis communication in non-Anglo-American countries to provide more robustness to previously identified effects (Avery et al., 2010). Whilst the above studies have conducted an experimental study into crisis communication in a Belgian (Claeys et

al., 2010) and German (Schultz et al., 2011) context, the present study fills the vacuum of studies examining the effect of crisis response strategies in a Dutch context. When taken together, the present study fills these research gaps by re-examining the effect of Coombs' (2015) preferred and alternative crisis response strategy for a crisis in the accidental cluster in the context of a non-profit organisation evaluated by Dutch stakeholders.

**H1:** In an accidental crisis, use of the preferred crisis response strategy (i.e. Diminish) vs. the alternative crisis response strategy (i.e. Rebuild) causes stakeholders to be more favourable towards the non-profit organisation's reputation.

**H2:** In an accidental crisis, use of the alternative crisis response strategy (i.e. Rebuild) vs. the preferred crisis response strategy (i.e. Diminish) causes stakeholders to resort to more negative behavioural intentions towards the non-profit organisation.

### ***2.3 Emotionality in crisis communication***

Organisations and stakeholders alike can perceive organisational crises as highly emotional (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014; Jin, Pang & Cameron, 2012). Crisis communication, then, has a crucial part to play in tempering stakeholders' emotions and ensuring that the organisation's post-crisis reputation remains stable (Claeys, Cauberghe & Vyncke, 2010). Several studies have examined the role of moderating stakeholder emotionality in crisis communication. Coombs and Holladay (2005), for instance, have shown that increased perceived crisis responsibility leads to negative affect in stakeholders, whereas lower perceptions of crisis responsibility cause stakeholders to experience more positive affect. Coombs (2015) also demonstrated that stakeholders experience negative emotions, specifically feelings of anger, when they attribute more responsibility to the organisation for the crisis. Subsequently, stakeholders were found to report increased intention to engage in negative secondary crisis reactions in the form of boycotting the organisation and negative word of mouth (Coombs, 2015). Conversely, this study showed that stakeholders are more sympathetic towards the organisation when the organisation is seen as less responsible for the crisis. Jin (2010) has also provided evidence that the emotions that stakeholders may experience as a result of a crisis communication message play a role in their behavioural tendencies and affective responses. More specifically, this study showed that perceived high crisis

predictability and high crisis controllability caused participants to experience more anger towards the organisation. Conversely, similar to Coombs' (2015) findings, stakeholders experience more sympathy when they attribute less responsibility to the organisation. When considering the crisis clusters in the SCCT, stakeholders attribute responsibility to a greater extent when the organisation is in an intentional crisis cluster and to a lesser extent in case of a victim cluster (Coombs, 2007). An accidental cluster, which is the focus of inquiry in the present study, is situated in the middle of these clusters in terms of attributed responsibility. It can therefore be expected that stakeholders' levels of emotions, and therewith also their behavioural intentions, are present yet not intensified because of high levels of attributed responsibility. In other words, it is forecasted that stakeholders experience relatively more emotions when presented with a crisis in the accidental cluster as opposed to a victim crisis cluster. At the same time, stakeholder emotionality is expected to be less high in an accidental cluster than in an intentional crisis cluster.

As has been stated, the aforementioned studies have identified anger and sympathy as two salient emotions in crisis management and communication (Jin, 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2005). Anger and sympathy have also been recognized as the two core emotions in attribution theory, which is the theoretical framework underlying the assumptions of the SCCT (Coombs, 2004). According to Jin (2010), it is crucial that crisis communication researchers and practitioners alike consider the role of these specific emotions and the way stakeholders experience them to develop effective and meaningful crisis response recommendations. Coombs (2015) argues that opting for a crisis response congruent with the crisis type causes stakeholders to have positive behavioural intentions and organisational perceptions. By extension, a congruent crisis response strategy may also evoke relatively more positive affect or emotions. This has been confirmed by Weiner (2006), who indicated that behavioural intentions are negative when anger is evoked as a result of high attributed responsibility, whereas behavioural intentions are positive when sympathy is evoked and attributed responsibility is low. Consistent with the above findings, it is therefore hypothesised that:

**H3:** In an accidental crisis cluster, use of the alternative crisis response strategy (i.e. Rebuild) vs. the preferred crisis response strategy (i.e. Diminish) causes stakeholders to have more feelings of anger towards the organisation.

**H4:** In an accidental crisis cluster, use of the preferred crisis response strategy (i.e. Diminish) vs. the alternative crisis response strategy (i.e. Rebuild) causes stakeholders to have more feelings of sympathy towards the organisation.

#### ***2.4 The Foreign Language Effect and language choice in crisis communication***

Strategic crisis communication has become one of the most complex challenges for multinational corporations operating in an international environment, largely due to the linguistic and cultural diversity of its publics (An et al., 2010). Whilst it has been shown that communication responses can impact stakeholders' assessment of an organisation, research in the domain of psychology has established that the language in which information is presented also plays a substantial role in the decision-making process (Costa, Vives, & Corey, 2017). When information is presented in people's native language (L1) they tend to form different judgments as opposed to being presented with information in a foreign or second language (L2). More specifically, people tend to respond more emotionally to information presented in their L1 than to information in their L2. This phenomenon is referred to as the Foreign Language Effect. The processes underlying the FLE have been shown to be driven by a dual-process framework consisting of two cognitive mechanisms, which are referred to as *System 1 thinking* and *System 2 thinking* (Costa et al., 2017; Hayakawa et al., 2017). Whilst System 1 refers to automatic mental processes, System 2 involves deliberative cognitive mechanisms. In effect, foreign language use has been found to affect decision-making as L1 usage is related to System 1 thinking, whereas L2 usage is indicative of System 2 thinking. (Hayakawa et al., 2017). Within the context of crisis communication, Claeys and Coombs (2021) have also referred to the dual-process framework, arguing that it also applies in the way stakeholders process strategic crisis communication messages. When stakeholders rely on System 1 thinking to process information, they may focus less on the validity of information and rely on non-content cues and comprehensible information. When they rely on System 2 thinking, on the other hand, this allows them to thoroughly evaluate the information (Claeys & Coombs, 2021).

Research on the FLE has revealed that there are differential effects of assessing L1 and L2 messages across different decision-making domains, modalities, and languages. Costa et al., (2017), for instance, have reviewed evidence in favour of the FLE in three domains: (1) in people's approaches of assessing losses, gains, and risks; (2) in the way people assess morality; (3) and in

making sense of events that are encountered in the world. The second domain, the effect of the FLE in the assessment of moral dilemmas, is currently the largest site of research on the FLE (Hayakawa et al., 2017). Brouwer (2019), for instance, has considered the FLE in written and auditory moral dilemmas in a sample of highly proficient Dutch-English participants. Her findings show that the participants were not more emotional when the participants read the moral dilemma in their L1 vs. their L2 whilst the effect did indeed occur when the participants listened to moral dilemmas. This reveals that there are contexts in which the FLE may be bolstered, though it is inhibited in others (Brouwer, 2019).

To the researcher's knowledge, the only study examining the role of emotionality and language choice as a mechanism driving consumer responses is that of Puntoni et al. (2009) who considered these variables in the context of advertising. Overall, Puntoni et al. (2009) found that advertisements presented in consumers' native language evoke more emotions than advertisements in their L2, which was English in all five of the experiments they conducted. This effect was found to be robust across twenty different L1s and a variety of stimuli. These findings provide support for the FLE, even though the authors do not refer to the FLE literature but instead to theories on emotional processes in bilingualism in general. Despite this, research examining the interplay between language and decision-making is still in its infancy according to Costa et al., (2017). Moreover, Coombs (2007) did not consider potential effects of language choice in crisis communication in the development of his SCCT, which did not initially consider crisis communication in an international context at all. As noted above, however, it has since been recommended extending the model to integrate international contexts (Coombs & Laufer, 2018). The present study therefore examines the FLE in a new context: that of crisis communication.

In terms of the classification by Costa et al. (2017), the field of crisis communication can be defined in the third domain, that of making sense of events that are encountered in the world. Whilst this domain is by default comprehensive, the ramifications of the interplay between language and communication in studies such as Puntoni et al. (2009) may provide crucial insights for decision-making in general, which in turn aid organisations in their stakeholder management. If language choice in advertisements plays a role in stakeholders' decision-making with regards to purchasing products or services, this prompts the question of whether language choice affects the way stakeholders perceive crisis communication messages. Moreover, Costa et al. (2017) mention that future studies should address the role of emotionally arousing information to uncover whether

language influences the decision-making process. Crisis communication may provide such a fruitful basis for emotionally arousing information due to the controversial nature of crises. Lastly, Claeys and Coombs (2020) have shown that System 1 and System 2 thinking are also driving mechanisms in the assessment of crisis communication. Whilst these mechanisms have also been found as underlying factors of the FLE (Hayakawa et al., 2017), no prior studies have attempted to investigate the effect of both language choice and crisis response strategy.

Prior research on the FLE in terms of the effects of an L1 versus an L2 has mainly considered typologically and linguistically distant language pairs (Costa et al., 2017). As the present study was conducted in the Dutch context, language choice in crisis response strategy was examined in a closely related language pair: Dutch-English. These languages are not only related on a linguistic level, yet also on a cultural level as the English language plays an increasingly more prominent role in Dutch society (Brouwer, 2019). The Dutch are among the world's most proficient L2 speakers of English (Education First, 2020). A closely related language pair such as Dutch-English, then, may provide insights which are more readily generalizable when compared to relatively distant L1-L2 language pairs. Whilst the Dutch-English language pair has been tested in prior effect studies of the FLE (cf. Puntoni et al., 2009; Geipel, Hadjichristidis, & Klesse, 2018; Brouwer, 2019), it has not been studied in the context of crisis communication as of yet. It therefore remains to be seen whether the FLE is robust in the domain of crisis communication for a closely-related language pair with stakeholders who have relatively high L2 proficiency levels. The practical impetus of the present study is that non-profit organisations who operate internationally also benefit from knowing the effects of crisis communication in stakeholders' L1 or L2 for relatively proficient English-speaking stakeholders such as the Dutch. Communicating in English, then, becomes a logical decision by a global organisation who also operates in the Netherlands. Since the FLE predicts that communication in individuals' L1 evokes more emotionality as opposed to communication in L2 (e.g. Puntoni et al., 2009), and since information provided in an L1 causes individuals to make more emotionally-laden decisions, and thus less rational decisions, as opposed to information presented in their L2 (e.g. Costa et al., 2017), it is hypothesised that:

**H5:** Crisis communication responses presented in stakeholders' L1 (Dutch) vs. their L2 (English) cause a higher degree of stakeholder emotionality.

**H6:** Crisis communication responses presented in stakeholders' L1 (Dutch) vs. their L2 (English) cause stakeholders to experience greater feelings of anger.

**H7:** Crisis communication responses presented in stakeholders' L1 (Dutch) vs. their L2 (English) cause stakeholders to resort to more negative behavioural intentions.

Taken together, the present study intends to contribute to the field of international crisis communication research by examining the effect of crisis response strategy and language choice on Dutch stakeholders' affective perceptions and behavioural intentions towards a non-profit organisation's crisis communication responses. The central research question was therefore as follows: "to what extent do crisis response strategy and language choice affect Dutch stakeholders' affective perceptions and behavioural intentions in an accidental crisis cluster?"

### **3. Methodology**

#### ***3.1 Materials***

To examine the effect of the two independent variables, crisis response strategy (Diminish vs. Rebuild) and language choice (Dutch vs. English), on stakeholders' affective perceptions and behavioural intentions towards the organisation, an online experiment was conducted. In this experiment, all participants were introduced to a fictitious non-profit organisation in the form of a Dutch Wikipedia article outlining the organisation's mission and activities (see Appendix I). The information on the fictitious non-profit, called *Vox Infans*, was framed in such a way that participants would potentially liken the organisation to real-life humanitarian and developmental aid organisations such as UNICEF and Oxfam. However, it was not disclosed to the participants that the organisation was in fact fictitious.

After having read the Wikipedia article on *Vox Infans*, all participants were shown a news article in Dutch which outlined the cause and context of a fictitious organisational crisis (see Appendix I). This crisis was framed as a challenge crisis, in which an external party or stakeholder challenges the organisation with misconduct, within the accidental cluster of Coombs' (2007) crisis cluster classification. The news article was presented in a Google News format, in which a wide variety of news is published, to ensure that there would be no consumer bias of newspaper ideology or (political) orientation. Both introductory articles were written in a true-to-life manner and the events referenced in the article were also instances of crisis events that have occurred in the past (i.e. Cyclone Idai in Mozambique) and have affected real-life non-profit organisations.

The crisis response was manipulated for crisis response strategy (Diminish vs. Rebuild) and language choice (Dutch vs. English). The original Dutch crisis response was based on Coombs' (2007) preferred and alternative crisis response super strategies for the accidental crisis cluster and their corresponding sub-strategies. For the Diminish conditions, the sub-strategies were excuse and justification, whereas the sub-strategies apology and compensation were applied in the Rebuild conditions. The present study mirrored statements and insights from the stimuli developed by Sisco (2012) and Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014) in the composition of these crisis response strategies.

The two original Dutch crisis responses were translated to English by both the researcher as well as a professional translator. Both translators had an academic background in English and linguistics. The translations were then compared and combined into one final translation, which

was edited by a third reader to ensure that the translation would be idiomatic. All participants who were assigned to one of the two English versions of the crisis response received the explanation that the organisation is an international organisation whose CEO therefore communicates in English. This explained why the crisis response was in English, contrary to what could be expected by participants since they read a Dutch Wikipedia article and Google news article prior to reading the English crisis response. A transcript of all four crisis responses can be found in Appendix I.

### ***3.2 Pre-test***

To establish whether the two crisis response strategies were indeed perceived differently, whether they evoked emotionality in general, and whether they were considered to be authentic and clear, the stimuli were pre-tested in a between-subjects design among 20 Dutch respondents (age:  $M = 24.40$ ,  $SD = 1.93$ ; age range: 22 – 28).

After reading the crisis response, participants were asked four questions, of which two tapped into either one of the sub-strategies as stipulated by Coombs (2004). More specifically, participants were required to report to what extent the organisation provided (1) an apology for the crisis, and (2) compensation for the victims of the crisis, which referred to the sub-strategies apology and compensation for the Rebuild crisis response. One example of a question alluding to the Rebuild crisis response strategy was: “To what extent does Vox Infans take responsibility for the crisis?”. Participants were also asked two different questions pertaining to the Diminish super-strategy’s two sub-strategies: *excuse* and justification. These participants were required to respond to two statements assessing to what extent they felt that the organisation (1) minimised organisational responsibility by shifting the blame, and (2) minimised the perceived damage caused by the crisis. A question intended to match with the Diminish crisis response strategy was: “To what extent does Vox Infans apologise for the crisis?”. All four items were anchored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).

Emotionality was measured in two open items (one for the news article and one for the crisis response) asking participants the question: “Which emotions does the above message raise in your mind?”.

Authenticity was measured via four self-developed items which were repeated for both the news article and the crisis response. One item gauged the extent to which participants could come across the message on either an online news medium or on the organisation’s corporate website.

The items asked participants the question “I considered the above message to be...” for three items. All questions were anchored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The reliability of ‘authenticity’ comprising four items was good ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

Clarity was measured via four self-developed items which were repeated for both the news article and the crisis response. Participants were asked to answer the question “I considered the above message to be...” for four items on a 5-point Likert scale varying from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The reliability of ‘clarity’ comprising four items was good ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

Participants were also asked to assess the severity of the crisis on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not severe at all) to 5 (very severe). Lastly, participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the organisation, the news article, or the crisis response in an open item.

Four independent samples t-tests were performed to test the manipulations. The first showed a significant difference between the Diminish and Rebuild regarding the excuse manipulation check ( $t(14.50) = 4.32, p < .001$ ). Participants felt that the organisation provided an excuse for the crisis to a significantly larger extent in the Rebuild crisis response ( $M = 4.11, SD = 1.27$ ) than in the Diminish crisis response ( $M = 1.91, SD = .94$ ). Another independent samples t-test did not show a significant difference between the Diminish and Rebuild with regard to the justification manipulation check ( $t(16.87) = 1.66, p = .116$ ). Participants did not feel that the organisation justified the crisis to a larger extent in the Rebuild crisis response ( $M = 3.56, SD = 1.51$ ) compared to the Diminish crisis response ( $M = 2.45, SD = 1.44$ ). The third t-test showed a significant difference between the Diminish and Rebuild regarding the apology manipulation check ( $t(12.42) = 6.04, p < .001$ ). Participants felt that the organisation provided an apology to a significantly larger extent in the Rebuild crisis response ( $M = 4.22, SD = 1.09$ ) than in the Diminish crisis response ( $M = 1.73, SD = .65$ ). The fourth t-test showed a significant difference between Diminish and Rebuild with regard to the compensation manipulation check ( $t(16.24) = 4.88, p < .001$ ). Participants felt that the organisation provided compensation to the victims of the crisis to a significantly larger extent in the Rebuild crisis response ( $M = 3.89, SD = 1.17$ ) than in the Diminish crisis response ( $M = 1.45, SD = 1.04$ ).

Two independent samples t-tests were executed to test the authenticity and clarity of the two crisis responses. An independent samples t-test showed no significant difference between Diminish and Rebuild regarding the authenticity of the crisis responses ( $t(15.61) = 1.70, p = .109$ ).

Both the Diminish crisis response ( $M = 2.80, SD = 1.28$ ) and the Rebuild crisis response ( $M = 3.56, SD = .67$ ) were thus perceived as similarly authentic. Another independent samples t-test also showed no significant difference between Diminish and Rebuild with regard to the clarity of the crisis responses ( $t(13.12) = 1.92, p = .077$ ). Both the Diminish crisis response ( $M = 3.54, SD = 1.03$ ) and the Rebuild crisis response ( $M = 4.19, SD = .38$ ) were perceived as equally clear.

From the pre-test, it was concluded that whilst the manipulation checks were successful in the Rebuild crisis response, the Diminish crisis response did not always yield the expected results. For the excuse manipulation checks, for instance, the significant effect was found in a direction opposite of what would be expected based on Coombs' (2007) SCCT. Moreover, the justification manipulation yielded no significant effect and was therefore deemed to be unsuccessful. In the open items, participants also cited some ambiguity in the phrasing of the questions for the excuse and justification manipulations checks. The crisis response strategies and manipulation check questions were therefore simplified for the final experiment based on the feedback that participants provided (see Appendix I for the final versions of the stimuli). The stimuli texts were assessed as comparably authentic and clear, so no adjustments were made with regards to authenticity and clarity. The full pre-test can be found in Appendix II.

### ***3.3 Participants***

Dutch participants were recruited to take part in the online experiment. In terms of sampling criteria, participants had to be 18 or older and were required to have completed or be a student of higher professional education (Dutch: hbo) at minimum. Participants were recruited within the researcher's network. 323 people responded to the call to fill out the questionnaire. 106 participants were excluded from further analysis, as they had not finished the questionnaire in its entirety. Another 48 participants were excluded, as they either responded having a language other than Dutch as their native language or did not have the required educational level. Lastly, 6 participants were rejected for not sufficiently identifying the manipulations as measured by two manipulation checks (i.e. those participants who had a combined mean lower than 2.0 on these two questions).

Ultimately, the data of 163 participants were analysed for the present study. The average age of the participants was 27.37 ( $SD = 8.80$ ; range 19 – 62). A one-way univariate analysis of variance of age on experimental condition did not show a significant main effect ( $F(3, 159) < 1$ ). The mean age was therefore similar across the four experimental conditions.

In terms of gender, 65% of the participants identified as female and 33.7% reported identifying as male. 1.3% reported identifying in other gender categories (e.g. ‘other’, or ‘prefer not to say’). As the absolute number of respondents identifying in other gender categories was lower than five, these participants were excluded from the subsequent Chi-square analysis. A Chi-square test between experimental condition and gender did not yield a significant result ( $\chi^2 (6) = 3.07, p = .800$ ). The ratio between female and male participants was therefore similar across experimental conditions.

For educational level, the majority of participants reported that their highest level of current or completed education is a master’s degree from a research university (44.8%), followed by a bachelor’s degree from a research university (28.2%), higher vocational education (24.5%), secondary school<sup>1</sup> (1.8%), and a PhD (0.6%). A Chi-square test between experimental condition and educational level did not reach significance ( $\chi^2 (12) = 12.78, p = .385$ ). The distribution of educational level was thus similar across all experimental conditions.

The participants who were assigned to one of the two conditions with the English version of the crisis response strategy ( $n = 82$ ) were asked to self-assess their English language proficiency in terms of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The overall self-reported language proficiency for participants in the two English conditions was high ( $M = 4.41, SD = .73$ ). An independent samples t-test did not show a significant difference between the Diminish and the Rebuild condition with regard to self-reported English language proficiency ( $t (79.75) = .02, p = .988$ ). Participants in the Diminish condition ( $M = 4.41, SD = .75$ ) did not self-rate their English language proficiency differently than participants in the Rebuild condition ( $M = 4.41, SD = .72$ ).

After having filled out all the questions measuring each of the dependent variables, all participants were asked to specify their perception of the fictitious non-profit’s organisational responsibility. The question “how responsible do you consider Vox Infans to be for this crisis?” was anchored on a five-point semantic differential scale ranging from 1 (not at all responsible) to 5 (entirely responsible). A one-way analysis of variance showed that crisis response strategy had no significant effect on perceived organisational responsibility ( $F (1, 161) = 2.75, p = .099$ ). Participants perceived the organisation’s responsibility similarly in the Diminish crisis response ( $M = 3.78, SD = 1.18$ ) and the Rebuild crisis response ( $M = 4.07, SD = 1.08$ ). This indicates that

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<sup>1</sup> Despite one of the sampling criteria for participants being that they had at minimum higher vocational schooling, the participants who reported having secondary school as their highest level of education were presented with one of the two Dutch conditions.

perceived organisational responsibility was not a confounding variable. Provided that participants in general attributed relatively high levels of responsibility to the organisation ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ), it can be expected that participants experience moderately high levels of emotions across the two crisis response strategies.

### 3.4 Design

A 2 (crisis response strategy: Diminish vs. Rebuild) by 2 (language choice: Dutch vs. English) between-subjects design was employed in the present study. Participants were randomly assigned to either one of the four experimental conditions (see Table 3). All participants were presented with the same Wikipedia and Google News articles, in Dutch, to introduce them to the organisation and to the crisis before they were presented with one of the four versions of the CEO's crisis response. The six dependent variables analysed in the present study included Emotionality, Anger, Sympathy, Organisational reputation, Intention to engage in negative word of mouth, and Willingness to boycott.

**Table 3.** Four experimental conditions for the two independent variables crisis response strategy and language choice

		Crisis response strategy	Language
Condition 1	$n = 39$	Diminish	Dutch
Condition 2	$n = 43$	Diminish	English
Condition 3	$n = 42$	Rebuild	Dutch
Condition 4	$n = 39$	Rebuild	English

### 3.5 Instruments

Firstly, participants had to fill out two manipulation checks to determine whether they recognised the respective crisis response strategy. The manipulation checks developed in the pre-test were reused, though some phrasings in the items were simplified. Contrary to the pre-test, however, participants only answered the two manipulation questions pertaining to the sub-strategies of each crisis response strategy. In other words, participants who were assigned to one of the two Rebuild conditions were asked two questions likened to the sub-strategies apology and

compensation. Conversely, participants who were assigned to the Diminish conditions were asked two different questions relating to the sub-strategies excuse and justification.

Emotionality was measured via three items assessing the emotional intensity of the crisis response in general, using a five-point semantic differential scale ranging from “unemotional” to “emotional”, adapted from Puntoni et al. (2009). An example of an alternative item on a different scale is “This response makes me emotional”, which was anchored on a five-point semantic differential scale ranging from “completely disagree” to “completely agree”. The reliability of Emotionality comprising three items was poor ( $\alpha = .58$ ). After removing one of the items, reliability was good ( $\alpha = .85$ ). Therefore, the mean of these two items was used to calculate the compound variable Emotionality for the purpose of subsequent analyses.

Anger was operationalised similarly to Van der Meer and Verhoeven’s (2014) study, namely in terms of nine items that tapped the negative emotional appeal and affect stakeholders experienced towards the organisation. The nine items developed by Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014) were reused for the present study. Participants were asked to rate nine statements measuring their feelings of anger towards the organisation on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). An example of a statement is “I have feelings of anger towards the organisation”. The reliability of Anger comprising nine items was good ( $\alpha = .86$ ). The mean of all nine items was therefore used to calculate the compound variable Anger for use in further analyses.

Sympathy was also operationalised via Van der Meer and Verhoeven’s (2014) scale, which considered the positive affect of stakeholders towards the organisation. Sympathy was measured with four items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). An example of a statement is “I am sympathetic towards the organisation”. The reliability of Sympathy comprising four items was acceptable ( $\alpha = .75$ ). The mean of all four items was therefore used to calculate the compound variable Sympathy, which was used in additional analyses.

Organisational reputation was defined similarly to Dowling (2016) as stakeholders’ attitude. This concept was measured via the Organisational Reputation Scale. More specifically, the five items selected by Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014) were reused. These items were anchored on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). An example of an item is: “The organisation is concerned with the well-being of its public”. The

reliability of the dependent variable Organisational reputation comprising five items in the present study was good ( $\alpha = .84$ ). Consequently, the mean of all five items was used to calculate the compound variable Organisational reputation which was used in subsequent analyses.

Intention to engage in negative word of mouth was operationalised and defined similarly to Schultz et al. (2011) and considered three indicators of negative word of mouth, that is the likelihood of (1) sharing the message, (2) to tell friends about the crisis, and (3) to post a reaction to the message (p. 23). The present study reused five items by Schultz et al.'s (2011) to match the current context of the organisation and the crisis. In these items, participants were asked to rate statements in terms of likelihood on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (extremely unlikely) to 5 (extremely likely). An example of an item is "I would tell negative things about Vox Infans". Because the reliability of Intention to engage in negative word of mouth comprising five items was good ( $\alpha = .80$ ), the mean of all five items were combined into a single variable.

Willingness to boycott was defined as stakeholders' willingness to refrain from providing donations to the organisation and resorting to actively rejecting the organisation. Seven items to measure this concept were adapted from Schultz et al. (2011) and Coombs and Holladay (2008). An example of such an item is "I would sign an online petition to boycott the organisation", which was anchored on a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of Willingness to boycott comprising seven items was good ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Consequently, the mean of all seven items was used to calculate the compound variable Willingness to boycott which was used in further analyses.

Lastly, participants were asked to fill out questions on their demographic details in the form of gender, age, and educational level. They were also asked to state what their native language is to confirm that all participants were native speakers of Dutch. The participants who were assigned to one of the English versions of the crisis response ( $n = 82$ ) were also asked to self-assess their English language proficiency. The question "How would you rate your own language proficiency in English in terms of..." with four items (listening, reading, speaking, and writing), was anchored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good). Since the reliability of English language proficiency comprising four items was excellent ( $\alpha = .94$ ), the mean of all four items were combined into a single variable. The full questionnaire (in Dutch) can be found in Appendix III.

### ***3.6 Procedure***

The questionnaire was developed via Qualtrics. The link to the questionnaire was distributed via the researcher's personal network and via social media. Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis without being provided a financial incentive. Participants could fill out the questionnaire in their own time without any (online) surveillance. Data collection took place between 18 and 26 May 2021. The questionnaire was preceded by information on the experiment and a declaration of informed consent. All participants were asked to provide permission and consent for data collection before they could proceed to the questionnaire. After having finished the entire questionnaire, participants were thanked for their contribution. The goal of the experiment was not disclosed and participants were not debriefed in any manner. The researcher's e-mail address was supplied to grant participants the opportunity for any post-survey remarks or questions. It took participants on average 7.5 minutes to complete the questionnaire in its entirety.

### ***3.7 Statistical treatment***

All data was analysed via IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Two chi-square tests were performed to establish that gender and educational level were equally distributed across all four experimental conditions. A one-way ANOVA was performed to confirm an equal distribution for age across all conditions. Another one-way ANOVA was executed to ascertain the nature of the variable Perceived organisational reputation. Reliability analyses were performed to confirm that items could be combined into compound variables (Cronbach's  $\alpha \geq .70$ ). Several independent samples t-tests were performed for the manipulation questions in the pre-test and in the final questionnaire. After this, several two-way ANOVA's were executed to uncover any main effects of crisis response strategy and/or language choice as well as an interaction between both.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Manipulation checks

All participants were asked two different manipulation checks depending on the condition they were assigned to. Those who read the Diminish crisis response were asked whether the organisation minimised both the organisational responsibility (excuse) and the perceived damage caused by the crisis (justification). Participants recognised both the excuse ( $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) and the justification ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = .79$ ) similarly in the manipulated crisis response. An independent samples t-test revealed no significant difference between the Dutch version of the Diminish crisis response ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = .60$ ) and the English version of the Diminish response ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = .61$ ) with regards to the Diminish manipulation checks ( $t(79.51) = .84$ ,  $p = .403$ ). Participants who were assigned to the Rebuild crisis response answered two questions pertaining to the apology and the compensation offered by the organisation. The apology ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) and the compensation ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) were equally acknowledged by those assigned to these conditions. An independent samples t-test revealed no significant difference between the Dutch version of the Rebuild crisis response ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = .77$ ) and the English version of the Rebuild response ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = .87$ ) with regards to the Rebuild manipulation checks ( $t(75.90) = .20$ ,  $p = .846$ ). All manipulations were therefore deemed to be successful.

### 4.2 Emotionality

Levene's test of equality of error variances showed a significant difference regarding the error variance of Emotionality across all groups ( $p = .009$ ). The assumption of homogeneity was therefore violated<sup>2</sup>. Since the groups were comparable in size, a two-way analysis of variance was performed nonetheless<sup>3</sup>. A two-way analysis of variance with language (Dutch vs. English) and crisis response strategy (Diminish vs. Rebuild) as factors showed a significant main effect of crisis response strategy on Emotionality ( $F(1, 159) = 20.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .12$ ). Participants who read the Diminish crisis response reported that they felt significantly more emotional ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = .116$ ) than participants who read the Rebuild crisis response ( $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = .92$ ). There was no significant main effect of language on Emotionality ( $F(1, 159) < 1$ ). The interaction between

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<sup>2</sup> Levene's test of equality of error variances was only violated for the dependent variable Emotionality. Provided that the assumption of homogeneity was not violated for other variables, Levene's test was not reported for these variables.

<sup>3</sup> The comparability of means was confirmed by the Faculty of Arts Statistics Support team.

language and crisis response strategy was also not statistically significant ( $F(1, 159) = 1.75, p = .187, \eta^2 = .01$ ).

### ***4.3 Anger***

A two-way analysis of variance with language (Dutch vs. English) and crisis response strategy (Diminish vs. Rebuild) as factors showed a significant main effect of crisis response strategy on Anger ( $F(1, 159) = 29.17, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$ ). Participants who read the Diminish crisis response experienced significantly more feelings of anger towards the organisation ( $M = 4.20, SD = .56$ ) than participants who read the Rebuild crisis response ( $M = 3.70, SD = .61$ ). There was no significant main effect of language on Anger ( $F(1, 159) < 1$ ). The interaction between language and crisis response strategy was not statistically significant ( $F(1, 159) < 1$ ).

### ***4.4 Sympathy***

A two-way analysis of variance with language (Dutch vs. English) and crisis response strategy (Diminish vs. Rebuild) as factors showed a significant main effect of crisis response strategy on Sympathy ( $F(1, 159) = 22.69, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$ ). Participants who read the Rebuild crisis response experienced significantly more feelings of sympathy towards the organisation ( $M = 2.62, SD = .79$ ) than participants who read the Diminish crisis response ( $M = 2.08, SD = .66$ ). There was no significant main effect of language on Sympathy ( $F(1, 159) < 1$ ). The interaction between language and crisis response strategy was not statistically significant ( $F(1, 159) < 1$ ).

### ***4.5 Organisational reputation***

A two-way analysis of variance with language (Dutch vs. English) and crisis response strategy (Diminish vs. Rebuild) as factors showed a significant main effect of crisis response strategy on Organisational reputation ( $F(1, 159) = 23.26, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$ ). Participants who read the Rebuild crisis response were significantly more positive about the organisation's reputation ( $M = 2.88, SD = .82$ ) than participants who read the Diminish crisis response ( $M = 2.31, SD = .72$ ). There was no significant main effect of language on Organisational reputation ( $F(1, 159) = 2.50, p = .116, \eta^2 = .02$ ). The interaction between language and crisis response strategy was not statistically significant ( $F(1, 159) < 1$ ).

#### ***4.6 Intention to engage in negative word of mouth***

A two-way analysis of variance with language (Dutch vs. English) and crisis response strategy (Diminish vs. Rebuild) as factors showed no significant main effect of crisis response strategy on Intention to engage in negative word of mouth ( $F(1, 159) = 3.65, p = .058, \eta^2 = .02$ ). There was no significant main effect of language on Intention to engage in negative word of mouth ( $F(1, 159) < 1$ ). The interaction between language and crisis response strategy was not statistically significant ( $F(1, 159) < 1$ ).

#### ***4.7 Willingness to boycott***

A two-way analysis of variance with language (Dutch vs. English) and crisis response strategy (Diminish vs. Rebuild) as factors showed a significant main effect of crisis response strategy on Willingness to boycott ( $F(1, 159) = 5.10, p = .025, \eta^2 = .03$ ). Participants who read the Diminish crisis response were more willing to boycott the organisation ( $M = 4.17, SD = .63$ ) than participants who read the Rebuild crisis response ( $M = 3.93, SD = .70$ ). There was no significant main effect of language on Willingness to boycott ( $F(1, 159) < 1$ ). The interaction between language and crisis response strategy was not statistically significant ( $F(1, 159) < 1$ ).

All means and standard deviations of the above two-way analyses of variance can be found in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Mean scores and standard deviations (in brackets) for Emotionality, Anger, Sympathy, Organisational reputation, Intention to engage in negative word of mouth, and Willingness to boycott in function of crisis response strategy and language choice (1 = very low affective perceptions/very low behavioural intentions, 5 = very high affective perceptions/very high behavioural intentions).

	Dutch		English	
	Diminish <i>n</i> = 39 <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Rebuild <i>n</i> = 42 <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Diminish <i>n</i> = 43 <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Rebuild <i>n</i> = 39 <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
Emotionality	2.63 (1.22)	2.10 (.98)	2.93 (1.11)	1.96 (.85)
Anger	4.19 (.54)	3.75 (.59)	4.21 (.59)	3.64 (.64)
Sympathy	2.13 (.63)	2.58 (.84)	2.02 (.68)	2.66 (.71)
Organisational reputation	2.25 (.71)	2.75 (.85)	2.36 (.72)	3.02 (.77)
Intention to engage in negative word of mouth	2.75 (.81)	2.51 (.64)	2.70 (.79)	2.48 (.79)
Willingness to boycott	4.15 (.66)	3.91 (.75)	4.19 (.61)	3.95 (.66)

## **5. Discussion and conclusion**

Prior effect studies which have investigated and applied the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) in a variety of contexts reveal mixed findings in light of Coombs' (2007) projected theory, specifically in terms of congruence between crisis cluster and crisis response strategy. Moreover, no prior studies have considered the role of the Foreign Language Effect (FLE) or language choice in crisis response messages within the field of international crisis communication. The present study therefore sought to examine the effect of a fictitious non profit organisation's crisis response strategy (Diminish vs. Rebuild) and language choice (Dutch vs. English) on Dutch stakeholders' affective perceptions and behavioural intentions in an accidental crisis cluster. This section will discuss the findings of the present study for both independent variables, crisis response strategy and language choice, in light of the projected hypotheses. These findings will also be compared and contrasted to the findings in prior relevant studies. Lastly, the limitations, suggestions for further research, and practical implications of the present study are discussed.

### ***5.1 The effect of crisis response strategy (H1-H4)***

H1 predicted that use of the preferred crisis response strategy (i.e. Diminish) would cause stakeholders to be more favourable towards the reputation of the organisation as compared to use of the alternative crisis response strategy (i.e. Rebuild). Whilst the results indeed show a significant main effect of crisis response strategy on Organisational reputation, the effect was found in the direction opposite to what was hypothesised. That is, participants who read the Diminish crisis response were significantly more positive about the organisation's reputation than those who read the Rebuild crisis response. H1 was therefore rejected.

H2 predicted that use of the alternative crisis response strategy (i.e. Rebuild) would cause stakeholders to resort to more negative behavioural intentions than would be the case when the preferred crisis response strategy (i.e. Diminish) was used. While crisis response strategy had a significant effect on Willingness to boycott, no significant main effect of crisis response strategy on Intention to engage in negative word of mouth was found. The significant effect was again found in the opposite direction of the proposed hypothesis. Participants who read the Diminish crisis response were significantly more willing to boycott the organisation than those who read the Rebuild crisis response. Therefore, H2 was also rejected.

H3 expected that use of the alternative crisis response strategy (i.e. Rebuild) would cause stakeholders to experience more feelings of anger towards the organisation when compared to use of the preferred crisis response strategy (i.e. Diminish). Although crisis response strategy had a significant effect on Anger, the effect was again opposite to what was expected in H3. Participants who read the Diminish crisis response were significantly angrier towards the organisation than those who read the Rebuild crisis response. H3 was thus rejected.

H4 proposed that use of the preferred crisis response strategy (i.e. Diminish) would cause stakeholders to experience more feelings of sympathy towards the organisation when compared to use of the alternative crisis response strategy (i.e. Rebuild). There was indeed a significant effect of crisis response strategy on Sympathy, though this effect was in the opposite direction of the projection in H4. Participants who read the Rebuild crisis response were significantly more sympathetic towards the organisation than those who read the Diminish crisis response. As a result, H4 was rejected.

The fact that all four hypotheses regarding the effect of crisis response strategy were rejected is striking in light of Coombs' (2007) SCCT on which the hypotheses were based. In fact, the findings reveal a consistent pattern exactly opposite of what would be expected from the SCCT. This study therefore does not confirm the SCCT's assertion that crisis clusters should be matched with their preferred crisis response super-strategy (Coombs, 2007; Coombs and Holladay, 1996). The present study also reveals that participants are angrier when exposed to a Diminish crisis response strategy and more sympathetic when exposed to a Rebuild crisis response strategy, which reveals a pattern opposite to that found by Weiner (2006). An incongruent crisis response (i.e. Rebuild) was shown to impact stakeholders' affective perceptions in the present study, though not adversely but instead favourably. The findings of the present study also contradict those of Sisco (2012) who found no significant differences between the Diminish and Rebuild strategies in terms of organisational reputation and behavioural intentions in an accidental cluster. Lastly, this study contradicts the findings by Schultz et al. (2011) who did not find evidence for crisis response strategy affecting organisational reputation. However, the present study did partly confirm the pattern revealed by Schultz et al. (2011) that participants were less willing to boycott the organisation, though not less likely to engage in negative word of mouth on the organisation when exposed to a Rebuild crisis response as opposed to a Diminish crisis response.

Whilst this study's findings may contradict the projections in Coombs' (2007) SCCT, the results of the present study do reveal similar patterns to those identified by prior effect studies. Claeys et al. (2010) demonstrated that a Rebuild crisis response strategy caused their participants to have significantly more favourable perceptions of the organisation than the Diminish crisis response strategy, for all three crisis types, so including an accidental crisis. In a similar vein, Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014) showed that stakeholders had significantly higher perceptions of organisational reputation when a Rebuild strategy was applied as opposed to the application of a Diminish strategy. The findings of the present study are therefore consistent with those of Claeys et al. (2010) and Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014) when considering stakeholders' perceptions of organisational reputation. In that, the present study provides further exploratory evidence for both the academic as well as the professional field of crisis communication in that it suggests that the congruence between crisis cluster and recommended crisis response strategy may sometimes be overstated and does not always yield the best proceeds for the organisation. An explanation for this is put forward by Sisco (2012) who argues that the weight of providing an apology and compensation may outweigh the diminish strategy in that it mitigates reputational damage to the organisation. An alternate justification for the fact that the effect occurred in the direction opposite of what could be expected from Coombs' (2007) SCCT is that the theory is not as robust for the accidental crisis cluster, as the preferred strategy is not the most favourable one in this crisis cluster.

### ***5.2 The effect of language choice (H5-H7)***

Language choice was not found to have a significant effect on any of the dependent variables. H5 projected that crisis communication responses presented in one's L1 (i.e. Dutch) would cause more emotionality than those presented in their L2 (i.e. English). In H6, it was hypothesised that crisis communication responses presented in one's L1 would cause stakeholders to experience more feelings of anger than those presented in their L2. H7 expected that crisis communication responses in one's L1 would cause stakeholders to resort to more negative behavioural intentions than when the responses were formulated in their L2. Since there was no effect of language choice on any of the dependent variables, H5 to H7 were rejected.

The fact that the present study did not uncover an effect of language choice in general is in contrast with prior studies which have identified an FLE across a variety of domains. Hayakawa et al. (2017), for instance, demonstrated that information conveyed in one's L1 cause participants to

experience said information as more emotional as opposed to information presented in their L2. In the present exploratory study, participants did not perceive crisis communication messages in their L1 as more emotional than their L2, however. The findings of the present study also contradict Puntoni et al. (2009) who found that consumers experienced L1 advertisements as more emotional than L2 advertisements. It was proposed that Puntoni et al.'s (2009) findings within the field of advertising could be extended to stakeholders' affective perceptions and behavioural intentions with regards to crisis communication. However, the FLE failed to be robust in the context of crisis communication in the present study. According to Costa et al., (2017) the research of domains in which the FLE has been found to persist is still in its infancy, however. One should therefore be tentative to refute the existence of the FLE in the entire domain of crisis communication, since no other studies have examined the role of language choice in crisis communication.

One potential reason why language choice failed to have an effect on stakeholders' affective perceptions and behavioural intentions is because of the choice of language pair. Research on the FLE has largely examined the FLE in typologically and linguistically distant language pairs, which does not always yield insights that are readily generalizable to other language pairs (Brouwer, 2019). To fill this research gap and test the robustness of the FLE, this study examined a closely related language pair: Dutch-English. However, the present study has shown that the FLE does not persist in this context of Dutch stakeholders who evaluated crisis response strategies on their emotionality. Previous studies have shown that high L2 proficiency levels may inhibit the FLE, causing highly proficient bilinguals to experience messages in their L1 similarly to those in their L2 in terms of emotionality (Costa et al., 2014). Since the self-reported proficiency levels of the participants in this study were particularly high ( $M = 4.41$ ), the FLE might have been dampened to such an extent that the effect has become negligible. In other words, it might be the case that these Dutch participants' understanding of the L2 English moderates the perceived emotionality of a message. This is in accordance with the findings by Brouwer (2019) who also demonstrated that the FLE did not persist for Dutch-English participants who read moral dilemmas. The findings by Brouwer (2019) and those of the present study may also suggest that the FLE fails to be robust for closely related language pairs. However, Hayakawa et al. (2017) demonstrated that the effect was present in a sample of English-German bilinguals.

To conclude, the findings of this study can now be consulted to answer the research question: "to what extent do crisis response strategy and language choice affect Dutch

stakeholders' affective perceptions and behavioural intentions in an accidental crisis cluster?". Whilst crisis response strategy was found to have a significant effect on stakeholders' affective perceptions and largely on behavioural intentions (except for Intention to engage in negative word of mouth), the effects were found in a direction opposite of what was hypothesised based on Coombs' (2007) SCCT. Despite this, the results of the present study were in line with Claeys et al. (2010) and Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014), in that it confirms that the congruence between crisis cluster and crisis response strategy may be overstated in some contexts. In the present context of an accidental crisis for a fictitious non-profit organisation, the alternative crisis response super-strategy was consistently evaluated more favourably than the preferred crisis response super-strategy. Language choice did not have an influence on stakeholders' affective perceptions and behavioural intentions. In other words, the Dutch crisis response did not differ from the English crisis response, irrespective of crisis response strategy. This disconfirms the general tenets of the FLE found in prior effect studies (Costa et al., 2014; Hayakawa et al., 2017). Despite this, the results of this study point in the same direction as those found by Brouwer (2019) and Costa et al. (2014) in that language proficiency may be a potential moderator of the FLE.

### ***5.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research***

There are several limitations to the present study. Firstly, this study chose a fictitious non-profit organisation as its organisational context. In effect, participants were unable to identify any crisis history or prior reputational damage. However, the organisation and crisis were framed similarly to existing non-profit organisations such as UNICEF and Oxfam which may have caused participants to liken the fictitious organization to others they are familiar with. Indeed, some participants in the pre-test confirmed this assumption in the open-ended items by stating they had lost faith in non-profit organisations of this calibre. Moreover, since this experiment was the first and only exposure participants had to this fictitious organisation, it can be argued that the variable Organisational reputation considers participants' attitude at one point in time rather than a continuous measure of reputation. Therefore, the choice and nature of the fictitious organisation which was developed for the purpose of this study might have influenced participants' responses.

Secondly, participants in the present studies might have interpreted the crisis in the present study differently than intended. The accidental crisis which was chosen for the present study was identified as a *challenge* crisis. Coombs (2007) explains that a crisis of this type occurs when

stakeholders claim that the organisation has behaved inappropriately. However, whilst the challenge crisis is identified as a manifestation of an accidental crisis, the challenge strategy might be interpreted as bordering on an intentional crisis. The reason for this is that a third party's claim of the organisation's injustices might be so strong that the crisis is considered to be intentional rather than accidental. Participants in this study also reported relatively high levels of perceived organisational responsibility to the fictitious non-profit ( $M = 3.93$ ), even though accidental crises are commonly attributed moderate levels of perceived organisational responsibility (Coombs, 2007). Whilst perceived organisational responsibility was not found to be a confounding variable, these high levels may imply that participants interpreted the crisis as (bordering on) intentional rather than accidental. In effect, it might be the case that the challenge crisis type is less suitable for this type of experimental research. A limitation to this study, then, is that no items were dedicated to uncovering whether participants indeed identified the crisis within the intended cluster.

Lastly, the present study did not include a control condition in which the organisation did not respond to the crisis at all. Whilst remaining silent in the face of a crisis is not identified in Coombs' SCCT (2007), more and more organisations refrain from responding to challenges and claims made by media outlets (Stieglitz, Mirbabaie, Kroll, & Marx, 2019). Silence as a crisis response strategy has recently received attention in academic literature by Le, Teo, Pang, Li, and Goh (2018) who argue that there are typologies of strategic silence with varying degrees of effectiveness. Some of these types of silence even have potential for reducing reputational damage. At the same time, it might be the case that stakeholders perceive any form of crisis response by an organisation as favourable in and of itself as opposed to an organisation who does not respond to challenges or claims made by third parties.

Future research may do well to reconsider the effect of language choice in crisis communication, specifically in light of the potential moderating role of proficiency levels. The participants in the present study self-reported high levels of L2 proficiency, which arguably might have moderated the FLE. Comparing the difference between low, moderate, and high L2 proficiency may therefore be a compelling site of future research. Secondly, future studies could investigate whether the FLE is strengthened or inhibited in other crisis clusters, as the FLE may be stronger when stakeholders' morality is prompted because of the crisis type or when the severity of the crisis is increased. Lastly, future experimental research should apply more variance to

contexts in terms of organisational type and crisis to unveil the efficacy of the SCCT in these contexts. The accidental crisis cluster is especially crucial to consider since the present study confirms prior mixed experimental evidence in this cluster.

#### ***5.4 Practical implications***

The results of this study reveal that crisis response strategy plays an important role in the way stakeholders perceive a crisis and how they intend to behave towards the organisation. However, the present study demonstrates that applying the recommendations of the oft-cited SCCT does not always yield the most favourable outcomes. Whilst the SCCT prefers certain crisis response strategies over others depending on the crisis type, this study shows that the congruence between crisis type and crisis response strategy need not always be applied. Provided that this study shows that a rebuild crisis response strategy leads to more favourable stakeholder perceptions and intentions, (crisis) communication practitioners and managers alike are advised to administer a rebuild strategy when their organisation finds itself in an accidental crisis cluster. The findings of this study also provide practical knowledge to multinational organisations, specifically in terms of whether to opt for a country's local language or for the organisation's corporate *lingua franca* in crisis communication. Based on the findings of the current study, multinational organisations may opt for either the L1 or the L2 when communicating their crisis responses in a context of Dutch stakeholders who are relatively proficient in English. However, as argued, it remains to be seen whether this implication persists in a context of (Dutch) stakeholders with low or moderate L2 proficiency levels.

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## Appendix I: Materials

### Wikipedia Article Vox Infans (Dutch only)



**WIKIPEDIA**  
De vrije encyclopedie

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Artikel **Overleg** Lezen **Bewerken** Meer ▾

## VOX INFANS

**Vox Infans** is een internationale organisatie die strijdt tegen honger en ongelijkheid in [ontwikkelingsgebieden](#). Hoewel de organisatie de ontwikkeling van deze landen in de breedste zin des woord bevordert, richt zij zich met name op [kinderen](#) onder de zestien jaar.



**VOX INFANS**

Zoals de naam van de organisatie al impliceert, verkondigt *Vox Infans* ([Latijn](#) voor 'de stem van het kind') de noodzakelijke behoeften van kinderen in ontwikkelingsgebieden in bestuurlijke overleggen met [internationale verdragsorganisaties](#). Zo zorgt *Vox Infans* bijvoorbeeld dat [slachtofferhulp](#) snel geboden kan worden en dat er ook na een [oorlog](#) of [ramp](#) een plan ligt om kinderen blijvend te helpen. Dit varieert van [voedselpakketten](#) tot [gezondheidszorg](#) en [scholing](#).

De [missie](#) van *Vox Infans* is om kinderen in ontwikkelingslanden écht kind te kunnen laten zijn.

Google Nieuws

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**Voorpaginanieuws**

- Voor jou
- Je volgt
- Opgeslagen zoekopdrachten

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COVID-19

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Nederland

Wereld

Je lokale nieuws

Zakelijk

Wetenschap en technologie

Amusement

---

### Crisis Vox Infans

Onlangs berichtte de Britse krant *The Times* op basis van ervaringsverhalen dat *Vox Infans* geld dat bedoeld was voor ontwikkelings- en slachtofferhulp als gevolg van een natuurramp in Mozambique voor persoonlijke doeleinden heeft ingezet.

Cycloon Idai zorgde in maart 2019 voor een grote humanitaire ramp op Mozambique. De cycloon kostte meer dan 1300 levens in Mozambique. Daarnaast verloren duizenden gezinnen hun huis. *Vox Infans* was verantwoordelijk voor de wederopbouw van huizen in verschillende Mozambikaanse dorpen. Om dit te realiseren, had *Vox Infans* toegezegd om 3,1 miljoen dollar aan donatiegelden in te zetten.

Verslaggevers van verschillende kranten en vrijwilligers van andere ontwikkelingshulporganisaties rapporteren in gesprekken met *The Times* echter dat *Vox Infans* geen rol heeft gespeeld bij de wederopbouw van huizen in de regio. Ze zeggen wel een delegatie van de organisatie te hebben gezien, maar dat de afgevaardigden van *Vox Infans* vrijwel direct vertrokken en de donatiegelden niet hebben ingezet voor ontwikkelingshulp.

Volgens vrijwilligers van andere hulpbiedende organisaties in Mozambique zouden de *Vox Infans*-medewerkers in kwestie de donatiegelden op verschillende manieren hebben verduisterd. Zo zou een *Vox Infans*-medewerker hebben verteld dat het geld op zou worden gemaakt aan een vakantie. Volgens *The Times* is dit niet de eerste keer is dat medewerkers van *Vox Infans* individueel beschikking hebben tot ontwikkelingsgeld van de organisatie en hier misbruik van hebben gemaakt.

# VOX INFANS

Actualiteiten en Nieuws

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## **Reactie CEO Jane Cooper**

In het artikel van *The Times* worden medewerkers van Vox Infans beschuldigd van het verduisteren van donatiegelden die bedoeld waren voor ontwikkelingshulp voor de wederopbouw van huizen in Mozambique die door cycloon Idai zijn verwoest. Vox Infans betreurt de ontstane situatie en de bijbehorende negatieve publiciteit. De situatie was bij het management van Vox Infans niet bekend en kwam pas aan het licht via het artikel van *The Times*. Vox Infans kon zodoende weinig doen om het incident te voorkomen. Het was niet onze bedoeling om schade aan te richten.

Vox Infans wil benadrukken dat het slechts één van vele organisaties was die ter plaatse was om de cycloonschade te verhelpen en wederopbouw van huizen te ondersteunen. Inmiddels is dit doel bereikt. Zodoende kan er gesteld worden dat de wederopbouw ook zonder de donatiegelden toebedeeld aan Vox Infans is gerealiseerd. De consequenties van het handelen van individuele medewerkers hebben dus minder impact dan door verslaggevers van *The Times* wordt gespeculeerd. De schade die is ontstaan door deze situatie is dan ook verwaarloosbaar. Hoewel Vox Infans het handelen van deze individuele medewerkers afkeurt, zijn er binnen de organisatie geen andere vergelijkbare situaties van onjuist handelen voorgekomen. Vox Infans zal dan ook koers houden en haar huidige beleid voortzetten.

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# VOX INFANS

## Current Affairs and News

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### **Reaction CEO Jane Cooper**

In an article in *The Times*, employees of Vox Infans were accused of embezzling donations. The money had been intended for development aid aimed at rebuilding houses which had been destroyed by cyclone Idai in Mozambique. Vox Infans regrets the situation and the negative publicity it has generated. Vox Infans' management was not aware of this situation until the appearance of the article in *The Times*. Vox Infans could therefore have done little to prevent the incident. We did not intend to cause any harm.

Vox Infans would like to emphasise that it was one of many organisations that were present in Mozambique to help restore the damage caused by the cyclone and support the rebuilding of houses. By now, this goal has been achieved. It can therefore be argued that this goal was realised even without money donated to Vox Infans. The consequences of individual employees' actions therefore have less impact than has been speculated by journalists of *The Times*. The damage that may have been caused by this situation is therefore insignificant. Although Vox Infans condemns the behaviour of these individual employees, no other instances of unjust acts have occurred within the organisation. Therefore, Vox Infans will stay on course and continue its current policy.

# VOX INFANS

## Actualiteiten en Nieuws

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### **Reactie CEO Jane Cooper**

In het artikel van *The Times* worden medewerkers van Vox Infans beschuldigd van het verduisteren van donatiegelden die bedoeld waren voor ontwikkelingshulp voor de wederopbouw van huizen in Mozambique die door cycloon Idai zijn verwoest. Vox Infans betreurt de ontstane situatie en de bijbehorende negatieve publiciteit. Hoewel de situatie voor het verschijnen van het artikel in *The Times* bij het management van Vox Infans niet bekend was, neemt Vox Infans de volledige verantwoordelijkheid voor het handelen van haar medewerkers. Het was niet onze bedoeling om schade aan te richten.

Hoewel het doel om de cycloonschade te herstellen en wederopbouw van huizen te ondersteunen is gerealiseerd door de inzet van andere hulporganisaties, had het niet tot de mogelijkheden moeten behoren dat individuele Vox Infans-werknemers toegang hadden tot de donatiegelden die enkel bedoeld waren voor ontwikkelingshulp in Mozambique. Hiervoor biedt Vox Infans dan ook haar welgemeende excuses aan. Als compensatie zal Vox Infans op eigen initiatief een nieuwe delegatie werknemers naar Mozambique sturen en een extra investering doen in de wederopbouw van huizen aldaar. Onafhankelijke organisaties zullen er streng op toezien dat de donatiegelden enkel voor dit doel zullen worden ingezet. Vox Infans zal bovendien een intern onderzoek uitrollen om ervoor te zorgen dat dergelijke situaties zich in het vervolg niet binnen onze organisatie kunnen voordoen.

# VOX INFANS

## Current Affairs and News

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### **Reaction CEO Jane Cooper**

In an article in *The Times*, employees of Vox Infans were accused of embezzling donations. The money had been intended for development aid aimed at rebuilding houses which had been destroyed by cyclone Idai in Mozambique. Vox Infans regrets the situation and the negative publicity it has generated. Despite the fact that Vox Infans was unaware of the situation before the appearance of the article in *The Times*, Vox Infans takes full responsibility for the actions of its employees. We did not intend to cause any harm.

Although the goal of repairing the damage caused by the cyclone has since been realised with aid from other relief organisations, it should not have been an option for individual Vox Infans employees to access the donation funds that were specifically meant for aid in Mozambique. For this, Vox Infans would like to offer its sincerest apologies. By way of compensation, Vox Infans will send a new delegation of employees to Mozambique on its own initiative and make a further investment to aid the local reconstruction of houses. Independent organisations will closely monitor this operation to ensure that money is used for this purpose only. Moreover, Vox Infans will carry out an internal investigation to ensure that similar situations will not occur within our organisation in the future.

## Appendix II: Full pre-test questionnaire

### Instructional text:

Beste respondent,

U wordt uitgenodigd om deel te nemen aan een onderzoek over de communicatie van organisaties ten tijde van een crisissituatie. Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd als onderdeel van mijn masterthesis voor de opleiding International Business Communication aan de Radboud Universiteit.

De data die tijdens dit onderzoek worden verzameld, zijn anoniem. Uw antwoorden kunnen dus niet naar u herleid worden en zullen vertrouwelijk worden verwerkt. De geanonimiseerde data zullen beschikbaar worden gemaakt voor andere onderzoekers voor een periode van ten minste 10 jaar. Alle data worden veilig opgeslagen volgens richtlijnen van de Radboud Universiteit.

Uw deelname is geheel vrijwillig. Indien u wil deelnemen, moet u uw toestemming geven. U mag uw deelname en toestemming op elk moment tijdens het onderzoek intrekken zonder hier een reden voor op te geven.

Het invullen van deze vragenlijst zal circa 10 minuten van uw tijd in beslag nemen. Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden. Ik ben enkel geïnteresseerd in uw persoonlijke mening.

Mocht u meer informatie willen over dit onderzoek of de dataverzameling, dan kunt u een e-mail sturen naar [a.humphrey@student.ru.nl](mailto:a.humphrey@student.ru.nl).

Alvast bedankt voor uw deelname.

Met vriendelijke groeten,

Allysha Humphrey

### Consent question

Als u start met de enquête en doorklikt naar de volgende pagina, geeft u aan dat:

- U de bovenstaande informatie goed heeft gelezen
- U vrijwillig instemt deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek
- U minstens 18 jaar oud bent

Ik bevestig dit en wil deelnemen aan dit onderzoek

Ik bevestig dit niet en wil niet deelnemen aan dit onderzoek

### Demographic questions

Met welk geslacht identificeert u zich het meest?

- O Man
- O Vrouw
- O Anders
- O Zeg ik liever niet

Wat is uw leeftijd (in jaren)? (*open question*)

### Introduction organisation

Hieronder wordt een organisatie aan u geïntroduceerd. Lees de tekst goed door.

*(Accompanying text: Wikipedia article Vox Infans (see Appendix I))*

### Crisis context

Hieronder wordt een crisis die Vox Infans recentelijk heeft meegemaakt voor u geschetst in een nieuwsbericht. Lees de informatie goed en ga door naar de volgende pagina als u klaar bent met het lezen van het nieuwsbericht.

*(Accompanying text: Google News article (see Appendix I))*

### Authenticity (repeated for news article, Diminish and Rebuild crisis strategy)

Hoe waarschijnlijk is het dat u het bericht over deze crisis/bovenstaande reactie van Vox Infans tegen zou kunnen komen in een krant of online nieuwsmedium/op de website van de organisatie?

*(scale 1 (extremely unlikely) 5 (extremely likely))*

Ik vond het bovenstaande nieuwsbericht...

Echt

Realistisch

Authentiek

*(scale 1 (helemaal oneens) to 5 (helemaal eens))*

### Clarity (repeated for news article, Diminish and Rebuild crisis strategy)

Ik vond het bovenstaande nieuwsbericht...

Duidelijk

Begrijpelijk

Leesbaar

*(scale 1 (helemaal oneens) to 5 (helemaal eens))*

### Emotionality (repeated for news article, Diminish and Rebuild crisis strategy)

Welke emotie(s) roept bovenstaand nieuwsbericht bij u op? (*open item*)

### Instruction crisis response

U krijgt nu de reactie van de CEO van Vox Infans op de hiervoor beschreven crisis te lezen. Lees de reactie goed en beantwoord de vragen onder de reactie op basis van uw persoonlijke mening.

### Crisis severity

Hoe ernstig acht u de crisis voor de organisatie Vox Infans (*scale 1 (totaal niet ernstig) to 5 (zeer ernstig)*)

### Manipulation checks (based on Coombs (2004))

In hoeverre erkent Vox Infans haar verantwoordelijkheid voor de ontstane crisis? (*scale 1 (helemaal niet) - to 5 (helemaal wel)*)

In hoeverre probeert Vox Infans de schade als gevolg van de crisis te minimaliseren? (*scale 1 (helemaal niet) - 5 (helemaal wel)*)

In hoeverre biedt Vox Infans haar excuses aan voor de ontstane crisis? (*scale 1 (helemaal niet) - 5 (helemaal wel)*)

In hoeverre biedt Vox Infans compensatie aan om de schade van de crisis te repareren? (*scale 1 (helemaal niet) - 5 (helemaal wel)*)

### Questions/remarks

Heeft u nog feedback of opmerkingen op de informatie over de organisatie, de context van de crisis, of de reactie van Vox Infans op de crisis? (*open question*)

### End of questionnaire message

Bedankt voor het invullen van deze vragenlijst. Als u nog vragen of opmerkingen heeft, dan kunt u altijd contact opnemen ([a.humphrey@student.ru.nl](mailto:a.humphrey@student.ru.nl)).

### Appendix III: Full questionnaire

#### Instructional text

Beste deelnemer,

U bent uitgenodigd om deel te nemen aan een onderzoek over de communicatie van organisaties ten tijde van een crisissituatie. Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd als onderdeel van mijn masterthesis voor de opleiding International Business Communication aan de Radboud Universiteit.

De data die tijdens dit onderzoek worden verzameld, zijn anoniem. Uw antwoorden kunnen dus niet naar u herleid worden en zullen vertrouwelijk worden verwerkt. De geanonimiseerde data zullen beschikbaar worden gemaakt voor andere onderzoekers voor een periode van ten minste 10 jaar. Alle data worden veilig opgeslagen volgens richtlijnen van de Radboud Universiteit.

Uw deelname is geheel vrijwillig. Indien u wil deelnemen, moet u uw toestemming geven. U mag uw deelname en toestemming op elk moment tijdens het onderzoek intrekken zonder hier een reden voor op te geven.

Het invullen van deze vragenlijst zal circa 10 minuten van uw tijd in beslag nemen. Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden. Ik ben enkel geïnteresseerd in uw persoonlijke mening.

Mocht u meer informatie willen over dit onderzoek of de dataverzameling, dan kunt u een e-mail sturen naar [a.humphrey@student.ru.nl](mailto:a.humphrey@student.ru.nl).

Alvast bedankt voor uw deelname.

Met vriendelijke groeten,

Allysha Humphrey

#### Consent question

Als u start met de enquête en doorklikt naar de volgende pagina, geeft u aan dat:

- U de bovenstaande informatie goed heeft gelezen
- U vrijwillig instemt deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek
- U minstens 18 jaar oud bent

Ik bevestig dit en wil deelnemen aan dit onderzoek

Ik bevestig dit niet en wil niet deelnemen aan dit onderzoek

### Introduction organisation

Hieronder wordt een organisatie aan u geïntroduceerd. Lees de tekst goed door.

*(Accompanying text: Wikipedia article Vox Infans (see Appendix I))*

### Crisis context

Hieronder wordt een crisis die Vox Infans recentelijk heeft meegemaakt voor u geschetst in een nieuwsbericht. Lees de informatie goed en ga door naar de volgende pagina als u klaar bent met het lezen van het nieuwsbericht.

*(Accompanying text: Google News article (see Appendix I))*

### Instruction crisis response (Dutch conditions)

U krijgt nu de reactie van de CEO van Vox Infans, Jane Cooper, op de hiervoor beschreven crisis te lezen. Lees de reactie goed en beoordeel de stellingen onder de reactie van de CEO op basis van uw persoonlijke mening.

**U kunt bij het invullen van de vragen altijd terug naar boven scrollen om het bericht nogmaals door te lezen.**

### Instruction crisis response (English conditions)

U krijgt nu de reactie van de CEO van Vox Infans, Jane Cooper, op de hiervoor beschreven crisis te lezen. **Omdat Vox Infans een internationale organisatie is, is de reactie in het Engels geschreven.**

Lees de reactie goed en beoordeel de stellingen onder de reactie van de CEO op basis van uw persoonlijke mening.

**U kunt bij het invullen van de vragen altijd terug naar boven scrollen om het bericht nogmaals door te lezen.**

### Manipulation checks (Diminish crisis response conditions; based on Coombs (2004))

Vox Infans schuift de oorzaken van de crisis van zich af (*scale 1 (helemaal niet) - 5 (helemaal wel)*)  
Vox Infans zwakt de schade, die ontstaan is door de crisis, af (*scale 1 (helemaal niet) - 5 (helemaal wel)*)

### Manipulation checks (Rebuild crisis response conditions; based on Coombs (2004))

Vox Infans heeft haar excuses aangeboden voor de ontstane crisis (*scale 1 (helemaal niet) - 5 (helemaal wel)*)

Vox Infans geeft aan de schade, die veroorzaakt is door het handelen van haar werknemers, te willen herstellen (*scale 1 (helemaal niet) - 5 (helemaal wel)*)

Emotionality (adapted from Puntoni et al., 2009)

Ik vind deze reactie

niet emotioneel O O O O O emotioneel

Deze reactie maakt mij emotioneel

helemaal mee oneens O O O O O helemaal mee eens

Deze reactie raakt mij

helemaal mee oneens O O O O O helemaal mee eens

Sympathy (adapted from Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014)

Ik ervaar gevoelens van frustratie naar de organisatie

Ik vind dat de organisatie gestraft moet worden

Ik heb behoefte om de organisatie te bestraffen

Ik heb sympathie voor de organisatie

*(scale 1 (helemaal mee oneens) - 5 (helemaal mee eens))*

Anger (adapted from Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014)

Ik zou me geïrriteerd voelen ten opzichte van de organisatie

Ik heb gevoelens van boosheid ten opzichte van de organisatie

Ik heb gevoelens van vijandigheid ten opzichte van de organisatie

Ik heb gevoelens van leedvermaak ten opzichte van de organisatie

Ik heb gevoelens van opluchting ten opzichte van de organisatie

Ik heb gevoelens van blijdschap ten opzichte van de organisatie

Ik heb gevoelens van vergenoegen ten opzichte van de organisatie

Ik heb gevoelens van voldoening ten opzichte van de organisatie

Ik heb gevoelens van genoegdoening ten opzichte van de organisatie

*(scale 1 (helemaal mee oneens) - 5 (helemaal mee eens))*

Organisational reputation (adapted from Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014)

Vox Infans bekommert zich om het welzijn van de betrokkenen

Vox Infans is in principe onbetrouwbaar

Ik vertrouw niet dat Vox Infans de waarheid vertelt over de crisis

In de meeste gevallen zou ik vertrouwen op wat Vox Infans zegt

Vox Infans is niet bezorgd om het welzijn van de betrokkenen

*(scale 1 (Helemaal mee oneens) - 5 (Helemaal mee eens))*

Intention to engage in negative word of mouth (adapted from Schultz et al., 2011)

Negatieve dingen zou zeggen over Vox Infans en haar werkzaamheden

De reactie zou delen met uw vrienden, familie, of kennissen

Uw vrienden zou vertellen over deze crisis?

Een reactie zou plaatsen onder deze reactie

Over het algemeen een dergelijk bericht zou delen  
(scale 1 (Zeer onwaarschijnlijk) - 5 (Zeer waarschijnlijk))

Willingness to boycott (adapted from Coombs & Holladay, 2008, and Schultz et al., 2011)

Een online petitie zou tekenen om Vox Infans te boycotten  
(scale 1 (Zeer onwaarschijnlijk) - 5 (Zeer waarschijnlijk))

Na het lezen van deze reactie..

Zou ik zelf doneren aan Vox Infans

Zou ik donateur van Vox Infans blijven, als ik dat al was

Zou ik mijn vrienden aanmoedigen om te doneren aan Vox Infans.

Zou ik mijn familieleden aanmoedigen om te doneren aan Vox Infans

Zou ik Vox Infans over het algemeen aanbevelen als goed doel om aan te doneren.

Zou ik mijn donateurschap bij Vox Infans intrekken

(scale 1 (Volledig mee oneens) - 5 (Volledig mee eens))

Perceived organisational responsibility

Hoe verantwoordelijk vindt u Vox Infans voor de ontstane crisis?

Helemaal niet verantwoordelijk O O O O O Geheel verantwoordelijk

Demographic questions

Met welk geslacht identificeert u zich het meest?

O Man

O Vrouw

O Anders

O Zeg ik liever niet

Wat is uw leeftijd (in jaren)? (open question)

Wat is uw huidige of hoogst afgeronde opleidingsniveau?

O Middelbare school (vmbo/havo/vwo)

O MBO

O HBO Bachelor

O WO Bachelor

O WO Master

O PhD

Wat is uw moedertaal? (open question)

Self-reported English language proficiency (English conditions only)

Hoe beoordeelt u uw eigen taalvaardigheden in het **Engels** op het gebied van...

Lezen

Luisteren

Schrijven

Spreken

*(scale 1 (Zeer slecht) - 5 (Zeer goed))*

End of questionnaire message

Bedankt voor het invullen van deze vragenlijst. Als u nog vragen of opmerkingen heeft, dan kunt u altijd contact opnemen ([a.humphrey@student.ru.nl](mailto:a.humphrey@student.ru.nl)).