

The Impact of Crisis Response Strategy, Crisis Type, and Corporate Social Responsibility on Post-crisis Consumer Trust and Purchase Intention

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ABSTRACT

Organisational crises can have deleterious consequences for organisational reputation and sales. Hence, one exigent question pertains to the effects of a company's action prior to the crisis and its crisis response on customers' post-crisis attitude and behavioural intention. To address that question, a scenario-based 2 (rebuild versus diminish response strategy) × 2 (product-harm versus moral-harm crisis) × 2 (institutional versus promotional CSR program) experiment was conducted with 304 Dutch respondents. Main effects were found for all independent variables. Our research shows that a rebuilding strategy has a more positive effect on benevolence- and integrity-based trust. A product-harm crisis leads to a significant larger drop in ability-based trust and in purchase intention,

while a moral-harm crisis damages more strongly integrity-based trust in the organisation. Furthermore, an institutional CSR program is advantageous for all outcome variables. Additionally, an interaction effect between crisis type and crisis response strategy is found. Results of the study have important practical implications, especially that companies must employ the most appropriate crisis communication strategy according to the type of crisis that confronts them.

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KEYWORDS: crisis response strategies; crisis type; corporate social responsibility; consumer trust, purchase intention

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INTRODUCTION

Organisational crisis can result in negative publicity, which could harm organisational reputation and sales (Claeys *et al.*, 2010; Coombs, 2007b; Dean, 2004; Fan *et al.*, 2013). During an organisational crisis, stakeholders and the media demand immediate, thorough, and qualified response from an organisation (Seeger *et al.*, 2001, 2003). Several studies have already looked into the effectiveness of various crisis response strategies (Claeys *et al.*, 2010; Coombs, 1995; Coombs and Holladay, 2002; Dutta and Pullig, 2011; Hegner *et al.*, 2014). For instance, it has been reported that when a crisis is preventable or the company is held responsible for the crisis, a rebuilding crisis response strategy works better in reducing reputational damage after a crisis than other strategies such as diminishing and denying (Claeys *et al.*, 2010).

Aside from how a company responds to a crisis, its pre-crisis actions have also been reported to shape stakeholders' view of and attitude towards a company in a crisis (Benoit, 1997). Specifically, the level of corporate engagement in social responsible activities could shield a company from the deleterious effects of a crisis (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004; Kim and Lee, 2015; Klein and Dawar, 2004). The unquestionable importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) for crisis communication could be explained by the pivotal role the former plays in strengthening a company's pre-crisis reputation. A positive pre-crisis reputation, according to Wigley and Pfau (2010), can help an organisation withstand the damaging effects of a crisis.

In the current study, the focus is on the impact of crisis response strategy and an organisation's employed CSR program on customer trust and purchase intention and how such an impact could be moderated by crisis type, especially when the crisis is preventable. Literature on crisis management

broadly categorises any crisis to be either product-harm or moral-harm. Except for a handful studies (e.g. Dutta and Pullig, 2011; Pullig *et al.*, 2006) into the two types of crises mentioned, the impact of these crisis types on consumer trust and behavioural intention (e.g. readiness to engage in a post-crisis exchange with a company) is not yet adequately understood. Although both types of crises are potentially damaging for any organisation, we argue that consumers' reaction to any of the two would substantially vary. This is the primary gap in the literature on crisis communication that the research aims at filling.

One question that emerges from the previously proposed relationship pertains to the type of CSR program (institutional or promotional) that would contribute to post-crisis company trust and prompt purchase intention when the crisis involves either a defective product or a violation of a society's moral standards. Another question pertains to the crisis response strategy (rebuilding or diminishing) that a company should employ when faced with either a product-harm or a moral-harm crisis. Hence, the primary research question addressed in this study is 'to what extent do crisis response strategy, crisis type, and CSR program influence post-crisis consumer trust and purchase intention?'. Figure 1 shows the research model tested in this study. Experimental research was implemented to address the primary research question.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Crisis Communication and Consumer Outcomes

An organisational crisis can be defined as a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and could threaten an organisation's high priority goals (Seeger *et al.*,

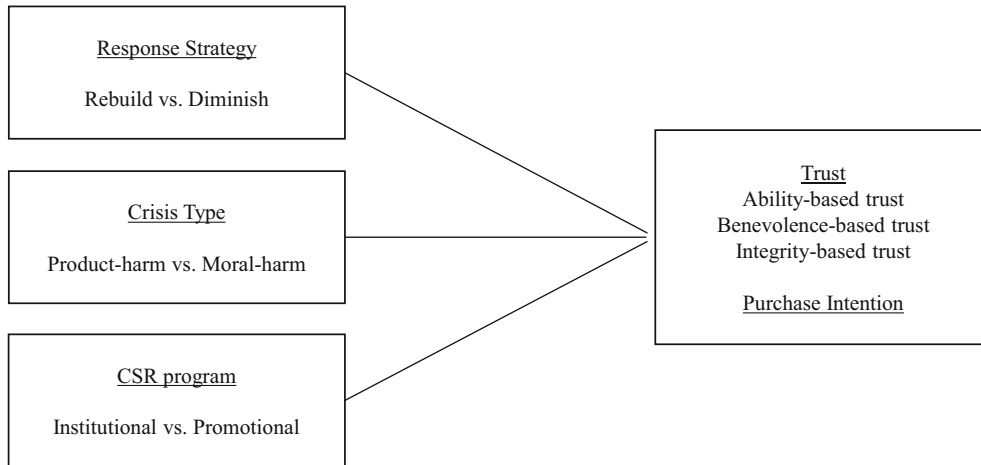


Figure 1: Theoretical research model

1998). When inadequately handled, these non-routine events can seriously damage organisational reputation (Coombs, 2007a), just as they can sever company-customer relationship (Barton, 2001; Dowling, 2002). Scholars in both crisis communication and reputation management recognise the importance of crisis communication in reducing the reputational damage inflicted by a crisis (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1995; Murray and White, 2005).

Crisis communication researchers often use the Situation Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT; Coombs, 2007b; Coombs and Holladay, 2002) in an attempt to understand how organisational actions immediately after a crisis could influence customers' emotions, attitudes, and behaviours. SCCT posits that following a negative event, stakeholders make attributions about its cause along causal dimensions (Coombs, 2007a; McDonald *et al.*, 2010), which are shaped by information from the media, the company, or other sources (Klein and Dawar, 2004).

The fact that a crisis can significantly impact customers' trust in either a company or its products gives companies in crises enough reason to employ tactics to repair trust (that may have been damaged by the crisis) and to display their trustworthiness

(Gillespie and Dietz, 2009; Xie and Peng, 2009). It has been noted that the ways an organisation communicates to its stakeholders during a crisis shape customers' trust in that organisation (Xie and Peng, 2009) and their behavioural intentions (e.g. purchase intention; Coombs, 2007b). In this research, trust is defined as an expression of a party's willingness to be vulnerable to the action of another party, predicated on the expectation of the latter's inclination to perform an important act for the former, even in the absence of control mechanisms (Mayer *et al.*, 1995). As a complex concept, trust is regarded to have two important elements, namely, trusting beliefs (ability, integrity, and benevolence) and trusting intention (intended performance of a behaviour expressing a level of trust; Hegner and Jevons, 2016; Kim *et al.*, 2004).

Crisis Communication Response Strategies

Coombs (2007b) identified three post-crisis response strategies, namely (1) denial, (2) diminishing, and (3) rebuilding. The deny strategy involves claiming that no crisis exists or that the organisation has no responsibility for it (Claeys *et al.*, 2010; Coombs, 2007b),

and it primarily aims at removing the connection between the crisis and the organisation. The diminish strategy involves minimising the seriousness of the crisis and lessening the organisation's responsibility for the crisis. The rebuild strategy entails the extension of compensation to parties affected by the crisis and the release of an official statement of apology. Consequently, researchers have emphasised the need to conscientiously select the response strategy that fits the crisis type. As Coombs (2006) suggests, crisis managers should employ crisis response strategies that best serve to protect the organisation. It is vital that crisis managers make informed choices about crisis response strategies based upon theoretically derived and empirically tested evidence rather than relying on hunches or recommendations from simple case studies (Benson, 1988; Choi and Lin, 2009; Coombs and Schmidt, 2000).

According to SCCT, stronger attributions of crisis responsibility increase stronger feelings of anger, while reducing feelings of sympathy. Since Coombs suggests that rebuilding is the most suitable response strategy during a preventable crisis, since this strategy should have the least negative effect on consumer's trust (Claeys *et al.*, 2010). As the most suitable repair effort that leads to the most positive post-crisis effect, the rebuild strategy is deemed highly effective in restoring a damaged reputation after a crisis. Concerning the behavioural reaction of consumers, empirical evidence shows a positive relationship between purchase intention and recovery from failure, that is, satisfaction with recovery (Kelley and Davis, 1994).

The denial strategy can only be effective if the stakeholders truly believe that there is no link between the crisis and the organisation (Coombs, 2006). As we are going to employ a preventable crisis situation in this study, we focus on the diminish and the rebuild strategies for a comparison. While the diminish strategy aims at proving that the crisis is not really harming the organisation

and at changing the number of attributions created by the stakeholders, the rebuild strategy intends to neutralise the tarnished reputation of the organisation. The rebuild strategy is said to be the most appropriate if the organisation is held responsible for the crisis. Although the strategy is deemed highly effective, it is also the most expensive strategy (Tyler, 1997), which could lead to a high financial loss for the organisation. Thus, the question is 'is a monetary loss in the form of a rebuilding strategy always necessary or can a diminishing strategy already fulfil consumers' expectations in a crisis situation?'

Crisis Harm Type

Aside from the crisis response strategy, the type of crisis is an important factor in crisis situations. Literature on crisis management broadly categorises any crisis to be either product-harm or moral-harm. On the one hand, a product-harm crisis occurs when products that have reached the market are eventually discovered to be defective, unsafe, or hazardous to be consumed or used (Dawar and Pillutla, 2000; Dutta and Pullig, 2011; Grunwald and Hempelmann, 2010). On the other hand, a moral-harm crisis 'does not directly involve the product, but involves social or ethical issues surrounding the values espoused by the brand' (Dutta and Pullig, 2011, p. 1282). Thus, a moral-harm crisis does not involve specific attributes that affect functional product use (Pullig *et al.*, 2006). Rather, this type of publicity involves social or ethical issues, such as the revelation of sexual harassment or racial discrimination by members of an organisation, which affects a company's ability to deliver symbolic and psychological benefits.

Although both types of crises are potentially damaging for any organisation, we argue that people's reaction to any of the two would significantly vary. Without a doubt, instances of labour exploitation and envi-

ronmental harm in relation to the production of goods could instigate people to ostracise a company embroiled in one of the two ethically compromising actions (or both). Nonetheless, as a product-harm crisis could directly harm product users, when compared to a moral-harm crisis, it could be expected that negative emotions would be more intense among customers exposed to the first crisis type than to the second type. The notion that personal safety concerns outweigh concerns for other people's welfare is predicated on the precept that individual safety is a basic human need and much more indispensable than the human need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1943), which could be realised in several ways including the decision to act out of moral considerations (Reiss and Havercamp, 2005).

Nevertheless, Dutta and Pullig (2011) argue that a product-harm crisis negatively impacts expected benefits related to brand functionality, whereas a moral-harm crisis negatively impacts a brand's expected symbolic and psychological benefits. Moreover, Dutta and Pullig (2011) claim that negative information related to functional benefits strongly influences satisfaction and choice likelihood. We expect that cognitions based on the functional evaluation of a product as ability-based trust, as well as behavioural purchase intention, are more negatively influenced by a product-harm crisis; while a moral-harm crisis strongly affects the affective facets of trust such as benevolence and integrity. Thus, the question is 'to what extent do the two types of crises differentially affect the various components of trust and purchase intention?'

Corporate Social Responsibility Programs

CSR has emerged in recent years as both an important academic construct and a pressing corporate agenda item (e.g. Colvin, 2001; Harrison and Freeman, 1999; Sen and Bhat-

tacharya, 2001; Waddock and Smith, 2000). Dahlsrud (2008) defines CSR as "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" (p. 7). From an organisational perspective, the firm's economic benefits from CSR have been heavily documented, specifically concerning CSR's impact on consumers' positive product and company evaluations, brand choice, and recommendations (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Drumwright, 1994; Handelman and Arnold, 1999; Osterhus, 1997; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). Schnietz and Epstein (2005), as well as Kim and Lee (2015), show that CSR also acts as a buffer in times of crises.

Companies can pursue various forms of CSR initiatives in an effort to fulfill their social responsibilities. Two categories of CSR programs have been identified in the literature, namely, institutional CSR and promotional CSR (Pirsch *et al.*, 2007). Institutional CSR programs, on the one hand, "provide a comprehensive approach to CSR, attempting to fulfil a company's social obligations across all stakeholder groups and touching on all aspects of the company" (Pirsch *et al.*, 2007, p. 126). Institutional CSR programs are argued to be most effective at increasing customer loyalty, enhancing attitude toward the company, and decreasing consumer scepticism.

A promotional CSR, on the other hand, is implemented only through a one-time campaign or focuses on a small aspect of organisational citizenship. Promotional CSR is what happens when corporate sustainability and responsibility is seen mainly as a public relations opportunity to enhance the brand image and reputation of the company (Visser, 2010).

Institutional CSR has a greater impact on customer loyalty and enhancing attitudes toward the company than promotional CSR, while promotional CSR programs are targeted at selling products and, thus, are said to be more effective in generating

purchase intention than institutional CSR (Öberseder *et al.*, 2011; Pirsch *et al.*, 2007). Since institutional CSR programs are said to have a more positive effect on attitudes, we expect that it would also lead to more trust in the company, while promotional CSR programs are designed for short-term sale purposes; thus, we expect them to have a stronger positive effect on purchase intention. Thus, the question is ‘To what extent do the two types of CSR programs differentially affect the various components of trust and purchase intention?’.

Interaction Effects Between Response Strategy, Crisis Harm Type, and CSR Programs

Since the independent variables used in this study – crisis response strategy, CSR program and crisis harm type – have not been previously studied together, investigating how they interact to influence trust and purchase intention is a worthwhile research focus. For instance, as a positive pre-crisis reputation might act as a buffer during crises times (Coombs, 2006; Kim and Lee, 2015), a diminishing response might be sufficient for organisations with an institutional CSR compared to organisations with a promotional CSR, since organisations with an institutional CSR program can fall back to their pre-crisis positive actions. On the contrary, companies employing a promotional CSR campaign might need to go an extra mile to repair the damage a crisis caused, which might eventually result in serious financial losses. Thus, those companies might be better off employing a rebuilding strategy.

Furthermore, Dutta and Pullig (2011) report that a company confronted with a product-harm crisis would be better off using a corrective action which implies that a brand accepts responsibility and promises remedial and possibly preventive actions. However, for a moral-harm crisis, both corrective actions and strategies to reduce a

crisis’ offensiveness by de-emphasising consequent damages are effective. This prompts the question on whether the impact of a specific crisis response on customers’ trust and on their behavioural intention would also depend on crisis type.

Furthermore, a moral-harm crisis might be more severe for organisations that claim to engage heavily in goodwill based on their institutional CSR programs than a product-harm crisis as a moral-harm crisis strongly contradicts consumers’ expectations of the company. Thus, such an ethical wrongdoing could destroy a company’s reputation, which is based on its positive moral image. Thus, the question is ‘To what extent do the independent variables used in this study – crisis response strategy, CSR program, and crisis harm type – interact with one another when influencing the various components of trust and customers’ purchase intention?’.

METHOD

Design and Material

To address the research questions proposed for this study, a 2 (institutional versus promotional CSR program) × 2 (diminish versus rebuild response strategy) × 2 (product- versus moral-harm crisis) between-subject design was implemented online. The system used for this online study enabled the researchers to randomly assign participants to one of the eight scenarios. A fictitious shampoo brand (HydroStar) was employed in the stimulus material. The purpose of using a fictitious shampoo brand was to rule out any prior reputational effects and to have a product everyone is using on a regular basis. The stimulus material was presented to the respondents as an article about a press conference of HydroStar on a Dutch news website. While the layout and length of the article were the same, content differences for the eight scenarios depended on the levels of the manipulations.

Crisis type was manipulated with two scenarios. The product-harm crisis was due to the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority's discovery of a significant quantity of DEA (diethanolamine) carcinogens in the shampoos of HydroStar. The crisis response manipulation was incorporated in the scenarios through a rebuilding strategy from the CEO, in which he apologised and announced a product recall, in contrast to a diminishing strategy in which he claimed that other shampoos had the same ingredients and that the quantity of DEA was not high enough to be harmful.

The moral-harm crisis was manipulated by stating that Radar, a Dutch documentary program, exposed the inhuman conditions experienced by HydroStar employees in Indonesia. For the rebuilding scenario, the CEO apologised and promised to change the working conditions in Indonesia. For the diminishing scenario, the CEO downplayed the crisis by stating that HydroStar provided employment opportunities according to the standard working conditions in Indonesia.

The corporate social responsibility manipulation was included in the scenarios through a description of HydroStar, in general, at the end of the article. The institutional CSR manipulation was described as long on-going activities, concerning environmentally conscious product packaging and supporting different aid agencies and small entrepreneurial project in their production countries in Asia. The promotional CSR manipulation described an annual marketing campaign, in which HydroStar donated a percentage of the profits from a specific product.

A pretest was performed to check whether the independent variables were manipulated correctly, the scenarios were understandable, realistic and suitable, and the formulations in the questionnaire were clear. Results of the manipulation check in the pre-test and in the main study indicated that the manipulations were successful.

Participants

A total of 304 Dutch participants completed the survey, of which 190 were women (62 per cent). Research participants were recruited through a snowball sampling technique. The average age of the participants is 27.95 (SD = 11.35) with a minimum age of 18 and a maximum age of 70. The frequency of shampoo usage in the sample is, on average, 4.5 times per week.

Measurements

The dependent variables of interest were measured using previously validated scales. Trust was measured with three dimensions, namely, ability (five items, $\alpha = .79$), benevolence (four items, $\alpha = .80$), and integrity (five items, $\alpha = .75$), based on the scale by Mayer and Davis (1999). Purchase intention ($\alpha = .74$) was measured with two items based on Yoo and Lee (2009), $\alpha = .74$.

For the manipulation checks of the independent variables, self-developed items were used. Additionally, the authors measured anger, sympathy, and involvement with the scenario as control variables. Anger ($\alpha = .81$) was measured with 4 items by Lee (2004), whereas sympathy ($\alpha = .85$) was measured with four items by McDonald *et al.* (2010). 'Involvement with the issue' was measured with one item by asking how affected respondents were by the issue described in the article. All items were measured using a five-point Likert agreement scale with 1 representing 'strongly disagree' and 5 'strongly agree'.

RESULTS

One-way analyses of variance were performed to address the research questions. Table 1 and Figure 2 give an overview of the effects found in this study.

Response strategy The response an organisation gives after a crisis occurred leads to significant main effects on benevolence-

Table 1: ANOVA Results for the Main and Interaction Effects of Response Type, Crisis Type, and CSR Program

	Response strategy (RS) <i>F (p)</i>	Crisis type (CT) <i>F (p)</i>	CSR program (CSR) <i>F (p)</i>	RS × CT <i>F (p)</i>	RS × CSR <i>F (p)</i>	CT × CSR <i>F (p)</i>	RS × CT × CSR <i>F (p)</i>
Ability-based trust	1.59 (.21)	6.75 (.01)	11.69 (.00)	.81 (.37)	.04 (.85)	.92 (.34)	.03 (.87)
Benevolence-based trust	11.61 (.00)	.42 (.52)	.34 (.56)	13.34 (.00)	2.46 (.12)	2.17 (.14)	.65 (.42)
Integrity-based trust	20.59 (.00)	23.47 (.00)	4.76 (.03)	3.19 (.08)	.21 (.65)	1.42 (.24)	.79 (.38)
Purchase intention	3.00 (.08)	25.73 (.00)	7.20 (.01)	.07 (.79)	.17 (.68)	.89 (.35)	1.13 (.29)

In bold are the significant effects.

based trust ($F(1, 296) = 11.61, p = .00$) and integrity-based trust ($F(1, 296) = 20.59, p = .00$). Looking at the mean values, it is apparent that the rebuild strategy results in a relatively higher benevolence-based trust (rebuild: $M = 2.91, SD = .72$; diminish: $M = 2.61, SD = .76$) and integrity-based trust (rebuild: $M = 2.77, SD = .62$; diminish: $M = 2.47, SD = .61$) in the company than the diminish strategy. No main effects for response strategy were found on ability-based trust ($F(1, 296) = 1.59, p = .21$) and purchase intention ($F(1, 296) = 3.00, p = .08$).

Crisis type The results show a significant main effect of crisis type on ability-based trust ($F(1, 296) = 6.75, p = .01$), integrity-based trust ($F(1, 296) = 23.47, p = .00$), and purchase intention ($F(1, 296) = 25.73, p = .00$). The mean values in Table 2 show that while a product-harm crisis results in relatively low levels of ability-based trust (product-harm: $M = 2.91, SD = .73$; moral-harm: $M = 3.11, SD = .62$) and purchase intention (product-harm: $M = 1.99, SD = .75$; moral-harm: $M = 2.41, SD = .70$), a moral-harm crisis could be damaging for integrity-based trust (product-harm: $M = 2.78, SD = .60$; moral-harm: $M = 2.45, SD = .63$). No main effect of crisis type was found on perceived benevolence ($F(1, 296) = .42, p = .52$).

CSR program The employment of an institutional instead of a promotional CSR program leads to significant main effects on ability-based trust ($F(1, 296) = 11.69, p = .00$), integrity-based trust ($F(1, 296) = 4.76, p = .03$), and purchase intention ($F(1, 296) = 7.20, p = .01$). The mean values show that an institutional CSR program results in somewhat higher levels of ability-based trust (institutional: $M = 3.14, SD = .62$; promotional: $M = 2.88, SD = .72$), integrity-based trust (institutional: $M = 2.70, SD = .60$; promotional: $M = 2.55, SD = .66$), and purchase intention (institutional: $M = 2.31, SD = .73$; promotional: $M = 2.08, SD = .77$) than a promotional CSR

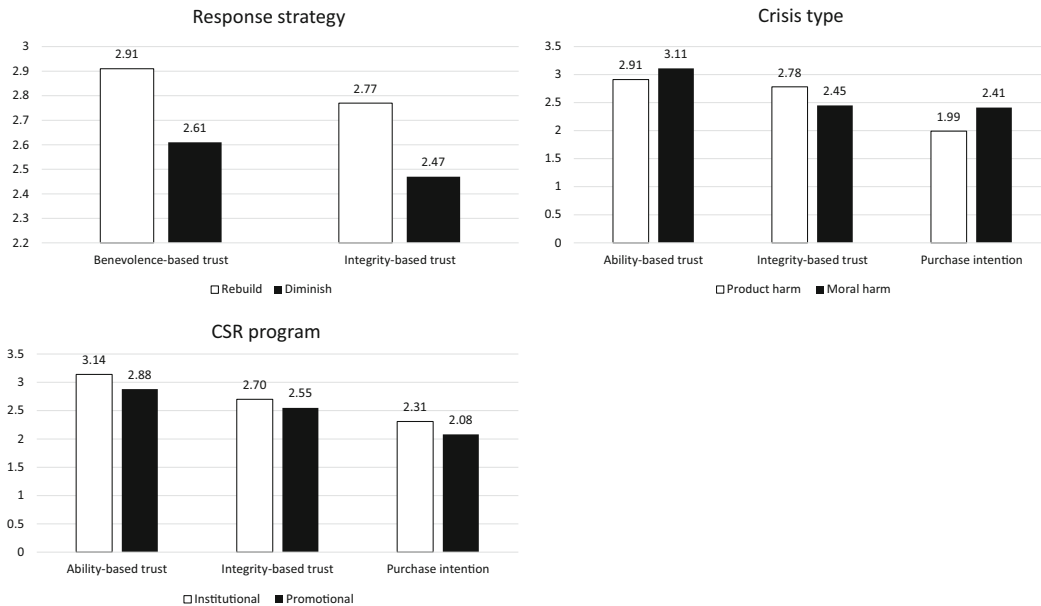


Figure 2: Results of the main effects

program. Analysis further shows that a CSR program has no main effect on benevolence-based trust ($F(1, 296) = .34, p = .56$).

Interaction Our findings show a significant interaction effect between crisis type and response strategy on benevolence-based trust ($F(1, 296) = 13.34, p = .00$; see Figure 3). Whereas the response strategy employed during a moral-harm crisis does not lead to any difference in benevolence-based trust (rebuild strategy: $M = 2.80, SD = 0.75$; diminish strategy: $M = 2.79; SD = .66$), a rebuild strategy ($M = 3.03, SD = 0.76$) results in a somewhat higher level of benevolence-based trust during a product-related crisis than a diminish strategy when employed during a similar crisis type ($M = 2.44, SD = 0.73$).

Additionally, the two emotions, anger and sympathy, as well as the respondent's involvement with the described issue in the scenario were included in the analyses as dependent variables and covariates. None of the three variables showed significance nor did they lead to a change in the F- or p-values.

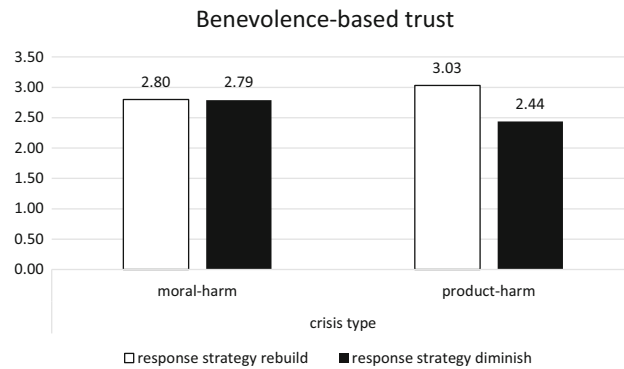
DISCUSSION

Company crises can impair an organisation's reputational and financial assets. An essential consumer outcome that mainly suffers from negative publicity is trust in the company. As Fennis and Stroebe (2014) state, trust is a variable that is easily destroyed and painfully and slowly restored.

Media tend to emphasise crises, especially if their consequences are deemed newsworthy. Therefore, companies must react properly and promptly to any crisis situation (Vanhamme and Grobbsen, 2009). Previous studies suggest that resorting to a rebuild strategy during a preventable crisis is more effective than using a diminish strategy (Claeys *et al.*, 2010; Coombs and Holladay, 2002). Interestingly, our research shows that a rebuild strategy only has a more positive effect on the two affect-based trust dimensions (benevolence and integrity), while cognition-based trust (ability) and conative outcome (purchase intention) do not seem to be affected by the response strategy employed (for a distinction between affect-

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Values for the Main Effects

	<i>Response strategy</i>		<i>Crisis type</i>		<i>CSR program</i>	
	<i>Rebuild</i> Mean (SD)	<i>Diminish</i> Mean (SD)	<i>Product harm</i> Mean (SD)	<i>Moral harm</i> Mean (SD)	<i>Institutional</i> Mean (SD)	<i>Promotional</i> Mean (SD)
Ability-based trust	2.96 (.69)	3.05 (.68)	2.91 (.73)	3.11 (.62)	3.14 (.62)	2.88 (.72)
Benevolence-based trust	2.91 (.72)	2.61 (.76)	2.74 (.80)	2.79 (.70)	2.79 (.75)	2.74 (.76)
Integrity-based trust	2.77 (.62)	2.47 (.61)	2.78 (.60)	2.45 (.63)	2.70 (.60)	2.55 (.66)
Purchase intention	2.26 (.75)	2.11 (.76)	1.99 (.75)	2.41 (.70)	2.31 (.73)	2.08 (.77)


Figure 3: Results of the interaction effect

based and cognition-based trust, consult McAllister, 1995). A similar conclusion is drawn by Hegner *et al.* (2014) who looked at the effects of response strategies on the perceived brand equity, which can also be classified as a more cognition-based factor.

Concerning the crisis type, Pullig *et al.* (2006) differentiate a crisis into two, namely, product-related and value-related. Our results suggest that the two types of crises have differential effects on the components of trust and purchase intention. While a product-harm crisis leads to low levels of ability-based trust and purchase intention, a moral-harm crisis can be highly damaging for integrity-based trust. These findings are in line with Dutta and Pullig's (2011) claim that a product-harm crisis negatively impacts expected benefits related to product performance, whereas a moral-harm crisis negatively impacts symbolic product attributes. Again, a distinction between affect-based trust, in this case the perceived integrity

of an organisation, and the cognition-based aspect of ability and purchase intention seems to apply. A moral-harm crisis can negatively affect the affective component of customers' trust in a company, while a product-harm crisis can be harmful for the cognitive component of their trust.

Although CSR has emerged in recent years as both an important academic construct and a pressing corporate agenda, not much research into the various consequences of CSR actions in the context of crisis communication has been done. Pirsch *et al.* (2007) suggest that institutional CSR programs are more effective in increasing customer loyalty, enhancing attitude towards the company, and decreasing consumer scepticism, while promotional programs tend to be more effective in generating purchase intention. This assumption is not confirmed in our research. Our study shows that an institutional CSR program is advantageous for

attitudinal and intentional outcome variables. This might be due to the different contextual settings of the two studies. While Pirsch *et al's* results are based on a stable organisational setting, we conducted our study during a crisis situation. Since a crisis may be conflicting with the idea of a company that 'does good to people', a fitting description for CSR, CSR communication messages are most likely to be interpreted differently during crisis situations. In the scenario used for the experiment, a company was confronted with a crisis and in the process of reporting about the incident, the company's promotional CSR program was described. One could not rule out the possibility that people might be highly sceptical of such a program and might even regard it as a marketing ploy.

The interaction effect between crisis type and crisis response strategy has interesting implications. Dutta and Pulling (2011) stated that corporate response strategies are important in affecting consumers' brand-related post-crisis judgments. However, they suggest that the relative effectiveness of response strategies depends on the nature of the crisis. This is also confirmed in our study. Whereas the response strategy employed during a moral-harm crisis does not lead to any difference in benevolence-based trust, a rebuild response strategy results in higher levels of benevolence-based trust than a diminish strategy during a product-related crisis. Thus, when a company is embroiled in a moral-harm crisis, it might be better for its managers to resort to the diminish strategy (as opposed to SCCT's recommendation of using a rebuild strategy), as it would lead to less financial loss. During a moral-harm crisis, customers might be inclined to positively respond to a crisis communication technique that aims at explaining the incident (Dutta and Pullig, 2011).

However, benevolence-based trust could be substantially influenced by the response strategy employed by a company embroiled

in a product-harm crisis. Since a product-harm crisis is close to the consumer and could harm the consumer directly, the crisis might be perceived more seriously, hence an apologetic response might be more appropriate. Dholakia (2001) states that crises concerning functional benefits lead to more consumer information seeking than crises concerning symbolic and psychological benefits.

Managerial Implications

In 1999, Coombs posited that organisations should be prepared as much as possible to adequately and appropriately respond to a crisis. Since the field of communication is a dynamic field, especially considering the 24-hour communication flow in the online and global environment caused by the pervasiveness of the Internet, Coombs' statement is even more relevant nowadays. Communication executives are struggling to craft crisis-related messages and to maintain control of the flow of messages within this dynamic landscape (Baka, 2016; Tucker and Melewar, 2005; Young and Flowers, 2012).

Since the crisis response strategy influences consumer outcomes, informed responses are recommended. Although the direct behavioural consumer reaction, purchase intention, is not influenced by the response, a rebuild response when faced with a preventable crisis positively influences customers' attitude towards the organisation. Nevertheless, costs and benefits should be considered prior to decision making. Additionally, our research confirms that investing in institutional CSR programs seem to pay off, especially as previous research confirms that properly implemented CSR can also protect a company's reputation in times of crises (Kim and Lee, 2015).

When confronted with a moral-harm crisis, a company's decision to use a diminish strategy is just as effective as using a rebuild strategy. However, during a product-harm

crisis, a rebuild strategy appears to be the most appropriate. This statement reflects the flexibility, level of context interpretation, and capability of cultivating an organisation's reputation through information stakeholders receive (Bell, 2010). Crisis communication managers should be aware of this flexibility instead of relying on prescribed crisis communication preparedness plans.

Limitations and Future Research

This is the first study that looks into the extent to which the impact of response strategies on trust dimensions and purchase intention depends on the type of crisis and the CSR program. Nonetheless, there are still several points that should be considered for future research. First, future research should investigate the long-term effects of crises on consumers' attitudes and behaviours or behavioural intentions. One can investigate whether a product-harm crisis is more harmful in the long run than a moral-harm crisis and determine the most appropriate crisis strategies for positive long-term effects.

Second, the current study only focused on preventable crisis situations. Future research investigating crisis aspects could study accidental or victim crisis situations, as well. As responsibility and blame attributions might play a large role in crisis situations, aspects buffering the crisis impact would be an interesting research theme. Furthermore, our study was based on a hypothetical scenario in order to avoid previous knowledge effects. Nevertheless, the generalisability of our results is limited and should be validated with real-life data.

Furthermore, future research should consider the impact of the framing of the crisis-related response. Previous studies have shown that emotions affect information processing and are key predictors of attitudes and intentions towards organisations (Kim and Cameron, 2011; Yoo and MacInnis,

2005). Thus, considering the interaction between response strategy and message framing might be another relevant research focus.

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