

Should the shady steal thunder? The effects of crisis communication timing, pre-crisis reputation valence, and crisis type on post-crisis organizational trust and purchase intention

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A scenario-based 2 (communication timing: stealing thunder vs. thunder) × 2 (pre-crisis reputation valence: positive vs. negative) × 2 (crisis type: product-harm vs. moral-harm) between-subjects experiment was implemented with 273 Dutch participants to address the question of whether or not the positive effects of stealing thunder depend on pre-crisis reputation valence and crisis type. Statistical analyses reveal that stealing thunder by an organization with a positive pre-crisis reputation results in higher post-crisis trust and purchase intention levels than stealing thunder by an organization with a negative pre-crisis reputation. Moreover, crisis type interacts with crisis communication timing in influencing post-crisis trust and purchase intention, as stealing thunder works better than thunder during a product-harm crisis.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Legal research demonstrates that the reputational damage of a crisis could be mitigated if the organization is the first to inform its stakeholders of a potential crisis that may have deleterious repercussions instead of another party (e.g., media) exposing it. A study by Williams, Bourgeois, and Croyle (1993) indicated that convicted suspects who revealed incriminating evidence first were punished less severely for an offence than if the prosecutor introduced the negative information. In an organizational context, scholars suggest that successful management of an organizational crisis also largely depends on how an organization acts after the crisis hits (Benoit, 1997; Brown & White, 2011; Coombs, 2007). A crisis-stricken organization has the option of either being the first to publicly reveal the existence of a problem that may affect stakeholders (in the literature, this approach is known as “stealing thunder” or proactive communication) or being at first reticent about the issue and only delivering a response when a third party discovers the problem (consequently referred to as “thunder”).

Stealing thunder might initially appear counterintuitive (Coombs, 2014), as from an expectations disconfirmation perspective, a company's revelation of self-incriminating information contradicts external stakeholders' expectations of a company doing whatever is necessary to safeguard its interests (Arpan & Pompper, 2003).

However, such revelation, Arpan and Pompper add, could also contribute to perceptions of company credibility, probably as the act could be seen as an indication of that company's willingness to put relevant parties' interests over its own. In an era when almost everyone is networked with one another due to the pervasiveness of social media (Palen, Vieweg, Liu, & Hughes, 2009), crisis-related information can rapidly spread, even before traditional media outlets could publicize them, leaving crisis-stricken organizations with no choice but to confront a crisis “event” head on.

An organization's failure to handle a crisis could have catastrophic consequences for its legitimacy (Booth, 2000). Besides, an organization's ability to properly respond to a crisis event is what sets that organization from its competitors (Vassilikopoulou, Lepetos, Siomkos, & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009). The question of how and when should an organization communicate crisis-related information and crisis events to its stakeholders, hence, deserves to be adequately addressed for that organization's survival.

The impact of communication timing has received little research attention so far (Claeys, Cauberghe, & Leysen, 2013). Earlier studies into crisis communication timing, specifically stealing thunder (e.g., Arpan & Pompper, 2003; Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005), concentrated on its impact on customers' attitude and behaviour outside of a possible interaction with other variables. However, a few studies have investigated how the effect of crisis communication timing

could interact with variables such as pre-crisis communication (Fennis & Stroebe, 2014), information type in the communication (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012) and message framing (Claeys et al., 2013).

Since stealing thunder can be a double-edged sword, as it results both in positive evaluations of the organization that steals thunder (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005) and in people's suspicion of the motivation behind the act (Arpan & Pompper, 2003), Fennis and Stroebe (2014) looked into the potential of pre-crisis reputation to either magnify or diminish the impact of stealing thunder. The current study, however, extends the design of Fennis and Stroebe (2014) with the inclusion of crisis type, as organizations are bound to confront not only product-related crises but also crises involving violations of moral standards or social expectations. Nowadays, consumers are not only confronted with reports of unsafe and defective products proliferating in the market but also with possibly disturbing news accounts of leading brands having their goods produced in highly questionable conditions in developing countries.

Thus far, the effects of stealing thunder have been studied in the context of either product-harm crisis or a crisis of a non-moral nature only (e.g., Claeys, Cauberghe, & Pandelaere, 2016; Claeys et al., 2013; Fennis & Stroebe, 2014). Knowing that people respond differently to either a product- or moral-harm crisis (Hegner, Beldad, & Kraesgenberg, 2016), one might also expect that people's reaction to stealing thunder would depend on the crisis type, in such a way that stealing thunder might be more appropriate when the crisis could directly harm customers than when customers are not directly exposed to the possibly damaging effects of the crisis. As the interactions among crisis communication timing, pre-crisis reputation, and crisis type when influencing trust and behavioural intention are not yet fully understood, this study will test the assumption previously mentioned. The primary research question for this study is as follows:

To what extent do crisis communication timing, pre-crisis reputation, and crisis type have main and interaction effects on customers' post-crisis trust in and their intention to purchase from a crisis-stricken organization?

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 | Organizational crisis and crisis communication and their impact on trust and behavioural intention

Pearson and Clair (1998) define a crisis as "a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly" (p. 60). A crisis is a critical situation that can inflict serious damages to the organization. When an organization is embroiled in a crisis that can potentially harm its stakeholders, the public expects timely communication from the organization, considering communication's critical role in effectively managing a

crisis (Coombs, 2012b; Pearson & Clair, 1998; Spence, Lachlan, Omilion-Hodges, & Goddard, 2014).

Crisis communication is defined as "the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation" (Coombs, 2012b; p. 20). Scholars highlight the importance of timing in releasing relevant information during crises (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005). Timely communication is critical as various stakeholders demand immediate and thorough response from an organization embroiled in a crisis (Seeger, 2006). The potential of a crisis to impair stakeholders' trust and severe their interaction with a crisis-stricken company amplifies the need for that company to engage in crisis communication to repair customers' trust (Xie & Peng, 2009) and to either regulate stakeholder distrust or demonstrate company trustworthiness (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009).

2.2 | The impact of communication timing (stealing thunder vs. thunder)

The timing of crisis-related information disclosure is a tactic within an organization's control that could mitigate the negative effects of a crisis or an event that could morph into a crisis. Coombs (2015) describes timing as the moment when an organization decides to communicate about the crisis. Such communication could take place either before the problem becomes publicly known and turns into a crisis (stealing thunder or proactive communication) or after the problem has been known by the public (thunder or reactive communication). When employed in a crisis situation, a thunder approach or a reactive communication concentrates on the rhetoric of apology, while stealing thunder (proactive communication) is primarily concerned about relationship management (Wan & Pfau, 2004).

Stealing thunder, which is synonymous with the proactive communication approach (Kim, Hong, & Cameron, 2014), refers to the decision of an organization to be the first to admit the existence of a problem before it will be exposed by an external party (Arpan & Pompper, 2003; Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005). Stealing thunder (or the proactive crisis communication approach) when used during a crisis involving defective or unsafe products is strongly exemplified by a product recall (Seo, Jang, Miao, Almanza, & Behnke, 2013), especially when the recall is voluntary (not prompted by a regulatory agency; Siomkos & Shrivastava, 1993). Such voluntary recall demonstrates concerns for customers (Laufer & Coombs, 2006), whereas an involuntary product recall (enforced by a regulatory agency) is most likely to be perceived by customers as an initial attempt on the part of the company to hide something from them (Siomkos & Shrivastava, 1993). Throughout the paper, the concepts "stealing thunder" (for proactive communication) and "thunder" (for reactive communication) will be used.

If an organization opts not to disclose a "problem" that could impact its stakeholders, another party, such as the media, would most likely unveil it, eventually resulting in a crisis situation for the organization. In this scenario, then, the organization assumes the burden of responding to the crisis to mitigate its devastating consequences. According to Arpan and Pompper (2003), when an

organization chooses to only react to accusations from the media or key stakeholders, it loses some degree of control over how the crisis narrative is framed or the way it is represented in the media.

In an increasing number of studies into the impact of “stealing thunder” or proactive communication, it is revealed that organizations that stole thunder received higher credibility ratings (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005; Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012), were more likely to have their post-crisis reputation restored (Claeys et al., 2013), and were more trusted after a crisis (Fennis & Stroebe, 2014) than those that opted not to “steal.” Moreover, an organization’s decision to steal thunder also resulted in people paying less attention to the negative publicity from a third party when compared to an organization that did not disclose crisis-related information (Claeys et al., 2016).

That an organizational crisis, which is often a violation of societal expectations, can damage an organization’s legitimacy (e.g., trust, credibility; Coombs, 2006a) is an important point echoed in trust repair and crisis management literature. The link between crisis and trust is succinctly captured in Webb’s (1996) assertion that a “crisis is a uniquely flamed crucible for the creation and destruction of trust” (p. 289). The impact of a crisis on customers’ post-crisis trust, however, depends on how an organization communicates about the crisis to its stakeholders (Xie & Peng, 2009).

Trust, as defined by Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), is “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (p. 712). The complex nature of trust as a concept implies that its operationalization must take into account two critical elements, namely trusting beliefs (ability, benevolence, and integrity) and trusting intention (intended performance of a specific behaviour as a manifestation of trust; Hegner & Jevons, 2016; Kim et al., 2004). Mayer et al. (1995) refer to *ability* as the skills and competencies a trustee has to realize a promise, while *benevolence* is conceptualized as the belief in a trustee’s motivation to do good for the trustor. Additionally, they define *integrity* as the belief in the trustee’s adherence to a set of principles considered acceptable by the trustor.

An organization’s decision to steal thunder enhances its credibility (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005; Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012) and such credibility perception is bound to translate into customers’ trust in the organization (Seeger, 2006). In Fennis and Stroebe’s (2014) experimental study into the impact of stealing thunder on trust, they reported that a company’s decision to proactively communicate about a crisis—a move that counters its self-interest—could be viewed as a gesture reflecting that company’s honesty, which could eventually enhance a company’s trustworthiness and contribute to a positive customer evaluation of the company. In another study into the use of stealing thunder in an entirely different context (product selling), it is known that salespersons who used a non-conventional persuasion strategy (stealing thunder—explicitly indicating the motivation behind the persuasion tactic) are perceived more trustworthy and sincere than those who employ a conventional

persuasion approach (flattering the customer without any indication of the motive behind the persuasion; Guo & Main, 2012).

When used by organizations in crisis situations, it should be emphasized that the voluntary decision to release possibly self-incriminating information that might be relevant for its stakeholders’ well-being could be indicative not only of the company’s honesty and sincerity (integrity) but also of its willingness to do good for its customers (benevolence) and its competence (ability) to adequately handle the error or flaw. Hence, the first set of hypotheses is proposed.

Hypothesis 1: Customers will have higher levels of (a) ability-based trust, (b) benevolence-based trust, (c) integrity-based trust in a company, and (d) intention to purchase from a company that steals thunder than a company that does not steal thunder.

2.3 | The impact of pre-crisis reputation valence

Reputation, defined as “the evaluation of a firm by its stakeholders in terms of their affect, esteem, and knowledge” (Deepphouse, 2000; p. 1093), is a valued intangible asset. While a single crisis can wreck a company’s reputation (Coombs, 2007), the valence of a company’s pre-crisis reputation can also determine the ramifications of a crisis for a company. A negative pre-crisis reputation will intensify attributions of crisis responsibility to a company (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002), while a positive pre-crisis reputation, which is comparable to a bank account with sufficient reputational asset (Coombs, 2006b), enables a company to “still have a stronger post-crisis reputation because it has more reputational capital to spend than an organization with an unfavourable or neutral prior reputation” (Coombs, 2007, p. 165).

A positive prior reputation, on the one hand, can create a halo effect that protects an organization from the destructive effects of a crisis, as this positive reputation might work as a shield that deflects the potential reputational damage from a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2006). A positive pre-crisis reputation, Coombs and Holladay added, could also prompt external stakeholders to give a crisis-stricken organization the benefit of the doubt and reduce their propensity to attribute crisis responsibility to that organization. On the other hand, a negative pre-crisis reputation can have a *velcro effect*, as an unfavourable pre-crisis reputation “acts like a *velcro* and attracts additional reputational damage” (Coombs & Holladay, 2006, p. 126).

How the halo effect of pre-crisis reputation works can be explained by Edwards and Smith’s (1996) disconfirmation model, which posits that when people are confronted with arguments that counter their existing view and beliefs, they will try to reduce the intensity and strength of those arguments. Reducing the strength of contradictory arguments is a response to the human need to evade cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

The halo effect of a positive pre-crisis reputation has also been confirmed in several studies. Turk, Jin, Stewart, Kim, and Hipple

(2012) found that post-crisis attitude (e.g., likeability, friendliness) towards a company was stronger among individuals exposed to a company with a favourable pre-crisis reputation than among people confronted with a disreputable company. Additionally, in another experimental study, Claeys and Cauberghe (2015) reported that when exposed to a company with a favourable pre-crisis reputation, people are less likely to attribute crisis responsibility to the company than when the company has a dubious pre-crisis reputation. More importantly, the positive effects of a favourable corporate reputation on trust (e.g., Doney & Cannon, 1997; Keh & Xie, 2009) and purchase intention (e.g., Gatti, Caruana, & Snehotka, 2012) have been established in several studies. From these points, the second set of hypotheses is advanced.

Hypothesis 2: Customers will have higher levels of (a) ability-based trust, (b) benevolence-based trust, (c) integrity-based trust in a company, and (d) intention to purchase from a company with a positive pre-crisis reputation than a company with a negative pre-crisis reputation.

2.4 | The impact of crisis type

In crisis management literature, two types of crisis have been identified, namely product-harm crisis and moral-harm crisis. On the one hand, a product-harm crisis, also known as performance-related crisis (Dutta & Pullig, 2011), refers to a situation when products have been found to be defective, unsafe, or dangerous to be used (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000; Dutta & Pullig, 2011). Klein and Dawar (2004) argued that “the increasing complexity of products, more demanding customers, and more vigilant media are making product-harm crises an even more visible occurrence” (p. 205). Hence, when confronted with a product-harm crisis, companies are expected to implement actions that would mitigate the crisis’ deleterious repercussions, as a product-harm crisis can shatter a company’s positive image, just as it can have long-term performance implications for that company (Van Heerde, Helsen, & Dekimpe, 2007).

On the other hand, a moral crisis or a value-related crisis “does not directly involve the product, but involves social or ethical issues surrounding the values espoused by the brand” (Dutta & Pullig, 2011; p. 1282). This type of crisis or negative publicity does not involve certain features affecting the functional use of a product but instead is associated with social or ethical issues (e.g., sexual harassment, racial discrimination against employees), which have a bearing on a company’s or a brand’s ability to deliver the symbolic benefits of using a product from a crisis-stricken company/brand (Pullig, Netemeyer, & Biswas, 2006).

However, we argue that although both types of crisis would be deleterious for a company’s reputation and legitimacy, people would react differently when confronted with either one of the two crisis types. Certainly, incidences of human exploitation (e.g., child labour) or environmental harm (pollution) in the production phase could

prompt customers to boycott a company (Cisse-Depardon & N’Goala, 2009). However, as a product-harm crisis could directly harm customers when compared to a moral-harm crisis, one would expect that negative emotions and attitudes would be more intense and positive behavioural intentions would be lower among customers exposed to a product-harm crisis than to a moral-harm crisis. The premise that primary safety concerns could outweigh concerns for others’ welfare is founded on the thesis that individual safety is a fundamental need and much more basic than the need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1943), which is partly expressed in the need to act morally (Reiss & Haverkamp, 2005).

The two types of crisis, however, could have distinct effects on the dimensions of trust. A moral-harm crisis primarily involves a character-based trust transgression (lack of integrity and benevolence) and a product-harm crisis can be a transgression of both the competence and the character dimensions of trust. Support for this assertion can be found in a recently published study in which it is reported that a product-harm crisis significantly lowers ability-based trust, while a moral-harm crisis is detrimental to integrity-based trust (Hegner et al., 2016). That same study also reveals that purchase intention tends to be lower when people are exposed to a product-harm crisis than to a moral-harm crisis. Based on these points, the third and fourth sets of hypotheses are proposed.

Hypothesis 3: Customers will have lower levels of (a) ability-based trust in and (b) intention to purchase from a company confronted with a product-harm crisis than a company confronted with a moral-harm crisis.

Hypothesis 4: Customers will have lower levels of (a) benevolence-based trust and (b) integrity-based trust in a company confronted with a moral-harm crisis than a company confronted with a product-harm crisis.

2.5 | Communication timing and pre-crisis reputation valence

Despite findings that “stealing thunder” is beneficial for any organization, as it enhances organizational credibility (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005; Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012), contributes to customers’ trust in the organization (Fennis & Stroebe, 2014), and prompts customers to have a positive view of an organization’s crisis communication actions (Spence et al., 2014), the use of the strategy can also backfire as its use could also be viewed as a public relations trick and a manipulation technique (Arpan & Pompper, 2003). Williams et al. (1993) argue that stealing thunder can be ineffective for two reasons, namely that it (a) creates a negative schema (introducing a negative information early in the event might increase its salience due to primacy effect) and (b) increases the availability of negative information (a negative information revealed by the organization might be repeated by a potential competitor and such repetition might increase people’s processing of the negative information).

The fact that an organization's decision to steal thunder can also be viewed with suspicion leads to the question of whether or not pre-crisis reputation plays a role in either enhancing or reducing the positive impact of such communication strategy. Except for Fennis and Stroebe's (2014) research into the interaction between stealing thunder and pre-crisis reputation, not much is known about the extent to which the impact of stealing thunder on certain outcomes would depend on the valence of a company's pre-crisis reputation. Fennis and Stroebe (2014) found that proactive disclosure of problematic information works well when performed by a company with a negative pre-crisis reputation instead of a company with a positive pre-crisis reputation. The researchers attributed this finding to the trust-enhancing function of stealing thunder, which would be more relevant for a company with a questionable pre-crisis reputation.

However, it is highly likely that customers would be sceptical of the motives behind a company's use of the stealing thunder strategy, especially if the company has an unfavourable pre-crisis reputation. In fact, a study by Siomkos and Malliaris (1992) indicated that people tend to be more positive about the crisis communication of a company with a positive pre-crisis reputation than the communication from a company with a negative pre-crisis reputation. Furthermore, a negative pre-crisis reputation could amplify the adverse consequences of the crisis and might prompt external stakeholders to discount the company's narrative about the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2001).

The view that stealing thunder by a company could just be a clear public relations stunt (Arpan & Pompper, 2003) might be more salient in a situation when a company has a dubious pre-crisis reputation than in a situation when a company's reputation before the crisis is solidly positive. Companies with a bad reputation are highly predisposed to engage in socially acceptable activities (e.g., corporate social responsibility) to substantially alter their image (Yoon, Giihrhan-Canli, & Schwarz, 2006). The use of stealing thunder by a badly reputed organization, hence, might just be deemed as an image enhancement tool instead of an authentic expression of concern for customers' well-being. And customers, according to Forehand and Grier (2003), tend to distrust companies that pursue supposedly ethical actions out of ulterior motives (e.g., increased profit, image management) instead of pure public-serving motives. These points prompted the fifth set of research hypotheses.

Hypothesis 5: Levels of trust in terms of (a) ability, (b) benevolence, and (c) integrity and (d) purchase intention are higher when stealing thunder is used by a company with a positive pre-crisis reputation than by a company with a negative pre-crisis reputation.

2.6 | Communication timing and crisis type

As mentioned earlier, previous research into stealing thunder employed either a symbolic crisis (e.g., fraud; Claeys & Cauberghe,

2012) or a product crisis (e.g., toxic ingredient in a soft drink; Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005) only as a context for an experimental study. Thus far, nothing is still known about the extent to which the impact of communication timing (specifically stealing thunder) on consumers' attitude and behavioural intention would depend on crisis type.

Given the multiplicity of response strategies a company can employ when a crisis strikes (Coombs, 2007; Stephens, Malone, & Bailey, 2005), taking the crisis type into account when deciding how to respond has been reported to result in positive outcomes. For instance, when faced with a performance-related crisis (or product-harm crisis), a company would be better off using a corrective action. However, for a value-related crisis, both reduction-of-offensiveness and corrective actions worked well (Dutta & Pullig, 2011). This prompts the question of whether the impact of communication timing on customers' trust in the company and on their behavioural intention would also depend on crisis type.

As a product-harm crisis involves serious problems that could result in severe physical injuries and, even, death (Laufer, Gillespie, McBride, & Gonzales, 2005) when compared to a moral-harm or value-related crisis, external stakeholders would most likely expect a thorough response from a company embroiled in a product-harm crisis (compared to a moral-harm crisis; Dutta & Pullig, 2011). Anchored on this argumentation is the premise that stealing thunder would be more effective in influencing customers' trust and purchase intention when employed during a product-harm crisis than a moral-harm crisis. The last research hypothesis, hence, is as follows:

Hypothesis 6: Levels of trust in terms of (a) ability, (b) benevolence, and (c) integrity and (d) purchase intention are higher when stealing thunder is used during a product-harm crisis instead of during a moral-harm crisis.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed relationship among the research variables.

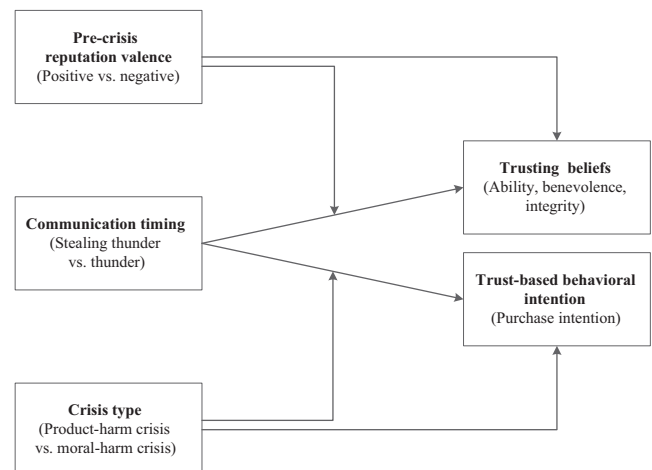


FIGURE 1 Research framework

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Design

To test the hypotheses proposed for this research, a 2 (crisis timing: stealing thunder vs. thunder) \times 2 (crisis type: product-harm vs. moral-harm) \times 2 (pre-crisis reputation: positive vs. negative) was implemented. The crisis used as a context for the study is intentional or preventable, as this crisis type is most likely to generate negative responses from stakeholders (Hegner, Beldad, & Kamphuis op Heghuis, 2014).

3.2 | Materials and procedure

The crisis scenarios used for the between-subject experimental design involved two expectation-violating actions pursued by a fictional company "LeParis." A fictional company was used to eliminate the possible effects of pre-crisis reputation by minimizing the effect of subject bias (Siomkos, 1999). The elements manipulated for the experimental study (communication timing, pre-crisis reputation, and crisis type) were presented in a newspaper article supposedly published in one of the leading Dutch newspapers.

To manipulate the "stealing thunder" condition, it was described in the newspaper article that the fictional company held a press conference to publicly announce the existence of a "crisis." For the "thunder" condition, the newspaper article reported that the fictional company released an official statement in response to an exposé by a Dutch consumers' association.

Pre-crisis reputation also had a two-level manipulation, in which for the positive pre-crisis reputation, the newspaper article emphasized that LeParis had been actively pursuing corporate reputation responsibility (CSR) activities and that it was a financially viable company prior to the crisis. For the negative pre-crisis reputation condition, it was highlighted that LeParis had been receiving negative publicity due to complaints from disgruntled customers and that it was at the brink of bankruptcy prior to the crisis.

The product-harm crisis involved clothing items with high levels of toxic chemicals, while the moral-harm crisis primarily involved the use of children in the production of clothing items.

Participation was completely confidential and respondents were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions. They were asked to read the hypothetical crisis message carefully and were requested to answer questions pertaining to that message. First, they answered three manipulation check questions. For crisis timing, the question "Who announced the crisis situation?" was asked, because this manipulation refers to stealing thunder which means the defendant organization was the first to reveal negative information about oneself before a third party does. For crisis type, the question was "In what kind of crisis was LeParis involved?", while for pre-crisis reputation, "How is LeParis described in the news before the crisis situation?" was asked. After having read the assigned newspaper article, respondents were then instructed to indicate their responses to the items measuring the dependent

variables (trusting beliefs, purchase intention) and to provide their demographic information.

3.3 | Manipulation check

The three manipulations were checked for the main study and were deemed successful after the removal of participants who provided wrong answers to the manipulation check questions. First, the respondents had to choose between LeParis and the Consumers' Association as the source of crisis-related information. Twenty-four respondents (7.5%) failed to correctly identify the party that first announced the crisis situation in the condition they were assigned to.

To check the crisis type manipulation, respondents were asked to identify the type of crisis (chemicals in clothing vs. clothes produced using child labour) described in the scenario they have read. Three respondents (0.9%) erroneously answered the question.

Finally, for the pre-crisis reputation valence, respondents had to indicate whether the company in the scenario had a positive or a negative pre-crisis reputation based on how the company was described. Twenty-three respondents (7.2%) failed to correctly identify the pre-crisis reputation valence of the company mentioned in their respective scenarios. In total, data from 48 respondents who incorrectly answered one or all manipulation check questions were excluded from analysis, and this ensured that the three manipulations were correctly identified by respondents who were exposed to them.

3.4 | Participants

A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants for the experiment. With this approach, 321 Dutch citizens were initially approached to read a specific scenario and to complete the online questionnaire. After the removal of 48 respondents who provided incorrect answers to the manipulation check questions, data from 273 respondents were subjected to statistical analyses. Of the 273 respondents, 57.9% were women. Respondents' age ranged between 18 and 75 with a mean age of 35.90 ($SD = 15.07$). Presented in Table 1 is the complete demographic information for the experimental participants.

TABLE 1 Complete respondents' demographic information

Demographics		N	%	M	SD
Gender	Male	115	42.1		
	Female	158	57.9		
Education	Low	53	19.4		
	Medium	116	42.5		
	High	104	38.1		
Age				35.90	15.07
Total		273	100		

3.5 | Dependent measures

The dependent variables (ability-, benevolence-, integrity-based trust, and purchase intention) were measured after the participants have read a specific scenario. Participants had to respond to statements selected to measure the dependent variables using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree." The 15-item scale of Mayer et al. (1995) was adopted to measure trust as a three-dimensional construct.

"Ability-based trust" (Cronbach's alpha = .73) was measured with five items, which included the statement "This organization is very capable of performing its job." "Benevolence-based trust" (Cronbach's alpha = .72) was also measured with five items, which included the statement "This organization is very concerned about my welfare." Five items were originally used to measure "integrity-based trust" (Cronbach's alpha = .70). An example of an item measuring the construct is "I believe sound principles guided the company's behaviours." The fourth dependent variable, purchase intention, was measured with three items by Stockmyer (1996). "The likelihood of me buying this product again is high" is an example of an item used to measure the construct (Cronbach's alpha = .84).

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Preliminary test

The results of the analyses are presented according to the approach proposed by Teas and Agarwal (2000). Before examining specific hypothesized relationships, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test the hypothesized linkages between the set of independent and dependent variables. The results of the analyses, which are reported in Table 2, indicate that each manipulation (independent variable) is significantly related to the different dependent variables. These results indicate that testing specific hypothesized linkages specified in Figure 1 is justified. These specific hypothesized linkages are presented in Table 2 based on the ANOVA results.

4.2 | Hypotheses pertaining to the main effects of communication timing, pre-crisis reputation and crisis type

4.2.1 | Crisis communication timing

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) results indicate that levels of ability-based trust ($M_{\text{stealing thunder}} = 2.97$, $SD = .67$ vs. $M_{\text{thunder}} = 2.73$, $SD = .66$; $F(1,271) = 8.95$, $p < .01$), benevolence-based trust ($M_{\text{stealing thunder}} = 2.95$, $SD = .64$ vs. $M_{\text{thunder}} = 2.46$, $SD = .65$; $F(1,271) = 39.21$, $p < .001$), and integrity-based trust ($M_{\text{stealing thunder}} = 2.94$, $SD = .64$ vs. $M_{\text{thunder}} = 2.34$, $SD = .56$; $F(1,271) = 66.90$, $p < .001$) are significantly higher among respondents confronted with a company that stole thunder than a company that did not steal thunder.

Furthermore, scores for purchase intention ($M_{\text{stealing thunder}} = 2.87$, $SD = .85$ vs. $M_{\text{thunder}} = 2.38$, $SD = .90$; $F(1,271) = 21.71$, $p < .001$) are also higher among respondents confronted with a company that stole thunder than those confronted with a company that did not steal thunder. These results signify that hypotheses 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d are supported.

4.2.2 | Pre-crisis reputation valence

ANOVA also reveals that participants have higher levels of ability-based trust ($M_{\text{positive}} = 3.06$, $SD = .63$ vs. $M_{\text{negative}} = 2.61$, $SD = .64$; $F(1,271) = 34.42$, $p < .001$), benevolence-based trust ($M_{\text{positive}} = 2.86$, $SD = .68$ vs. $M_{\text{negative}} = 2.52$, $SD = .67$; $F(1,271) = 17.10$, $p < .001$), and integrity-based trust ($M_{\text{positive}} = 2.81$, $SD = .72$ vs. $M_{\text{negative}} = 2.44$, $SD = .55$; $F(1,271) = 22.89$, $p < .001$) in a company with a positive pre-crisis reputation than individuals exposed to a company with a negative pre-crisis reputation.

Additionally, respondents tend to rate their intention to purchase from a company with a positive pre-crisis reputation higher than respondents assigned to a company with a negative pre-crisis reputation ($M_{\text{positive}} = 2.79$, $SD = .94$ vs. $M_{\text{negative}} = 2.43$, $SD = .93$; $F(1,271) = 11.36$, $p < .001$). Thus, hypotheses 2a, 2b, 2c, and 2d are supported.

TABLE 2 Results of MANOVA and ANOVA

	MANOVA			ANOVA			
	Wilks	df	F value	A F val.	B F val.	I F val.	PI F val.
Communication timing (T)	0.76	4, 262	20.99***	8.95**	39.21***	66.90***	21.71***
Pre-crisis reputation (PR)	0.84	4, 262	12.31***	34.42***	17.10***	22.89***	11.39***
Crisis type (CT)	0.92	4, 262	5.76***	1.95	0.05	4.37*	5.66*
C × PR	0.95	4, 262	3.23**	2.55	3.67	10.89***	6.56**
C × CT	0.93	4, 262	5.12***	4.56*	12.15***	0.81	9.92**
PR × CT	0.99	4, 262	0.44	0.04	0.46	0.70	0.04
C × PR × CT	0.97	4, 262	1.92	0.00	0.04	0.89	4.45*

Note: MANOVA—multivariate analysis of variance; ANOVA—analysis of variance.

A—Ability, B—Benevolence, I—Integrity, PI—Purchase Intention.

*Significant at .05. **Significant at .01. ***Significant at .001.

4.2.3 | Crisis type

ANOVA results further indicate that crisis type has main effects on two dependent variables, namely integrity-based trust and purchase intention. Specifically, participants have higher levels of integrity-based trust ($M_{\text{product}} = 2.71, SD = .67$ vs. $M_{\text{moral}} = 2.55, SD = .66$; $F(1,271) = 4.37, p < .05$) in a situation when the company was involved in a product-harm crisis than those assigned to a scenario in which the company was involved in a moral-harm crisis.

On the contrary, the score for purchase intention ($M_{\text{moral}} = 2.75, SD = .92$ vs. $M_{\text{product}} = 2.49, SD = .88$; $F(1,271) = 5.66, p < .05$) is significantly higher among those confronted with a moral-harm crisis than those exposed to a product-harm crisis. As crisis type has no main effects on ability-based trust ($M_{\text{moral}} = 2.90, SD = .66, M_{\text{product}} = 2.79, SD = .69$; $F(1,271) = 1.95, p = .16$) and benevolence-based trust ($M_{\text{moral}} = 2.71, SD = .63, M_{\text{product}} = 2.69, SD = .75$; $F(1,271) = 0.05, p = .83$), hypotheses 3a and 4a are not supported, while hypotheses 3b and 4b are supported. Presented on Table 3 are the mean and the standard deviation values for the different dependent variables in relation to the main effects of crisis timing, pre-crisis reputation valence, and crisis type.

4.3 | Hypotheses pertaining to the interaction effects of communication timing, pre-crisis reputation valence, and crisis type

4.3.1 | Crisis communication timing × pre-crisis reputation valence

ANOVA results show a significant interaction effect for crisis timing and pre-crisis reputation on integrity-based trust ($F(1,269) = 10.89, p < .001$) and purchase intention ($F(1,269) = 6.56, p < .01$) but not on ability-based trust ($F(1,269) = 2.55, p = .11$) and benevolence-based trust ($F(1,269) = 3.67, p = .06$).

Specifically, integrity-based trust score is higher when stealing thunder is used by a company with a positive pre-crisis reputation ($M_{\text{stealing thunder} \times \text{positive}} = 3.24, SD = .62$) instead of a company with a negative pre-crisis reputation ($M_{\text{stealing thunder} \times \text{negative}} = 2.63, SD = .49$). The score for purchase intention also appears to be higher when stealing thunder is used by a company with a positive pre-crisis reputation ($M_{\text{stealing thunder} \times \text{positive}} = 3.18, SD = .83$) instead of a

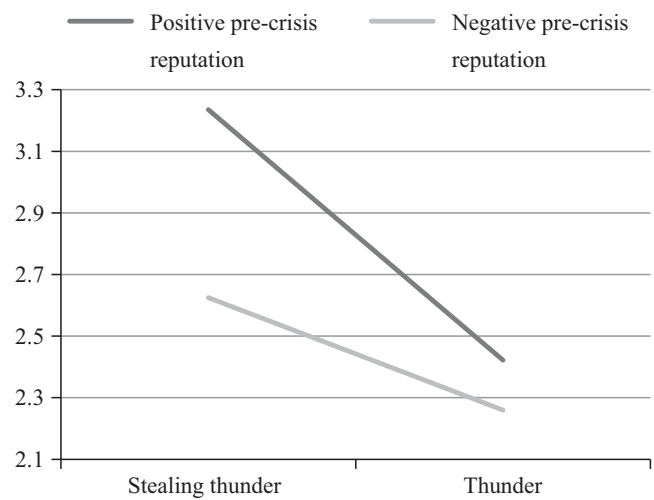


FIGURE 2 Interaction effect of crisis timing and pre-crisis reputation on “integrity-based trust”

company with a negative pre-crisis reputation ($M_{\text{stealing thunder} \times \text{negative}} = 2.54, SD = .74$). Figures 2 and 3 clearly show that the gap between positive and negative pre-crisis reputation widens when stealing thunder is used, while the role of pre-crisis reputation valence is irrelevant during a thunder condition. These results indicate that hypotheses 5c and 5d are supported, while hypotheses 5a and 5b are not supported.

4.3.2 | Crisis communication timing × crisis type

The results show a significant interaction effect for crisis timing and crisis type on ability-based trust ($F(1,269) = 4.56, p < .05$), benevolence-based trust ($F(1,269) = 12.15, p < .001$), and purchase intention ($F(1,269) = 9.92, p < .01$).

In particular, stealing thunder used in a product-harm crisis results in a slightly higher score for ability-based trust ($M_{\text{stealing thunder} \times \text{product}} = 2.99, SD = .69$) than when it is used during a moral-harm crisis ($M_{\text{stealing thunder} \times \text{moral}} = 2.94, SD = .65$). The values for ability-based trust also differ more when thunder is used during a moral-harm crisis ($M_{\text{thunder} \times \text{moral}} = 2.87, SD = .67$) than during a product-harm crisis ($M_{\text{thunder} \times \text{product}} = 2.59, SD = .63$).

The score for benevolence-based trust is also higher when stealing thunder is used during a product-harm crisis

TABLE 3 Mean and standard deviation values for the main effects

	Crisis timing		Pre-crisis reputation		Crisis type	
	Proactive	Reactive	Positive	Negative	Product-harm	Moral-harm
Ability	$M = 2.97$ $SD = 0.67$	$M = 2.73$ $SD = 0.66$	$M = 3.06$ $SD = 0.63$	$M = 2.61$ $SD = 0.64$	$M = 2.79$ $SD = 0.69$	$M = 2.90$ $SD = 0.66$
Benevolence	$M = 2.95$ $SD = 0.64$	$M = 2.46$ $SD = 0.65$	$M = 2.86$ $SD = 0.68$	$M = 2.52$ $SD = 0.67$	$M = 2.69$ $SD = 0.75$	$M = 2.71$ $SD = 0.63$
Integrity	$M = 2.94$ $SD = 0.64$	$M = 2.34$ $SD = 0.56$	$M = 2.81$ $SD = 0.72$	$M = 2.44$ $SD = 0.55$	$M = 2.71$ $SD = 0.67$	$M = 2.55$ $SD = 0.66$
Purchase intention	$M = 2.87$ $SD = 0.85$	$M = 2.38$ $SD = 0.90$	$M = 2.79$ $SD = 0.94$	$M = 2.43$ $SD = 0.93$	$M = 2.49$ $SD = 0.88$	$M = 2.75$ $SD = 0.92$

Note: M—Mean value, SD—Standard deviation.

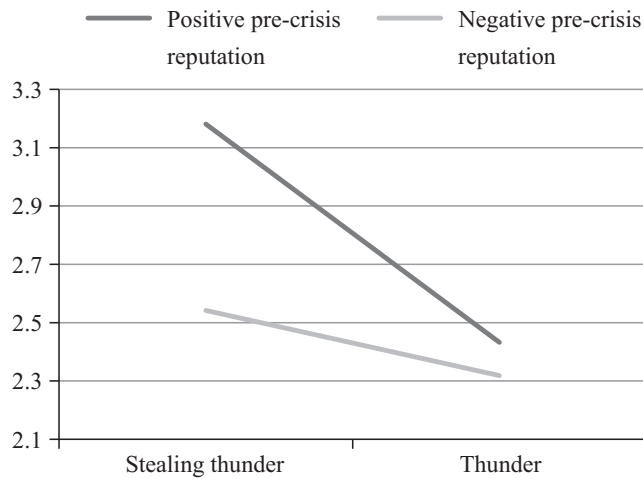


FIGURE 3 Interaction effect of crisis timing and pre-crisis reputation on “purchase intention”

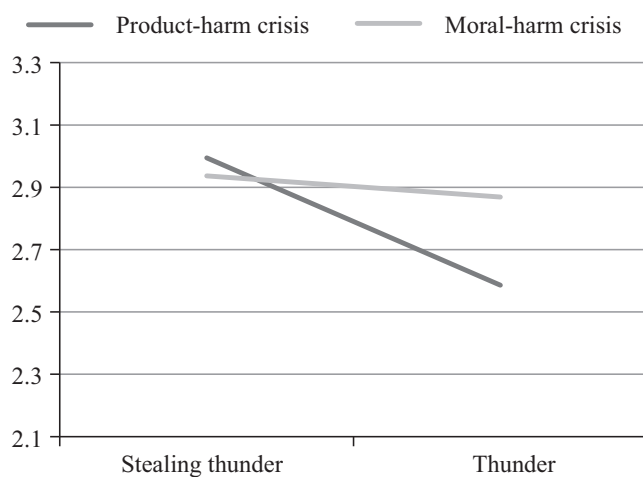


FIGURE 4 Interaction effect of crisis timing and crisis type on “ability-based trust”

($M_{\text{stealing thunder} \times \text{product}} = 3.07, SD = .65$) instead than during a moral-harm crisis ($M_{\text{stealing thunder} \times \text{moral}} = 2.82, SD = .61$). Figures 4 and 5 display the nature of the interaction effect between crisis communication timing and crisis type.

Furthermore, purchase intention is slightly higher when stealing thunder is used during a product-harm crisis ($M_{\text{stealing thunder} \times \text{product}} = 2.90, SD = .78$) than during a moral-harm crisis ($M_{\text{stealing thunder} \times \text{moral}} = 2.84, SD = .92$). However, the use of thunder during a product-harm crisis ($M_{\text{thunder} \times \text{product}} = 2.09, SD = .78$) results in a significantly lower score for purchase intention than during a moral-harm crisis ($M_{\text{thunder} \times \text{moral}} = 2.67, SD = .92$). Figure 6 illustrates these results.

4.3.3 | Crisis type \times pre-crisis reputation valence

Although we did not offer any hypothesis for the interaction effect of the two independent variables on the dependent variables, we still performed the necessary analysis to see whether such an

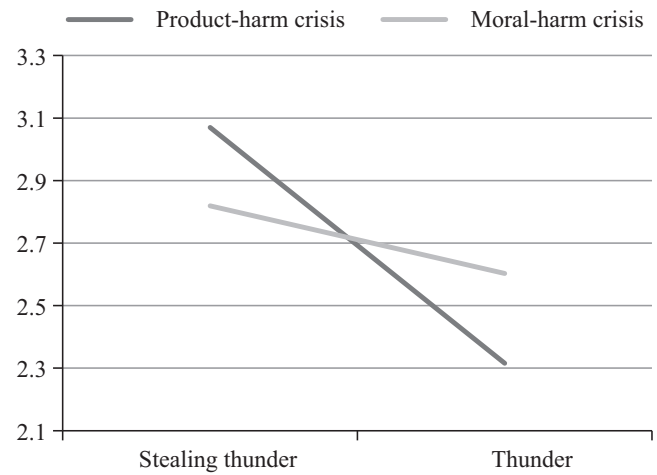


FIGURE 5 Interaction effect of crisis timing and crisis type on “benevolence-based trust”

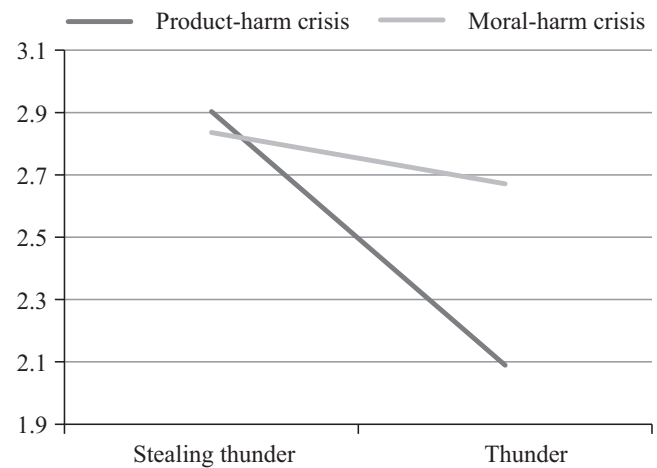


FIGURE 6 Interaction effect of crisis timing and crisis type on “purchase intention”

interaction effect exists. ANOVA results indicate that there is no significant interaction effect for crisis type and pre-crisis reputation valence on ability-based trust ($F(1,269) = 0.04, p = .85$), benevolence-based trust ($F(1,269) = 0.46, p = .50$), integrity-based trust ($F(1,269) = 0.70, p = .40$), and purchase intention ($F(1,269) = 0.04, p = .84$).

4.3.4 | Crisis communication timing \times pre-crisis reputation valence \times crisis type

ANOVA results further indicate that there is no significant interaction effect for crisis timing, pre-crisis reputation, and crisis type on the trust-based variables ability ($F(1,265) = 0.00, p = .99$), benevolence ($F(1,265) = 0.04, p = .84$), and integrity ($F(1,265) = 0.89, p = .36$).

Interestingly, the results support a three-way interaction effect for purchase intention ($F(1,265) = 4.45, p < .05$). Specifically, purchase intention is higher when during a moral-harm crisis a company

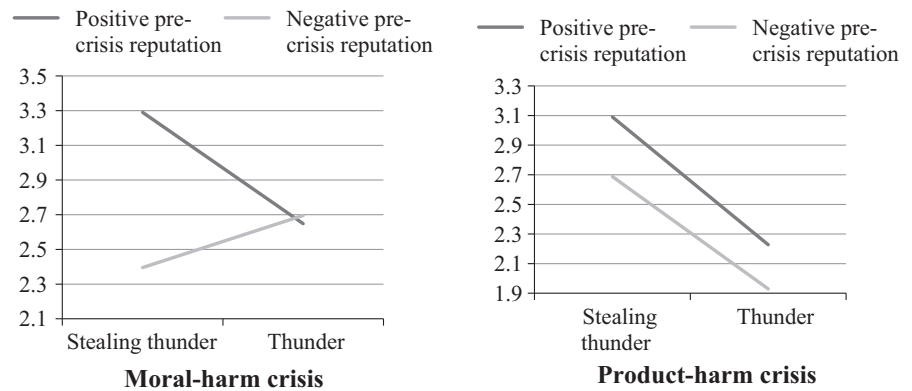


FIGURE 7 Interaction effect of crisis timing, pre-crisis reputation valence and crisis type on “purchase intention”

with a positive pre-crisis reputation uses stealing thunder ($M_{\text{stealing thunder} \times \text{positive}} = 3.29$, $SD = .85$) compared to a company with a negative pre-crisis reputation ($M_{\text{stealing thunder} \times \text{negative}} = 2.40$, $SD = .76$) that decides to steal thunder. This is reflected in Figure 7. However, during a product-harm crisis, crisis communication timing and pre-crisis reputation have no significant interaction effect on purchase intention.

5 | DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 | Discussion

When confronted with something that might result in a crisis, organizations have the option to either be the first to inform their stakeholders about the crisis or to stay taciturn hoping it will not be exposed. A handful of studies have indicated that stealing thunder is better for an organization than opting not to steal thunder. However, it remains to be seen whether or not the impact of stealing thunder on customers' trust and purchase intention depends on a company's pre-crisis reputation and on crisis type.

The current research showed that stealing thunder is an effective strategy in enhancing customers' view of the organization. Specifically, customers are more likely to trust a company and to engage in an exchange with it when it steals thunder instead of staying silent about the problem. This finding corresponds to what is known in previous studies (Arpan & Pompper, 2003; Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005; Fennis & Stroebe, 2014). A company that proactively relays crisis-related information is deemed credible as its action could indicate a high sense of responsibility (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005; Spence et al., 2014; Wigley, 2011) and is less likely to suffer from post-crisis reputational damage (Claeys et al., 2013).

A positive pre-crisis reputation results in a more favourable assessment of all dependent measures. As explained by Fombrun and van Riel (2003), a positive reputation decreases the damage that may stem from the crisis. Organizations with a favourable pre-crisis reputation suffer less reputational loss than organizations with an unfavourable pre-crisis reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2006;

Edwards & Smith, 1996), as a favourable pre-crisis reputation is a buffer against possible reputational loss during a crisis.

People confronted with a moral-harm crisis scored significantly higher on purchase intention than those exposed to a product-harm crisis. This finding could be explained by closely looking into the clear distinction in the proximity of the threats posed by the two crisis types on the human body (Coombs, 2012a). A product-harm crisis appeals to individual's cognitions involving an unsafe product, which resulted in a lower intention to purchase products. Carrigan and Attalla (2001) argued that personal reasons (e.g., safety) are more important than moral or ethical considerations of other people's welfare when deciding to purchase a product. In this study, a product-harm crisis results in a more severe outcome than a moral-harm crisis because the former places customers directly at risk.

Results of the current study, however, indicate that the effect of crisis type on trust and purchase intention is not a straightforward thing. Integrity-based trust in a company is significantly lower when the company is involved in a moral-harm crisis than when it experiences a product-harm crisis. This finding confirms results of a previous study that shows how integrity-based trust in a company could be substantially severed by a moral-harm than instead of a product-harm crisis (Hegner et al., 2016). As a moral-harm crisis is a potential assault on the character of the company, one can expect that such a crisis could also compromise customers' character-based trust in the company.

Additionally, a product-harm crisis negatively impacts research participants' purchase intention only and not the three trust dimensions. Again, support for this finding can be found in the study of Hegner et al. (2016). As previously noted, this type of crisis directly places customers at risk and this might suffice to form customers' impression of the unsafe nature of the product, which would expectably lower their inclination to purchase that product.

One notable finding from this study is that stealing thunder does not only have a positive effect on trust and behavioural intention but also that its effect depends on the valence of a company's pre-crisis reputation. Specifically, research participants' levels of purchase intention and integrity-based trust in a company that steals thunder when it has a positive pre-crisis communication are significantly higher than in a company that steals thunder but with a negative

pre-crisis reputation and in a company that does not steal thunder (regardless of the valence of that company's pre-crisis reputation).

These results, however, do not conform to what a previous study indicated that stealing thunder results in a positive perception of company trustworthiness and in a positive evaluation of the company, in general, when employed by a company with a poor reputation instead of a company with a good reputation (Fennis & Stroebe, 2014). Our research finding that stealing thunder works only when used by a company with a positive pre-crisis reputation implies that a negative pre-crisis reputation is a significant liability for companies that aim at doing probably the right thing of being forward with crisis-related information it possesses.

Arpan and Pompper (2003) underscore that stealing thunder can be a double-edged sword, as its positive effect of enhancing a company's credibility could also be countered by the potentially negative consequence of eliciting customers' suspicion of the company's motive for stealing thunder. Customers might perceive the use of stealing thunder by a company with a negative pre-crisis reputation as an image enhancement strategy (Yoon et al., 2006) and not an authentic expression of concern for customers' well-being or a genuine display of regret for the wrong committed. When the ulterior motives (e.g., image protection) for a company's action become apparent for customers, the latter might be considerably propelled to distrust the former (Forehand & Grier, 2003). As Coombs (2007) claims, during a crisis, an ethical company should be first concerned about protecting the physical and psychological needs of its customers before worrying about its image.

This study's results also show that the effects of stealing thunder on ability- and benevolence-based trust and purchase intention depend on the crisis type for which it is deployed. Specifically, stealing thunder when used during a product-harm crisis results in higher levels of trust and purchase intention than when employed during a moral-harm crisis. As a product-harm crisis can have deleterious consequences (e.g., illness, death, damage to one's property) for affected customers (Cleeren, Dekimpe, & Helsen, 2008; Laufer & Coombs, 2006), the public will expectedly demand a timely, active, and consistent response from the crisis-stricken company (Huang, 2009).

Indeed, when confronted with a product-harm crisis, a company is expected to voluntarily handle and contain that crisis, for instance, by recalling the potentially harmful product from the market. Although such a voluntary recall might be extremely costly for the recalling company (Siomkos & Shrivastava, 1993), the strategy could trigger customers to view a crisis-stricken company as responsible (Siomkos & Kurzbard, 1994). Moreover, product recalls initiated by well-reputed companies are known to result in customers' positive attitude towards those companies (Siomkos & Shrivastava, 1993).

The results of the current study strongly imply that in situations when their safety and well-being could be jeopardized by defective products, customers would expect the organization to be the first to reveal the crisis-related information. For organizations embroiled in a product-harm crisis, opting to be reticent right at the start and conveying a response only when the crisis situation has been exposed by a third party could potentially be disastrous for their legitimacy.

5.2 | Practical implications

The primary objective of this study was to test the main and the interaction effects of crisis communication timing, pre-crisis reputation, and crisis type on customers' trust and purchase intention. Results of the study have important implications for both practitioners and researchers within the crisis communication domain.

The *first practical implication* of the research results is that a company's decision to steal thunder pays off, as the action is sure to easily win its customers' ability-, benevolence-, and integrity-based trust and enhance their willingness to buy from the company. However, the decision to employ the aforementioned crisis communication approach must also depend on the company's pre-crisis reputation and the type of crisis a company is confronted with. This leads to the *second practical implication* of the research results—that although stealing thunder can be beneficial for organizations with either a positive or a negative pre-crisis reputation, organizations with a positive pre-crisis reputation benefit more from stealing thunder than those with a negative pre-crisis communication. For organizations with a negative pre-crisis reputation, the decision to steal thunder might be sceptically viewed as a pure image enhancement device and not a veritable expression of concern for their customers' interests and of regret for the mistake committed.

As stealing thunder works when used during a product-harm instead of a moral-harm crisis, the *third practical implication*, then, is that when faced with a crisis involving defective or unsafe products, the organization must proactively convey the relevant and necessary information about the situation and take immediate actions (e.g., voluntary product recall) to prevent unnecessary damages to customers instead of just waiting for it to be discovered by another party. Stealing thunder appears not to have any benefit for an organization caught in a moral-harm crisis, and this could be due to customers' lack of any concrete expectation of how and when organizations should actually respond when involved in ethically dubious activities.

5.3 | Future research directions

Despite the current study's contribution to the ongoing understanding of the impact of stealing thunder on variables such as consumers' trust and purchase intention and of the extent to which the effect of the communication approach might depend on pre-crisis organizational reputation and crisis type, the study reported in this paper has not been spared from issues that could serve as starting points for future research endeavours. Although decisions concerning sample and sampling approach were carefully considered, the use of a convenience sampling approach to recruit Dutch respondents could potentially limit the generalizability of the findings. Subsequent research into the variables mentioned above, therefore, should seriously consider two critical points, namely (a) the use of a more stringent sampling technique and (b) the collection of data from individuals from more than one cultural group.

The second point merits attention as the way individuals respond to a specific crisis communication timing, for instance, could be

shaped by their cultural characteristics. Knowing that people's perception of certain realities are partly moulded by their culture (Jandt, 2016; Liu, Volcic, & Gallois, 2015), the use of stealing thunder by a company with a shady pre-crisis reputation might be interpreted differently by individuals from cultures with entirely different ways of looking at things.

Additionally, the fact that the study only used one organization for the crisis scenario and that it is a fictional one might also have a bearing on the study participants' responses. For instance, the low values for the trust and intention constructs (even in conditions in which scores should have been high) might be indicative of the likelihood that participants knew of the non-existence of the organization used for the crisis scenario. Such an awareness might have prompted them to indicate low probabilities in trusting the crisis-stricken company and in purchasing something from it. Although the use of an actual organization for a crisis scenario has its share of complications, doing so would also enable researchers to measure relevant variables such as pre- and post-crisis reputation and actual trust in the organization.

Although the current study also looked into the impact of crisis type on trust and purchase intention and how a specific type interacts with a communication approach, it might also be worthwhile to revert to the idea of testing the impact of a specific crisis communication timing in a product-crisis situation. A twist in the design, however, could be introduced by manipulating either the severity of the crisis (severe vs. not severe) or the immediacy of the crisis' impact (immediate impact vs. delayed impact). One wonders whether a reactive crisis (the thunder approach) communication would be still regarded negatively if used during a product-harm crisis that is not severe and whose impact is not immediately felt.

6 | CONCLUSION

Crisis management is crucial for the survival of an organization. The results substantially support the claim that how an organization successfully manages a crisis depends on what it does when a crisis strikes and, even, before the crisis occurs. It benefits the organization to release initial information about a crisis occurrence, because reputational damage is intensified if another party is the first to do so. If the situation of the organization is taken into account, stealing thunder together with a positive pre-crisis reputation and in the context of a product-harm crisis would result in the most positive outcomes.

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