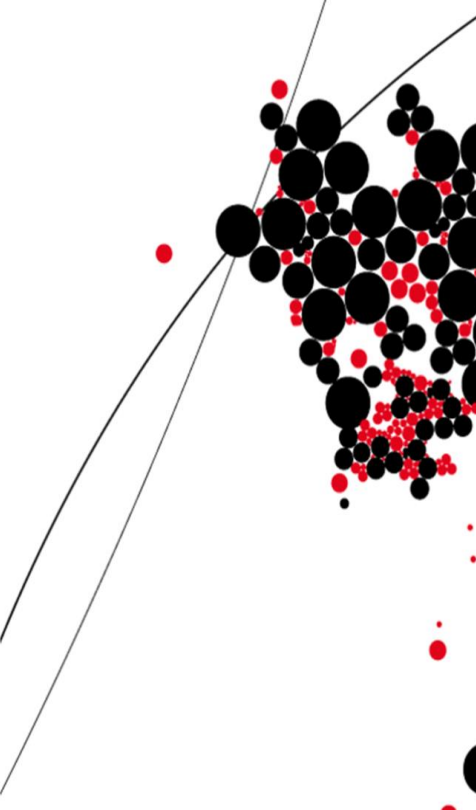




The Dieselgate

A transnational in-depth content analysis of German and American newspaper coverages regarding the Volkswagen organisational crisis

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Master Thesis

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Abstract

On 18 September 2015 Volkswagen, the second largest automotive manufacturer in the world was confronted with a public statement by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which stated that the carmaker from Germany has violated the “Act of Clean Air” by installing software in its diesel vehicles that allowed misleading the results of governmental emission tests. This was the advent of the VW crisis that in the vernacular was called “Dieselgate”. On 21 April 2016, a litigation settlement between VW and EPA had the outcome that affected American customers were treated favourably in comparison with their German counterparts. Earlier studies in crisis communication have found that the newspapers’ selections of crisis frames, crisis issues and crisis tonality can be influenced by the newspaper’s country of origin. These selections are significant, since the public opinion towards an organisational crisis is formed by the news media coverage of a crisis. In addition, the notion of crisis variable shifting from one crisis moment to another crisis moment has gained momentum in disaster communication studies. This study is an attempt to combine both areas in the context of a preventable transnational organisational crisis. These insights may be of interest for crisis communication researchers as the study tries to fill a research gap as well as for crisis managers that are in need of a crisis response strategy for a transnational preventable organisational crisis.

The present study is an in-depth content analysis that examined to what extent American newspapers differ in their coverage of two key crisis moments of the VW crisis in terms of crisis framing, crisis issues and crisis tonality from the coverage of the same crisis by German newspapers. A total of 163 newspaper articles were analysed in order to explore and compare the similarities and divergences in the transnational crisis coverage. The American newspapers scrutinised were The New York Times, The Washington Post and USA Today. The German newspapers used for this study were Der Tagesspiegel, Die Welt and Die Tageszeitung.

This study revealed that the predominance of crisis frames, crisis issues and crisis tonality was significantly different across the two examined countries. Moreover, this study revealed that the predominance of crisis frames, crisis issues and crisis tonality shifted from the first examined crisis moment to the second examined crisis moment. Consequently, the findings of this study are of importance for both theoretical implications as well as practical implications. The theory in crisis communication is extended by a transnational preventable organisational crisis that took the four crisis variables into account and correlated them. In a practical context, crisis managers are advised to take the media system characteristics of the individual country into account when developing a crisis response strategy for a transnational organisational crisis. In addition, the results of this study indicate that the factor timing is decisive for crisis managers. Based on the findings of this study, crisis managers who have to cope with transnational preventable organisational crises such as the Volkswagen crisis are advised to tailor crisis response strategies according to the characteristics of specific countries as well as specific crisis moments. Crisis managers need to adjust their external communication to the

characteristics of the involved media systems and evolving crisis moments. These adjustments can contribute to successful crisis response strategies in a transnational preventable organisational crisis context.

Keywords: Crisis Response Strategy, Preventable Organisational Crisis, Transnational Framing, Crisis Issues, Crisis moments, Tone of voice, Content Analysis, Newspaper Coverage, Media Systems

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1. Introduction

In light of globalisation, crisis communication studies have examined that the prevalence of crisis framing, crisis issues and crisis tonality can differ from one country to another (Boin, Hart & Mc Connel, 2009). In order to understand global discrepancy in news coverage Hallin and Mancini (2004) developed the model of Comparing Media Systems. They concluded that a discrepancy of media characteristics between these major media systems are rooted in historical events and politics that therefore lead to different framed narratives and tonality of the same issue in the two countries (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Furthermore, research found that the prevalence of these crisis variables could shift over the time of the media crisis coverage. Kuttchreuter et al. (2011) and Schultz et al. (2012) found that during the inception of the crisis the media content differed in comparison with the media content during later examined crisis moments. However, both studies examined different crisis types (Coombs, 2007).

The crisis

A public statement of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency confronted the carmaker from Wolfsburg on 18th September 2015, which said that Volkswagen has violated the “Act of Clean Air” by installing software in its diesel vehicles that allowed cheating on emission tests (EPA, 2015).

On 20 September 2015, a press statement was released which included the admission of former CEO of the VW Group Dr Martin Winterkorn that the allegations of the U.S. agency were founded (VolkswagenAG, 2015). The company had to declare that the diesel vehicles might have a real emission of 20 times more than the initial stated amounts in advertisements. One day later, on 21 September the world stock markets opened again, and the VW stock lost its value by 20 percent in comparison to its pre-crisis stock price of the pre-crisis week. As a response to the severe organisational crisis, a video apology of Dr Martin Winterkorn was issued on all the company’s press platforms on 22 September 2015. On 23 September 2015, Dr Winterkorn resigned from his post stating that his resignation as CEO of VW would enable the company a fresh start (VolkswagenAG, 2015).

The company was forced to announce a litigation settlement in conjunction with a preliminary court ruling in San Francisco on the 21 April 2016. The ruling forced VW not only to reveal the approximate fine for litigations in the U.S., which amounted to approximately \$18 billion, but the settlement also stated that the company has to offer its customers to either fix the affected cars or to buy them back in the United States (Ewing, 2016).

The VW crisis is an interesting crisis to study for several reasons. Firstly, it is the first organisational crisis on a transnational scale that was caused by the implementation of an emission software that was intentionally programmed to trick governmental regulations. Hence, the VW crisis can be described as a severe organisational crisis that has to be placed in the most extreme cluster of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory – the preventable cluster (Coombs, 2007). The German company deliberately placed people at health risk and deliberately violated US laws and regulations. According to Coombs

(2007), a corporate crisis within the preventable cluster is a severe threat to the reputation of the company. In addition, the crisis responsibility of a preventable crisis is strongly associated to the company. Secondly, VW is ranked as the second largest automotive manufacturer in the world and American automotive manufactures such as General Motors and Ford are ranked close behind Volkswagen (OICA,2015). In addition, the German media system is categorised as *Democratic Corporatist Model*, which is characterised by a high newspaper circulation, a historically strong party press, a strong professionalization of journalists, as well as a strong state intervention. On the other hand, its American counterpart is categorised as *Liberal Model*. The liberal model is characterised by a medium newspaper circulation, a neutral commercial press, strong professionalization of journalists as well as a weak state intervention (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Moreover, buyers of VW products with the rigged emission software in Europe could not expect the same compensation offers their American equals have received due to weaker consumer and environmental laws in Europe (Bloomberg, 2016).

Thus, it assumed that the media in American and in Germany did cover the crisis differently regarding the predominance of crisis frames, crisis issues and tonality as the former, being the country in which the scandal was detected as well as the country in which VW customers received a buy-back offer from VW and the latter being the domestic market of Volkswagen and one of the countries in which VW did not offer a buy-back option.

So far, research on a transnational preventable organisational crisis in media framing context is scarce. Only a few studies have investigated such crises (An & Gower, 2009; Valentini & Romenti, 2011) and they examined only one crisis moment and came to disconfirming results. Consequently, this research field is relatively unexplored. Especially research on comparison the German crisis media coverage and the US media crisis coverage is lacking, even though it is known that these countries are part of two different media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In addition, disaster media coverage researches have found correlations among the combined four crisis variables (Kuttschreuter et al., 2011; Schultz et al., 2012). Hence, this study assumes also correlations of these four crisis variables in a transnational preventable organisational context.

No crisis communication research has been found that combined the four crisis variables crisis frames, crisis issues, crisis tonality and two crisis moments. Thus, the goal of this study is that it will try to fill the research gap by comparing the crisis coverage of American newspapers and German newspapers and exploring the similarities, divergences and developments from one crisis moment to the other crisis moment.

The primary research question that will be addressed in this study is:

“To what extent did American newspapers differ in their coverage of two key crisis moments of the VW crisis in terms of crisis frames, crisis issues and crisis tonality from the coverage of the same crisis by German newspapers?”

The method being used to answer the research questions of this study is a comparative in-depth content analysis of American and German newspaper articles that have covered the VW crisis. The study will analyse printed newspaper articles related to the two company's key crisis moments covered by six major daily newspapers, three U.S. newspapers and three German newspapers. This study will take the widely in crisis framing studies used framing coding scheme of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) into account, as it is the coding scheme that was also used by transnational crisis communication studies regarding a preventable organisational crisis (An & Gower, 2009; Valentini & Romenti, 2011).

The insights gained from this study can be paramount for crisis managers and public relations researchers as crisis communication studies have shown that the public's opinion of a crisis can be influenced by crisis coverage of news media outlets (Coombs, 2006b). The discrepancy in news coverage of a crisis between two countries that are both impacted by a crisis can be driven by the "different relationships, proximities and interests in such affected areas" (Tian & Stewart, 2005, p.290). Hence, it is a necessity to explore and understand the prevalence of crisis frames, the prevalence of crisis issues, the crisis tonality, and the crisis timing by the news media outlets across countries in order to react accordingly.

2. Theoretical framework

This part of the research focuses on elaborating the literature related to the study. First, the topic of organisational crisis will be discussed followed by a section on agenda setting in news media outlets. Then framing of an organisational crisis by news media outlets will be examined. Afterwards, the topic of crisis framing on a transnational level will be elaborated. Then, the tone of voice in different media systems will be discussed. Finally, the topic of crisis moments will be discussed.

2.1 Organisational Crisis

Over the years, many scholars have formed and have adjusted the definition of crisis in an organisational context. A crisis is “a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization” (Pearson & Claire, 1998, p. 60). Sundelius and Stern (1997) pinpoint the characteristics of an organisational crisis down to three words: “threats, unpredictability and urgency” (p.13).

Falkheimer and Heide (2006) add to the aforementioned definitions of organisational crisis the variable of stakeholders. According to them a crisis threatens not only the organization, but to a high extent also the company’s stakeholders. Coombs (2007) identifies the threats of a crisis as being of reputational as well as fiscal nature. Thus, it can be stated that the occurrence of an organisational crisis can threaten everything that defines a company. Consequently, an organisational crisis can ultimately be a threat to the sheer existence of a company.

The research of Coombs and Holladay (2008, 2009) underscored that individuals who are affected by an organisational crisis will blame the crisis on somebody that in turn will create a state of emotions that ultimately will end up in a reaction of the individuals to the exposed crisis. When the individual reckons that the amount of the organisation’s responsibility for a crisis is high, the negative emotions towards the organisation will end up being extreme as well (Coombs, 2007).

It is possible to mitigate the consequences of an organisational crisis by opting for a suitable crisis response strategy. These strategies are an aid for organisations to communicate to the public in an efficient way. In the case of Volkswagen, the accusations of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the mounting media pressure in the case evoked a huge reputational threat for the company. The crisis of the carmaker can be defined as a crisis type of preventable cluster according to the Situational Crisis Communication Theory of Coombs (2007). A crisis within the preventable cluster is a crisis created by an organisation, which intentionally harmed laws and regulations as well as people through its organisational deeds (Coombs, 2007).

2.2 Agenda setting in news media outlets

The beginning of various researches into agenda setting in news media coverages was triggered by the work of Cohen in 1963. He argued that news media coverage “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about”

(p.139). The concept of agenda setting in the news media outlets is defined by creating public awareness and by making some issues salient in the news coverage. Hence, it can be stated that news media outlets are capable of filtering and shaping the news issues for the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Indeed, many studies found a correlation between a salient news issue and the importance of that issue that the public eventually associates to it (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002; McCombs et al., 1997; Scheufele, 1999). The media is therefore capable of setting an agenda. Prominent news stories about one specific issue such as an organisational crisis can lead to a strong influence among the public concerning that specific issue (Carroll & McCombs, 2003). The salience of a portrayed news story can be transferred through news media coverage onto the agenda of the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Researchers describe the agenda of the public as “a list of issues and events that are viewed at a point in time as ranked in a hierarchy of importance” (Rogers & Dearing, 1988, p. 565).

In an organisational crisis context, news outlets are regarded as the vehicles that inform the public about the crisis and its aftermath, whereas the affected company’s communication is aimed at mitigating the crisis and its collateral damage (Nijkraak, Gosselt, & Gutteling, 2014). The stakeholders and the public turn to the media in order to receive information about an organisational crisis and its issues and the news media possesses the power to either report favourably, unfavourably or not at all about an organisational crisis and specific crisis issues. Valentini and Romenti (2011) found profound differences in the newspaper coverage of a preventable organisational crisis from different media systems. The stressed crisis issues, associated tonality, and associated crisis frames were different in their transnational comparison.

2.3 Framing of an organisational crisis by news media outlets

The theory of framing can be described as an expansion of the concept of agenda setting. Whereas the concept of agenda setting deals with the magnitude and the salience of an issue, the theory of framing concentrates on the content of an issue as well as the means of different presentation options that make a news coverage of one issue more salient and prominent than news coverages of other topics.

(Scheufele, 1999). Explaining it in the words of Cohen (1963), the concept of agenda setting defines what the public thinks about and the concept of framing defines also how the public should think about it.

Entman (1993) offers a detailed explanation of how media provide audiences with schemas for interpreting events. For Entman essential factors of framing are selection and salience: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or

treatment recommendation” (p. 52). To tell stories strategically can be of interest for cultural, economic, as well as political entities and interrelations (Xenos & Foot, 2006).

In covering an organisational crisis, news media outlets are in a powerful position. Journalists and editors decide on how to frame a specific organisational crisis. They do so by creating a core topic for the crisis and stressing particular events and developments of the crisis (Birkland, 1997). Therefore, news media outlets are able to spin stories around organisational crisis coverage and journalists gauge which topics of a crisis are more newsworthy than other news topics (Entman, 1991). The selection of news frames has a direct impact on the public’s attitude towards a company (Jasperson et al., 1998).

According to Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the five prevalent crisis frames are: the conflict frame, the human-interest frame, the economic consequences frame, the morality frame as well as the responsibility frame. Several scholars have used Semetko and Valkenburg’s coding scheme of five press crisis frames in their studies as a bedrock for their studies (An & Gower, 2009; Cho & Gower, 2006; Coombs & Holladay, 2009). The crisis frame of conflict is described by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) as a frame stresses the conflict either among individuals, groups and institutions or between the respective entities. The human-interest frame is stated to be employed to cover a crisis story with human touch, meaning the human-interest frame is built on a crisis coverage of sentiments. The human-interest frame is used to emotionalize the crisis coverage for the audience (An & Gower, 2009). The third crisis frame is according to Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the economic consequences frame states as the name of the frame implies the economic consequences for an affected individual or a group of people that is affected by a covered crisis. The morality frame is described by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) as a crisis frame that places the crisis in the context of morals and social prescriptions. This frame is mostly used indirectly by quotes due to the journalistic norm of objectivity. The attribution of responsibility frame is the fifth prevalent crisis frame and it is one of the decisive crisis frames because the responsibility frame provides the audience with an idea of whom to blame for the crisis, its cause, as well as its solution. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) differentiate between three responsible entities- the government, an individual and a group.

2.4 Crisis framing on a transnational level

In recent years, the research of framing has shifted its focus from zooming in on one country of origin to a more globalised approach (Guo, Holton, Ho Jeong, 2012; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Valentini & Romenti, 2011). Frame differences that occur in different countries concerning the same organisational crisis can not only be explained by embedded cultural differences (Hofstede, 2001), but the divergence of a portrayed story also strongly depends on the fact whether the crisis is spread on a domestic or a foreign market of the organisation in question (Valentini & Romenti, 2011). An and Gower (2009) found that the most prevalence crisis frames in the coverage of US newspapers of a preventable US crisis were

the attribution of responsibility, human-interest and morality frames. On the other hand, Valentini and Romenti (2011) found that in their examined preventable Italian crisis the most used frames by the Italian newspapers were economic, conflict and attribution of responsibility frames and by international newspapers the economic, attribution of responsibility, and the conflict frames.

According to scholars, the domestic market tends to portray another picture of an organisational crisis than a market that is the home market of a rival organisation (Boin, Hart & Mc Connel, 2009). Aldred and Tepe (2011) deem that differences in international framing of an organisational crisis are explained by the content of “distinct nationally specific discourses and political cultures” in two countries into comparison (p. 1567). The discrepancy in news coverage of a crisis between two countries that are both impacted by a crisis can be driven by the “different relationships, proximities and interests in such affected areas” (Tian & Stewart, 2005, p.290).

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), the media coverage in different media systems is influenced by the respective role the media plays in the respective media system and therefore it is possible that one specific issue is narrated very different concerning employed frames and tonality in comparison with the media coverage of the same issue from another major media system.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) identified three dimensions of media systems in the Western world. They determined the different major media systems by comparing media systems of Western democracies. In order to zoom in on their research goal, Hallin and Mancini (2004) developed four different factors in their study “Comparing Media Systems”, namely the development of the mass press, political parallelism, professionalization of journalist as state’s intervention in the freedom of press.

Table 1

The Three Models: Media System Characteristics

	Polarized Pluralist Model	Democratic Corporatist Model	Liberal Model
	Italy	Germany	USA
Newspaper Industry	Low newspaper circulation	High newspaper circulation	Medium newspaper circulation
Political Parallelism	High political parallelism	External pluralism; historically strong party press	Neutral commercial press

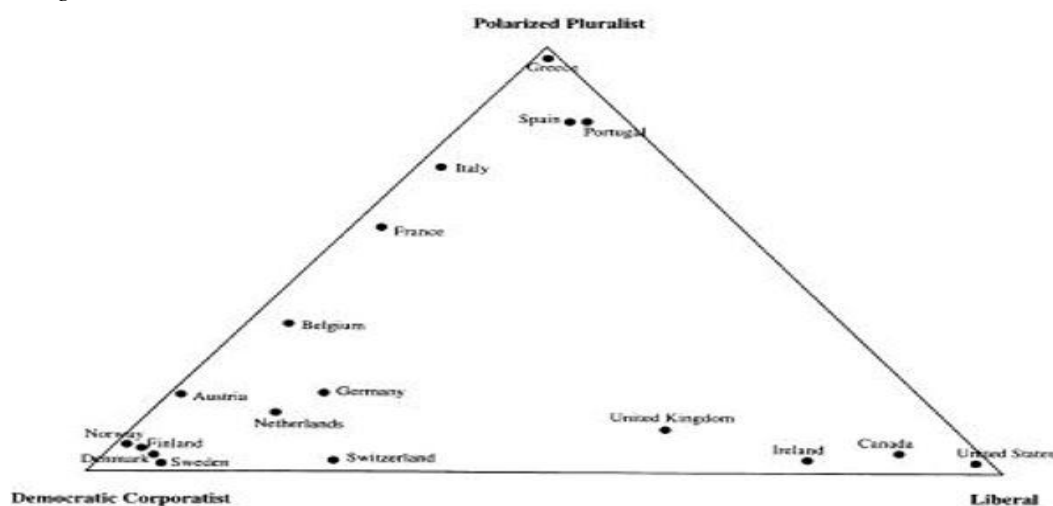
Table 1 continued

Professionalization	Weaker professionalization	Strong professionalization	Strong professionalization
Role of the State in the Media System	Strong state intervention	Strong state intervention on but with protection for press freedom	Market dominated

They scrutinised the media systems of 18 different Western democracies and concluded in their study that there is an umbrella of three prevalent different major media systems in the analysed Western democracies. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004) occurs *The Polarized Pluralist Model* in countries that belong to Southern Europe (e.g. Italy). This model is characterised by a low newspaper circulation, high political parallelism, a weak professionalization of journalists, as well as a strong state intervention. The second media system that was developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) is *The Democratic Corporatist Model*. This model is mostly deployed in North and Central Europe (e.g. Germany). This model is characterised by a high newspaper circulation, a historically strong party press, a strong professionalization of journalists, as well as a strong state intervention.

Finally, Hallin and Mancini introduced the third major media system: *The Liberal Model*. This model is embedded in the countries that have English as a first language (e.g. USA). It is defined by a medium newspaper circulation, a neutral commercial press, strong professionalization of journalists as well as a weak state intervention.

Table 2
The Triangle Model



The triangle model of the comparing media system approach of Hallin and Mancini (2004) shows that the clustering of the single media systems per country is not as coherent as the simple definitions of the three media systems sound like. The corners of the triangle diagram depict the ideal concept of the three media systems and the placement of the countries are an indicator where the country's media system stands in comparison with the ideal concepts and the media systems of other countries. One country's media system can have some overlapping characteristics with another categories media model for instance; Germany's media landscape was very much a polarized pluralist system before and during the WW2. The country shifted afterwards to the democratic corporatist model in the post-WW2 time.

Since this study focuses on a comparison of German and US newspapers it will shortly be zoomed in on the media system differences of the two countries. The German news media system is influenced by a strong external political pluralism. The classic political party press vanished after the WW2, however the German newspapers persist a political parallelism, and therefore the German newspapers can be placed across a wide political spectrum. Hence, German newspapers possess distinct political tendencies and distinct political orientations (Pfetsch, 2001).

Moreover, the study of Donsbach (1995) showed that German journalists want to stress ideas and values and take an advocacy role in their articles. On the other hand, the American media system can be described as almost the blue print of the liberal media system model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The US media is characterised by a neutral commercial press and therefore a political-centered reporting such as it happens in Germany does not happen in the US media system. Pfetsch (2001) described the discrepancy between the German and the US media system by stating: "the relationship between journalists and politicians is defined by a more media-oriented style of interaction the US, a more politically motivated interaction style in Germany."(p.64).

However, there are political orientations within the liberal system, but the political orientations are marked by an editorial part and do not influence the subsequent news reporting as much as they influence the reporting in Germany. In addition, the US political orientation is constrained on two political orientations – the Democratic Party and the Republican Party (Donsbach, 1995). Nevertheless, The New York Times and the Washington Post are in particular two American newspapers that are well known for their intensive economic reporting (An & Gower, 2009). The political alignments of the six examined newspapers can be seen in table 3.

Table 3

Political alignment of newspapers

Newspaper	Daily circulation	Political alignment	Publisher
Germany			
1. Die Welt	187.866	Centre-right	Axel Springer AG
2. Der Tagesspiegel	111.146	Liberal	Georg von Holtzbrinck Publishing Group
3. Die Tageszeitung	51.959	Left-wing/green	Die tageszeitung Verlagsgenossenschaft eG
USA			
1. The New York Times	1.865.318	Consistently liberal	The New York Times Company
2. USA Today	1.674.306	Consistently liberal	Gannet Compay
3. The Washington Post	474.767	Consistently liberal	Nash Holdings

2.5 Tone of voice in different media systems

Crisis coverage can not only be presented differently by selected crisis frames, but also the choice of words, the selected phrases and images as well as the tone of voice in crisis news coverage are all means which journalists can employ to depict a crisis. These means will then eventually influence the public's opinion (An & Gower, 2009; Cho & Gower, 2006; Kuttschreuter et al., 2011). The overall tone of voice in news media coverage is defined either as negative, neutral or positive (Liu, 2010).

Crisis communication studies have indicated that the tone of voice in news coverage concerning an organisational crisis is mostly neutral or negative (Kuttschreuter et al., 2011; Nijkraake et al., 2014). However, the tone of voice in news coverage depends on the amount of responsibility that is associated to a crisis issue and actor by the reporting newspapers (Valentini & Romenti, 2011). Valentini and Romenti (2011) found that the Italian newspapers did review some crisis issues regarding an Italian crisis more negatively than their international counterparts did. They concluded that the different media systems of the compared Italian and international newspapers triggered this discrepancy and that the Italian newspapers exploited the crisis coverage as a political instrument.

Only a handful of newspaper articles regarding an organisational crisis are positively associated. Besides, the tonality in a crisis newspaper article depends not only on the crisis issue and crisis frame. The amount of responsibility may swiftly change from one crisis issue to another crisis issue after crisis disclosures and therefore the tone of voice can evolve during a crisis coverage. Hence, the newspaper can depend on the crisis moment as well (Kuttschreuter et al., 2011).

2.6 Crisis moments

Crisis coverage of news media outlets is mostly done in the advent of an organisational crisis, since it is assumed that the public's interest in crisis topics will have diminished after a short while of crisis coverage and therefore crisis coverage is more newsworthy for the news media outlets during the onset of a crisis (An & Gower, 2009).

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of crisis frame shifting over crisis moments has been elaborated by some studies yet, however the crisis types have not been comparable to the Volkswagen crisis (Kuttschreuter et al., 2011; Schultz et al., 2012). Kuttschreuter et al. (2011) examined the used frames by Dutch newspapers in the aftermath of the Enschede fireworks disaster in the Netherlands. The researchers identified three crisis moment peaks in the newspaper coverage regarding the aftermath disaster in Enschede. The study of Kuttschreuter et al. (2011) compared the content and the prevalent frames during the three identified crisis moments.

They came to the conclusion that the content of the crisis coverage and the prevalent frames had shifted distinctively over the examined crisis moments. Schultz et al. (2012) elaborated also on the crisis frame shifting phenomenon. They analysed the crisis moments during the company crisis of BP in 2010. To be more precise, Schultz et al. (2012) studied the newspaper coverage of UK and US newspapers during the BP crisis. They examined the newspaper coverage during the onset of the crisis and compared it with the newspaper coverage after BP released a crisis press statement. Schultz et al. (2012) concluded that the frames had shifted from one crisis moment to another. Moreover, it became apparent that especially the US media tended to follow the content of the released press statement by BP.

Still, research regarding the combination of crisis frames, crisis issues, tonality in combination with crisis moments is scarce. Based on the aforementioned findings that the VW crisis was covered by newspapers from two different media systems and the fact that the crisis had a different outcome for the affected customers from the two countries the following research questions have been formulated.

Research question

“To what extent did American newspapers differ in their coverage of two key crisis moments of the VW crisis in terms of crisis frames, crisis issues and crisis tonality from the coverage of the same crisis by German newspapers?”

The first set of sub questions will attempt to provide answers to the prevalence of the five classical crisis frames (attribution of responsibility frame, human-interest frame, conflict frame, morality frame, economic frame) by taking the coding scheme of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) into account. Moreover, the prevalence of crisis issues and crisis tonality are taken into account. In order to determine the transnational crisis coverage differences with respect to three Major Media Systems Model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) the following sub research questions were developed:

Sub-questions

- 1a.** To what extent does the use of crisis frames vary significantly by country?
- 1b.** To what extent does the use of crisis frames vary significantly by outlet?
- 1c.** To what extent does the use of the crisis frames vary significantly by outlet across the two countries?
- 1d.** To what extent does the use of the crisis issues vary significantly by country?
- 1e.** To what extent does the use of the crisis issues by crisis frames vary significantly across the two countries?
- 1f.** To what extent does the crisis tonality vary significantly by country?
- 1g.** To what extent does the crisis tonality vary significantly by crisis issues across the two countries?

The second set of sub questions will attempt to provide answers to the crisis variable shifting of crisis frames, crisis issues and crisis tonality by the two examined Volkswagen crisis moments. In order to determine the crisis variable shifting the following sub questions were developed:

- 2a.** To what extent does the use of crisis frames vary significantly by crisis moment across the two countries?
- 2b.** To what extent does the use of crisis issues vary significantly by crisis moment across the two countries?
- 2c.** To what extent does the use of crisis tonality vary significantly by crisis moment across the two countries?

3. Methodology

The following section elaborates on the methods of the study. In this chapter, the research design, the sample, and the coding of this study are explained. Lastly, the analysis of this study is stated.

3.1 Research design

The main goal of this study is to define whether there were news coverage differences between American and German news media outlets in regards to the Volkswagen crisis and its developments. In order to execute this study in a reliable way, an in-depth content analysis of the VW crisis case was executed by taking the theory of agenda setting, applied crisis frames and the tone of voice of news in German and American newspaper articles into account.

3.2 Sample

This study aims to examine and compare the news media outlet coverage of two key crisis moments of the Volkswagen organisational crisis. Therefore, the sample of the study consisted of four different datasets (2 crisis moments X 2 countries) by examining the crisis articles of six newspaper from two specific countries. Firstly, the advent of the VW crisis was scrutinised. The advent of the crisis was triggered by the public accusation of the U.S: Environmental Protection Agency on 18th September 2015. Thus, the period from the 18th September 2015- 26th September 2015 was examined in order to cover the initial news reports concerning the advent of the crisis. On the 20th September 2015, the company published a press statement in which the guilt for the accusation of the U.S: agency was admitted. Moreover, the stock price of VW plunged in comparison to the pre-crisis share price. The CEO Dr Martin Winterkorn issued a public apology on the 22nd September 2015 and on the 23rd September, he resigned as CEO of the VW group.

The second analysis encompassed the week from the 21st April 2016 – 29th April 2016. This study utilised this week of news media reports since on the 21st April 2016 it came to a litigation settlement between the U.S. government and the company. The ruling made VW not only to reveal the approximate fine for litigations in the U.S. which will end up to be approximately a fine of \$18 billion, but the settlement also stated that the company has to offer the customers to either fix the affected cars or to buy them back in the United States of America (Ewing, 2016). Despite the litigation settlement in the U.S., European customers did not experience any VW buy back options. This matter of unequal crisis compensation may have triggered different news coverage in Europe than in the U.S.A. and thus this week of April was chosen to compare the reactions of German and American media outlets.

3.3 Procedure

In order to answer the research questions of this study, a comparative in-depth content analysis of American and German newspaper articles was employed. The former, being the country in which the scandal was detected as well as the country in which VW customers received a buy-back offer from VW and the latter being the domestic market of Volkswagen and one of the countries in which VW was not offering a buy-back option. The study analysed news articles related to the two company's key crisis moments covered by six major daily newspapers, three U.S. newspapers and three German newspapers. All six newspapers are regarded as elite as well reputed and they all have large national circulations. A large national circulation of a newspaper can be an indicator for a higher impact on the public than for example a newspaper with a low national circulation could have. The opted American newspapers *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* were used several times for research in the field of content analysis (An & Gower, 2009). The three selected German newspapers - *Die Welt*, *Der Tagesspiegel* and *Die Tageszeitung* - are comparable in their public prestige to their American counterparts. This study focused on the printed versions of articles, since printed newspaper coverage is still regarded by many as a more trusted source than its online counterpart is (Acar & Murarki, 2011).

The study was limited to two crisis moments as they were regarded as decisive and newsworthy by the news media outlets as the sheer surge of newspaper articles during the crisis moments indicated (LexisNexis, 2016). Since the VW crisis has been an unprecedented transnational crisis, the news coverage of the crisis has not stopped yet. However, an all-encompassing crisis content analysis would go beyond the scope of this study.

The quality of content analysis research does not only depend on the quality of analysed articles, but it also depends on the objectivity of the research coders. In order to prevent a too subjective coding result, twenty percent of all articles were analysed by a second Master Marketing Communication student of the University of Twente to maintain validity in this study.

The needed articles for this study were accessed via the UTwente's student license for LexisNexis Academic, which is an online academic research database, which is widely used in the field of academic research (LexisNexis, 2016).

3.4 Coding

The following query was employed in German and English language in the program LexisNexis Academic in order to zoom in on the relevant articles for this study:

English

- “Volkswagen” OR “VW manipulation” OR dieselpgate OR “VW scandal” OR “emission scandal”

German

- “Volkswagen” OR “VW Manipulation” OR dieselpgate OR “VW Skandal” OR “Abgasskandal”

Two human coders analysed the relevant articles according to an adjusted coding scheme of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). The coding scheme of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) assesses the prevalence of the following five crisis frames: Attribution of responsibility, Human-interest frame, Conflict frame, Morality frame and the Economic frame with 18 yes or no questions. This study had to omit the question concerning the visual information of the Semetko and Valkenburg coding scheme, since no images were shown in the LexisNexis software of this study. However, three more questions concerning the transnational frames were added to the original coding scheme of Semetko and Valkenburg. Moreover, the human coders examined the tonality of the relevant articles. In total, the employed coding scheme in this study had 20 framing questions and the tonality of the articles was recorded as well. The coding scheme was coded in such a way that when any of the coded frame questions was confirmed the whole crisis frame was marked as prevalent in the article in question.

After the coders finished the coding of the articles, the inter-coder reliability was determined. The inter-coder reliability is a means that indicates objectivity and marks high reliability between the coding results of the content analysis coders if the threshold of an inter-coder reliability of at least 80% is reached (Neuendorf, 2002).

The inter-coder reliability between the two coders of this study was conducted on a randomly selected sample of 20% of the news articles. Cohen’s kappa of this sample was 0.826, which means that the inter-coder reliability was statistically strong in this study. The study proceeded with creating a dataset of the coded articles in IBM’s SPSS program. SPSS helped to provide this study with analytical results. More precisely, SPSS was utilised to conduct Pearson’s chi-squared tests. The Pearson’s chi-squared tests tested for significant association between tested variables. In some cases, the Pearson’s chi-squared test assumptions were violated. The Pearson’s chi squared test assumptions were violated if more than 20% of the tested dataset had an expected count less than 5. In those cases, a different course of actions was conducted in this study. In case, that the Pearson’s chi-squared test assumptions were violated the Fisher’s Exact Test determined whether there was a significant statistical association between the tested variables.

3.5 Coding categories and measures

The unit of this study analysis was one newspaper article per coding scheme. The coding scheme consisted of the unit number, the media outlet, the country of origin, the date of publishing, the name of the author, the title of the newspaper article, the main topic of the newspaper article, the themes of the article, the summary of the newspaper article, the crisis issue of the article, the news sources of the newspaper article. Then the frame questions were stated in the coding scheme. The frame questions were taken from the coding scheme of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and were supplemented by three questions concerning the transnational framing approach. Eventually, the coding scheme of this study contained the frame evaluation, the frame devices, the tone of voice assessment of the article in question and an additional comment section. The coding scheme is presented in table 4 below.

Table 4

Coding Scheme

1. Unit Number:		
2. Media outlet		
3. Country of origin		
4. Date of publication		
5. Author		
6. Title		
7. Main topic		
8. Themes		
9. Summary		
10. Crisis issues		
11. News sources		
12. Frame questions		
Frames	Yes	No
Attribution of Responsibility		
Does the story suggest that some level of gov't has the ability to alleviate the problem?		
Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?		
Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?		
Does the story suggest that an ind. (or group of people in society) is resp. for the issue-problem?		
Human-interest frame		
Does the story provide a human example or "human face" on the issue?		
Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?		
Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?		

Table 4 continued

Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?

Conflict frame

Does the story reflect disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries?

Does one party-individual-group-country reproach another?

Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?

Morality frame

Does the story contain any moral message?

Does the story make reference to morality, God, and other religious tenets?

Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?

Economic frame

Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?

Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?

Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?

Transnational framing

Does the story contain factors of domestication such as cultural, ideological, political position, or major media system?

Does the story contain issue specific frames?

Does the story contain an issue specific choice of words?

13.Frame evaluation

14.Frame devices

15.Tone of voice

16.Comments

The process of identifying the crisis issues encompassed to state the title, the main topic, the themes, and the summary of every single article. From these factors, the coders filtered the most prevalent crisis issue. It is understood that several articles dealt with more than one crisis issue of this study. However, the coders were told to state only the single most straight forward and most prevalent crisis issue from every single article, which means that per coding scheme one crisis issue was identified, since otherwise the data analysis would go beyond of this study. Overall, the two independent coders of this study identified 22 different crisis issues. However, the US newspapers did not cover nine crisis issues that the German media brought up regarding the VW crisis. On the other hand, the German media did not

bring up four crisis issues that their US counterparts did bring up in the coverage of the Volkswagen crisis. Hence, to make the issue of crisis issues more comprehensible and statistically relevant the 22 crisis issues were clustered into four major crisis issues. Two of the clustered issues are of internal company characteristics, which were VW's role and Management VW. The other two clustered crisis issues were of external characteristics, namely US vs Germany and the Government's role in the crisis. The original crisis issue clustering can be found in the following table (table 5).

Table 5
Clustering Crisis issues

Clustered Issues	Description	Original issues
Internal		
VW's role	The company Volkswagen on any level	1.Union 2. VW's future 3. Financial position 4. Image VW 5. History of VW 6.Share value 7. Cultural sponsorships
Management VW	The top brass of Volkswagen on any level	1.Winterkorn's role 2.Müller's role 3.Intentional deception 4.Management style to blame
External		
US vs Germany	The conflict between the Germany and United States on any level	1.Economic consequences 2. Legal actions 3. Other carmakers 4 Reimbursement German customers 5. Reimbursement US customers 6. EPA Deal 7. German vs US customers
Government's role	The role of the German government on any level	1.End of the diesel engine 2. Role of German traffic minister Dobrindt 3. Role of the government 4. Image damage Germany

3.6 General information

In total, the chosen news media outlets published 163 articles concerning the Volkswagen diesel crisis in the time period between the 18th September 2015- 26th September 2015 and the time period between 21st April 2016 – 29th April 2016 (table 6). Hence, the analysed dataset consists of 163 individual articles. The German news media outlets published the lion’s share of the 163 articles. In total, the German news media outlets published 112 articles. From these 112 articles 43 articles were published by the German news media outlet *Die Welt* (26.40%). *Der Tagesspiegel* published 41 (25.20%) articles regarding the Volkswagen crisis and *TAZ* reported 28 (17.10%) times about the crisis. Their US counterparts reported in 51 articles about the diesel emission scandal. *The New York Times* reported in 25 (15.30%) articles about the crisis and *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* both published 13 (8.00%) articles concerning the Volkswagen crisis. Table 6 depicts the distribution of analysed articles by news media outlets.

Table 6
Prevalence of newspaper articles

	Frequency	Percentage
Welt	43	26.40%
Tagesspiegel	41	25.20%
TAZ	28	17.10%
NYT	25	15.30%
Washington Post	13	8.00%
USA Today	13	8.00%
Total	163	100.00%

The table below indicates the prevalence of frames according to the coding scheme of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). The array of the five crisis frames was coded in such a way that when any of the frame question of Semetko and Valkenburg was confirmed in the coding scheme the whole crisis frame was marked as a prevalent frame in the article. Therefore, there are more prevalent frames in the dataset than the sheer number of articles in the dataset.

Table 7
Crisis news frames in the newspaper articles

Crisis news frames	Number of articles	Percentage
Conflict frame	128	78.50%
Economic frame	111	68.10%
Attribution of responsibility	91	55.80%
Human-interest frame	43	26.40%
Morality frame	17	10.40%

The conflict frame is the most prevalent frame in the crisis dataset of VW. 128 articles have a form of conflict framing included in their contents. 128 articles that are framed in a conflict frame means that 78.50% of all articles used the conflict frame. The second most prevalent frame in the crisis dataset was the economic frame. 111 articles of a total of 163 articles utilised the economic frame in their contents. This means that 68.10% of all analysed article used this sort of frame. The attribution of responsibility frame is the third most executed frame in the crisis dataset. 55.80% of all articles regarding the Volkswagen crisis were framed by the attribution of responsibility frame. The human-interest frame appeared in 43 articles or 26.40% of all articles. The least utilised frame was the morality frame in the Volkswagen dataset. 17 articles and therefore only 10.40% of all articles were framed with a morality frame.

4. Results

In the following sections, the main results of this study will be elaborated. In order to test for significant differences between the tested crisis variables the Chi- Square tests and in case that the test assumptions of the Chi Square tests were violated the Fisher's Exact tests were used by means of SPSS. First, the prevalence of crisis frames by country, by outlet and by outlet across the two countries will be presented. Then the chapter will deal with the prevalence of crisis issues by country and the prevalence of crisis issues by frames across the two countries. Afterwards, the chapter will zoom in on the tonality by country and the tonality by crisis issues across the two examined countries.

Thereafter, the three crisis variables will be cross-correlated with the fourth crisis variable timing. First, the prevalence of crisis frames by crisis moment across the two countries will be shown. Secondly, the prevalence of crisis issues by crisis moment across the two countries will be depicted. Lastly, the use of crisis tonality by crisis moment across the two countries will be presented.

4.1 Prevalent crisis frames

4.1.1 Prevalent crisis frames by country

Table 8
Crisis frame prevalence by country of origin

Frame		Country of origin		Total	Chi Square
		I.USA	II.Germany		
Conflict frame	Count	38	90	128	.400
	% within country of origin	75%	80%	79%	
Economic frame	Count	40	71	111	.056
	% within country of origin	78%	63%	68%	
Attribution of responsibility	Count	36	55	91	.010
	% within country of origin	71%	49%	56%	
Human-interest frame	Count	20	23	43	.012
	% within country of origin	39%	21%	26%	
Morality frame	Count	8	9	17	.138
	% within country of origin	16%	8%	10%	
Total		51	112	163	
		31%	69%	100%	

As shown in table 8, it can be summarised that the prevalence of crisis frames per country differ when one compares the prevalence of crisis frames in the German newspapers regarding the VW crisis with the prevalence of crisis frames in the US newspapers regarding the VW crisis. The most evident difference is the different ranking of frame frequencies in the compared media outlets. The German newspapers made use of the conflict frame (80%) as the most often frame in their newspaper articles concerning the crisis, whereas in the US media the conflict frame was only the second most used frame (75%). However, in total the conflict frame (79%) was the most used frame overall, since the German newspapers published 69% of all articles that dealt with the examined crisis. Therefore, the in total frequency of prevalent frames of both countries together is identical to the German frequency frame ranking.

In the US newspapers, the most prevalent frame was the economic frame, which occurred in 78% of all US articles concerning the diesel crisis and in the German news media outlets it was the second most used frame with 63% articles utilising the economic frame. In total, 68% of all articles encompassed the economic frame. The Chi-Square tests on the prevalence of frames between the countries pointed out that there are statistical significant variations on two frames per country and a statistical trend on a third crisis frame per country. The first frame that showed a statistical significant discrepancy of prevalence was the attribution of responsibility frame ($\chi^2 = 6.60$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.010$). 71% of all US newspapers used the attribution of responsibility frame. On the other hand, the frame was prevalent in 49% of all German newspaper articles that dealt with the organisational crisis

The second crisis frame with a statistical significant discrepancy between the two countries was the prevalence of the human-interest frame ($\chi^2 = 6.30$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.012$). The human-interest frame was present in 39% of all US newspaper articles and it was present in 21% of all German newspaper articles.

A statistical trend can be seen, when the economic frame was examined ($\chi^2 = 3.65$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.056$). The Chi Square test assumptions were rejected. However, one can speak from a statistical trend between the prevalence of the economic frame between the German and the US media. The economic frame was present in 78% in the US coverage and in 63% of the German crisis coverage.

4.1.2 Prevalent crisis frames by outlet

Table 9
Prevalent crisis frames by newspaper outlet

Frame		Newspaper outlet						Total	Chi Square
		USA			Germany				
		NYT	Washington Post	USA Today	Tagesspiegel	TAZ	Welt		
Conflict frame	Count	17	9	12	31	25	34	128	.315
	% within News Media Outlet	68%	69%	92%	76%	89%	79%	79%	
Economic frame	Count	16	13	11	30	14	27	111	.022
	% within News Media Outlet	64%	100%	85%	73%	50%	63%	68%	
Attribution of responsibility	Count	18	8	10	22	17	16	91	.041
	% within News Media Outlet	72%	62%	77%	54%	61%	37%	56%	
Human interest frame	Count	11	5	4	10	4	9	43	.159
	% within News Media Outlet	44%	39%	31%	24%	14%	21%	26%	
Morality frame	Count	4	2	2	4	3	2	17	.550
	% within News Media Outlet	16%	15%	15%	10%	11%	5%	10%	
Total		51			112			163	
		31%			69%			100%	

The results show that the prevalence of two crisis frames by newspapers differed (table 9). The use discrepancy of the attribution of responsibility frame ($\chi^2 = 11.563$ $df = 5$, $p = 0.041$) and the use of the economic frame ($\chi^2 = 13.18$, $df = 5$, $p = 0.022$) showed statistical significance. The study zoomed in on the three news media outlets per country in order to find out whether or not the statistical discrepancy

was rooting from the news media outlets themselves or the country they originated. By testing the prevalence of the attribution crisis frame in the US newspapers (Fisher's Exact Test p-value: 0.784) and the prevalence in the German newspapers ($\chi^2 = 4.285$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.117$) it became clear that there is no significant association within the countries media regarding the attribution of responsibility frame prevalence. The economic frame prevalence in the German newspapers did not depict any discrepancy ($\chi^2 = 3.860$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.145$.), however this study found a difference in the use of the economic frame in the US newspapers (Fisher's Exact Test p-value: 0.027). *The Washington Post* used the frame in all of its articles regarding the organisational crisis, whereas *The New York Times* (64%) and *USA Today* (84.6%) used the frame less. It became evident that the German media and the US media differ statistically in terms of frequency use of the economic frame and the attribution of responsibility frame. In addition, the US use of the economic frame was different in the newspapers. The Washington Post made use of the frame in all of its articles (100%) and therefore the outlet distinguished itself in the use of this frame frequency not only from the German newspapers, but also from the US newspapers.

4.2 Prevalent crisis issues

4.2.1 Crisis issues by country

Table 10

Clustered crisis issues by country of origin

Crisis issue	Country			Chi Square
	USA	Germany	Total	
US vs Germany	25	37	62	
	49%	33%	38%	
Management VW	22	33	55	
	43%	29%	34%	
VW's role	3	23	26	
	6%	21%	16%	
Government's role	1	19	20	
	2%	17%	12%	
Total	51	112	163	.001
	31%	69%	100%	

The most used crisis issue used in both countries was the US vs Germany issue (table 10). In total, this issue was present in 62 (38%) articles regarding the VW crisis. The Management VW crisis issue that was prevalent in 55 (34%) articles follows it. The third most utilised crisis issue was the issue concerning VW's role in the crisis. It occurred in 26 (16%) articles. The least used issue was the role of the government. It appeared in 20 (12%) articles. Table 10 depicts the fact that the order of the crisis issues did not differ per county. In addition, this study used a Chi Square test to show whether there is a statistical significant association between the country of origin and the prevalent crisis issues used. The Chi Square test indicates that there is a significant statistical association between the country of origin and the crisis issues used ($\chi^2 = 15.442$., $df = 3$, $p = 0.001$). The US newspapers reported more about the crisis issues *US vs Germany* (49%) and *Management VW* (43%) than the German newspapers and on the other hand, the German newspapers focused more on the *Government's role* (17%) and *VW's role* (21%) than their US counterparts.

4.2.2 Crisis news frames by crisis issue across the two countries

Table 11
Crisis news frames by crisis issues

Media outlets	Crisis news frame	Crisis issues				N
		Management VW	US vs Germany	Government's role	VW's role	
German newspapers	Conflict	28%	33%	21%	18%	90
	Economic	31%	31%	11%	27%	71
	Attribution of responsibility	40%	22%	24%	14%	55
	Human interest	61%	17%	0%	22%	23
	Morality frame	33%	11%	11%	45%	9
US newspapers	Conflict	47%	45%	0%	8%	38
	Economic	43%	55%	0%	2%	40
	Attribution of responsibility	58%	36%	3%	3%	36
	Human interest	50%	40%	0%	10%	20
	Morality frame	80%	20%	0%	0%	8

In order to retrieve the information of how the four crisis issues were framed differently in the reporting of the two analysed countries the crisis news frames were cross correlated by crisis issues. Table 11 depicts the distribution of the four crisis issues on the five crisis frames across the two countries.

The crisis issues by crisis frame were distributed more equal in the German newspaper reporting than in the US coverage of the crisis issues. In the US newspapers, the pattern between crisis issues and crisis frames were stronger than in the German newspapers. The US newspapers concentrated mainly on two crisis issues – the management VW issue and the US vs Germany issue. The issues regarding the conflict frame and the economic frame were equally distributed in the German newspapers. The US newspapers associated with the conflict and the economic frame only the Management VW and the US vs Germany issue. The attribution of responsibility for the crisis was in the German newspapers associated to the management of VW (40%) and the government (24%), whereas in the US newspapers the responsibility was placed on the management (58%) and the US vs Germany issue (36%). The human-interest frame was used in the reporting of the management (61%) and the company’s role (22%) during the crisis in Germany. In the US newspapers, the prevalent crisis issues were again the management (50%) and the transnational relations (40%). Regarding the moral issues of the crisis, the German newspapers reported mostly about the company’s role (45%) during the crisis, whereas the US newspapers strongly pinned down the moral stories of the crisis on the management of VW (80%).

4.3 Tonality

4.3.1 Tonality by country

Table 12

Tonality by country of origin

Tonality	Country			Chi Square
	USA	Germany	Total	
positive	0	6	6	
	0%	5%	4%	
neutral	24	70	94	
	47%	63%	58%	
negative	27	36	63	
	53%	32%	38%	
Total	51	112	163	.018*
	31%	69%	100%	

(Note:* Calculated with Fisher’s Exact test assumptions)

In total, table 12 shows that six (4%) articles of the examined 163 articles in this study had a positive tone of voice. 94 (58%) articles had a neutral tone of voice and 63 (38%) of the articles that were written about the Volkswagen crisis were written in a negative tone of voice. Thus, the overall tonality in the coverage of the crisis was neutral. However, it was tested whether there was a statistical significant discrepancy between the tonality and the two countries. Indeed, a statistical discrepancy between the tone of voice and the country of origin was found in this study (Fisher's Exact Test p-value: 0.018). Overall, the US newspapers were more negative (53%) in their reporting about the crisis than their German counterparts (32%). Moreover, the German newspapers used a positive tonality regarding the organisation crisis in six of their articles (5%). On the contrary, the US newspaper did not report in a positive tone of voice in any of their articles concerning the crisis.

4.3.2 Tonality by crisis issues

Table 13
Crisis issue in the German and US newspapers by tone

US Newspapers	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total	Chi Square
Management VW	0 0%	7 32%	15 68%	22 43%	
US vs Germany	0 0%	15 60%	10 40%	25 49%	
Government's role	0 0%	0 0%	1 100%	1 2%	
VW's role	0 0%	2 67%	1 33%	3 6%	
Total	0 0%	24 47%	27 53%	51 100%	.150
German Newspapers					
Management VW	5 15%	18 55%	10 30%	33 30%	
US vs Germany	0 0%	22 60%	15 40%	37 33%	

Table 13 continued

Government's role	0 0%	12 63%	7 37%	19 17%	
VW's role	2 1%	18 78%	3 17%	23 20%	
Total	7 5%	70 63%	35 32%	112 100%	.443*

(Note:* Calculated with Fisher's Exact test assumptions)

Table 13 depicts the four crisis issues in the German and US newspapers by tone. The table shows that the tonality in the German newspapers was overall more neutral in reporting about the VW crisis than the US tonality associated to the VW crisis. The largest discrepancy in the tonality and the crisis issues across the two analysed countries was in the coverage of the Management VW crisis issue. The German newspapers opted for a 15% positive tonality, 55% neutral tonality and a 30% negative tonality regarding the Management VW crisis issue. On the other hand, the US press did not cover this issue positively associated at all, but 32% of the US articles were neutral associated and 68% were negatively associated. The US vs Germany issue was identically reported in the two countries regarding the opted tonality of the newspapers. The coverage was 60% neutral and 40% negative. The Government's role was in 63% covered neutrally and 37% with a negative tone of voice in the German newspapers. In the US newspapers, the issue concerning the Government's role was covered 100% negatively. VW's role was elaborated in 1% in a positive tone of voice in 78% neutral and 17% in a negative tone of voice by the German newspapers. The US counterparts covered the issue of VW's role in 67% neutral and 33% negative.

The Chi Square test assumptions were violated and therefore Fisher's Exact Test was used. It resulted in a p- value of 0.018. The result indicates that there is a statistical association given between countries of origin and the opted tonality towards the crisis. However no statistical evidence for differences within US outlets ($\chi^2 = 3.797$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.150$) or within German news media outlets are given. (Fisher's Exact Test p 0.443).

4.4 Crisis moments

The two crisis moments were selected beforehand in order to define the times in which the articles shall be published in. The first time period is the time period between the 18th September 2015- 26th September 2015 that was the first week after the crisis became public. Thus, this time period is named “Breakout 2015” in the analysis. The second scrutinised time period is the time period between the 21st April 2016 – 29th April 2016. The deal between the German company Volkswagen and the US Environmental Protection Agency marked this period. Consequently, this period was named EPA Deal 2016 in this analysis.

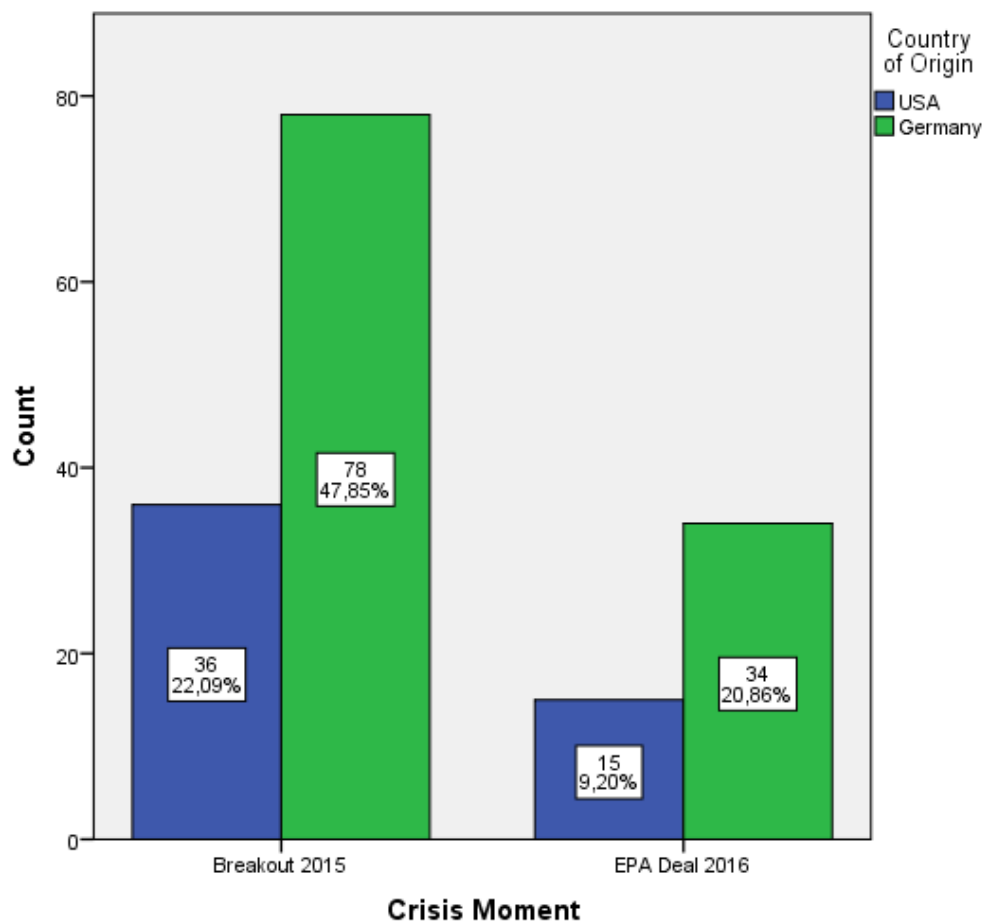


Figure 1. Comparison of publications during the crisis moments across the two countries

The diagram shows the number of publications per country of origin and crisis moment. It becomes apparent that the German news media outlet published in the wake of the crisis 78 articles in total. 78 articles are 47.85% of the total amount of published during the crisis moments. The US outlets published 36 articles in the beginning of the crisis, which is 22.09% of the total amount of articles. In the week of the EPA deal, the US outlets made 15 articles public. 15 articles are 9.20% of the total amount of articles. The German news media outlets published more than twice so many articles in the week of the EPA

deal in April 2016. The German news media outlets published 34 articles or in other words 20.86% of all analysed articles of the dataset. The sheer number of publications of the analysed newspapers confirms the widespread hypothesis in crisis scholars that crises are mostly newsworthy during the initial breakout of a crisis (An & Gower, 2009).

4.4.1 Crisis moments by frames

Table 14
Crisis moment by crisis frame

Breakout 2015	USA	Germany	Total	Chi Square
Conflict	29 81%	67 86%	96 84%	.467
Economic	30 83%	53 68%	83 72%	.086
Attribution of responsibility	32 89%	46 59%	78 68%	.001
Human interest	15 42%	19 24%	34 30%	.060
Morality frame	8 22%	8 10%	16 14%	.087
Total	36 32%	78 68%	114 100%	
EPA Deal 2016				
Conflict	9 60%	23 68%	32 65%	.604
Economic	10 67%	18 53%	28 57%	.371
Attribution of responsibility	4 27%	9 27%	13 26%	1.000*
Human interest	5 33%	4 12%	9 18%	.072
Morality frame	0 0%	1 3%	1 2%	1.000*
Total	15 30%	34 70%	49 100%	

(Note:* Calculated with Fisher's Exact test assumptions)

The five crisis frames were statistically tested on significant association between the prevalence of frames and the crisis moments across the two countries (table 14). The only statistical significant association between the prevalence of the crisis frame and the crisis moment across the two countries was evident by scrutinising the prevalence of the attribution of the responsibility frame during the breakout phase in 2015 ($\chi^2 = 10.202$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.001$). The difference of this prevalence was significant as the US newspapers used this frame in the breakout phase in 32 (89%) of their articles and the German counterparts in 46 (59%) of their articles. The other tested frames did not show any statistical significant differences between the used frames and the crisis moment across the two countries. However, in the German newspapers the use of two crisis frames shifted significantly from one crisis moment to the other crisis moment. The conflict frame was during both occasion the most used crisis frame in the German newspapers, but the prevalence of the frame dropped from initially 86% to 68%. This decrease was significant as the results indicate ($\chi^2 = 4.997$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.025$). The second frame that showed a significant decrease during the moments was the attribution of responsibility frame in the German newspapers. Its prevalence decreased from 59% to 27%. ($\chi^2 = 10.010$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.02$). In the US newspapers, the results indicate that only the prevalence of the attribution of responsibility frame decreased significantly from the first to the second crisis moment. During the first crisis moment 89% of all US articles encompassed the attribution of responsibility frame, during the second crisis moment its prevalence decreased to 27% ($\chi^2 = 19.745$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.001$). Hence, this frame was the most used frame in the US newspapers during the breakout phase and it was the fourth most used frame in the US newspapers during the second crisis moment

Interestingly, the frequency order of the prevalent frames did not shift in the German newspapers, but it shifted in the US newspaper articles from the first crisis moment to the second crisis moment. The most prevalent frame during the second crisis moment in the US newspapers was the economic frame (67%) followed by the conflict frame (60%) and the human-interest frame (33%). The fourth most used frame was the attribution of responsibility frame (27%), which was the most used frame during the first crisis moment in the US newspapers. The least prevalent frame remained the morality frame (0%) in the US newspaper articles during the EPA Deal 2016 coverage.

4.4.2 Crisis moments by crisis issues

Table 15
Crisis moment by issue

Breakout 2015	USA	Germany	Total	Chi Square
VW's role	2 6%	17 22%	19 16%	
Government's role	1 2%	16 20%	17 15%	
US vs Germany	13 36%	14 18%	27 24%	
Management VW	20 56%	31 40%	51 45%	
Total	36 32%	78 68%	114 100%	.001
EPA Deal 2016				
VW's role	1 7%	6 18%	7 14%	
Government's role	0 0%	3 9%	3 6%	
US vs Germany	12 80%	23 68%	35 72%	
Management VW	2 13%	2 5%	4 8%	
Total	15 31%	34 69%	49 100%	.401*

(Note: * Calculated with Fisher's Exact test assumptions)

Table 15 shows the results for the prevalent crisis issues by country. During the Breakout in 2015 the frequency of the four crisis issues covered by the US and the German newspapers differed significantly (p-value 0.001), whereas during the EPA Deal 2016 no statistical discrepancy was found (Fisher's Exact Test p-value 0.401). During the crisis coverage in 2015, the discrepancy between the US coverage (2%)

of the Government's role and the German coverage of the same issue (20%) and the occurrence of the transnational relation between the US coverage (36%) and the German coverage (18%) were the issues with the highest coverage discrepancy. The most prevalent crisis issue during the breakout in 2015 was in both countries the Management VW. During the EPA Deal 2016 coverage of the crisis, the focus of the crisis coverage shifted in both countries from the Management VW to the US vs Germany issue. The transnational issue was the most covered issue in the US newspapers (80%) and in the German newspapers (68%). Moreover, the interest of the media in the Management of VW dropped. In the US newspapers, only 13% dealt with this issue and in the German newspapers only 5% dealt with this issue during the second crisis moment. The total shift of the crisis issues from one crisis moment to the other crisis moment was significant as the results indicate ($\chi^2 = 36.403$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.001$). In addition, the crisis issue shift in the countries was significant as well. In Germany the results were as follows $\chi^2 = 29.023$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.001$ and in the US newspapers the Fisher's Exact test indicated a p-value of 0.012.

4.4.3 Crisis moments by tonality

Table 16
Crisis moment by tonality

Breakout 2015	USA	Germany	Total	Chi Square
Positive	0 0%	6 8%	6 5%	
Neutral	13 36%	46 59%	59 52%	
Negative	23 64%	26 33%	49 43%	
Total	36 32%	78 68%	114 100%	.004*
EPA Deal 2016				
Positive	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	
Neutral	11 73%	24 71%	35 71%	
Negative	4 27%	10 29%	14 29%	
Total	15 31%	34 69%	49 100%	1.000*

(Note: * Calculated with Fisher's Exact test assumptions)

During the breakout crisis moment in 2015, the overall press coverage was associated with a neutral tonality as 52% of all 114 published articles had neutral tonality (table 16). Overall, 43% of the newspaper articles published during the first crisis moment was negative associated. 64% of the US newspaper articles were negative associated and 33% of the German newspaper articles were negative associated. Moreover, 8% of the German newspaper articles had a positive tone of voice, but no US newspaper article was associated with a positive tone of voice. Hence, in total 5% of all articles published during the first crisis moment was positive associated. The Fisher's Exact Test (p-value 0.004) shows that there is a significant association between the tonality in the German and US newspapers by the breakout crisis moment in 2015. In total, during the first crisis moment the US newspapers were in the majority associated to a negative tone of voice (64%), whereas the majority of the German articles were associated to a neutral tone of voice (59%).

During the coverage of the second crisis moment the tonality of the German and US newspapers were almost identical. There is no statistical significant association between the tonality in the German and US newspapers by the EPA Deal crisis moment in 2016 (Fisher's Exact test results: p-value: 1.000). The EPA deal coverage of the press was generally in a neutral tonality (71%). 73% of the US articles were neutral associated and 71% of the German articles. This examination shows that the tonality in both countries shifted to a more neutral crisis coverage in comparison with the first crisis moment. The most notable change can be seen by comparing the US coverage. The majority of a negative tone of voice during the first crisis moment in the US newspapers (64%) shifted to the majority of US newspaper articles written in a neutral tone of voice (73%) during the second crisis moment. Moreover, no article during the second crisis moment was positive associated.

However, the overall shift of tonality from one crisis moment to the other crisis moment was significant. (Fisher's Exact Test p 0.036). In addition, the shift in tonality in the US newspapers was also significant ($\chi^2 = 5.888$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.015$), whereas in the German newspapers the results demonstrate that the shift from one crisis moment to the other crisis moment was not significant.

5. Discussion

This study was aimed at investigating to what extent the Americans newspapers differed in their coverage during two key crisis moments of the Volkswagen organisational crisis from the coverage of the same organisational crisis by German newspapers. This was done by means of a transnational in-depth content analysis of newspaper articles from three US and three German newspapers that covered the crisis. No crisis communication research has been found that combined and correlated the four crisis variables (crisis frames, crisis issues, crisis tonality, and crisis moments) in a transnational preventable organisational crisis context so far.

In the following sections, the general discussion of results will be stated. Then, the theoretical and practical implications, which derived from the study's results, will be discussed. After that, the limitations as well as the suggestions for future research in this field of study will be presented. At last, the conclusion of this study will be stated.

Crisis frames

This study found that the prevalence of the five crisis frames according to the coding scheme of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) differed in the coverage of the organisational crisis across the two examined countries. The results were found to be significant for the prevalence of the attribution of responsibility frame and the prevalence of the human-interest frame between the US and the German coverage of the crisis. This corresponds partly with an existing crisis communication literature by An and Gower (2009), who looked into the prevalence of the five crisis frames in context of a preventable American organisational crisis reported by US newspapers. They found that in the case of a preventable organisational crisis the US newspapers most often used the attribution of responsibility and the human-interest frame to cover the examined organisational crisis. However, this study only found that the US newspapers used the mentioned frames significant more often than their German counterparts did. The most prevalent frames in the US newspapers were the economic frame, the conflict frame and the attribution of responsibility frame. The German newspapers used most often the conflict frame, the economic frame and the attribution of responsibility frame. Moreover, a statistical trend could be found in the discrepancy of the prevalence of the economic frame in the coverage of the crisis in the two countries. Significant differences in the use of the crisis frames across the two countries were expected by this study due to the fact that the US was the country in which the VW scandal was detected as well as the country in which Volkswagen customers received a buy-back offer from VW, whereas Germany is the domestic market of VW as well as the market on which no buy-back offer was offered. Furthermore, the American automotive companies are in fierce competition with the German company Volkswagen worldwide (Bloomberg, 2016).

The prevalence of crisis frames by newspapers differed. The use of the attribution of responsibility and the use of the economic frame showed a significant statistical discrepancy. This was expected by this

study due to the aforementioned differences between the US and Germany in the crisis. However, it was also expected by this study that while zooming in on the three newspapers per country in order to find out whether or not the statistical discrepancy was rooting from the news media outlets themselves or the country they originated that a differences in the frame prevalence between the German newspapers would be detected. The reason for this assumption is the fact that the US and the German media systems are identified by existing literature as media systems with different media characteristics (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Pfetsch (2001) argues that German newspapers possess distinct political tendencies and orientations, whereas the US newspapers have no real political orientation. Surprisingly, this study examined the contrary to this argumentation. In this study, the prevalence of the economic frame did differ between the three US newspapers. The Washington Post used the frame in all of its analysed articles and made therefore more often use of the frame than the other US newspapers. A possible explanation could be that the Washington Post in particular is known for its intensive economic reporting (An & Gower, 2009)

Crisis issues

The four identified crisis issues were found to differ significant in their prevalence across the two countries in this study. However, the frequency order across the countries was the same in this study. The most prevalent crisis issue used in both countries was the US vs Germany issue. The Management VW crisis issue was the second most prevalent issue, which was followed by the third most utilised crisis issue which was the was the issue concerning VW's role in the crisis. The least prevalent crisis issue in the coverage of the crisis was the role of the government. The significant discrepancy across the two countries was that the US newspapers reported more about the crisis issues *US vs Germany* and *Management VW* than the German newspapers. On the other hand, the German newspapers focused more on the *Government's role* and *VW's role* than their US counterparts. The latter crisis issues are related to the interests of Germany as a country and it can therefore be explained by a recent transnational literature which concluded that the discrepancy in news coverage of a crisis between two countries that are both impacted by a crisis can be driven by the "different relationships, proximities and interests in such affected areas" (Tian & Stewart, 2005, p.290). Overall, the crisis issues' prevalence differed significantly during the two examined crisis moments.

In order to retrieve the information of how the four crisis issues were framed differently in the reporting of the two analysed countries the crisis news frames were cross correlated by crisis issues. Boin et al. (2009) argue that the domestic market of a company tends to portray another picture of an organisational crisis than a market that is home market to a rival organisation. And indeed, this study found that the US newspapers had a strong pattern between two crisis issues and selected crisis frames, whereas the German newspapers distributed the four crisis issues on the frames more equally. The attribution of responsibility for the crisis was in the German newspapers associated to the management of VW and the government. The reason that the German newspapers placed the blame of the crisis also on the

German government can be explained by the media system characteristics of Germany. The German Democratic Corporatist Model is a model in which the government plays a strong role, however the press freedom is protected as well and therefore the role of the government in general is daily news in Germany (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In the US newspapers, the responsibility was placed on the management and the US vs Germany issue. The fact that the responsibility of the crisis was placed on the top management brass of Volkswagen in the American newspapers confirms the findings of An and Gower (2009) who concluded that the American media blames in the case of a preventable crisis such as the Volkswagen crisis, the individual CEO rather than the company itself. The human-interest frame was used in the reporting of the management and the company's role during the crisis in Germany. In the US media, the prevalent crisis issues were again the management and the transnational relations. Regarding the moral issues of the crisis, the German newspapers reported mostly about the company's role during the crisis, whereas the US newspapers strongly pinned down the moral stories of the crisis on the management of VW.

Tonality

The finding in this study that the tonality between two countries from different media systems that covered a crisis is different is consistent with previous research (Valentini & Romenti, 2011). This study found that there was a significant discrepancy between the tonalities of the US newspapers in comparison with the German newspapers. The US newspapers covered the VW crisis mostly negative. On the contrary, the German newspapers covered the crisis mostly neutral and even in six articles positive. A possible explanation can be the fact that the Volkswagen company made use of an intentional deception to trick US governmental emission tests and that the deception was detected by US governmental agencies. This could have led to a more negative picture of the company VW in the US in comparison with Germany. Possible reasons for the more negative tonality in the American press can only be suggested, as no preventable organisational crisis comparison research of American and German newspaper articles is known.

Moments

Prior research showed that most of the crisis coverage through newspapers is done in the advent of the crisis, since this time period is regarded as the most newsworthy time (An & Gower, 2009). This study confirms the work of An and Gower (2009) as 114 newspaper articles were published during the breakout phase of the crisis in 2015 and 49 articles were published during the second scrutinised crisis moment in the study – the EPA deal in 2016. This study examined the influence of the crisis variable timing on the other 3 crisis variables of this study (crisis frames, crisis issues, tonality), since crisis literature have found an influence of the variable crisis timing on the other three crisis variables. The effect of timing in the prevalence of crisis variables is called shifting and was studied during newspaper coverages of two disasters so far – the Enschede fireworks disaster and the Deep Water Horizon disaster

(Kuttschreuter et al., 2011; Schultz et al., 2012). No literature could be found that examined the shifting of crisis variables over time in a preventable transnational organisational crisis context.

Scrutinising the two crisis moments in correlation with the five crisis frames indicate that the frame prevalence has partly shifted from the first crisis moment to the second crisis moment. Particularly in the US newspapers the frequency order of used crisis frames shifted from the attribution of responsibility, the economic and the conflict frame as the most prevalent crisis frames during the first crisis moment to the economic, conflict and human-interest frame during the second crisis moment. The frame prevalence in the German newspapers did not shift from one moment to another. The frequency order remained the same and the most used frames in the German newspapers were the conflict, economic and the attribution of responsibility frame. However, the prevalence of the attribution of responsibility frame was significantly more present in the US newspapers than in the German newspapers, which again confirms An and Gower's findings concerning American newspapers (2009). The use of the attribution of responsibility frame dropped significantly in the coverage of the US newspapers from one crisis moment to the other crisis moment. The use of the frame decreased from an initial 89% during the breakout to a use of 27% during the EPA Deal 2016. This finding corresponds with Schultz et al. (2012) who argue that especially the US media tends to follow the content of a company's press statement concerning a crisis. In the German newspapers, the attribution of responsibility frame prevalence and the conflict frame prevalence decreased significant from one examined crisis moment to the other crisis moments.

The covered crisis issues did shift significantly during the two examined crisis moments in this study. A significant difference in the prevalence of the total issues during the two crisis moments as well as in the coverage of the two countries could be found. During the crisis coverage in 2015, the discrepancy between the US coverage of the Government's role and the German coverage of the same issue as well the occurrence of the transnational relation between the US coverage and the German coverage were the issues with the highest coverage discrepancy. The former played a minor role in the coverage of the US newspapers and the latter an important role. In both countries, the issue of the management of VW was the most prevalent issue in the advent phase of the crisis. Then the crisis coverage focus shifted in both countries from the management of VW to the US vs Germany issues. This could be due to the fact that between the two crisis moments, the question of management guilt was answered by Volkswagen with the replacement of Martin Winterkorn (VolkswagenAG, 2015). Furthermore, the second crisis moment dealt with the settlement between the US government and the company and it became clear that the US affected customers were treated differently than their German counterparts (Bloomberg, 2016)

Existing research show that the amount of responsibility could swiftly change from one crisis issue to another crisis issues after crisis disclosures and therefore the tone of voice can evolve during a crisis coverage of several crisis moments (Kuttschreuter et al., 2011). This study found that the overall tone

of voice shifted from one crisis moment to the other crisis moment significantly. The US newspapers were mostly negative in their coverage during the advent of the crisis, whereas the German newspapers were mostly neutral in their coverage during the first crisis moment. After Volkswagen released several press statements and acted according to crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2007) the tonality in both countries was almost identical and shifted to a neutral coverage of the crisis in total. The shift in tonality in Germany from one crisis moment to the other crisis moment was not significant and remained neutral, whereas the shift in the tonality of the US newspapers shifted significantly from a negative to a neutral tone. Thus, it is an indication that the opted crisis response strategies of VW that included the public apology and resignation of CEO Winterkorn in between the two examined crisis moments may have worked well over time.

5.2 Research Implications

Implications for theory and practice could be obtained which are based on the findings of this study. These points will be discussed in the following sections.

This study revealed interesting insights regarding the newspaper coverage of a transnational preventable organisational crisis by examining and cross-relating the four crisis variables crisis frames, crisis issues, crisis tonality and crisis moments. The goal of this study was to contribute to existing transnational crisis content research, since especially the impact of crisis moments on the prevalence of the other crisis variables in a German and US newspaper comparison context has not been researched before.

5.2.1 Theoretical Implications

Crisis frames

In reconsidering the results of this study in respect of the prevalence of frames, the results of the prevalence of crisis frame discrepancy between German newspapers and US newspapers fulfilled the expectations of this study. This study assumed that there were significant differences in the prevalence across the two countries due to different media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) and different economic interests and crisis outcomes for the countries and their affected Volkswagen customers (Aldred & Tepe, 2011; Xenos & Foot, 2006). The US newspapers used most often the economic, the conflict and the attribution of responsibility frames, whereas the German newspapers made use if the conflict, the economic and the attribution of responsibility frame most often. Significant differences could be found in the US of the attribution of responsibility frame and the use of the human-interest frame. Both frames were more present in the US coverage of the crisis than in the German coverage. These findings are partly in line with an existing crisis communication literature by An and Gower (2009) who found that the US newspapers make use of the human-interest frame and the attribution of responsibility frame in the context of a preventable crisis. However, this study found that theses frames were not the most prevalent, but the frames with a significant discrepancy in the use of the US and the German newspapers. Then this study looked into the frame discrepancy in the newspapers per country.

It was expected by this study that the prevalence of crisis frames in the German newspapers could differ, since Germany has distinct media characteristics in comparison with their US counterparts. In Germany, newspapers with different political tendencies and orientations (see Table 3) are existent and were chosen for this study. Surprisingly, the findings of this study were contradictory to the initial assumption of this study. In Germany no significant difference could be found, however between the US the Washington Post stood out in its coverage of the crisis as it made use of the economic significant more than their counterparts did. This suggests that more research in the political tendencies and orientations of US newspapers is necessary. The only plausible explanation that could be found for this finding is the notion by An and Gower (2009) that the Washington Post is well known for its economic coverage of issues.

Crisis issues

In this study, the prevalence of used crisis issues across the two countries was significant. The US newspapers reported more about the *US vs Germany* and *Management VW* than the German newspapers. And the German newspaper covered more extensively *Government's role* and *VW's role* during the crisis. This significant discrepancy regarding the coverage of the crisis issues is in line with prior research findings that demonstrated that the discrepancy in news coverage of a crisis between two countries that are both impacted by a crisis can be driven by the "different relationships, proximities and interests in such affected areas" (Tian & Stewart, 2005, p.290). Then, the crisis issues were cross correlated by crisis frames. The findings of the study that the US coverage zoomed in on two crisis issues, whereas the German coverage was more equally distributed in regards to the four crisis issues is in line with existing research, which shows that different media systems can lead to a different priorities of media coverages (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Tonality

It was shown that the German newspaper coverage of the crisis was in terms of tonality mostly neutral and the US newspaper coverage of the same crisis was mostly negative. This finding is in line with prior research that crisis coverage of the media is in most cases either negative or neutral (Kuttschreuter et al., 2011; Nijkraake et al., 2014). The finding in this study that the tonality between two countries, which are originated from two different media systems, covered a crisis in an overall different tonality is in conjunction with the findings of Valentini and Romenti (2011). Nevertheless, this could be an interesting point for further research, since no further study has examined the discrepancy in tonality between a liberal media system (USA) and a Democratic Corporatist Model (Germany) yet.

Moments

The shifting of crisis variables over crisis moments was analysed in prior literature in a disaster context (Kuttschreuter et al., 2011; Schultz et al., 2012). This existing research suggests that the crisis variables

covered by media outlets can shift from one examined crisis moment to the other crisis moment. This study set the findings of the existing research in a transnational preventable organisational crisis context. Since the two crisis moments had two different outcomes for the two countries significant crisis variables' shifts were expected by this study. During the breakout moment, the US was the unfavourable protagonist, since its governmental agency was deceived by VW for several years. However, the second crisis moment outcome was favourable for US customers. The second crisis moment – the EPA deal in 2016 assured only the US customers' compensations (Bloomberg, 2016). This study assumed that the crisis frames, crisis issues, and the tonality of the coverage could significantly shift from one crisis moment to the other crisis moment.

In this study, the prevalence of the crisis frames did not differ significantly from one crisis moment to the other. However, the attribution of responsibility frame prevalence was interesting to examine, since its prevalence showed a significant prevalence across the two countries during the breakout moment in 2015. It was the most prevalent frame during the breakout moment in the US newspapers (89%), which is in line with the findings of An and Gower (2009) who analysed the prevalence of the crisis frames in US newspapers during a preventable organisational crisis. In the German newspapers, the attribution of responsibility frame was the third most used frame (59%). During the second crisis moment there was no significant discrepancy between the US and the German newspaper coverage concerning the crisis frames anymore. However, the shift of the prevalence of the attribution of responsibility frame was in both countries verifiable. The prevalence of the frame dropped significant from the first to the second crisis moment. In the US newspapers, the use of the frame decreased from being the most prevalent frame during the breakout to the fourth most used frame during the second crisis moment. These findings corresponds with Schultz et al. (2012) who argue that especially the US media tends to follow the content of a company's press statement concerning a crisis. In the German newspapers, the use of the attribution of responsibility frame and the conflict frame prevalence dropped from the first to the second crisis moment significantly. It can be suggested that this shift happened due to the media system of Germany (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Pfetsch, 2001) however, further research in this field needs to be done.

Moreover, this study found that the covered crisis issues in the breakout phase varied significantly between Germany and the US. This is in line with prior research findings that news coverage discrepancy across countries can be explained by different interests in covered areas (Aldred & Tepe, 2011; Tian & Stewart, 2005). However, during the second crisis moment this study found no significant discrepancy across the two countries. This suggests that more research is necessary in this field in order to explain the significant coverage discrepancy across the two countries during the first moment and the not significant discrepancy across the two countries during the second moment.

In this study, as expected the tonality shifted significantly from the first to the second crisis moment. During the first crisis moment, the overall tonality was mildly neutral due to the fact that the US

newspapers covered the crisis mostly negative and the German newspapers mostly neutral during the first crisis moment. The tonality discrepancy was significant across the two countries during the breakout moment of the crisis. This result confirms the argumentation of Kuttschreuter et al. (2011) and Nijkraak et al. (2014) that crisis coverage of newspapers is mostly either neutral or negative. Moreover, the findings of the study regarding the tonality during the breakout moment is in line with the findings of Valentini and Romenti (2011) who found that newspapers from different media systems cover an organisational crisis differently. During the second crisis moment, the overall tonality was more neutral, as the German coverage and mostly the US coverage shifted towards a more neutral coverage of the crisis. This can be explained by the assumption of Kuttschreuter et al. (2011) who argue that the amount of responsibility can swiftly change from one crisis issues to another crisis issue after crisis disclosures and therefore the tonality can be impacted and evolve during a crisis coverage. The shift from the breakout in 2015 to the EPA Deal in 2016 was significant in the US newspapers, whereas this shift was not significant in the German newspapers. Moreover, the discrepancy of the tonality across the two countries during the second crisis moment was not significant.

Overall, this study filled the crisis communication research gap of being the first study that cross-correlated the four crisis variables crisis frames, crisis issues, crisis tonality and crisis moments in a transnational preventable organisational crisis context. The theoretical contribution of this study is that the results of this study confirmed the results of previous disaster media coverage research (Kuttschreuter et al., 2011; Schultz et al., 2012) and therefore it can be stated that a correlation of the four crisis variables was also confirmed in a transnational preventable organisational context by this study.

5.2.2 Practical implications

This study was aimed at investigating to what extent the Americans newspapers differed in their coverage during two key crisis moments of the Volkswagen organisational crisis from the coverage of the same organisational crisis by German newspapers. This study is able to provide practical insights for crisis managers who have to react to a transnational preventable organisational crisis in the context of Germany and the US. The findings of the study help to more effectively design crisis response strategies. Besides, this study is also able to provide practical insights for crisis communication research, since no crisis communication research has been found that combined and correlated the four crisis variables (crisis frames, crisis issues, crisis tonality, and crisis moments) in a transnational preventable organisational crisis context so far. This study highlights the fact that the specific characteristics of the national media system as well as the news practices in a country in conjunction with the crisis moments have a significant impact on the choice of crisis frames, the crisis issues and the crisis tonality in the transnational newspaper coverage. First, the most prevalent frames in the US newspapers and the

German newspapers were the economic, the conflict and attribution of responsibility frame which confirms the findings of Valentini and Romenti (2011). Interestingly, as shown in the study, the prevalence discrepancy of the attribution of responsibility frame and the human-interest frame was significant across the two countries. The US newspapers made more use of those frames and simultaneously the US newspapers covered only the crisis issue of the VW Management in conjunction with these frames, whereas the German newspapers covered the VW Management, the role of the government as well as the role of the company in conjunction with these frames. These findings again indicate the important role of the different media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Thus, crisis managers should take the differences into account when tailoring unique crisis response strategies for the German and the US markets based on the different characteristics. Secondly, the tonality in the US newspapers' coverage of the organisational crisis was more negative than in the German newspapers in which a neutral tone of voice was prevalent. Thus, crisis managers need to find and focus on a different choice of words when communicating publicly about the organisational crisis in the two countries.

Third, apart from the aforementioned points, this study shows that timing in a crisis response strategy can be decisive for crisis managers, since the prevalence of frames, issues and tonality shifted from one crisis moment to the other crisis moment. The US newspapers were mostly negative in their coverage while the German newspapers were mostly neutral in their coverage during the first crisis moment. After Volkswagen released several press statements and acted according to crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2007) the tonality in both countries was almost identical and shifted to an overall neutral tonality. With respect to the covered crisis issues the focus shifted in both countries from the management of VW to the US vs Germany issue. This can be explained by the fact that between the crisis moments, the question of management guilt was answered by Volkswagen with the replacement of Martin Winterkorn (VolkswagenAG, 2015). The most prevalent frames across the countries shifted in the US from the most used frames being the attribution of responsibility, economic and conflict frame during the first crisis moment to the economic, the conflict and the human-interest frame during the second crisis moment. In Germany, the prevalence did not shift. However, the use of the attribution of responsibility frame dropped significantly in the coverage of the US newspapers and the German newspapers. In the German newspapers, the conflict frame prevalence decreased significantly as well. These differences from one crisis moment to another crisis moment indicate, "One-fits all crisis response strategy" is not the best option. It is a necessity that the crisis response strategies in a transnational preventable organisational crisis should be tailored to the media characteristics of the individual country as well as adjusted to the unique and evolving crisis moments of an organisational crisis.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study is subject to various limitations that should be considered for the interpretation of the results. Hence, the generalizability of the findings is limited as explained in the following.

Firstly, the study's analysis was restricted to only two countries, Germany and USA. Research in media systems have shown that the clustering of the single media systems per country is not as coherent as the simple definitions of the three media systems sound like. Hence, a country's media system can have some overlapping characteristics with another categories media model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Therefore, the results of this study might be subjective to possible influences of the very media systems of the countries and it would therefore be interesting to conduct the study for newspapers originated from other countries, which also belong to the Democratic Corporatist Model and the Liberal model in order to see whether the results would be identical.

Secondly, the newspaper examination was restricted to only two key crisis moments of the transnational organisation Volkswagen crisis. This restriction could be a limitation that may have influenced the predominance of the examined crisis variables in this study. Since the VW crisis has been an unprecedented transnational crisis, the news coverage of the crisis has not stopped yet. Therefore, it would be interesting to extend the study to more crisis moments.

Thirdly, this study used three elite newspapers from the two countries. The German newspapers were known to have different political standpoints, whereas the selected US newspapers belonged all to the consistently liberal political alignment (Pfetsch, 2001). The fact that all newspapers were elite and especially the fact that the US newspapers belonged all to the same political alignment may have resulted in the predominant use of some crisis frames and issues in this study. Future research should extend the scope of the analysis by examine also the crisis coverage of conservative, right wing American newspapers in order to assure an analysis of American newspapers with different political alignments.

Lastly, a limitation of this study is the selected crisis itself. The study explored one transnational preventable crisis, which makes the generalizability of the findings not possible. The Volkswagen crisis is a preventable organisational crisis that was caused by a German company. Thus, future researches are advised to look into a preventable transnational organisation crisis caused by an American company. It would be interesting to gain the notion whether or not the country of origin of the company influenced the crisis coverage in the two countries. Consequently, additional research in regards to media systems, news practices as well as the choice of crisis frames, crisis issues, crisis tonality, and crisis moments is a necessity in order to obtain more insights into the crisis management of transnational preventable organisation crises.

5.4 Conclusion

This study was aimed at investigating to what extent the Americans newspapers differed in their coverage during two key crisis moments of the Volkswagen organisational crisis from the coverage of the same organisational crisis by German newspapers. So far, research on a transnational preventable organisational crisis in media framing context is scarce. Only a few studies have investigated such crisis framing and they examined only one crisis moment and came to disconfirming results. Especially research on comparison the German crisis media coverage and the US media crisis coverage is lacking, even though it is known that these countries are part of two different media systems.

This study explored and compared the crisis coverage of 3 US newspapers and 3 German newspapers by taking the four crisis variables crisis frames, crisis issues, crisis tonality and crisis moments into account. This study assumed that there were significant differences in the prevalence of the crisis variables across the two countries due to different media systems and different economic interests and crisis outcomes for the countries and their affected Volkswagen customers. The results of this study indicate that it is a necessity for crisis managers to tailor their crisis response strategies in a transnational preventable organisational crisis to the media characteristics of the individual country as well as adjust to the unique and evolving crisis moments of an organisational crisis such as the Volkswagen crisis. The study found that the most used frames during the first crisis moment were the conflict, the economic and the attribution of responsibility frame.

It was found that the predominance of the attribution of responsibility frame and the less used human-interest frame was significant in the US newspapers in comparison with the German newspapers. More importantly, it was shown that the frame prevalence shifted from the first to the second crisis moment. During the second crisis moment, the US newspapers used most often the economic, the conflict and the human-interest frames, while the frequency order remained the same in Germany. In addition, the study found that the Washington Post set itself in its crisis coverage apart from the other newspapers by focusing in all of its articles on the economic frame. With respect to the covered crisis issues this study found significant differences. The US newspapers focused on the management of VW and the transnational relations in its crisis coverage, while their German counterparts covered the role of the company VW and the role of the German government in this crisis more extensively. The US newspapers associated the responsibility for this crisis to the management of Volkswagen and the German newspapers blamed the government for the crisis. It is significant to mention that the crisis issues shifted from the first examined crisis moment to the second crisis moment. Overall, the crisis issue of the management of VW was the predominant issue covered during the first crisis moment, whereas during the second crisis moment the transnational relations were the most reoccurring issue. In terms of tonality, the crisis coverage shifted from a mildly overall neutral tone to a strong neutral tone from the first crisis moment to the second crisis moment. The shift in the US newspapers was evidently

stronger, since the tone in the US newspapers shifted from a negative tone to a neutral tone, while the German newspapers covered the crisis neutral during both crisis moments.

Lastly, after reasoning about the literature in crisis communication, the results of prior studies in the field of preventable organisational crises and the outcomes of this study, the final conclusion is reached. It is of paramount importance for crisis managers to take the media system characteristics of the individual country into account when developing a crisis response strategy for a transnational organisational crisis. In addition, the factor timing is decisive for crisis managers. The external communication needs to be adjusted not only to the characteristics of the targeted media system, but also to the unique and evolving crisis moments of a transnational preventable organisational crisis in order to tailor a successful crisis response strategy.

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