Master study: Communication Studies

The effects of CSR fit and message framing in times of a corporate crisis

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ABSTRACT

Since last decade, CSR is at the forefront of corporate consciousness. Particular organizations in questionable industries seem to use CSR as a buffer against the negative effects of a crisis. Nevertheless, little research has been conducted into the use and effects of CSR initiatives in times of an organizational crisis. This study examines how CSR initiatives and message framing can be optimally used during a crisis. The influences of CSR fit, crisis type and message framing on specific consumer attitudes including attitude, trust, credibility, (non)skepticism and forgiveness were examined. A 2 (CSR fit: high vs. low) x 2 (crisis situation: accidental vs. preventable) x 2 (message framing: rational vs. emotional) between-subjects experimental design based on fictional scenarios was used. A survey among 340 respondents was conducted. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions. Not surprisingly, results revealed that preventable crisis situations have led to more negative consumer attitudes compared to accidental crisis situations. Furthermore, crisis responses with emotional framed messages generally had a more positive influence on consumer attitudes compared to crisis responses with a rational framing method included. Consumer attitudes were most negative when companies with a high CSR fit in a preventable crisis situation used a rational framing method. On the other hand, when organizations in accidental crisis situations used an emotional appeal regardless of their CSR fit, consumer attitudes were most positive. Findings indicate that organizations with a high CSR fit in preventable crisis situations should use emotional framing methods to increase attitude, non-skepticism and forgiveness. On the other hand, organizations in accidental crisis situations regardless of their fit, should use an emotional message framing in order to increase attitude, credibility, non-skepticism (non-skepticism applies just for low CSR fit organizations) and forgiveness. The current research can serve as a guideline for organizations to choose an appropriate framing strategy during a given crisis situation which suits their CSR fit.

Keywords

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

1. INTRODUCTION

During last decade there has been growing public attention for the role of corporations in society. Many firms are criticized for creating or being responsible for several social and environmental problems. The influence of large organizations on society and issues as pollution, waste and resource depletion has become the focus of increasing attention and concern (Reverte, 2009). Especially organizations in the oil industry are at the heart of persistent debates about their lack of respect for natural environment (Frynas, 2005). Several scientists have documented negative social and environmental consequences of oil. Disasters as the Exxon Valdez oil crisis in 1989 and BP's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 have triggered public attention and it questions the legitimacy of the oil industry. Thus, gaining broader societal acceptance became a critical factor in this controversial industry where organizations fail to meet consumers' and stakeholders' environmental and societal expectations (Campbell, 2007; Palazzo & Richter, 2005).

In this context, CSR initiatives appear as an useful tool to ensure organization's licence to operate in activities that might be perceived as unsustainable (Palazzo & Richter, 2005). Prior research has mainly focused on the effects of CSR activities in controversial industries (Frynas, 2005; Palazzo & Richter, 2005; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli & Schwarz, 2006). The present study does not only measure the impact of CSR initiatives in the oil industry, its uniqueness lies in the fact that it combines CSR and framing in crisis communication during an organizational crisis in one study.

When in a crisis, organizations use crisis communication to restore the reputation of the organization. The nature of a crisis, e.g. whether it is an accidental or preventable one, could have an effect on consumers attitude towards an organization. In his research, Coombs (2007) has investigated the effects of particular communication strategies organizations should use during specific crisis situations. He argued that organizations in a preventable crisis situation should use other crisis responses compared to organizations in accidental crisis situations in order to reap reputational benefits. Despite the fact that there are already many different models of crisis communication for specific crisis types, scientists also claimed that there are other ways to prevent reputational damage during a crisis. For example, Coombs (1995) argued that CSR communication might be an effective tool and could serve as a buffer to counter negative effects of a crisis. More specific, CSR communication could help an organization build a reputation that might protect its image against negative publicity (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). Other researchers argue that the way organizations frame crisis information may influence consumers' willingness to evaluate the content of an organizational message (McKay-Nesbitt, Manchanda, Smith & Huhmann, 2011). For example, organizations in crisis can opt for emotional or rational framing

methods. Where messages with emotional framing appeal to individuals' emotions, rational framing methods appeal to individuals' rationality (Yoo & MacInnis, 2005).

Thus, several researchers have investigated matching crisis response strategies to crisis types (Coombs, 1995; Hobbs, 1995). While others have examined the effects of framing in crisis communication (Kim & Cameron, 2011; McKay-Nesbitt, Manchanda, Smith & Huhmann, 2011). It may be obvious that an organizational crisis calls for effective communication to shelter an organization's reputation. Thereby, communication can be used to influence how stakeholders interpret a crisis and the organization in crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). However, knowledge of how organizations have to reap the benefits of CSR communication and message framing during a specific crisis type is missing. To fill this gap, this study investigates whether the nature of CSR initiatives and message framing in times of an organizational crisis affects consumers' attitudes towards an organization.

The goal of this study is to get better insights in the effects of message framing and CSR in a crisis context. In order to achieve this, the present study examines consumer attitudes on CSR messages after a corporate crisis. It measures to what extent emotional or rational message framing in combination with CSR fit (the congruence between the core business of an organization and its CSR activities) and crisis type (accidental or preventable) influences consumer attitudes as attitude, corporate trust, corporate credibility, (non)skepticism and forgiveness. A 2x2x2 experimental design will be used to answer the research question:

RQ: To what extent do CSR fit, crisis type and message framing influence consumer attitudes after an organizational crisis?

This research has three major contributions. Several scholars have called for more research on CSR communication in controversial industries as it tends to trigger consumer skepticism (Dawkins, 2004; Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). This research answers this call and advances the understanding of CSR communication in controversial industries. However, at the same time it advances understanding of the effects of CSR initiatives during an organizational crisis. Second, it identifies which framing mechanisms can enhance the effectiveness of crisis communication in a particular crisis situation. At last, it points out which sort of CSR initiatives needs to be embedded in CSR communication during a particular crisis situation to minimize negative consumer attitudes. All in all, organizations could use the outcomes of this research as a guideline, which elaborates consequences of a specific behaviour in a particular crisis situation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section starts with a theoretical introduction of CSR. Second, the concept of a corporate crisis will be elaborated. Then, consumer responses as attitude, organizational trust, organizational credibility, skepticism and forgiveness will be elaborated. After that, the independent variables CSR fit, crisis type and message framing will be explained.

2.1 CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

CSR is at the centre of corporate consciousness (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2007). More than ever, companies spend substantial resources on various social initiatives, ranging from community outreach to environmental protection. Those so-called CSR activities are described as activities if the firm goes beyond compliance and engages in actions that appear to improve the social good, beyond the interest of the firm (Mc Williams & Siegel, 2001). Many definitions of CSR have been formulated, all with their own perspectives. For instance, CSR is defined as a commitment to improve (societal) wellbeing through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources (Kottler & Lee, 2005). Others interpreted CSR as a company's commitment to minimizing or eliminating any harmful effects and maximizing its long-run beneficial impact on society (Petkus & Woordruff, 1992). Brown and Dacin (1997) define CSR associations as "those that reflect the organization's status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations" (p. 68). However, in this research CSR associations are related to the firm's commitment to its societal obligations (Sen, Bhattacharya & Korschun, 2006).

Carrol (1991) suggests that CSR includes four kinds of responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic. Where economic responsibilities of CSR refer to the importance of being committed to be as profitable in a responsible way, legal components of CSR refer to the importance to perform in a manner consistent with expectations of government and law (Carrol, 1991). Ethical components describe the importance to perform in a manner consistent with expectations of societal mores and ethical norms. At last, philanthropic responsibilities emphasise the importance to perform in a manner consistent with the philanthropic and charitable expectations of society (Carrol, 1991). These four categories of CSR might be depicted as a pyramid, and organizations are considered as 'good corporate citizens' if they acknowledge and act on these responsibilities (Brownwell & Warner, 2009). By being a good corporate citizen, an organization can foster consumer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, resistance to negative information and willingness to pay a price premium (Du et al., 2007). In other words, beyond transactional benefits to the company (for instance sales), benefits such as advocacy and loyalty may be the primary payback of CSR (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002; Klein & Dawar, 2004; Sen et al., 2006). Additionally, evidence is found in a positive relationship between CSR practices and

corporate image (David, Kline & Dai, 2005). Thereby, it can be argued that CSR can also serve as a buffer during an organizational crisis. A crisis is an event or interaction within a larger relationship between an organization and its stakeholders (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Thus, a crisis becomes part of that relationship and can damage or threaten this relationship (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). However, following the "halo effect-theory", which states that previous reputation affects the acceptance and interpretation of new information, an organization which has proven to be a shining star in CSR affords the benefit of the doubt in times of a crisis (Vanhamme & Grobben, 2007).

2.2 ORGANIZATIONAL CRISIS

Companies in controversial industries are frequently challenged. Over the past few decades, oil companies have been harshly criticized by both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Especially the media for issues ranging from environmental violations, human right abuses, and detrimental impact on local communities. Besides negative publicity about these issues, it also happens that oil companies generate negative publicity through an organizational crisis.

An organizational crisis can be defined as "a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution" (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 60). Also, a crisis is a sudden and unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organization's operations and therefore is seen as an organizational threat (Coombs, 2007). Moreover, a crisis could be considered as a threat, which reflects the potential of a crisis to do reputational damage (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). This reputational damage can lead to financial damage and threaten the organization's existence. Simultaneously, an organizational crisis can be seen as a challenge to an organization's legitimacy, because during such a crisis stakeholders question if an organization is meeting normative expectations (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). A crisis could affect a wide array of stakeholders including community members, employees, customers, suppliers and stockholders (Coombs, 2007) and it gives individuals reasons to think badly of an organization. Organizations who face a crisis can communicate with stakeholders via crisis communication. Crisis communication is defined as "the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required addressing a crisis situation" (Coombs, 2010, p. 20). It can be stated that there is a continuous debate with respect to the benefits of CSR during a crisis. More specifically, some researchers argue that CSR may serve as a buffer during a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Several studies have focused on the effects of CSR initiatives (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Nan & Heo, 2007; Du et al., 2010) and an organizational crisis (Coombs, 2007; Utz, Schultz & Glocka, 2013) on consumer attitudes.

However, little research demonstrates the relationship between CSR and crisis impacts (Klein & Dawar, 2004). This research focuses on effects of CSR fit and crisis type on specific consumer attitudes. In general, there are many types of consumer attitudes to distinguish. However, in this study common consumer attitudes on CSR initiatives and crisis situations as attitude, organizational trust, corporate credibility, (non)skepticism and forgiveness will be considered as the dependent variables.

Attitudes are described as an individual's internal evaluations (Mitchell & Olson, 1981). They can help to better understand the affective relationship between consumers and organizations (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002; Fullerton, 2005). Attitudes are long lasting and energize direct behaviour (Spears & Singh, 2004). Thereby, existing attitudes can distort perceptions and judgements of new objects (Brown & Dacin, 1997).

Organizational trust is defined as the feeling of security held by a consumer in his/her interaction with an organization, which is based on the perception that the organization is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer (Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Alemán & Yagüe-Guillén, 2003). Trust can be seen as an interpersonal determinant of behaviour that deals with beliefs about the integrity, ability, benevolence and predictability of other people or organizations (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995).

Newell and Goldsmith (2001) define corporate credibility as "the extent to which consumers feel that the firm has the knowledge or ability to fulfil its claims and whether the firm can be trusted to the truth or not" (p. 235). Research has shown that corporate credibility has a significant impact on both attitudes towards brands as well as purchase intention (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Folkes & Kamins, 1999). Furthermore, companies, which lack positive credibility perceptions, will have difficulties in achieving brand preference and presenting effective ad messages (Newell & Goldsmith, 2001).

Consumer skepticism is described as consumer distrust or disbelief of marketer actions (Forehand & Grier, 2003). Skepticism towards marketing messages or organizations originates from either doubts about the motives behind the messages or from difficulties to believe their claims (Boush, Friestad & Rose, 1994). Skepticism can also occur by the perception that a brand or organization is deceptive about its true motives, when there are discrepancies between advertisement claims, or when advertisement claims are difficult to verify (Forehand & Grier, 2003). Skepticism should be avoided because it leads to negative responses as negative attitude toward the motives of marketers (Forehand & Grier, 2003) and resistance towards messages (Mohr, Eroglu & Ellen, 1998).

In the context of organizational crises, forgiveness is defined as the public effort to reduce negative thinking, overcome unpleasant emotion, and restore their damaged relationship

with an organization due to a crisis (Moon & Rhee, 2012). The concept contains cognitive, affective and behavioural forgiveness. The cognitive dimension explains how consumers understand and abandon negative attitudes towards the organization. Then, the affective dimension is an explanation how consumers withdraw hatred from the organization. At last, the behavioural dimension is an indication how consumers meet the organization and improve their relationship with the organization (Moon & Rhee, 2012).

2.3 CSR FIT

Whether consumer attitudes are positive or negative, depends on many different factors. As has been mentioned before, the purpose of this research is to discover which explicit attitudes towards an organization can be created by means of certain independent variables. One of these independent variables is CSR fit. This research will examine, among others, whether the degree of CSR fit influences consumer attitudes. The degree of CSR fit is an interesting factor to include because stakeholders often engage in more sophisticated attribution processes, and are capable of perceiving and reconciling mixed CSR motives (Du et al., 2010). This means that simply engaging in CSR does not necessarily result into positive consumer attitudes towards an organization.

CSR fit is defined as "the perceived congruence between a social issue and a company's core business" (Du et al., 2010, p .12). CSR fit can be distinguished into two levels: high and low. A high CSR fit means that there is a clear relationship between an organization's core business and its CSR activity. A low fit means that the combination of an organization and its CSR activity is more or less random (De Jong & Van der Meer, 2017). CSR fit could result from affinity with specific target segments, common associations that an organization shares with the cause, or corporate image associations created by the organizations past conduct in a specific social domain (Mennon & Kahn, 2003).

Several studies on the effects of CSR fit on stakeholder's opinions and attitudes are conducted, but the results are divers. In general, most studies confirm that organizations should have a high CSR fit, suggesting that stakeholders have more appreciations for CSR activities, which follow logically from the organizations core business. It is found that a high fit is likely to lead consumers to transfer more positive feelings about the cause to the company (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002). Thereby, Becker-Olsen, Cudmore and Hill (2006) found in their research that low-fit CSR initiatives have a negative influence on consumers' beliefs and attitudes. This is partly due to the fact that a low CSR fit increases cognitive elaboration and is making extrinsic motives

more salient, thereby reducing consumers' positive reactions to a company's CSR activities (Du et al., 2010).

There are also several studies that discourage high CSR fit initiatives and argue for a low or moderate CSR fit. For example, Drumwright (1996) found that a high fit between an organization and a cause, arises cynical reactions from consumers. This is because consumers are more suspicious about organizations' motives if the organization implements high CSR fit programs (Yoon et al., 2006). Research of Ellen, Mohr and Webb (2000) has shown that causes judged as less congruent were evaluated more positively than congruent causes. Thereby, Zhou and Ki (2017) have found that a low CSR fit is helpful to build favourable corporate reputation and reduce the level of skepticism. They found that people who read about low fit CSR initiatives after cognitive elaboration perceive the CSR effort to be truly altruistic because they do not see the link between CSR investment and benefits (Zhou & Ki, 2017). This leads towards more positive consumer attitudes. Consistent with the beliefs of Zhou and Ki (2017) and assuming that this research focuses on CSR in a crisis context, it might be stated that consumer attitudes towards an organizational crisis of an organization with a high CSR fit are more negative than towards organizations with a low CSR fit. Thus, the first hypothesis is stated as follows:

H1: CSR messages with a low CSR fit will result in more positive consumer attitudes than CSR messages with a high CSR fit.

2.4 CRISIS TYPE

A second variable that will be used to discover which attitudes can be created towards an organization is crisis type. People directly evaluate organizational responsibility on a crisis when they determine the cause of a crisis. Therefore, it can be argued that the nature of a crisis can affect consumer attitudes to an organizational crisis.

An organizational crisis can be seen as a threat to the reputation of an organization. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) examines how various crisis situations as crisis type, crisis history, and prior reputation compose the public's crisis responsibility attributions, which in turn influence their perceptions and affects regarding the organization (Coombs, 2007). The SCCT has identified three crisis clusters based upon attributions of crisis responsibility by crisis type, namely: victim clusters, accidental clusters and preventable clusters (Coombs, 2004; 2007). The attribution of responsibility determines the level of guilt of the organization.

In this research the focus will be on the accidental and preventable cluster. Accidental crisis clusters contain crisis types with minimal attributions of crisis responsibility and

represent a moderate reputational threat. The organization's management is seen as not meaning for the crisis to happen and/or could do little to prevent it (Coombs, 2004; 2007). There is a limited control and the event is considered unintentional or uncontrollable by the organization (Coombs, 2004; 2007). Events that belong to the accidental crisis cluster are technical-error accidents and technical-error recalls (Coombs, 2004; 2007). Second, organizations in the preventable crisis cluster knowingly placed stakeholders or the environment at risk, took inappropriate actions or violated a law or regulation (Coombs, 2007). Those preventable crisis clusters contain crisis types that have strong attributions of crisis responsibility and represent a severe reputational threat (Coombs, 2004; 2007). Actions of an organization in a preventable crisis cluster are considered to be purposeful (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Events that belong to the preventable crisis cluster are human-error accidents, human-error recalls and organizational misdeeds (Coombs, 2004; 2007).

The more individuals attribute crisis responsibility to an organization, the stronger the likelihood of publics developing negative images of the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). In other words, the stronger the perceived responsibility, the more likely it becomes that the crisis will have a negative impact on the organization, and in particular on its reputation (Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2008).

H2: A preventable corporate crisis will evoke more negative consumer attitudes than an accidental crisis.

2.5 MESSAGE FRAMING

Last decade an increasing volume of crisis communication research has emerged. Sets of crisis response strategies (e.g. denial, diminish, rebuild, and reinforcing) are proposed to repair the reputation, to reduce negative affect and to prevent negative behavioural intentions towards organizations (Coombs, 2007). It can be argued that the public's attitudes to a given crisis can be influenced by how an organization describes it. Furthermore, how organizations frame a crisis may influence consumers' willingness to attend to the content of the crisis response (McKay-Nesbitt et al., 2011). The way information is framed may influence consumer judgments and decisions (Buda & Zhang, 2000). Framing is selecting aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text (Entman, 1993). A text can be framed with the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments (Entman, 1993). More precisely, emotional or rational frames can play a critical role in this process of message framing. Where some scholars state that emotional framing can help

enhance or protect an organization's reputation (Read, 2007), others state that rational framing messages persuade more because they focus on the content (Yoo & MacInnis, 2005). In this study the impact of emotional versus rational message framing in crisis communication will be established.

In the context of crisis communication there are many types of frames. However, in this research the distinction between emotional and rational frames is made. Emotionally framed messages attempt to persuade through appeals to emotions and they can be differentiated in terms of valence: positive (joy, warmth, happiness) or negative (fear, guilt, worry) (McKay-Nesbitt et al., 2011). Emotionally framed messages appeal to individuals' emotions by using drama and including subjective, evaluative properties (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014). According to Mckay-Nesbitt et al. (2011) primary responses to emotional frames are likely to be feelings as they appeal to receivers' emotions. In contrast, rationally framed messages provide information to persuade through appeals to recipients' thoughts (McKay-Nesbitt et al., 2011). Those rationally framed messages appeal to the rationality of the receiver through presenting information objectively and straightforward. Rational frames trigger consumers to evaluate the credibility of a message as they appeal to individual's cognitions (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014).

In their research, Choi and Lin (2009) also focused on the effects of emotional versus rational framing in crisis situations. They based their research on prior literature, suggesting that emotional framing methods were more effective in terms of attitude changes (Rosselli, Skelly & Mackie, 1995). They found that people are more likely to accept a corporate response when the message contains intensive emotional framing methods then when the message does not contain emotional framing methods (Rosselli et al., 1995). In the field of advertising, research has shown that both thoughts and feelings contribute to advertising effectiveness (McKay-Nesbitt et al., 2011). However, in the field of crisis communication Choi and Lin (2009) found that messages with emotional framing affect the interpretation of crisis situations, which may thereafter have an effect on the organization's reputation. Thereby, Kim and Cameron (2011), found that the presence of an emotional framing method in an organizational message positively influences participants' attitude to corporate messages compared to purely rational framing methods.

According to literature, it can be hypothesized that emotionally framed messages in crisis communication result in more positive consumer attitudes than rationally framed messages.

> **H3: Crisis communication messages with an emotional message framing will result in more positive consumer attitudes than crisis communication messages with a rational message framing.**

2.6 INTERACTION EFFECTS

Sufficient research is done into effects of CSR fit, crisis types or message framing on consumer attitudes. However, little is known on how organizations have to combine those factors and reap the benefits of CSR communication and message framing during a specific crisis type. Thus, besides studying the main effects of CSR fit, crisis type and message framing it is also interesting to investigate in which ways these factors interact in their effects.

2.6.1 INTERACTION EFFECT OF CSR FIT AND CRISIS TYPE

Little is known concerning the interactions between crisis type and CSR fit. However, Zhou and Ki (2017) have researched the effects of CSR fit in a preventable crisis situation.

Zhou and Ki (2017) found that in case of a preventable crisis, a company with a high CSR fit is more likely to obtain a higher level of CSR skepticism. Thereby, they state that in a preventable crisis situation, a higher CSR fit will lead to a higher attribution of crisis responsibility (Zhou & Ki, 2017). The study reveals that in a preventable crisis situation, high fit CSR is neither helpful to build favourable corporate reputation nor to reduce the level of CSR skepticism. On the contrary, they state that low CSR fit programs are able to obtain these goals.

> **H4: Preventable crisis types will lead to more negative consumer attitudes compared to accidental crisis types, especially when the organization has a high CSR fit.**

2.6.2 INTERACTION EFFECT OF CSR FIT AND MESSAGE FRAMING

There is conflicting evidence to the effectiveness of emotional and rational framing. According to the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of Cacioppo and Petty (1984), rational frames are effective when the amount a person thinks about a message is high, whereas emotional frames are more effective when elaboration is low. If an organization is framing a crisis in a rational way, organizations should match the crisis response strategy to the crisis type so that consumers observe the response as credible and meaningful (Yoo & MacInnis, 2005). As rational frames focus on message content, consumers have a more positive attitude towards the organization

when an organization frames a matched response in a rational compared to an emotional manner (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014). However, when an organization with a high CSR fit uses rational framing during a crisis, which could be seen as a mismatching crisis response, this effect could be vice versa. Thereby, according to McKay-Nesbitt et al. (2011) rational frames trigger consumers to evaluate message credibility because they appeal to an individual's cognitions. Therefore, it might be expected that if organizations use rational framing during a crisis, consumers become more sceptical if the organization has a high CSR fit, especially when the crisis is preventable. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: Consumer attitudes are most negative when rational framing is used, especially when organizations have a high CSR fit.

2.6.3 INTERACTION EFFECT OF CRISIS TYPE AND MESSAGE FRAMING

Research of Cho and Gower (2006) showed that an emotional response to a crisis might influence a rational judgment to evaluate organizational responsibility for the crisis (Cho & Gower, 2006). In other words, the use of an emotional frame in crisis communication may be an important predictor in explaining why people attribute organizational responsibility to a crisis (Cho & Gower, 2006). Their findings were that when a crisis type is an accident, emotional response would not serve as a factor in the attribution of blame or responsibility of a company. People might feel sorrow about a company's victims caused by uncontrolled events, but their emotional reactions do not contribute to their evaluations of the company's responsibility or blame. On the other hand, because rational frames appeal to individuals' cognitions, they trigger consumers to evaluate the credibility of a corporate message (McKay-Nesbitt et al., 2011; Yoo & MacInnis, 2005). Therefore, if a crisis is preventable, organizations should not use a rational frame. This will only lead to the rationality of the receiver and consumers will remark that the crisis was preventable. According to research of Kim and Cameron (2011), emotional messages about corporate crisis guide public responses. By communicating emotion judgements and decision-making can be guided (Loewenstein, Weber, Hsee & Welch, 2001). It is also found that emotional framed messages affected the interpretation of crisis situations, which will have an effect on an organization's reputation. Thereby, research of Kim and Cameron (2011) has pointed out that the presence of emotional framing in an organizational message in corporate messages during an accidental crisis positively influenced participants' response compared to rational frames. According to this literature, the following hypothesis is stated:

H6: Emotional frames in crisis communication will lead to more positive consumer attitudes compared to rational frames, especially in accidental crisis situations.

2.6.4 INTERACTION EFFECT OF CSR FIT, CRISIS TYPE AND MESSAGE FRAMING

Due to a lack of academic research there is no proved three-way interaction effect between CSR fit, crisis type and message framing. The purpose of this study is to examine whether the nature of CSR in combination with specific framing methods can help an organization in a crisis to protect their reputation. This is because both CSR practices and crisis communication share a common goal of maintaining corporate reputation, yet little research has been done to understand the benefits of those three variables at the same time. Therefore, an exploratory research question is formulated in order to investigate the three-way interaction:

RQ: To what extent do CSR fit, crisis type and message framing interact with each other and are they influencing consumer's responses as attitude, trust, credibility, skepticism and/or forgiveness?
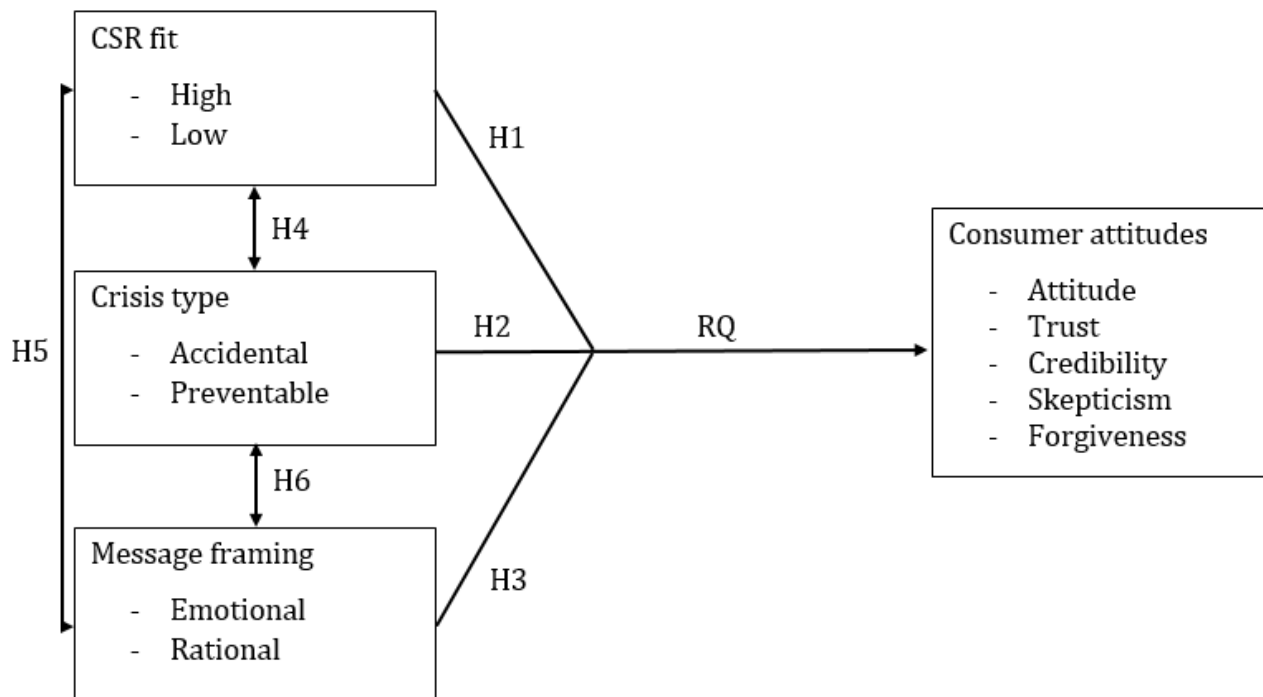
Figure 1 *Research framework*

Table 1 *Hypothesises*

Hypothesises
H1: CSR messages with a low CSR fit will result in more positive consumer attitudes than CSR messages with a high CSR fit.
H2: A preventable corporate crisis will evoke more negative consumer attitudes than an accidental crisis.
H3: Crisis communication messages with an emotional message framing will result in more positive consumer attitudes than crisis communication messages with a rational message framing.
H4: Preventable crisis types will lead to more negative consumer attitudes compared to accidental crisis types, especially when the organization has a high CSR fit.
H5: Consumer attitudes are most negative when rational framing is used, especially when organizations have a high CSR fit.
H6: Emotional frames in crisis communication will lead to more positive consumer attitudes compared to rational frames, especially in accidental crisis situations.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the research methodology of this study. First, the research design, procedure and stimulus materials are described. After that, the used measures and specific sample characteristics are discussed. The final paragraph discusses specific manipulation checks.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

To test the influence of particular message features (e.g. CSR fit, crisis type and message framing) on consumer attitudes a 2 (high vs. low CSR fit) x 2 (accidental vs. preventable crisis) x 2 (rational vs. emotional framing) experimental design was used. An online questionnaire including eight scenarios, manipulation checks and questions to measure dependent variables and demographics were distributed among university students and acquaintances of the researcher.

   Before starting the survey respondents had to read a short introduction. They were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and the survey was all about opinions and attitudes. Then, respondents were asked to read a short corporate story about the fictitious company 'Oil International' on their corporate website. An oil company was chosen because of the continuous social pressure on oil companies. A fictional company was used to prevent those former crises or existing beliefs of the company could influence outcomes (Coombs, 2004). After reading the corporate story (step 1) respondents read a newspaper article about a corporate crisis affecting the company (step 2). Eventually the crisis response of 'Oil International' on their corporate website was presented (step 3). Figure 2 shows the design of the research.
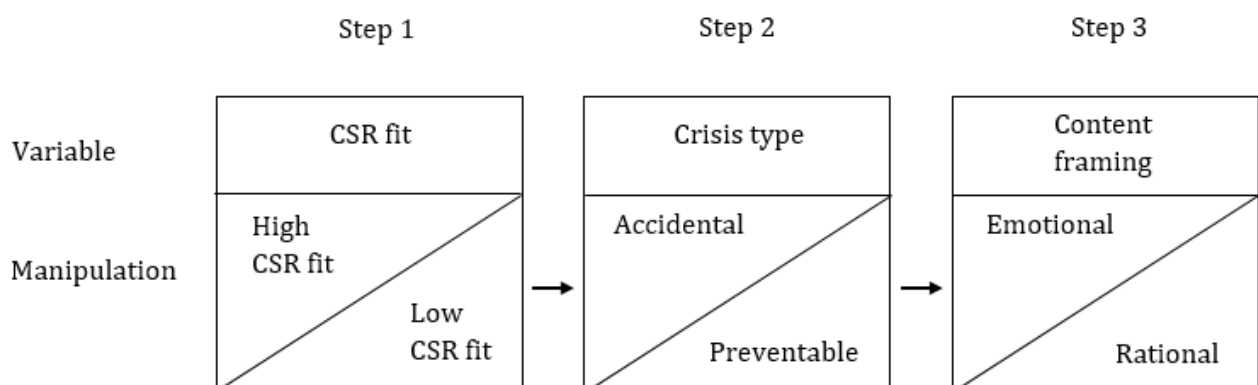
Figure 2 *Research design*

Respondents were then asked to fill in questions regarding the dependent measurements. Finally, respondents were asked about demographic questions, such as country of origin, age, sex, educational level and whether they were in the possession of a motor vehicle or fuel card. Possession of a motor vehicle or fuel card were considered as covariates because respondents might have had a different point of view regarding oil companies if they possessed a motor vehicle or fuel card. The survey can be found in Appendix A.

3.2 STIMULUS MATERIAL

Eight fictitious scenarios have manipulated CSR fit, crisis type and message framing. A three-step scenario involving a CSR initiative, a corporate disaster and a corporate response to the crisis of the fictitious organization 'Oil International' was used. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions. The stimulus materials are displayed in Appendix B.

Step 1: CSR fit: high vs. low
First, respondents had to read a corporate story of the fictitious oil company 'Oil International'. In this part, respondents were presented a short story about the core business of the company and the environment in which they operate. Respondents read that 'Oil International' is mainly concerned with the detection, extraction and processing of gas and oil and the sale of fossil fuels as a result from this process. Thereby, they read that the company is focussing on the extraction of oil and gas, both on the sea and on the mainland. Eventually, in this corporate story some information was given about one of the company's CSR initiatives. The high CSR fit condition was represented by a social initiative, which was committed to new pioneering innovative technologies in the oil and gas extraction process that must prevent earthquakes. A social afterschool sports program that works against racism and bullying was representing the low CSR fit condition. Both scenarios were presented in the format of the corporate website of 'Oil International' to provide an official perspective regarding CSR within the company (Wanderley, Lucian, Farache & Sousha Filho, 2008).

Step 2: crisis type: accidental vs. preventable
Then, respondents had to read a newspaper article about a corporate crisis related to the oil company. The crisis involved a situation in which the operations of the organization had caused an earthquake by its oil extraction. The scenario involved either a preventable or an accidental crisis type. The scenarios manipulated crisis type by explicitly stressing the organization's responsibility for the crisis. The organization was culpable in both situations. However, in the accidental crisis scenario the crisis was caused by a technical error, the organization had no

control and could do little to prevent it (Coombs, 2004). In the <u>preventable crisis</u> scenario, the organization had knowingly violated rules, which had caused the crisis (Coombs, 2004).

Step 3: message framing: rational vs. emotional

Eventually, after reading about the crisis, respondents had to read a press release from 'Oil International' on their corporate website with a response to the crisis offered by the CEO of the organization. In the <u>rational message framing</u> condition, the organization used direct phrases and was presenting information in an objective and straightforward manner (e.g., "We regret that this incident has occurred", "the organization wants to apologize for the inconvenience") (Clayes, Cauberghe & Leysen, 2013), or made use of facts and informational cues (McKay-Nesbitt et al., 2011). In the <u>emotional message framing</u> condition, the organization used subjective, evaluative properties and emotional adjectives (e.g., "We find it horrible that such a tragedy has occurred", "we are deeply sorry", "this is a tragedy") in their response (Clayes et al., 2013). Those emotions were also expressed in apologies and expressions that emphasise for example guilt and worries (McKay-Nesbitt et al., 2011).

3.3 MEASURES

To measure the dependent variables in this study, several scales drawn and modified from previous researches were used. Participants were presented different statements in order to measure attitude, trust, credibility, (non)skepticism and forgiveness. Participants had to indicate to what extent they (dis)agreed with the statements. All variables were measured on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1= strongly disagree, till 5= strongly agree.

Attitude towards the organization was measured by means of a bipolar five-point Likert scale consisting of adjectives (Spears & Singh, 2004). Examples of the adjectives are unappealing/appealing, bad/good, unpleasant/pleasant, unfavourable/favourable and unlikable/likable. This construct was found to be reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .83.

Organizational trust was measured by a 4-item index based on five-point ratings of agreement retrieved from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001). The following four statements were included: (1) I trust this organization; (2) I rely on this organization; (3) this is an honest organization; and (4) this organization is safe. This construct was found to be reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .81.

Message credibility was assessed by Flanagin and Metzger's (2000) scale to measure message credibility in an online environment. The following items measured participants' perceptions: (1) the message is believable; (2) the message is accurate; (3) the message is

trustworthy; (4) the message is not biased; and (5) the message is complete. This construct was found to be reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .66.

Mohr's, Eroglu and Ellen's scale for measuring skepticism towards claims in marketers communications (1998) served as a basis to measure skepticism. The items were stated as follows: (1) I think the message is intended to mislead rather than to inform consumers; (2) I don't believe this message; (3) I think that this message exaggerates; and (4) I believe that this message is true. In the first instance, this construct was found not to be reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .05. After removing item 4 the construct proved reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .65. However, further in this study in will be on non-skepticism because the values of skepticism were rescaled to provide a clear image of positive and negative values.

Xie and Peng's scale to measure forgiveness (2009) served as a basis to measure forgiveness. The scale consisted of five items which were stated as follows: (1) I would think favourably of this company; (2) given the company's response I would condemn it; (3) given the company's response I would forgive it; (4) I would disapprove of this company; and (5) I feel sympathetic towards this company. After recoding item 2 and 4 this construct was found to be reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .77.

3.4 RESPONDENTS

Respondents were approached via several different channels and asked to participate an online survey. In first instance, social media websites as Facebook and LinkedIn were used to gather respondents. The survey was also submitted to Sona Systems, an online environment where UT students can earn credits by filling in surveys or joining experiments. Moreover, the survey was submitted to an online community where students exchange surveys (e.g. SurveyStudent). Because individuals contacted by the researcher shared the survey with their own network, participants were also gathered through a snowball sampling. The data collecting was from 30 January 2018 until 22 February 2018. A total of 518 respondents started the survey. After checking the missing values it became clear that 340 completed surveys were useful for this study. The sample consisted of 91 males and 249 females. The average age was M=23.99 (8.98). Participants were relatively equally divided with respect to age and education in all conditions. On average each condition should contain a minimum of 30 respondents, so the low CSR fit*accidental*rational condition with only 28 respondents deviates. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to check whether there were significant differences between the conditions. No significant differences were found on gender (F (340)=1.49, p=.169), age (F (340)=1.34, p=.233) or education (F (340)=.64, p=723). Table 2 shows the exact distribution of gender, age and education over the eight experimental conditions.

Table 2 *Distribution of gender, age and education for each of the conditions and in total (N=340)*

CSR fit		High CSR fit				Low CSR fit				
Crisis type		Preventable		Accidental		Preventable		Accidental		**Total**
Framing		Rational	Emotional	Rational	Emotional	Rational	Emotional	Rational	Emotional	
Gender	Male	17	8	12	13	17	10	8	6	91
	Female	25	33	34	36	32	33	20	36	249
Age	Mean	23.86	24.12	21.83	23.63	25.82	26.47	23.21	22.60	23.99
	SD	6.88	6.64	6.58	7.99	13.53	11.82	7.19	6.67	8.98
Education	VMBO	2	2	0	4	4	1	0	1	14
	HAVO	2	6	1	3	3	5	3	4	27
	VWO	12	9	23	14	10	7	6	14	95
	MBO	0	3	2	4	6	6	3	5	29
	HBO	10	13	9	13	13	15	7	12	92
	WO	16	8	11	11	13	9	9	6	83
	Total	42	41	46	49	49	43	28	42	340

3.5 MANIPULATION CHECK

To check whether the independent variables were manipulated as pretended a manipulation check was executed. The manipulations were checked using an Independent Sample T-Test.

A manipulation check of the degree of CSR fit was included to assess whether the participants recognized the manipulation. CSR fit was checked by items, based on the work of Nan and Heo (2007) and Berens, Van Riel and Van Bruggen (2005). The following items were measured: (1) I think that the initiative described in the message represents a good match between the brand and the cause; and (2) I think that the engagement described in the message is a logical social activity for this brand. This construct was found to be reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .77. After conducting the Independent Sample T-Test, a significant difference was found between the high (M=3.17) and low (M=2.53) CSR fit condition (t (338)=6.70, p=.000).

Crisis type was checked by Griffin's, Babin's and Darden's (1992) scale for blame. The three items were (1) circumstances, not the organization are responsible for the crisis; (2) the blame for the crisis lies with the organization; and (3) the blame for the crisis lies in the circumstances not the organization. After recoding item 2 this construct was found to be reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .72. Thereby, the Independent Sample T-Test found a significant difference between the accidental (M=2.63) and preventable (M=2.87) condition (t (338)=-3.00, p=.003).

A two-item semantic differential scale was checking emotional versus rational framing (Liu & Stout, 1987). Respondents had to rate the organizational response on each item (e.g., rational vs. emotional, and objective vs. subjective). This construct was found not to be reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .37. Although, a significant difference was found between the rational (M=2.69) and emotional (M=3.10) framing condition respectively (t (338)=48.63, p=.000) and (t (338)=55.59, p=.000).

4. RESULTS

With the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) the linkages between CSR fit, crisis type and message framing and the set of consumer responses (attitude, trust, credibility, non-skepticism and forgiveness) were measured. Again, an alpha level of .05 is used for all statistical tests.

Results of the MANOVA, which can be found in Table 3, indicate that significant multivariate differences were found for both crisis type (F (1, 340)=2.59, p=.026; Wilks Lambda=.962; partial eta squared=.038) and framing (F (1, 340)=2.65, p=.023; Wilks Lambda= .961; partial eta squared=.039). Also an interaction effect between CSR fit*crisis type*framing was found (F (7, 340)=2.41, p=.036; Wilks Lambda=.965; partial eta squared=.035). The partial eta squared indicates that the effect is of moderate strength. Initially, no significant interaction effect was found on CSR fit*framing. However, after conducting an analysis of variance (ANOVA) a significant interaction effect in this condition was found.

There were no significant differences between consumer attitudes in the high fit condition compared to the low fit condition. Thereby, no significant interaction effects were found for CSR fit*crisis type and crisis type*framing. Furthermore, no between subjects effects were found for CSR fit, CSR fit*crisis type and crisis type*framing. Yet, a between subjects difference has been found for CSR fit*framing, this will be discussed in paragraph 4.2.1. According to the results hypothesis 1, 4 and 6 were not supported.

Table 3 *Multivariate Analysis of Variance (N=340)*

Treatment	Manova			
	Wilks	df	F-Value	p-Value
CSR fit	.995	1; 340	.35	.884
Crisis type	.962	1; 340	2.59	**.026***
Framing	.961	1; 340	2.65	**.023***
CSR fit*crisis type	.995	3; 340	.31	.909
CSR fit*framing	.969	3; 340	2.10	.065
Crisis type*framing	.991	3; 340	.59	.705
CSR fit*crisis type*framing	.965	7; 340	2.41	**.036***

NOTE: Manova= Multivariate Analysis of Variance.

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

4.1 MAIN EFFECTS ON CONSUMER ATTITUDES

Specific hypothesized connections were examined with descriptive statistics. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test the effects of crisis type and message framing on each of the dependent variables to examine specific hypothesized linkages. Again, an alpha level of .05 is used for all statistical tests.

4.1.1 CRISIS TYPE

The mean scores of all the dependent variables were used to indicate the differences between the crisis type conditions. Table 4 presents the results. H2 predicted that a preventable crisis would evoke more negative consumer attitudes than an accidental crisis. A statistically significant effect for crisis type was found on attitude ($F_{(1, 340)}=4.56$, $p=.033$), trust ($F_{(1, 340)}=4.78$, $p=.030$), credibility ($F_{(1, 340)}=4.20$, $p=.041$), non-skepticism ($F_{(1, 340)}=6.69$, $p=.018$) and forgiveness ($F_{(1, 340)}=12.22$, $p=.001$). The dependent variables were significantly more positive in the accidental crisis type condition compared to the preventable condition. Thus, results show that hypothesis 2 is supported.

Table 4 *Means and standard deviations attitude, trust, credibility, non-skepticism and forgiveness for crisis type and in total*

	Crisis type			
	Accidental	Preventable	Accidental vs. Preventable	
	(N=165)	(N=175)	F-Value	p-Value
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		
Attitude	2.93(.60)	2.76(.71)	4.56	**.033***
Trust	2.80(.60)	2.64(.71)	4.78	**.030***
Credibility	2.86(.57)	2.71(.57)	4.20	**.041***
Non-skepticism	3.04(.70)	2.86(.66)	6.69	**.018***
Forgiveness	2.90(.61)	2.66(.63)	12.22	**.001****

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

Note: the scale ranged from 1 up to and including 5

4.1.2 MESSAGE FRAMING

H3 predicted that crisis communication messages with an emotional message framing would result in more positive consumer attitudes than crisis communication messages with a rational message framing. Again, mean scores of the dependent variables were analysed to indicate the

differences between the conditions of message framing. Table 5 gives an overview of the results. Framing was found to have significant effects on attitude ($F(1, 340)=10.89$, $p=.001$), trust ($F(1, 340)=7.45$, $p=.007$), credibility ($F(1, 340)=8.28$, $p=.004$) and forgiveness ($F(1, 340)=8.90$, $p=.003$). Results show that attitude, trust, credibility and forgiveness were significantly more positive when emotional message framing is used rather than rational framing. Thus, hypothesis 3 is mostly supported.

Table 5 *Means and standard deviations attitude, trust, credibility, non-skepticism and forgiveness for message framing and in total*

	Message framing			
	Rational (N=165) Mean (SD)	Emotional (N=175) Mean (SD)	Rational vs. Emotional F-Value	p-Value
Attitude	2.72(.68)	2.95(.63)	10.89	**.001****
Trust	2.62(.61)	2.81(.66)	7.45	**.007****
Credibility	2.70(.57)	2.86(.56)	8.28	**.004****
Non-skepticism	2.88(.64)	3.00(.72)	3.08	.080
Forgiveness	2.67(.61)	2.88(.63)	8.90	**.003****

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

Note: the scale ranged from 1 up to and including 5

4.2 INTERACTION EFFECTS

In the following paragraphs, the two-way interaction between CSR fit*framing as well as the three-way interaction effects between the independent variables CSR fit, crisis type and message framing were discussed.

4.2.1 TWO-WAY INTERACTION CSR FIT AND MESSAGE FRAMING

H5 predicted that consumer attitudes were most negative when rational framing was used, especially when organizations had a high CSR fit. As shown in Table 4.1, the interaction of CSR fit with message framing didn't show a significant effect on the dependent variables as a group (Wilks' Lambda; $p=.969$). However, an interaction effect was found on non-skepticism ($F(3, 340)=4.59$, $p=.033$) and forgiveness ($F(3, 340)=8.10$, $p=.005$). After conducting a Post-Hoc Bonferroni Test results pointed out that means on non-skepticism and forgiveness in the high fit*emotional condition were significantly higher than in the high fit*rational condition. No

significant differences in the low fit condition were found. Results presented in Table 6 and Figure 3 show that hypothesis 5 is partly supported.

Table 6 *Interaction effects CSR fit and message framing*

		High Fit		Low Fit		CSR fit*framing	
		N	M(SD)	N	M(SD)	F-Value	p-Value
Attitude	Rational	88	2.69(.68)	77	2.76(.68)	1.29	.258
	Emotional	90	3.00(.63)	85	2.91(.63)		
Trust	Rational	88	2.56(.63)	77	2.68(.68)	1.12	.291
	Emotional	90	2.83(.64)	85	2.79(.68)		
Credibility	Rational	88	2.68(.57)	77	2.72(.58)	1.03	.310
	Emotional	90	2.91(.54)	85	2.81(.57)		
Non-skepticism	Rational	88	2.82(.64)	77	2.94(.64)	4.59	**.033***
	Emotional	90	3.10(.73)	85	2.91(.70)		
Forgiveness	Rational	88	2.59(.62)	77	2.76(.59)	8.10	**.005****
	Emotional	90	2.97(.53)	85	2.78(.70)		

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

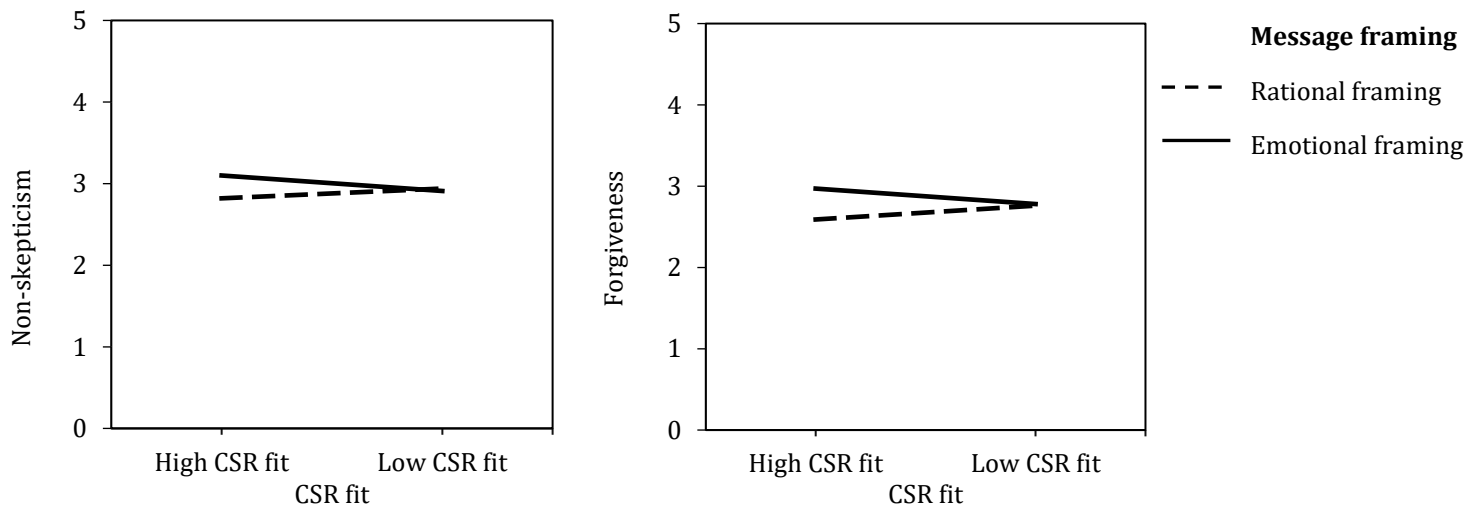Note: the scale ranged from 1 up to and including 5

Figure 3 *Interaction effects CSR fit and message framing on non-skepticism and forgiveness*

4.2.2 THREE-WAY INTERACTION CRISIS TYPE, CSR FIT AND MESSAGE FRAMING

Table 7 presents the means and standard deviations for each of the eight conditions. The interaction of crisis type, CSR fit and message framing showed a significant effect on the

dependent variables as a group (F (7,340)=2.41, p=.036). Significant interaction effects were found on attitude (F (7, 340)=6.36, p=.012), credibility (F (7, 340)=9.47, p=.002), non-skepticism (F (7, 340)=6.22, p=.013) and forgiveness (F (7, 340)=5.45, p=.020). To indicate which particular conditions were significantly different from each other, a post-hoc statistical Bonferroni test was conducted. Results have pointed out that attitude, credibility, non-skepticism and forgiveness were most negative in the high fit*preventable*rational condition and that there were significant differences between those scores in comparison with the high fit*preventable*emotional, high fit*accidental*emotional and low fit*accidental*emotional conditions.

First of all, results have shown that attitudes in the high fit*preventable*rational condition scored significantly lower (M=2.55) compared to attitudes in the high fit*preventable*emotional (M=3.00), high fit*accidental*emotional (M=3.00) and in the low fit*accidental*emotional condition (M=3.10). Second, credibility was significantly lower (M=2.54) compared to the high fit*accidental*emotional (M=2.92) and the low fit*accidental*emotional condition (M=3.00). Then, non-skepticism scored significantly lower in the high fit*preventable*rational condition (M=2.67) compared to the high fit*preventable*emotional (M=3.13) and low fit*accidental*emotional condition (M=3.13). Forgiveness scored significantly lower in the high fit*preventable*rational condition (M=2.38) compared to the high fit*preventable*emotional (M=2.94), high fit*accidental*emotional (M=3.00) and low fit*accidental*emotional condition (M=2.97). See Figure 4. At last, forgiveness in the high fit*accidental*emotional condition scored significantly higher (M=3.00) than in the low fit*preventable*emotional condition (M=2.60).
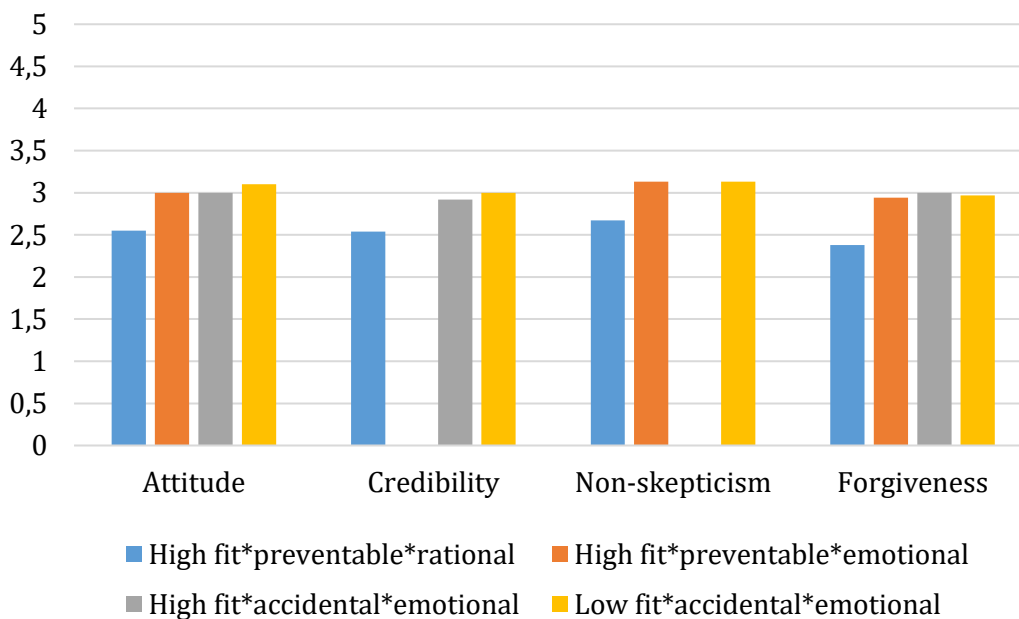
Figure 4 *Means of the significant three-way interactions on the dependent variables*

Table 7 *Interaction effects crisis type, CSR fit and message framing*

	High CSR fit				Low CSR fit				Crisis type*CSR fit*framing	
	Preventable		Accidental		Preventable		Accidental			
	Rational	Emotional	Rational	Emotional	Rational	Emotional	Rational	Emotional		
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	F-Value	p-Value
Attitude	2.55(.78)[a]	3.00(.66)[ab]	2.82(.55)	3.00(.62) [ab]	2.78(.74)	2.71(.61)	2.73(.57)	3.10(.59) [ab]	6.36	**.012***
Trust	2.39(.72)	2.81(.63)	2.72(.48)	2.84(.64)	2.67(.68)	2.66(.74)	2.68(.69)	2.93(.60)	3.74	.054
Credibility	2.54(.58) [a]	2.90(.55)	2.80(.54)	2.92(.54) [ab]	2.78(.61)	2.63(.46)	2.63(.53)	3.00(.62) [ab]	9.47	**.002****
Non-skepticism	2.67(.62) [a]	3.13(.64) [ab]	2.96(.63)	3.07(.80)	2.93(.67)	2.71(.61)	2.96(.58)	3.13(.73) [ab]	6.22	**.013***
Forgiveness	2.38(.66) [a]	2.94(.50) [ab]	2.77(.54)	3.00(56) [ab bc]	2.72(.60)	2.60(.63)[c]	2.82(.58)	2.97(.73) [ab]	5.45	**.020***

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

Both a, b, ab, and bc indicate significant differences in Bonferroni post-hoc test.

Note: the scale ranged from 1 up to and including 5

4.3 HYPOTHESES TESTS INVOLVING PREDICTIONS OF PERCEIVED MODERATORS

With the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and the analysis of variance (ANOVA) the influence of the perceived covariates possession of a motor vehicle and possession of a fuel card were tested. Overall, there were no obvious significant differences found. Yet, the outcomes declare that the moderator fuel card is only significant for the dependent variable credibility in the crisis type manipulation (F=4.22, p=.041). Results are shown in Table 8. In the first place, an accidental crisis type scored significant higher on credibility compared to a preventable crisis type. However, when including the covariance motor vehicle or motor vehicle and fuel card no significant results were found, respectively (p=.051) and (p=.055). The same independent variables as in the ANOVA analysis affect the dependent variables in the ANCOVA analysis.

Table 8 *Analysis of Covariance (N=340)*

		ANCOVA					
		F-Value[1]	p-Value[1]	F-Value[2]	p-Value[2]	F-Value[3]	p-Value[3]
Credibility	CRISISTYPE	3.84	.051	4.22	**.041***	3.71	.055

NOTE: ANCOVA= Analysis of Covariance.

1. Covariates = motor vehicle.

2. Covariates = fuel card.

3. Covariates = motor vehicle and fuel card.

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

Table 9 *Overview over supported and non-supported hypotheses*

Hypothesises	
H1: CSR messages with a low CSR fit will result in more positive consumer attitudes than CSR messages with a high CSR fit.	Not supported
H2: A preventable corporate crisis will evoke more negative consumer attitudes than an accidental crisis.	Supported
H3: Crisis communication messages with an emotional message framing will result in more positive consumer attitudes than crisis communication messages with a rational message framing.	Mostly supported
H4: Preventable crisis types will lead to more negative consumer attitudes compared to accidental crisis types, especially when the organization has a high CSR fit.	Not supported
H5: Consumer attitudes are most negative when rational framing is used, especially when organizations have a high CSR fit.	Partly supported
H6: Emotional frames in crisis communication will lead to more positive consumer attitudes compared to rational frames, especially in accidental crisis situations.	Not supported

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this section, the discussion of the study is presented. First of all, the research question will be discussed. Then, a discussion of the researched findings is presented. Subsequently, research limitations, recommendations for future research and practical implications are presented. Finally, in the last chapter a general conclusion is given.

5.1 ELABORATION OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The objective of the research at hand was to get better insights in the effects of CSR and message framing in a crisis context. Therefore the research question was focused on indicating whether and to what extent there were main and interaction effects between CSR fit, crisis type and message framing on consumer attitudes. Whereas other studies have researched the effects of CSR fit, communication during crises or message framing, the present study is the first to investigate the effects of aforementioned variables at the same time. This study contributes to the field of crisis communication by indicating which framing mechanisms should be used during a particular crisis situation to minimize negative consumer attitudes.

Not surprisingly, results revealed that preventable crisis situations had led to more negative consumer attitudes compared to accidental crisis situations. Furthermore, crisis responses with emotional framed messages generally had a more positive influence on consumer attitudes compared to rational framed crisis responses. Consumer attitudes were most negative when companies, with a high CSR fit in a preventable crisis situation, used a rational framing method. On the other hand, in accidental crisis situations when organizations use emotional framing, regardless of their CSR fit, consumer attitudes were most positive.

    To answer the research question, the interaction between CSR fit, crisis type and content framing was measured. Several three-way interactions were found on attitude, credibility, non-skepticism and forgiveness. Most negative consumer attitudes were found for high CSR fit organizations in a preventable crisis that made use of rational framing (high fit*preventable*rational). On the other hand, the most positive consumer attitudes were found towards high CSR fit organizations who made use of emotional framing regardless of the crisis situation (high fit*preventable*emotional and high fit*accidental*emotional) and organizations with a low CSR fit in accidental crisis who made use of emotional framing (low fit*accidental*emotional).

5.2 DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCHED FINDINGS

Where literature about the outcomes of CSR initiative fit is highly divided, in this research it was hypothesised that a low CSR fit would increase consumer attitudes. On the one hand, findings in literature have shown that CSR initiatives have been criticized (Varadajan & Menon, 1988) and may run the risk of consumer skepticism if consumers question the relevance, validity or appropriateness of an organizations' offer (Schwartz, 1977). While on the other hand, a high level of congruency between a company's core business and its CSR initiatives makes it clearer how the company profits from the offer and may, as a result, lead to consumer backlash (Drumwright, 1996). In this research, no significant effects were found between a high or low CSR fit. This lack of effect on attitude, trust, credibility, non-skepticism and forgiveness can be explained by the altruistic motive of the company (Ellen, Mohr & Webb, 2000). The more an organization supports a CSR initiative the more consumer attitudes might increase, regardless of the CSR initiative fit. A possible explanation for this can be that consumers may not be sensitive to the congruency between the core business and the CSR initiative, as long as the initiative seems appropriate to the cause (Ellen et al., 2000).

Then, it was hypothesised that crisis communication messages with emotional framing would result in more positive consumer attitudes compared to crisis communication messages with rational framing. This hypothesis was mostly supported. However, an interesting observation was that contrary to attitude, trust, credibility and forgiveness, message framing had no significant effect on non-skepticism. Overall, these findings are in line with prior literature on cognitive/affective matching effects, which states that people tend to have more positive intentions when the corporate message contains emotional frames compared to when the message contains no emotional frames (Petty, Fabrigar & Wegener, 2003). However, because this research made use of a fictitious organization, participants might were sceptical from the start. Thereby, Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) propose that consumers are more cynical and sceptical towards certain business sectors than others. It can be argued that the oil industry sector is known for being one of the largest environment polluters. Thus, perceived discrepancies between stated (environmental) intentions and organizations initiatives assume stakeholder's skepticism and distrust towards those organizations (Frynas, 2005). This could be an explanation why the cognitive/affective matching effects theory not entirely applied as intended and emotional framing had no effect on skepticism in this study.

In the first instance, no significant interaction effect between CSR fit and framing on the dependent variables as a group was found. Though, a between subject effect was found on non-skepticism and forgiveness. It was found that organizations with a high CSR fit, which used an emotional framing method scored significantly higher on non-skepticism and forgiveness than if they used a rational framing method. These findings are inconsistent with findings of Zhou and

Ki (2017). They found that a high CSR fit is neither helpful to build a favourable corporate reputation nor to reduce the level of skepticism. However, the findings are in line with findings of other research. Firstly, Elving (2013) states that the more an organizations CSR behaviour aligns with its core business, the lower CSR skepticism. Furthermore, other researchers state that two factors that influence skepticism are CSR fit and the length of CSR involvement (Du et al., 2010; Elving, 2013; Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009). According to them, implementing a cause of emotion can decrease skepticism. Other studies revealed that positive CSR impressions help alter crisis responsibility attribution (Kim, 2014), and if crisis attribution is altered it might be that people show more forgiveness.

Another interesting finding is that, in the rational framing condition, no significant results were found between organizations with a high CSR fit in an accidental crisis situation and low fit CSR organizations in an accidental or preventable crisis situation. This means that when rational framing was used, attitudes towards organizations with a high CSR fit in an accidental crisis type did not deviate from consumer attitudes towards low CSR fit organizations regardless of the crisis situation.

5.3 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The present research had several limitations that can be improved in future research. First, a fictitious oil company was used during this study. This was a deliberate choice to prevent that former crises or prior knowledge of the organization influenced the outcomes (Coombs, 2004). Some of the stimulus materials were presented in a fictitious template of the company's corporate website designed for this study. However, by using a fictitious company and website template, respondents might consider the situation as unreal or unbelievable. Especially because respondents were asked to rate the trustworthiness and credibility of the organization, this might had influenced the outcomes of the research. In future research it might be an option to use an existing company to prevent this. However, when an existing organization is used it might be wise to implement a zero measurement to find out participants' existing beliefs about the organization.

Second, because the organization in this research was fictitious and the research was primarily focussing on the oil industry, results might not be generalizable. In order to achieve generalizability of the results, the scenarios could be presented in different contexts. When focussing on more industries at the same time, e.g. the oil- and tobacco industry results become more general.

Third, too less respondents were assigned in one of the eight conditions. After excluding the missing values it became clear that the low fit*accidental*rational condition counted only 28

respondents. With the exception of the aforementioned condition, all conditions counted more than 40 respondents. However, according to the ANOVA this inequality had not led to a distorted image of the outcomes because no significant differences were found.

Fourth, this research made use of reliable existing scales found in literature. However, the Cronbach's alpha of the framing scale was found not to be reliable. During the pre-test, a reliable Cronbach's alpha was found. Unfortunately, while calculating the final Cronbach's alpha the scale was found not to be reliable. Nonetheless, after conducting an independent T-test on the items apart, significant differences were found on both the items. A recommendation for future research is to choose another scale, which includes more than two items. If a scale with multiple items will be used, it is more likely to reach a higher Cronbach's alpha by removing constructs.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

For future research it will be interesting to measure attitudes towards the organization prior to an organizational crisis. A zero measurement, which measures the effect of the crisis on consumer attitudes, can be conducted. Thereafter, the effect of the press article on these attitudes can be measured. In this way it can be measured in which phase the attitude towards the organization has been changed and what the effects of the different messages features were.

Furthermore, it is interesting to find out whether attitudes towards the organization would differ if other particular mediums were used. In this study, information source was manipulated by the corporate website of the fictitious organization and a newspaper article from "De Volkskrant". However, research of Schultz, Utz and Göritz (2011) had analysed the role of social media in crises. Those researchers have been challenging classical crisis communication theories and they proved that the medium used affects the impact of crisis communication. Thus, for future research it will be interesting to add the role of mediums to extend this knowledge and check out whether different results were achieved if the information source was manipulated by particular social media sources. This knowledge can be used to design more complex models of crisis communication.

A last recommendation for future research is taking variables as skepticism and credibility into consideration as mediators. Despite the fact that respondents are sceptical about the crisis communication response of an organization, or do not consider it as credible, it is still possible that they have a positive attitude towards the organization. For future research it is interesting to include these variables as mediators to measure the effect of skepticism and credibility on dependent variables as attitude, trust and forgiveness.

5.5 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This research contributes to the field of crisis and CSR communication by contradicting existing beliefs about CSR communication. Furthermore, it provides a few practical implications from which organizations in a crisis situation could benefit.

It is well known that many organizations use their CSR communication as a means to increase favourable consumer attitudes (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). Moreover, contemporary organizations were expected to engage in CSR. However, when in a crisis, CSR communication of an organization might result in negative consumer attitudes like skepticism. A lot of previous research is done on CSR and crisis communication, but little is known about CSR communication in times of a crisis. At these moments consumers might become increasingly critical towards organizations. Therefore, it is important for organizations to know how to behave in particular situations. Especially nowadays, because complaints and protests against oil extraction companies in the Netherlands often appeared in the media.

Results of this study revealed that organizations with a high CSR fit in a preventable crisis situation should avoid a rational framing method because this shall lead to the lowest attitude, credibility, non-skepticism and forgiveness scores. On the contrary, high CSR fit organizations in a preventable crisis situation should use an emotional response to increase attitude, non-skepticism and forgiveness. At the same time, organizations in an accidental crisis situation should use an emotional framing method regardless whether they have a high or low CSR fit to increase attitude, credibility (non-skepticism) and forgiveness.

By using the results of this study, organizations become aware that the choice for a particular framing strategy could have an impact on consumer attitudes. Thereby, they can choose an appropriate framing method to prevent negative consumer attitudes towards the organization in times of a crisis. Organizations should focus their framing strategy in communication messages on their CSR fit and they should consider in which crisis type situation they belong.

5.6 CONCLUSIONS

Organizations need to carefully consider which framing method is suitable by their CSR fit in a particular crisis situation in order to achieve positive consumer attitudes and avoid negative ones. The current study addresses whether there was an interaction effect between CSR fit, crisis type and message framing and in what extent they influenced consumer attitudes as attitude, trust, credibility, non-skepticism and forgiveness.

The study concluded that there were no significant differences between consumer attitudes towards high or low CSR initiatives. Thereby, it was found that an accidental crisis results in more positive consumer attitudes than a preventable crisis. When regarding the framing methods, all consumer attitudes except from non-skepticism, were most positive towards emotional framed messages.

An interaction effect was found between CSR fit and message framing on non-skepticism and forgiveness. Organizations with a high CSR fit should use emotional message framing in times of crisis in order to increase forgiveness and non-skepticism. Also a three-way interaction was found. Findings indicate that organizations with a high CSR fit in preventable crisis situations are advised to use emotional framing methods to increase attitude, non-skepticism and forgiveness. On the other hand, organizations in accidental crisis situations regardless of their fit should use an emotional message framing in order to increase attitude, credibility, non-skepticism (non-skepticism applies just for low CSR fit organizations) and forgiveness.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – SURVEY DUTCH VERSION

Beste deelnemer,

Allereerst wil ik u graag bedanken voor uw deelname aan mijn onderzoek. Dit onderzoek vindt plaats in het kader van mijn afstudeeropdracht voor de opleiding Communicatiewetenschap aan de Universiteit Twente.

U leest straks enkele berichten omtrent een bedrijf. Hierop volgen een paar korte vragen. Bij het beantwoorden van de vragen staat uw mening centraal, er zijn dus geen goede of foute antwoorden.

De resultaten van dit onderzoek kunnen niet worden teruggekoppeld naar een individuele deelnemer, dus deelname is volledig anoniem. Het onderzoek zal ongeveer 5 minuten van uw tijd innemen.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Loes Lentferink
l.r.m.lentferink@student.utwente.nl

Ik heb bovenstaande informatie gelezen en ik stem geheel vrijwillig in met deelname aan dit onderzoek.
- o Ja
- o Nee

Hieronder ziet u een korte bedrijfsbeschrijving op de webpagina van het oliebedrijf Oil International. Lees de webpagina aandachtig door en ga daarna verder naar de volgende stap door op de pijl te klikken. Let op: u kunt straks niet meer terug naar deze pagina.

[In the questionnaire the corporate story of 'Oil International' including one of the two CSR fit scenarios is placed here]

Master thesis - The effects of CSR fit and message framing in times of a corporate crisis

Beantwoord de volgende vraag zorgvuldig.

1. Geef je mening over de volgende uitspraken over het maatschappelijke initiatief van Oil International.

	Helemaal mee oneens				Helemaal mee eens
Ik denk dat er een goede match is tussen het maatschappelijke initiatief dat wordt beschreven op de webpagina en de producten die Oil International normaal gesproken levert.	O	O	O	O	O
Ik denk dat het maatschappelijke initiatief dat stond beschreven op de webpagina een logisch maatschappelijk initiatief is voor Oil International.	O	O	O	O	O

Hieronder ziet u een krantenartikel over Oil International. Lees het krantenartikel alstublieft aandachtig door en ga daarna verder naar de volgende pagina door op de pijl te klikken. Let op: u kunt straks niet meer terug naar deze pagina.

[In the questionnaire one of the two crisis type conditions is placed here]

Hieronder leest u het persbericht van Oil International. Dit persbericht is een reactie van Oil International op de gebeurtenissen zoals beschreven in het krantenartikel dat u zojuist heeft gelezen. Lees het persbericht aandachtig door. Wanneer u klaar bent klikt u op de pijl. Let op: u kunt straks niet meer terug naar deze pagina.

[In the questionnaire one of the two crisis responses (emotional vs. rational message appeal) is placed here]

Beantwoord de volgende vragen zorgvuldig.

2. Het persbericht van Oil International was:

Rationeel	O	O	O	O	O	Emotioneel
Objectief	O	O	O	O	O	Subjectief

3. Geef uw mening over het persbericht van Oil International.

	Helemaal mee oneens				Helemaal mee eens
Het persbericht is geloofwaardig.	O	O	O	O	O
Het persbericht is nauwkeurig.	O	O	O	O	O
Het persbericht is betrouwbaar.	O	O	O	O	O
Het persbericht is niet bevooroordeeld.	O	O	O	O	O
Het persbericht is compleet.	O	O	O	O	O

4. Geef uw mening over het persbericht van Oil International.

	Helemaal mee oneens				Helemaal mee eens
Ik denk dat het persbericht is bedoeld om consumenten	O	O	O	O	O

te misleiden in plaats van te informeren.					
Ik geloof het persbericht niet.	O	O	O	O	O
Ik denk dat het persbericht overdreven is.	O	O	O	O	O

5. Mijn algemene indruk ten aanzien van Oil International is:

Onaantrekkelijk	**O**	**O**	**O**	**O**	**O**	**Aantrekkelijk**
Slecht	O	O	O	O	O	Goed
Onaangenaam	O	O	O	O	O	Aangenaam
Ongunstig	O	O	O	O	O	Gunstig
Onaardig	O	O	O	O	O	Aardig

6. Geef je mening over de volgende uitspraken ten aanzien van de verantwoordelijkheid voor de crisis.

	Helemaal mee oneens				Helemaal mee eens
Omstandigheden, niet Oil International, zijn verantwoordelijk voor de crisis.	O	O	O	O	O
De schuld van de crisis ligt bij Oil International.	O	O	O	O	O
De schuld van de crisis is te wijten aan omstandigheden en niet aan Oil International.	O	O	O	O	O

7. Geef aan in hoeverre u het eens of oneens bent met de volgende uitspraken over Oil International.

	Helemaal mee oneens				Helemaal mee eens
Ik vertrouw deze organisatie.	O	O	O	O	O
Ik reken op deze organisatie.	O	O	O	O	O
Dit is een eerlijke organisatie.	O	O	O	O	O
Deze organisatie is veilig.	O	O	O	O	O

8. Geef aan in welke mate u het eens of oneens bent met de volgende uitspraken.

	Helemaal mee oneens				Helemaal mee eens
Ik heb een gunstige indruk van Oil International.	O	O	O	O	O
Gezien de reactie van Oil International zou ik het veroordelen.	O	O	O	O	O
Gezien de reactie van Oil International zou ik het vergeven.	O	O	O	O	O
Ik zou Oil International afkeuren.	O	O	O	O	O
Ik voel sympathie voor Oil International.	O	O	O	O	O

9. Wat is uw leeftijd in jaren?

   Jaar: 0-100

10. Wat is uw geslacht?

- o Man
- o Vrouw

11. In welke provincie bent u woonachtig?
- o Friesland
- o Groningen
- o Drenthe
- o Flevoland
- o Overijssel
- o Gelderland
- o Utrecht
- o Noord-Holland
- o Zuid-Holland
- o Noord-Brabant
- o Limburg
- o Zeeland

12. Bent u in het bezit van een motorvoertuig?
- o Ja
- o Nee

13. Bent u in het bezit van een tankpas?
- o Ja
- o Nee

14. Wat is uw hoogst genoten opleiding?
- o VMBO
- o HAVO
- o VWO
- o MBO
- o HBO
- o WO

Hartelijk dank voor uw medewerking aan dit onderzoek.

Tot slot wil ik u erop wijzen dat Oil International een niet bestaand bedrijf is. De informatie die u net heeft gelezen is fictief.

Voor vragen kunt u mailen naar l.r.m.lentferink@student.utwente.nl.

APPENDIX B - STIMULUS MATERIAL

HIGH CSR FIT CONDITION

HOME   **OVER ONS**   **ZAKELIJKE KLANTEN**   **CONSUMENTEN**   **PERS**   **CONTACT**

OVER ONS

MAATSCHAPPELIJK VERANTWOORD ONDERNEMEN

Oil International houdt zich met name bezig met het opsporen, winnen en verwerken van gas en olie en de verkoop van producten die daaruit voortkomen. Zowel op het vasteland als op zee richten we ons op de exploratie en winning van aardolie en gas. Onze verschillende raffinaderijen houden zich vervolgens bezig met de verwerking van de fossiele brandstoffen.

Wij vinden dat organisaties een steentje moeten bijdragen aan de maatschappij waarin we leven. Maar we zijn ons er ook van bewust dat omwonenden soms last hebben van onze activiteiten. Daarom zetten we ons speciaal in voor het ontwikkelen van nieuwe, baanbrekende technologieën in het olie- en gaswinningsproces om mogelijke aardbevingen te voorkomen. Dit doen we om omwonenden voor eventuele schade te behoeden.

LOW CSR FIT CONDITION

OVER ONS

MAATSCHAPPELIJK
VERANTWOORD
ONDERNEMEN

Oil International houdt zich met name bezig met het opsporen, winnen en verwerken van gas en olie en de verkoop van producten die daaruit voortkomen. Zowel op het vasteland als op zee richten we ons op de exploratie en winning van aardolie en gas. Onze verschillende raffinaderijen houden zich vervolgens bezig met de verwerking van de fossiele brandstoffen.

Wij vinden dat organisaties een steentje moeten bijdragen aan de maatschappij waarin we leven. Dit betekent onder andere dat we onze maatschappij voor iedereen prettig en leefbaar moeten maken. Daarom zetten we ons speciaal in voor het tegengaan van racisme en pesten op scholen door maatschappelijke naschoolse sportprogramma's te organiseren.

ACCIDENTAL CRISIS CONDITION

deVolkskrant

VOLKSKRANT.NL

Technische storing Oil International veroorzaakte aardbeving Groningen

GRONINGEN- De aardbeving in Groningen van afgelopen zomer blijkt veroorzaakt te zijn door het oliebedrijf Oil International. De aardbeving telde een magnitude van 2.6 op de Schaal van Richter en heeft veel financiële schade in de nabije omgeving aangericht. Zo zijn in verschillende gebouwen in de omgeving van de olie- en gaswinning scheuren ontstaan.

Oil International is al sinds 1955 operationeel in het betreffende gebied. Het oliewinningsproces is, tot de aardbeving van afgelopen zomer, jarenlang probleemloos verlopen. De aardbeving is ontstaan door een technische storing, deze veroorzaakte een sterk dalende druk in de ondergrond. Als gevolg hiervan zijn spanningsveranderingen opgetreden die hebben geleid tot een plotselinge aardbeving. Uit onderzoek is gebleken dat de storing buiten de macht van Oil International lag en dat de organisatie niks kon doen om de situatie te voorkomen. Tevens kwam naar voren dat het bedrijf alle veiligheids- en millieuwetten heeft nageleefd.

Foto: Joep Cornelissen

CDA vraagt om debat over zorgpremies

PREVENTABLE CRISIS CONDITION

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Nalatigheid Oil International veroorzaakte aardbeving Groningen

Foto: Joep Cornelissen

GRONINGEN- De aardbeving in Groningen van afgelopen zomer blijkt veroorzaakt te zijn door nalatigheid van het oliebedrijf Oil International. De aardbeving telde een magnitude van 2.6 op de Schaal van Richter en heeft veel financiële schade in de nabije omgeving aangericht. Zo zijn in verschillende gebouwen in de omgeving van de olie- en gaswinning scheuren ontstaan.

Oil International is al sinds 1955 operationeel in het betreffende gebied. Het oliewinningsproces is, tot de aardbeving van afgelopen zomer, jarenlang probleemloos verlopen. De aardbeving is ontstaan doordat het bedrijf bewust verschillende regels in het winningsplan heeft overtreden. Hierin staan per gasveld de verschillende specifieke risico's, bodemdalingen en aardbevingskansen beschreven. Uit onderzoek is gebleken dat er meer olie is gewonnen uit het gebied dan wat volgens het winningsplan werd aangegeven. Dit heeft geleid tot een sterk dalende druk in de ondergrond. Als gevolg hiervan zijn spanningsveranderingen opgetreden die hebben geleid tot een plotselinge aardbeving. Als Oil International het winningsplan zou hebben nageleefd had de aardbeving voorkomen kunnen worden, dit maakt Oil International verantwoordelijk voor de beving.

CDA vraagt om debat over

EMOTIONAL FRAMING CONDITION

HOME   **OVER ONS**   **ZAKELIJKE KLANTEN**   **CONSUMENTEN**   **PERS**   CONTACT

 PERSBERICHTEN

PERSBERICHT

Oil International toont medeleven en versterkt gebouwen aardbevingsgebied Groningen

Januari 2018

CEO van Oil International Teun van der Zande: "De aardbeving van afgelopen zomer is helaas een tragisch gevolg van onze werkzaamheden in Groningen. Het spijt ons zeer dat, min of meer door ons toedoen, vele huizen zijn beschadigd. Maar dat niet alleen. Wij zijn ons er goed van bewust dat door deze tragedie veel inwoners emotioneel ontdaan zijn en dat er een gevoel van onveiligheid heerst. Wij leven erg mee met de inwoners en willen dit laten blijken door fors te investeren in het versterken van diverse gebouwen in het getroffen gebied. Hiermee hopen wij dat het gevoel van onveiligheid wordt weggenomen. Daarnaast zullen wij investeren in onze eigen bedrijfsvoering om situaties als deze in de toekomst te voorkomen."

RATIONAL FRAMING CONDITION

HOME   OVER ONS   ZAKELIJKE KLANTEN   CONSUMENTEN   PERS   CONTACT

PERSBERICHTEN

PERSBERICHT

Oil International versterkt gebouwen in aardbevingsgebied Groningen

Januari 2018

CEO van Oil International Teun van der Zande: "Oil International is inmiddels tientallen jaren succesvol actief in de omgeving van Groningen en tot op heden hebben zich geen problemen voorgedaan. Echter, naar nu blijkt, is de aardbeving van afgelopen zomer een gevolg van onze werkzaamheden in Groningen. De aardbeving telde een magnitude van 2.6 op de Schaal van Richter en heeft vele huizen beschadigd. Door fors te investeren in het versterken van diverse gebouwen in het getroffen gebied en in onze eigen bedrijfsvoering gaan we er vanuit dat incidenten als deze in de toekomst worden voorkomen."