

Crisis with a happy end: The effect of storytelling elements in organizational crisis communication

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Abstract

Background:

Facebook, Volkswagen, Facebook: Many companies who experienced an organizational crisis in the past still suffer from negative brand associations and cognitions inherited by the public. As conventional crisis communication methods do not always seem to be effectively counteracting these disadvantageous reactions by customers, this study investigates if storytelling may have a more powerful impact on the cognitions of the public.

Objectives:

This study aims to investigate the effects storytelling elements in an organizational crisis response have on the public. A convincing narrative has an identifiable protagonist, to which the audience can relate to, and depicts events that are plausible to happen in the real world. In the context of a crisis, organizational communication efforts aim to influence customers' attitude and emotions towards the brand, as well as the willingness to buy the company's products. Consequentially, the effects of endorser archetype, endorser identification, and plausibility on narrative transportation, brand attitude, emotional response, and purchase intention are studied. Further, this study aims to substantiate the term "storytelling" by applying a narrative structure to an organizational statement.

Methods:

An experimental 2 (high endorser identification/low endorser identification) x 2 (warrior endorser archetype/ruler endorser archetype) between-groups design was applied. Data was gathered by the distribution of a quantitative online questionnaire. With the help of convenience- and snowball sampling procedure, 127 responses from an international and mainly academic group of respondents were collected.

Results:

Endorser archetype had significant main effects on narrative transportation and endorser identification. Endorser identification has been found to affect brand attitude and different dimensions of emotional response, namely anger/sadness and sympathy.

Conclusion:

This study is one of the first to investigate the effects narrative elements can have on external stakeholders when applied in an organizational crisis response message. It serves as a basis for further investigations and studies in this field.

Recommendations:

The findings of this study add the method of storytelling to the communicational toolbox of companies when creating an organizational response to a crisis. Nevertheless, organizations should be careful to not overestimate the effects storytelling elements can have in the context of organizational crisis. Future studies can use the results of this study to further investigate the effects of endorser archetype and narrative elements in organizational messages. Further, future studies may be able to correct some shortcomings of this study when designing the stimuli material and composing the sample.

Introduction

On the 6th of October 2019, the Hong Kong e-sports pro player Chung “Blitzchung” Ng Wai showed support for the Hong Kong protests and the independence of the state in a post-game interview of a “Hearthstone” tournament organized by the game’s developer and publisher, Blizzard. Two days later, Blizzard drew consequences of the incident and banned Wai as well as two commentators from the current and future Hearthstone tournaments. The company justified the ban by saying that Wai violated the tournament’s official rule to not express political statements. In response, many gamers criticized Blizzard for this decision and began to boycott the company. Players suspected that Blizzard’s harsh punishment of Wai resulted from pressure of the Chinese government and the company’s interest to maintain a good relationship with the country, ignoring the suppression of Hong Kong’s citizens. Even though Blizzard denied an influence of the Chinese government on their decision and reduced the punishment of Wai, gamers continued to boycott the company. Customers ended their subscription of Blizzard’s multiplayer game “World of Warcraft”, flooded game stores with negative reviews of the company’s games, and caused the hashtag “#BoycottBlizzard” to trend on Twitter. Additionally, the community attempted to make a game character of Blizzard’s successful game “Overwatch” a symbol of the Hong Kong protest. The backlash extended beyond Blizzard’s community. Employees of the company protested, and several members of Congress sent a letter to the CEO of Blizzard addressing the controversy around the punishment of Wai (Gonzalez, 2019). It is safe to say that the poor handling of this organizational crisis costed Blizzard the sympathy and trust of many customers and gamers.

As the case of Blizzard shows, an organizational crisis can seriously affect a brand’s public image, if not handled properly. The second example shows that effective crisis communication is not easy, but can have a huge impact on a company’s standing. The American ice cream brand Blue Bell is known for its loyal consumer base, high reputation, and its family-centric corporate culture. Storytelling and narratives have always been at the core of the organization’s external communication. Blue Bell’s public image is built around their over 100 years of history and their rural origin. The company tries to maintain a deep connection with their consumers, by featuring consumer-made recipes with their products on their homepage, or by inviting fans to their production facilities. In March 2013, however, it was found that certain Blue Bell products were contaminated with the bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes*, which can lead to the life-threatening infection Listeriosis. Five cases of Listeriosis, including three deaths, were linked to products from Blue Bell. The company immediately recalled affected product lines and shut down three of their production facilities.

The CEO of Blue Bell promised to work on their production process to fix the problem of contaminated products. He also announced that the organization will work together with the State Health Departments of Alabama in order to guarantee a clean production of ice cream. In 2015, Blue Bell's production resumed, and their recalled product lines re-entered the market. By many of the company's loyal customers, the return of the ice cream was desperately anticipated. Fans posted images on social media wearing t-shirts and holding signs waiting for Blue Bell's return. Other consumers put up yard signs to show their support for the organization. The day the ice cream became available after the crisis, customers lined up in front of stores in order to purchase the long-missed products (Barret & Hynes, 2016). Despite a severe health-related crisis, Blue Bell was able to keep a strong base of loyal consumers, bound to the company through the means of convincing and thought-through storytelling.

Research objectives and research question

This study aims to extend the literature on the effects storytelling elements in crisis communication can have on consumers. Further, the study tries to substantiate the term "storytelling" with clear theoretical concepts. The elements used to create a narrative, in turn, can be practically applied in a company's external crisis communication efforts. Organizations also benefit from this study by gaining insight into customers' cognitive reactions to crisis storytelling.

The present study aims to answer the following research questions:

In which way do storytelling elements in an organizational crisis response affect the relationship between a company and consumers?

Practical relevance

Successful crisis communication can yield a multitude of favourable outcomes for an organization. First and foremost, effectively communicating a crisis has a positive effect on the company's reputation, which is often damaged during a crisis (van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014; Utz, Schultz & Glocka, 2013; Kim & Yang, 2009; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Coombs, 1999). Additionally, effective crisis communication renders the activities and actions of a company as more legitimate (Massey, 2001). When thoughtfully communicating to the public, organizations can also strengthen their relationship with their customers, positively affecting customers' sympathy, loyalty and attitude towards the company

(McDonald, Sparks & Glendon, 2010). In general, consumers get more accepting towards the firm (Coombs & Holladay, 2008), resulting in an increased buying intention and a decreased willingness to boycott the company (Utz et al., 2013) and express negative word-of-mouth (Xiao, Hudders, Claeys & Cauberghe, 2018; Utz et al., 2013). Customers are more likely to show supportive behaviour towards the organization if the company is able to communicate successfully during a crisis situation (Coombs, 1999; Kim & Yang, 2009). By learning how to communicate and interact with their consumers during an organizational crisis, companies are able to minimize the damage usually resulting from such an emergency situation.

It is essential for companies to preserve strong and trusting relationships with their customers in order to recover well from an organizational crisis. Effective use of crisis communication helps to form and influence these relationships. This study will add a method to the toolbox organizations can use to handle a crisis communication more effectively, by investigating storytelling as a new approach to communicate during a crisis situation.

Theoretical relevance

During the past decade, scholars have increasingly studied the concept of storytelling in communication. Storytelling is different from other approaches in the sense that narratives are an universal language, and are understood by citizens of different cultures (Barker & Gower, 2010). Stories do not only work independent of cultures but are also universal with regard to the complexity of the message they can transport. Narratives make difficult topics easier to understand, such as scientific theories or phenomena (Dahlstrom, 2014). In a study among employees, Barker and Gower (2010) found supporting evidence that narratives are easy to understand and, in addition, are able to deliver meaningful, value-laden and rich messages. Leaders use stories to communicate values as well as to motivate and influence employees (Auvinen, Aaltio & Blomqvist, 2013). Similarly, narratives were found to be effective in communicating and expressing organizational culture (Boyce, 1996). Narratives are also able to infuse even rational and routine activities with meaning, thereby enchanting them and making organizational members' effort to work on these activities more significant (Chen 2012). Stories' capacity to transport meaning and values enables dialogue and discussion by sharing identities and perspectives with another party (Black, 2008). In the healthcare setting, for instance, storytelling helps physicians and patients to understand illness experiences and to learn about individual cases which in turn leads to better diagnoses and treatment, as caregivers can adapt better to the illness case (Gray, 2009).

A central of every narrative is the hero. Several authors tried to investigate the application and effects of organizational heroes in companies' communication efforts. When interviewing executives of companies located in New Zealand, Olsson (2002) found that many of them explain and present themselves as possessing character traits similar to heroic figures. Many organizational leaders rhetorically communicate these values to employees. Zhaoxun (2005) identified five different types of organizational heroes based on the values leaders communicate and their underlying belief systems. Some companies also try to apply the hero figures when communicating to external stakeholders. Krause and Smith (2014), for instance, analysed how the Boston police positioned itself as the hero fighting terrorism during and after the bomb attack at the Boston marathon in the year 2013. In another setting, Clark (2009) made a case study about hospitals applying storytelling to raise money for medical equipment. In this case, different patients were depicted as protagonists and heroes fighting against their diseases and pointing out the lack of proper medical equipment. This approach brought the patients in the centre of local news coverage.

When applying storytelling to an organizational setting, literature predominantly pays attention to the effects of narratives when communicating internally to employees and other organizational members. The use of storytelling in external crisis communication is a rather new approach, and only a few scholars tried to investigate its application. In 2003, Dowell analysed presidential crisis speeches and was able to identify storytelling elements in them. Kopp, Nikolovska, Desiderio, and Guterman (2011) were one of the first scholars which created a theoretical connection between storytelling and crisis communication. They worked out that human resources development (HRD) and crisis communication share a multitude of theoretical assumptions. And as storytelling is applied in HRD to communicate, for instance, organizational change, Kopp and his colleagues found that narratives can also be used in crisis communication, leveraging human capital pre-, during and postcrisis. Kent (2015) identified and listed different kinds of plots which can be applied in public relations, including the use case for communicating a crisis. In 2016, Barrett and Hynes published a case study about the brand Blue Bell, which successfully applied storytelling in crisis communication, providing practical evidence for effectively using narratives when communicating a crisis to the public. Storytelling can be an effective tool to solve a crisis and provide chances for organizations to explain themselves during an emergency (Eray, 2018). Moors (2019) found that storytelling can also be used in social media as a method to leverage the possibilities and affective potential of these platforms, helping organizations to explain and situate a crisis.

Novelty of the research

Storytelling is proofed to have beneficial effects on the relationship between a company and its stakeholders. Additionally, narratives can transport meaningful and rich messages, which are easily processed and understood by recipients. Although some scholars began to investigate the application of storytelling in external crisis communication, no study was focussed on consumers' perception of organizational storytelling during an emergency situation. Additionally, storytelling is often described as a vague concept, without illuminating the concrete aspects and elements which make narratives effective in stakeholder communication. This study adds to the existing literature by investigating the effects organizational storytelling in a crisis situation can have on consumers' cognitive reaction to the message. Moreover, this study attempts to fill the term 'storytelling' with more well-grounded elements and structural characteristics, as the concept is often defined in a rather imprecise way.

The study is divided into different sections, starting with the construction of a theoretical framework. Past literature on the concept of storytelling and crisis communication is revised in order to achieve a mutual understanding of basics terms necessary to understand the context of this study. To provide a theoretical foundation for this research, relevant constructs investigated in this study are explained by reviewing existing literature. In this context, hypotheses regarding the relationship between the different constructs are established.

Second, the methods used to collect and analyse the data are discussed. The research design is presented. Following, the design of the stimuli material is described and motivated. Items and scales used to measure the constructs under analysis are established. Subsequently, the sampling procedure and sample characteristics are described.

Third, the process of the data analysis is documented, and results are presented. It is checked if the previously established hypotheses are significant and supported by the data.

Lastly, the results of the analysis are discussed. The findings are explained in light of the applied research methods and existing literature. Following, it is reflected on used methods and instruments as well as possible research limitations. Finally, theoretical and practical implications resulting from this study are formulated and a conclusion based on the study's findings and research methods is drawn.

Theoretical framework

After establishing the problem setting and research question, a theoretical foundation is created. Past literature is reviewed to establish and explain necessary terms in the context of the study and constructs under analysis. Additionally, research hypotheses are formulated.

Organizational crisis

No company is immune to the event of an organizational crisis. Sellnow and Seeger (2013), define an organizational crisis as “a specific, unexpected, non-routine event or series of events that creates high levels of uncertainty and a significant or perceived threat to high priority goals” (p. 7). Additionally, a crisis presents a restricted time frame for a response (Hermann, 1963). Scholars have proposed different categorisations and classifications of the nature of an organizational crisis. Hwang and Lichtenthal (2000), for instance, distinguish between abrupt and cumulative crises. An abrupt crisis is triggered by specific events and is in its nature very specified on certain aspects of an organization’s practices. The abrupt crisis comes fast and is difficult to predict. In a cumulative crisis, many aspects of an organization’s practices are misaligned with the environment and is not specified on certain aspects. This kind of crisis builds up gradual and is thus easier to predict. Further, a cumulative crisis becomes more probable to occur over time. Snyder, Hall, Robertson, Jasinski and Miller (2006) classified crises types by establishing a two by two matrix. The first two dimensions express the degree of normality. A normal crisis is easier to predict, and its timing, magnitude and consequences are clearer to assess than when dealing with an abnormal crisis. The other two dimensions characterise if the crisis is internally or externally rooted. An internal crisis arises from within the company, such as from the mindset and behaviour of employees (Wicks, 2001) and its effects are specific to the organization. An external crisis emerges from the outside of the organization and has consequences for multiple companies. The emergence of a crisis, if externally or internally rooted, threatens the organization’s goals and disrupts its activities.

An organizational crisis can have a strong impact on the relationship between the organization and its customers. In general, Ki and Brown (2013) found a negative impact on the consumer-organization relationship such as reduced satisfaction, trust, commitment, and control mutuality. Specifically, scholars identified negative effects on corporate reputation (Ma & Zhan, 2016; Verhoeven, van Hoof, ter Keurs & van Vuuren, 2012), trust (Hegner, Beldad & Kraesgenberg 2016; Lee, 2004), purchase intention (Hegner, Beldad & Kraesgenberg 2016), attitude towards the brand (Piotrowski & Guyette, 2010), consumers’ expectations regarding the organization (Lee, Lim & Drumwright, 2018), and impressions

towards the company (Lee, 2004). A crisis also results in disadvantageous emotional responses towards the company such as anger (Jin, 2010; Coombs & Holladay, 2005), sadness (Jin, 2010) and schadenfreude (Coombs & Holladay, 2005), as well as a decreased sympathy towards the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Lee, 2004). The event of an organizational crisis weakens the organization's relationship which can be harmful to the company's activities.

Storytelling and crisis communication

The application of storytelling in an organization's communication can have different beneficial outcomes for the company. When communicating internal to employees, storytelling can have a positive effect on employee engagement (Gustomo, Febriansyah, Ginting & Santoso, 2019; Wilson, 2019), and, according to administrators and principals, positively influence professional development during change (Wilson, 2019).

When communicating to external stakeholders, and specifically to customers, the application of storytelling has a wide range of consequences. For instance, customers show a higher purchase intention (Pan & Chen, 2019; Gilliam & Zablah, 2013; Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus & van Riel, 2013), perceive products of better quality (Pan & Chen, 2019), show higher levels of trust (Li, Zou & Yang, 2019), show rational engagement and persuasion (Pera & Viglia, 2016), show a more positive brand attitude (Yu & Chang, 2013) as well as positive brand associations (Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus & van Riel 2013). Several scholars discovered that the application of storytelling can evoke emotional responses by the receiver, if mediated by empathy with a story's character or by the story's content (Kang, Hong & Hubbard, 2020; Pera & Viglia, 2016; Merchant, Ford & Sargeant, 2010). Storytelling can also influence the behaviour of consumers. Muniz, Woodside & Sood (2015) found that through storytelling, consumers are encouraged to fulfil certain roles or archetypes. In another study, Merchant, Ford and Sargeant (2010) showed that a story's happy ending and the resulting positive emotions can increase the likelihood of customers of showing similar behaviour in the future. Furthermore, storytelling in communication can be applied to mobilize members and evoke a political response (Vromen & Coleman, 2013). By telling stories, companies can benefit from a multitude of beneficial effects resulting from their communication efforts.

Storytelling can also be an effective and viable way to communicate during or after a crisis. Crisis communication is defined as "the ongoing process of creating shared meaning among and between groups, communities, individuals and agencies, within the ecological context of a crisis, for the purpose of preparing for and reducing, limiting and responding to

threats and harms” (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, p. 13). In addition to the consequences described previously, storytelling enables the public’s understanding of a crisis, contributes to the problem-solving process of a crisis and helps organizations to avoid losing their publics (Eray, 2018). In particular, the application of storytelling in an organization’s crisis communication may lead to the following outcomes.

Increased purchase intention

As one outcome of an organizational crisis, the purchase intention of consumers may be lower. Intention, in general, is defined by the “determination to act in a certain way or to bring about a certain state of affairs” (Shultz, 1980). Younus, Rasheed and Zia (2015) specify purchase intention as “the preference of [the] consumer to buy the product or service” (p. 9). Spears and Singh (2004) further emphasize the consciousness of the purchase decision. Purchase intention is, for instance, influenced by the content of advertising, the customer’s involvement with the cause of the brand, as well as by the consumer’s trust and mood (Khuong & Nguyen, 2015; Bester & Jere, 2012).

Increased brand attitude

The attitude an individual holds towards the brand is negatively affected by an organizational crisis. Bohner and Dickel (2011) describe attitude as an evaluation of an object of thought. Percy and Rossiter (1992) define brand attitude as “a buyer’s overall evaluation of a brand with respect to its perceived ability to meet a currently relevant motivation” (p. 266). They identify four characteristics of brand attitude. According to their propositions, brand attitude (1) depends upon the currently relevant situation, (2) consists of both a cognitive and affective component, (3) may be comprised of a series of specific benefit beliefs, (3) and is a relative construct. Brand attitude can be influenced by advertising content, mediated by the attitude towards the ad and dependent on the receiver’s involvement with the ad (Muehling & Lacznia, 1988; Mitchell & Orson, 1981).

Emotional response

Consumers also react emotionally to an organizational crisis. Duffy (1941) defines emotion as an implicit part of a response: “emotion is the conscious aspect of a response, or group of responses, which the individual makes to a stimulating situation which he interprets as having marked significance for himself, favourable or unfavourable” (p. 284). Stout and Leckenby

(1986) conform with this assumption and specify that an emotional response is “a response to some psychologically important event, real or imagined, past or anticipated” (p. 36). They further establish multiple levels of emotional response. At the empathic level, receivers feel the emotion as a character does, and at the experiential level, receivers show a true emotional response as a reaction to self-relevant events. Individuals can be influenced in their emotional response to a message by, for instance, the message’s framing and the pre-existing beliefs of the receiver (Gross, 2008; Gross & D’Ambrosio, 2004).

What qualifies a text as a story?

Communicating information in the form of stories lies is practised by humans for thousands of years. Many scholars attempted to define and conceptualise this form of communication. Stein (1982) identifies a temporal sequence of events as the most basic characteristic of a story. Apart from this structure, stories can have different features, such as goal-directed behaviour of the protagonist. Ryan (2007) extends the groundwork laid out by Stein by defining four different dimensions which qualify a text as a narrative. The spatial dimension, which states that the text must take place in a world populated by individuated existents; the temporal dimension, which states that the world must undergo significant situations caused by non-habitual physical events; the mental dimension, which renders some of the participants in a story as intellectual agents which are able to react emotionally to the aforementioned events; and the formal and pragmatic dimension, which determines the structure of a narrative as a chain of causal events followed by a closure, as well as that the story must communicate something meaningful to the audience (p. 29). Furthermore, she claims that a story is a mental representation and is thus not tied to a particular medium and can describe fictional, as well as non-fictional events. Similarly, Herman (2009) describes four basic elements of each narrative: situatedness, event sequencing, world-making and world-disruption, as well as “what it’s like” the feeling of experiencing the world and events of a story. Later, the possible structures of a story will be further evaluated. For now, it can be stated that a transforming world filled with intellectual and emotional individuals form the conditions for a text to qualify as a narrative.

As established earlier, a text needs to be structured into a sequential and causal chain of events in order to be identified as a story. Two story formats are especially prominent when structuring a narrative: The five-act drama and the hero’s journey. The five-act drama was first defined by Freytag (1863). As the name suggests, this form of narrative consists of five sequential parts. In the “introduction”, the narrative world and the characters in this world are

introduced. In the “rise”, the conflicts between the characters appear. At the “climax” of the story, the conflicts and the narrative’s tension reach their peak. During the “return” or “fall”, the tension decreases, and the characters must deal with the consequences of their actions performed at the climax. At the “catastrophe” or “resolution”, all story paths get resolved and the narrative comes to an end.

The hero’s journey was first described by Campbell (2008), who describes a narrative consisting of 17 sequential elements. This story format puts the focus on the protagonist and the audience follows him or her through the whole narrative. The hero is pulled out of his or her familiar world, needs to overcome obstacles and undergoes trial in order to reach his or her ultimate goal. Afterwards and after refusal, the hero leaves the new world in order to save his or her old, familiar world. Later, Vogler (2007) revised and modernised the hero’s journey. In the following, more aspects making a story appealing and convincing will be described in greater detail.

Endorser identification

When following a story, many of the audience’s reactions to the plot are a result of identifying with the protagonist of the narrative. Kagan (1958) defines identification as “an acquired, cognitive response within a person. The content of this response is that some of the attributes, motives, characteristics and affective states of a model are part of the person’s psychological organization. [...] The person may react to events occurring to the model as if they occurred to him” (p. 298). In other words, the person may behave, think and feel in similar ways as the protagonist he or she follows in a narrative. When individuals identify with an endorser, they show high brand attitude, even if was negative publicity regarding that endorser (Um, 2013; Choi & Rifon, 2012). Pradhan, Duraipandian & Sethi (2016), on the other side, did not find evidence of an effect of celebrity personality – user personality congruence on attitude towards the brand. In order to test the effect of identification on brand attitude, the following is hypothesised (figure 1):

Endorser identification has a positive effect on consumer’s brand attitude (H1a).

Both identification and wishful identification, the wish to be like the endorser, results in greater purchase intentions, even if the endorser received negative publicity (Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2020; Um, 2013; Choi & Rifon, 2012). This effect also accounted for the congruence between brand image and self-image (Li, Wang & Yang, 2011). Similarly,

Basil (1996) discovered that identification with a celebrity endorser resulted in a change of intention, in this case, to get a HIV blood test. Braunstein-Minkove, Zhang and Trail (2011), though, identified only a weak effect on purchase intention, an outcome which they termed “purchase consideration”. Following the suggestions of the literature, the following effect is assumed:

Endorser identification has a positive effect on consumer's purchase intention (H1b).

Additionally, literature suggests that identification with the protagonist influences emotional response (Ooms, Hoeks & Jansen, 2019). In this case, it is of interest if negative emotions evoked by an organizational crisis, as described earlier, can be counteracted. Thus, the following hypothesis is established:

Endorser identification has an effect on consumer's emotional response, specifically on anger, sadness, sympathy, and schadenfreude (H1c).

Endorser archetype

Narratives are often experienced following the main character. Especially in the hero's journey, the narrative is focussed on the perspective of the protagonist, the hero. The receiver gains knowledge and understanding through the eyes of the hero (Shadraconis, 2013). By framing the protagonist of a narrative as a hero, heroism is embedded and embodied in the everyday. It shows that every individual has the potential and the equipment to become a hero (Efthimiou, 2017).

The protagonist, or, in this case, the hero of a story, are often created and developed following pre-existing and established templates. In the year 1944, Pearson identified six reoccurring archetypes on stories: the innocent, the orphan, the wanderer, the warrior, the martyr, and the magician. Almost 50 years later, Pearson (1991) extended her work and formulated twelve archetypes: the innocent, the orphan, the warrior, the caregiver, the seeker, the lover, the destroyer, the creator, the ruler, the magician, the sage, and the fool or jester. These archetypes are applied when using the structure of the hero's journey and each of them corresponds to character types of individuals in a certain stage of their life. The archetypes innocent, orphan, warrior and caregiver are assigned to the stage of departure; the seeker, lover, destroyer and creator are assigned to the journey stage; the ruler, magician, sage and fool are characters which are at the return stage of the hero's journey. However, in practice, a

study found that a single individual can hold archetypes which are assigned to different stages of the hero's journey. Thus, the stages do not apply to real people (Hautala & Routamaa, 2008). Most importantly, Hautala and Routamaa (2008) found that archetypes can be identified in real individuals outside of fictional narratives. As a consequence, it may be possible that a receiver is more likely to identify with endorsers which hold a similar archetype as he or she does.

Thus, by relating to the endorser and his or her archetype, the following is hypothesised:

Endorser archetype has a positive effect on identification with the protagonist (H2a).

Furthermore, the use of the warrior archetype was found to have a positive influence on purchase intention, especially for male participants (Laksmidewi, Susianto & Afiff, 2017). So, the following relationship will be tested:

Endorser archetype has a positive effect on purchase intention (H2b).

Moderating effect of plausibility

Stories which could depict the real or are even based on events, that actually happened, have a special appeal to the audience. The degree to which a story is perceived to be realistic is described by the concepts of verisimilitude and plausibility. Plausibility is a dimension of perceived realism (Hall, 2003) and refers to the receiver's perception that a story event could possibly happen in reality (Cho, Shen & Wilson, 2014). Plausibility is also referred to as verisimilitude. The more likely or realistic an outcome is perceived to be in comparison to other possible outcomes, the higher is its level of verisimilitude. In other words, an outcome which corresponds better to the facts than others is perceived to be more likely to happen and has thus a higher level of verisimilitude (Popper, 1966). Hall (2003) describes, that plausibility is based on personal experiences in the world and shaped by the similarity of media representation and the receiver's experience. Based on these experiences, the receiver decides which things he or she considers as possible.

Cho Shen and Wilson (2014) found that plausibility seems to influence the receiver's emotional response. The more realistic a story appears to be, the more likely the narrative will elicit an emotional response within the recipient. Thus, a moderation effect is assumed:

Plausibility moderates the relationship between endorser identification and consumer's emotional response (H3).

Mediating effect of transportation

The phenomenon of being captivated by a story and experiencing the narrative is described by the concept of transportation. Gerrig (2018) was one of the first describing this term: When following a narrative, the receiver leaves the real world and immerses him- or herself into the world of the story (p. 12). Later, Green and Brock (2002) developed the “Transportation-Imagery Model”. It states that readers form images in their head based on the descriptions in the text and are not only able to see real activity in their physical surroundings. This process is called “transportation”. Through the imagery evoked by a story, the reader is immersed in the story and may not think of the real world and arguments that contradict the assumptions made in the story. The powerful images evoked by narratives provide their own arguments in favour of a particular policy. By having a memory of what they read, transported readers react not only emotionally to events that are written words, but can also be influenced in their beliefs. The authors limit the persuasive effect of transportation “to story texts (scripts) (a) which are in fact narratives, (b) in which images are evoked, and (c) in which readers’ (viewers) beliefs are implicated by psychological transportation” (p. 316). In essence, through the imagery of stories, the reader is transported into the narrative world to such an extent that his or her beliefs can be influenced by the arguments valid in this world.

Van Laer, de Ruyter, Visconti, and Wetzels (2013) extended the work of Green and Brock by composing their “Extended Transportation-Imagery Model”, which specifies the antecedents and effects of narrative transportation. They divided the antecedents into two groups: storyteller antecedents and story receiver antecedents. For instance, the storyteller needs to create identifiable and clearly defined characters as well as developing a plausible plot with a high level of plausibility, whereas story receivers need to pay attention and should be somehow familiar with the story in order to increase transportation. Effective narrative transportation can have an effect on, for instance, intention, attitude, and affective responses.

In line with van Laer et al. (2013), the following hypotheses are established (figure 2 and 3):

Transportation mediates the effect of endorser identification and plausibility on emotional response, brand attitude and purchase intention (H4a).

Transportation mediates the effect of endorser archetype on purchase intention (H4b).

Figure 1

Main effects of endorser identification and endorser archetype, and moderating effect of plausibility

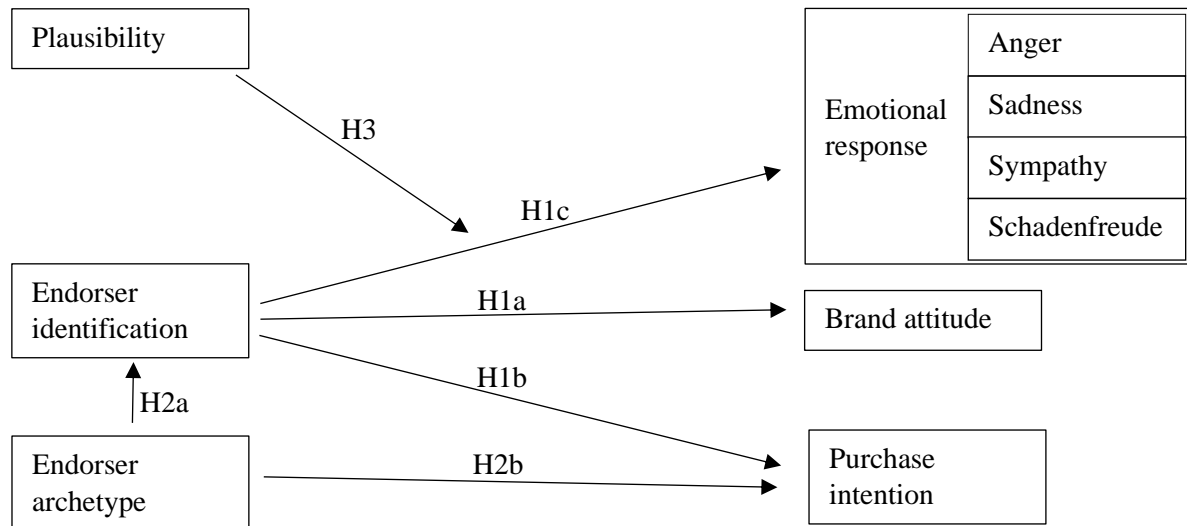


Figure 2

Mediation of transportation on main effects of endorser identification

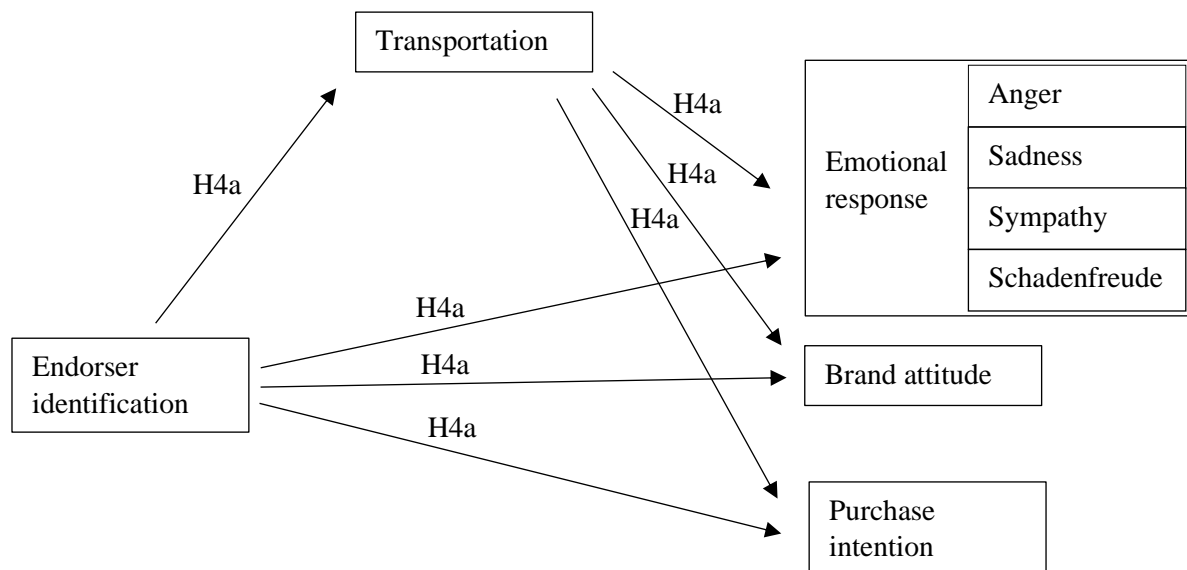
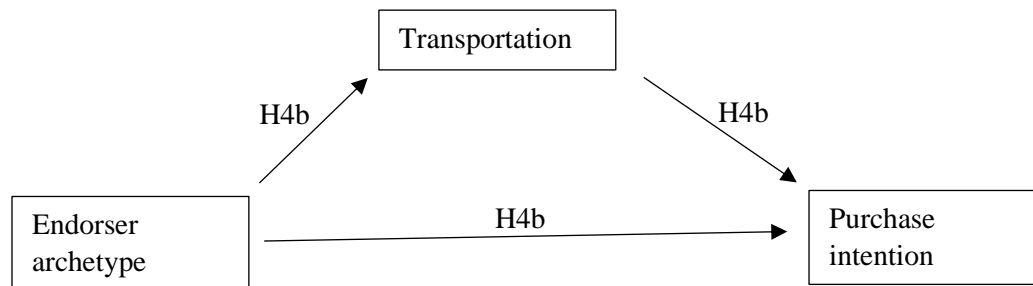


Figure 3

Mediation of transportation on main effects of endorser archetype



Methods

After discussing the constructs under analysis and formulating research hypotheses, the methods used to collect and analyse the data are explained. The design of the stimuli is described. Following, the used measurements are presented and tested for their reliability and validity. Finally, the applied sampling procedure and the sample characteristics are presented.

Research design

In the present study, the effects of endorser archetype and endorser identification in response to an organizational crisis response are investigated. It is studied if and how participants are influenced in their attitude to towards the brand, in their emotional response, in their purchase intention, and in their level of narrative transportation. Further, the perceived plausibility of each statement is studied as a moderator variable. In order to test the effects of the variables endorser identification and endorser archetype, the study was constructed in the form of an experimental 2 (high endorser identification/low endorser identification) x 2 (warrior endorser archetype/ruler endorser archetype) between-subjects design, confronting each of the four different sub-samples with a different combination of stimuli. An experimental design is best suited to study causal relationships, in this case, the effect of the stimulus material on the recipient's cognitions (Babbie, 2016). An online survey is carried out to collect responses, as quantitative methods are the preferred approach when drawing inferences about a diverse and broad population, as, in this case, consumers. Additionally, surveys enable to study and explore multiple relationships simultaneously (Babbie, 2016).

The stimuli material consists of three different parts. First, a short description of an organizational crisis is presented, which has the purpose to introduce participants to a crisis situation. In order to increase the authenticity of the stimuli, a real crisis case of a well-known brand is described. Following this introduction, two versions of the organization's response to

this crisis are presented. In each of the versions, the endorser representing the brand embodies one of two archetypes. The organizational response is written in the structure of a narrative, specifically in the form of the hero's journey (Vogler, 2007). In this particular kind of narrative structure, the use of archetypes is necessary and most natural. In this way, the effect of endorser archetype is studied. After the statement, an image of the endorser will be depicted. To evoke different levels of identification with the endorser, the respondents were confronted with two different images of the brand's spokesperson. In one version, the image will show a person participants are likely to show high levels of identification with, in the other version the endorser will be depicted as a person the participants are likely to show low levels of identification with. As the sample is expected to consist mainly of people who do not hold the position of a CEO, one picture will show an ordinary employee, and the other the CEO of the organization in the crisis. The two different versions of the image were expected to evoke different levels of endorser identification in the participants. In the further course of analysis, endorser identification is treated as the second independent variable, next to endorser archetype.

After being confronted with the stimuli material, the respondents are asked to indicate a quantitative survey, allowing the researcher to measure the relevant variables under investigation. In the survey, the constructs of brand attitude, emotional response, consisting of the dimensions sympathy, anger, sadness as well as schadenfreude, purchase intention, narrative transportation, plausibility, and endorser identification were measured. Endorser identification serves as an independent variable, and plausibility as a moderator variable.

Design of stimuli material

In order to provide a fundament for the design of stimulus material in the main study, design elements were tested in a pre-study. This test helped to determine which brand, spokespersons, and archetypes will be used. The sample consisted of eleven participants, ranging from the age of 20 to 65, of which 5 were females and 6 males.

First, it was investigated which brand should be used in the study as the case of an organizational crisis. The brands H&M, ELLE, and TikTok were tested. These brands were chosen, because they all experienced an organizational crisis in recent years. H&M and ELLE caused a debate about racial discrimination, and TikTok was accused of being controlled by the Chinese government. In order to enable unbiased reactions to the organizational crises, brand attitude was measured on four 5-point Likert scales based on Allen and Janiszewski (1989). Additional to working out the brand which is perceived as most neutral, brand

recognition was measured. Participants were asked to indicate if they knew the brand. If participants are familiar with a brand, it is easier for them to form an attitude towards the brand (Srivastava & Kamdar, 2009). As a result, the brand TikTok was perceived as most neutral ($M = 2.9$, $SD = 2.5$) compared to H&M ($M = 2.9$, $SD = 1.6$) and ELLE ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 1.8$) (see Appendix A). Every participant recognised H&M, 18.18 percent did not recognise TikTok, and 63.64 percent did not recognise the brand ELLE. As the mean attitude of H&M and TikTok are very close to one another, and every respondent knew H&M, the brand H&M was chosen to be used as a case of an organizational crisis in the stimulus material of the main study.

Consequently, all participants were first confronted with an organizational crisis of H&M, which was perceived as neutral and was recognised by every participant in the pre-study. The crisis situation refers to a discussion around the company in 2018, after H&M was alleged to feature racist product images in their online shop (Jarvis, 2018). With a short description prior to the stimulus material, respondents were introduced to this crisis situation of H&M.

Second, two fitting endorser archetypes were identified for each version of the organizational statement. In order to incorporate endorser archetype into an organizational message communicating about a crisis in a discreet and authentic way, two different archetypes will be linked with corresponding strategies of Coombs' (2007) situational crisis communication strategy. Three organizational crisis cases were presented to the respondents, together with the respective organizational responses to these crises (see Appendix B). Each response makes use of a different primary crisis response strategy: Adidas uses an apology strategy, True fruits an attack strategy, and Odwalla a compensation strategy. Based on these organizational crisis responses, participants are asked which archetype they perceive the brand to be, using five scales, each measuring a different narrative archetype. The tested archetypes, namely warrior, destroyer, caregiver, ruler, and innocent were pre-chosen by the researcher. Each case was tested for subjectively pre-chosen kinds of archetypes, based on the perceived best fit between crisis response strategy and archetype. The apology strategy of Adidas was tested for the perceived archetypes ruler and innocent, True fruits' attack response was tested for the perceived archetypes warrior and destroyer, and Odwalla's compensation strategy was tested for the perceived archetype caregiver. The answers were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, using items established by Pearson and Marr (2007) (see Appendix C). As a result, the combination attack strategy/perceived warrior archetype ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 2.5$) and apology strategy/perceived ruler archetype ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 1.9$) scored the highest (see

Appendix D). In the main study, an attack strategy will be used in one version of the stimuli material, and an apology strategy in the other version.

In line with the findings of the pre-study, the attack strategy was linked with the archetype warrior, and the apology strategy was linked with the archetype ruler. In order to evoke stronger responses to the different archetypes, the structure of the organizational response was structured following the pattern of the hero's journey (Vogler, 2007). In one version, the spokesperson reacted to the crisis situation in the style of an attack. In short, he assailed the accusers of being hypocrites. In the role of the ruler, the spokesperson apologised for the incident, partly expressing the original response of H&M at the times of the crisis (see Appendix E).

Third, an identifiable endorser was determined. As the sample of the main study would be mainly employees and non-CEOs, it was assumed that respondents are more likely to identify with an employee compared to a CEO. In order to find two pictures who are perceived as most different in their organizational position, ten different images of employees and CEO were presented to the participants. For each picture, they were asked if they perceived the person as holding the position of an employee, the CEO, or other. The images were subjectively pre-selected by searching for the terms "employee" and "CEO" on the image distribution websites Unsplash and Pexels. Of all images, the person in picture 8 was most clearly identified as being a CEO (90.91%) (see Appendix F). Picture 5 (90.91%) and picture 6 (81.82%) were most clearly perceived on depicting an employee. Although picture 5 scored higher, image 6 was chosen to be used as stimulus material in the main study, as the person in the image fits better into the context of a clothing brand as H&M is.

As a result, each version of the organizational statement will be followed by one of the two images identified in the pre-study. In this way, participants are expected to show different levels of identification with the endorser, dependent on the image shown after the statement

In total, the stimulus material exists in four different versions: Ruler archetype statement paired with an image of a person perceived as a CEO, Ruler archetype statement paired with an image of a person perceived as an employee, the warrior archetype statement paired with a picture of a person perceived as a CEO, as well as paired with an image depicting a person perceived as an employee. An example of a stimuli combination is found in figure 4. The complete set of stimuli material used for the main study can be found in Appendix G. Following the stimuli material, respondents are asked to respond to the measurement scales and items.

Figure 4

Exemplary combination of stimuli material

a

In January 2018, the fashion brand H&M was under fire for using a black child to model a sweatshirt sporting the phrase "coolest monkey in the jungle."


The image first appeared on the British version of the Swedish-based retailer's website.

Upon noticing an advertisement with the photo, social media users erupted in outrage at H&M for what they deemed to be a racist and inconsiderate move.

b

"At H&M, we try to deliver every day high-quality clothing suited to the taste of customers to an affordable price. During the recent years, H&M grew to be one of the world's biggest and most successful clothing brands, operating in hundreds of countries worldwide. Every day, many different meetings, photo shootings and other business activities take place around the world. Sometimes, unintended and accidental incidents are taking place and decisions are made in a rush. So, it happened, that we published the picture of the black child model wearing a hoodie with a racist message on our website. The critique we faced for this picture has shaken us up. We did not only face accusations of being racist from partners, but also from people who had trust in H&M and our values. The message we communicate with the publishing of this picture deeply contradicts the values we believe in and live in the company every day. I cannot explain how this could happen. But we hear you, and we understand your anger and disappointment. From now on, we need to be more sensitive to the issues of racism and discrimination in every single activity. We believe in diversity and inclusion in all that we do and will be reviewing all our internal policies accordingly to avoid any future issues. We will not accept this kind of mistakes in the future. We agree with all the criticism that this has generated – we have got this wrong and we agree that, even if unintentional, passive or casual racism needs to be eradicated wherever it exists. This incident is accidental in nature, but this doesn't mean we don't take it extremely seriously or understand the upset and discomfort it has caused. We will now be doing everything we possibly can to prevent this from happening again in future."

c



Note. a = introduction to the crisis case, b = organizational response, c = image of endorser

Procedure

In order to collect the data, an online survey was distributed. At the beginning of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their gender, age, nationality, and level of education. Afterwards, the stimulus material was presented. All participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions, each consisting of a unique combination of stimuli material. Subsequently, the scales measuring the constructs under investigation were presented to the respondents in the following order:

1. Emotional response
 - a. Anger
 - b. Schadenfreude
 - c. Sadness
 - d. Sympathy
2. Narrative transportation
3. Brand attitude
4. Plausibility
5. Purchase intention
6. Identification
7. Manipulation check
 - a. Archetype recognition
 - b. Brand familiarity
 - c. Employee/CEO recognition

Measures

The relevant constructs for this study were recorded using sets of items, measured on Likert scales. A table with all used items can be found in Appendix H. In the following, each scale is described, and their reliability using Cronbach's alpha is assessed. Afterwards, the results of the factor analysis for the respective scale are presented.

Initially, a principal component analysis containing 41 items, remaining after excluding items which did not fulfil the criteria of reliability analysis, was conducted. Nine factors with an Eigenvalue of > 1 were expected, as the questionnaire measured nine different constructs. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .775. The principal component analysis, however, identified ten factors with an Eigenvalue of > 1 . The first factor explained a variance of 19.71%, the second factor a variance of 12.25%, the third factor a

variance of 10.22%, the fourth factor a variance of 7.95%, the fifth factor a variance of 5.19%, the sixth factor a variance of 4.51%, the seventh factor a variance of 3.48%, the eighth factor a variance of 3.20%, the ninth factor a variance of 2.78%, and the tenth factor a variance of 2.49%. In sum, these ten factors explained 71.79% of the variance. Catell's scree tests suggest to keep seven factors. Varimax rotation was performed to aid in the interpretation of the components and item loadings. Factor loadings below .3 were suppressed.

After making corrections to the scales based on the initial factor analysis, a second principal component analysis was conducted. 34 items were included in the analysis. Again, seven factors with an Eigenvalue of > 1 were expected. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .791. The principal component analysis, in line with the expectations, identified seven factors with an Eigenvalue of > 1 . The first factor explained a variance of 20.87%, the second factor a variance of 13.39%, the third factor a variance of 10.87%, the fourth factor a variance of 9.14%, the fifth factor a variance of 5.84%, the sixth factor a variance of 4.23%, and the seventh factor a variance of 3.70%. In sum, these seven factors explained 68.03% of the variance. Catell's scree tests suggest to keep seven factors. Varimax rotation was performed to aid in the interpretation of the components and item loadings (see Table 1). Factor loadings below .3 were suppressed. Afterwards, the scale's Cronbach's Alpha was recalculated, if necessary.

In the following, the results of the second factor analysis are reported, and it is stated if changes were made to a scale.

Brand attitude

The scale measuring brand attitude contained four items captured on a 7-point Likert scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree). The items are based on the scale Allen and Janiszewski (1989) used for measuring attitude (e.g. "H&M is a pleasant brand").

The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .94. All items measuring brand attitude loaded on the first factor, with factor loadings from .858 to .890.

Endorser identification

Endorser identification was captured using six items based on Basil (1996) (e.g. "Do you relate to the spokesperson?"), measured on a 5-point Likert scale (not at all – strongly).

The Cronbach's alpha for the scale scored .82. The items of the scale endorser identification loaded on factor 3, with factor loadings ranging from .639 to .755.

As endorser identification serves as an independent variable, a median split was performed. To assess the mean difference of the two groups, an independent t-test of the dummy variable against the original scale measuring endorser identification was conducted. The mean difference was significant $t(125) = -14.81, p < .001$. Participants who scored high on endorser identification ($M = 2.7, SD = 0.1$) reported higher levels of identification than participants who scored low on endorser identification ($M = 1.4, SD = 0.3$). The 95% confidence interval for this effect was $[-1.43, -1.1]$. In a one-sample t-test held against the midpoint of the scale, participants who scored low on endorser identification reported lower levels of endorser identification ($M = 1.4, SD = 0.3$) than the midpoint of the scale, $t(58) = -45.31, p < .001$. Participants who scored high on endorser identification also reported lower levels of endorser identification ($M = 2.7, SD = 0.6$) than the midpoint of the scale, $t(67) = 4.2, p < .001$.

Plausibility

The concept plausibility was measured using five items (e.g. “The situation in the statement could actually happen in real life”), captured on a 7-point Likert scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree), based on items used in previous studies (Cho, Shen & Wilson, 2014; Hall, 2003).

The Cronbach’s alpha scored .80 and could be increased to .83, if item 5 would be deleted. But as Cronbach’s alpha is high, and the item-total correlation of .388 acceptable (Cristobal, Flavian & Guinaliu, 2007), it is kept. All items measuring the construct plausibility loaded on the fifth factor, with factor loadings ranging from .515 to .859.

As the construct plausibility is used as a moderator variable, a median split was performed. To assess the mean difference of the two groups, an independent t-test of the dummy variable against the original scale measuring plausibility was conducted. The mean difference was significant $t(125) = -14.48, p < .001$. Participants who scored high on plausibility ($M = 6.1, SD = 0.5$) reported higher levels of plausibility than participants who scored low on plausibility ($M = 4.5, SD = 0.79$). The 95% confidence interval for this effect was $[-1.87, -1.42]$. In a one-sample t-test held against the midpoint of the scale, participants who scored low on plausibility reported higher levels of plausibility ($M = 4.5, SD = 0.8$) than the midpoint of the scale, $t(58) = 4.84, p < .001$. Respondents who scored high on plausibility also reported higher levels of plausibility ($M = 6.1, SD = 0.5$) than the midpoint of the scale, $t(67) = 37.97, p < .001$.

Emotional response

Four dimensions of emotional response were measured, based on negative emotions organizational crises evoke, as discussed previously in the theoretical framework of this study. The identified emotions were reduced sympathy, anger, schadenfreude, and sadness. All dimensions of emotional response were measured on 5-point Likert scales (not at all – strongly).

Sympathy was captured using five items based on Escalas and Stern (2003) (e.g. “I understand what the spokesperson is feeling”). The Cronbach’s alpha was .84. The items measuring sympathy, loaded on factor 4, with factor loadings from .705 to .780.

Anger was measured using three items based on previous studies from Rucker and Petty (2004) (e.g. “Angry”). The Cronbach’s alpha scored .87.

The third dimension, sadness, was captured using three items based on Rucker and Petty (2004) (e.g. “Sad”). The Cronbach’s alpha was .88. However, all items measuring anger and sadness loaded on the same factor. Therefore, both these scales were combined into one scale measuring anger/sadness. The combined items measuring anger and sadness loaded on the second factor, with factor loadings from .674 to .883. The Cronbach’s alpha for this combined scale was .88.

The dimension schadenfreude was captured using four items based on Leach, Spears, Branscombe and Doosje (2003) (e.g. “Schadenfreude”). The Cronbach’s alpha of .74 could be increased by deleting item 1 (“Schadenfreude”) to .86. The item has an item-total correlation of only .155. This item also loaded on another factor than the other three items. As this item is the key item of the scale, the whole scale measuring schadenfreude will be excluded from further analysis, as it seems that the scale is low in both validity and reliability.

Purchase intention

The variable purchase intention was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree) using four items previously used by Dodds, Monroe and Grewal (1991) (e.g. “I would consider buying a product of H&M”).

The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .95. Items measuring purchase intention loaded both on the first factor, together with brand attitude, and on the seventh factor. On the first factor, factor loadings ranged from .698 to .790, and on the seventh factor, items loaded with .404 to .504. Purchase intention and brand attitude loaded on the same factor, which can be explained with the close relatedness of the two constructs (Ghorban, 2012; Shah et al., 2012). A second principal component analysis was conducted, containing only the items

capturing brand attitude and purchase intention. In line with the expectations, two factors with an Eigenvalue of > 1 were identified. The items measuring brand attitude loaded on the first factor, while the items measuring purchase intention loaded on the second factor, confirming the distinctiveness of these two constructs. Thus, the constructs brand attitude and purchase intention will further be treated as different variables.

Narrative transportation

Narrative transportation was captured using eleven items, based on Green and Brock (2000) (e.g. “I was mentally involved in the statement while reading it”), using a 7-point Likert scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree).

Cronbach’s alpha was .61, but was increased to .7, after discarding item 2 (.44), item 5 (.66), item 8 (.292), and item 9 (.176) due to their low item-total correlation scores. In the initial factor analysis, items 1, 3, and 4 loaded on another factor, and were therefore excluded from the scale. The four remaining items measuring narrative transportation loaded the sixth factor, with factor loadings from .478 to .764. As a result, the Cronbach’s alpha decreased, scoring .66.

Manipulation check

The manipulation check consisted of five scales, all measured using a 7-point Likert scale. The level of brand familiarity with H&M was measured using a single item (“How often do you buy products from H&M?”). One item measured to which degree participants identified the endorser as being a CEO, another item measured to which degree participants identified the endorser as being an employee. Two items captured if respondents perceived the endorser as fulfilling the archetype of a ruler. Item 1 (“The spokesperson takes over if things look like they are getting out of hand”) is based on Pearson and Marr (2007), and scored the highest ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.8$) on archetype ruler in the pre-test. The Cronbach’s alpha was .75. In a confirmatory principal component analysis, the two items explained 79.82% of the variance, with factor loadings from .893 for both items. Another two items measured if participants perceived the endorser as being a warrior. The first item (“The spokesperson is willing to take personal risks to defend his beliefs”), again, was based on Pearson and Marr (2007) and was adapted from the pre-test, as it scored the highest ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.9$) on archetype warrior. Cronbach’s alpha scored .6. 71.33% of variance was explained, with factor loadings of .845 for both items.

Table 1**Rotated component matrix of exploratory factor analysis**

Items	<i>Component</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Endorser identification</i>							
Do you relate to the spokesperson?			.755				
How much do you like the spokesperson?			.714				
Is the spokesperson a personal rolemodel?			.713				
Do you have feelings for the spokesperson?			.680				
Do you think of the spokesperson as a friend?			.640				
Do you think you would work well with the spokesperson?			.639				
<i>Brand attitude</i>							
H&M is a pleasant brand	.907						
H&M is a positive brand	.890						
H&M is a likeable brand	.881						
H&M is a good brand	.858						
<i>Plausibility</i>							
The statement shows something that could happen in real life					.859		
The situation in the statement portrays a real-life situation					.777		
The situation in the statement could actually happen in real life					.774		
What was shown in the statement would never happen in real life					.752		
Real people would not do what is shown in the statement					.515		
<i>Emotional response: Sympathy</i>							
I tried to understand the spokesperson's motivation				.780			
I understand what is bothering the spokesperson				.777			
I tried to understand the events as they occurred				.760			
I am able to recognise the problems that the spokesperson has				.759			
I understand what the spokesperson is feeling				.705			

Emotional response: Anger/Sadness

Sad	.883		
Down	.867		
Gloomy	.792		
Angry	.689	-.337	-.307
Irritated	.674		
Frustrated	.579		-.302

Purchase intention

I would consider buying a product of H&M	.790		.404
I am willing to buy a product of H&M	.778		.412
The likelihood that I would purchase a product of H&M is high	.715		.504
The probability that I would consider buying a product of H&M is high	.698		.486

Transportation

The events in the statement are relevant to my everyday life			.764
The statement affected me emotionally	.358		.670
While reading it, I wanted to learn how the statement ended			.648
The events in the statement have changed my life	.359		.478

Note. Principal component analysis, varimax rotation applied, rotation converged in 6 iterations

Ethical approval

The study has been ethically approved by the BMS lab of the University of Twente. Prior to the study, the purpose and aim of the survey are presented, as well as the kind of data which will be collected. Participants need to indicate their approval to participate in the study under the mentioned conditions.

Participants

Responses were collected using convenience sampling and snowball sampling. The study was distributed among the researcher's friends and relatives. Additionally, the questionnaire was posted in Facebook groups in which every member has the possibility to answer surveys and

share their own questionnaires. Further, respondents were collected by distributing physical flyers in the city of Enschede, Netherlands.

In total, 186 responses were recorded. 25 responses were removed because they were incomplete. 31 additional responses were excluded, as these participants took less than ten seconds to process the stimulus material. In this small time frame, the stimuli cannot be adequately internalised, possibly leading to faulty responses. The sample which was analysed consisted of 127 participants.

The whole sample was roughly evenly distributed among the four conditions; each holding between 20.5% and 30.7% of the analysed sample (see table 2). The original condition employee/CEO was discarded in favour of high identification/low identification, as endorser identification serves as a predictor variable. The condition employee/CEO was included because it was supposed to evoke different levels of endorser identification. When looking at the distribution of high and low identifiers within the original condition employee/CEO, it becomes apparent that participants which were confronted with the stimulus of the employee showed generally high levels of endorser identification. In general, the majority (53.5%) of the whole sample falls in the group of high identifiers (see table 3).

Table 2

**Sample distribution in conditions
endorser identification and endorser
archetype**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Low identification / warrior</i>	26	20.5%
<i>Low identification / ruler</i>	33	26%
<i>High identification / warrior</i>	39	30.7%
<i>High identification / ruler</i>	29	22.9%
<i>Total</i>	127	100%

Table 3**Sample distribution of identification in the condition organizational position**

	<i>Low endorser identification</i>	<i>High endorser identification</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Employee</i>	29	36	65
<i>CEO</i>	30	32	62
<i>Total</i>	59	68	

The sample consisted of 61.4% female, and 38.6% male participants. A Pearson Chi-Square test showed that there is no significant association between the four conditions and gender, $X^2(3) = 0.66, p = .883$. 59.1% of the respondents were between 16 and 24, 26.8% between 25 and 34, 9.4% between 35 and 54, 3.9% between 55 and 64, and 0.8% between 65 and 99 years old. Running a one-way UNIANOVA analysis, the four conditions had no significant effect on age, $F(1, 123) = 1.63, p = .185$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. Almost a third of the sample were Dutch (30.7%) respondents, followed by other European (22.8%), German (21.3%), Asian (10.2%), North American (7.1%), Australian (2.4%) and South American (1.6%) participants. 3.9% of the sample did not indicate their nationality. When asked about their educational level, 31.5% of the respondents reported that they hold a high school degree or equivalent, 42.5% completed their bachelor's degree, 22.8% hold a master's degree, and 3.1% hold a doctorate. Again, running a Pearson Chi-Square test, no significant association between the four conditions and educational level was found, $X^2(9) = 2.81, p = .971$.

Considering the distribution of sample characteristics among all four conditions, the subsamples hold nearly similar attributes (see table 4). The mean age and standard distribution in the condition high identification/warrior endorser scores slightly higher than the other conditions. In the same condition, the ratio between male and female participants is slightly more balanced. In the condition low identification/warrior endorser, the number of people which hold a high school diploma or equivalent was the same as participants which completed a bachelor's degree, whereas in the other conditions the proportion of participants with a bachelor's degree scored the highest. Opposed to the other conditions, no Asians were part of the sample in the condition low identification/ruler endorser.

Table 4**Distribution of sample characteristics**

	Warrior endorser		Ruler endorser	
Low Identification				
Age ^{a)}	M = 26,81 / SD = 7,40		M = 25,42 / SD = 7,42	
Gender ^{b)}	Male	34,60%	Male	36,40%
	Female	65,40%	Female	63,60%
Educational level ^{c)}	1)	34,60%	1)	27,30%
	2)	34,60%	2)	48,50%
	3)	26,90%	3)	21,20%
	4)	3,80%	4)	3,00%
High Identification				
Age ^{a)}	M = 30,38 / SD = 13,22		M = 26,62 / SD = 10,03	
Gender ^{b)}	Male	43,60%	Male	37,90%
	Female	56,40%	Female	62,10%
Educational level ^{c)}	1)	33,30%	1)	31,00%
	2)	41,00%	2)	44,80%
	3)	20,50%	3)	24,10%
	4)	5,10%	4)	0%

a) Mean + SD of self-reported age

b) Percentage division Male / Female

c) Percentage: 1)=Low, high school or vocational level / 2)=Bachelor level / 3)=Master level / 4)= Doctorate level

Results

Following the description of the used research methods, the results of the data analysis are presented. It is investigated if previously established research hypotheses are supported by the data.

Manipulation check

Before arriving at the main effects between the variables, the stimulus material was validated.

In order to investigate if participants recognised the endorser archetypes as such, three independent t-tests were conducted, inspecting the effect endorser archetype had on perceived

archetype. There was no significant effect for archetype stimulus on perceived ruler archetype $t(125) = -1.26, p = .209$ despite people in the warrior endorser archetype condition ($M = 4.7, SD = 1.2$) scored higher than people in the ruler endorser archetype condition ($M = 4.4, SD = 1.3$). Also when testing the effect of endorser archetype on the single item “The spokesperson is a ruler “, no significant effect is found, $t(125) = -1.28, p = .203$. Participants in the warrior endorser archetype stimulus condition ($M = 4.5, SD = 1.4$) compared to participants in the ruler endorser archetype stimulus condition ($M = 3.5, SD = 1.3$) reported significantly better scores on perceived warrior archetype, $t(125) = -4.07, p < .001$. In conclusion, whereas the ruler archetype was generally not perceived as such, the warrior archetype stimulus can be validated.

In order to validate the stimulus material indicating the endorser’s organizational position, two independent t-tests were conducted, investigating the relationship between the endorser’s organizational position and the perceived organizational position. There was no significant effect for endorser position stimulus on perceived employee position $t(125) = -0.22, p = .823$ despite participants in the employee endorser condition ($M = 4.9, SD = 1.5$) scored higher than people in the CEO endorser condition ($M = 4.9, SD = 1.8$). However, one can conclude, based on the high means scoring above the midpoint of the scale, that both the stimuli material depicting ordinary employee and the CEO were perceived as depicting spokespersons working for the organization H&M. Participants in the CEO endorser position stimulus condition ($M = 4.8, SD = 1.8$) compared to participants in the employee endorser position stimulus condition ($M = 3.9, SD = 1.8$) reported significantly better scores on perceived CEO position, $t(125) = 2.69, p = .008$. Concluding, the stimulus material depicting a CEO can be validated, whereas the mean difference regarding the depiction of the employee was not significant. Still, participants in both conditions recognised the respective endorsers as employees of H&M.

Further, two independent t-tests were conducted, investigating the relationship between the four conditions and the test variable brand familiarity. There was no significant effect for archetype stimulus on brand familiarity $t(125) = -1.07, p = .289$ despite people in the ruler endorser archetype condition ($M = 2.7, SD = 1.0$) scored higher than people in the warrior endorser archetype condition ($M = 2.5, SD = 1.1$). The effect of endorser position stimulus on brand familiarity also scored insignificant, $t(125) = 0.62, p = .536$, despite participants in the employee endorser condition ($M = 2.6, SD = 1.1$) scored higher than people in the CEO endorser condition ($M = 2.5, SD = 1.1$).

Tests of main effects

A one-way MANOVA analysis was conducted to test the effects of the independent variables endorser archetype and endorser identification, as well as the moderator plausibility on the dependent variables brand attitude, emotional response, purchase intention, and narrative transportation (see table 6). For most dependent variables, Levene's test of equal variance scored non-significant. However, Levene's test for purchase intention was significant, $F(7, 119) = 2.22, p = 0.037$. On the one hand, the null hypothesis of equal population variance for purchase intention can, therefore, be rejected. On the other hand, the sample sizes for each condition were roughly the same (table 3). The mean scores of each dependent variable for each relationship to an independent variable is depicted in table 5.

Effects of endorser identification

There was a statistically significant difference in the dependent variables based on endorser identification, $F(5, 115) = 2.55, p = .006$; Wilk's $\Lambda = .870$, partial $\eta^2 = .13$. Endorser identification had a significant effect on brand attitude, $F(1, 119) = 4.67, p = .033$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. Additionally, endorser identification had a significant effect on different dimensions of emotional response, namely sympathy, $F(1, 119) = 5.5, p = .021$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$, and anger/sadness $F(1, 119) = 7.3, p = .008$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$. However, endorser identification showed no significant effect on purchase intention and narrative transportation.

Thus, whereas hypotheses H1a and H1c are supported by the data, hypothesis H1b is rejected.

Effects of endorser archetype

There was a statistically significant difference in the dependent variables based on endorser's narrative archetype, $F(5, 115) = 2.59, p = .029$; Wilk's $\Lambda = .899$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. Endorser archetype had no significant effect on any other dependent variable under investigation.

Running a UNIANOVA analysis, the effect of endorser archetype on endorser identification was investigated. Levene's test for equal variance was not significant. Endorser archetype had a significant effect on endorser identification, $F(1, 125) = 4.41, p = .038$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. The mean score of endorsers in the warrior archetype condition on endorser identification was 2.45, whereas participants in the ruler archetype condition scored on average 1.95. The found main effects of both endorser identification and endorser archetype are depicted in figure 5.

Following these results, hypothesis H2a is supported by the data, whereas hypothesis H2b is rejected.

Moderating effect of plausibility

There was no statistically significant difference in the dependent variables based on the interaction of endorser identification and plausibility (see figure 5).

As there is no significant interaction between endorser identification and plausibility and consequently no moderating effect of plausibility on endorser identification, hypothesis H3 is rejected.

Effects of plausibility

There was a statistically significant difference in the dependent variables based on plausibility, $F(5, 115) = 2.35, p = .045$; Wilk's $\Lambda = .907$, partial $\eta^2 = .09$. First, plausibility had a significant effect on sympathy, $F(1, 119) = 5.03, p = .027$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. Second, plausibility had a significant effect on purchase intention, $F(1, 119) = 4.08, p = .046$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$.

Mediating effect of transportation

As endorser identification showed to have no effect on narrative transportation, hypothesis H4a is rejected (see figure 6).

Additionally, hypothesis H4b is rejected, as endorser archetype has been found to affect narrative transportation, but not purchase intention (see figure 7).

Interaction of endorser archetype and endorser identification

There was no statistically significant difference in the dependent variables based on the interaction of endorser's narrative archetype and endorser identification.

Table 5**Descriptive statistics of the dependent variables**

	<i>Warrior endorser</i>		<i>Ruler endorser</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Low identification</i>						
Brand attitude ^{a)}	4,05	1,33	4,24	1,38	4,16	1,35
Purchase intention ^{a)}	4,12	1,72	4,7	1,39	4,44	1,56
Transportation ^{a)}	3,72	1,17	2,82	1,1	3,22	1,21
Sympathy ^{b)}	3,55	0,88	3,58	0,82	3,57	0,84
Anger/Sadness ^{b)}	2,55	1,18	2,15	0,99	2,33	1,09
<i>High identification</i>						
Brand attitude ^{a)}	4,74	1,21	4,72	1,1	4,73	1,51
Purchase intention ^{a)}	4,7	1,4	4,95	1,22	4,81	1,32
Transportation ^{a)}	3,6	0,94	3,3	1,13	3,47	1,03
Sympathy ^{b)}	4,18	0,7	3,65	0,7	3,96	0,75
Anger/Sadness ^{b)}	1,91	0,88	1,8	0,77	1,86	0,83
<i>Total</i>						
Brand attitude ^{a)}	4,46	1,29	4,47	1,27		
Purchase intention ^{a)}	4,47	1,55	4,82	1,31		
Transportation ^{a)}	3,65	1,03	3,04	1,13		
Sympathy ^{b)}	3,93	0,83	3,61	0,76		
Anger/Sadness ^{b)}	2,17	1,05	1,99	0,91		
^{a)} 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree / 7=strongly agree) ^{b)} 5-point Likert scale (1=not at all / 5=strongly)						

Table 6
Multivariate test for variance (GLM /
MANOVA)

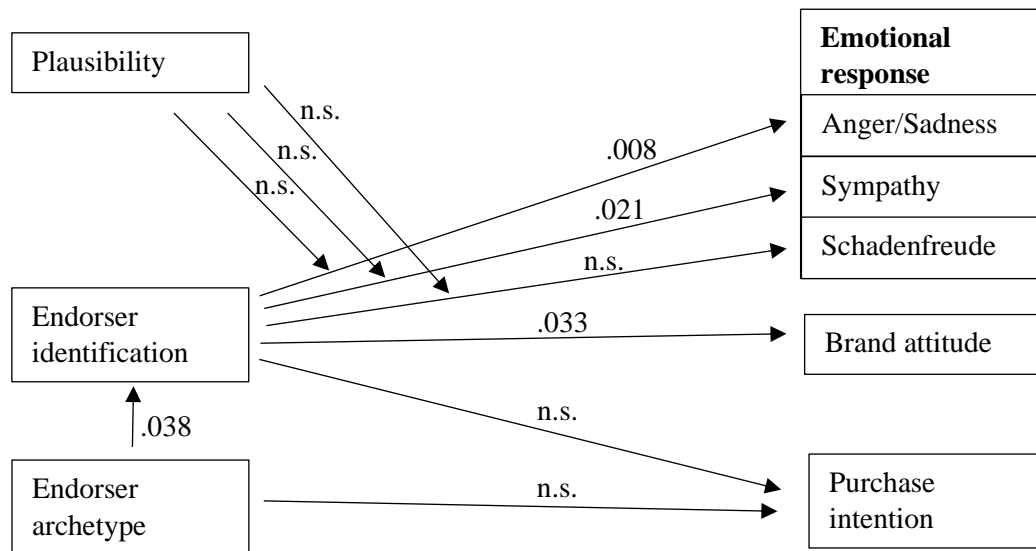
Multivariate Tests	<i>F-value</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Partial Eta Squared</i>
<i>Wilks' Lambda</i>			
Endorser archetype	2,587	0,029	0,101
Endorser identification	3,443	0,006	0,13
Endorser archetype * Endorser identification (interaction)	1,163	0,332	0,048
Endorser identification * Plausibility (interaction)	0,567	0,725	0,024
<hr/>			
Test of between-subjects design effects	<i>F-value</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Partial Eta Squared</i>
<i>Endorser archetype</i>			
Brand attitude ^{a)}	0,398	0,529	0,003
Purchase intention ^{a)}	2,528	0,114	0,021
Transportation ^{a)}	8,207	0,005	0,065
Sympathy ^{b)}	3,048	0,083	0,025
Anger/Sadness ^{b)}	2,075	0,152	0,017
<hr/>			
<i>Endorser identification</i>			
Brand attitude ^{a)}	4,669	0,033	0,038
Purchase intention ^{a)}	1,802	0,182	0,015
Transportation ^{a)}	0,379	0,54	0,003
Sympathy ^{b)}	5,495	0,021	0,044
Anger/Sadness ^{b)}	7,297	0,008	0,058
<hr/>			
<i>Endorser archetype * Endorser identification (interaction)</i>			
Brand attitude ^{a)}	0,33	0,567	0,003
Purchase intention ^{a)}	0,161	0,689	0,001
Transportation ^{a)}	1,819	0,18	0,015
Sympathy ^{b)}	3,383	0,068	0,028
Anger/Sadness ^{b)}	0,539	0,464	0,005
<hr/>			
<i>Endorser identification * Plausibility (interaction)</i>			
Brand attitude ^{a)}	0,919	0,34	0,008
Purchase intention ^{a)}	0,001	0,971	0
Transportation ^{a)}	0,33	0,567	0,003
Sympathy ^{b)}	1,204	0,275	0,01
Anger/Sadness ^{b)}	0,025	0,875	0

a) 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree / 7=strongly agree)

b) 5-point Likert scale (1=not at all / 5=strongly)

Figure 5

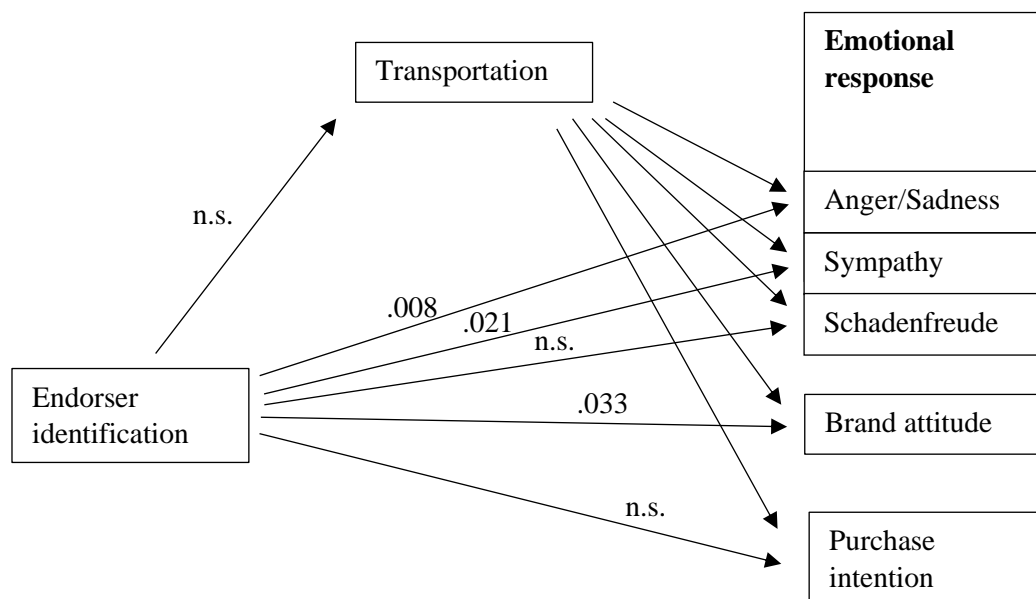
Structural model showing main effects of endorser identification and endorser archetype, and moderating effect of plausibility



Note. Effect sizes are shown in level of significance

Figure 6

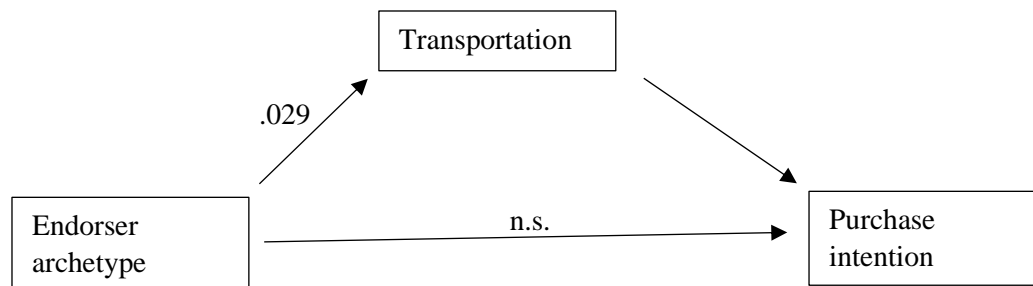
Structural model of mediating effect of transportation on main effects of endorser identification



Note. Effect sizes are shown in level of significance

Figure 7

Structural model of mediating effect of transportation on main effects of endorser archetype



Note. Effect sizes are shown in level of significance

Discussion

After presenting the results of the data analysis, these findings are discussed and put into context. First, the research question formulated at the begin of the study is answered.

Afterwards, each hypothesized relationship is discussed regarding their significance or non-significance in the light of existing literature and the applied research methods. Second, it is reflected on the used methods and instruments as well as on possible research limitations.

Third, theoretical and practical implications of the study are formulated. Lastly, the findings and relevance of the study are summarized and recommendations for future research are given.

The analysis of the data yielded answers to the research question established before. Identification with the endorser has been found to have a positive effect on brand attitude. Additionally, endorser identification affected different dimensions of emotional response. Participants who showed high levels of endorser identification felt more sympathy and less angry and sad after reading the organizational statement in reaction to a crisis. Respondents who were confronted with an organizational response articulated by a spokesperson with a warrior archetype showed higher levels of narrative transportation as well as identification with that endorser than people who read the statement from a spokesperson with a ruler archetype. The other hypothesized effects of endorser identification, endorser archetype, the moderating effect of plausibility, and the mediating effect of narrative transportation, were not supported by the data.

Main effects of endorser identification

The effect found of endorser identification on brand attitude corresponds with similar findings in the literature (Um, 2013; Choi & Rifon, 2012). Pradhan, Duraipandian and Sethi (2016), however, did not find a significant effect of celebrity personality - user personality congruence on brand attitude. These seemingly contradicting findings can be explained by the definitional differences of the concepts under study. Whereas identification describes to which degree an individual can relate to another (Kagan, 1958), Pradhan and his colleagues investigated the similarity of individuals' self-concept. Identification, however, can happen independently of one's self-concept.

The finding that endorser identification affects the emotional response of respondents, specifically on sympathy, anger and sadness, is in line with existing literature which found effects of identification on emotional response (Ooms, Hoeks & Jansen, 2019). To elicit stronger and broader emotional responses, the content of a narrative or, in this case, a message, should describe events more significant to the self. Stout and Leckenby (1986) describe that receivers show true emotional reactions in response to self-relevant events. Another possible aspect strengthening the feeling of anger and sadness within low-identified respondent may be the content of the crisis and organizational statement. The crisis situation originated in from a public discourse accusing the brand being racist. Participants who strongly oppose discriminant behaviour may show generally low levels of endorser and brand identification and thus feel more negative emotions towards the company in general. Underlining this assumption, respondents in the condition low identification/warrior showed the highest level of negative emotional response. In the warrior archetype condition, the endorser accused the critics of being hypocrites, thus further boosting the negative emotions felt by low identifiers in response to the racial debate surrounding the organization. A limiting factor in the analysis of the effects on emotional response was that the originally distinct scales measuring sadness and anger needed to be merged into a single scale, as the validity analysis indicated that both scales seemed to measure the same construct. Still, it can be concluded that high endorser identification seems to reduce negative emotions in response to an organizational message. Additionally, the feeling of schadenfreude could not be measured as the scale was found to be low in validity as well as reliability. Further research is necessary to measure this construct to a sufficient degree.

The analysis did yield no significant effect of endorser identification on purchase intention. Limiting the statistical power of this effect, the population variances for purchase intention were not equal. On the other hand, the sample sizes in each variable were roughly

the same. Still, this result seems to contradict findings of existing literature, differences between these studies and the present study can be found. In the study of Um (2013) no significant effect could be found of endorser identification on purchase intention. In his study, participants who showed high identification only reported a slightly higher mean score on purchase intention compared to participants showing low levels of endorser identification. In most of the other studies, the content of the message was an advertisement of a product, and not an organizational crisis response (Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2020; Choi & Rifon, 2012; Braunstein-Minkove, Zhang & Trail, 2011; Basil, 1996). Additionally, the vast majority of the existing literature puts well-known celebrity in the role of the endorsers, as opposed to fictitious and unknown employees (Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2020; Choi & Rifon, 2012; Braunstein-Minkove, Zhang & Trail, 2011; Basil, 1996). Similar to the previously mentioned literature on the relationship between endorser identification and brand attitude, Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget (2020) investigated the effect of endorser – recipient similarity, which is a different construct than endorser identification. Further, Basil (1996) reported a significant effect of endorser identification on change of sexual behaviour and intention to get a HIV blood, which is hard to compare to the intention to purchase a product. Finally, Braunstein-Minkove, Zhang and Trail (2011) did report just a small impact of endorser identification on purchase intention. In general, the insignificant effect on purchase intention in this study may stem from the difficult situation of the organization. Consumers may not be inclined to buy a product from an organization which experiences a crisis situation. Additionally, a crisis response message may not be as persuasive as a product advertisement when it comes to creating a desire to purchase a brand's product.

Main effects of endorser archetype

Contrary to the hypothesized effect, endorser archetype did not have an impact on purchase intention. In another study by Laksmidewi, Susianto and Afiff (2017) dealing with the concept of anthropomorphism, it was shown that an endorser with the characteristics of a warrior archetype positively affected participants' purchase intention. However, the study's subject and phenomenon under investigation were substantially different from the present study, as Laksmidewi and her colleagues studied the effects of anthropomorphism in product advertising. The endorser, a non-human medicine, was depicted as a hero with a warrior archetype in order to appear more human-like. In this context, equipping a non-human object with the characters of a human warrior, endorser archetype affected purchase intention. The present study, however, deals with human endorsers responding to an organizational crisis.

Consequently, these studies are hard to compare and found effects of endorser archetype may not be transferrable. Additionally, participants may generally not be willing to increasingly purchase products of an organization in a crisis situation.

The hypothesized effect of endorser archetype on endorser identification was found to be significant. When the endorser holds the archetype of a warrior, participants showed higher levels of endorser identification. Although the scores on identification were generally low, this result shows that narrative archetypes can affect the recipient in their cognition towards an endorser. As the relationship between endorser archetype and endorser identification is not regarded by the literature yet, future studies should further investigate this relationship in greater detail and different contexts, such as advertisements.

Moderating effect of plausibility

Although it was hypothesized that message plausibility would strengthen the relationship between endorser identification and emotional response, the interaction between endorser identification and plausibility was found to be insignificant. This could have multiple reasons. Different to the study of Cho, Shen and Wilson (2014), which found a significant effect of narrative plausibility on emotional response, plausibility was not treated as an independent variable, but as a moderator. The data of this study suggest that plausibility may have a positive effect on sympathy if being hold as an independent variable. Future studies on this relationship should create two versions of an organizational statement, which differ in its perceived level plausibility. Studies investigating plausibility as a predictor variable may be able to find stronger and clear effects of plausibility on emotional response. Additionally, the content of the messages were video advertisements and messages with a clear persuasive intent, such as public service announcements arguing against the consumption of drugs. Further enhancing the power of the messages, each participant attended a screening of these messages in an experimental environment. Through this experimental design, the messages may be able to transport more of their emotional content to the respondents than an organizational crisis response in the form of a text. Further, Cho and her colleagues measured the construct “emotional involvement” by asking the participants to indicate which degree of “emotion” they felt. This measurement is less nuanced than asking respondents about different dimensions of emotional response. Participants which would score low on different facets of emotional response may score higher on a scale just asking for felt “emotion”, as participants may add up multiple subtle feelings of different kinds of emotions. Further, the participants generally perceived the stimuli to be high in plausibility. Respondents in both

groups, showing high levels and low levels of plausibility, reported mean scores laying above the midpoint of the scale. In further studies, one version of the stimuli material should depict a situation which is perceived as being more unrealistic in order to achieve stronger effects of perceived plausibility.

Mediating effect of transportation

Narrative transportation did not mediate the effects endorser archetype and endorser identification had on the dependent variables, although endorser archetype showed a main effect on narrative transportation. The hypothesis that narrative transportation mediates the effect of endorser archetype and endorser identification was based on the Extended Transportation-Imagery Model by van Laer et al. (2013). In this study, the authors found that “Identifiable characters” is an antecedent of narrative transportation. Considering the significant effect of endorser archetype on narrative transportation, this assumption holds true. When testing the participants of both archetype conditions for archetype recognition, only the participants in the warrior archetype condition reported that they recognised the endorser as a warrior. They were able to clearly identify the character, and thus showed higher levels of narrative transportation. As endorser archetype showed no main effects on the variable purchase intention, a mediation effect of narrative transportation cannot be verified. The non-significant effect of endorser identification on narrative transportation may stem from a wrong interpretation of the antecedent “Identifiable character”. Van Laer and his colleagues described the term as the recipient’s ability to clearly identify a character based on their description, rather than enabling the recipient to identify *with* a character.

Reflection on research limitations

This study made use of an experimental 2x2 between-subjects design to test the effects of storytelling elements in an organizational crisis response. The reactions of the participants were collected by an online questionnaire, in which the stimuli material was presented.

On the one hand, the quantitative method helped to get a broad overview of the reactions to an organizational statement. Especially when it comes to national diversity, the sample showed to represent a broad range of cultures and countries from all over the world. Further, it was possible to measure a large number of theoretical constructs, capturing a variety of recipients’ reactions to the organizational statement. As the majority of scholars carried studying the effects of organizational messages and advertisements carried out their research using quantitative methods, it was also easier to replicate the measures and

instruments of existing literature on this topic and test their theories and findings in another context.

On the other hand, quantitative methods suffer from a lack of explanatory depth. In this study, some hypotheses could not be confirmed, and the lack of insight into the reasons of insignificant effects render some findings difficult to explain. Qualitative methods are also suited for discovering new and poorly researched phenomena. In the present study, only scarce literature exists about the effects of narrative archetypes in organizational settings. Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews may enable a better basic understanding of this concept. Additionally, an online questionnaire makes it difficult to assess whether participants properly processed and internalised the stimuli material. An offline study in a controlled environment allows the researcher to ensure that participants are properly exposed to the stimuli, especially when participants are required, as in this study, to immerse themselves in a narrative.

While analysing the data, some issues within the collected data became apparent. Generally, the sample could be improved. The sample size was small, which limits the ability to draw reliable assumptions from the data. Further impacting the reliability, the sample consisted of a relatively homogeneous group of respondents. Although a diverse variety of nationalities was presented, more than 60% of the participants were female, the majority of respondents were between 16 and 24 years old, and more than two thirds of the sample hold an academic degree. The low level of heterogeneity of the sample may originate from the used sampling procedure. Convenience sampling was used to collect responses from the social environment of the researcher, which consists to a large proportion of students. Additionally, participants were recruited from Facebook groups consisting mainly of other students and researchers. Further, physical flyers were distributed in the neighbourhood of a city inhabited by many students (Studiekeuze123, 2020). Future studies may be able to improve the sample heterogeneity and in order to improve the reliability of the findings.

The stimuli material also showed some major points of improvement. First, participants were not able to identify one the ruler endorser archetype, which leads to an impaired informative value of the findings. This flaw already became apparent in the pre-study, in which the scores on archetype recognition were generally low. In the main study, it became clear that many participants struggled to clearly identify the stimulus depicting a ruler archetype as such. Second, the content of the organizational statement and the subject of the crisis situation may have also influenced the results of this study. As the organizational crisis of H&M originated from a racial debate, some participants may be influenced in their

reactions to the stimuli material. This became especially apparent in the warrior archetype/low identification condition. In this condition, respondents reported the highest mean score on negative emotional response, specifically anger and sadness. Participants may have shown low levels of endorser identification because they opposed the racist actions taken by H&M. In the warrior archetype condition, the endorser accused the critics of being hypocrites, further provoking opposing participants, resulting in a high score of negative feelings towards the statement. The sensible subject may be also the cause for the generally low scores on endorser identification. Participants in both conditions, high and low endorser identification reported mean scores below the midpoint of the scale. Future studies may pick a more neutral subject in order to prevent distorted results.

While analysing the data, a few scales showed to be unreliable or low in validity. The scale measuring *schadenfreude*, a dimension of emotional response, needed to be excluded from analysis. The item expressing the key meaning of the scale (“*schadenfreude*”) was found to be both low in reliability as well as in validity. A possible explanation could be that participants may have not understood the term “*schadenfreude*”. In future studies, this item could be replaced using a term or expression which is easier to understand. Regarding other scales capturing different dimension of emotional response, the two scales measuring anger and sadness were combined, as they loaded on the same factor and seemed to measure the same construct. The combined scale rather seemed to measure negative emotions in response to the organizational statement. Finally, the scale measuring narrative transportation was broken down from originally eleven items to four items. The excluded items were deleted as they showed both problems in reliability and validity. These problems may be related to the complexity of the concept of narrative transportation.

Further limiting the power of effects were the generally low mean difference of the dependent variables, especially of plausibility and endorser identification. On average, participants reported high scores of plausibility, scoring above the midpoint of the scale, as well as low scores of endorser identification, scoring below the midpoint of the scale. Consequentially, all participants showed a rather low identification with the endorsers and perceived all statements as being rather plausible. In truth, two levels of low endorser identification and two levels of high plausibility were measured, rather than one low level and one high level of both endorser identification and plausibility. As a result, the small mean difference of endorser identification and plausibility may be one reason for the rather weak impact on the outcome variables.

Reflection on theoretical implications

This study is one of the first to investigate the effects storytelling elements in external crisis communication have on the public. To a certain extent, it confirms the findings of existing literature stating that storytelling can be an effective and viable way of communicating a crisis (Moors, 2019; Eray, 2018; Koop et al., 2011). Specifically, this study adds to existing that the application of narrative archetypes in organizational statements increases the identification with the endorser, and enables recipients to be immersed into the message. This research also concluded that the effects of endorser identification on emotional response and brand attitude already found by other scholars (Ooms, Hoeks & Jansen, 2019; Um, 2013; Choi & Rifon, 2012) also apply when communicating an organizational crisis response to the public. Further, this study was one of the first to substantiate the often vaguely used term “storytelling” by structuring the organizational statement according to the hero’s journey and equipping the endorser’s with characteristics based on narrative archetypes.

Nevertheless, contrary to the suggestions of some scholars (e.g. Eray, 2018), this study was not able to fully confirm the large impact storytelling can have when communicating an organizational crisis. Rather, the multitude and significance of effects in this study were limited. So, even if existing literature certifies storytelling a large potential in crisis communication, future literature needs to substantiate these claims with studies leading to insightful and conclusive findings.

Reflection on practical implications

Practically, this study adds a method to companies’ repertoire to communicate an organizational crisis response to the public in order to preserve advantageous relationships with their customers. Specifically, using narrative archetypes improves customer’s identification with the endorser, which, in turn, may reduce negative emotions towards the organization evoked by a crisis, such as sadness, anger, or low sympathy. By describing the application of a narrative structure and narrative archetypes to an organizational crisis response message, this study also provides guidelines for organizations which aim to apply storytelling elements to their organizational messages. The stimuli material of this study can aid practitioners to structure an organizational message according to the form of the hero’s journey. Additionally, the potential impact of an identifiable and relatable endorser are highlighted.

Still, professionals should be careful to overestimate the power storytelling has when communicating in response to an organizational crisis. Although some scholars found that storytelling can be effective when promoting a product or brand, this study shows that the effect of these narrative elements may be weaker in a crisis setting.

Conclusion

This study was one of the first to apply narrative elements to external crisis communication. It showed that endorser archetype influences the degree to which recipients are immersed in a story and to which level they identify with an endorser. Increased endorser identification was found to strengthen the relationship between the public and an organization in a crisis situation, specifically by influencing emotional responses and attitude towards the brand. This study serves as a basis to understand how storytelling elements can be applied in an organizational crisis response statement and how these elements influence the public. Scholars can use this study as a starting point for future research on this subject, by further investigating found relationships and ironing out some methodological shortcomings in the sampling procedure and the design of the stimuli material.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Brand attitude towards the brands H&M, ELLE, and TikTok

	Brand is a positive brand	Brand is a good brand	Brand is a pleasant brand	Brand is a likeable brand	Total	Don't know the brand
H&M	2.82	2.73	3.00	3.00	2.89	0%
ELLE	3.50	3.25	3.75	3.50	3.50	63.64%
TikTok	3.00	2.89	2.89	2.89	2.92	18.18%

Appendix B

Organizational crisis cases and the respective organizational responses presented in the pre-study

Brand	Description of crisis case	Organizational response
Adidas	<p>During the Boston marathon in April 2013, two homemade bombs detonated near the finish line of the race, killing 3 people and injuring several hundred others.</p> <p>After the Boston Marathon in 2017, Adidas sent a congratulatory email about 'surviving' the marathon, not really thinking about the terrorist incident at the event four years ago. (Calfas, 2017)</p>	<p>Adidas afterwards apologised for the email with the following words:</p> <p><i>"We are incredibly sorry. Clearly, there was no thought given to the insensitive email subject line we sent Tuesday. We deeply apologise for our mistake."</i></p>
True fruits	In the year 2016, the German smoothie brand 'True fruits' introduced a new smoothie, which came in a black bottle. The company advertised it with	True fruits responded to the allegations by stating that the company wanted to criticise the conservative Austrian Government and its decisions to make the

	<p>the words "<i>Our quota black</i>".</p> <p>One year later, the same smoothie was promoted in Austria. One of the advertisement slogans was: "<i>Rarely makes it across the border</i>"</p> <p>These marketing campaigns caused public outrage. Many people accused True fruits of promoting racial discrimination and racism. (Rentz, 2017)</p>	<p>immigration for refugees more difficult.</p> <p>Further, the company stated that the public response to the advertisements was inflated and the accusation of discriminations exaggerated. True Fruits rejected the accusations and blamed accusers of being low in intelligence.</p>
Odwalla	<p>In 1996, the American food product company 'Odwalla' produced a batch of apple juice accidentally contaminated with the E. coli bacterium, because blemished fruits were used in the production process. The consumption of contaminated bottles of apple juice sickened 66 people and killed a 16-month-old girl. (Wikipedia, 2020)</p>	<p>As a reaction to these tragic incidents, Odwalla recalled 16 different products containing apple juice, worth 16 Million Dollar. Additionally, the company offered to pay the medical expenses of ill individuals and visited victims with their families.</p>

Appendix C

Scales used to measure a brand's perceived archetype based on its response to a crisis situation

Brand case	Construct	Items
True fruits	Warrior archetype – attack strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Competition energizes True Fruits 2. True Fruits is willing to take personal risks to defend their beliefs 3. True Fruits puts fear aside and do what needs to be done 4. True Fruits stands up to offensive people 5. True Fruits is comfortable being assertive

		6. Competition brings out True Fruits' best efforts
	Destroyer archetype – attack strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. True Fruits is breaking out of a bad situation 2. True Fruits is changing rapidly 3. True Fruits feels bewildered by so much change in their life 4. Recent experiences have caused True Fruits to rethink who they are 5. True Fruits is grieving a loss
Odwalla	Caregiver archetype – compensation strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Odwalla finds fulfilment in giving to others 2. Odwalla finds satisfaction in caring for others 3. Odwalla has a hard time saying no 4. Odwalla puts the need of others before their own 5. Kindness is a primary value for Odwalla
Adidas	Ruler archetype – apology strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adidas has leadership qualities 2. Adidas prefers to be in control 3. Adidas prefers to be in charge 4. Adidas takes over if things look like they are getting out of hand 5. Adidas has a duty to meet their obligations
	Innocent archetype – apology strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adidas believes that people don't really mean to hurt each other 2. Adidas can count on others to take care of them 3. Adidas feels safe 4. Adidas assumes that people are trustworthy 5. Adidas thinks the world is a safe place

Appendix D

Mean scores of perceived brand archetype based on an organization's situational crisis response strategy

	Warrior	Destroyer	Caregiver	Ruler	Innocent
Apology				3.76	3.07
Attack	3.61	2.96			
Compensation			3.00		

Appendix E

Content of organizational responses based on the structure of the hero's journey and narrative archetypes





Stage of Hero's Journey	Apology - ruler	Attack - warrior
<p>Act 1: Separation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Call to adventure - Refusal of the call - Meeting the mentor - Crossing the threshold 	<p>At H&M, we try to deliver every day high-quality clothing suited to the taste of customers to an affordable price. During the recent years, H&M grew to be one of the world's biggest and most successful clothing brands, operating in hundreds of countries worldwide. Every day, many different meetings, photo shootings and other business activities take place around the world. Sometimes, unintended and accidental incidents are taking place and decisions are made in a rush. So, it happened, that we published the picture of the black child model wearing a hoodie with a racist message on our website. The critique we faced for this picture has shaken us up.</p>	<p>At H&M, we try to deliver every day high-quality clothing suited to the taste of customers to an affordable price. During the recent years, H&M grew to be one of the world's biggest and most successful clothing brands, operating in hundreds of countries worldwide. We believe in diversity and equality among all people. So, it happened, that we published the picture of the black child model wearing a hoodie with a message on our website, which was perceived as being racist. The critique we faced for this picture has irritated us.</p>
<p>Act 2a: Descent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tests, allies and enemies - Approach the innocent cave - The ordeal 	<p>We did not only face accusations of being racist from partners, but also from people who had trust in H&M and our values. The message we communicate</p>	<p>We did not only face accusations of being racist from partners, but also from people who have trust in H&M and our values. This hoodie is not supposed to</p>






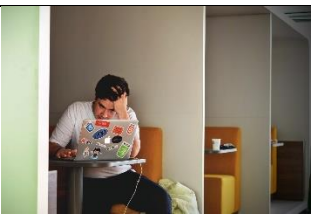
	<p>with the publishing of this picture deeply contradicts the values we believe in and live in the company every day. I cannot explain how this could happen.</p>	<p>send a message, it is just a piece of clothing after all. It only appears as offensive to people, who want to make a connection between skin colour and a few innocent words on a children's hoodie. We think that people who accuse us of being racist are making the wrong connections, and are not able to see the hoodie as what it is: a simple piece of clothing, regardless of who wears it. If people really mean that they see all people as equal, the discussed image should not cause such a huge debate. The people who threaten us, are the real problem. They are hypocrites and are attacking our fundamental values: to see everyone in the world as equal, regardless of their appearance, religion, or origin.</p>
<p>Act 2b: Initiation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reward - Road back 	<p>But we hear you, and we understand your anger and disappointment. From now on, we need to be more sensitive to the issues of racism and discrimination in every single activity. We believe in diversity and inclusion in all that we do and will be reviewing all our internal policies accordingly to avoid any future issues. We will not accept this kind of mistakes in the future.</p>	<p>Because we believe in a truly unbiased and diverse society, we will not accept the accusations and critique. We will continue to sell this hoodie. The feedback tells us that we are still far away from achieving our goal. We will stay true to our values.</p>
<p>Act 3: Return</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resurrection - Return with elixir 	<p>We agree with all the criticism that this has generated – we have got this wrong and we agree that, even if unintentional, passive or casual racism needs to be eradicated wherever it exists. This incident is accidental in nature, but this doesn't mean</p>	<p>Our mission will be accomplished when the publishing of such a picture will not cause a public outrage. Only if we stay resilient to unjustified critique, we will eventually accomplish our goal: a truly equal, diverse and unbiased society.</p>

	we don't take it extremely seriously or understand the upset and discomfort it has caused. We will now be doing everything we possibly can to prevent this from happening again in future.	
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Appendix F

Perceived organizational position

	CEO	Employee	Other
 Picture 1	45.45%	45.45%	9.09%
 Picture 2	18.18%	54.55%	27.27%
 Picture 3	81.82%	18.18%	0%
 Picture 4	72.73%	18.18%	9.09%

 <p>Picture 5</p>	9.09%	90.91%	0%
 <p>Picture 6</p>	9.09%	81.82%	9.09%
 <p>Picture 7</p>	0%	54.55%	45.45%
 <p>Picture 8</p>	90.91%	9.09%	0%
 <p>Picture 9</p>	0%	90.91%	9.09%
 <p>Picture 10</p>	0%	18.18%	81.82%

Appendix G

Complete set of stimuli material used in questionnaire

Stimuli material: Introduction to the crisis situation

In January 2018, the fashion brand **H&M** was under fire for using a black child to model a sweatshirt sporting the phrase “coolest monkey in the jungle.”

The image first appeared on the British version of the Swedish-based retailer’s website.

Upon noticing an advertisement with the photo, social media users erupted in outrage at H&M for what they deemed to be a racist and inconsiderate move.

Stimuli material: Ruler archetype response

"At H&M, we try to deliver every day high-quality clothing suited to the taste of customers to an affordable price. During the recent years, H&M grew to be one of the world's biggest and most successful clothing brands, operating in hundreds of countries worldwide. Every day, many different meetings, photo shootings and other business activities take place around the world. Sometimes, unintended and accidental incidents are taking place and decisions are made in a rush. So, it happened, that we published the picture of the black child model wearing a hoodie with a racist message on our website. The critique we faced for this picture has shaken us up. We did not only face accusations of being racist from partners, but also from people who had trust in H&M and our values. The message we communicate with the publishing of this picture deeply contradicts the values we believe in and live in the company every day. I cannot explain how this could happen. But we hear you, and we understand your anger and disappointment. From now on, we need to be more sensitive to the issues of racism and discrimination in every single activity. We believe in diversity and inclusion in all that we do and will be reviewing all our internal policies accordingly to avoid any future issues. We will not accept this kind of mistakes in the future. We agree with all the criticism that this has generated – we have got this wrong and we agree that, even if unintentional, passive or casual racism needs to be eradicated wherever it exists. This incident is accidental in nature, but this doesn't mean we don't take it extremely seriously or understand the upset and discomfort it has caused. We will now be doing everything we possibly can to prevent this from happening again in future."

Stimuli material: Warrior archetype response

"At H&M, we try to deliver every day high-quality clothing suited to the taste of customers to an affordable price.

During the recent years, H&M grew to be one of the world's biggest and most successful clothing brands, operating in hundreds of countries worldwide. We believe in diversity and equality among all people. So, it happened, that we published the picture of the black child model wearing a hoodie with a message on our website, which was perceived as being racist. The critique we faced for this picture has irritated us.

We did not only face accusations of being racist from partners, but also from people who have trust in H&M and our values. This hoodie is not supposed to send a message, it is just a piece of clothing after all. It only appears as offensive to people, who want to make a connection between skin colour and a few innocent words on a children's hoodie. We think that people who accuse us of being racist are making the wrong connections, and are not able to see the hoodie as what it is: a simple piece of clothing, regardless of who wears it. If people really mean that they see all people as equal, the discussed image should not cause such a huge debate. The people who threaten us, are the real problem. They are hypocrites and are attacking our fundamental values: to see everyone in the world as equal, regardless of their appearance, religion, or origin.

Because we believe in a truly unbiased and diverse society, we will not accept the accusations and critique. We will continue to sell this hoodie. The feedback tells us that we are still far away from achieving our goal. We will stay true to our values.

Our mission will be accomplished when the publishing of such a picture will not cause a public outrage. Only if we stay resilient to unjustified critique, we will eventually accomplish our goal: a truly equal, diverse and unbiased society."

Stimuli material: Image of employee



Stimuli material: Image of CEO



Appendix H

Items used in the questionnaire to measure constructs under investigation

Construct	Items
Endorser identification	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How much do you like the spokesperson?2. Do you have feelings for the spokesperson?3. Do you think of the spokesperson as a friend?4. Do you relate to the spokesperson?5. Do you think you would work well with the spokesperson?6. Is the spokesperson a personal rolemodel?
Brand attitude	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. H&M is a good brand2. H&M is a positive brand3. H&M is a pleasant brand4. H&M is a likeable brand
Plausibility	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The statement shows something that could happen in real life2. The situation in the statement portrays a real-life situation

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. The situation in the statement could actually happen in real life 4. What was shown in the statement would never happen in real life 5. Real people would not do what is shown in the statement
Emotional response	Sympathy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I understand what the spokesperson is feeling 2. I am able to recognise the problems that the spokesperson has 3. I tried to understand the spokesperson's motivation 4. I tried to understand the events as they occurred 5. I understand what is bothering the spokesperson
	Anger	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Angry 2. Irritated 3. Frustrated
	Schadenfreude	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Schadenfreude 2. Relieved 3. Satisfied 4. Happy
	Sadness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sad 2. Gloomy 3. Down
Purchase intention		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The likelihood that I would purchase a product of H&M is high 2. I would consider buying a product of H&M 3. The probability that I would consider buying a product of H&M is high 4. I am willing to buy a product of H&M
Transportation		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. While I was reading the statement, I could easily picture the events in it taking place 2. While I was reading the statement, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind 3. I could picture myself in the scene of events described in the statement 4. I was mentally involved in the statement while reading it 5. After finishing reading the statement, I found it easy to put it out of my mind 6. While reading it, I wanted to learn how the statement ended 7. The statement affected me emotionally

		8. I found myself thinking of ways the statement could have turned out differently 9. I found my mind wandering while reading the statement 10. The events in the statement are relevant to my everyday life 11. The events in the statement have changed my life
Manipulation check	Brand familiarity	1. How often do you buy products from H&M?
	CEO recognition	1. Do you think the spokesperson is the CEO of the company H&M?
	Employee recognition	1. Do you think the spokesperson is an employee of the company H&M?
	Archetype ruler recognition	1. The spokesperson takes over if things look like they are getting out of hand 2. The spokesperson is a ruler
	Archetype warrior recognition	1. The spokesperson is willing to take personal risks to defend his beliefs 2. The spokesperson is a warrior

Appendix I:

Literature search log

Date	Source	Search terms	Hits
21-02-2020	Google Scholar	brand storytelling effect consumer	36.600
24-02-2020	Google Scholar	brand storytelling effect consumer purchase intention	22.200
24-02-2020	Google Scholar	brand storytelling effect consumer attitude	30.600
25-02-2020	Google Scholar	storytelling crisis communication	118.000
25-02-2020	Google Scholar	Hero's journey	112.000
25-02-2020	Google Scholar	hero's journey vogler	3950
01-03-2020	Google Scholar	Organizational crisis effect	2.390.000
02-03-2020	Google Scholar	hero archetype storytelling	26.000
03-03-2020	Google Scholar	narrative transportation concept	429.000
04-03-2020	Google Scholar	plausibility emotional response	174.000

05-03-2020	Google Scholar	endorser identification effects	20.200
25-02-2020	University library	crisis communication storytelling	844
01-03-2020	University library	organizational crisis effects consumer	3873
07-04-2020	University library	Pearson marr archetype indicator	7

Reflection:

I mainly use Google Scholar when searching for literature. Although the results are often messy and contain articles irrelevant to the search query, Google Scholar offers the widest range of literature out of all search engines. Finding relevant articles via Google Scholar takes time, but mostly leads to literature relevant to the study. The university library is always my second place to go if I am done looking for literature on Google Scholar. The online library offers many filter options which are not available in Google Scholar. Additionally, all the articles I find in the online library are always available right away, as they are not hidden behind paywalls or subscriptions. On the other side, the selection of articles is much smaller than on Google Scholar. In general, I need to work on the specificity of my search queries. In the fear of excluding relevant and interesting articles, I keep my search queries very open. This results in very time-consuming literature search sessions, as many search results are irrelevant or low in quality.