

# UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

**“Can it get even worse?” – “Yes, because I  
posted it”**

**The effects of framing and message source on reputation, secondary crisis  
communication and secondary crisis reactions during a crisis**

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Master Thesis in Communication Science

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** A crisis can disrupt an organization's operations and is a threat to an organization's reputation. In addition, through the increasing use of social media, people are enabled to comment on crisis messages or forward information to others which can further harm the organization in crisis. In order to manage the crisis, organizations make use of different crisis communication strategies. However, not only organizations themselves but also external influences communicate about the incident, such as the media. This study aims to examine the effects of framing and message source on reputation, secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reactions during a crisis as well as how these effects are mediated by emotions.

**Methodology:** In order to answer the study's research questions, an experimental 2 (emotional versus rational framing) x2 (organization vs media) design was conducted. The sample consisted of 273 participants that were randomly assigned to one of the four manipulated conditions of a fictitious crisis message that was posted by either the organization itself or by the media. By doing so, it was investigated how framing and message source influence the public's attitude, communication and behaviour towards the organization. Additionally, it was interrogated how emotions mediate such effects.

**Findings:** A multivariate analysis of variance that was performed showed that there were no significant effects of framing and message source on the dependent variables. However, by conducting a Pearson correlation, some significant effects between the dependent variables could be found. These effects indicated that participants feeling anger were more likely to have a negative attitude towards the organization, to communicate about the crisis and to have negative behavioural intentions towards the organization while participants feeling sympathy were showing the opposite.

**Implications:** By investigating the interaction between framing and message source, this study adds to existing research in crisis communication. Since there could be found some contradictions to previous literature, it serves to contribute to what is already known in this area and provides recommendations for communication professionals on how to enhance crisis communication in order to reduce reputational harm, secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reactions.

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## 1. Introduction

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 2015, a plane by Germanwings, a low-cost airline owned by Lufthansa, headed from Barcelona to Düsseldorf with 150 people on board. However, that plane never arrived as it crashed into the mountains in the French Alps (Canny, 2016). After investigating the case, it turned out that the crash was intentionally caused by the co-pilot who had already been diagnosed with depression. However, he hid this information and his sick notes from Lufthansa as well as Germanwings and caused his own as well as the death of 150 other people which resulted in a major crisis for the airline (Lahti, 2015). Thus, immediately after this incident, Lufthansa and Germanwings communicated to its stakeholders and apologized to the victims' families (Canny, 2016). However, not only the organization itself but also the media reported about this incident. While the organization just communicated information that was based on facts (Le Roux 2017), the media questioned if Lufthansa regularly checks on the health of their employees and if it was aware of the co-pilot's state of health (Lahti, 2015). This got people starting to communicate on social media about this incident, meaning that they shared existing media posts, commented on this incident or exchanged information with each other (Masip, Ruiz, & Suau, 2019). Additionally, people started boycotting the organization and talked negatively about it which made it even more difficult for the airline to recover from the crisis. The reason for such strong reactions to this case was that the death of over hundred people caused emotional pain to the company's stakeholders (Lahti, 2015).

This example illustrates the interplay between crisis communication, post-crisis reputation and behaviour as well as the importance of emotions during a crisis. A crisis, an unexpected occurrence, can disturb an organization's business and can threaten to harm the organization's reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). In addition, how an organization recovers from a crisis also depends on the public's communication and behaviour during and after the crisis. With today's omnipresence of the Internet and social media, in particular, people are enabled to communicate with each other and to exchange information at a fast pace (Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013). The public's communication about crisis information and the organization in crisis is defined as secondary crisis communication, meaning that the public shares or forwards crisis messages. Besides secondary crisis communication, people can also engage in negative word-of-mouth or have negative behavioural intentions towards the organization which is called secondary crisis reactions (Utz et al., 2013). Since the public's activities during a crisis can make it harder for organizations to recover from a crisis (Zheng, Liu, & Davison, 2018), it is important to find out what factors might influence the reputation, secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reactions during and after a crisis.

More specifically, whether people engage in secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reactions and whether the reputation of an organization is affected by the crisis is dependent on the way the crisis message is framed (Kiambi & Shafer, 2015). In the current paper, a distinction will be made between emotional framing and rational framing. Frames are important when it comes to shaping public opinion and, therefore, it can help organizations to reduce reputational damage. However, it needs to be considered that the media also frames the crisis in a certain way. This is important to note as people are likely to be influenced by what is told in the media. Thus, crisis managers need to understand how the media can influence people's perceptions and activities during a crisis (An & Gower, 2009).

A crisis message is essential for an organization in order to protect and improve its reputation. While there is already much known about what influences an organization's reputation during a crisis, there is only little research conducted about the public's communication and behaviour and what factors might influence such activities. This knowledge is especially important since increasing secondary crisis communication and reactions can make it harder for an organization to take control of the crisis and to recover from it. Additionally, even though there is evidence that the media play an important role in influencing the public, there is not enough research conducted on how the media and organizations differ in their influence on the public's perception, communication and behaviour. By conducting this research, organizations can be advised on how to communicate during a crisis. Additionally, this study might serve to enable organizations to minimize secondary crisis communication and reactions and, therefore, to take control of the crisis involvement. Therefore, the effects of an organization's crisis response and the media's crisis response on reputation, secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reaction will be compared regarding the same crisis. This leads to the following research question:

RQ1: What are the effects of framing and message source on reputation, secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reaction during a crisis?

In addition, the way people perceive an organization during a crisis can be explained through the emotions they experience. More specifically, during a crisis, people feel negative emotions (Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000). However, the way a message is framed can influence emotions and can either deepen such negative emotions or can turn them into more sympathy (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). For instance, the more an individual perceives the organization to be responsible, the more anger this person will feel towards the

organization (Coombs, 2004). Moreover, to what extent people feel certain emotions during a crisis might depend on who the sender of the message is. The reason for this is that people tend to perceive the media as more trustworthy which, in turn, leads to more positive emotions (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2015). Apart from the public's attitude towards the organization, according to Kim and Cameron (2011), emotions can also influence an individual's behavioural intentions towards the organization. For instance, a person who experiences feelings of anger is more likely to have negative intentions towards the organization, such as negative word-of-mouth (Wetzer, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2007). Thus, organizations and the media can play an important role when it comes to clarifying information and decreasing doubt and negative feelings during a crisis (Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2014). Therefore, this study also investigates the following research question:

RQ2: Are the effects of framing and message source on reputation, secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reaction mediated by emotions?

## **2. Framework**

### **2.1 Reputation**

Researchers use different definitions for the term reputation. According to Coombs (2007), an organization's reputation is an "aggregate evaluation stakeholders make about how well an organization is meeting stakeholder expectations based on its past behaviours" (Coombs, 2007, p. 164). In addition to that, Mira, Lorenzo, and Navarro (2013) state that the reputation involves how clients, employees and suppliers think of an organization. Furthermore, Gotsi and Wilson (2001) describe reputation as the character to ascribe to a person, thing or action. Thus, the current framework understands reputation as stakeholders' perceptions of an organization which influence the organization's success. This means that everyone has the opportunity to affect an organization's reputation and, therefore, everyone is able to influence its success.

Several reasons can be detected as to why it is important for an organization to have a good reputation. Firstly, Mira et al. (2013) state that a good reputation makes people think that an organization has a safe environment, meaning that reputation affects the customers' thoughts and choices. Secondly, a bad reputation leads to a decrease in customers and, therefore, to a decline in profits (Gray & Balmer, 1998). Thirdly, Mira et al. (2013) state that a good reputation might attract competent employees as well as experts. Especially in times of a crisis, the loyalty and commitment of employees is essential.

However, even though a good reputation is important, it is not always possible for an organization to maintain a good reputation. For instance, a company's image can be threatened through a crisis. More specifically, a crisis can harm an organization's reputation and, therefore, can influence stakeholders' interactions with the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

## **2.2 Secondary Crisis Communication**

A crisis can lead to high reputational damage which means that it is necessary to communicate with stakeholders. However, this suggests a one-to-many model of communication even though the Internet and social media enabled stakeholders to not only be informed about the crisis but to also engage in discussions with each other (Utz et al., 2013). Thus, a crisis cannot only influence the attitude people have towards an organization but it can also affect people's communication about that organization which is called secondary crisis communication. This term involves the willingness to share and forward crisis communication or even to leave a reaction online (Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011). According to Schultz et al. (2011), people especially tend to engage in secondary crisis communication when they are shocked about the crisis of an organization. This type of communication is important to consider since organizations might get difficulties to manage the communication process (Utz et al., 2013) and since it can lead to additional problems by influencing other people's behavioural intentions, such as the willingness to boycott the organization and negative word-of-mouth communication which is called secondary crisis reaction (Luo & Zhai, 2017).

## **2.3 Secondary Crisis Reaction**

A crisis can also affect the public's behaviour, which is referred to as secondary crisis reaction and involves buying intention, negative word-of-mouth or boycott (Utz et al., 2013). Through social media, people have the opportunity to spread crisis information or negative comments about the organization. Such communication and behaviour among the public can have negative effects for organizations since it can make it harder for organizations to recover from a crisis (Zheng et al., 2018). According to Utz et al. (2013), people engage in less negative behaviour towards the organization if their uncertainty is reduced. This, in turn, happens if they get accurate information about the crisis as early as possible (Utz et al., 2013).

Important to note as well is that Luo and Zhai (2017) state that secondary crisis reactions can be influenced by secondary crisis communication. More specifically, communication among the public might cause emotions that, in turn, have an influence on the



public's behaviour. This is in line with Bi, Zheng, and Liu (2014) who state that receiving negative information from others can intensify negative behavioural intentions towards an organization. In other words, the emotions people experience while participating online can further influence their behaviours. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H1: Secondary crisis communication is positively related to secondary crisis reactions.*

## **2.4 Framing**

Matthes and Schemer (2012) define framing as highlighting certain aspects of a story or event. Framing can have a large influence during a crisis since it plays an essential role in the attribution of meaning to a crisis (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013) and it can be regarded as the process that results in certain interpretations to the public discourse (Etter & Vestergaard, 2015). Nijkrake, Gosselt, and Gutteling (2015) describe the effect of framing and state that the way a message is framed determines how people define not only problems but also attributions of responsibility.

A message can be framed in an emotional and in a rational way. Firstly, Moon and Rhee (2012) state that the emotional frame focuses on the communicator's concern for the ones who are affected by the crisis. This means that emotional framing is the appeal to an individual's emotions and this is done by including drama as well as personal features in the crisis message (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014). Secondly, rational framing focuses on messages that merely contain objective and simple information without any emotions (Claeys, Cauberghe, & Leysen, 2013). According to Yoo and MacInnis (2005), leaving out emotions in the crisis message encourages people to assess the credibility of the message as rational messages appeal to people's cognitions instead of their emotions (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014).

Firstly, the way a crisis message is framed can influence the public's perception of an organization and, therefore, an organization's reputation. According to Schultz et al. (2011), emotional framing appeals to the public's emotions and, therefore, it can evoke positive emotions, such as sympathy (Schultz et al., 2011). Choi and Lin (2009) build on that by suggesting that such positive feelings can positively influence people's attitudes. They also add that crisis messages that are emotionally framed are more likely to be remembered. Cotte and Ritchie (2005) agree on that and state that emotional framing is more convincing than rational framing. For instance, in political campaigns, it can help to obtain votes.

Secondly, the way a crisis is framed cannot only influence people's attitude but it can also influence the public's secondary crisis communication. Utz et al. (2013) suggest that evoking stakeholders' emotions through an emotional crisis message results in less secondary crisis communication. Schultz et al. (2011) explain this suggestion by saying that people are more likely to forward messages when they are shocked about the crisis and have negative feelings about the organization. Therefore, if the organization in crisis expresses regret and sympathy, the public's negative feelings will be reduced which means that people are less likely to communicate about the crisis.

Thirdly, framing can also have an influence on individuals' behavioural intentions. Schultz et al. (2011) suggest that the use of sympathy and, thus, emotional framing leads to less negative crisis reactions than just informing the public. Luo and Zhai (2017) explain that this is because emotions that are triggered through emotional framing influence people's behavioural intentions. Coombs and Holladay (2007) agree on that by claiming that positive emotions that are evoked through such emotional messages are expected to increase supportive behaviour towards the organization. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H2: Emotional framing leads to less a) reputational harm, b) secondary crisis communication, c) secondary crisis reactions, as compared to rational framing.*

## **2.5 Message source**

If a crisis occurs in an organization, a crisis message can be formulated not only by the organization itself but also by a third party, such as the media. Since crises can be associated with a high degree of uncertainty and rumours, organizations need to decide how to communicate with their stakeholders in order to maintain the reputation. This is important since corporate communication is regarded as one of the most important factors in influencing the involvement and the outcomes of a crisis (Coombs, 1999). However, there are also external influences that can affect an organization's reputation during a crisis, such as the way the media frames the crisis (Kiambi & Shafer, 2016). For the general public, mass media are the main source of information regarding daily news or other events. Therefore, news media have a high level of responsibility, since they influence public opinion and specify how stakeholders should perceive a crisis (De Vreese, 2005). Since organizations and the media have different goals and stakes in reporting on a crisis it can be assumed that both parties

differ in their communication about a crisis. More specifically, while organizations aim to minimize uncertainty and reputational damage, the media mainly focus on informing and entertaining the public (Nijkraake et al., 2015).

Research suggests that the sender of crisis information is a factor that affects public opinion. More specifically, the source of information determines the public's level of trust and their perception of credibility which, in turn, influences whether people accept the crisis message (Jin et al., 2014). In other words, the more a message is perceived as credible, the more it is accepted by the public. However, publics tend to perceive crisis communication by the organization itself as less credible which can lead to negative perceptions of the organization. This is because people think that the company wants to present itself as well as possible and, therefore, wants to hide some information of the crisis (Callison, 2001). In contrast, research suggests that third party sources, such as the media, are associated with high credibility and, therefore, can positively influence people's attitude towards the organization in crisis (Mack, Blose, & Pan, 2008; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007). This is in line with Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2013) who state that the media can mitigate public speculation and, therefore, have the power to prevent a crisis from escalating. This illustrates that credibility can be an issue for organizations' crisis managers (Kim & Park, 2017).

Moreover, message source can also have an effect on secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reactions. Since the media are perceived as more credible, their crisis message is also more likely to be accepted. Therefore, the third-party source is also more effective in positively influencing people's attitudes towards the organization in crisis. This, in turn, is stated to result in a more supportive behaviour towards the organization (Stephens & Malone, 2010). This can be explained by the fact that if a crisis is reported by a third party, the public attributes lower responsibility to the organization which influences behavioural intentions in favour of the organization (Kim & Park, 2017). This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H3: A crisis message communicated by the media leads to less a) reputational harm, b) secondary crisis communication, c) secondary crisis reactions, as compared to the crisis message communicated by the organization.*

## **2.6 Framing and Message Source**

There might be an interaction effect of framing and crisis message source on crisis outcomes. According to Schultz et al. (2011), emotional frames are likely to evoke positive feelings, such as sympathy. In addition, emotional framing is more likely to lead to attitude changes as it is more persuasive (Cotte & Ritchie, 2005). With regards to message source, people tend to perceive the media as more credible and trustworthy since the public thinks that the media do not need to hide anything from the public (Callison, 2001). Such high trust reduces the public's uncertainty and, in turn, leads to more positive feelings (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2015). Therefore, it can be said that if the media uses the emotional frame when reporting on a crisis and shows sympathy, people are more likely to believe such apologies and, therefore, develop empathy towards the organization. This is supported by Mack et al. (2008) who state that a crisis message by the media has a positive influence on the attractiveness of an organization. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H4: When a crisis message is communicated by the media, the effects of emotional framing on less a) reputational harm, b) secondary crisis communication, c) secondary crisis reactions, are stronger than when a crisis message is communicated by the organization.*

## **2.7 Emotions**

Research has found that, besides framing and message source, emotions can also have an effect on crisis outcomes. Anger and sympathy in specific are both likely to be experienced by the public. Anger is usually experienced when someone can be blamed for something. Additionally, people tend to feel angry when they feel threatened by an organization in their well-being (Jin, 2010). Jin and Pang (2010) adds to that that anger is experienced if something threatens the "me" and "mine" of an individual. Sympathy, on the other hand, is most likely to occur if an individual is aware of another's suffering, especially if the suffering is regarded as undeserved. Thus, sympathy includes the understanding of the other's feelings (Jin, 2013).

Emotions can have an influence on the reputation of an organization. Whether people feel anger or sympathy depends on the attribution of responsibility during a crisis since, if an organization is considered responsible, the reputation will suffer (Coombs, 2007). This can be explained by the fact that if people blame the organization for the crisis, they tend to feel angrier and, therefore, the attitude towards the organization is more negative (Kim & Cameron, 2011). On the other hand, people feeling empathy after reading a crisis message are stated to perceive the organization as more human (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014).

Emotions also play a role in secondary crisis communication. When it comes to the public's communication, the attribution of responsibility plays an important role too. More specifically, if the public holds an organization responsible for the crisis, the more negative the emotions will be towards the organization. In turn, if people experience negative emotions, they are more likely to engage in secondary crisis communication (Luo & Zhai, 2017). The reason for that is that people are more likely to react on messages when they are shocked about the incident (Schultz et al., 2011). This is explained by Utz et al. (2013) who state that if the public feels anger towards the organization, they feel that they can do something about the situation and, therefore they are also more likely to take action. Therefore, apology and sympathy should not only lead to less negative feelings, but also to less secondary crisis communication (Schultz et al., 2011).

Lastly, literature suggests that emotions can also affect secondary crisis reactions. More specifically, both emotions are stated to influence people's behaviour, meaning that they either support or harm the organization (Jin, 2013). According to Luo and Zhai (2017), emotions like anger can result in behaviour that does not correspond to social norms, such as personal attacks. This is because people feeling anger are encouraged to take control of the situation (Turner, 2007) as they believe that they can influence the situation (Utz et al., 2013). McDonald, Sparks, and Glendon (2011) support that by claiming that anger can lead to negative purchase intentions or negative word-of-mouth. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H5: The feeling of sympathy leads to less a) reputational harm, b) secondary crisis communication, c) secondary crisis reactions, as compared to feelings of anger.*

## **2.8 Mediating effect of emotions with other variables**

### *2.8.1 Emotions and Framing*

The way a message is framed is related to emotions people experience. More specifically, it is stated that, when reading the news, an individual tends to experience certain emotions which has an impact on the individual's evaluations (Kim & Cameron, 2011). Schultz et al. (2011) claim that using the emotional frame evokes positive feelings, such as sympathy. Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014) explain that through emotional framing, people perceive the organization as more human which reduces the feeling of anger towards the organization.

Thus, it can be said that emotional framing might lead to more sympathy and less anger towards the organization which, in turn, leads to a more positive attitude towards the organization. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H5a: Emotional framing leads to more sympathy and less anger towards the organization than rational framing.*

### *2.8.2 Emotions and Message Source*

Who a crisis message is sent by influences the public's emotions which, in turn, has an influence on the reputation of the organization. According to Callison (2001), people tend to perceive crisis messages by a third party as more credible since they think that they can be more trusted. This is due to the fact that people think that the media do not need to preserve the organization's reputation and, therefore do not need to engage in opportunistic behaviour (Gefen, 2000). According to Dunn and Schweitzer (2015), trust and emotions are strongly related, meaning that an increase of trust can be associated with positive emotions and a decrease of trust is related with negative emotions, such as anger. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H5b: A crisis message communicated by the media leads to more sympathy and less anger towards the organization than a crisis message communicated by the organization.*

### 3. Research Model

Based on the above-discussed and hypothesized relationships, the visual representation of the conceptual research model can be found in Figure 1.

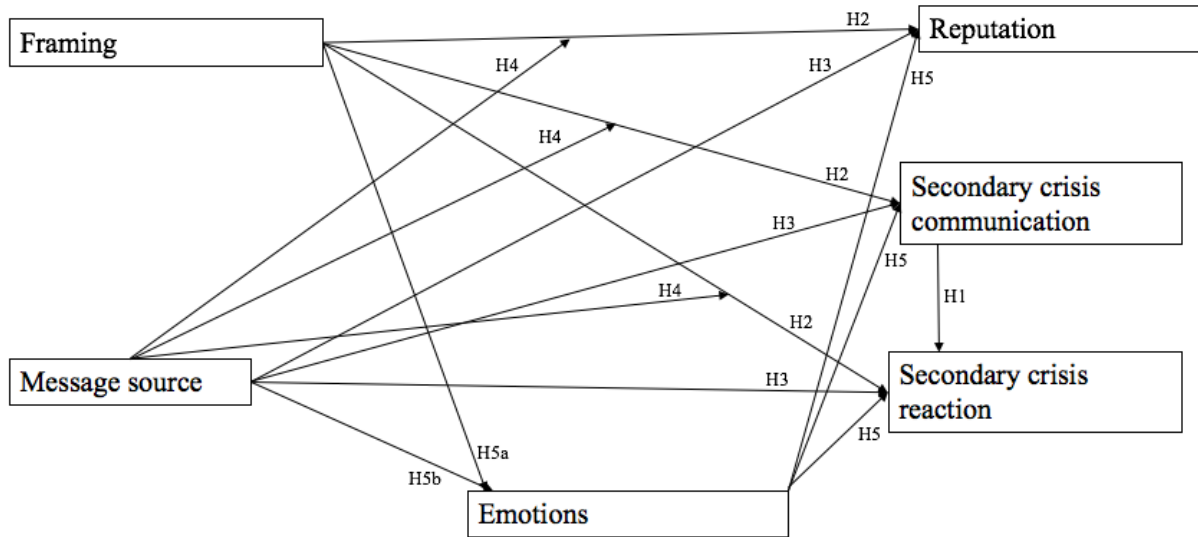


Figure 1. Research model

### 4. Method

#### 4.1 Design

In order to answer the given hypotheses of this study, an experimental 2 (organization vs media) x 2 (emotional vs rational) design was conducted. According to Rungtusanatham, Wallin, and Eckerd (2011), an experiment can serve to investigate how and why people have certain preferences or make decisions. The research consisted of two parts: an experimental study with four fictitious scenarios that manipulated framing and message source and a questionnaire to measure the effects on reputation, secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reaction as well as emotions. In order to manipulate message source, participants were exposed to a post by either the organization or by the media. Additionally, in order to manipulate framing, each group was divided into either the emotionally framed or the rationally framed message. A visualization of the research design can be found in Figure 2.

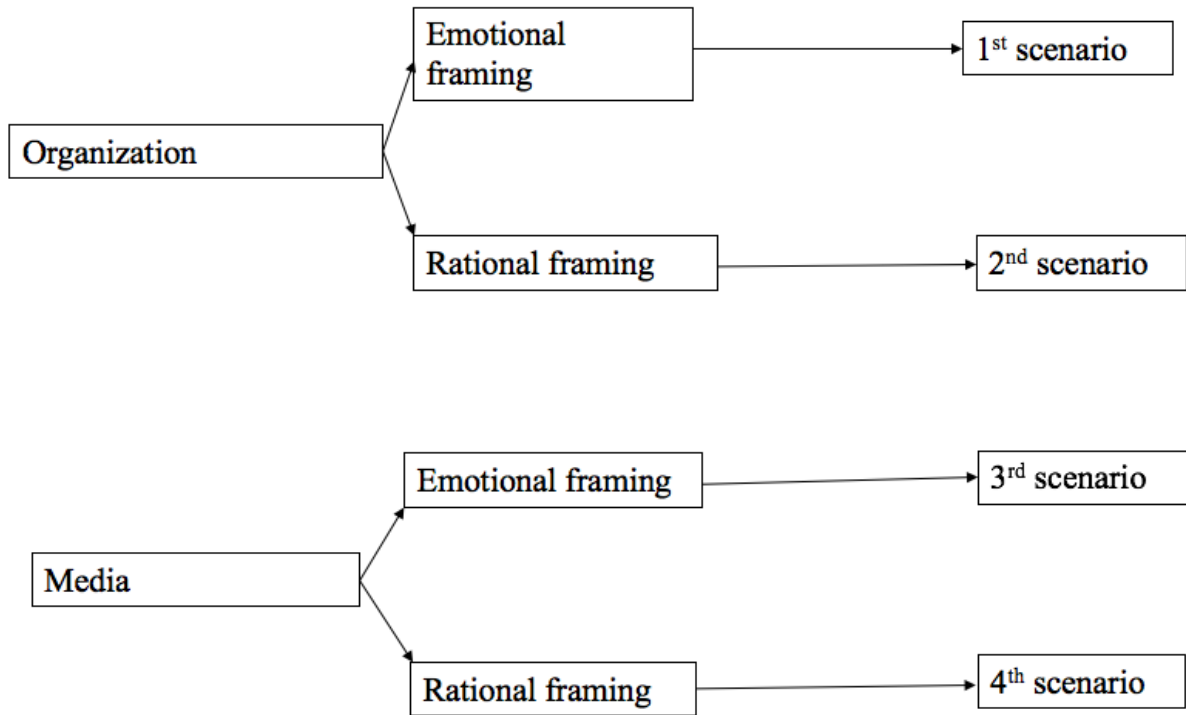


Figure 2. Research design

#### 4.2 Stimulus Materials

The stimulus materials contained scenarios that portrayed a fictitious organization, named Schiff's, that is currently facing a crisis. Message source was manipulated by creating the scenarios in the design of the German newspaper 'Spiegel Online' and in the design of the website of the restaurant. The reason why a newspaper was used as a medium is that with a social media post, people might have been biased by seeing the number of likes or comments. By using such a neutral medium, this bias could be avoided. An example of the design of the website can be found in Figure 3 and the design of the media can be found in Figure 4.

Framing was manipulated by framing the crisis message emotionally and rationally. Emotional and rational framing was chosen in the current research since it is an important crisis response strategy that serves to reduce reputational damage during a crisis (Ahmad, Ashari, & Samani, 2017). According to Ahmad et al. (2017), emotionally framed messages include expressions of concern. In contrast, rationally framed messages involve solely information about the crisis without any emotions (Ahmad et al., 2017). Therefore, the emotionally framed version contained terms like 'shock', 'sorry' or 'hope' while the rationally framed version was only based on facts. A table that shows the differences between both versions can be found below (see Table 1). The four different scenarios that were used as stimulus materials can be found in Appendix A.



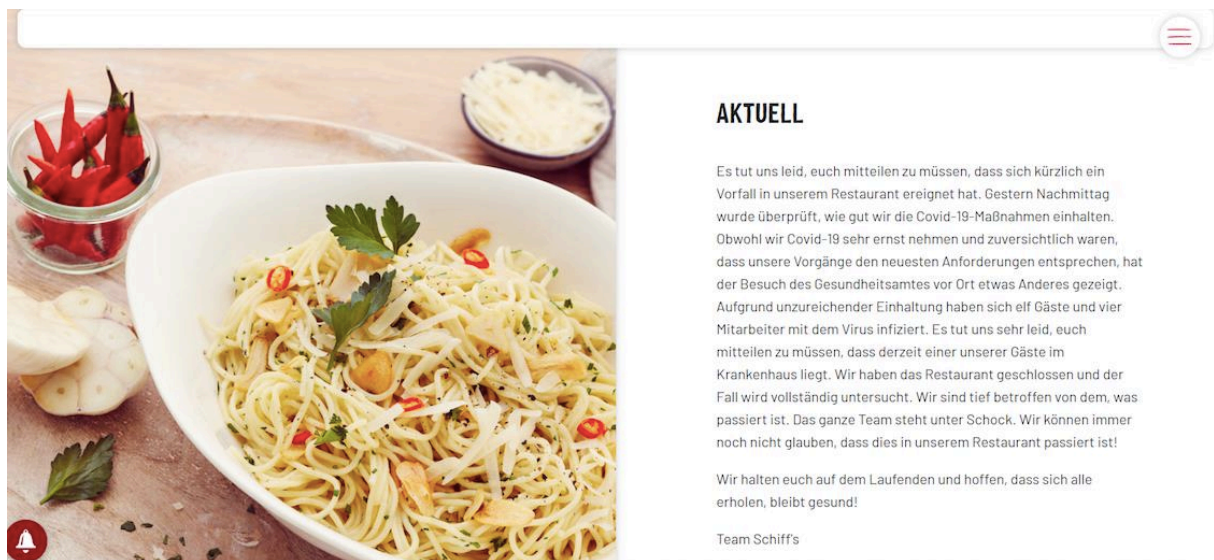


Figure 3. Stimulus material (framing: emotional, message source: restaurant)



Figure 4. Stimulus material (framing: rational, message source: media)

Table 1.

*Quotes of the scenarios*

<b>Emotional Framing</b>	<b>Rational Framing</b>
“We are very sorry to inform you about an incident that recently happened in our restaurant.”	“Yesterday in the afternoon, it was checked how well we adhere to Covid-19 measures.”
“We are very sorry to say that one of our guests currently is hospitalized.”	“One of the guests currently needs to stay in the hospital.”
“We are deeply affected by what happened. The whole team is in shock. We still cannot believe this happened in our restaurant!”	“The restaurant has closed and the case will be fully investigated.”
“We hope that everyone will recover, stay safe!”	“We will keep you updated, stay safe!”

### 4.3 Pre-test

In order to be sure that the participants understand the survey correctly, a pre-test was conducted. Additionally, the pre-test served to assure that the manipulations were measured correctly. In the pre-test, the questionnaire was established using the tool Qualtrics. It was conducted in German and, therefore, it was sent out to 10 German people who did not know anything about the purpose of this study. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four scenarios. They were asked to go through the questionnaire, to carefully fill out the survey and, while doing so, to check if everything is easy to understand and free from spelling or grammar mistakes. After conducting the pre-test, spelling mistakes were corrected, some explanations were made clearer and some questions and items were formulated differently. In addition, in Qualtrics, it could be seen whether the participants perceived the manipulations correctly. It turned out that all manipulations worked in the pre-test and, therefore, the survey could be sent out.

### 4.4 Procedure

Before conducting the research, the study was reviewed from the ethical committee of the University of Twente. The study was conducted online and the survey was distributed via online channels, such as email, social media (WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook) and, lastly,

the survey was available on the scientific research platform SONA of the University of Twente. Firstly, the participants were briefed regarding the procedure of the study. Followed by that, they were informed about any existing privacy implications, meaning their data protection and the right to stop at any point. Thereafter, the participants were asked to sign a consent form in order to allow participation. Then, the participants were asked some demographic questions, such as their age or gender. Followed by that, they were exposed to either the organization's crisis message or the media's crisis message that they were asked to read carefully. Thereafter, they were asked to indicate their perception towards the organization of which the crisis was just described in one of the scenarios. Additionally, the questionnaire also included questions regarding secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reactions as well as emotions. Followed by that, the manipulation checks were asked. After completing the questionnaire, participants were debriefed regarding further information as well as the intention of the study. Finally, they were thanked that they participated in the study. On average, the complete research procedure took approximately 10-15 minutes per participant.

#### **4.5 Measures**

The beginning of the survey consisted of demographic variables, being age, gender, nationality, place of residence and educational level.

Thereafter, the reputation was measured with items retrieved from the study by Ponzi, Fombrun, and Gardberg (2011). Items that measured reputation were "Schiff's is a restaurant I have a good feeling about", "Schiff's is a restaurant that I trust", "Schiff's is a restaurant that I admire and respect" and "Schiff's has a good overall reputation". This scale was found to be reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .88.

Additionally, secondary crisis communication was measured using the items "I am likely to share the message of Schiff's with other people", "I am likely to tell my friends about the incident" and "I am likely to leave a reaction somewhere online" which were retrieved from the study by Coombs and Holladay (2008). Since the item "I am likely to leave a reaction somewhere online" did not load on the factor of secondary crisis communication, the item was taken out for further analysis. The secondary crisis communication items combined reached a Cronbach's alpha of .77.

Secondary crisis reaction was measured using the items "I would tell negative things about the restaurant and the services they deliver", "I would encourage friends or relatives not to visit the restaurant" and "I would recommend the restaurant to someone who would ask my advice". The items were retrieved from the study by Schultz et al. (2011). Since the item "I

would recommend the restaurant to someone who would ask my advice” did not load on the factor of secondary crisis reaction, the item was eliminated for further analysis. This variable as well was found to be reliable with a Cronbach’s alpha of .71.

Lastly, emotions was measured with the items from the study by McDonald et al. (2011). Emotions was divided into two separate variables being anger and sympathy. Anger was measured with the items “Towards the organization, I feel angry”, “Towards the organization, I feel disgusted”, “Towards the organization, I feel annoyed” and “Towards the organization, I feel outraged” while sympathy was measured using the items “Towards the organization, I feel compassionate”, “Towards the organization, I feel sympathetic”, “Towards the organization, I feel sorry” and “Towards the organization, I feel empathetic”. Both variables were found to be reliable with anger reaching a Cronbach’s alpha of .86 and sympathy reaching a Cronbach’s alpha of .88. With a 7-point Likert scale ranging from ‘Strongly disagree’ to ‘Strongly agree’ the participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agree with the statements. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

#### **4.6 Respondents/Sample**

Since the study did not focus on a specific age range or other demographics, it was aimed to find a sample with a wide age range. In addition, the educational background or the nationality was not of importance in this study. In the current study, a total of 302 filled in the questionnaire. However, due to incomplete answers, 29 were deleted which resulted in a data set of 273 respondents (see Table 2), with 69.6% being female and 29.7% being male. One participant indicated to be ‘Other’ and one participant indicated ‘Prefer not to say’. The age ranged from 18 to 75 with the average of 30.44 years (SD=14.53). Moreover, the majority of the participants had a German nationality with 94.1% while 5.9% indicated to have another nationality, such as Portuguese, Vietnamese, or Mexican. Regarding the place of residence, it turned out that 243 of the participants lived in Germany while 30 participants lived somewhere else, such as the Netherlands, the USA or Mexico. Lastly, concerning the level of education, half of the participants’ highest completed level of education was high school or equivalent (N=138). Additionally, the highest degree of 68 participants was a Bachelor degree, of 29 participants a Master’s degree and of 38 other than that, such as a diploma or state examination. All of the respondents participated voluntarily.

Table 2.

*Demographics*

<b>Items</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Gender	Male	81	29.7
	Female	190	69.6
	Other	1	.4
	Prefer not to say	1	.4
Nationality	German	257	94.1
	Other	16	5.9
Place of residence	Germany	243	89.0
	Other	30	11.0
Level of education	High school or equivalent	138	50.5
	Bachelor's degree	68	24.9
	Master's degree	29	10.6
	Other	38	13.9

#### **4.7 Analysis**

In order to test the hypotheses presented in the theoretical framework, the results of the survey were analysed using the program SPSS. After the validity of the study and the reliability of the survey items could be ensured, a multivariate analysis was conducted for the dependent variables in order to identify the significance of existing differences between groups.

#### **4.8 Construct Validity and Reliability**

##### *4.8.1 Validity*

In total, 18 items, separated by five factors were analysed. In the table of 'KMO and Bartlett's Test', the score was over .50 which means that the data could be used for the factor analysis. If some items did not load on the same factors as specified in the survey before, the variables needed to be rearranged. In the current research, some variables needed to be adjusted because of the results of the factor analysis that are mentioned above. The table of the factor analysis can be found below (see Table 3). The table of the factor analysis that includes also the items that were deleted for further analysis can be found in Appendix C.

#### 4.8.2 Reliability

Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha was calculated which served to ensure the reliability of the items of this study. This served to examine how closely related a set of items were as a group which is also called internal consistency. Each Cronbach Alpha from the variables scored over and above .70 (see Table 3) which means that the items had a relatively high internal consistency. Thus, the items could be computed into variables.

Table 3.

#### *Validity Factor Analysis*

<b>Items</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Factor 1: Reputation (<math>\alpha=.88</math>)</b>					
Schiff's is a restaurant that I have a good feeling about.	.78				
Schiff's is a restaurant that I trust.	.82				
Schiff's is a restaurant that I admire and respect.	.74				
Schiff's has a good overall reputation.	.76				
<b>Factor 2: Secondary Crisis Communication (<math>\alpha=.77</math>)</b>					
I am likely to share the message of Schiff's with other people.					.88
I am likely to tell my friends about the incident.					.87
<b>Factor 3: Secondary Crisis Reactions (<math>\alpha=.71</math>)</b>					
I would tell negative things about the restaurant the services they deliver.				.77	
I would encourage friends or relatives not to visit the restaurant.				.69	
<b>Factor 4. Anger (<math>\alpha=.86</math>)</b>					
Towards the organization, I feel angry.			.82		
Towards the organization, I feel disgusted.			.74		
Towards the organization, I feel annoyed.			.79		

Towards the organization, I feel outraged. .78

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**Factor 5: Sympathy ( $\alpha=.88$ )**

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Towards the organization, I feel  
compassionate. .83

Towards the organization, I feel  
sympathetic. .80

Towards the organization, I feel sorry. .83

Towards the organization, I feel  
empathetic. .82

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#### 4.9 Manipulation check

At the end of the survey, some manipulation checks were asked. The manipulation checks of framing included the items “The crisis response of Schiff’s was emotional”, “The crisis response of Schiff’s was subjective”, “The crisis response of Schiff’s was impersonal” and “The crisis response of Schiff’s was based on facts” which were retrieved from the study by Claeys et al. (2013). The manipulation checks of message source were “The crisis response of Schiff’s was delivered by...” with “Media/Restaurant”, “Third party/Organization” and “Spiegel Online/Schiff’s” as answer options. By doing so, it could be found out whether or how the participants perceived the manipulation of the independent variables. The manipulation framing was checked by conducting an independent samples t-test. The results of the test can be found in Table 4. Since the manipulation question of message source only had two answer options, meaning that it was a categorical variable, a chi-square test was conducted. All manipulations were successful.

Table 4.

*Independent samples t-test*

<b>Manipulation</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	<b>t</b>
<b>Framing</b>			.00	8.33
Emotional	4.43	.87		
Rational	3.52	.92		

---

## 5. Results

### 5.1 MANOVA

In order to test the hypotheses presented in the theoretical framework, a MANOVA was conducted. A MANOVA serves to compare two groups on their outcome on the dependent variables of the study. In the following, it will be elaborated on the main effects as well as the interaction effects.

#### 5.1.1 Framing

In total, no significant effects could be found of the independent variable framing on the dependent variables (Wilks' Lambda:  $p = .72$ ). Thus, participants in the emotionally framed condition did not have different crisis consumer outcomes than participants in the rationally framed condition. An overview of the results can be found in Table 5 and in Table 6. Based on that, hypothesis 2 and 5a cannot be supported.

Table 5.

*MANOVA effects – Framing*

<b>Dependent measure</b>	<b>Sum of sq.</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean sq.</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Reputation	1.14	1	1.14	.00	1.00
Secondary Crisis Communication	1.01	1	1.01	.37	.54
Secondary Crisis Reactions	2.77	1	2.77	1.45	.23
Anger	.17	1	.17	.09	.77
Sympathy	1.17	1	1.17	.71	.40

\*Significant effect:  $p < 0.05$



Table 6.

*Means and standard deviations – Framing*

<b>Dependent measure</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Emotional</b>		<b>N</b>	<b>Rational</b>	
		<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>		<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Reputation	131	3.62	1.39	142	3.62	1.25
Secondary	131	4.15	1.76	142	4.26	1.55
Crisis						
Communication						
Secondary	131	3.05	1.41	142	2.86	1.36
Crisis Reaction						
Anger	131	3.37	1.34	142	3.32	1.43
Sympathy	131	4.38	1.28	142	4.51	1.28

*5.1.2 Message source*

Regarding the independent variable message source, there could be found no significant effects on the dependent variables (Wilks' Lambda:  $p = .74$ ). This means that participants in the media condition did not perceive the restaurant differently compared to participants in the restaurant condition (see Table 7 and 8). Thus, hypothesis 3 and 5b cannot be supported.

Table 7.

*MANOVA effects – Message source*

<b>Dependent measure</b>	<b>Sum of sq.</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean sq.</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Reputation	.18	1	.18	.10	.75
Secondary	5.46	1	5.46	2.01	.16
Crisis					
Communication					
Secondary	.58	1	.58	.31	.58
Crisis					
Reactions					
Anger	.96	1	.96	.50	.48
Sympathy	.19	1	.19	.12	.74

\*Significant effect:  $p < 0.05$

Table 8.

*Means and standard deviations – Message source*

<b>Dependent measure</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Restaurant</b>		<b>N</b>	<b>Media</b>	
		<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>		<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Reputation	142	3.64	1.32	131	3.59	1.31
Secondary	142	4.34	1.50	131	4.06	1.79
Crisis Communication						
Secondary	142	3.00	1.32	131	2.89	1.45
Crisis Reaction						
Anger	142	3.40	1.32	131	3.29	1.46
Sympathy	142	4.42	1.28	131	4.48	1.28

*5.1.3 Interaction effects*

There could be found no significant interaction effect of framing and message source on the dependent variables (Wilks' Lambda:  $p = .42$ ) which can be seen in Table 9 and 10.

Therefore, hypothesis 4 cannot be supported either.

Table 9.

*MANOVA effects – Framing x Message source*

<b>Dependent measure</b>	<b>Sum of sq.</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean sq.</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Reputation	.01	1	.01	.00	.96
Secondary	1.84	1	1.84	.67	.41
Crisis Communication					
Secondary	5.31	1	5.31	2.79	.10
Crisis Reactions					
Anger	.00	1	.00	.00	.99
Sympathy	.63	1	.63	.38	.54

\*Significant effect:  $p < 0.05$

Table 10.

*Means and standard deviations - Framing x Message source*

<b>Dependent measure</b>		Restaurant			Media		
		<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Reputation	Emotional	68	3.65	1.33	63	3.59	1.46
	Rational	74	3.64	1.32	68	3.60	1.17
Secondary Crisis Communication	Emotional	68	4.36	1.64	63	3.91	1.86
	Rational	74	4.32	1.37	68	4.20	1.73
Secondary Crisis Reaction	Emotional	68	2.60	1.31	63	3.14	1.51
	Rational	74	3.03	1.35	68	2.66	1.36
Anger	Emotional	68	3.43	1.20	63	3.31	1.47
	Rational	74	3.38	1.43	68	3.26	1.45
Sympathy	Emotional	68	4.40	1.18	63	4.36	1.38
	Rational	74	4.44	1.36	68	4.58	1.18

## 5.2 Mediation Analysis

Since the conditions to conduct a mediation analysis were not met, the mediation effect could not be tested. More specifically, there needs to be a direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable at first in order to test a mediation effect (Collins, Graham, & Flaherty, 1998). Since there was no effect of the independent variables on the dependent variables, it was not needed to test whether such effects were mediated. Therefore, the second research question cannot be answered.

## 5.3 Pearson Correlation

Before testing the hypotheses, a Pearson correlation was conducted in order to check the relations of the dependent variables. There could be found eight significant relations with the significant relationship between anger and secondary crisis reactions being the strongest, meaning that people who felt anger were also more likely to behave negatively towards the restaurant. Followed by that, there was a significant relation between anger and reputation,

meaning that angrier participants also scored lower on the variable reputation. In the same vein, there was a relation between anger and secondary crisis communication, meaning that angrier participants were more likely to communicate about the crisis. This is in line with a significant relation between sympathy and reputation as well as a relation between sympathy and secondary crisis reactions. These results show that hypothesis 5 can be supported. There was also a significant relation between anger and sympathy. Moreover, there could be found a significant relation between secondary crisis reactions and reputation, meaning that people who liked the restaurant were less likely to harm the restaurant. Lastly, there could be found a significant relation between secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reactions, meaning that the participants who indicated that they were more likely to communicate about the crisis, were the ones who were also more likely to boycott the restaurant. This means that hypothesis 1 can be supported. The results of the Pearson correlation can be found in Table 11.

Table 11.

*Pearson correlation between variables*

	Reputation	Secondary Crisis Communication	Secondary Crisis Reactions	Anger	Sympathy
Reputation	1				
Secondary Crisis Communication	.01	1			
Secondary Crisis Reactions	-.32**	.15*	1		
Anger	-.50**	.21**	.54**	1	
Sympathy	.50**	-.03	-.30**	-.33**	1

\*\*Significant effect  $p < 0.01$

\*Significant effect  $p < 0.05$

## 5.4 Hypotheses Overview

From the given results, Table 12 gives an overview of all hypotheses and whether they could be supported or not. In total, two hypotheses could be supported.

Table 12.

### *Hypotheses with Support*

<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>Support</b>
H1: Secondary crisis communication is positively related to secondary crisis reactions.	Yes
H2: Emotional framing leads to less a) reputational harm, b) secondary crisis communication, c) secondary crisis reactions, as compared to rational framing.	No
H3: A crisis message communicated by the media leads to less a) reputational harm, b) secondary crisis communication, c) secondary crisis reactions, as compared to the crisis message communicated by the organization.	No
H4: When a crisis message is communicated by the media, the effects of emotional framing on less a) reputational harm, b) secondary crisis communication, c) secondary crisis reactions, are stronger than when a crisis message is communicated by the organization.	No
H5: The feeling of sympathy leads to less a) reputational harm, b) secondary crisis communication, c) secondary crisis reactions, as compared to feelings of anger.	Yes
H5a: Emotional framing leads to more sympathy and less anger towards the organization than rational framing.	No
H5b: A crisis message communicated by the media leads to more sympathy and less anger towards the organization than a crisis message communicated by the organization.	No

## 6. Discussion

The main goal of this study was to identify to what extent framing and the media influence an organization's reputation and how the public communicates and behaves during an organization's crisis. Additionally, the aim was to investigate whether the public's emotions mediate the influence of framing and the media.

### 6.1 Main Effects

#### 6.1.1 Framing

Firstly, it was hypothesized that emotional framing would lead to less reputational damage, to less secondary crisis communication and to less secondary crisis reactions. However, this hypothesis had to be rejected and it turned out that, in this study, participants that were exposed to the emotional frame and participants that were exposed to the rational frame did not perceive the restaurant significantly different. This result is not in line with previous literature which suggested that through emotional framing, positive feelings are evoked which reduces reputational harm, secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reactions (Schultz et al., 2011).

This result might be explained by the fact that people process information differently (De Vreese, 2005) and, therefore, the effect of message framing might differ among the public. This assumption can be related to the elaboration likelihood model. The model describes that people process information differently depending on their level of involvement. More specifically, the model distinguishes between two routes, being the central route and the peripheral route. While the peripheral route involves people who are low involved and do not actively think about the issue at hand, the central route involves people who are highly involved and concentrate on the content of the message (Cyr, Head, Lim, & Stibe, 2018). Therefore, on the one hand, emotional frames are likely to persuade as they appeal to people's emotions but, on the other hand, rational frames can also encourage people to evaluate the credibility of a message since they appeal to individuals' cognitions (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014). In general, involvement refers to the extent to which an individual perceives an issue to be personally relevant (Heath, Seshadri, & Lee, 1998). In the current study, however, the participants' level of involvement was not taken into account which means that participants might have differed in their level of involvement. This, in turn, might have resulted in a non-significant effect.

In addition to that, it was hypothesized that emotional framing will lead to more sympathy and less anger towards the organization, as compared to rational framing. This, as well, was found to be non-significant. This means that participants with the emotionally and rationally framed conditions felt equally empathetic and equally angry towards the organization even though previous literature stated that emotional framing evokes positive feelings (Schultz et al., 2011) and reduces the feeling of anger towards the organization (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014).

The reason for that might be that the organization that was chosen in this study does not actually exist and, therefore, participants did not have any prior attitude towards the organization. This, in turn, might have made it difficult for the participants to evaluate the organization and to determine their feelings about it. For instance, if the restaurant would have had a good prior reputation, people would have had more trust towards the restaurant and, therefore, they also would have felt more sympathy towards it (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2015).

#### *6.1.2 Message source*

For message source, it was stated that a crisis message posted by the media would lead to less reputational damage, less secondary crisis communication and less secondary crisis reactions. However, this hypothesis needed to be rejected as well, meaning that, on average, the perceptions of participants that were exposed to the restaurant's crisis message and of participants that were exposed to the media's crisis message did not differ. This is not in line with previous research that stated that the public tends to perceive a crisis message by the media as more credible since people think that the media do not need to hide anything (Callison, 2001).

This result might be explained by the fact that, when communicating online, it is likely that some information is missing. Such missing information, in turn, makes the public uncertain. This is why people prefer to get crisis information from the organization's official sources rather than from those who are not in contact with the company since those might share unconfirmed news (Kim & Park, 2017). In the current case, the participants did not have any knowledge about the restaurant and, therefore, they did not know whether they can trust the restaurant and its information. Additionally, they also did not know how affiliated the media are with the organization, meaning that they also did not know if they could trust the media's information (Kim & Park, 2017). Therefore, due to their lack of knowledge and familiarity regarding both information sources, the participants could not judge the credibility of the information which might have resulted in a non-significant effect.

Additionally, it was hypothesized that a crisis message communicated by the media leads to more sympathy and less anger towards the organization than a crisis message communicated by the organization. This, however, could not be supported in the current study either. Thus, participants exposed to the media condition and the restaurant condition did not significantly differ regarding their emotions towards the restaurant. The opposite was stated in the literature since, according to Dunn and Schweitzer (2015), trust is related with positive emotions, such as sympathy, while a lack of trust is related with anger. Such trust was stated to be increased through a crisis message by the media (Callison, 2001).

The reason for that might be that the participants were not familiar with the restaurant or the media, and, therefore, they could not determine whether they can trust the sources or not. Since they could not determine their level of trust, neither positive nor negative emotions came up which might have led to the non-significant effect.

## **6.2 Interaction Effects**

Moreover, it was stated that when a crisis message is communicated by the media, the effect of emotional framing on more positive consumer outcomes is stronger than when a crisis message is communicated by the organization. However, as shown in the results, there were no significant interaction effects of framing and message source on the dependent variables. This means that emotional and rational framing have the same influence on people's perceptions regardless of the message source.

Literature stated that with emotional framing, positive emotions arise and people feel empathy towards the organization (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). Additionally, it was stated that since people trust the media rather than the organization (Callison 2001), people are more likely to believe apologies that are posted by the media. However, in this study, the participants did not feel more empathy towards the organization and did not trust the media more. Therefore, the perceptions, communication and behaviour of people during a crisis depend on other factors than framing or message source that were not investigated in the present study.



### **6.3 Correlation between dependent variables**

Finally, the correlations between the dependent variables were checked, being reputation, secondary crisis communication, secondary crisis reactions, anger and sympathy. There could be found some significant effects. Firstly, it was found that the angrier the participants felt towards the organization, the lower was their trust and liking towards the company. Additionally, they were also more likely to communicate about the incident and to harm the organization when being angrier. In contrast, when the participants felt more sympathy towards the organization, they stated to like the organization more and they stated to be less willing to boycott the restaurant. This is also in line with the significant result that if the participants felt more sympathy, they felt less angry. These results can also be found in previous literature since it was stated that people feeling anger feel threatened in their well-being (Jin, 2013) and, therefore, the reputation suffers while people feeling sympathy perceive the organization as more human (Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). Additionally, Schultz et al. (2011) explained that sympathy leads to less negative feelings. This, in turn, results in less secondary crisis communication and less secondary crisis reactions. This is due to the fact that their feeling of anger and their urge to take control of the situation is minimized when feeling sympathy (Turner, 2007; Utz et al., 2013). Moreover, there could be found a relation between reputation and secondary crisis reactions, meaning that participants who liked the restaurant were less likely to harm the restaurant. This as well is in line with previous literature as people having a more favourable attitude towards an organization are less motivated to do something about the incident (Utz et al., 2013) since they do not feel disrespected or threatened by the organization (Jin, 2010). This is also in line with the fact that people feeling more sympathy liked the organization more and were less willing to harm the company which underlines the importance of emotions.

Lastly, it was hypothesized that secondary crisis communication has an effect on secondary crisis communication, meaning that people who engage more in dialogues with others are also more willing to boycott the restaurant and, therefore, to engage in secondary crisis reactions. This hypothesis could be supported since there could be found a relation between these two variables. This is in line with the study by Luo and Zhai (2017) who stated that secondary crisis communication influences secondary crisis reactions by causing emotions and, thereby, influencing behaviour. According to Bi et al. (2014), this is due to the fact that if people receive negative information from others, they are more likely to have negative behavioural intentions. Luo and Zhai (2017) also stated that this effect exists due to

negative emotions. This can also be found in this study since the angrier the participants were the more they were willing to forward messages about the incident and to harm the company while participants feeling more sympathy were less likely to harm the company.

#### **6.4 Theoretical Implications**

This study aimed to examine the effect of framing and message source on reputation, secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reactions. Additionally, it was aimed to find out to what extent emotions mediate the effect of framing and message source on the attitude, communication and behaviour towards an organization during a crisis. Thus, the current study served to give organizations a direction on how to manage their crisis communication activities and to influence the public's communication and behaviour during a crisis. By doing so, organizations are enabled to maintain their reputation and to prevent crisis escalation. Since there is only little research conducted about the public's communication and behaviour during crisis, this study provided insights to see how people think, communicate and behave during a crisis and to reveal the factors that make them think and do so.

Based on previous literature, in this study, it was predicted that framing and message source will have an effect on reputation, secondary crisis communication, secondary crisis reactions and emotions. However, it could be found many contradictions with previous literature. Since there could not be found any effect of the independent variables, it is suggested for future research that crisis consumer outcomes are influenced by other factors which need to be explored in additional studies. For example, Schultz et al. (2011) found that the medium of a crisis message is of high importance. This relates to the importance of social media, meaning that future studies might look into the effects of different social media platforms on the dependent variables. Moreover, in the current study, no prior reputation and no prior experience with the organization was taken into account during the analysis. Therefore, it might be interesting to investigate in the future how people react to a crisis of an organization with either a good or a bad prior reputation. Finally, it was shown that emotions have an effect on the dependent variables. This is why, for the future, it might be of interest to look for more factors that influence the public's emotions and, therefore, it can be found how emotions might mediate the effects on consumer evaluations. Despite the missing effects in this study, all in all, it can be said that reputation, secondary crisis communication, secondary crisis reactions and emotions are important factors to consider in crisis communication which can also be seen in the significant effects between each other.

## 6.5 Practical Implications

The aim of this research was to find out how crisis messages need to be framed, who the sender of this message should be and how these factors should be combined in order to reach positive crisis consumer outcomes. After conducting the research, some recommendations can be given on how to improve an organization's reputation and on how to influence the public's communication and behaviour during a crisis.

Firstly, it could be seen that framing did not have any effect. However, in other studies, there could be found an effect which shows that organizations still should focus on the way they frame a message. When doing so, however, the organizations in crisis should still be aware of who is responsible for the crisis since this influences the evaluations of the public (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). In addition, since the participants' unknown level of familiarity with the organization and the crisis situation posed some issues in the current study, it is important for organizations to be aware of their prior reputation. Thus, they need to define their target group and their target group's needs. By doing so, it will be easier for organizations to gain back trust from the people. Related to that, it can be said that it is important to focus on the people's emotions. In order to increase the feeling of sympathy, it is important to establish trust and credibility (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2015). This is done by being consistent and transparent in communication as well as action (Kang & Hustvedt, 2013).

Secondly, there could not be found any effect of message source which showed that neither the media nor the organization were perceived as more credible. Generally, it can be said that the public faces a high amount of uncertainty during a crisis (Utz et al., 2013). In order to reduce this uncertainty, the organization should communicate, as the official source, as transparently as possible. This is done by giving as much background information on the organization itself and on the crisis as possible. Additionally, concerned stakeholders should get timely and accurate information by the organization in crisis (Utz et al., 2013). By doing so, people do not get the impression that the organization needs to hide anything and they might trust the official source even more since the organization itself is less likely to deal with unconfirmed information (Kim & Park, 2017). Finally, since Schultz et al. (2011) stated that the medium is also an important factor in forming an attitude towards an organization during a crisis, it might be of advantage to post the crisis message on social media as well as in traditional media.

## **6.6 Limitations & Future recommendations**

There were some limitations of the study. Firstly, with around 273 participants, the sample size could be increased in the future in order to get more reliable results. Secondly, this study focused on the general public without any age limitations or educational conditions. However, in the study, it could clearly be seen that the majority of participants were female, meaning that the data collection might have been biased. A reason for that might have been the sampling method since the convenience sampling method was chosen. Even though it is an easy way to get many participants in a short amount of time, it could be clearly seen that the sample was not entirely balanced. In the future, it is advised to have a more balanced sample regarding the demographics and, therefore, to use a systematic sample method. Thirdly, some participants dropped out of the study which could be due to the fact that they did not understand some questions or items of the questionnaire. Fourthly, the questionnaire was sent out in German and, therefore, the majority of the participants were German. However, there could also be some differences in perceptions among different cultures, since cultures play an important role in crisis management too (Fatima Oliveira, 2013).

Moreover, the case that was presented to the participants might have been a limitation. More specifically, since the crisis was about a fictional organization, participants did not have any prior attitude towards the organization which might have made it difficult for participants to rate on items, such as 'I trust the organization'. Even though it is good that participants did not have any bias due to an organization's prior reputation, a fictional case might not be as realistic. For future research, it might be helpful to give some more information on the organization and add it in the questionnaire. Furthermore, during the study, it was not asked for the participants' previous experience with Corona even though the people's experience with the theme described in the crisis message might influence the participants' perceptions. This is supported by Cyr et al. (2018) who state that people process information differently depending on their level of involvement. Therefore, for the future, it would be interesting to investigate what kind of experiences the participants have made with the topics that are presented to them in the crisis message.

Additionally, even though the manipulations worked, there could be found no significant effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables. Thus, in the future, it is advised to take more time for the pre-study in order to ensure that there is a clear difference between the scenarios. Lastly, it would be interesting to test other variables and their impact on people's attitudes, communication, behaviour as well as emotions.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to answer the research questions *'What are the effects of framing and message source on reputation, secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reaction during a crisis?'* and *'Are the effects of framing and message source on reputation, secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reaction mediated by emotions?'*. All in all, it can be said that, in this study, framing and message source seem to not be an important factor in crisis communication even though previous literature stated otherwise. Therefore, it is important to say that crisis communication cannot be generalized and that every decision in crisis communication depends on several factors, such as the organization's prior reputation, the public's previous experiences or the level of involvement. Additionally, it can be said that the organization itself can be an important source in crisis communication too. This is because the public may perceive the organization as a credible source since the organization, as the official source, most likely only deals with information that is reliable. Moreover, it turned out that the role of emotions is important when it comes to the public's attitude, communication and behaviour towards an organization during a crisis and, therefore, organizations need to carefully choose how to influence the people's emotions. Lastly, it can be said that organizations should not only maintain and protect the reputation itself during a crisis but they should also take care of the people's communication and behaviour towards the organization since this might influence how well organizations recover from the crisis.

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## 8. Appendix

### Appendix A – Stimulus Material




**AKTUELL**

Es tut uns leid, euch mitteilen zu müssen, dass sich kürzlich ein Vorfall in unserem Restaurant ereignet hat. Gestern Nachmittag wurde überprüft, wie gut wir die Covid-19-Maßnahmen einhalten. Obwohl wir Covid-19 sehr ernst nehmen und zuversichtlich waren, dass unsere Vorgänge den neuesten Anforderungen entsprechen, hat der Besuch des Gesundheitsamtes vor Ort etwas Anderes gezeigt. Aufgrund unzureichender Einhaltung haben sich elf Gäste und vier Mitarbeiter mit dem Virus infiziert. Es tut uns sehr leid, euch mitteilen zu müssen, dass derzeit einer unserer Gäste im Krankenhaus liegt. Wir haben das Restaurant geschlossen und der Fall wird vollständig untersucht. Wir sind tief betroffen von dem, was passiert ist. Das ganze Team steht unter Schock. Wir können immer noch nicht glauben, dass dies in unserem Restaurant passiert ist!

Wir halten euch auf dem Laufenden und hoffen, dass sich alle erholen, bleibt gesund!

Team Schiff's

Figure 5. Stimulus material (framing: emotional, message source: restaurant)



**AKTUELL**

Gestern Nachmittag wurde überprüft, wie gut wir die Covid-19-Maßnahmen einhalten. Auch wenn wir Covid-19 ernst nehmen und zuversichtlich waren, dass unsere Vorgänge den neuesten Anforderungen entsprechen, hat der Besuch des Gesundheitsamtes vor Ort etwas Anderes gezeigt. Wegen unzureichender Einhaltung haben sich elf Gäste und vier Mitarbeiter mit dem Virus infiziert. Einer der Gäste muss derzeit im Krankenhaus bleiben. Das Restaurant hat geschlossen und der Fall wird vollständig untersucht.

Wir halten euch auf dem Laufenden, bleibt gesund!

Team Schiff's

Figure 6. Stimulus material (framing: rational, message source: restaurant)

**SPIEGEL** Wissenschaft Abonnement [Anmelden >](#)

Menü Startseite > Wissenschaft > Medizin > Coronavirus > Corona: Ema empfiehlt Zulassung für Biontech-Impfstoff ab 12 Jahren

### Coronaausbruch im Restaurant Schiff's – Restaurant verstößt gegen Coronamaßnahmen

Leider hat sich kürzlich ein Vorfall im Restaurant Schiff's ereignet. Gestern Nachmittag wurde überprüft, wie gut sich das Restaurant an die Covid-19-Maßnahmen hält. Auch wenn das Restaurant Covid-19 sehr ernst nahm und zuversichtlich war, dass ihre Vorgänge den neuesten Anforderungen entsprechen, hat der Besuch des Gesundheitsamtes vor Ort etwas Anderes gezeigt. Wegen unzureichender Einhaltung haben sich elf Gäste und vier Mitarbeiter mit dem Virus infiziert. Leider befindet sich einer der Gäste derzeit im Krankenhaus. Das Restaurant wurde geschlossen und der Fall wird vollständig untersucht. Das gesamte Team ist tief betroffen von dem, was passiert ist. Das Restaurant steht unter Schock und kann nicht glauben, dass dies in dem Restaurant passiert ist!

Das Restaurant möchte alle auf dem Laufenden und hofft, dass sich alle erholen und gesund bleiben.







Figure 7. Stimulus material (framing: emotional, message source: media)

**SPIEGEL** Wissenschaft Abonnement [Anmelden >](#)

Menü Startseite > Wissenschaft > Medizin > Coronavirus > Corona: Ema empfiehlt Zulassung für Biontech-Impfstoff ab 12 Jahren

### Coronaausbruch im Restaurant Schiff's – Restaurant verstößt gegen Coronamaßnahmen

Gestern Nachmittag wurde überprüft, wie gut sich das Restaurant Schiff's an die Covid-19-Maßnahmen hält. Obwohl sie Covid-19 ernst nahmen und zuversichtlich waren, dass ihre Vorgänge den neuesten Anforderungen entsprechen, hat der Besuch des Gesundheitsamtes vor Ort etwas Anderes gezeigt. Wegen unzureichender Einhaltung haben sich elf Gäste und vier Mitarbeiter mit dem Virus infiziert. Einer der Gäste muss derzeit im Krankenhaus bleiben. Das Restaurant hat geschlossen und der Fall wird vollständig untersucht.

Das Restaurant möchte alle auf dem Laufenden halten und wünscht, dass alle gesund bleiben.







Figure 8. Stimulus material (framing: rational, message source: media)

## Appendix B – Final Questionnaire

Table 13.

*Questionnaire*

Variable	Items
Demographics	<p>What is your age?</p> <p>What is your gender?</p> <p>What is your nationality?</p> <p>Where do you live?</p> <p>What is your highest completed level of education?</p>
Reputation	<p>Schiff's is a restaurant I have a good feeling about.</p> <p>Schiff's is a restaurant that I trust.</p> <p>Schiff's is a restaurant that I admire and respect.</p> <p>Schiff's has a good overall reputation.</p>
Secondary Crisis Communication	<p>I am likely to share the message of Schiff's with other people.</p> <p>I am likely to tell my friends about the incident.</p> <p>I am likely to leave a reaction somewhere online.</p>
Secondary Crisis Reactions	<p>I would tell negative things about the restaurant and the services they deliver.</p> <p>I would encourage friends or relatives not to visit the restaurant.</p> <p>I would recommend the restaurant to someone who would ask my advice.</p>
Anger	<p>Towards the organization, I feel angry.</p> <p>Towards the organization, I feel disgusted.</p> <p>Towards the organization, I feel annoyed.</p> <p>Towards the organization, I feel outraged.</p>



Sympathy	Towards the organization, I feel compassionate.
	Towards the organization, I feel sympathetic.
	Towards the organization, I feel sorry.
	Towards the organization, I feel empathetic.
Framing Manipulation	The crisis response of Schiff's was emotional.
	The crisis response of Schiff's was subjective.
	The crisis response of Schiff's was impersonal.
	The crisis response of Schiff's was based on facts.
Message source Manipulation	The crisis response of Schiff's was delivered by the Media/Restaurant.
	The crisis response of Schiff's was delivered by a third party/organization.
	The crisis response of Schiff's was delivered by Spiegel Online/Schiff's.

## Appendix C – Validity Factor Analysis

Table 14.

### *Validity Factor Analysis*

Items	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Factor 1: Reputation (<math>\alpha=.88</math>)</b>					
Schiff's is a restaurant that I have a good feeling about.	.78				
Schiff's is a restaurant that I trust.	.82				
Schiff's is a restaurant that I admire and respect.	.74				
Schiff's has a good overall reputation.	.76				

<b>Factor 2: Secondary Crisis Communication (<math>\alpha=.77</math>)</b>	
I am likely to share the message of Schiff's with other people.	.88
I am likely to tell my friends about the incident.	.87
I am likely to leave a reaction somewhere online.	.57
<b>Factor 3: Secondary Crisis Reactions (<math>\alpha=.71</math>)</b>	
I would tell negative things about the restaurant the services they deliver.	.77
I would encourage friends or relatives not to visit the restaurant.	.69
I would recommend the restaurant to someone who would ask my advice.	-.66
<b>Factor 4. Anger (<math>\alpha=.86</math>)</b>	
Towards the organization, I feel angry.	.82
Towards the organization, I feel disgusted.	.74
Towards the organization, I feel annoyed.	.79
Towards the organization, I feel outraged.	.78
<b>Factor 5: Sympathy (<math>\alpha=.88</math>)</b>	
Towards the organization, I feel compassionate.	.83
Towards the organization, I feel sympathetic.	.80
Towards the organization, I feel sorry.	.83
Towards the organization, I feel empathetic.	.82