"NOT IN MY BACKYARD"

EMPATHIC CRISIS RESPONSE STRATEGIES FOR REPAIRING REPUTATION AND REGAINING TRUST IN THE CASE OF A PREVENTABLE CRISIS IN THE WIND ENERGY SECTOR
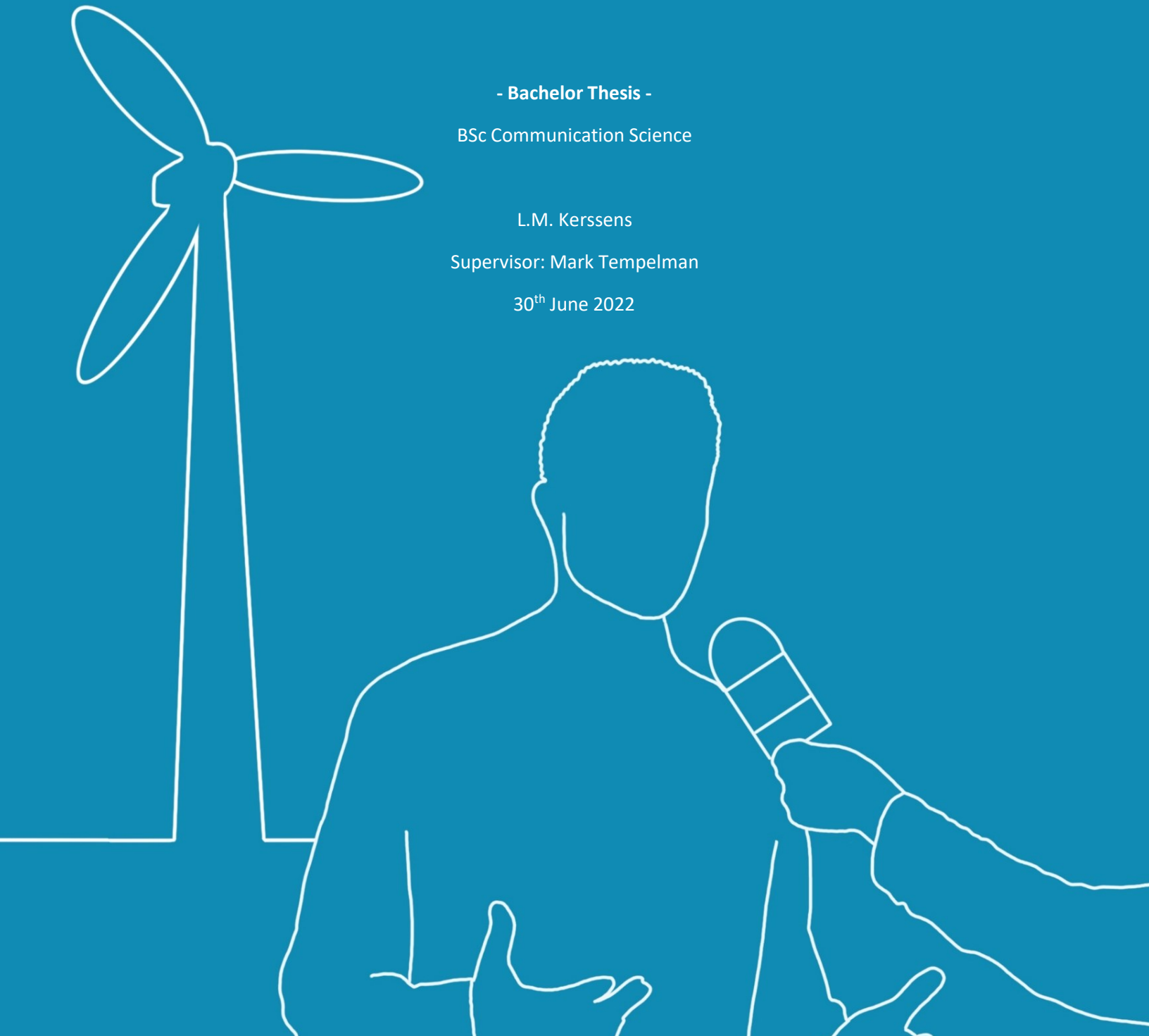
- Bachelor Thesis -

BSc Communication Science

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ABSTRACT

Previous research demonstrates that empathy is an essential aspect of successful crisis response strategies. To build upon the existing body of research, this study investigates how 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior' as aspects of empathic crisis responses contribute to regaining trust and repairing reputation after a preventable crisis in the wind energy sector. Additionally, the study investigates to what extent this is influenced by one's general attitude towards renewable energies and examines visual orientation and emotional intelligence as possible moderators. An online experiment featuring a fictional crisis in the wind energy sector was conducted, in which participants were presented with written crisis responses. A 2-by-2 design was used to measure the impact of the manipulations. Results show the potential impact of 'non-verbal behaviors' and the effect of general attitude towards renewable energies on post-crisis reputation. No effects were found for the dependent variable post-crisis trust and the independent variable 'personal communication and language use'. However, results show that congruent and matching crisis responses, featuring personal communication and language use as well as compassionate non-verbal behavior, result in less negative impact and higher mean scores for post-crisis reputation. Practical implications, limitations and recommendations for future research are discussed. Especially the practical relevance of appropriate non-verbal behaviors in support of a crisis response was highlighted.

Keywords: crisis communication; empathy; non-verbal behavior; language use; reputation; trust; Situational Crisis Communication Theory

CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION

Global climate change and the scarcity of natural resources have challenged our traditional fossil-based energy use and increased the call for renewable and more sustainable energy sources. While the social movement "Fridays for Future" was an awakening call for many to recognize the importance of renewable energies to combat climate change, the war in Ukraine has shown us the consequences of depending on Russian gas and oil. Especially for countries such as Germany that depend largely on fossil-based energy from Russia, renewable energies are gaining in importance (Braun, 2022).

Wind energy especially plays a large role in the growing sector for renewable energies in Germany. Almost 50 percent of the country's renewable electricity is derived from wind parks, both off- and onshore (BDEW, 2022). And while onshore wind parks are the source of most of this energy, they also face the most backlash about disturbances such as visual emissions, noise and the effects on the landscape and wildlife (BDEW, 2022; Fachagentur WindEnergie, n.d.; Hübner & Löffler, 2013). Because of these concerns, people are hesitant about wind parks in their "own backyard", despite a generally positive public view of wind energy (Hübner & Pohl, 2015; van Toorn, 2021). The closer one lives to a wind park, the higher the emissions and negative outcomes of wind parks are usually perceived (Hübner & Pohl, 2015).

Not always, however, can these concerns and side effects of wind parks be avoided, and residents feel disturbed by the wind park's emissions. Examples of this are the municipality of Houten in the Dutch province of Utrecht, where residents were affected by increased noise emitted from the wind park (Venderbosch, 2021a, 2021b) or the German administrative district of Friesland, where residents pursued legal actions against the municipality that was responsible for the permit of a local wind park (Ahrens, 2022). However, these examples are only two of many that can be found in the media headlines on a regular basis (Ahrens, 2022; Hönig, 2020; Leuschner, 2022; Saarbrücker Zeitung, 2022). Due to backlash and critique from stakeholders, situations like that can turn into crises, which in turn can harm the organizational reputation and trust in the organization (Coombs, 2004, 2007a). Hence, it is important for organizations to react appropriately.

Reputational threats of crises can be managed and repaired by the communication that occurs post-crisis (Coombs, 2015). But to repair reputation and regain trust when faced with such a crisis, companies must not only choose the appropriate response type for the crisis, but also consider other characteristics of the response (Coombs, 2007; Claeys et al., 2010). One of these characteristics that has received attention in recent research is empathy (Ndone & Park, 2022; Schoofs et al., 2019, 2022). Both research and best practices in the field of crisis communication emphasize the importance of empathy towards affected stakeholders as part of a crisis response (Coombs, 2007a; Veil et al., 2011; Schoofs et al.,

2022). The concept of empathy, however, is often described vaguely and used interchangeably with terms as sympathy, concern, compassion and perspective-taking (Coombs & Holladay, Seeger, Veil et al., as cited in Schoofs et al. 2022). Schoofs et al. (2022), however, identified four aspects of crisis communication that demonstrate empathy: (1) explicit expressions of empathy, (2) apologies and accepting responsibility, (3) language use and personal communication, and (4) non-verbal communication. Nevertheless, it remains unclear how these aspects relate to each other, to what extent they impact post-crisis reputation and trust, and how they effectively blend in with the crisis response strategy.

Current examples of crises regarding wind parks, such as the ones in Houten and Friesland (Ahrens, 2022; Venderbosch, 2021a, 2021b), show the potential of the backlash on onshore wind parks to turn into an organizational crisis. Given the current practical relevance of the topic, this thesis aims at contributing to the current research and practice by providing a better understanding of how characteristics of empathic crisis responses can be used to repair reputation and regain trust after an organizational crisis.

This thesis will therefore investigate how 'non-verbal behavior', particularly facial expressions, and 'personal communication and language use' in a written crisis response affect corporate reputation and trust in an organization within the wind energy sector while faced with a preventable crisis. For non-verbal communication, however, research has found other concepts that were linked to this aspect of expressing empathy. Specifically emotional intelligence was generally linked to how individuals perceive emotions in non-verbal communication (Ciarrochi et al., 2001; Jacob et al., 2013). Additionally, the processing style might also play a role in perceiving non-verbal communication, since individuals with higher visual orientation are more likely to rely on visual information (Höffler et al., 2017; Kiat & Belli, 2018). Therefore, it will be investigated how the effect of non-verbal behaviors is possibly moderated by emotional intelligence and visual orientation. Lastly, due to the context of this study, it will also be considered how the general attitude towards wind energy is related to post-crisis reputation and trust.

This translates to the following research questions:

RQ1: Do 'non-verbal behavior' (neutral vs compassionate) and 'personal communication and language use' (personal vs impersonal) in a written crisis response affect post-crisis reputation and trust in the case of a preventable crisis in the wind energy sector?

RQ2: Do non-verbal behaviors interact with personal communication and language use in regaining trust and repairing reputation?

RQ3: Does emotional intelligence moderate the effects of 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior' on reputation and trust?

RQ4: Does visual orientation moderate the effects of 'non-verbal behavior' on reputation and trust?

RQ5: How is general attitude towards wind energy related to reputation and trust for an organization in the wind energy sector?

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE RISE OF ONSHORE WINDPARCS

Wind energy is an essential component of the ongoing energy transition. The concept of the energy transition refers to the shift from fossil-based energies such as oil, gas, and coal to renewable and more sustainable sources of energy like wind and solar energy (Thomas et al., 2022). While society at large has been calling for renewable energies for a while, the war in Ukraine again has shown the current relevance of the topic, with many European Countries depending on Russian gas and oil. Germany for example, relies on Russia for at least 50 percent of its gas. With the invasion of Ukraine, however, Germany, as well as other European countries call for a shift to renewable energies, also to gain independence from Russia (Braun, 2022). In a joint statement president of the European Union Ursula von der Leyen and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau support this ambition and call for a deepened cooperation to "eliminate the EU and its Member States' dependence on Russian energy" (European Comission, 2022).

But even before that, municipalities and other governmental institutions in Europe have worked on initiatives towards more renewable energies, such as setting up on- or offshore wind parks or solar parks. In Germany, most electricity from renewable energy sources comes from onshore wind energy, followed by photovoltaic, biomass and offshore wind energy. In 2021 almost 39 percent of all renewable electricity in Germany was derived from onshore wind parks and around 11 percent resulted from offshore wind parks (BDEW, 2022). With a share of nearly 50 percent, wind energy is therefore the most significant source of renewable energy in the country. And while Germany is the European leader regarding the installed capacity of wind energy parks, other countries are following the example. In 2020, the Netherlands installed the most wind energy Europewide with 1,979 MW (Bundesverband WindEnergie, n.d.)

Wind energy is evaluated predominantly positive in Germany, however, people do not want wind parks in their own backyards (Hübner & Pohl, 2015; van Toorn, 2021). Local residents to wind parks typically show concerns based on an array of specific emissions: visual emissions (e.g., obstacle marking, shadows), noises, the effects on the landscape and wildlife (Fachagentur WindEnergie, n.d.; Hübner & Löffler, 2013). Not always, however, can these concerns and side effects of wind parks be avoided and residents in result are affected by noise, shadows and other emissions. Due to the backlash and critique

from residents and other stakeholders, situations like these can turn into crises for both municipalities and companies responsible for the construction and operation of wind parks. This can have serious consequences for the organizations faced with those crises. Crises can, not only, harm an organization's reputation but also damage the trust stakeholders have in the organization (Beldad et al., 2018; Coombs, 2014; Xie & Peng, 2009). Hence, it can be beneficial to look deeper into theory on crisis types and responses.

2.2 DEFINING TYPES OF CRISES AND RESPONSE STRATEGIES

A crisis is a rather broad term that can generally be described as a sudden and unexpected breakdown in a system that leads to shared stress and holds the potential to violate stakeholders' expectations about an organization (Coombs, 2007a, 2014). By disrupting the organization's operations, it poses a threat to the organization's financial situation, trust in the organization as well as the organization's reputation and therefore influences how people interact with the organization in question (Beldad et al., 2018; Coombs, 2007a, 2014; Xie & Peng, 2009). This is because different stakeholders such as employees, customers, stockholders, etc. can be affected by the crisis, which can lead to unfavorable perceptions of the organization. This shift from favorable to unfavorable explains a potential shift in the stakeholders' interaction with the organization (Coombs, 2004, 2007b). A favorable reputation is a strategic resource and offers competitive advantages (Carmeli & Tishler, 2005), similarly however, a bad reputation can potentially result in negative outcomes such as low trust in the organization (Groenland, 2002).

One of the most referenced theories on crisis communication is the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (short. SCCT) as proposed by Coombs (2007b). The SCCT provides theoretical ground and empirically tested strategic advice on the selection of crisis response strategies. It provides a framework for crisis managers to match crisis type and crisis response by proposing a set of response strategies that relate to crisis types with different responsibility attributions, as shown in table 1 (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014; Coombs, 2007b). The first step according to the SCCT is determining crisis responsibility. According to Coombs (2007b) there are three types of crisis clusters (table 1): (1) the victim cluster (natural disasters, workplace violence, product tampering, and rumor), (2) the accidental cluster (technical-error accident, technical-error product harm, and challenge), and (3) the preventable cluster (human-error accident, human-error product harm, and organizational misdeed). As aforementioned, these crisis clusters differ in the amount of responsibility stakeholders attribute to the organization in crisis: victim crises have the lowest responsibility attributions and preventable crises the highest responsibility attributions (Coombs, 2007b; Coombs & Holladay, 2008). This crisis responsibility in turn influences the threat to the organizational reputation. The higher the responsibility attributions, the higher the initial

threat to the organization's reputation (Coombs, 2007b; Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Based on the responsibility attributions and type of crisis, different response strategies should be applied. While victim crises call for deny strategies and accidental crises call for diminish strategies, preventable crises should be responded to with rebuild strategies (Coombs, 2007a). Generally speaking, a higher reputational threat results in the crisis manager having to accept more responsibility for the crisis (Coombs, 2007b). However, crises not only affect organizational reputation, but they can also result in other negative outcomes such as financial threats and public trust (Beldad et al., 2018; DiStaso et al., 2015; Schoofs et al., 2022; Xie & Peng, 2009; Zhao et al., 2020). Therefore, it becomes relevant to consider strategies that lower the impact of the crisis on reputation and trust. Impact here being defined as the difference between the pre-crisis and post-crisis state. The higher the impact of the crisis, the higher is the difference between the pre-crisis and post-crisis state.

2.2.1 PREVENTABLE CRISES AND REBUILD STRATEGIES

As established, organizations in crisis can face severe reputational damage. Hence, it is important for those organizations to respond in the most appropriate way to minimize damage and restore their post-crisis reputation (Coombs, 2004). According to the SCCT preventable crises are those with the highest responsibility attributions and therefore also those with the most negative impact on the organizational reputation. The SCCT therefore advises that preventable crises should be reacted to by means of so-called rebuild strategies regardless of the prior crisis history and pre-crisis reputation (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014; Coombs, 2007a). By using these rebuild strategies, organizations acknowledge their mistakes and admit full responsibility for the crisis (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014). This includes apologizing and offering compensation (Coombs, 2007a; Mohamad Ashari et al., 2017). Apology as a rebuild strategy has also shown to be the most effective crisis response strategy for repairing organizational reputation (Coombs & Holladay, as cited in Claeys et al., 2010). This strategy can alter the perceptions that stakeholders have of the organization in crisis, either by offering real or symbolic aid (compensation) or by asking forgiveness for the crisis (apology). By taking positive action the focus can be shifted from the crisis to more positive associations (Mohamad Ashari et al., 2017).

Since preventable crises are those that pose the highest threats to organizations, within this study focus will be on this specific crisis type. A rebuild response strategy including apology and compensation in response to a preventable crisis will be used as the basis for the research. However, research has established that next to the appropriate response strategy, other factors, such as empathy also are important aspects of a crisis response.

Table 1.

Crisis types and matching crisis response strategies

Crisis types	Crisis response strategies
Victim Cluster	Deny strategies
Natural disaster	Attack the accuser
Rumor	Denial
Workplace violence	Scapegoat
Product tampering/Malevolence	
Accidental Cluster	Diminish strategies
Technical-Error accidents	Excuse
Technical-Error product harm	Justification
Challenges	
Preventable Cluster	Rebuild strategies
Human-Error accident	Compensation
Human-error product harm	Apology
Organizational misdeed	

Source: adapted from Coombs, 2007a

2.3 EMPATHY IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Next to a match between crisis type and response strategy, it is also important to consider other crisis response characteristics. Crisis communication scholars agree that empathy is an important aspect for a successful crisis response (Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011; Coombs 2007a; Schoofs et al., 2022; Xiao et al., 2018). Reasons for this are manyfold. Coombs (2007a) highlights the ethical responsibility that organizations have towards their stakeholders and mentions empathy as the base response for all crises. The author also notes that focusing solely on the reputation as an initial reaction to the crisis is irresponsible and only after physical and psychological concerns are addressed, one should turn attention towards the reputational assets. Other studies emphasize the importance of empathy as a strategic asset in crisis responses in order to calm stakeholders' negative responses and rebuild trust and reputation (Veil et al., 2011; Schoofs & Claeys, 2021, Schoofs et al., 2022). Therefore, expressing empathy should have a positive impact on corporate reputation. This leads to the first hypothesis of this research:

When defining empathy in a broader sense, emotions are a crucial element in explaining the concept. Holland et al. (2021) generally as define empathy as the process of sharing and understanding one another's emotions. Within the specific field of crisis communication, scholars mainly describe two

ways in which empathy plays a role. Firstly, the stakeholders' empathy towards an organization in crisis and secondly, an organization's expression of empathy towards the affected stakeholders (de Waele et al., 2019; Schoofs et al. 2019; Schoofs et al., 2022). This study will focus on the latter, since scholars describe it as an essential part within an organization's crisis response strategy (De Waele et al., 2019; Schoofs et al. 2019; Schoofs et al., 2022). Often empathic crisis responses are however "only generically and vaguely described as a response that acknowledges and addresses the needs of crisis-affected stakeholders" (Schoofs et al., 2022, p. 2). Moreover, the term is often used interchangeably with other related concepts such as sympathy, concern, compassion, and perspective-taking (Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Schoofs et al., 2022).

When it comes to understanding the concept of expressing empathy towards stakeholders, there is only limited research on what emotional expressions within a crisis response should entail (Schoofs et al., 2022). Most literature in the field examines the role of empathy as a communication characteristic in terms of strategic and reputational benefits as outcome of empathic crisis communication (Coombs, 2007; Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011; Schoofs et al. 2022). However, some studies have made first steps in identifying how crisis managers can express empathy. Ndone and Park (2022) argue that crisis managers can practice empathy by listening to the public's fears and showing stakeholders that they are not alone. According to the authors, the SCCT suggests that when providing both instructing as well as psychological information, crisis managers effectively practice empathy. More specifically, a recent study by Schoofs et al. (2022) identified four aspects of crisis communication that demonstrate empathy: (1) explicit expressions of empathy, (2) apologies and accepting responsibility, (3) language use and personal communication, and (4) non-verbal communication.

This study will focus on two of the four aspects of expressing empathy as identified by Schoofs et al. (2022): 'language use and personal communication' and 'non-verbal communication'. The aspect of 'apologies and accepting responsibility', however, will be used as a basis for the crisis response, since apology is part of the rebuild crisis response as proposed by the SCCT. 'Explicit expressions of empathy', according to Schoofs et al. (2022), are difficult to express within a written text and are therefore not considered for this study. Hence, 'language use and personal communication' and 'non-verbal communication' will be used as variables to investigate the influence of empathy within a written crisis response, since both have been identified to be important aspects of expressing empathy towards stakeholders (Schoofs et al., 2022). Both variables will be discussed in further detail.

2.3.1 PERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE USE

One of the aspects of empathic crisis responses according to Schoofs et al. (2022) is personal communication and language use. The authors found that organizational representatives tend to talk in a very formal manner which gives the impression that they stand above the addressed stakeholders. This way of communicating, however, can increase the distance between stakeholder and organization and therefore appear to be lacking empathy (Schoofs et al., 2022). Hence, the authors establish that an empathic crisis response should be given a human voice and face, to make the empathic response authentic to the addressed audience. In general, PR professionals advise the spokesperson or CEO to step forward to give a face to the crisis. However, it should be carefully considered who should step forward as the face of the crises. In crises with high severity, professionals agree that the CEO should be the one representing the organization, rather than other representatives (Schoofs et al., 2022).

One extensively studied concept within communication science that aims at making communication more personal is Conversational Human Voice (CHV), which was first established by Kelleher (2009). The concept was first researched within interactive online environments, but since has been applied to many different fields, such as public relations and corporate communication (Liebrecht et al., 2021). CHV includes both human voice attributes that contrast with an organizational tone of voice like sense of humor and treating others as humans, and conversational attributes like providing feedback and openness for dialogue (Kelleher as cited in Liebrecht et al., 2021). However, CHV is operationalized and interpreted differently among studies (Liebrecht et al., 2021). Within this study, focus will lay on human voice attributes rather than interactive conversational attributes since press releases in a classic sense are not designed for interactive communication between stakeholders and the organization.

According to van Noort et al. (2014) there are three tactics to establish CHV: (1) message personalization, (2) informal speech and (3) invitational rhetoric. Message personalization describes the degree to which a specific stakeholder can be addressed. Informal speech refers to more casual language in contrast to organizational language. Lastly, invitational rhetoric describes the conversational aspect of the communication that for example creates a mutual understanding between the involved parties (Liebrecht et al., 2021). Based on these three tactics Liebrecht et al. (2021) identified different manipulations that have been used in prior research to convey CHV. Since their study was an analysis of multiple studies across different contexts, this study will only discuss those manipulations that are of interest in the specific context of this research.

For this study, especially the first tactic, 'message personalization' as identified by Noort et al.context (2014) is of particular interest for the aspect of 'personal communication and language use'. Liebrecht et al. (2021) found five different categories of manipulations that were used for message

personalization in prior research, namely personal greeting, personal addressing consumer, personal addressing employee, personal signature. Personal greetings, as the name suggests, refer to personally greeting and actively addressing the stakeholder at the start of the message. Personally addressing consumers can be done by using second-person pronouns, while personal addressing the employee is done by using first-person pronouns. Personal signature refers to signing the message and lastly, personal information employee is about including personal contact information.

Summarizing, personal communication and language use can be used to express empathy and manage reputation during a crisis. To make messages appear personal, tactics of CHV related to message personalization can be made use of. Based on general research that empathy has positive influence on stakeholder perceptions (Veil et al., 2011; Schoofs & Claeys, 2021, Schoofs et al., 2022) and specific research into the aspects of empathy in crisis communication (Schoofs et al., 2022) it can be expected that personal communication and language use implemented through message personalization has a positive impact on both reputation and trust. This leads to the following hypothesis:

> **H1**: 'Personal communication and language use' as an aspect of an empathic crisis response will result in higher scores for post-crisis reputation and trust as well as less negative impact on reputation and trust compared to 'impersonal communication and language use'.

2.3.2 NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

A second aspect of empathic crisis responses is the use of non-verbal behaviors that express compassion and empathy (Schoofs et al., 2022). Schoofs et al. (2022) found that PR professionals think that non-verbal behaviors signal whether the spokesperson is genuinely empathic and cares about the stakeholders. Most of the respondents even argued that the public mainly relies on non-verbal behaviors to judge the honesty and empathy of the spokesperson and therefore the represented organization (Schoofs et al., 2022). This in turn may influence the public's trust in the organization. At the same time non-verbal behaviors should match the content of the message and should resonate with the emotions experienced by the public (Schoofs et al., 2022).

Non-verbal behaviors can express empathy towards affected stakeholders. Schoofs and Claeys (2021) found that not only can non-verbal expressions of emotions by the organizational representative can evoke empathy among the public, but they also have a positive influence on post-crisis reputation. The authors explain this with emotional empathy, meaning that recognizing another's emotions automatically triggers a congruent emotional response. Hence, non-verbally expressing empathy can motivate the affected stakeholders to recognize that the organization in crisis feels distress about the

actions leading to the crisis (Schoofs & Claeys, 2021). Similarly, studies on facial mimicry support the assumption that facial expressions relate to both the sharing and understanding of emotions, which is also known as empathy (Holland et al., 2021). Facial mimicry refers to the tendency to mimic others' movements and has been shown to result in "emotional contagion", otherwise known as affective empathy (Prochazkova & Kret, 2017). Facial mimicry can therefore be used by organizational representatives to portray empathy towards stakeholders.

However, for organizational representatives to make use of the concept of facial mimicry, it is fundamental to understand which emotions are evoked within the affected stakeholders and which emotions should be portrayed by the organizational representative to appear compassionate towards the situation. Coombs and Holladay (2005) found that the stakeholders' emotions towards the organization in crisis largely depend on the type of crisis. In general, there are three emotions stakeholders can experience in the event of a crisis: sympathy, anger, and schadenfreude (= taking joy from the pain of the organization) (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). In the case of a preventable crisis, stakeholders are most likely to experience anger and feel that the organization should have done something to prevent the crises (Coombs & Holladay, 2005).

By being compassionate to the stakeholders' anger organizational representatives can exert positive influence on post-crisis reputation. Being compassionate is commonly understood as showing sympathy or sadness towards others' suffering (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Especially emotions of sadness and related secondary emotions (e.g. shame, guilt and regret) can be used to repair reputation after a preventable crisis (Schoofs & Claeys, 2021; van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). People hold the believe that during an apology one should express sadness (ten Brinke & Adams, 2015). Therefore, using sadness or it's secondary is congruent to people's expectations during an apology and can therefore increase the perceived empathy and perceived sincerity of the response (ten Brinke & Adams, 2015). However, Schoofs et al. (2022) argue that non-verbal expressions of emotions should be used in a subtle manner, to avoid that the organizational representative appears unprofessional. Hence, negative emotions of sadness and related secondary emotions can help rebuild reputation in the case of a preventable crisis to react to the stakeholders' feelings of anger.

Emotions of sadness can be expressed non-verbally through facial expressions and head positioning. Most research within psychology agrees that primary emotions such as happiness, sadness and anger, are universally expressed within different human populations (Brown, 2004; Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Julle-Danière et al., 2020). Secondary emotions such as regret, guilt or shame, however, differ between cultures and are also more context-dependent. Therefore, secondary emotions are also often confused with each other (Julle-Danière et al., 2020). ten Brinke and Adams (2015), however, argue that

feelings of shame, guilt or remorse are expressed on the face as variations of the expression of sadness (secondary emotions). Sadness in general is expressed through downcast facial expressions, for example by lowering the corners of one's lips and raising the inner potion of one's eyebrows, and through a lowered position of the head (see figure 1) (Schoofs & Claeys, 2021; ten Brinke & Adams, 2015). This differs from neutral facial expressions in which facial muscles are relaxed and mouth, eyebrows, eyes and head are in a normal resting position (see figure 1) (ten Brinke & Adams, 2015). Hence, by using expressions of sadness, confusion with between secondary emotions can be avoided, however, shame and guilt can still be seen as elements or variations of the primary emotion sadness.

Figure 1.

Ekman's seven basic emotions and corresponding facial expressions
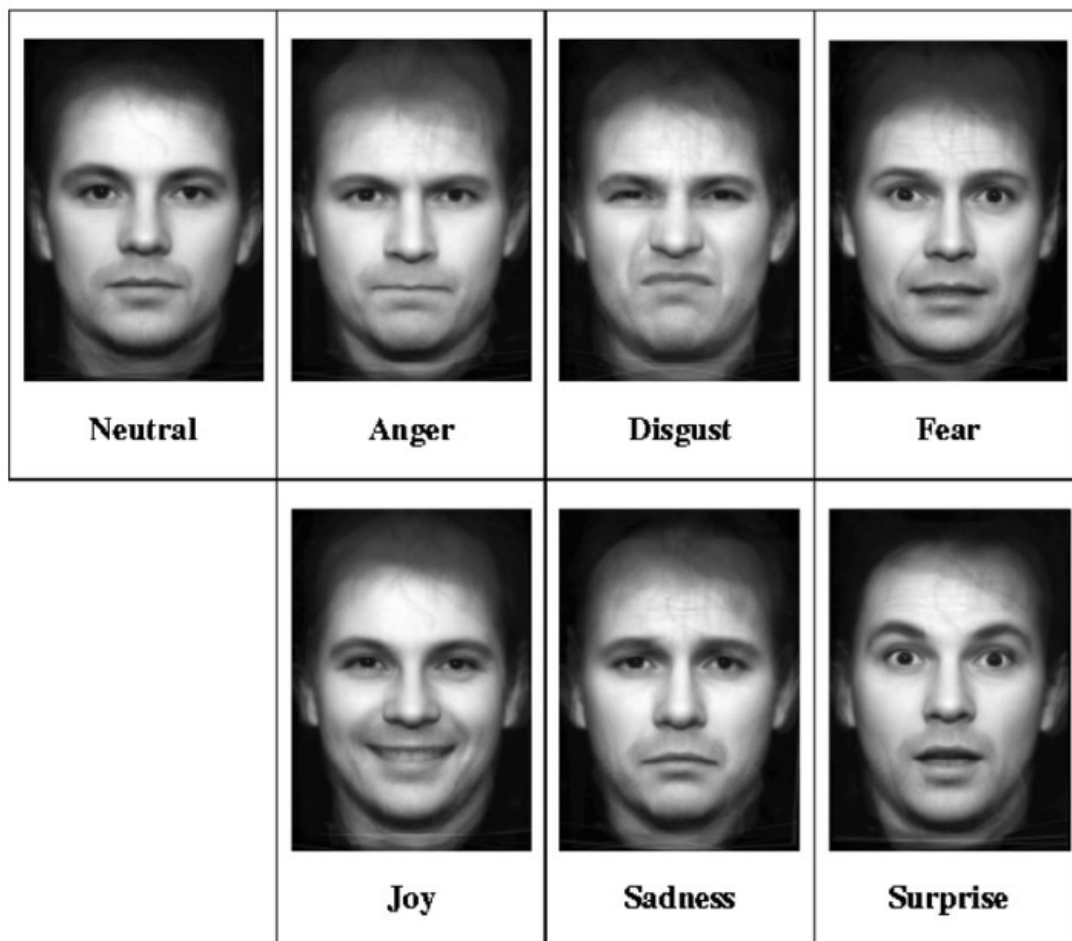
Note. Reprinted from "Affective recommender systems in online news industry: how emotions influence reading choices", by Mizgajski, J. & Morzy, M. 2019. User Modelling and User-Adapted Interaction, 29(6), p. 356.

Summarizing, it can be said that compassionate non-verbal behaviors can be defined as those that show characteristics of the primary emotions of sadness. These behaviors have been shown to evoke empathy in stakeholders and positively influence trust in the organization and post-crisis reputation. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> **H2:** 'Compassionate non-verbal behavior' as an aspect of an empathic crisis response will result in higher scores for post-crisis reputation and trust as well as less negative impact on reputation and trust compared to 'neutral non-verbal behavior'.

2.3.3 Interaction between non-verbal behavior and personal communication and language use

Both 'non-verbal behavior' and 'communication and language use' are separate aspects of crisis communication that demonstrate empathy (Schoofs et al., 2022). Schoofs et al. (2022), however, found that for an effective empathic crisis response, "empathy should shine through in every aspect of the organizational crisis response throughout the crisis life cycle" (p. 6). The authors argue that combining those aspects and therefore expressing empathy more explicitly will most likely be perceived as more empathic and genuine and therefore have a more positive effect on the stakeholders' responses to the crisis. Concludingly, non-verbal expressions of empathy and personal communication and language use supposedly positively interact in increasing post-crisis reputation and trust.

Research in the field of communication science found that congruent messages have a more positive effect on their audience than incongruent ones. van Rompay et al. (2010) for example found that picture-text congruence positively affects product attitude. The authors explain this effect through processing fluency. Stimuli that portray congruent meanings through visuals and text are easier to process and therefore result in more favorable attitudes (Reber et al., 2004; van Rompay et al., 2010). The more fluently stimuli can be processed, the more positive they will be evaluated (van Rompay et al., 2010). Similarly, (Schoofs & Claeys, 2021) found that verbal (personal communication and language use) and non-verbal cues (facial expressions and gestures) are mainly working together in a reciprocal way, meaning that verbal expressions that are congruent, are perceived stronger than when verbal and non-verbal cues are incongruent. Hence it can be assumed that 'communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior' positively interact and congruent messages in terms of both aspects lead to more favorable perceptions of reputation and trust. Nevertheless, congruent messages that include compassionate 'non-verbal behavior' and personal 'communication and language use' lead to more favorable outcomes than

congruent messages that include neutral 'non-verbal behavior' and impersonal 'communication and language use', because the match the crisis as elaborated on earlier.

H3: Responses using message characteristics that are congruent and match the crisis situation (personal + compassionate) will result in lower impact scores for post-crisis reputation as compared to responses with message characteristics that are incongruent or do not match the crisis situation.

2.4 THE MODERATING EFFECT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

One concept related to the understanding of emotions within non-verbal communication is emotional intelligence. It is defined as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Mayer & Salovey, as cited in Jacob et al., 2013; p. 784). According to this definition, there are four main aspects to the concept of emotional intelligence: perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions. For this study one aspect is of main interest, namely perceiving emotions. It relates to detecting and deciphering emotions of others in faces, pictures, cultural artefacts and voices, but also to perceive one's own emotions (Salovey & Grewal, 2005). The authors also argue that this aspect is the most fundamental to the concept of emotional intelligence as it enables the processing of all other emotional information. Hence, in this study it becomes of main interest to see how emotional intelligence may influence how individuals perceive the non-verbal behavior in response to a crisis.

Different studies have linked emotional intelligence with faster recognition of emotions portrayed through non-verbal behaviors. Jacob et al. (2013) found that emotional intelligence correlated positively with non-verbal dominance, meaning that individuals with high emotional intelligence rely more on non-verbal cues. The authors suggest as a possible explanation that this non-verbal dominance is driven by higher authenticity in non-verbal cues. Thus, it might reflect in higher perceptions of honesty and therefore possibly trust. Other authors also found that individuals with high self-reported emotional intelligence were better equipped to identify in emotions in photographs of faces (Ciarrochi et al., 2001). Hence, the aspect of non-verbal behaviors might be more influential for people with high emotional intelligence and consequently also correlate with reputation and trust. To test this, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H4: High emotional intelligence will positively moderate the impact of compassionate non-verbal behavior on post-crisis reputation and trust.

2.5 THE MODERATING EFFECT OF VISUAL ORIENTATION

When it comes to processing information such as press releases, there are different cognitive processing styles among individuals. Cognitive processing style is based on dual-coding theory and refers to the differences in modality-specific preferences and consistencies, specifically the differences between visual and verbal processing styles (Childers et al., 1985; Höffler et al., 2017; Kiat & Belli, 2018). Early research dates back to Richardson (as cited in Kiat & Belli, 2018) who categorized people in two cognitive processing styles: visualizers and verbalizers. Visual-oriented individuals are more reliant on visual information processing such as pictures, while verbal-oriented individuals rely mostly on verbal information processing (Höffler et al., 2017; Kiat & Belli, 2018; Plass et al., 2003).

Differences between visualizers and verbalizers can be found in different contexts. Plass et al. (2003) for example found that people with a more visual orientation can profit from visual learning material while verbalizers are less dependent on additional visual materials. Other authors also found that visualizers show better scores in visual-source monitoring (Kiat & Belli, 2018). In a more general sense, Höffler et al. (2017) found that in a joint gaze behavior test visual-oriented people rely more strongly on pictures than on texts while verbal-oriented people tended to rely mainly on text. Hence, for the context of this study, it can be presumed that visual-oriented people when presented with a press release that features both visual information (non-verbal behavior) and written information (language use) will be more susceptible to the visual stimuli than verbal oriented people. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: High visual orientation will positively moderate the impact of compassionate non-verbal behavior on post-crisis reputation and trust.

2.6 GENERAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS RENEWABLE ENERGIES

Due to the context of the study, attitude towards renewable energies is considered as a possible covariate of reputation and trust for an organization in the wind energy sector. In general, renewable energies, such as wind energy, are evaluated rather positive in Germany (Hübner & Pohl, 2015; van Toorn, 2021). A study commissioned by German the agency for onshore wind power in 2019, for example, indicated that 82 percent of respondents deemed development of onshore wind energy important (Sondershaus, 2019).

Renewable energies, such as wind energy, are strongly related to concepts of sustainability and environmental friendliness. Especially younger generations, including millennials and GenZ, are known for their high interest in sustainability, environmental, and ethical matters (Choudhary, 2020; Muritala et al., 2022). Hence, specifically for these generations, general attitude towards renewable energies can impact how they perceive the topic. Different studies (e.g. Ellis & Ferraro, 2016; Bidwell, 2013) found that

individual beliefs on environmental issues and individual attitudes towards wind energy can influence the acceptance of wind energy projects. However, little is known on how the general attitude towards renewable energies might potentially influence a crisis in the related sector. Therefore, this research will aim at identifying if and to what extent the general attitude towards renewable energies influences perceptions of reputation and trust in the scenario of a preventable crisis in the wind energy sector.

> **RQ5**: Is general attitude towards renewable energies a covariate of reputation and trust for an organization in the wind energy sector?

2.7 CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

The proposed hypotheses and research questions have been visualized within the hypothesized conceptual model shown in figure 2.

Figure 2.

Hypothesized model of the impact of language use and non-verbal-behavior on post-crisis reputation and post-crisis trust
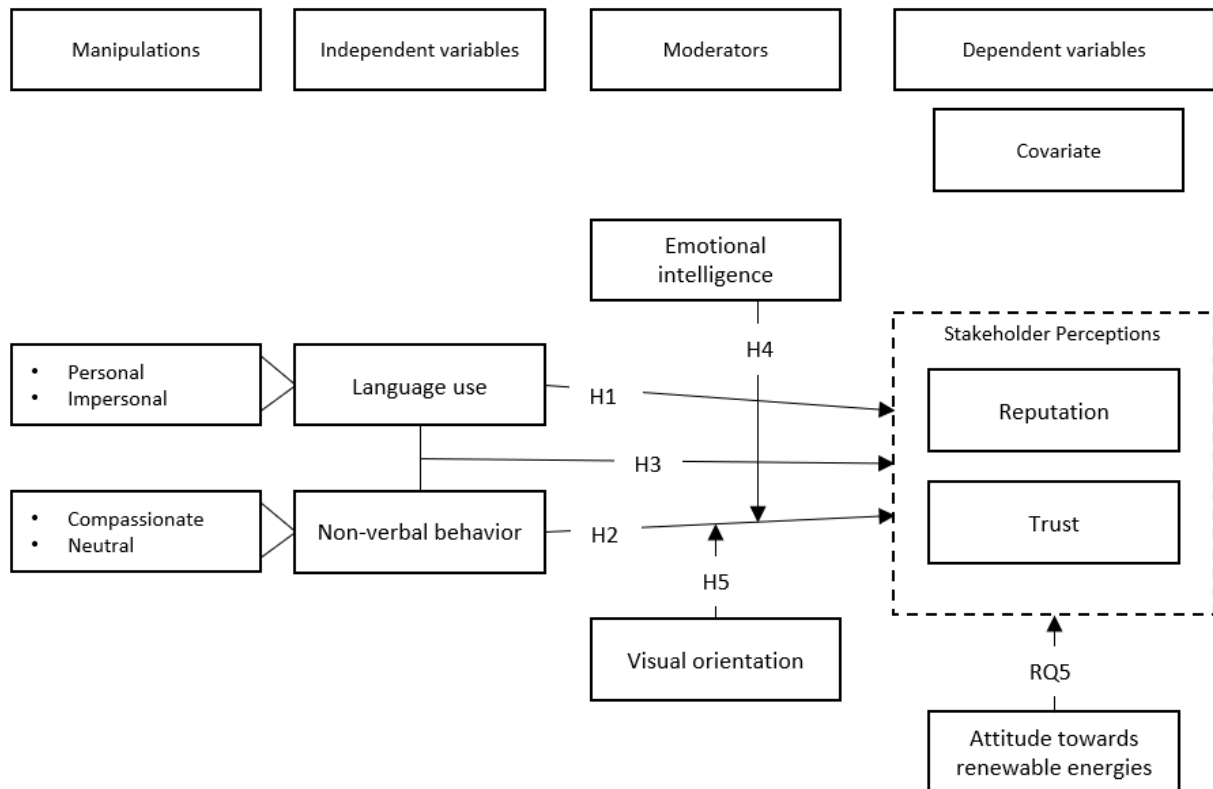
Table 2.

Overview of hypotheses/research questions

Number	Hypothesis
H1	'Personal communication and language use' as an aspect of an empathic crisis response will result in higher scores for post-crisis reputation and trust as well as less negative impact on reputation and trust compared to 'impersonal communication and language use'.
H2	'Compassionate non-verbal behavior' as an aspect of an empathic crisis response will result in higher scores for post-crisis reputation and trust as well as less negative impact on reputation and trust compared to compared to 'neutral non-verbal behavior'.
H3	Responses using message characteristics that are congruent and match the crisis situation (personal + compassionate) will result in lower impact scores for post-crisis reputation as compared to responses with message characteristics that are incongruent or do not match the crisis situation.
H4	High emotional intelligence will positively moderate the influence of compassionate non-verbal behavior on post-crisis reputation and trust.
H5	High visual orientation will positively moderate the impact of compassionate non-verbal behavior on post-crisis reputation and trust.
RQ5	Is general attitude towards renewable energies a covariate of reputation and trust for an organization in the wind energy sector?

3. METHOD:

3.1 GENERAL DESIGN

The proposed hypotheses were tested with a 2 (personal language use and communication: personal vs. impersonal) by 2 (non-verbal behavior: neutral vs. compassionate) between-subjects experimental design considering visual orientation and emotional intelligence as moderators between the independent and dependent variables. Furthermore, general attitude towards wind energy was analyzed as a covariate to the hypothesized model. The 2 by 2 design was chosen to be able to understand the effects of two different independent variables and to compare the means of the different combinations of the variables. To compare the effects between the four conditions, impact scores were calculated by subtracting the post-crisis reputation and trust from the belonging pre-crisis measure.

Within this study, a fictional company in the wind energy sector was situated in a preventable crisis, since that type of organizational crisis results in the highest responsibility attributions (Coombs, 2007b; Coombs & Holladay, 2008). In this particular case, the fictional company Vientec GmbH was deemed responsible for high noise emissions in an onshore wind park, that exceed the legal levels. Different manipulated press releases were then used to portray the crisis response of the organization. The stimuli will be elaborated on in further detail in the following sections.

3.2 STIMULI

CASE DESCRIPTION

A description about the fictional organization (Appendix A) and a fictional newspaper article (Appendix B) were used to prime participants on the organizational context of this study and on the preventable crisis within the wind energy sector. The scenario used in this study describes a fictional organization in order to prevent confounding effects of pre-crisis reputation, that an existing organization might have (Laufer & Jung, 2010). The crisis type within this research resembles a preventable crisis which is the crisis type with the highest treat towards organizational reputation (Coombs, 2007a).

The first priming material, the description of the organization, was designed to represent a favorable local company with a good reputation. To do so, the company was situated as a big, local organization with positive influence on the local economy. The local context was added to make the situation more relatable and indicate higher stakeholder involvement. Furthermore, the description included elements connected to a favorable reputation according to the Reputation Quotient by Fombrun et al. (2000). These elements are 'trust', 'respect', 'innovation', 'high quality products', 'good leadership' and 'good treatment of employees'. The second priming material, the newspaper article, aimed at introducing the crisis to the participants. Focus within this material was on introducing the crisis situation as a preventable crisis by making clear that the organization is responsible, and the crisis is a human-error crisis (Coombs, 2007a). Furthermore, the article describes the negative effects of the crisis on the affected stakeholders and the stakeholders' opinions on the crisis.

MANIPULATION OF CRISIS RESPONSE MESSAGES

As a response to the crises, participants were presented with one of four possible scenarios. To do so, press releases that were manipulated in the variables 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal-behavior' (Appendix C-F). The variable 'personal communication and language use' was manipulated in text by using different tactics of message personalization as identified by (Liebrecht et al., 2021). The perspective of the CEO was taken, both first and second person pronouns were used in direct quotes from the CEO, as for example "On behalf of Vientec GmbH, I would like to apologize for our

mistake." (in German: "Stellvertretend für die Vientec GmbH möchte ich mich bei Ihnen für unseren Fehler entschuldigen"). Furthermore, the CEO's signature was included in the end of the press release. The impersonal condition, in contrast, did not include any of the aforementioned manipulations. To make the difference between the two conditions clear, the impersonal condition featured an impersonal organizational perspective.

To manipulate the second variable 'non-verbal behavior' the press release carried a picture of the fictional CEO. For the compassionate condition, the picture portrayed down-cast facial expressions (e.g. lowering the corners of the lips, raising the inner potion of the eyebrows, and a lowered position of the head) (Schoofs & Claeys, 2021; ten Brinke & Adams, 2015). The neutral condition, in contrast, portrayed the fictional CEO with relaxed facial muscles, and mouth, eyebrows, eyes and head in a normal resting position (ten Brinke & Adams, 2015). Stock pictures, as shown in figure 3, were used for the stimuli. The reason for this is, that an otherwise-known person could have led to potential biases among participants. By using Stock pictures of an unknown person, this could be avoided.

Figure 3.

Pictures of the fictional CEO (Compassionate vs. neutral non-verbal behavior)
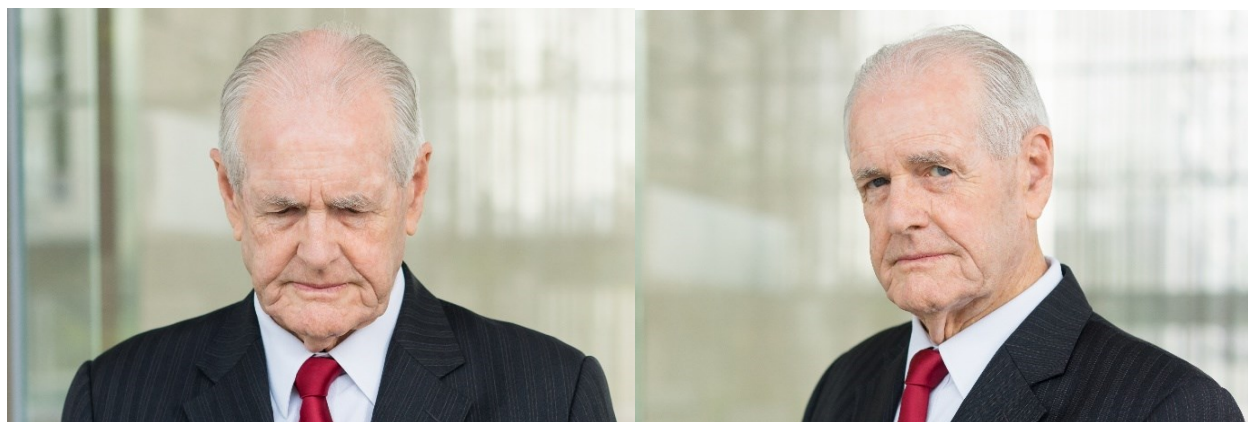
3.3 PRE-TEST

To test whether the stimuli for this study served their intended purpose, a pretest was conducted. Participants (N=10) were gathered through convenience sampling. One sample t-tests were conducted to determine whether the means of the sample significantly differ from the criterion value. Significance was evaluated at an alpha level of 5%.

To evaluate whether the description of the organization successfully conveyed the prescribed context, participants were asked to indicate their agreement on 3 statements. Values ranged from 1

(totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Participants agreed that Vientec GmbH is a big company (M = 3.80, SD = 0.92; t(9) = 2.75, p = .022), that the company has strong influence on the local economy (M = 4.50, SD = 0.71; t(9) = 6.71, p = .000) and that the company is rooted in the region (M = 4.30, SD = 0.48; t(9) = 8.51, p = .000), compared to the scale midpoint of 3.

Afterwards participants were asked to evaluate the crisis setting described in the newspaper article. Again, a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree), was used. Participants agreed that the crisis was preventable (M = 5.30, SD = 1.25; t(9) = 3.28, p = .009), based on a human error (M = 5.00, SD = 1.05; t(9) = 3.00, p = .015) and realistic (M = 6.10, SD = 0.74; t(9) = 9.00, p = .000), compared to the scale midpoint of 4. The one sample t-test to test whether the company was deemed responsible showed insignificant results (M = 4.90, SD = 1.37; t(9) = 2.07, p = .068), compared to the scale midpoint of 4. Hence, for the final study crisis responsibility was made clearer in the stimuli.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the manipulations of non-verbal behavior, participants were first presented with four pictures of a fictional CEO (Appendix G) that portrayed either neutral or compassionate non-verbal behavior. Participants were then asked to evaluate the pictures on a 7-point bipolar scale ranging from neutral to compassionate. The order of the pictures was randomized to avoid potential biases. One sample t-tests with a criterion value of 4 were performed to determine whether the sample mean was significantly different. Both picture number 1 (M = 5.00, SD = 1.33; t(9) = 2.37, p = .042) and 4 (M = 5.20, SD = 1.40; t(9) = 2.71, p = .024) were found to be compassionate, compared to the scale midpoint of 4. Similarly, both pictures number 2 (M = 1.60, SD = 0.51; t(9) = -14.70, p = .000) and 3 (M = 1.70, SD = 0.82; t(9) = -8.84, p = .000) were found to be neutral, in comparison to the scale midpoint of 4. For the final study, the pictures 2 and 4 were used, since they resulted in the highest and lowest mean values.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the manipulations of message personalization, participants were shown two press releases, one of which was using personal and the other impersonal language. Participants were then asked to evaluate the press releases on a 7-point bipolar scale ranging from impersonal to personal. The order of the press releases was randomized to avoid potential biases. One sample t-tests with a criterion value of 4 were conducted to determine whether the sample mean was significantly different. Participants agreed that the press release 1 was personal (M = 5.20, SD = 0.79; t(9) = 4.81, p = .001) and press release 2 was impersonal (M = 2.90, SD = 1.37; t(9) = -2.54, p = .032) compared to the scale midpoint of 4.

Based on the pre-test, stimuli and manipulations for the main survey were adapted or kept as was if the pre-test showed to be successful.

3.4 MEASURES

This section will elaborate on the measures used within the study (Appendix H). All measures used in this experiment were translated from English to German to be used for the online experiment. To make sure that the original meaning was kept during the translation process, back-to-back translation was used.

3.4.1 TRUST

Trust in the organization was measured with a six-item scale developed by Hon and Grunig (1999) (see Appendix H). This particular scale has been shown to reliably measure trust in prior research (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Lee & Jahng, 2020). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement to several statements on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Statements included for example "Whenever this organization makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me" and "This organization can be relied on to keep its promises".

3.4.2 ORGANIZATIONAL REPUTATION

Organizational reputation was measured by means of nine items derived from the reputation quotient by Fombrun et al. (2000). Examples of these items include "This company offers high quality products and services" and "This company is an environmental responsible company" (see Appendix H). The chosen items cover four of the six dimensions as defined by the reputation quotient: emotional appeal, products and services, vision and leadership, and social and environmental responsibility. Workplace environment and financial performance were not considered due to the lack of relevance within the given case. Furthermore, similar combinations of items have been shown to be reliable in comparable research (Schoofs & Claeys, 2021). For the study, all items were translated to German. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement to the statements on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Due to a mistake in the data collection process, post-crisis reputation had to be converted from a 5-point Likert scale to a 7-point Likert scale.

3.4.3 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

To measure emotional intelligence, a 4-item scale was used (see Appendix H). The items were derived from the emotional intelligence scale by Schutte et al. (1998). For this research four out of 33 items were chosen, which fit the context of this study. Examples of these items are "I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them" and "I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them". Participants were asked to indicate their agreement to the items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

3.4.4 VISUAL ORIENTATION

Visual orientation was measured by a 3-item scale (see Appendix H). The items used were derived from the Style of Processing scale as proposed by Childers et al. (1985). For this study, three out of the 22 items that measure visual orientation were used to determine whether the participant is visually oriented or not. These items are "My thinking often consists of mental "pictures" or images", "After I meet someone for the first time, I can usually remember what they look like, but not much about them" and "I find it helps to think in terms of mental pictures when doing many things". Participants were asked to indicate their agreement to the items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

3.4.5 GENERAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS RENEWABLE ENERGIES

The general attitude towards renewable energies was measured on a 3-item scale (see Appendix H). To measure the general attitude towards renewable energies, participants were asked to report their general attitudes towards three types of renewable energies: wind, solar and water energy. The attitude for all three types of renewable energies were measured on a 5-point bipolar scale ranging from negative to positive.

3.4.6 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF MEASURES

To confirm validity of the scales, a confirmatory factor analysis, using principal component analysis and varimax rotation, was conducted. The factor analysis confirmed the factors for visual orientation, emotional intelligence and general attitude towards renewable energies. Reputation and trust were mostly confirmed as factors, however, statement 5 and statement 6 of the trust scale were assigned towards factor 1 (reputation) and statement 8 of the reputation scale was assigned to factor 2 (trust). Therefore, all three items were removed from the scales within the further analysis. For all five factors, sufficiently high eigenvalues >1 were found (based on Kaiser's Criterion) and therefore all factors were kept for analysis. The explained variance for the factors ranged from 5.87 to 27.19%, showing that 5.87 to 27.19% of variation is explained by the factors. Furthermore, a scale analysis was conducted to measure reliability of the scales. As shown in table 3, all scales have a Cronbach Alpha > 0.60 and are therefore deemed sufficiently reliable. After confirming reliability and validity of the proposed constructs, mean scores for reputation (pre-crisis and post-crisis), trust (pre-crisis and post-crisis), emotional intelligence, visual orientation and general attitude towards renewable energies were calculated.

Table 3.

Factor analysis (rotated component matrix)

Statements	Factor				
	1	2	3	4	5
1.5 Rep. This company offers high quality products and services.	.789				
1.1 Rep. I have a good feeling about this company.	.767				
1.3 Rep. I trust this company.	.742				
1.7 Rep. This company has excellent leadership.	.700				
1.4 Rep. This company develops innovative products and services.	.694				
1.2 Rep. I admire and respect this company.	.670				
1.6 Trust. This organization has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.	.532				
1.6 Rep. Is an environmental responsible company.	.519				
1.5 Trust. I feel very confident about this organization's skills.	.504				
1.2 Trust. Whenever this organization makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me.		.770			
1.4 Trust. I believe that this organization takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.		.757			
1.1 Trust. This organization treats people like me fairly and justly.		.743			
1.8 Rep. This company maintains high standards in the way it treats people.		.626			
1.3 Trust. This organization can be relied on to keep its promises.		.570			
3. EI. I find it easy to understand the non-verbal messages of other people.			.771		
2. EI. I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them.			.765		
1. EI. I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them.			.657		
4. EI. I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others.			.533		
3. Visual. I find it helps to think in terms of mental pictures when doing many things.				.801	
1. Visual. My thinking often consists of mental "pictures" or images.				.735	
2. Visual. After I meet someone for the first time. I can usually remember what they look like, but not much about them.				.697	
3. Attitude. Water energy					.804
2. Attitude. Wind energy					.680
1. Attitude. Solar energy					.670
Explained variance:	27.19%	10.69%	7.76%	6.01%	5.87%
Eigenvalue:	6.53	2.57	1.86	1.44	1.41
Cronbach Alpha:	0.860	0.885	0.638	0.640	0.630
Cronbach Alpha (items removed):	(0.846)	(0.864)			

3.5 PROCEDURE

To ensure ethically responsible research practice, the study was reviewed and approved by the BMS Ethics Committee of the University of Twente before the experiment was conducted. Participants were recruited by means of convenience sampling and reached out to through social media (Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp) and personal contacts of the researcher. Because of the regional context of the online

experiment, German nationality was set as criterion for participation to make sure that participants understood the context of the crisis. Furthermore, the minimum age for participation was set to 18 years. Participation in the survey took place online.

The participants were first presented with a starting page that gave general information on the nature of the study. The exact aim (research on the impact of empathy on crisis communication), however, was not revealed to avoid biases. Instead, participants were informed that the online experiment was about a scenario on a company within the wind energy sector. Furthermore, participants were informed about the duration expectancy and confidentiality of the experiment, before being asked to give informed consent. The survey started with demographic questions regarding age, gender, nationality, and education. Furthermore, 'visual orientation', 'emotional intelligence' and attitude towards renewable energies were measured. Afterwards participants were presented with a description of the fictional organization 'Vientec GmbH' and were asked to answer measurements of trust and reputation. A manipulation check based on items from the pre-test was conducted. Participants were then presented with a newspaper article introducing the crisis scenario, followed by a manipulation check on the crisis scenario. Then one of four possible crisis responses was presented to the participants, after which reputation and trust were measured again. Before finishing the experiment, participants were asked to evaluate the manipulation on non-verbal behavior on a 7-point bipolar scale ranging from neutral to compassionate. Furthermore, they were asked to evaluate the press release they were shown on a 7-point bipolar scale ranging from impersonal to personal, to check the manipulation. After ending the survey, participants were once again informed about the contact of the researcher and shown a summary of their responses.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION AND PARTICIPANTS

Data was collected from 150 participants using a convenience sampling method. Out of the 150 collected responses, 148 were fully completed while one response was completed to 88% and another one to 91%. The two incomplete responses were nevertheless used for the analysis since data for all independent and dependent variables was included. Due to extreme outliers, 3 participants were removed from the analysis, resulting in a total sample of N= 147. As shown in table 4, participants aged between 18 and 61, with a mean age of M=29.16. About 64% of the respondent were female, while 36% were male. As set in the requirements for the study, all participants had German nationality, with one participant having dual citizenship. Regarding the highest completed education, the participant group was rather mixed. Most participants completed a vocational training or similar degree (34%), followed by those with a bachelor's

degree (26.5%), high school degree (21.1%) and master's degree or higher (15.6%). Four participants (2.7%) preferred not to indicate their level of education.

Table 4.

Participant demographics

Item	Category	Mean	Standard deviation	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-61	29.16	11.22		
Gender	Female			94	63.9
	Male			53	36.1
Nationality	German			146	99.3
	German and US-			1	0.7
	American				
Level of	Highschool			31	21.1
education	Vocational level / similar			50	34.1
	Bachelor's degree			39	26.5
	Master's degree or			23	15.6
	higher			4	2.7
	No information			0	0

Furthermore, participant demographics were analyzed for the different conditions within the experiment. Participants were equally distributed among the four conditions by the data collection software. However, due to the removal of incomplete responses and outliers, numbers were not entirely equally distributed per group. Therefore, the number of participants and participant characteristics per group were analyzed. Nevertheless, the number of participants per group was fairly equal, ranging from 36 to 37 participants per group. Furthermore, as shown in table 5, all four conditions showed similar group characteristics regarding age, gender and level of education. Since all participants were required to be of German nationality, this demographic was not included in the analysis. A one-way ANOVA showed that there were no significant age differences between the conditions ($F(3, 142) = 1.48$, $p = .222$). Furthermore, Chi-Square analyses showed no significant differences between the conditions in terms of gender ($x^2 (3) = 1.684$; $p = .640$) and level of education ($x^2 (12) = 6.947$; $p = .861$).

Table 5.

Distribution of sample characteristics

		Compassionate	Neutral
Personal	Age [a]	M = 27.54 / SD = 8.99	M = 27.35 / SD = 10.66
	Gender [b]	Male 32.43 %	Male 44.74 %
		Female 67.57 %	Female 55.26 %
Educational level [c]		1) 18.92 %	1) 26.32 %
		2) 27.03 %	2) 39.47 %
		3) 32.43 %	3) 21.05 %
		4) 18.92 %	4) 13.16 %
		5) 2.7 %	5) -
Impersonal	Age [a]	M = 29.69 / SD = 11.36	M = 32.17 / SD = 13.28
	Gender [b]	Male 33.33 %	Male 33.33 %
		Female 66.67 %	Female 66.67 %
Educational level [c]		1) 25.00 %	1) 13.89 %
		2) 30.56%	2) 38.89 %
		3) 22.22 %	3) 30.56 %
		4) 16.67 %	4) 13.89 %
		5) 5.56 %	5) 2.78 %

[a] Mean + SD of self-reported age

[b] Percentage division Male / Female

[c] Percentage: 1)= High school level / 2)= Vocational level or similar / 3)= Bachelor degree / 4)=Master degree or higher / 5)= no information

4. RESULTS

4.1 MANIPULATION CHECK MAIN STUDY

To check whether the stimuli and manipulations met their intended purpose a manipulation check was conducted. The same items that were used for the pre-test were used for the manipulation check of the main study. One sample t-tests were conducted to determine whether the means of the sample significantly differ from the criterion value. Furthermore, independent samples t-tests were conducted for the manipulation checks on non-verbal behavior and language use to see whether they group means differ significantly. Significance was evaluated at an alpha level of 5%.

Description of the organization and realism of the scenario

To evaluate whether the description of the organization successfully conveyed the prescribed context, participants were asked to indicate their agreement on 3 statements. Values ranged from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Participants agreed that Vientec GmbH is a big company (M = 4.06, SD = 0.81; t(146) = 15.83, p = .000), that the company has strong influence on the local economy (M = 4.20, SD = 0.65; t(146) = 22.41, p = .000) and that the company is rooted in the region (M = 4.16, SD = 0.68; t(146) = 20.65, p = .000).

Newspaper article (crisis)

Afterwards participants were asked to evaluate the crisis setting described in the newspaper article. A 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree), was used. Participants agreed that the crisis was preventable (M = 5.50, SD = 1.15; t(146) = 15.86, p = .000), based on a human error (M = 5.53, SD = 1.12; t(146) = 16.50, p = .000), realistic (M = 5.24, SD = 1.30; t(146) = 11.55, p = .000) and that the company was responsible (M = 5.62, SD = 0.99; t(146) = 19.72, p = .000).

Manipulation 1 – Non-verbal behavior

To evaluate the effectiveness of the manipulations of non-verbal behavior, participants were asked to evaluate the picture they saw on a 7-point bipolar scale ranging from neutral to compassionate. An independent samples t-test showed that people that have been shown the compassionate manipulation reported higher impressions of compassion (M= 4.70, SD= 1.38) than those that have been shown the neutral manipulation (M= 2.94, SD= 1.54), t(136)= 7.07, p= .000. For both the compassionate and neutral version one sample t-tests with a criterion value of 3 were performed to determine whether the sample mean was significantly different from the midpoint of the scale. Participants agreed that the compassionate manipulation was perceived as compassionate (M = 4.70, SD = 1.38; t(69) = 4.26, p = .000) and the neutral manipulation was perceived as neutral (M = 2.94, SD = 1.54; t(67) = -5.65, p = .000).

Manipulation 2 – Personal communication and language use

Participants were asked to evaluate the language use of the press release on a 7-point bipolar scale ranging from impersonal to personal. An independent samples t-test showed that people that have been shown the personal manipulation reported higher values for personal language use (M= 4.83, SD= 1.50) than those that have been shown the impersonal manipulation (M= 3.77, SD= 1.36), t(142)= 4.43, p= .000. One sample t-tests with a criterion value of 3 were conducted to determine whether the sample mean was significantly different. Participants agreed that the personal manipulation was perceived as personal (M = 4.83, SD = 1.50; t(74) = 4.80, p = .000) and the impersonal manipulation was perceived as impersonal (M = 3.77, SD = 1.36; t(68) = -1.41, p = .162).

4.2 ASSUMPTION CHECK AND IMPACT SCORES

Before conducting the analysis, the assumption of normality was checked for the measurements of pre- and post-crisis reputation and trust. Histograms, as shown in Appendix I, were created to check the assumption. Despite not showing perfect normal distributions, all histograms closely resembled normal distributions. Both the histograms for post-crisis trust and reputation were less clear, so that further tests were conducted to confirm normality. A Shapiro-Wilk test showed no evidence of non-normality for post-crisis reputation (W= 0.98, p= .096) and post-crisis trust (W= 0.98, p= 0.284).

To assess the impact of personal communication and language use on reputation and trust among the different conditions, impact scores, as shown in table 6, have been calculated by subtracting the post-crisis measurements of reputation and trust from the corresponding pre-crisis measurements. Furthermore, total scores per manipulation were calculated. In general, the calculated impact and mean scores are in the expected direction, however, with the exemption of trust- and reputation impact within the manipulations of language use. Contrary to the expectations, impact scores are smaller for the impersonal condition compared to the personal condition. Whether these effects are significant, however, remains to be tested.

Table 6.

Pre-, post-, and impact scores for reputation and trust (means and standard deviations per condition)

		Compassionate	Neutral	Totals
		Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Personal	Reputation [a)]	1) 5.13 (0.73)	1) 5.29 (0.72)	1) 5.21 (0.72)
		2) 4.84 (0.87)	2) 4.37 (0.92)	2) 4.61 (0.92)
	Trust [b)]	1) 4.49 (0.88)	1) 4.43 (0.91)	1) 4.46 (0.89)
		2) 4.31 (1.08)	2) 3.76 (1.34)	2) 4.03 (1.24)
	Impact score [c)]	R) 0.29 (0.85)	R) 0.92 (0.94)	R) 0.61 (0.94)
		T) 0.18 (0.81)	T) 0.68 (1.52)	T) 0.43 (1.24)
Impersonal	Reputation [a)]	1) 4.87 (0.73)	1) 5.00 (0.69)	1) 4.93 (0.71)
		2) 4.47 (0.69)	2) 4.49 (0.81)	2) 4.48 (0.75)
	Trust [b)]	1) 4.44 (0.85)	1) 4.38 (0.65)	1) 4.41 (0.75)
		2) 3.94 (0.92)	2) 4.01 (0.99)	2) 3.97 (0.95)
	Impact score [c)]	R) 0.40 (0.73)	R) 0.57 (0.85)	R) 0.48 (0.79)
		T) 0.46 (0.97)	T) 0.38 (1.17)	T) 0.42 (1.07)

Table 6. (continued)

	Compassionate	Neutral	Totals
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Totals	1) 5.00 (0.74)	1) 5.15 (0.71)	
	2) 4.66 (0.81)	2) 4.43 (0.86)	
	1) 4.47 (0.86)	1) 4.41 (0.79)	
	2) 4.13 (1.02)	2) 3.88 (1.18)	
	R) 0.34 (0.79)	R) 0.75 (0.91)	
	T) 0.32 (0.90)	T) 0.53 (1.36)	

[a] 1)= Pre-crisis measurement / 2)= Post-crisis measurement

[b] 1)= Pre-crisis measurement / 2)= Post-crisis measurement

[c] R)= Reputation / T)= Trust

4.3 CORRELATION ANALYSIS

To test hypotheses 4 and 5, as well as RQ5, a correlation analysis between the impact scores for the dependent variables trust and reputation, the hypothesized moderators visual orientation and emotional intelligence, and the hypothesized covariate attitude towards renewable energies was conducted. Results of this analysis are shown in table 7.

For the reputation impact, no significant correlations were found with emotional intelligence ($r(145)= 0.125$, $p= .133$), visual orientation ($r(145)= 0.129$, $p= .120$) or general attitude towards renewable energies ($r(145)= 0.055$, $p= .506$). This indicates that emotional intelligence and visual orientation do not serve as moderators for reputation impact. Further, general attitude does not serve as a covariate to reputation impact.

For trust impact no significant correlations were found with visual orientation ($r(145)= 0.108$, $p= .194$) or general attitude towards renewable energies ($r(145)= 0.055$, $p= .509$), indicating that visual orientation does not serve as a moderator and general attitude towards renewable energies is not a covariate to trust impact. Trust impact and emotional intelligence have been found to be weakly positively correlated ($r(145)= 0.213$, $p= .010$). Regarding hypothesis 4, there is evidence that emotional intelligence could weakly moderate the relationship between the independent variables and trust.

For post-crisis reputation, a significant correlation was found with the hypothesized covariate general attitude towards renewable energies ($r(146)= 0.268$, $p= .001$). No significant correlations were found with visual orientation ($r(146)= -0.068$, $p= .415$) or emotional intelligence ($r(146)= -0.170$, $p= .195$), indicating that the variables do not serve as moderators for post-crisis reputation.

For post-crisis trust no significant correlation were found with either general attitude towards renewable energies (r(145)= 0.111, p= .182), visual orientation (r(145)= 0.010, p= .905) and emotional intelligence (r(145)= -0.076, p= .365). This indicates that emotional intelligence and visual orientation do not serve as moderators for reputation impact. Further, general attitude does not serve as a covariate to reputation impact.

Correlations between trust impact and emotional intelligence, and post-crisis reputation and general attitude towards renewable energies indicate possible moderation and covariation effects. To test these further, emotional intelligence, in line with hypothesis 4, will be tested as a moderator on trust impact. Based on RQ5 and the found correlation, general attitude towards renewable energies will be tested as a covariate to post-crisis reputation. Since the analysis did not show any correlations of the dependent variables with visual orientation, hypothesis 5, that visual orientation moderates the relationship between non-verbal behavior and the outcome variables, was not supported and therefore not tested within the further analyses.

Table 7.

Pearson Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Attitude						
2. Visual orientation	-0.065					
3. Emotional intelligence	0.023	0.223**				
4. Reputation impact	-0.035	0.125	0.143			
5. Trust impact	0.055	0.108	0.213**	0.642**		
6. Post-crisis reputation	0.268**	-0.068	-0.107	-0.633**	-0.536**	
7. Post-crisis trust	0.111	0.010	-0.076	-0.542**	-0.743**	0.756**

** correlations are significant at 0.05 level

4.4 UNIVARIATE ANALYSES OF VARIANCE AND PLANNED COMPARISONS

To compare the impact of 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior' on the dependent variables, separate ANOVAs for both outcome variables reputation and trust have been conducted. For the outcome variable trust impact, emotional intelligence was included as a factor in the ANOVA since correlation analysis indicated possible moderation effects of the variable. Similarly, for the

outcome variable post-crisis reputation, general attitude was included as a covariate in the ANOVA, since correlation analysis showed support for RQ5. Furthermore, planned comparisons were conducted to test hypothesis 3.

4.4.1 TRUST IMPACT

Contrary to hypotheses 1 and 2, 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior' did not significantly influence trust impact. The main effect of 'personal communication and language use' was not significant ($F_{(1, 138)} = 0.02$, $p = .887$). Furthermore, the effect of 'non-verbal behavior' did not reach significance ($F_{(1, 138)} = 4.94$, $p = .483$). The interaction between 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior' was not significant ($F_{(1, 138)} = 1.63$, $p = .204$). Contrary to hypothesis 4, the interaction between 'non-verbal behavior' and emotional intelligence was not significant ($F_{(1, 138)} = 2.80$, $p = .097$).
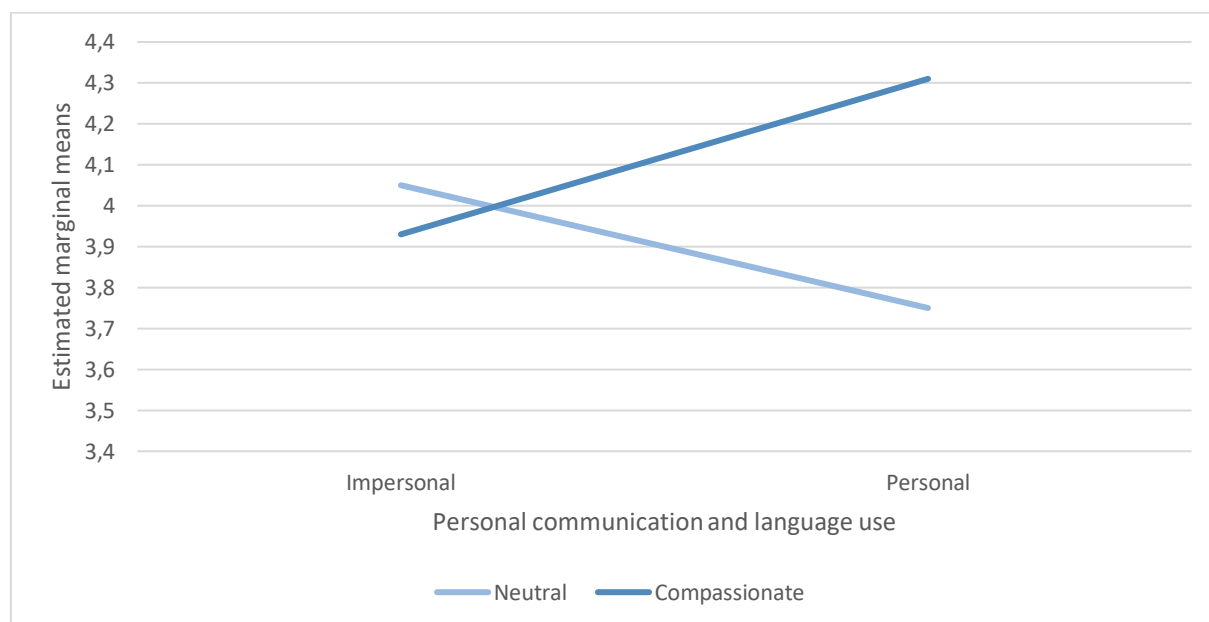
4.4.2 REPUTATION IMPACT

Contrary to hypothesis 1, 'personal communication and language use' did not significantly influence reputation impact. The main effect of 'personal communication and language use' was not significant ($F_{(1, 142)} = 0.691$, $p = .407$). In line with hypothesis 2, the effect of 'non-verbal behavior' was significant ($F_{(1, 142)} = 8.25$, $p = .005$), indicating that press releases featuring compassionate non-verbal behavior have less impact on reputation ($M = 0.34$, $SD = 0.79$) compared to those featuring neutral non-verbal behavior ($M = 0.75$, $SD = 0.91$). The interaction between 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior' was not significant ($F_{(1, 142)} = 1.80$, $p = .181$).

4.4.3 POST-CRISIS TRUST

Contrary to hypotheses 1 and 2, 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior' did not significantly influence trust impact. The main effect of 'personal communication and language use' ($F_{(1, 142)} = 0.12$, $p = .732$) and 'non-verbal behavior' ($F_{(1, 142)} = 1.76$, $p = .187$) did not reach significance. The interaction between 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior' was not significant ($F_{(1, 142)} = 2.95$, $p = .088$). The p-value of .088 however, could indicate a trending effect of the interaction which is shown in figure 4. In line with hypothesis 3, the interaction plot shows that compassionate non-verbal behavior results in higher values for post-crisis trust when combined with a congruent personal communication and language use.

Figure 4.

Interaction between 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior'

4.4.4 POST-CRISIS REPUTATION

Contrary to hypotheses 1, 'personal communication and language use' did not significantly influence post-crisis reputation. The main effect of 'personal communication and language use' was not significant ($F_{(1, 142)} = 0.41$, $p = .524$), In line with hypothesis 2, the effect of 'non-verbal behavior' was significant ($F_{(1, 142)} = 3.95$, $p = .049$), indicating that press releases featuring compassionate non-verbal behavior result in better post-crisis reputation ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.81$) compared to those featuring neutral non-verbal behavior ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.86$). The interaction between 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior' was not significant ($F_{(1, 142)} = 2.37$, $p = .126$). Regarding RQ5, the main effect general attitude towards renewable energies was significant, indicating that general attitude towards wind energy is a covariate, positively influencing post-crisis reputation, as proposed in the hypothesized model ($F_{(1, 142)} = 10.89$, $p = .001$).

4.4.5 PLANNED COMPARISONS

To test hypothesis 3, that congruent crisis responses that match the crisis are more potent in regaining trust and reputation, planned comparisons have been conducted for each dependent variable. An analysis of variance with planned contrasts yielded a non-significant variation among conditions for trust impact, $F_{(3, 142)} = 1.22$, $MSE = 1.33$, $p = .304$. Similarly, for post-crisis trust, an analysis of variance with planned contrasts yielded a non-significant variation among conditions, $F_{(3, 142)} = 1.65$, $MSE = 1.21$, $p = .181$. Post-crisis reputation was found to have no significant variations among conditions, $F_{(3, 143)} = 2.33$, $MSE = $

0.31, p = .077. However, the p-value of .077 could indicate a trend towards variations among the conditions. For reputation impact, an analysis of variance with planned contrasts yielded a significant variation among conditions, $F(3, 143) = 4.41$, MSE = 0.50, $p = .009$.

Further analyses were conducted to compare the means among conditions for post-crisis reputation (figure 5) and reputation impact (figure 6). In line with hypothesis 3, figure 5 shows that condition 1 (M= 4.85, SD= 0.87), with compassionate and personal manipulations, shows a trend towards higher mean post-crisis reputation than the other conditions. Furthermore, in line with hypothesis 3, figure 6 shows that condition 1 (M= 0.28, SD= 0.85) results in significantly lower impact on reputation as compared to the other conditions and thereby confirming the hypothesis that a congruent and matching crisis response combining personal language use and compassionate non-verbal behavior results in less impact on reputation compared to incongruent or non-matching responses. For both trust impact and post-crisis trust, hypothesis 3 was not confirmed.

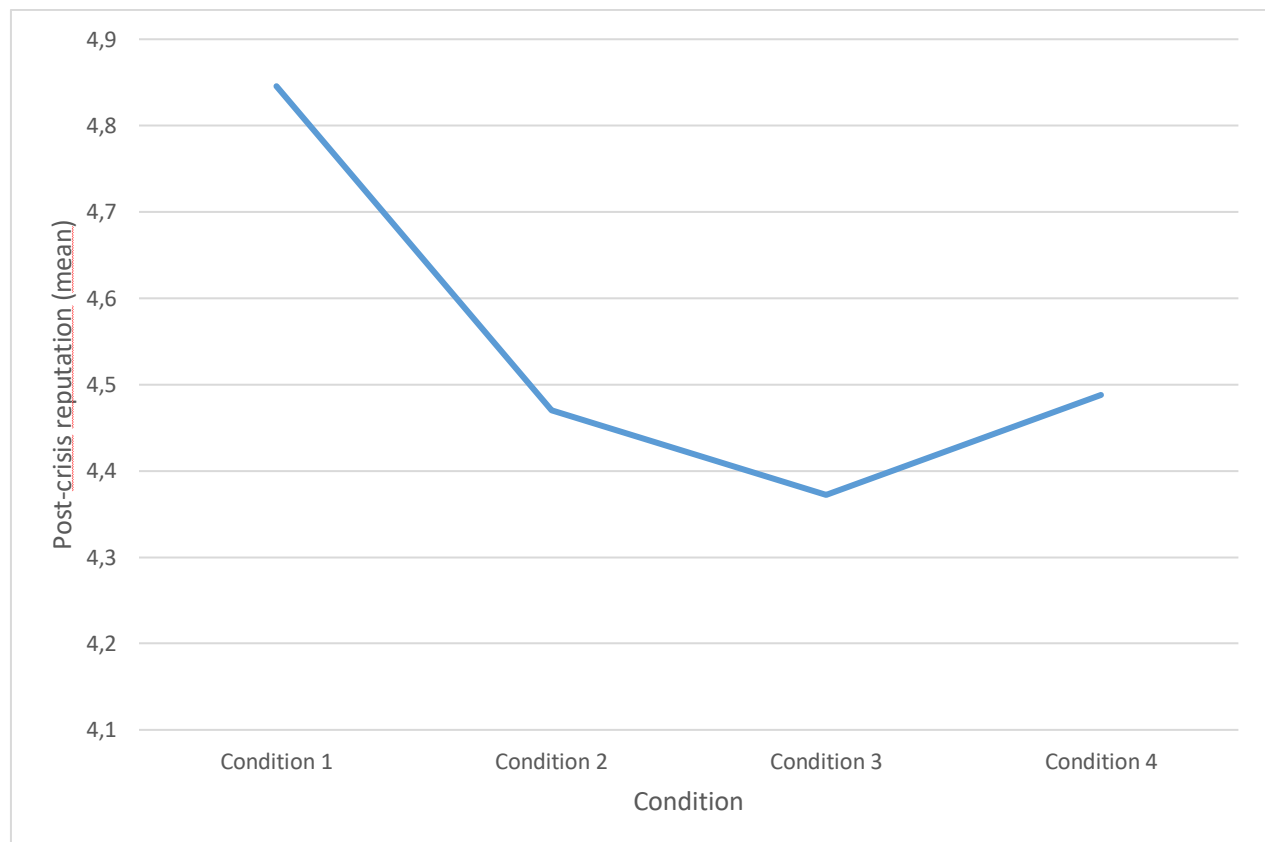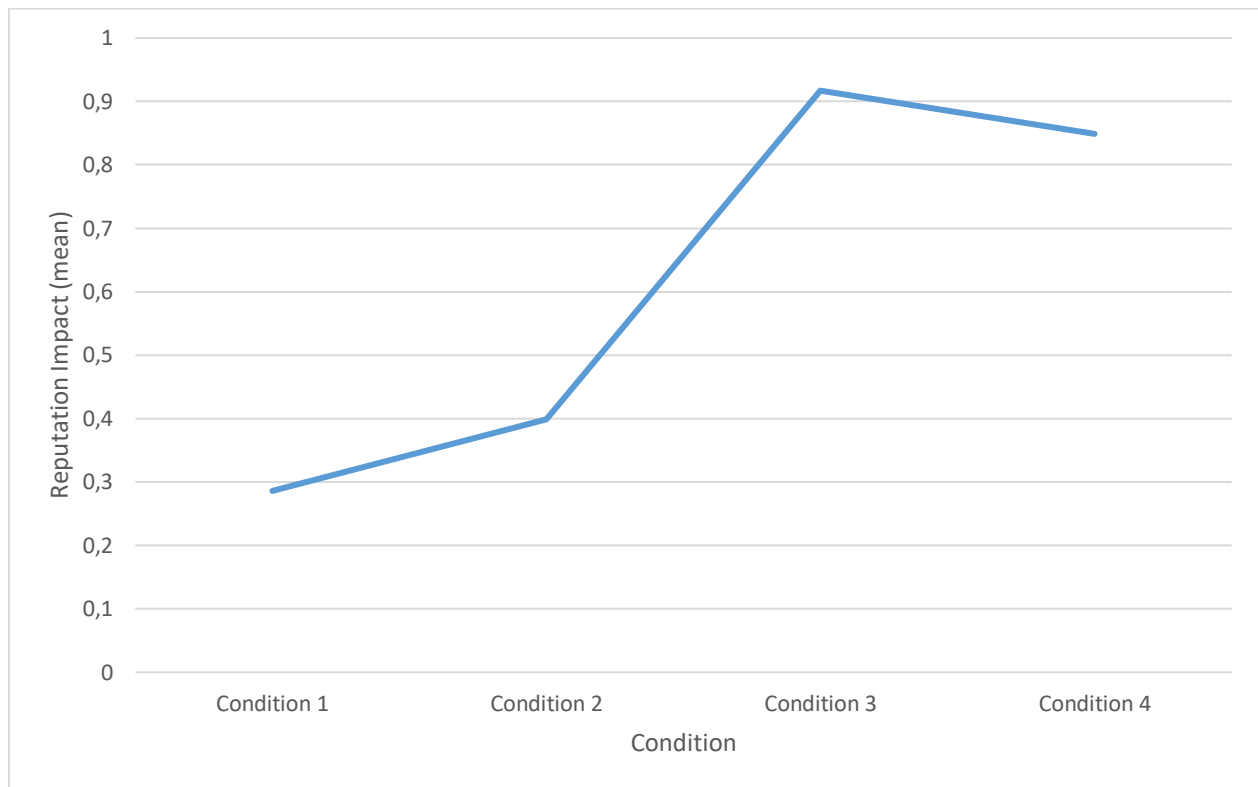**Figure 5.**

Mean plot for post-crisis reputation.

Figure 6.

Mean plot for reputation impact

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Inspired by previous research on the effects of empathy on crisis communication, this study aimed at identifying possible effects of 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior' as aspects of empathic crisis communication on reputation and trust in the specific case of a preventable crisis in the wind energy sector. Furthermore, it aimed at identifying the extent to which these aspects can help in repairing reputation and regaining trust, while taking into account possible moderating effects of emotional intelligence and visual orientation. This study thereby contributes to a growing body of research on the effects of empathy on crisis communication and helps to gain deeper knowledge on how empathy can be expressed within crisis communication and how it affects post-crisis reputation and trust. The performed analyses of variance revealed that personal communication was not impacting reputation or trust, non-verbal behavior, however, was shown to be a useful tool for limiting impact on reputation after a preventable crisis.

A performed analysis of variance revealed that, contrary to the expectations, that there was no evidence for 'personal communication and language use' to impact either post-crisis reputation or post-crisis trust. Since a pretest and manipulation checks confirmed that the impersonal and personal manipulations had significantly different group means, it can, however, be assumed that manipulations were indeed perceived as intended by participants. The findings of this study thereby contrast with the expectations and findings of Schoofs et al. (2022) that 'personal communication and language use' is an aspect of empathic crisis communication and by this may influence how an organization is perceived.

Furthermore, analyses showed that there is evidence that 'non-verbal behavior' positively affected post-crisis reputation, meaning that compassionate non-verbal behavior resulted in more favorable post-crisis reputation scores than neutral behaviors. Differences between the compassionate and neutral conditions, however, were very subtle. Furthermore, non-verbal behavior was shown to positively affect the impact on reputation. Hence, not only did compassionate non-verbal behavior result in more favorable post-crisis reputation, but it also lowered the impact of the crisis on reputation. This is in line with prior research that suggested a positive impact of facial expressions and body language on reputation (Schoofs et al., 2022; Schoofs & Claeys, 2021; van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). For post-crisis trust, however, no effect was found.

Based on research by Schoofs et al. (2022) it was expected that 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior' interact with each other. For this hypothesis, however, no evidence could be found. Only for post-crisis trust, a trend towards an interaction effect could be found. However, since neither of the independent variables had an effect on post-crisis trust by themselves and the interaction effect is not significant, these findings cannot be verified and therefore require further research. Nevertheless, planned comparisons showed that the condition combining personal communication and language use and compassionate non-verbal behavior resulted in significantly lower impact scores compared to the other conditions. Hence, for reputation impact it can be concluded that a congruent combination of manipulations indeed lowered the impact on reputation. For post-crisis reputation, the variation among groups was not statistically significant, the results, however, might indicate a possible trend towards the compassionate and personal condition having a more favorable post-crisis reputation than the other conditions. This trend supports the findings that a combination of personal communication and language use and compassionate non-verbal behavior is more effective in repairing reputation than the other combinations of manipulations. These results are consistent with previous research that found that verbal (personal communication and language use) and non-verbal cues (facial expressions and gestures) are working together in a reciprocal way (Schoofs & Claeys, 2021). Furthermore,

it is in line with research on processing fluency and congruency, which states that congruent stimuli, which can be processed more fluently, are evaluated more positive (van Rompay et al., 2010).

Contrary to the hypotheses, no moderating effects of visual orientation or emotional intelligence were found for either outcome variable, indicating that both visual orientation and emotional intelligence are not influencing how non-verbal behavior impacts reputation or trust. Hence, this study did not find support for prior research which states that visual-oriented people rely more strongly on pictures than on texts while verbal-oriented people tended to rely mainly on text (Höffler et al., 2017), or that individuals with high emotional intelligence rely more on non-verbal cues (Jacob et al., 2013). This indicates that individual differences in processing style or emotional intelligence do not affect the effectiveness of the investigated aspects of empathy in crisis communication.

Because of the context of the study, it was also analyzed to what extent general attitude towards wind energy might influence reputation and trust in this particular case. Analysis showed that general attitude towards renewable energies positively influenced post-crisis reputation but had not influence on either impact score or post-crisis trust. This indicates that individuals with a generally more positive attitude towards renewable energies have generally higher scores for post-crisis reputation than those with less positive attitudes. However, since no covariate effect was found for reputation impact, it cannot be assumed that this attitude lowers the crisis impact. Instead, it could be that individuals with more positive attitudes towards renewable energies generally evaluate the reputation of organizations in the wind energy sector higher than other individuals. To make assumptions on this, further research would be required.

5.2 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

For the conducted research, some potential limitations must be addressed and recommendations for future research are proposed.

The study used a preventable crisis in the wind energy sector in Germany as a basis for the research. However, as proposed by the SCCT, different crisis clusters require different response strategies (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014; Coombs, 2007a; Schoofs et al., 2022). Results of this study are therefore not representative for other crisis clusters since matching crisis response strategy to the crisis type is of essential importance. Furthermore, wind energy is perceived predominantly positive in Germany (Hübner & Pohl, 2015; van Toorn, 2021). As found in the analysis, general attitudes towards renewable energies can act as a covariate for post-crisis reputation and a trend is recognizable for the same phenomenon for reputation impact. Hence, the results of this study are coupled to this specific regional context. For other countries, in which renewable energies are perceived differently, results might therefore differ. Similarity results should only be cautiously applied to other business sectors. Next to that, results of this study should

be treated with caution based on the sampling method used for this research. To gather participants for this research, convenience sampling, combined with snowball sampling, was used as a main sampling approach. Due to that, many participants were students who generally have a different living situation than working individuals. This could have led to possible limitations regarding the representativity of the study, since individuals without a garden or own property might have more difficulties imagining the impact of the scenario used in this study. Lastly, due to a mistake in the data collection process, post-crisis reputation had to be converted from a 5-point to a 7-point scale retrospectively. This might have influenced results for both post-crisis reputation and reputation impact. Hence, results for both variables should be evaluated critically.

This study, however, is only one of the first steps in researching the impact of different aspects of empathy in crisis communication. Therefore, the following recommendations for future research arose. Future research is needed to confirm and deepen the findings. Future research could expand these findings by contributing research on how empathy can impact crisis communication for different crisis clusters and further explore operationalizations of different aspects of empathic crisis communication. Further, this study focused on the wind energy sector specifically, different sector with different public perceptions, however, future research should aim to find how empathy in crisis communication differs among different sectors. Additionally, the preventable crisis in this scenario was rather low in emotional load, hence it might be interesting to research how empathic crisis responses impact crises with different levels of emotional load. Finally, this research was conducted with a sample including many students. It might be worth investigating whether a sample with more working individuals, that are closer to the scenario, yield the same results or could even increase representativity and outcomes.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

Based on the results of this study, some implications for both theory and practice can be concluded. This study contributed to a growing body of research on the topic of empathy in crisis communication. Current research only offers limited guidelines as to what empathic expressions within a crisis response should entail, with most literature in the field focusing on the role of empathy as a communication characteristic in terms of strategic and reputational benefits as outcome of empathic crisis communication (Coombs, 2007; Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011; Schoofs et al. 2022). First studies have made steps in identifying aspects of empathic crisis communication (Ndone & Park, 2022; Schoofs et al., 2022). This study specifically builds upon research by Schoofs et al (2022) which identifies 'personal communication and language use' and 'non-verbal behavior' as two antecedents of empathic crisis communication. With this research, further support was found for 'non-verbal behavior' as an aspect to empathic crisis communication that positively influences post-crisis reputation and lowers the impact the crisis has on reputation. However,

for personal communication, no evidence was found. Nevertheless, findings of the study suggest that congruent crisis responses, that combine both personal communication and compassionate non-verbal behaviors, and match the crisis type result in less negative impact compared to incongruent crises responses or those that do not match the crisis type. This study thereby adds to the understanding of congruency in terms of crisis responses.

In a more practical sense, this study gives implications for PR practitioners and crisis communicators. While personal language use and communication by itself seemed to have no influence on reputation or trust in this particular scenario, compassionate non-verbal behavior was found to be an effective strategy to achieve more favorable post-crisis reputation and lower the damaging impact of the crisis on reputation. Hence, practitioners should consider deliberately using non-verbal behaviors such as facial expressions in their crisis responses. Compassionate non-verbal behavior, in this case defined as expressions of sadness, can be used to strategically repair reputation, and keep damage on reputation low. This is also in line with prior research by Schoofs and Claeys (2021) who found that facial expressions of sadness have a positive impact on organizational post-crisis reputation. However, as indicated by the SCCT, it is important that the chosen crisis response and the supporting non-verbal behavior match the crisis situation. While expressions of sadness appear compassionate in this preventable crisis, the same non-verbal expressions might not fit in with other crisis clusters. Crises within the victim cluster for example require deny instead of apology strategies, in which compassionate facial expressions might be incongruent with the message (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014; Coombs, 2007a; Schoofs et al., 2022; van Rompay et al., 2010). Furthermore, results of the planned comparisons indicate that combining personal communication and language use with compassionate non-verbal behavior leads to more favorable post-crisis reputation and lower damaging impact on reputation for a preventable crisis. Hence, practitioners should see to combine both aspects to repair reputation, since verbal and non-verbal cues are working together in a reciprocal way (Schoofs & Claeys, 2021).

5.4 CONCLUSION

Renewable energies, such as wind energy are playing an increasingly important role in today`s society. However, despite a generally positive attitude towards wind parks in Germany. Especially onshore wind parks are met with a lot of skepticism, often with the argument that people feel disturbed by large wind turbines "in their backyards" because of noise or other emissions. Not always, however, can these emissions and concerns be avoided and can therefore result in crises for the responsible organizations. Nevertheless, negative outcomes such as damage on reputation and trust can be limited with effective crisis communication. Therefore, this study has shown how the importance of expressing empathy in dealing with preventable crises in the wind energy sector. This was done by investigating how 'non-verbal-

behavior' and 'personal communication and language use' as to aspects of expressing empathy affect corporate reputation and trust when incorporated in a written crisis response. In general, it can be concluded that expressing empathy in a crisis response have a positive impact on post-crisis reputation and limit the damaging impact on reputation. Contrary to expectations and prior research, however, the study has not found evidence that empathy can help in regaining trust after a preventable crisis. Similarly, this research has not found evidence for any moderating effects of visual orientation or emotional intelligence, indicating that individual differences in processing style or emotional intelligence do not affect the effectiveness of empathy in crisis communication. However, considering the specific context of the study, evidence was found that general attitude towards wind energy might serve as a covariate for post-crisis reputation and could therefore influence the outcome for this specific outcome variable. Additionally, the study has shown that congruent crisis responses that combine personal communication and compassionate non-verbal behaviors are stronger in repairing reputation compared to incongruent scenarios or those combining impersonal communication and neutral non-verbal behaviors. Hence, for practitioners, it is relevant to consider using both personal communication and language use as well as compassionate non-verbal communication to support their crisis response strategy. This study thereby highlights the practical relevance of expressing empathy in the specific case of preventable crises in one of the fastest growing sectors worldwide and adds to recent body of research in the field of crisis communication.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. DESCRIPTION OF THE FICTIONAL ORGANIZATION

ÜBER DAS UNTERNEHMEN

Vientec GmbH ist der größte regionale Hersteller von Windkraftanlagen rund um Neu-Windenburg

Neu-Windenburg. Mit über 15.000 installierten Windkraftanlagen und einer installierten Leistung von 27 Gigawatt ist Vientec GmbH einer der größten und innovativsten Hersteller von Windkraftanlagen in Deutschland. Das Unternehmen agiert vor allem rund um die Region Neu-Windenburg und ist einer der größten regionalen Arbeitgeber. Allein in der Region beschäftigt das Unternehmen über 2000 Beschäftigte und trägt seinen Beitrag zur regen Wirtschaft in Neu-Windenburg.

Gegründet wurde die Vientec GmbH im Jahr 1989 von Markus Hendriks, dessen Sohn Jan Hendriks 2001 die Geschäftsführung übernahm. Auch unter dem derzeitigen Geschäftsführer entwickelt sich die Vientec GmbH stetig gewinnbringend weiter. Das Unternehmen gilt als eines der wichtigsten Familienunternehmen Deutschlands und ist laut aktuellen Rankings in den Top 40 der besten Arbeitgeber Deutschlands sowie in den Top 50 der innovativsten und nachhaltigsten Unternehmen des Landes. Dank seiner innovativen und qualitativ hochwertigen Produkte genießt das Unternehmen auch über die Region hinaus großes Vertrauen und Respekt.

APPENDIX B. FICTIONAL NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

Mirjam Nilsson

Windpark geht Anwohnern auf die Ohren

Gutachten zeigt: Windpark Neu-Windenburg Süd überschreitet den Lärmpegel-Grenzwert von 55 Dezibel mitunter deutlich

Neu-Windenburg - Schon seit geraumer Zeit beschweren sich Anwohner des Windparks Neu-Windenburg Süd über den Lärmpegel der nahegelegenen Windkraftanlagen. Lange wurden die Sorgen der Anwohner abgetan. Nun zeigt ein Gutachten jedoch, dass die Geräuschemissionen je nach Windlage den gesetzlichen Grenzwert für Lärmpegel von 55 Dezibel deutlich überschreiten.

Bereits seit dem Bau des Windparks im Jahr 2018 durch das regionale Unternehmen Vientec GmbH äußerten Anwohner Bedenken am Projekt des Unternehmens in Kooperation mit der Stadt Neu-Windenburg. Gert Berger von der Bürgerinitiative „Windpark Neu-Windenburg - Nicht in meinem Garten" wohnt selbst nur einige 100 Meter vom Windpark entfernt und betonte schon damals, dass ein Windpark die Wohnqualität der Anwohner deutlich beeinträchtigen würde. Während ein Großteil der Neu-Windenburger den Windpark befürwortet, sehen sich die Anwohner durch die riesigen Windräder beeinträchtigt. „Vor allem bei starkem Wind aus süd-östlicher Richtung sind die Geräusche besonders deutlich zu hören", äußerte sich eine Anwohnerin auf Nachfrage der Redaktion.

Ein durch die Bürgerinitiative in Auftrag gegebenes Gutachten zeigt nun, dass der Lärmpegel je nach Windrichtung und Tageszeit tatsächlich bis zu 65 Dezibel erreicht. Erlaubt sind in Deutschland tagsüber 55 und nachts 40 Dezibel. Verantwortlich dafür sieht der Gutachter das zuständige Unternehmen Vientec. „Das Gutachten kommt zu dem Schluss, dass Fehler bei den Planungen für den Windpark ursächlich für die erhöhten Geräuschemissionen sind", so der Gutachter. Höchstwahrscheinlich sei der starke Süd-Ost-Wind bei den Berechnungen nicht einkalkuliert worden.

Pressemitteilung

Jan Hendriks entschuldigt sich für Lärmbelästigung durch Windpark Neu-Windenburg Süd

Neu-Windenburg, 28. März 2022. „Stellvertretend für die Vientec GmbH möchte ich mich bei Ihnen für unseren Fehler entschuldigen", so Geschäftsführer Jan Hendriks. Er ging damit auf die vorangegangenen Untersuchungen zur Lärmbelästigung im Windpark Neu-Windenburg Süd ein.

„Uns als Unternehmen war nicht bewusst, dass es zu Überschreitungen der gesetzlich vorgeschriebenen Grenzwerte kam. Lärm kann bedeutende Auswirkungen auf Anwohner haben und ist aus gutem Grund gesetzlich streng geregelt. Umso wichtiger ist es uns daher, dass wir auf Ihre Bedenken als Anwohner eingehen", äußerte sich der Geschäftsführer. Vientec sieht sich in der Verantwortung die Fehler in diesem Zusammenhang schnellstmöglich aufzudecken, um dazugehörige Prozesse in Zukunft sicherer zu gestalten.

„Die Zufriedenheit und Gesundheit der Menschen in und um Neu-Windenburg hat für uns als regionales Unternehmen hohe Priorität. Das ein Fehler bei den Berechnungen vonseiten des Unternehmens nun in diesem Fall zu Lärmbelästigungen der Anwohner geführt hat, macht mich untröstlich", erklärt der Geschäftsführer.

Jan Hendriks, Geschäftsführer Vientec GmbH

Pressemitteilung

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Jan Hendriks entschuldigt sich für Lärmbelästigung durch Windpark Neu-Windenburg Süd

Neu-Windenburg, 28. März 2022. Für seine Fehler in Bezug auf die Lärmgrenzwerte entschuldigt sich die Vientec GmbH bei allen Betroffenen. Das Unternehmen ging damit auf die vorangegangenen Untersuchungen zur Lärmbelästigung im Windpark Neu-Windenburg Süd ein.

Das Unternehmen teilt mit, dass Überschreitungen der gesetzlich vorgeschriebenen Grenzwerte dem Unternehmen vorab nicht bekannt waren. Lärm kann bedeutende Auswirkungen auf Anwohner haben und ist aus gutem Grund gesetzlich streng geregelt. Umso wichtiger ist es daher, dass Vientec auf die Bedenken als Anwohner eingeht. Vientec sieht sich in der Verantwortung die Fehler in diesem Zusammenhang schnellstmöglich aufzudecken, um dazugehörige Prozesse in Zukunft sicherer zu gestalten.

Die Zufriedenheit und Gesundheit der Menschen in und um Neu-Windenburg haben für die Vientec GmbH als regionales Unternehmen hohe Priorität. Das ein Fehler bei den Berechnungen vonseiten des Unternehmens nun in diesem Fall zu Lärmbelästigungen der Anwohner geführt hat, ist untröstlich.

APPENDIX F. SCENARIO 3: IMPERSONAL AND NEUTRAL

Pressemitteilung

Jan Hendriks entschuldigt sich für Lärmbelästigung durch Windpark Neu-Windenburg Süd

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APPENDIX G. NON-VERBAL MANIPULATIONS TESTED WITHIN PRE-TEST

Compassionate	**Neutral**
Picture 1	Picture 2

Picture 4	Picture 3

APPENDIX H. MEASURES

Concept	Items
Reputation (Fombrun et al., 2000)	I have a good feeling about this company.
	I admire and respect this company.
	I trust this company.
	This company develops innovative products and services.
	This company offers high quality products and services.
	Is an environmental responsible company.
	This company has excellent leadership.
	This company maintains high standards in the way it treats people.
Trust (Hon & Grunig, 1999)	This organization treats people like me fairly and justly.
	Whenever this organization makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me.
	This organization can be relied on to keep its promises.
	I believe that this organization takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.
	I feel very confident about this organization's skills.
	This organization has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.
Emotional intelligence (adapted from Schutte et al., 1998)	I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them.
	I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them.
	I find it easy to understand the non-verbal messages of other people.
	I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others.
Visual orientation (adapted from Childers et al., 1985)	My thinking often consists of mental "pictures" or images.
	After I meet someone for the first time. I can usually remember what they look like, but not much about them.

I find it helps to think in terms of mental pictures when doing many things.

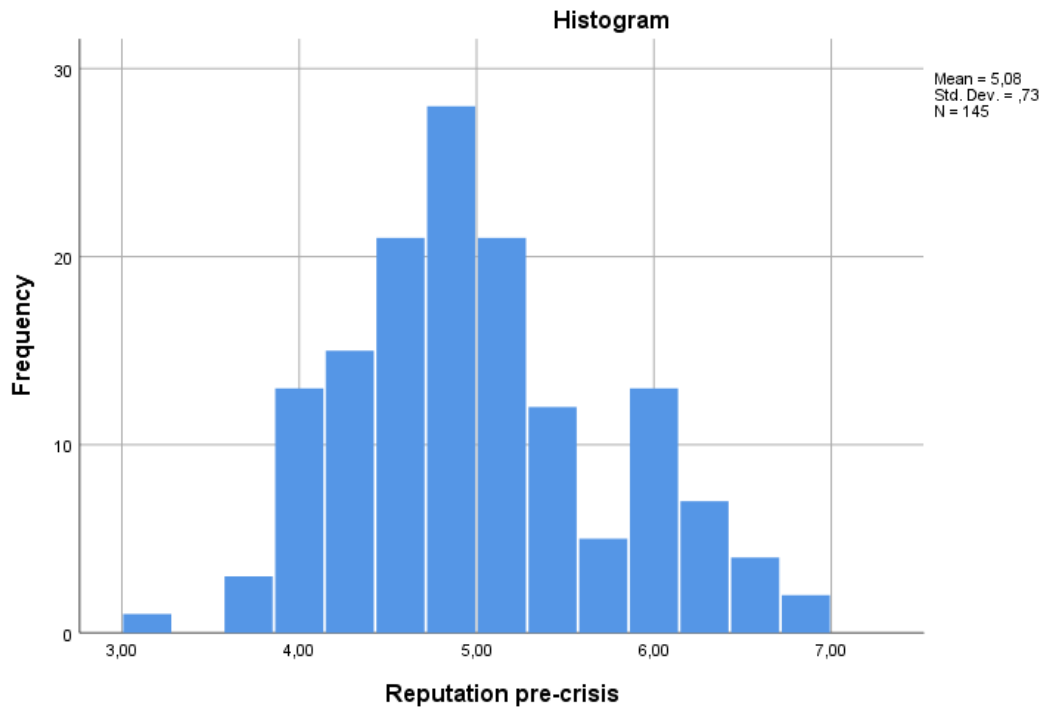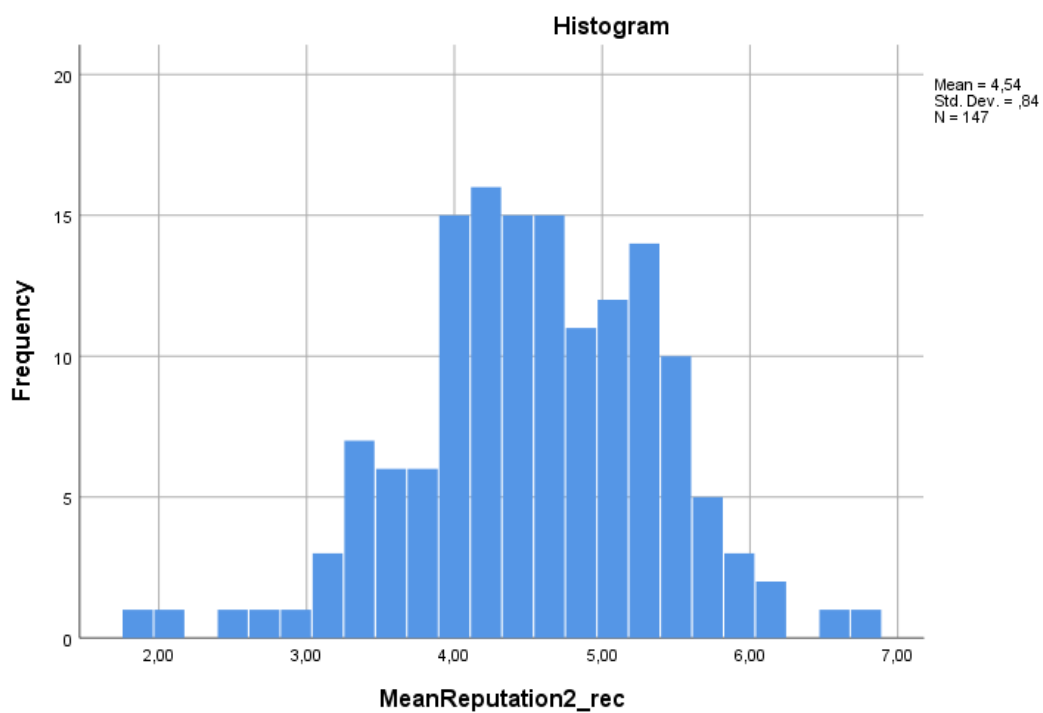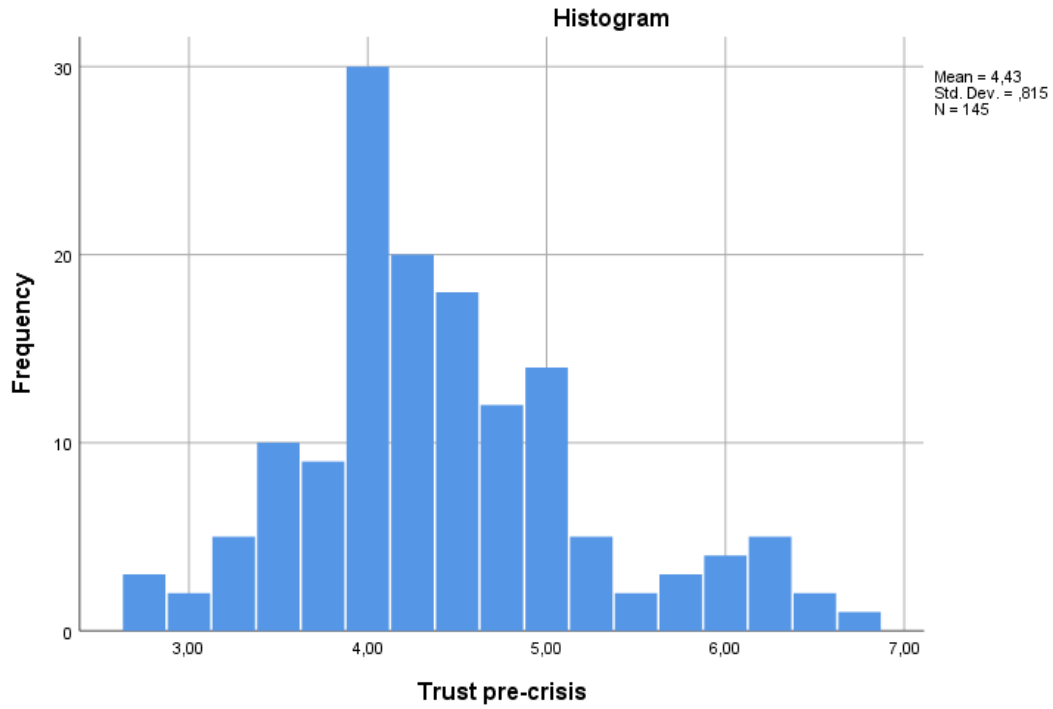# APPENDIX I. CHECK ASSUMPTION OF NORMALITY

Figure H1.

Figure H2.

Figure H3.

Figure H4.