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The Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication. A multiple case study.

AUTHOR

ADVISOR:

Student number	Name:	
223908	Kateryna Cherniavska	Tone Therese Linge
228523	Live Andrea Mikkelsen	

Abstract

This study builds on a multiple case study of two Norwegian organizations within aviation who underwent crisis situations in the past year. The main purpose of the study is to explore the role of social media in crisis communication through a qualitative approach. Four research questions were formulated to investigate the usage of Facebook and Twitter during and after a crisis situation, crisis response strategies and the challenges of social media in crisis communication.

Three semi-structured interviews were conducted, in addition to a content analysis of Facebook and Twitter. The findings suggested that an organization's presence on social media is reliant on the scope of the crisis. Also, it appeared that the public puts more trust in traditional media rather than social media. Furthermore, it was evident that the social media aspect is underdeveloped in crisis communication and crisis communication strategies such as SCCT.

This study acts as a contributor to the field of social media in crisis communication and allows organizations in other industries to gain insight into several factors of significance on the appliance of Facebook and Twitter in a crisis situation.

KEYWORDS: *crisis communication, social media, SCCT*

Contents

1.0 Introduction 1

2.0 Literature review 3

2.1 Introductory paragraph 3

2.2 What is a crisis? 4

2.3 Social media and Web 2.0 6

2.3.1 Social media during crisis communication. 7

2.3.2 Negative side of social media and crisis communication 8

2.3.3 Social media and ethical crisis communication 9

2.4 SCCT - Situational Crisis Communication Theory 11

2.4.1 Crisis situation model of SCCT 17

2.5 Image Restoration Theory 19

2.6 Discourse of renewal 20

3.0 Methodology 23

3.1 Introductory paragraph 23

3.2 Qualitative research 23

3.3 Research method and design 24

3.4 Interviews 25

3.4.1 Sampling 25

3.4.2 Qualitative measurement 26
3.4.3 Data collection 27
3.4.4 Strengths and weaknesses 28
3.5 Content analysis 30
3.5.1 Sampling 30
3.5.2 Qualitative measurement 31
3.5.3 Data collection 32
3.5.4 Strengths and weaknesses 33
3.6 Ethical Perspectives 34
3.7 Validity and Reliability 35
4.0 Results 38
4.1 Introductory paragraph 38
4.1.1 Organization Sun 38
4.1.2 Organization Moon 38
4.2 Interviews 39
4.2.1 Organization Sun 39
4.2.2 Organization Moon 45
4.3 Content analysis 49
4.3.1 Organization Sun 49
4.3.2 Organization Moon 54
5.0 Discussion 57
5.1 Introductory paragraph 57
5.2 SCCT and crisis response 57

5.3 Social media in organizations Sun and Moon........59

5.4 Research questions........62

5.5 Managerial implications........64

5.6 Limitations........65

5.7 Future research suggestions........66

6.0 Conclusion........68

References........71

Appendix........78

Appendix 1: Interview guide for Sun and Moon........78

List of tables:

Table 1 Presentation of participants 26
Table 2 Number of posts on Facebook and Twitter of Sun 31
Table 3 Number of posts on Facebook and Twitter of Moon 31
Table 4 Sun's codes distribution from Facebook 53
Table 5 Sun's codes distribution from Twitter 54
Table 6 Moon's codes distribution from Facebook 56

List of figures:

Figure 1 Crisis situation model of SCCT 18
Figure 2 Screenshot from Facebook Sun 49
Figure 3 Screenshot from Facebook Sun 50
Figure 4 Screenshot from Facebook Sun 50
Figure 5 Screenshot from Facebook Sun 51
Figure 6 Screenshot from Facebook Sun 51
Figure 7 Screenshot from Facebook Sun 52
Figure 8 Screenshot from Facebook Moon 55
Figure 9 Screenshot from Facebook Moon 56

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"Graduation is an exciting time. It marks both an ending and a beginning; it's warm memories of the past and big dreams for the future." (Unknown)

1.0 Introduction

In 2019 and 2020 two organizations experienced two individual crises that caught a lot of attention from both the media and the public. The scope of the crises was somewhat substantial which resulted in rumors and uncertainty for not only the organizations but also the public. When a crisis occurs, organizations' necessity is to minimize the impact of the crisis and restore the reputation. One of the steps that organizations can take, is to provide effective crisis communication towards the stakeholders and those affected by the crisis (Liu, Palen, Sutton, Hughes, & Vieweg, 2008; Sigala, 2011). Social media has become an essential tool in organizational crisis communication and enabled organizations to better understand the needs of the stakeholders and improve organizational reputation (Roshan, Warren, & Carr, 2016). However, it is still challenging for organizations to employ social media correctly in order to facilitate effective crisis communication (Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2014; Roshan et al., 2016).

Social media in crisis communication is still an emerging field of research which acted as a motivational factor for us to explore and contribute to more evidence-based research. The research topic woke our interest because social media is a tool of emergence in several industries. A tool of great support and assistance not only in a crisis situation, but on a daily basis. The combination of social media and crisis was alluring to us and resulted in a study aiming to explore both challenges and opportunities of social media in a crisis situation and how the two organizations experienced the involvement of social media when communicating in a crisis.

This study addresses social media in crisis communication in a multiple case study. The purpose of the study is to explore what role social media has in crisis communication by focusing on Facebook and Twitter.

Our main theoretical research background is the SCCT by Coombs (2006). Simultaneously, we apply attribution theory, image restoration theory and discourse of renewal theory as a part of the theoretical background as it is of relevance for our research topic and contributes to a more comprehensive perspective of crisis communication.

In order to explore this topic we formulated four research questions;

RQ 1. - What role plays social media in crisis communication?
RQ 1.1 - How was Facebook and Twitter used during the crisis?
RQ 2. - What crisis response strategies were used?
RQ 3. - What are the challenges of social media in crisis communication?

To answer the research questions we chose to conduct semi-structured interviews and a content analysis of the relevant posts on Facebook and Twitter during and after the crises.

This study is presented as follows. First, we will set out a theoretical background and the literature review that is relevant for the research topic. Second, we will describe our research method. Following, the presentation and analysis of the findings. Finally, we will discuss the findings and managerial implications, and eventually draw a conclusion.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Introductory paragraph

This thesis is based on Situational Crisis Communication Theory founded by Coombs (2000) given the great relevance for our chosen research purpose and analysis. SCCT provides an insight into different aspects of a crisis and its responses. SCCT has become one of the most used theories in crisis communication. Even though SCCT was developed before social media emerged, it can potentially help organizations to handle crises with the help of social media (Roshan et al., 2016).

Given the research questions for this thesis, it is reasonable to look into topics such as definition and main aspects of crisis where the focus lies on organizational crisis and crisis communication. The next part will address social media and the general definitions, followed by social media during crisis communication. To include more perspectives of crisis communication, we will introduce a paragraph on the negative sides of the usage of social media in communicating during a crisis and its ethics.

Eventually, we will deeply explore Situational Crisis Communication Theory and go through different types of crisis situations and applicable response strategies. Furthermore, we will explain the crisis situation model of SCCT which illustrates how an organization should act in a crisis situation. Additionally, we will elaborate on reputation repair theories of post crisis communication, in particular Image Restoration Theory and discourse of renewal.

2.2 What is a crisis?

Weick describes crises as events of low probability and yet of high consequence that might be threatening for one's goals (Weick, 1988). Such an event or incident is usually perceived as unexpected and negative. The emotions that follow after the crisis can lead to the feeling of vulnerability and change in one's state of mind (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003). Millar and Heath believe that reactions to crises can vary in their intensity and power, but they will affect individuals in either a physical or a cognitive way (Millar & Heath, 2003).

In our thesis we are focusing on organizational crisis, and based on this we will use a definition developed by Coombs: «a crisis is a significant threat to operations that can have negative consequences if not handled properly» (Coombs, 2007, p.3). Furthermore, Coombs also points out «that the threat is the potential damage a crisis can inflict on an organization, its stakeholders, and an industry» (Coombs, 2007, p.3). Another relevant definition of organizational crisis from Coombs is: «an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes» (Coombs, 2011, p. 3).

Organizational crisis situations can lead to the threat of public safety, financial loss and reputational loss. Public safety is the top primary concern when a crisis hits. If any deaths or injuries occur, it will intensify the level of a crisis. Financial and reputational loss, as damaging as they can be, are the secondary concern and should be addressed only after public safety has been taken care of (Massey & Larsen, 2006). It must be noted that all the threats are interconnected, and most likely will appear during the crisis regardless of its degree or magnitude (Coombs, 2007b).

Crisis associates directly with crisis communication. Crisis communication is the way an organization responds to a crisis situation (Roshan et al., 2016). Coombs and Holladay defined crisis communication in the following manner: «crisis communication includes the collection and processing of information for crisis team decision making along with the creation and dissemination of crisis messages to people outside of the team» (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 20). Lerbinger characterizes crisis communication as the way an organization addresses the public in a crisis situation. The first statement is a crucial step in the crisis communication process as it sets the priority line for the handling process. Furthermore, Lukaszewski suggests a sequence of steps that an organization can implement to achieve an efficient crisis communication. The first step (1) is to minimize or control the incident. The second step (2) is to bolster the trust of the public and the employees which will also lower the possibility for negative media attention. The third step (3) is to communicate with the media and tell the story (Coombs & Holladay, 2011; Lerbinger, 2011; Lukaszewski, 2013).

Because of globalization, continuous development of technology and increased usage of social media, organizations experience crises more regularly. Due to this, crisis situations are still unpredictable but not unexpected (Coombs, 1999; Sigala, 2011).

2.3 Social media and Web 2.0

There are countless ways to define social media. Generally speaking, social media is an umbrella term for applications and interactive platforms where individuals and communities can share and customize User Generated Content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Delerue, Kaplan and Haenlein define social media as «a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content» (Delerue, Kaplan & Haenlei, 2010, p. 101).

The development of social media started about 23 years ago, and back in 1997 there was already a social media platform, "Sixdegrees" where you could create profiles and add friends. This concept went on, which later brought us platforms such as MySpace and Facebook that are active to this day (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Social media includes e.g Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Wikis and microblogs (Balana, 2012). Alexander characterises social media as «interactive communication, in which message content is exchanged between individuals, audiences, organizations and sectors of the general public» (Alexander, 2014, p. 718).

To better understand the whole picture of social media and the web, it is important to distinguish and see the difference between web 1.0, web 2.0 and social media. Web 1.0 is about providing information to the visitors which in general terms is a one-way communication. Web 2.0 on the other hand is a term that defines the second generation and evolution of web-based development and design (McPherson, 2009). Web 2.0 is about connecting people and facilitation of User Generated Content and usability while providing a two-way communication (Leung, 2009). The idea behind web 2.0 is to encourage users to share content worldwide by using applications that are accessible from anywhere. Video and image sharing are the two main examples that can often be found on blogs and social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube (O'reilly, 2005).

Two-way communication on social media lets users create and share information effortlessly which in a crisis situation can potentially be of great value and turn the crisis into a more manageable situation. During a crisis there is a constant flow of updates and information, and through social media these messages are made available for everyone and is a convenient platform to participate in real-time discussions (Sigala, 2011).

2.3.1 Social media during crisis communication.

Social media is becoming a significant part of crisis management by facilitating room for user generated information and discussion. This arena is beneficial for both crisis managers and all the other parties involved e.g. stakeholders (Sigala 2011). Past crises such as natural disasters have paved the way for people to see the significance and contribution of websites to support and guide, not only crisis managers and those who are directly involved, but also those in different geographical locations to stay up to date and bring assistance if possible (Liu et al., 2008; Sigala, 2011).

Social media and crisis communication is an emerging field of research which is yet to be expanded and further developed, but even after a few studies there is a clear evidence that different types of social media (blogs, microblog etc.) facilitate the dissemination of information in real-time and constant flow on both national and international levels

(Alexander, 2014). Coombs argues that previous studies and the rapid growth of social media have influenced modern crisis communication as it has a distinctive way of facilitating two-way communication. Jin, Liu and Austin confirmed in their study that because of user preferences almost every organization is now using social media to communicate with both stakeholders and the public during crises (Jin et al., 2014). Organizations will benefit from communicating on social media as it will strengthen the relationship with stakeholders and build a foundation of trust which the organization can lean on during future crises (Lachlan, Spence, Lin, Najarian, & Del Greco, 2016).

User Generated Content (UGC) in crises plays a beneficial role as it allows organizations to get access to the content and stay up to date on the happenings on the scene during and after the crisis due to the real-time sharing of pictures, videos and posts on the web (Palen & Vieweg, 2008). In some cases, UGC can prevent a situation before it becomes a crisis because it gives organizations the opportunity to monitor and detect potential problems (Sigala, 2011). Additionally, according to Kent and Taylor's framework, real-time interactions create a dialogue that facilitates openness and vulnerability which in situations of uncertainty promotes credible and effective communication (Du Plessis, 2018; Kent & Taylor, 2002).

2.3.2 Negative side of social media and crisis communication

As helpful as social media can be in crisis communication, it has the potential of turning into a disadvantage. In some cases, social media can even escalate the crisis as it has the power to spread false or misleading information. Moreover, the high speed of sharing false information and sometimes rumors can create a chaos among the population and in the organization. This can create an additional pressure on the organization and damage the reputation if not dealt with properly (Alexander, 2014).

Social media is accessible for everyone as it creates a space for people to freely share their opinions in the comment section on a Facebook post, or participate in the spreading of imprecise information which can dramatize a situation. Photos and videos posted by people during a crisis can add to a false perception of the situation and imprecise information, which all are contributors to the power of the internet (Alexander, 2014). Castillo, Mendoza and Poblete in their research discovered that Twitter had the power to create rumors and spread fear in a population (Castillo, Mendoza, & Poblete, 2011). This factor can make it more challenging in crisis communication for organizations because according to Coombs and Holladay, messages on social media can either work for an organization by helping to repair their reputation or against it in case of unfavorable comments (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). Castillo et al. pointed out that because of the negative aspect of social media, the public have more trust in traditional media such as newspapers (Castillo et al., 2011). Social media provides a high volume of information which undoubtedly makes it difficult to find reliable information which according to Alexander is perhaps one of the biggest challenges for both the public and the organizations (Alexander, 2014).

2.3.3 Social media and ethical crisis communication

Ethics can be defined as: «beliefs about what is morally right and wrong» (Erim, 2011, p. 7). Ethics is central in the context of crisis communication. Technology has affected the way organizations manage and communicate during a crisis, and the ethical aspect has changed with it. For instance, if there is an accident that involves fatality, organizations have to keep certain factors such as personal information of whoever is involved private.

Organizations should have policies in place, that in case of an incident would not violate the privacy of anyone involved. Even if the crisis is of lesser damage, the same policies must remain. With the frequent use of social media during the past decades it became easier to breach rules and policies because the ethical boundaries became less prominent (Alexander, 2014).

The activity on social media can differ according to the crisis type. If a community experiences disasters caused by nature such as tsunami, earthquakes, floods etc. it will usually unite people as they all face the same consequences. According to Alexander, such disasters tend to consolidate the inhabitants and create a “therapeutic community”. During such a period, social media acts as a means of communication and support (Alexander, 2014). The inhabitants show their support to each other by communicating on social media where Twitter is frequently used. Twitter is used to generate hashtags to raise attention to the crisis. These hashtags usually go viral and reach out to many worldwide (Gruber, Smerek, Thomas-Hunt, & James, 2015). During the hurricane Sandy 2012 that hit the east-coast of the United States and caused major damage, people originated the hashtag #sandy to support those affected by the crisis (Spence, Lachlan, Lin, & del Greco, 2015). In such events, the feeling of unity initiates people to act and communicate towards what is morally right (Alexander, 2014).

Contrarily, other crisis types such as accidents in an organization regardless of the cause, can result in unethical behaviour from the public on social media. Georgescu and Popescul mention in their research that Facebook is the most used social platform where it is easy to not only participate in discussions, but also start speculations that can potentially bring on unnecessary rumors onto the organization. More often than not, those who start these discussions operate anonymously as they create fake profiles which is an easily attainable option on Facebook. This is how unethical behaviour is created (Georgescu & Popescul, 2015). In situations like this it can be challenging for organizations to control the information flow on social media. The public will normally look for answers as to why the incident happened which can turn into a so called “blame game”. Additionally, organizations should be careful not to participate in discussions as this can contribute to more rumors and possibly reputational damage (Alexander, 2014).

2.4 SCCT - Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Situational Crisis Communication Theory is a framework and approach to crisis response which can protect and rebuild organizational reputation and minimize negative effects (Coombs, 2007b). The theory divides crisis situations in 13 types and provides an applicable response strategy to each of the types. Additionally, SCCT works as a mechanism to protect the relationship between stakeholders and the organization in a crisis.

Coombs developed SCCT based on Attribution Theory as a guide for post-crisis communication, which is a more extensive framework of Attribution Theory. Back in 1980, Mowen was the first to discover the important connection between Attribution Theory and crisis communication, and how this connection can contribute to more evidence-based crisis communication instead of unscientific experience (Mowen, 1980). Weiner shaped Attribution Theory on the assumption that people search for cause and explanation of a negative event, and how it affects people's behavior (Weiner, 1972). Crisis communication and Attribution Theory are interrelated in the way that crisis usually hits without any warning and the first reaction that follows is “What happened? Who is responsible? Why did it happen?”. In a crisis situation the stakeholders are the ones that need the answer to those questions in order to protect themselves, meanwhile organizations need to protect their reputation. In this type of situation, the stakeholders top priority is to get an overview of the whole situation in order to make a decision if they want to continue to cooperate or end the relationship (Coombs, 2007b).

To gain a better understanding, the theory presents three causes of dimensions that affect an attribution. First one is locus of control. Locus is the cause of the crisis, either internal or external. Internal locus of control is where one believes they have control over the outcome in a situation. External locus of control is where one interprets events as beyond their control. Second dimension is stability which shows if the cause will change over time and if the attribute contains unchanging factors. Third and last dimension is controllability. This dimension indicates the degree to which the one can control the cause. Here the difference is between the cause that one can control, such as one's skills and the cause that is dependent on someone else, for instance their actions, which are uncontrollable (Coombs, 2007a).

SCCT presents three different types of crisis. The (1) victim cluster refers to the type of crisis where the organization is a victim and not the cause of it. Most common examples of the victim cluster are crises caused by nature such as earthquakes, fire or tsunamis. Other examples are rumors, workplace violence and product tampering. Rumors that spread around or inside the organization can often contain false and damaging information. Workplace violence is also placed under the victim cluster, where employees attack each other both physically and mentally at work. Product tampering is when external operators commit damage to the organization. Since the organization is a victim of the crisis, it leads to a mild reputational threat and lower crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007b).

The second type of crisis cluster is the (2) accidental cluster. As the name suggests, it is when organizations experience crises unintentionally or by accident. Technical-error accidents and technical-error product harm where technology and equipment fail, are the two examples that can lead to crisis situations in the organization. In some cases, if the stakeholders believe that an organization acted in unethical manner it might worsen the situation for the organization. Accidental cluster can therefore cause a moderate reputational threat and the organization might face some crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007b).

The third type of crisis, (3) preventable cluster can harm an organization the most. Unethical actions or violated laws which organizations intentionally execute can not only put organizational reputation at risk, but also its employees. This cluster presents different cases such as human error accidents, product harm or organizational misdeed where stakeholders are the victims. Whether injuries occur or laws are violated it can directly harm the stakeholders and the organization and severely damage the organizational reputation. The crisis responsibility fully lies on the organization as the crisis could be prevented (Coombs, 2007b).

SCCT suggests that there are three intensifying factors that play a significant role to which degree the organization's reputation is threatened. Initial crisis responsibility indicates to which extent the stakeholders hold the organization responsible for a crisis. Crisis history is the second factor which highlights past crises or misconduct of the organization. A history of crisis can be an indicator of an issue that lays underneath the surface and is not being properly dealt with. Prior relationship reputation indicates how the organization has treated the stakeholders in the past. An unfavorable prior relationship reputation refers to poor treatment of stakeholders and serves as a weak foundation on how well the organization handles a future crisis - “the bank of trust” is already poorly set (Coombs, 2007b).

If a crisis occurs, independent of the size or extent of damage, organizations will benefit from having a response strategy. Crisis response strategies are a combination of how the management addresses the media, how they minimize negative effects and repair the reputation (Coombs, 2007b). SCCT includes different crisis response strategies. Coombs argues that there must be an initial crisis response called instructing information. Instructing information is separated from other crisis response strategies. As SCCT suggests, instructing information is a step that cannot be avoided during a crisis. It will provide an understanding of the crisis and its scope to the stakeholders. Instructing information is divided into three types: (1) Crisis basics, will provide the basic information about the crisis situation; (2) Protection, how stakeholders can protect themselves; (3) Correction, the measures that organizations are taking to correct the problem or prevent a similar crisis in the future. It must be mentioned that organizations may not follow the steps systematically because the crisis type can contain unavailable information. If the cause of the crisis is unknown, it will be challenging to execute corrective measures. Although as more information becomes available, the organization must disseminate information to the stakeholders (Coombs, 2007b).

According to Coombs, crisis response strategies are optional but it can also be argued that in order to protect organizational reputation there must be a response to the crisis. Also, having a well-planned strategy will signify respect and sympathy towards the victims and stakeholders. The primary crisis response strategies are denial, diminish and rebuild (Coombs, 2007b).

Denial

Denial is when the management will either prove that the crisis is non-existent, or won't admit to the responsibility. If the crisis is really non-existent the management should try to put it to evidence towards the stakeholders and media in order to protect the reputation. Coombs provides three options for denial response strategies. The first option is when management attacks the accusers who claim that the organization is facing a crisis. Second, scapegoating is when the management blames someone else for the crisis. The third option is denial where the organization refutes the crisis event (Coombs, 2007b).

Diminish

The diminish crisis response strategy focuses on two primary approaches. First, the organization declares little to no responsibility for the accident and lessens the negative effect of the crisis. This strategy is often used in the victim cluster, where the crisis is outside of the organization’s control. Assuming that the organization is a victim of the crisis, managers in most cases need to provide substantial evidence that backs up their statement of innocence. If the organization succeeds to prove to stakeholders and the public that the crisis was beyond their control and they are not at fault, it will minimize reputational damage and harm. Second, the organization tries to communicate to the stakeholders that the extent of the accident is minimal. The main purpose of diminish response strategy is to reduce crisis responsibility and protect the relationship with the stakeholders as well as organizational reputation

(Coombs, 2006, 2007b). Social media as a factor can complicate the diminishment strategy as the news are spreading fast through several online platforms where some information can be considered untrustworthy.

Rebuild

Rebuild strategy is beneficial to use if the crisis was intentional or preventable. If the organization was a victim of a crisis, but has a crisis history and poor reputation, the rebuild strategy is a good attempt to improve the reputation. The main emphasis of the strategy is to act effectively towards the stakeholders. In such case the organization will usually issue a public apology while providing all the needed help and/or compensation. That is why rebuild strategies can be considered costly, which is why not every organization is able to fully compensate their stakeholders. One might think that this strategy is the most optimal regardless of the crisis type, as it addresses the victims. However, Coombs argues that rebuild strategies should be used cautiously as it actually can worsen the situation if it's unsuitable for the particular crisis (Coombs, 2007b).

Bolstering

Bolstering is categorized as a secondary crisis response strategy, and Coombs suggests to use it additionally with the three other primary strategies. This strategy can not act alone, but it will strengthen the connection between the organization and stakeholders. This type of strategy focuses on maintaining and/or bolstering the stakeholders perception of the organization. By doing this organization reminds the stakeholders about past good work and builds up goodwill. However, Roshan et al. suggest in their study that bolstering strategies can also be used in isolation if the primary strategies are not applicable in a crisis (Coombs, 2007b; Roshan et al., 2016).

All the crisis response strategies mentioned are guidelines provided by SCCT that act as a template for how to handle crises efficiently. One of the main factors that needs to be considered when choosing the response strategy is how your stakeholders will interpret the information. Organizations assume that their chosen crisis response strategy will be received and understood by the stakeholders, but in some cases organizations fail to fully convey the message. SCCT suggests that crisis type, crisis history and past relationship reputation are the important factors that need to be taken into account by the crisis managers when choosing crisis response strategy (Coombs, 2007b).

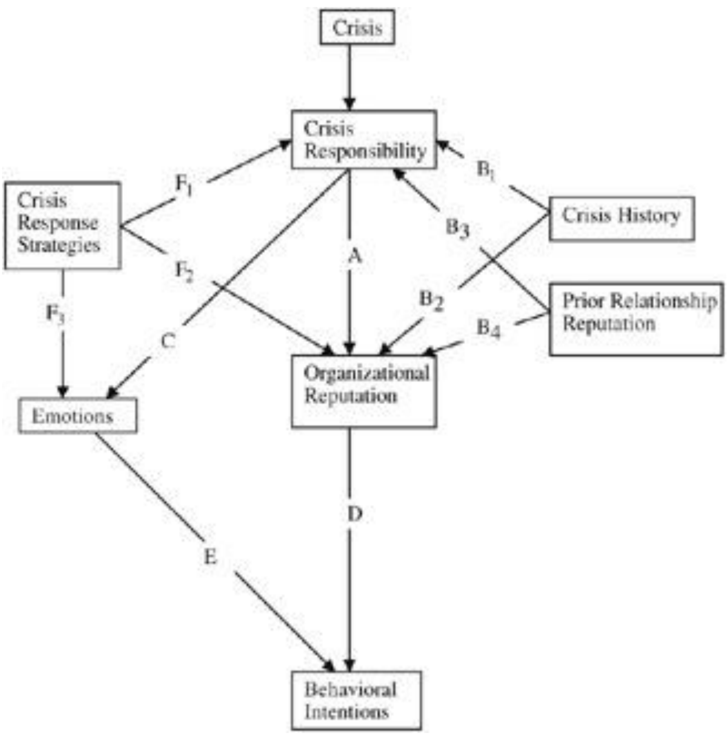
Another significant factor for how to respond to a crisis is dependent on the financial situation, which can make organizations to employ the next best strategy. SCCT can help to determine the strategy that will require less resources but still show enough responsibility and restore reputation (Coombs, 2007b).

2.4.1 Crisis situation model of SCCT

The model represents how an organization should act in a crisis situation to achieve the best end result. According to the model when a crisis situation arises, the first aspect would be crisis responsibility. How much responsibility the organization will take depends on the next aspects such as crisis history, prior relationship reputation and crisis response strategy. As an example, if an organization has an extensive crisis history and poor relationship reputation, the extent of responsibility will increase. If this is the case, all the aspects will reflect on the choice of crisis response strategy. If the crisis was intentional, the response strategy should contain more elements that would regain trust and repair the reputation, as opposed to when the organization is a victim of the crisis (Coombs, 2007b).

Crisis history, prior relationship, crisis response strategy and crisis responsibility all affect the organizational reputation and the amount of threat. Crisis responsibility and response strategies are linked to the emotions of stakeholders such as empathy or anger. In addition, emotions are determined by the pre-crisis and post-crisis phase such as preparation and “lessons learned”. How the organization handles the crisis will later reflect on the behavioral intentions of the stakeholders. They can either show their support or spread a negative word of mouth. The aspect of crisis responsibility is prominent throughout the whole model, and from an early stage it can predict the outcome of the crisis (Coombs, 2007b).

Figure 1 Crisis situation model of SCCT



In conclusion, the main goal of SCCT is to facilitate organizations with communicative advice. SCCT provides a baseline on responses independent of crisis type. Organizations should firstly get the crisis under control and to prevent further damage. Thereafter, organizations should be able to help those affected by the crisis cope psychologically, by expressing sympathy and reaffirming actions will be important and can prevent the same type of crisis in the future (Coombs, 2007b, 2011).

2.5 Image Restoration Theory

Benoit´s Image Restoration Theory offers five strategies to repair the crisis-damaged reputation of an organization; (a) denial, (b) evasion of responsibility, (c) reducing the offensiveness of the act, (d) corrective action and (e) mortification (Benoit, 2008).

(a) Denial strategy suggests that the organization was not at fault and the involvement in the crisis is non-existent. (b) Evasion of responsibility argues the minimal responsibility in the situation, or that the crisis situation was accidental. (c) Reducing the offensiveness of the act lets the public see the crisis or the involved organization as less alarming (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). Seeger and Padgett mention in their research that reducing the offensiveness of the act strategy includes three sub strategies: (1) bolstering, (2) differentiation and (3) transcendence. Bolstering occurs when the organization attempts to minimize the negative effects of the crisis. Differentiation is when the current crisis is being compared to a more threatening crisis to minimize the public's negative perception. Transcendence tries to highlight the event in a broader and more positive context in order to improve the organization's image. In addition to these three sub strategies, Benoit adds three more which are minimizing the crisis, attacking the accuser and compensating the victims (Benoit, 2008; Seeger & Griffin Padgett, 2010).

(d) Corrective action implies that an organization will take corrective measures in order to repair the damage after the crisis. (e) Mortification is the last strategy with the most uncertain outcome. Even if an organization admits to its wrongdoing and apologizes for it, it can lead to a lawsuit (Benoit, 2008; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). Coombs mentions similar response strategies in post crisis communication. Denial strategy in both theories imply that organizations refuse to admit to their involvement in the crisis. Parallels can also be drawn between diminish strategies and evasion of responsibility where the focus lies on diminishing or minimizing the accountability. Although the Image Restoration Theory and SCCT have a few similar traits, SCCT focuses more on post crisis public relations while Image Restoration Theory emphasizes the actions that can repair the damaged reputation (Coombs, 2007b; Seeger & Griffin Padgett, 2010).

2.6 Discourse of renewal

Image Restoration Theory and SCCT are considered as more traditional crisis communication strategies. In some situations, organizations have the need for an alternative post crisis communication strategy. Ulmer and Sellnow established a discourse of renewal theory that consists of four components (Boatwright & Mazer, 2017; Ulmer, Seeger, & Sellnow, 2007). This theory centralizes the positive aspect of a crisis event and emphasizes the potential opportunities instead of threats of a crisis (Seeger & Griffin Padgett, 2010). The first component (a) organizational learning, deals with evaluation of origin of the crisis and the way it could have been dealt with differently. Second component (b) ethical communication, suggests that all communication to the public and stakeholders must happen in an ethical manner meaning that the organization shows its vulnerability and no information is withheld. Third component (c) prospective versus retrospective vision, targets the rebuilding aspect focusing on becoming more aware of stakeholders needs (Mazer, Dutchak, & Thatcher, 2017). This component is future oriented, as it brings out potential growth and profitability (Ulmer et al., 2007). The last component (d) sound organizational rhetoric, is oriented towards the communication with all the parties involved in the crisis. This should be done in a way that inspires and motivates the public and stakeholders in order to level up the mindset (Mazer et al., 2017).

Due to technological development during the past decade post crisis communication can become more practical by applying discourse of renewal on different social media platforms. According to Kent and Taylor, the use of discourse of renewal through social media can lead an organization unscathed through a crisis as the social web such as Facebook allows for two-way interactions and thus opens up for stakeholders dialogue (Du Plessis, 2018; Kent & Taylor, 2002). Yang, Kang and Cha support this in their study on dialogic communication and trust, by stating that interaction with the public can increase trust towards the organization (Yang, Kang, & Cha, 2015).

In crisis situations most organizations nowadays choose to provide real-time updates to the public and even though the content given to the public is controlled, the organization can not foresee the upcoming reactions e.g. comments and discussions (Corcoran, 2009). Discourse of renewal correlates with resilience-generating theory, since by focusing on the positive aspect of the crisis the organizations validate their resilience (Du Plessis, 2018). Several scholars mention in their studies that resilience can be grown and maintained with communication (Buzzanell, 2010; Carlson, 2018). By sharing real-time updates to the public organizations demonstrate their resilience and preparedness by communicating and being transparent, as well as addressing the needs of stakeholders. The discourse of renewal on social media can lead to a more efficient post-crisis communication and result in a more positive outcome, as well as contribute to image and reputation (Du Plessis, 2018; Ulmer et al., 2007).

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introductory paragraph

In this part we will address how our study was conducted and look into our choice of method. We will explain our research method and design. Our data collection methods, interviews and content analysis, will be described separately with a step by step description of the processes, its data collection as well as strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, we will mention ethical perspectives of the research. Finally, we will describe the concept of validity and reliability.

3.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative research can be defined as:

> Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions on inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports details of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Khan, 2014, p. 225).

Qualitative research seeks answers to social problems or topics on values, behaviours and cultural context of a population. Qualitative research provides understanding on human experiences and a deeper perspective on the research topic through an interpretive approach

(Jacobsen, 2015; Mack, 2005). Qualitative research is applied when a researcher aims to get a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. The objectives can be opinions and relationships, as well as factors such as social norms, religion, gender roles and social status (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007; Mack, 2005). Semi-structured interviews, participant observation and focus groups are considered to be some of the most used methods within qualitative research (Neuman, 2014a).

3.3 Research method and design

In our study we conducted a multiple case study with an exploratory design. Case study is a research strategy that is based on a real-life phenomenon that aims to find answers to how and why questions, and focuses on a small group of individuals or on a small geographical area (Yin, 2003). However, our study focuses on two crisis situations within two different aviation organizations, which makes it a multiple case study. According to Yin, multiple case studies can provide a richness to the research as one gets to explore a case or a situation from various perspectives and an interpretative angle (Yin, 2003). In our study, the cases consist of organizations. Yin distinguishes between three case study categories; explanatory, descriptive and exploratory. Our research questions are formulated as “what” questions, therefore our case study is exploratory (Yin, 2003). Exploratory case studies seek to take a deeper look at a phenomenon where the outcome is unpredicted. Obtaining details is much simpler when conducting a case study as opposed to quantitative research method (Zainal, 2007). The outcome of the research might lead to further examination and observation of the research subject (P. Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Choosing a multiple case study, gave us an opportunity to examine two different crisis situations and analyze how the organizations handled social media as a means for communication. In order to get an insight in both crisis situations and social media we conducted semi-structured interviews followed by content analysis.

3.4 Interviews

The purpose of a qualitative research interview is to describe the experience of the participant by using words, rather than numbers. The participant describes the situation as accurately and descriptively as possible (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

We chose interviews as our data gathering method because it is suitable for our research questions as we want to explore and go in depth of social media in crisis communication. We wanted our participants to share their thoughts and experiences from the crisis, therefore we believed that semi-structured interviews would help our participants to open up and give extensive answers. Originally our plan was to conduct approximately 10 to 12 interviews, but as a result of global pandemic (Covid-19), we only got in touch with three participants. However, even with three interviews, we felt that the given answers provided us with detailed data. Additionally, in order to achieve even richer data that could contribute to answering RQ1.1 “how was Facebook and Twitter used during the crisis?”, we conducted a content analysis of posts on Facebook and Twitter.

3.4.1 Sampling

As a first step to get in touch with potential participants, we sent out emails to the management of the organizations where we introduced ourselves and described the research topic. The sampling strategy we applied was non-random purposive sampling as our intent was to get in contact with those who had a role during the incidents, e.g the management and communication team. The first to respond to our email was head of communications for organization Sun. Shortly after the first interview, we scheduled the second interview with the managing director for organization Moon.

Table 1 Presentation of participants

Participant	Organization	Position	Seniority
P1	Organization Moon	Managing director	7 years
P2	Organization Sun	Head of communications	7 years
P3	Organization Sun	Managing director	1 years

3.4.2 Qualitative measurement

The interview guide was developed simultaneously while working on the literature review, as we based the questions on SCCT, crisis communication and social media. Hereafter, the questions were categorized into following:

- Introduction
- Generally/before the crisis
- Crisis strategy
- Social media during the crisis
- Communication during the crisis
- After the crisis
- Own experiences

- Follow-up questions

We chose to categorize the interview guide accordingly to the research questions as this gave a better structure and overview throughout the interview sessions and analysis. The interview guide was reviewed and approved by our advisor. On paper we had 30 questions in total, but the dynamic and the responses during the interviews came into play, where some questions got adjusted or follow-up questions were added to clarify or maintain the conversation flow.

3.4.3 Data collection

Due to the Covid-19, the interviews were held on telephone and Skype. In two of the interviews we could see the participants through video call, while the third interview was a regular phone call as our participant did not have the possibility to use Skype. The interview guide was not presented beforehand as we wanted the answers to be more spontaneous and authentic, rather than prepared. The first two interviews took place in March 2020 and the third one in April 2020. All three interviews were recorded with a tape recorder instead of a phone recorder as no internet connection is allowed during the interviews. We followed the requirements of the guidelines on processing personal data §8.1 “Requirements relating to equipment/procedures when recording audio material/or videos/images” provided by Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD, 2020). Each interview had the duration of 30 to 40 minutes. The interview guide was originally written in English, however we decided to conduct the interviews in Norwegian as it facilitated a better communication flow. All the participants have Norwegian as their mother tongue, therefore it was natural and more comfortable for them to express themselves.

The transcription process started briefly after the interviews, followed by the translation process from Norwegian to English. Transcribing shortly after an interview will help the researcher to recall the interview in a better way in regard to emotions and body language (Jacobsen, 2015). Jacobsen also claims that it gives an opportunity for the researcher to contact the participants if any confusions or follow-up questions must appear (Jacobsen, 2015). In order to assess inter-rater reliability of the interviews, we analyzed and coded them separately (Hallgren, 2012). We chose to code the interviews by following the categories on the interview guide. This resulted in four codes:

1. Crisis strategy
2. Social media and communication during crisis
3. Social media and communication after the crisis
4. Personal experiences

We chose to analyze the data from all the participants by combining their answers under each category. This gave us a clear overview over the vast amount of data which later would contribute to flow for the reader in the results chapter. Thereafter we compared our interpretations and combined the findings into one. Due to Covid-19, the further data collection process was put on hold but in the mid April we managed to conduct the third interview with the airport director for Sun. The same translation and transcription process got repeated. Furthermore, we tried to get in touch with more potential participants in Moon, but unfortunately without luck.

3.4.4 Strengths and weaknesses

Semi-structured qualitative interviews have a strength to deeper explore one's feelings and experiences of a phenomenon which provides detailed data and can potentially strengthen the validity of the findings. In our interview process we experienced that participants opened up more when we asked them to share their own experiences of the incidents. Open-ended questions made the participants speak more freely, which gave us a more nuanced data and insight in their emotions during the time of the crisis (Choy, 2014). Addedly, a participant's point of view and personal experiences can facilitate the development of new perspectives that the researcher did not consider in advance. Semi-structured interviews can in some cases generate new angles to the research, which can add to a more comprehensive data collection (Neale, 2008). The framework of the interview process allows both the researcher and interviewee to clarify any aspects on a subject in order to stay true to the context (Neuman, 2014b).

However, semi-structured interviews can be considered as subjective and open up for bias of the researcher which can weaken the reliability. Interviews are time-consuming and comes with a possibility that a researcher might miss a few details, especially after conducting several interviews (Neale, 2008). When the interviews are not conducted face-to-face, it makes it more challenging for the researcher to grasp certain emotions and nuances of the body language of the participant (Neuman, 2014b). Neuman's statement aligns with our own experience that the Skype interviews contributed to a closer connection to the participants, as opposed to the interview that was held over the phone.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, we also conducted content analysis with the aim to get a more comprehensive picture and gain deeper insight on the usage of social media during and after the crises.

3.5 Content analysis

Qualitative content analysis is a method for analyzing text data by applying subjective interpretation. Content analysis is a process of coding with the aim to identify patterns of the context. Qualitative content analysis is divided into three approaches: (1) conventional, (2) directed and (3) summative (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The goal for our content analysis was to discover how organizations Sun and Moon used their communication strategies in their recent crisis situations on social media. We chose conventional content analysis as this type of analysis is appropriate when looking for themes and trying to comprehend the sense of the whole. Instead of using preconceived categories, the categories emerged based on the context of the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Coombs and Holladay claim that content analysis can be useful for organizations in order to learn if their crisis communication responses were success or failure (Coombs & Holladay, 2011).

3.5.1 Sampling

The sampling strategy for the content analysis was non-random purposive sampling since we were looking at all the posts on Facebook and Twitter made by the organizations on the dates of the incidents. To collect all the necessary data there was no need for us to get in contact with anyone as all the information we needed was available for everyone on social media. Our primary goal was to look closely into the comment section and the response rate from the organizations. However, the number of likes (reactions) and shares/retweets was also of interest as it showed the overall activity on the organizations accounts, which contributed to a better analysis and understanding.

3.5.2 Qualitative measurement

We conducted content analysis by looking at all the relevant posts on Facebook and Twitter on the dates of the incidents and the following periode. Tables 2 and 3 show the number of posts on Facebook and Twitter for the organizations.

Table 2 Number of posts on Facebook and Twitter of Sun

Organization Sun	
	Posts
Facebook	11
Twitter	4

Table 3 Number of posts on Facebook and Twitter of Moon

Organization Moon	
	Posts
Facebook	6
Twitter	0

The timeframe for the content analysis was two months for organization Sun and one month for organization Moon. Although to ensure the anonymity of the organizations we can not disclose the dates of the incidents.

3.5.3 Data collection

The coding process consisted of developing themes from the posts on Facebook and Twitter. We attempted to follow phases and stages of theme development in qualitative content and thematic analysis (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). The first phase (1) initialization: we read through every post and comment on Facebook and Twitter while trying to immerse ourselves into the data. Every comment that we found noteworthy was highlighted. In step two of phase one the initial categories were created. Category one and two were created based on the emotion behind the message from the public. Category three included all the questions from the public. Category four included comments of low relevance. In step three of phase one we made reflective notes to make more meaning of the data and potentially increase the trustworthiness (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

Phase two (2) construction: consisted of classifying the messages, comparing them to each other, labeling categories and defining them (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). This resulted in four codes:

1. Sympathy/support
2. Dissatisfaction/anger
3. Questions
4. Irrelevance

Phase three (3) rectification: in this phase a researcher needs to distance him-/herself from the data in order to verify developed themes. To achieve the distance, we shifted our focus back to the interviews and read thoroughly through them. It was interesting to see if the content from the interviews matched the reality performed on social media. The fourth and last phase, (4) finalization: finally, we went back to the content analysis to look if there was a pattern that followed through every post. Eventually, we tried to analyze the gained knowledge against RQ1.1 “how was Facebook and Twitter used during the crisis?” and draw a conclusion.

3.5.4 Strengths and weaknesses

One of the main strengths of content analysis is the involvement of creativity. According to Morse, involvement of creativity can sometimes lead to innovation, however only if the researcher is experienced (Morse, 2008). Content analysis is a systematic analyzing process, and therefore, offers replicability and a certain degree of reliability. Additionally, content analysis is flexible as it can be done at any time and requires minimal resources (Kohlbacher, 2006). We experienced content analysis as a systematic and easily achievable method to collect data. In our case, the content analysis had a clear timeline with precise dates which made the process easy to follow.

Cho and Lee claim that content analysis is a time-consuming process, which is considered to be one of the weaknesses (J. Y. Cho & Lee, 2014). Having said that, in total we had 21 posts on Facebook and Twitter that needed to be analyzed which wasn't too extensive, hence the process did not take long to perform. Content analysis invites subjectivity in the researcher's interpretation, which is considered as a weakness and is apparent in most qualitative research (Visram, 2015). Researchers can have different interpretations of the same content, which hinders the replicability aspect. For instance, two researchers might not come up with the same codes for the content and Visram claims that it depends on the researchers' own experiences and upbringing (Visram, 2015). Therefore in order to ensure reliability in our study we came up with initial codes separately and later compared and combined them into final codes. Another downside of content analysis is the risk of not producing enough applicable data, which was relatable for our analysis because of the few number of posts within the stipulated framework (J. Y. Cho & Lee, 2014).

3.6 Ethical Perspectives

Research ethics is a central aspect in scientific research, and concerns how researchers should act towards the subject of the research and participants. As a researcher one should always follow ethical guidelines, be fair and objective to the empirical material. Honesty about the background and purpose of the study when approaching participants is crucial and lays the foundation for responsible research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

NSD is a tool that provides guidelines for researchers to ensure the opportunity for safe and effective research (NSD, 2020). As the first step of our research, we requested to get approval of NSD by sharing the purpose and the background of the research. When the NSD approved our request we drafted the first email to the potential participants, which later got approved by our advisor to make sure that we followed ethical guidelines and provided all the needed information about the rights and anonymity. In addition to participant anonymity, we kept both organizations anonymous throughout our thesis in order for our participants to feel safe when sharing information and own experiences, and also to avoid possible reputational damage to the organizations.

Prior to the interviews, we sent out the consent form containing their rights as an interviewee, and informed the participants that the interview was going to be recorded using a tape recorder and that they and their organization would remain anonymous. We asked them to consent orally on tape to secure their anonymity according to NSD.

We made sure to inform the participants that they had the right to withdraw their participation at any time without an explanation. Additionally, the participants were free to choose not to answer some of the questions in case it contradicted with their ethical guidelines. The ethical aspect of scientific research acted as guidance throughout the data collection process, which also reflected in the openness of our participants.

To conduct content analysis in an ethical manner, we made sure to keep all information regarding the organizations and the crisis situations anonymous. The posts that are presented in the results section, contains no information that could reveal the identity of the organizations. In addition, all the names from the comment section were also left out. All the names that can compromise the anonymity of the organizations were changed into fictional names.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

Validity in qualitative research refers to whether the research showed what it had intended to show, and determines the degree of whether preconceived knowledge matches the reality (J. Cho & Trent, 2006). Validity is a term used in both qualitative and quantitative studies, namely because there is a need for qualifying check or measure (Golafshani, 2003). The term reliability is often used in quantitative studies and insinuates that several researchers can conduct the same study, go through every step and eventually will achieve the same results. However, the interpretive nature of a qualitative study makes it difficult for other researchers to replicate and reach the same conclusions (Brink, 1993).

In quantitative studies the measurements of validity and reliability are much more precise as the criteria comes in the form of numbers. When conducting a quantitative study it is natural to include criteria such as internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. Even though these criteria can also be applied in qualitative studies, there has been discussions among researchers that qualitative studies require different criteria (Anney, 2014). Guba and Lincoln suggested that: «internal validity should be replaced by that of credibility, external validity by transferability, reliability by dependability and objectivity by confirmability» (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 3-4). Credibility signifies the description accuracy of the research object and ensures that the research findings represent correct interpretation of original data collected from the participants. To enhance the credibility of a study, researchers often use a method of triangulation. Patton refers to triangulation as a combination of different methods or strategies for collecting data in order to get a more extensive understanding of the research phenomena (Patton, 1999). In our research we applied triangulation of data sources by conducting interviews and content analysis on social media for both organizations. Our intention of this process was to conduct the interviews before conducting content analysis as we wanted to see if the findings from the interviews matched the findings on social media. Unfortunately, the analysis of the interview of Moon turned out to be less comprehensive as we only got to interview one participant. Therefore the credibility might be weakened.

Transferability in qualitative studies implies to which degree the findings of the research can be generalized or transfered to other contexts (Anney, 2014). The intent of our research was not to achieve generalizable findings, but to look closely at two specific organizations that recently underwent crisis situations and how they handled social media. However, it can not be ruled out that findings of similar nature might be discovered in future case study research within social media and crisis communication. Dependability concerns whether the research would get the same results if it was repeated in the same context (Anney, 2014). Although this concept might be possible in quantitative studies, qualitative studies are dependent on the researcher's personal interpretation of the findings. Hence the research process described in the methodology chapter needs to be as transparent as possible for other researchers in order for them to follow it as a guide and understand the chain of reasoning in the present study. Confirmability in qualitative research is the last criterion towards determining trustworthiness of a study. According to Baxter and Eyles, the degree of confirmability measures whether the findings of the research can be confirmed by other researchers. In order to achieve confirmability, it is necessary for the researcher to ascertain what preconditions that may have influenced the interpretations. Such preconditions include the researcher's background and his/her reasons for conducting the study (J. Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Our interpretation of the findings is based on our personal understanding of the theory presented in the literature review. We cannot exclude personal bias as we based our analysis on personal experiences and perception of the crisis situations.

4.0 Results

4.1 Introductory paragraph

In this chapter we will present our findings from the analysis. We will start with a short presentation of the organizations. Thereafter, we will present the results from the interviews followed by the content analysis.

4.1.1 Organization Sun

Organization Sun is an international airport located in one of the bigger cities in Norway. The airport operates with approximately four million passengers a year.
At the start of this year Sun underwent a crisis situation where one of the buildings on their premises caught fire. The extinguishing process lasted a whole night leaving an extensive damage to the building. This resulted in material damage but luckily no one got hurt.

4.1.2 Organization Moon

Organization Moon is a helicopter organization with approximately 100 employees that is based in several cities in Norway. The services they offer varies from cargo flight to sightseeing. During an event where Moon offered sightseeing trips, one of their helicopters crashed. The accident ended in fatalities for both the pilot and passengers. The cause of the accident is still under investigation.

4.2 Interviews

The results of the interviews for the organizations will be presented separately and according to the codes. The participants will be referred to as shown in Table 1 in the methodology chapter.

4.2.1 Organization Sun

P2 stated that Facebook is their primary communication platform, both for employees and the public, which was also confirmed by P3. Organization Sun uses different social platforms for various purposes, Facebook is for communicating with the public, Instagram is for branding, LinkedIn is to represent them as an employer and Twitter is mainly for journalists.

Both participants agreed that Facebook is their primary social platform, because according to P2 it reaches out to most which was obvious when conducting the content analysis. Also, most of their employees are active on Facebook which makes it convenient to communicate internally.

Crisis strategy

P2 and P3 stated that updating the public on relevant information is crucial for them. P2 explained: “We are very active. We focus on sending the “message” by using media handling and internal communication. Facebook is an example where we stay active. We document the latest updates on a relevant case on our Facebook page continuously.”

According to P3 social media is integrated into their crisis plan. During a crisis, they are more active on Facebook compared to Twitter, because there is a continuous change of information and Facebook is useful to document the latest updates.

Sun has teams/employees who are responsible for media handling during crisis, although the experience of P2 differed from P3 as their positions are unequal and they work from different locations. P3 also pointed out that they have different divisions but the media link is integrated into all of them. P2 mentioned that such a task force is convenient as they can reply to messages shortly, stay active and monitor the media during all times as well as reach out to many.

P2 stated that it is very important to respond to posts on social media, everything from basic and practical information to the updates during a crisis. P3 confirmed that. One of the main values for Sun is openness and P2 stated:

> We (Sun) are based on an important principle which is openness. So in every crisis we want to be open about the incident, as well as it is of course important to inform the public about the potential consequences …, so those are two basic principles that we always navigate after. That we will be open about what's going on and inform about the consequences.

Both P2 and P3 agreed that Facebook is where they get the best response.

P3 said that the whole airport is committed to the same mandatory crisis plan regardless of the crisis type. P3 added that their local strategy is built upon the central crisis strategy plan but it varies according to organization levels.

When asked to what degree the strategy was completed, P3 said that it was completed to a substantial degree and that the crisis protocol was followed. P2 emphasized that it was challenging to work according to plan because social media creates several sources of information and allows for many people to have different opinions. While Sun tries to navigate after "openness", their communication part on social media is narrowed down to important updates, flight information etc. P2 pointed out that when it comes to an incident they would not disclose any information about the injuries and possible deaths.

P2 and P3 were both satisfied with how the crisis was handled communication-wise and they were not looking to make any major changes in the crisis plan in the future. P2 pointed out that the feedback from the public was good and there was an overall satisfaction on how Sun handled the crisis. However, P3 mentioned that there might be some adjustments on how they will cooperate with the local emergency services.

Social media and communication during crisis

According to P3 social media was used actively providing frequent updates on Facebook and via press releases. All information that was going to be posted had to be approved by the communications' and organizations' manager. P2 explained: "..., it's up to me to formulate the message to use in the media internally, and on all of our platforms."

When asked about the challenges concerning media handling during the crisis, P2 answered that every incident is different and lack of routines can be challenging because an organization needs to be aware that a crisis can escalate quickly. P2 added that it is crucial to act right away when a crisis arises otherwise it will create a "lag" in the system and slow down the communication flow on Facebook.

P2 was asked to tell about the opportunities of using social media during the crisis. P2 responded: "Well, it's all about being quick and becoming a primary source of information regarding the event which is easy and beneficial when you can use social media. It's very practical because you stay close to the travellers."

Communicating with the public during the crisis was very important according to P2. P3 commented that frequent communication was significant and it made people feel calmer.

Last question was to what degree did it help to be active on social media during the crisis considering reputational damage. Both of the participants saw the importance of social media during the crisis considering minimizing reputational damage because one can share simplified and precise messages simultaneously on several channels. P2 experienced social media as a tool that helps to get the information out in the early stage of a crisis and added: "Social media is crucial in creating the impression that we are in control of the situation."

Social media and communication after the crisis

When asked how important it was to communicate with the public after the crisis the participants had slightly different responses. P2 didn´t see the importance of communicating after the crisis, as long as it did not affect the organization anymore. While P3 mentioned that it is very important in order to make people feel safe as they are the industry operating with peoples safety. P2 experienced the communication on social media after the crisis as exhausting at times because when the crisis averted the journalists and the press started digging for more information. P3 explained that as an organization they cannot go into discussions on social media and the organization has to stick to its original message.

When asked if the organization took any corrective measures to prevent the same type of crisis in the future, P3 said that there has been an internal investigation of the incident and they are constantly looking for improvements in order to prevent such a crisis.
P3: “It is important to work together as a team in one organization but also cooperate with other organizations. To stay united and take responsibility.”

According to P2, the feedback from the public was mixed, but after developing a media report and going through all the feedback they concluded that only a few critical questions were unanswered. P2 then added that police and other emergency services were satisfied with the way Sun handled the crisis which was somewhat a confirmation that they could handle an even bigger crisis. P3 was under the same impression. Not only was it a lesson learned for Sun, but it also created a learning curve for other organizations internationally.

Both of the participants mentioned that there were several lessons learned. P2 emphasized that social media is the platform that makes it easy to document everything with pictures and videos, however this made it challenging for the organization to keep up and enhanced the dramatic aspect. For P2 the location was a significant factor and affected the overall perception of the crisis which was one of the lessons learned:

> ..., and for me when I sit in **** as opposed to those who are at the airport looking at the burning building - they take it more seriously. I didn't at first, until I saw the pictures in the newspapers with all the smoke and flames. And of course this makes the situation more dramatic because of all the pictures, rumors about where the fire had started,…

P3 added that it is important to have defined roles and that crisis situations call for a well established communication.

Personal experiences

P2's personal experience of the crisis was the intense media pressure. Journalists would call 24/7, which made it overwhelming. P2: "You get a bad relationship with your phone because you are so sick of it ringing all the time which also affects your personal life."

To ease the media pressure, Sun constantly had three to four people on media watch which according to P2 was very helpful.

In P3's experience one needed to have a clear plan on what and how to convey a particular message, whether it's in the press or on social media. Both participants agreed that it is easier to convey the message when they firstly show compassion to those who are affected and that kindness and sympathy can go a long way. P3 also pointed out that this particular crisis facilitated an opportunity to prove they could provide the same quality service shortly after the incident occured.

P3 further stated that they navigated after “three knuckles” from their crisis response strategy; (1) We have a plan for this. (2) How to solve it (3) How to solve it with certain tools. P3: “These three knuckles will make you feel more prepared when addressing the press or social media”.

When asked if the participants used social media to keep themselves updated if a crisis occured, both answered yes without hesitation. Although P2 underlined that social media, especially Facebook, contains a certain amount of irrelevant information which makes sorting out useful information time consuming. Both participants highlighted that newspapers were more trustworthy when looking for reliable information.

Neither of the participants trust the information given on social media and the phrase of “fake news” was mentioned in both interviews.

4.2.2 Organization Moon

P1 stated that their primary social platforms for organization Moon are Facebook and Twitter. However, after some research we were unable to find Moon’s Twitter account. Moon uses Facebook as a means of communication with the clients and advertising purposes.

Crisis strategy

When asked about how social media is integrated in their crisis plan, P1 elaborated:

..., communicating during a crisis is not always the right thing to do. It depends on what phase you are in. We were quick to confirm on social media that we were the ones who were affected by the crisis, and then we didn't really communicate to the public.

P1 further explained that, independent of crisis type, social media is still integrated into the crisis plan and Moon has a few criteria that they follow. Every post on social media has to be approved by P1 and number and frequency of posts is always dependent on crisis type and the overall scope of the situation.

Moon doesn't have a team responsible for handling social media during a crisis. They do however have employees who are dedicated to social media being a secondary task in their job description. P1 stated that Moon has a good response rate from the public on Facebook and Twitter, and they make sure to respond to comments in a relatively short time.

Social media and communication during crisis

P1 experienced a mix of responses from the public after posting information on social media. “There was an attack against the company so it was very mixed. It was anger, it was compassion – it was a light mix.”

Moon chose not to respond to any comments on social media, whether they were positive or negative. Although, it was important to provide correct information about what has happened. It was important because the information published in the national media wasn't necessarily correct, which was both time consuming and challenging for Moon. P1 mentioned that the employees who had the main responsibility for handling social media during the crisis with such a fatal outcome, was tough and turned out to be one of the biggest challenges for them. To keep the public updated but also show respect and compassion for the families and community was a delicate balance.

Social media and communication after crisis

We asked P1 to tell us about the experience of communication on social media after the crisis. P1 answered that the overall experience was positive, Moon didn't lose many followers on Facebook and the negative comments subsided quickly. They received good feedback from the public and the appreciation for their openness in and outside of social media. "Openness never hurts. Openness is always important. Openness and honesty, as well as taking the responsibility for what happened."

In P1's opinion their reputation wasn't damaged after the crisis. After the crisis situation, Moon received good feedback from their stakeholders. " Every week I meet different people and communication advisors that think we did really good. We handled it with integrity."

P1 shared that this crisis taught them a lesson on a deeper level involving human emotions. Such a type of crisis left an impact on the whole organization. P1 referred to feelings of sorrow, anger, powerlessness and unity and then added that this crisis made them stronger internally.

Personal experiences

P1's personal experience of the first four hours was hectic as the crisis plan had to be set in motion right away. It was challenging to get a hold of emergency services, next of kin and own employees.

> I found out what happened after it was already in the media. And there are a lot of things rushing through one's head when this kind of thing happens, even when you´ve got all the routines and instructions in place.

Moon started taking measures as fast as they could, decided who was going to address the media and how. The media pressure was intense in such a sudden and uncertain crisis situation. "Some can handle it, some can't. I've been working a lot with this, so my experience was good, if you can call it that."

We asked if P1 stays updated on social media if a crisis situation occurs. P1 said no, and added that they, for this particular crisis, hired a person to handle the media after a few days. P1 doesn't trust the information given on social media and further stated that they had to correct a lot of information in the newspapers and social media. "Social media has got a lot of power. The downside is that it's got a great deal of "fake news" so we need to respond or comment, and it can be challenging. And starting discussions doesn't always pay off."

4.3 Content analysis

4.3.1 Organization Sun

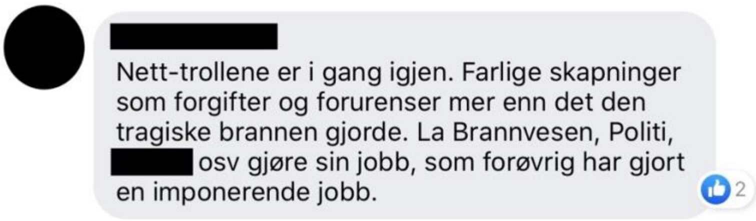
Facebook

Organization Sun made the first post on Facebook just a couple of hours after the fire had started. In the post they informed the public about the fire and the ongoing fire extinguishing. They asked to refer to their website for further updates and information. The post got 118 likes, 15 shares and 53 comments. 41 of the comments fell under the category of irrelevance, 4 under questions, 5 under dissatisfaction and 2 under sympathy/support. The comment section included speculations about what started the fire, irrelevant statements and discussion on the lack of safety. Sun did not respond to any comments from the public. In the example below a user was asking for more information by demonstrating frustration in an irrelevant comment:

Figure 2 Screenshot from Facebook Sun

Another example on one of the two comments under sympathy/support showed a user's gratitude towards Sun and the emergency services, where the user also acknowledged the "net trolls" which emphasised the amount of irrelevant comments:

Figure 3 Screenshot from Facebook Sun



A few hours later Sun made a second post to inform about air traffic and how they could help the passengers with transportation. They referred to their official website for more information. The post got 40 likes, 26 shares and 17 comments. 12 of the comments fell under irrelevance, 1 under questions, 3 under dissatisfaction/anger and 0 under sympathy/support. The comment section contained irrelevant discussion between the public and repeated comments on lack of information.

Example below shows a comment from a dissatisfied user that missed more information.

Figure 4 Screenshot from Facebook Sun

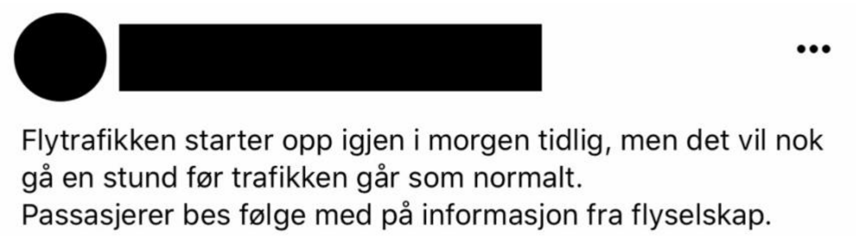
The second example shows a comment under the category of questions where a user asked for more information about the parking.

Figure 5 Screenshot from Facebook Sun

Sun did not respond to any of the comments.

Later that day Sun updated the public that the air traffic will be continued as normal the next day. See screenshot below.

Figure 6 Screenshot from Facebook Sun



The post got 91 likes, 8 shares and 33 comments. 23 of the comments fell under the code of irrelevance, 5 under questions, 2 under dissatisfaction/anger and 0 under sympathy/support. Sun replied to one of the comments regarding practical information about parking. See screenshot below.

Figure 7 Screenshot from Facebook Sun

The next day Sun posted information about parking facilities and still referred to their website for more information. The post got 17 likes, 0 shares and 7 comments. 3 of the comments fell under the code of irrelevance, 1 under questions, 1 under dissatisfaction/anger and 0 under sympathy/support. Sun responded to one comment of dissatisfaction/anger on a complaint from a passenger regarding a poorly updated flight schedule. Two days later, Sun informed the public about parking and apologized for misleading traffic signs around the airport. The post received 17 likes, 14 shares and 2 comments. The post had 1 comment that fell under the code of irrelevance and 1 under questions, and 0 comments under dissatisfaction/anger and sympathy/support.

The next day Sun made another post with the extended information about the parking. The post got 13 likes, 8 shares and 1 comment. That one comment was under the code of question where the user asked about parking for a particular vehicle. Sun did not respond to the comment. Post number 7 informed the public about the temporary solutions regarding parking. The post received 10 likes, 2 shares and 1 comment. The comment fell under the code of questions, where a user asked for a map of the parking area, Sun did not respond.

Post number 8 informed about parking and how the damage from the fire would be handled. Sun referred to their website for more information. The post got 16 likes, 11 shares and 1 comment which fell under the code of questions regarding short term parking. Sun replied shortly providing necessary information. Next post also informed about parking and referred to the parking operator for more information. The post got 25 likes, 15 shares and 3 comments. 1 comment fell under the code of irrelevance, 1 under questions and 1 under sympathy/support. Sun responded to the question regarding parking. The next post informed about the new parking area. The post got 91 likes, 24 shares and 14 comments. The post had 6 comments under the code of irrelevance, 2 under questions, 1 under dissatisfaction/anger and 5 under sympathy/support. Sun did not respond to the questions. The last post from Sun regarding the fire was made on the same day where they informed the public about the technical issues with the parking operator. The post got 2 likes, 0 shares and 1 comment. The comment fell under the code of dissatisfaction/anger.

Table 4 Sun's codes distribution from Facebook

Facebook	Sympathy/support	Dissatisfaction/anger	Questions	Irrelevance
1. post	2	5	4	41
2. post	0	3	1	12
3. post	0	2	5	23
4. post	0	1	1	3
5. post	0	0	1	1
6. post	0	0	1	0
7. post	0	0	1	0
8. post	0	0	2	0
9. post	1	0	1	1
10. post	5	1	2	6
11. post	0	1	0	0

Twitter

The first post on Twitter from organization Sun was the same day as the fire and the post was published approximately at the same time as their first post on Facebook. The post was retweeted from another airport where they informed the public about the fire and that all air traffic was stopped. Sun also referred to their website for more information. The post got 6 likes, 6 retweets and 3 comments. 1 comment fell under the code of question, 1 under dissatisfaction/anger and 1 under sympathy/support. The question was from a passenger regarding an upcoming flight. The second post was made on the same day about an hour later, Sun informed about the ongoing situation and referred to the official website for further updates. They also published pictures taken from the media. The post got 3 likes, 2 retweets and 0 comments. The third post, was also made on the same day as the fire where Sun informed about the air traffic. The post got 0 likes, 2 retweets and 0 comments. The fourth and last post was made the day after and informed that the air traffic was up and running. This post got 2 likes, 1 retweet and 0 comments.

Table 5 Sun's codes distribution from Twitter

Twitter	Sympathy/support	Dissatisfaction/anger	Questions	Irrelevance
1. post	1	1	1	0
2. post	0	0	0	0
3. post	0	0	0	0
4. post	0	0	0	0

4.3.2 Organization Moon

Facebook

Organization Moon made the first post on Facebook the next day after the accident. In the post they confirmed that their helicopter crashed with six people on board. They informed the public that police and other emergency services were investigating the accident.

Organization Moon asked the public and the media for understanding. The post got 724 likes, 14 shares and 176 comments. All the comments fell under the category of sympathy/support. Screenshot below shows some of the comments.

Figure 8 Screenshot from Facebook Moon

The next post was made 3 days later where Moon informed the public that they were allowed to fly again but the investigation was still ongoing. The post had 402 likes, 5 shares and 0 comments.

Six days later Moon made another post to update the public on the status of the investigation. The post received 99 likes, 7 shares and 0 comments. A few hours later the same day, Moon made a new post to let the public know that the inspection was done but there were no findings. This post received 85 likes, 6 shares and 1 comment. This comment fell under the category of sympathy/support.

After only a couple of days Moon shared an article from the local newspaper where it said that a woman collected 100.000 kr for the next of kin of the pilot. The post was shared by the managing director of Moon. The post received 458 likes, 17 shares and 17 comments. All the comments fell under the category of sympathy/ support. See screenshot below for an example.

Figure 9 Screenshot from Facebook Moon

Table 6 Moon's codes distribution from Facebook

Facebook	Sympathy/support	Dissatisfaction/anger	Questions	Irrelevance
1. post	176	0	0	0
2. post	0	0	0	0
3. post	0	0	0	0
4. post	1	0	0	0
5. post	17	0	0	0

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Introductory paragraph

The aim of this study was to find out what role social media plays in crisis communication. The focus of this study was to explore the usage of Facebook and Twitter during two recent crisis situations in organizations Sun and Moon, including their crisis response strategies. We gathered the data by conducting interviews and doing a content analysis and then presented the findings. In this chapter we will discuss and conclude the findings, along with limitations and suggestions for future research.

5.2 SCCT and crisis response

According to SCCT, there are three different types of crisis. The crisis situations experienced by Sun and Moon were unintentional and out of their control. However, there are some factors of the crisis that are still unclarified, which makes it difficult to place within either of the clusters. Although, based on our findings both of the crises have similar characteristics to what is described in the accidental cluster. The accidental cluster is often caused by technical error and technical-error product harm (Coombs, 2007b).

The main research question and angle of the study was to explore how crisis response was communicated through social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Findings from the content analysis showed that Sun made the first post on Facebook shortly after the fire had started. In that post they provided the basic information about the crisis, which according to Coombs is one of the three steps of instructing information in the initial crisis response

(Coombs, 2006). For organization Sun the cause of the crisis was clear, which led them to take corrective measures to prevent a similar crisis in the future. Taking corrective measures is another step in the initial crisis response provided by Coombs (Coombs, 2007b). As for organization Moon, the cause of the crisis is still under investigation therefore according to P1 the corrective measures will be taken once the cause is clarified.

SCCT provides three crisis response strategies, which according to Coombs are optional but rather beneficial if the organizations want to protect their reputation (Coombs, 2007b). Our findings on the crisis response strategies of the organizations lacked necessary information that would put the organizations in either of the primary crisis response categories. Our focus lies on social media as a tool for crisis communication and therefore the findings are based on information from Facebook and Twitter, rather than focusing on the organizational and internal communication angle. Judging from the content analysis and information provided by our participants, both of the organizations showed traits of the bolstering crisis response strategy. It is evident from the posts on Facebook that the organizations maintained communication with the stakeholders during and after the crisis with the intention to bolster their relationship.

Even though bolstering is the secondary crisis response strategy and Coombs recommends applying this strategy in addition to one of the three primary strategies, bolstering is applicable in many of the crisis situations as it is more universal. This backes up Roshan et al. 's statement that bolstering can be used by itself and may be more appropriate in the social media context (Coombs, 2007b; Roshan et al., 2016). Based on our findings, we can conclude that the three primary strategies are very specific and descriptive and not always suitable in every crisis situation.

The crisis situation model of SCCT presents the aspects that can help an organization to achieve the best possible outcome of the crisis (Coombs, 2007b). After collecting data from the interviews and the content analysis and comparing the findings against the theory, we have discovered that the model is not consistent with our findings as well as we lack the information on the strategies and crisis history. Additionally, the model does not include social media as a factor that might affect the communication process during and after a crisis. Many scholars agree that social media should be integrated into crisis communication as it will strengthen their relationship with stakeholders and facilitate the dissemination of information in real time (Alexander, 2014; Jin et al., 2014; Lachlan et al., 2016). Our suggestion would be to consider adding a media aspect into the crisis situation model as this would bolster SCCT and become a more efficient way of communication.

Summed up briefly, these reflections only gave a partial answer to RQ2 and more information is necessary in order to give a more extensive answer.

5.3 Social media in organizations Sun and Moon

Organization Sun spends time on building and integrating social media into their crisis strategy. They operate on different social media platforms for different purposes such as Instagram and LinkedIn, but undoubtedly Facebook remains their primary platform for communication. Both participants from Sun stated that giving responses on social media is important for them, especially in the context of a crisis. Interestingly enough that was not evident in the content analysis. In particular Sun didn't respond to any comments on the first two posts on Facebook during the crisis. According to Roshan et al., the public expects human conversation and empathy from the organization (Roshan et al., 2016). Similarly, Coombs suggested that organizations should help those who were affected by the crisis cope psychologically by showing sympathy and reaffirming actions that will prevent the same type of crisis in the future (Coombs, 2011). These statements were supported by P2 and P3 in the interviews when they both mentioned that compassion towards those affected by the crisis is an essential part of crisis communication (Roshan et al., 2016). However, our findings from the interviews contradict the findings from the content analysis which proves the importance of the triangulation method and strengthens the credibility of the study (Patton, 1999). Theory-wise, this can indicate that there can occur a gap between crisis communication in theory and crisis communication in practice.

The comment section on Facebook revealed emotions from the public such as dissatisfaction and frustration in the form of questions where they were asking for information. Results from the content analysis of Sun showed a lot of comments of irrelevance where the public repeatedly was looking for answers as to why the incident happened, referring to the first post made by Sun on Facebook on the day of the incident where 41 comments were about what had started the fire. Due to the anonymity matter, we cannot provide the screenshot as it discloses too much information about the incident. For an organization it is challenging to control the information flow in social media, therefore according to Alexander it is normal behaviour for the public to wonder what had happened and begin the “blame game” (Alexander, 2014). Corcoran added that organizations can only control the content of the posts but not the upcoming reactions or discussions (Corcoran, 2009). In these situations organizations would not want to participate in discussions which was the statement emphasised by all three participants during the interviews. Alexander explained in his study that organizations participating in discussions can potentially damage their reputation (Alexander, 2014). Still, other studies show that a two-way interaction such as dialogue between the organization and stakeholders on social media can hinder unnecessary reputational damage and increase trust towards the organization. Having this in mind from the early stage of the crisis, the discourse of renewal can increase its value (Du Plessis, 2018; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Yang et al., 2015).

Based on the posts, one might assume that frustration and irrelevant comments could have been avoided if Sun would not only respond to relevant questions but also provide more frequent updates. Lack of response from Sun is apparent in every post on Facebook and Twitter. It must be noted that this is only based on the posts, and our perception could have been different if we were provided with the response rate on direct messages via the chat function.

As opposed to Sun, Moon experienced a type of crisis that involved fatalities creating a ripple effect in the community. P1 mentioned in the interview that they as an organization, but most importantly as human beings have learned a lot from this. They had to work together as a team to process the emotions which in the end only made them stronger. P1 further elaborated in the interview that the feedback they received from the emergency services and stakeholders was positive. Also, the statistics showed that they did not lose any followers on social media nor did they lose any customers. Moon continued to be transparent with the public about the investigation of the accident, which demonstrated their vulnerability and resilience which falls in line with the resilience-generating theory (Du Plessis, 2018). We believe that Moon demonstrated their transparency and resilience as a part of discourse of renewal which also bolstered ethical communication (Alexander, 2014).

P1 from Moon agreed that it is important to stay connected on social media and provide information if there is a crisis situation, but at the same time the circumstances of a crisis are important to take under consideration on how active one should be. For instance, Moon informed the public about their crisis on Facebook but did not respond to comments on any of the posts. The results of the content analysis showed that Moon as opposed to Sun, received only comments of sympathy and support. Coombs and Holladay argued that messages or comments on social media can either help an organization to repair their reputation or work against it if the comments are unfavorable (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). It gives us the reason to believe that comments of sympathy might have been one of the factors that managed to keep Moon's reputation on the same level during and after the crisis.

Sun and Moon experienced two completely different crises, hence different presence on social media. Sun and Moon's crisis situation made it clear that the crisis type is a major deciding factor for how active an organization should be during a crisis.

5.4 Research questions

To answer RQ1 and RQ1.1 we conducted interviews and content analysis of Facebook and Twitter. The findings have led us to a conclusion that crisis type is the factor that determines what role social media would have in crisis communication and sets the tone for the whole process. Sun kept the public updated by posting information on Facebook, but according to the content analysis several questions were left unanswered. This could indicate that Sun did not fully exploit social media as a means of communication. The content analysis of Sun also presented a clear divide between the usage of Facebook and Twitter. Twitter was significantly less used with only four posts compared to eleven posts on Facebook. As presented in the results chapter, the public also proved to be less active on

Twitter in comparison to Facebook. Moon only operated on Facebook mostly to inform about the crisis but because of the circumstances the two-way communication was intentionally absent.

So far, we have covered the social media aspect on the organizational level but we also wanted the participants to share their thoughts about social media and the way they use it. This helped us to find answers to RQ3 about the challenges of social media in crisis communication. We asked the participants if they personally trust the information given on social media. Interestingly enough, all of them mentioned the term “fake news”. None of the participants trust the information on social media, and to stay updated on the events they rather choose the traditional media such as newspapers. Castillo et al. underlined the same point in their study that media such as newspapers is more trustworthy for the public than social media (Castillo et al., 2011). The reason that traditional media is more preferable than social media may be because of the high volume of information which often tends to be unreliable which is probably one of the biggest challenges for both organizations and the public (Alexander, 2014). P2 in the interview confirmed this challenge and also added that organizations need to act right away because otherwise it will create a lag in the system and slow down the communication flow on Facebook. Communication flow is seen as an opportunity by P2, but can also be a challenge in many cases. Alexander pointed out that social media facilitates mass participation which can lead to uncontrolled communication in comment sections (Alexander, 2014). Our findings and the theory have led us to reflect on the differences between social and traditional media and the question arose: why is traditional media considered to be more trustworthy than social media? We believe that the answer lies within a lower threshold for participating in discussion on Facebook compared to traditional media. These discussions usually facilitate irrelevant opinions and point of views. This could be an interesting topic for a further study to investigate the possibility of social media to become a more trustworthy source of information.

After analyzing the data from the interviews and content analysis we have discovered some traits about the organizations that influenced their crisis communication on social media. Firstly, their communication style on social media platforms is different. Sun’s Facebook page appears to be a platform to show them off as a brand and operates in a commercial manner. Their posts are mainly based on service promotions and advertisements of new flight routes, which exudes a formal voice lacking hummanes. Moon, on the other hand, uses their Facebook page as a platform for storytelling where they share their daily assignments by expressing themselves in a personal manner. These differences were evident in the posts during the crises. This interpretation might be influenced by the size of the organizations as Sun is a larger organization than Moon. Based on the interviews, we can speculate that Sun has a more well-planned framework for facing crisis and better defined roles and structure. Contrarily, Moon is a smaller organization with fewer employees and therefore lesser defined roles.

5.5 Managerial implications

Our participants made several valuable points which might be of help to the industry to become more efficient in handling social media platforms. Organizations might benefit from having a team that focuses on social media. Choosing to study two different crisis situations led us to uncover the importance of adjusting an organization's presence on social media according to crisis type. Our findings from the content analysis could serve as an example for not only Sun and Moon, but also other organizations in order to learn if their crisis communication responses were success or failure, which could be an additional implication for the industry (Coombs & Holladay, 2011).

5.6 Limitations

This study is based on two cases within two organizations, and our findings might not be applicable for other organizations in crisis situations. This is why generalization of the results is not possible.

Because of the pandemic our sample size was limited to only three participants which was lesser than we anticipated. A study with larger sample size would illuminate more perspectives on the research topic which potentially would strengthen the validity. When working on the grounded theory for our study, we experienced little variety in the literature of SCCT which is evident in the literature review chapter as the most part of the relevant theory was written by Coombs. The theory lacks involvement from other scholars in order to gain a broader perspective, which would contribute to a more active frame of reference.

Prior to the data collection, our goal was to collect a representative amount of data from both Facebook and Twitter, however Twitter couldn’t provide us with much data. A research showed that Twitter is more frequently used when a community is experiencing a crisis caused by nature, where it acts as a hashtag generator and not platform for discussions which in our study played out as a limitation (Georgescu & Popescul, 2015; Gruber et al., 2015). We could also speculate that Twitter is not a common platform to use in Norway as opposed to other countries.

Our cases did not fully fit within any of the crisis response clusters as SCCT presents a fixed framework which is not suitable for every crisis situation and in combination with shortage of information from interviews, it resulted in a weak foundation in accommodating the answer to RQ2.

5.7 Future research suggestions

This study explored two different crises within the same industry over a relatively short period of time. Future studies could address other types of crisis over a longer period of time to investigate how a different time frame could influence the crisis response on social media. It would also be interesting to investigate the same type of crisis, not only in the context of Norway but internationally as well as shift the focus to other social media platforms such as Instagram.

We chose to conduct a qualitative study, and our suggestion could be to conduct a quantitative study by looking at a larger number of organizations and possibly explore stakeholders reactions of organizational crisis response on social media. Also, we briefly touched on the reputational aspect, and therefore a further suggestion would be to take a closer look on how the connection between social media and reputation affect each other in a crisis.

After analysing and discussing the findings, we discovered a gap in SCCT. The findings indicated that SCCT needs to be further developed in order to be used properly in the social media context, yet Coombs' clusters can act as a template for organizations in order to figure out the initial steps towards the best possible outcome.

Finally, a further suggestion would be to base the study on a different theory rather than SCCT and compare the findings against each other to spot potential differences.

6.0 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the role of social media in crisis communication through qualitative multiple case study. The data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews and content analysis of Facebook and Twitter.

SCCT accommodates organizations with a theoretical framework for communication in crisis and lays out a foundation that can protect organizational reputation (Coombs, 2007b). During the research process, it became apparent that the theory lacks a substantial framework that includes social media in crisis communication which was one of the first findings. On the other hand, there were evident traits of the discourse of renewal theory in Sun and Moon's crisis communication strategy and led us to believe that this theory is more applicable in the context of social media, and has the potential to further develop the research within the usage of social media in crisis communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Social media has an undoubtable role in crisis communication which was one of the main findings of the study. What role social media will play in a crisis is determined by the crisis type. Consequently, the presence on social media that an organization should have is reliant on the scope of the crisis. This case study provided evidence that an organization in crisis involving fatalities would have a lesser presence on social media and be more considerate in formulating the message compared to a crisis with only material damage. However, there are no clear guidelines, and organizations need to have knowledge on how to communicate ethically on social media in order to stay respectful towards the public and to handle the crisis with integrity.

Further, findings indicated that it can be challenging to act according to plan when communicating on social media due to the fact that, especially Facebook, is a user-generated platform that gives the freedom of speech to the public (Alexander, 2014: Leung, 2009). Organizations need to convey the message in an unambiguous way and know when to participate in discussions because it will affect the reputation and how people will perceive the organization externally. The interviews showed that navigating after values such as openness and honesty will help the organizations to obtain the best possible outcome and minimize the challenges.

One final point indicated in the content analysis ascertained that social media can be beneficial in terms of branding, but the challenges of using social media presented in this study can signalize that Facebook can not act alone as a source of information in crises, therefore traditional media is considered to be more trustworthy. Despite this, findings showed that by implementing social media as a tool for communication, organizations will strengthen their social media voice and have an ability to gain more control over the traditional media. Hence, these findings are of importance as they can improve the social media image and reputation. Additionally, it will make the implementation of social media in organizations easier as the findings can serve as a contributor to the topic of social media in crisis communication.

We believe that collecting data from several sources such as semi-structured interviews and content analysis gave us the opportunity to explore our research topic in a broader perspective. Moreover, it opened up for additional questions to discuss that would not be addressed without the triangulation.

Finally, this study did not aim to decide which organization handled the crisis better but rather to reflect on the factors that all affected Sun and Moon's crisis communication on various levels on social media. This reflection is of importance due to the fact that it sheds light on how two organizations applied social media in dissimilar ways and how it affected the overall outcome. Organizations in several industries can find this study useful as it can facilitate a starting point for their desirable implementation of social media in crisis communication.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide for Sun and Moon

Introduction

1. What's your current position?
2. How long have you been employed at Sun/Moon?
3. What are your daily tasks?

Generally/before the crisis

1. Which social platforms are being used in the organization? And how are they used?
2. How is social media integrated in your crisis emergency plan?
3. How active are you on social media during crisis?
4. Do you have a team responsible for handling of social media?
   - If no: What's the reason?
   - If no: Would you invest in such a team?
   - If yes: How has the experience been with such a team?
5. How important is it for you to respond to posts on social media?
6. Where do you get the best response from the public? Facebook or Twitter?

Crisis strategy

1. What strategies did you have in place before a possible crisis?
2. To what degree were they completed?
3. Will you make any changes in your strategies in the future?

Social media during the crisis

1. How was social media used during the crisis?
2. What challenges did you face?
3. Were there any opportunities?

Communication during the crisis

1. How important was it to communicate with the public during the crisis?
2. To what degree did it help to be active on social media during the crisis considering reputational damage?

After the crisis

1. How did you experience the communication on social media after the crisis?
2. Did you use any of that to better your routines in the future?
3. What did you do regarding the reputation of the organization after the crisis?
4. Did you take any corrective measures to prevent the same type of crisis in the future?
5. Did you get any feedback on the way the crisis was handled - both from your partners and the public?
6. Based on your experiences, how important is it to communicate with the public after a crisis?
7. What did you learn from this incident?
8. How did this crisis affect the relationship between the organization and your stakeholders?

Your own experiences

1. How did you experience and handle the crisis situation?

Follow-up questions

1. If a crisis situation occurs, do you go on social media to keep yourself updated?
2. Do you trust the information given on social media?