

**LAPPEENRANTA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

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**International Marketing Management (MIMM)**

**Master's Thesis**

**WEATHERING CRISES ON SOCIAL MEDIA – THEORY AND PRACTICES  
FROM SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVE ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING IN FINLAND**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Thesis compiles findings from previous research to produce guidelines on addressing crises on social media. These guidelines extracted from previous research are compared qualitatively with empirical evidence from 12 organizations by examining whether organizations apply practices recommended in previous research. Much of guidelines gain support from practitioners with few exceptions. Findings stemming from theory and practice combine to shed light on how controversies are born on social media, how crises can be prevented on social media and how organizations may manage crisis situations on social media. The majority of the resulting guidelines focus on how to address negative information and communicate during a crisis but other means of crisis management are also presented. Previous research had voiced that the field of public relations was very fractured, crisis management was lacking qualitative research and provided very little information on what organizations should do before a crisis. Thesis collects a comprehensive amount of previous research from various fields of PR in an effort to unite findings and guidelines, gathers and analyzes empirical data in a qualitative manner and includes a pre-crisis paradigm. One of the challenges in the field of crisis management still remains the absence of universally agreed definition of a crisis and the lack of means to quantify and compare the magnitude of crises.

## **Tiivistelmä**

<b>Tekijä:</b>	Antti Korpinen
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Tähän Pro gradu –tutkielmaan on koottu löydöksiä aikaisemmasta tutkimuksesta. Näiden teorialöydöksiä pohjalta on muodostettu toimintamalleja, joita verrataan laadullisen tutkimuksen keinoin 12 organisaatiossa käytössä oleviin toimintamalleihin. Empiriaalöydökset tukevat pääsääntöisesti toimintamalleja. Löydökset antavat suuntaa siitä, miten sosiaalisen median kohut syntyvät ja miten kriisitilanteita voidaan ehkäistä sekä hoitaa. Tutkielmassa esitetty ohjeistus koskee pääsääntöisesti negatiiviseen tietoon suhtautumista ja siihen vastaamista kriisin aikana. Tutkimuksessa on esitetty myös muita kriisinhallinnan keinoja.

Edeltävässä tutkimuksessa on ilmaistu, että PR-alan tutkimus on hyvin hajaantunutta ja kriisinhallinnan tarvitsevan lisää laadullista tutkimusta. Aikaisemmassa tutkimuksessa on korostettu myös tarvetta lisätutkimukselle toimenpiteisistä, jotka organisaatio voi tehdä ennen kriisiä. Tämä tutkielma yhdistää tutkimustietoa useilta eri PR:n osa-alueilta ja vastaa edellämainittuihin aikaisemmassa tutkimuksessa esille tuotuihin tarpeisiin. Kriisinhallinnan haasteisiin kuuluu edelleen puute yleisesti hyväksytystä kriisin määritelmästä sekä asteikosta, jolla kriisejä voidaan mitata ja vertailla.

## **FOREWORD**

Social media is a time-consuming environment with never-ending tasks and chores for those organization representatives that dare to take on the challenge. I want to give thanks to these individuals who managed to find time to contribute to this thesis. Your input is highly appreciated and this thesis could not have been completed without you.

Special thanks for the unrelated but fitting quote below go to Jim Milner, providing help all the way from the state of Washington in the US.

“Recognizing the threat is one thing; preparing for it is something quite different. If you do little more than familiarize yourself with the potential dangers, your chances of surviving improve slightly. With each and every preparation you make, those chances increase. However, understand that no matter what you do, there is no guarantee that you will survive. Likewise, if you do absolutely nothing, it is not a certainty that you will die. Preparing is all about improving your odds. By making well thought out preparations, you position yourself to have a better chance of surviving than those who have not prepared. “  
Arthur T. Bradley (2012, 13-14) in *Disaster Preparedness for EMP Attacks and Solar Storms*

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21.08.2016

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions in English

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# **1 INTRODUCTION**

The introduction chapter will begin by introducing the studied phenomenon and by justifying the need for further study. This is followed by clarification of the goals and focus of this thesis and explaining how the results of this study will fit into existing academic literature. The chapter continues by presenting the research questions which are formulated to reach the goal of the thesis. In order to explain how central terminology is perceived in this thesis, the essential definitions are provided next. Contemporary and past relevant literature will also receive attention in order to establish the current standing of the studies done in the areas relevant to the studied phenomenon. The chapter will conclude by briefly introducing the applied methodology, theoretical framework, delimitations and the structure of the thesis.

## **1.1 Background**

Before the age of Internet, consumers relied on traditional sources of information to guide them in their purchase decisions such as talking in person with the seller, reading magazines or by watching TV. Albeit those sources of information are still prevalent in the marketing mix of certain brands and products, it is generally accepted that the traditional channels of product information delivery have been forced to give way to social media marketing (Nambisan et al. 2007; Kirtiş & Karahan, 2011). The use of social media is on the rise as in 2010, only 31% of adult internet users in the US were using any social media site at all (Smith, 2010) and already in 2014 71% of adult US internet users were using Facebook (Duggan et al. 2015) which is only one of several popular social media sites. The same survey conducted by Duggan et al. (2015) also showed that the amount of individuals that used several social media platforms rose almost 25% from previous year, which also suggests that social media users are becoming more active on social media than before. The introduction of these new communication channels create new opportunities for marketing and is even changing how consumers behave, as they are evermore interconnected and give more weight to peer opinions (Okazaki, 2009). Studies such as Smith et al. (2005) and Trusov et al. (2009) also claim that word-of-mouth communication is often more influential than traditional advertising. These developments have not gone unnoticed by companies actively engaging in marketing efforts. Content Marketing

Institute (2014) concluded that 76.5% of companies doing B2C marketing in the US are engaging in content marketing and of which 93% conduct it on social media. This means that in the US at least 71% of active B2C marketers engage in social media marketing. Social media marketing was also still gaining budget share from traditional media marketing in 2014 in the US (CMO, 2014).

One central part of evolved consumer behavior from the perspective of this study is the change in customer feedback. Before consumers were not so keen on complaining in case they had a negative experience, as the costs of complaining were often seen higher than the benefits gained from complaining (Chebat et al. 2005). Social media is now providing numerous easily accessible forums for these potential complainers. The amount of customer anger and complaints is growing (McColl-Kennedy et al. 2009) and it can also have a true impact on business as a questionnaire conducted by Leibovitz (2011) in the US with over 500 respondents concluded. In that questionnaire 38.8% of the respondents were somewhat less likely to make a purchase from a company that was ignoring complaints on social media, 49.5% were far less likely to make a purchase and only 11.7% stated this would not affect future purchases. We have moved on to an era where Internet-enabled social media can truly have an impact on business.

It should also be recognized that even if a company's target group would not be very active on social media, friends and family of the target group relay information to these individuals as word-of-mouth takes place on the Internet and outside of it. Non-users' perception of a company's reputation is highly affected by activity on social media (Dijkmans et al. 2015). This means that having a target group that does not participate in social media is not an excuse for a company to disregard social media altogether. Especially children (Ming & Chou, 2009; Nørsgaard et al. 2007) as well as young adults (Kaur & Medury, 2011) affect on families' purchase decisions. If the youngsters of a family do not appreciate a brand, this may drive parents to purchase a competing product. This is especially true in low-priced consumables. (Isin & Alkibay, 2011) This means that both positive and negative information on social media extends also to non-user groups.

It is clear that by partaking in social media marketing in a correct way, companies have been able to reach larger audiences faster, with a better coverage and lower costs than by using traditional marketing channels (Kirtiş & Karahan, 2011). Social media also introduces new perils to businesses. Social media is a challenging environment and seeing

it just as an opportunity for a company is dangerous (Valentini, 2015). For example, an ongoing media crisis may seriously hinder a launch of a new product, as attitude towards a brand at a given time outweighs brand loyalty when it comes to a consumer's decision whether to spread information about the new product via word-of-mouth. (Okazaki, 2009) This has significant implications for social media crisis management.

Marketing encompasses countless definitions and is divided into numerous branches. Part of marketing is also damage control. It is discussed under a wide umbrella of topics including brand management, service recovery, corporate image and crisis management to name a few. Effect of negative word-of-mouth in business is real (Leibovitz, 2011; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Zhang et al. 2010) and in many cases, negative word-of-mouth is more potent than positive word-of-mouth (Sen & Lerman, 2007; Chang & Wu, 2014). In general, negative information seems to have a more profound impact on people than what positive information has (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Online damage control is beneficial in order to retain the brand image in a social media crisis (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012). A social media crisis can be triggered by a variety of causes (e.g. Hilse & Hoewner, 1998; Greyser, 2009) from a poor customer experience to a number of public relations issues that escalate into a social media issue. Public relations crises have been taking place since the beginning of interaction between individuals but the recent emergence of social media platforms have added a new dimension and catalyst to the mix (Gonzales-Herrero & Smith, 2008). There are indications that social media crises are growing more common (Pang et al. 2014) and it is most likely that sooner or later all companies face a social media crisis of some extent. Some will go through several. In the case of large publicly traded companies, there is an 80% chance that the company will face some form of reputational crisis during a five-year period, resulting in the loss of more than 25% of share value (Oxford Metrica, 2012). It makes sense to know how to act when a reputational crisis takes place on social media and how to prepare for such events, which is what this thesis focuses on. "It is no longer a question of whether a major crisis will strike; it is only a matter of when, which type and how." (Regester & Larkin, 2005, 157). This thesis aims to contribute mainly on a practical level, yet academics may benefit from some of the findings. Findings of the thesis are meant to benefit social media active organizations or those who are planning to establish a social media presence as well as PR-companies that are providing social media management services.

## 1.2 Positioning of the Study

It could be argued that crisis management on social media should be entirely segregated from traditional crisis management branch. According to Coombs and Holladay (2012), many contemporary crisis management authors are leaning towards this direction but they imply that this decision is made in pursuit of personal gain, so that the authors could better sell their seemingly novel ideas. “While social media does have serious implications for crisis communication tactics, strategy rarely goes out of style” (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, 410).

Another three authors who have written papers on both traditional crisis management and crisis management in the social media context agree stating: “While customers may have louder megaphones now, what they seek from the firms that let them down really has not changed all that much” (Grégoire et al. 2015, 182).



*Figure 1. Area of research including central contributing fields and related phenomenon.*

The phenomenon of social media transcends scientific fields. This thesis extracts theory from various fields from public relations to psychology in the quest to provide a comprehensive picture of the state of current research related to the phenomenon. Main contributing fields and related phenomenon are presented in figure 1. The findings of this thesis are positioned to extend the knowledge on crisis management in the context of social media.

### **1.3 Goals and Purpose of the Study**

Crisis management has been studied extensively, yet many authors still agree that while the introduction of social media has not made the entirety of past crisis management studies obsolete, some degree of modification should be implemented (e.g. Freberg, 2012). Lee and Song (2010, 1073) go even as far as stating that” [...] corporate response strategies to online complaints should be different from conventional response strategies.” It is clear that online context has introduced new challenges for public relations, brand management and customer service, that can only be met by extending the knowledge of crisis management. In addition, problems that emerge online can be less predictable than those that emerge offline (Coombs, 2008) further increasing the need for preparedness. Although recent research has armed practitioners with some practices to apply before a crisis, the point made by Kent (2010, 705) that the academic crisis management literature has had a “post hoc” approach to crises, meaning that little research has focused on the actions that a company can take before a crisis, seems still to hold true.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide practitioners methods and practices that they can use to prevent and manage crises on social media. In order to understand how to react and avert a brewing crisis, it is also necessary to understand how crises are born. This is the first goal of this study and it is to be reached by scanning relevant academic literature which alongside with the empirical research should provide decent insight on how the crisis process starts and escalates on social media.

The second goal of the study is finding out how an organization can prevent a social media crises. This goal is to be reached by scanning literature and by empirical research which is warranted as Huan (2015) indicated that at least on some of the areas of social media, academic knowledge is far behind that of the practitioners.

The third goal of the study is to find out how an organization should manage various crisis situations on social media once a crisis has caught wind. This goal is also to be reached by utilizing existing literature as well as by drawing insight from empirical research.

## 1.4 Research Questions

The main research question is as follows:

*How to manage and prevent crises on social media?*

In order to fulfil the purpose and achieve the goals of the study, the main research question was divided into three sub-questions. There are numerous studies in academic crisis management literature, which include the online context to a varying degree. Already six years ago Kent (2010) stated that over 130 articles had been published in *Public Relations Review* alone on the subject of crisis management. It can be challenging and time-consuming to form an understanding of how controversies sprout on social media. To provide some help to the problem and to achieve the first goal of the study, the first sub-question was formed as follows:

*How are controversies born on social media?*

To achieve the second goal of the study and to address the need for information concerning crisis prevention, the second sub-question was composed as follows:

*How can crises be prevented on social media?*

To achieve the third goal of the study, the third sub-question was formed:

*How can crises be managed on social media?*

By answering all three sub-questions, this thesis should provide practitioners a good idea of how to prepare, what to look out for and how to react in the current social media environment. Answers for all the sub-questions can be found from chapter 5.

## **1.5 Key Definitions**

The field of public relations was already a jungle of definitions in the late 70's when the very term *public relations* was defined almost in 500 different ways. The number of definitions under the subject and especially under crisis management has since been growing and causing confusion in the field. (Jaques, 2009) The field of public relations seems also to be fragmented into several different branches with their own language (Shrivastava, 1993). Even the term *crisis* is understood in various different ways and is overused and misused (Jaques, 2009). After the academics brought social media into the literature, introduction of new terminology has ballooned and this thesis would do a great disservice to the field by introducing new terminology. Therefore, this thesis is composed using only existing terminology. To avoid confusion and to explain how various words are perceived in this thesis, definitions for the most essential terminology is provided below.

### **Social Media**

Social media can be defined in various ways and some elements may or may not be included. In this thesis, the following definition provided by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 61), is used: "Social media is 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.". This thesis refers to individual social medias such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram as social media platforms for the sake of clarity. Social media services are used to refer to additional services that are provided around these platforms such as monitoring tools or social media management services.

### **Social Media Crisis**

The search term "Social media crisis" produced 169 000 results at the end of the year 2015 on Google search. The term is well known and also used in the academic literature. The distinction between crisis on social media and social media crisis is not clear. Crises on social media can originate outside social media or they can be born on social media. A social media crisis can move on to traditional media and vice versa. In this thesis, social media crisis is used to refer to all crisis events that take place on various social media platforms, regardless whether the crisis extends beyond social media or has originated

outside of it. Some such as Coombs (2007) include an attribute of surprise to the definition of a crisis. In this thesis, it is acknowledged that crises can take place suddenly, but the definition of a crisis includes also those that can be foreseen. Some authors perceive a crisis as an event, a specific point in time. In this thesis, crisis is seen as a process.

Social media crisis is used to describe such processes that take place on one or several social media platforms and include extensive stakeholder participation and exchange of information and opinions that results in negative effects on an organization's stock value, reputation, sales, primary stakeholders such as business partners, clients or personnel and/or any other aspect that is central to the organization's future success. Bare negative information of a company on social media is referred as a *controversy* in this thesis.

### **Controversy**

*Paracrisis* is used by Coombs (e.g. 2012) to describe a situation where negative information of a company is available to the public and it may hurt the company. Ziek (2015) uses *controversy* to refer to a very similar situation to that what paracrisis refers to. In addition Lerbinger (1997) uses *challenge crisis* to address a developing crisis situation. In this thesis, *controversy* is used to describe a potential crisis on social media. Separating a controversy from an actual crisis is difficult and Ziek (2015) emphasizes that controversy and crisis are too often mixed but the author also states that occasionally this is only an issue of semantics.

When a transition from a controversy to crisis happens, is not an easy point to define. If one is losing hair, at which point can one start calling himself bald? Often this definition is easier to make post-crisis, when the actual negative impacts of the crisis can be seen. It could be argued that the distinction between a controversy and a crisis cannot be made before the effects or lack of them can be seen. Controversy is used in this thesis to refer the beginning of the crisis process where information with crisis potential is available in the online context, regardless of whether the controversy evolves into a crisis later on.

## **Double Deviation**

Double deviation is used in this thesis to refer to situations where a customer or other stakeholder has initially had a bad experience and has then turned to the involved organization for help or for a solution but has not been satisfied with the received help or solution. The term is used widely in research involving service recovery, often assuming that it has to be preceded by a service failure event involving human interaction. Already in 1990 Bitner et al. discussed about double deviation and in their definition double deviation was more closely related to service recovery failure than the actual initial cause. In this thesis double deviation is used to refer to failures relating to failed recovery attempts on social media, regardless whether the initial failure included human interaction or not.

## **Electronic Word-of-Mouth**

Word-of-mouth is a term used to refer to peer-to-peer communications that often concern a third party, such as an organization. When word-of-mouth takes place on any Internet-enabled platform it is referred as electronic word-of-mouth. Many authors abbreviate word-of-mouth to WOM and electronic WOM to eWOM which is visible in some of the figures, but these abbreviations are not otherwise used in the text.

## **Stakeholders**

The term *stakeholders* is used to refer to all concerned parties, no matter how small their stake in the issue is. In other words, stakeholders include *secondary stakeholders* such as communities and general public as defined by Jurgens et al. (2016, 129).

## **1.6 Literature Review**

Academic crisis management literature with a focus on a single business has been available since the latter half of the 70's (e.g. Boulding, 1975; Smart & Vertinsky, 1977; Dunbar & Goldberg; 1978). Internet presence together with company image has been discussed by academics already since the 90's, e.g. (Lymer & Tallberg, 1997). The proper study of social media crises and social media as a crisis management tool in academic journals began in the early 2000's (e.g. Taylor & Perry, 2005). Social media marketing may sound

like a novel subject, yet it has been studied since the 90's by (e.g. Aldridge et al. 1997) using the terminology of their time in an article *Get linked or get lost: Marketing Strategy for the Internet*.

Crisis management literature started including the context of social media holistically only at the end of the last decade, circa 2008 according to Gonzales-Herrero and Smith (2008). Prior to this, the conversation revolved mostly around single online channels that a company could utilize during a crisis (Gonzales-Herrero & Smith, 2008). Already before the existence of today's most popular social media platforms such as Facebook, that was established 2004 (Phillips, 2007) or Twitter, established in 2006 (Carlson, 2011), academic literature started implying that two-way customer communications on the Internet (Esrock & Leichty 1998; Kent et al. 2003) is growing more important and that the Internet in general (Pinkham, 1998; Goodman, 2000) as well as various Internet-based tools such as websites (Hwang et al. 2003), forums and chats (Post, 2000) were an increasingly important channels for corporate brand management.

One of the more established authors in crisis management literature is W. Timothy Coombs, who has published work on the topic of crisis management at least since 1995 (Coombs, 1995) and contributed to the creation of the *Situational Crisis Communication Theory* (Coombs & Holladay, 2002) that has been a widely utilized theory in the field since. Coombs has published numerous insightful crisis management articles that have been ahead of their time and he is still actively contributing. Although the term *Social media* took root in the academic literature only in the latter half of 2000's, Coombs emphasized already in 1998 the effects that sharing various media formats and information with peers via the Internet – which essentially is social media – could have on companies' reputation and future operations. Coombs (1998, 299) stated the following: “[...] stakeholder network involves forging links to other stakeholders. Essentially the links are communication lines for exchanging messages. The communication lines can generate pressure on the organization by making other stakeholders aware of an issue [...]” and “Activists have been quick to utilize the Internet when engaging in CSP (Corporate Social Performance) based issues [...] The primary goal of such efforts is to pressure organizations into voluntarily correcting their misbehavior.” Even though a few authors have studied online crisis communication around the turn of the millennium, the majority

of progress in the field has taken place more recently as the subject has been picked up by a larger number of academics.

Crisis management in social media derives from several different scientific fields such as *Service recovery*, which is the paradigm favored by authors that study crises originating from poor customer experience (e.g. Grégoire et al. 2015; Haj-Salem & Chebat 2014; Tripp & Grégoire, 2011). Another major field of study is *public relations* and more precisely, *crisis communications* where authors discuss about crises often caused by non-product related issues in studies such as Pang, (2014), Balakrishnan (2011), Jin and Liu (2010) and Coombs (2007). Controversies that may escalate into crises are taking place on social media constantly and examples are abundant e.g. DKNY using copyrighted material without consent and being confronted on social media (Cohen, 2013), Burger King posting drug promoting Twitter messages after their account was hacked (Satlin, 2013) or Joan Rivers promoting Apple products in pre-scheduled post on Instagram after her death (Weisman, 2014).

Matos and Veiga (2005) concluded that negative information concerning products affects company reputation more than negative information concerning company practices. This would support approaching social media crises from service recovery perspective. Then again Sohn and Lariscy (2014) concluded that social responsibility related crises have a more significant impact on company image than company competence related crises. It seems that jury is still out on which type of social media crisis really is the most harmful. Whichever the initial cause of a crisis may be, there seems to be a consensus among authors that majority of social media crises are ultimately triggered by not responding at all or by responding incorrectly to negative publicity (e.g. Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Haj-Salem & Chebat, 2014).

From an organizational viewpoint, the most important issue is how to handle or how to prevent a crisis. Avery et al. (2010) published an analysis of 66 PR crisis communication articles from 1991 to 2009 concluding that the literature could benefit from concrete recommendations on how to pre-emptively take action to avoid a crisis altogether. At least Coombs and Holladay have answered this call with their 2012 study. Coombs and Holladay (2012) synthesized an up to date *modus operandi* for companies to deal with a potential social media crisis aka *challenge crisis* by Lerbinger (1997), a *paracrisis* by Coombs and Holladay (2012) or a *controversy* by Ziek (2015). In their study, a *paracrisis*

was born when a concern or a complaint regarding a company was voiced on a public forum – in this case on social media. Coombs and Holladay's (2012) approach to a paracrisis included paracrisis identification, evaluation as well as planning potential actions if a company decided to address the issue in question. Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) also contributed to proactive crisis management comprehensively by studying on which platforms companies should engage negative word-of-mouth and when should they do this. Authors also introduced the terminology of *proactive* and *reactive webcare*. A recent study by Grégoire et al. (2015) also recognizes that in order to avoid social media crises, different types of customer complaints should be tackled with appropriate responses instead of using a universal approach. Utz et al. (2013) emphasize that it is not just the correct response that matters but also the channels used.

Crisis response has been an area that has received a lot of attention in the older pre-online context. It has been studied in hundreds of academic journals. The more recent studies on the matter that include online context are less common by comparison but not rare. Already in 2010 Siah et al. published their rather generic model on how to approach organizational crisis on social media. Coomb's Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) was extended in 2010 by Jin and Liu who stated that blogs are perhaps the most efficient crisis communication channel. The new model added blogs as a tool to do damage control during a crisis. The Blog-Mediated Crisis Communication (BMCC) was not long lived, as the authors tested their model in 2010 with 40 communication practitioners and decided to expand the model to include all social media platforms, ultimately renaming the model Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) (Liu et al. 2012). In 2011, Schultz et al. suggested that the most beneficial crisis communication platform could actually be Twitter, as the users are more likely to engage in electronic word-of-mouth. The new SMCC model has been since tested and it seems to work in indicating what sort of communication platforms an organization should use during a crisis and how it should respond in these platforms (Jin et al. 2014).

Studies such as (Lee & Song 2010; Jin & Liu 2010; Grégoire et al. 2015) indicate how and where a company should respond to negative electronic word-of-mouth. This line of study was extended in 2015 by Avnet and Laufer who discovered that in addition to appropriate communication, a company could minimize damage caused by a crisis to future sales by making changes to the image it is projecting through online advertising.

While the subject of crisis management is not new and it has been studied in the online context to some extent, much of the research has been conducted by quantitative means: creating hypotheses founded on previous research and testing them. Qualitative journal-published studies that aim to gather data from companies operating on the field and map practices and methods that companies actually found useful is practically non-existent and the very few such studies utilize only secondary data (e.g. Canhoto et al. 2015). Much of the empirical sections of the studies stay very close to previous research on traditional crisis communications which makes them well-grounded but also potentially misfitting in the realm of social media or even possibly partly obsolete as optimal online responses may well need to be different from traditional crisis responses according to Lee and Song (2010). This study aims to start filling the research gap for qualitative studies in social media crisis management by gathering fresh data, supplementing existing theory and hopefully, providing a holistic approach to social media crisis management along with novel methods. Need for such research is also acknowledged by contemporary studies (e.g. Canhoto et al. 2015).

## 1.7 Methodology

This study was conducted by using qualitative methodology and half-structured interview was used as the empirical data collection method. Sample size of the study was 12. Overall reliability and validity were perceived to be at adequate levels and are further addressed in more detail in chapter 3.

## 1.8 Theoretical Framework

Much of the terminology used in figure 2 is explained in chapter 1.5. Theoretical framework (figure 2) illustrates the theories and phenomenon that contribute to each part of the crisis process. The theories and phenomenon have a coloured circle behind them to indicate which part the crisis process and what sub-question they contribute in. The framework also displays how the crisis process is perceived in this thesis and what parts of the process are of interest. Studying the actions modifying the effects between the components in the social media context is of special interest, as this is mainly where this thesis aims to contribute.

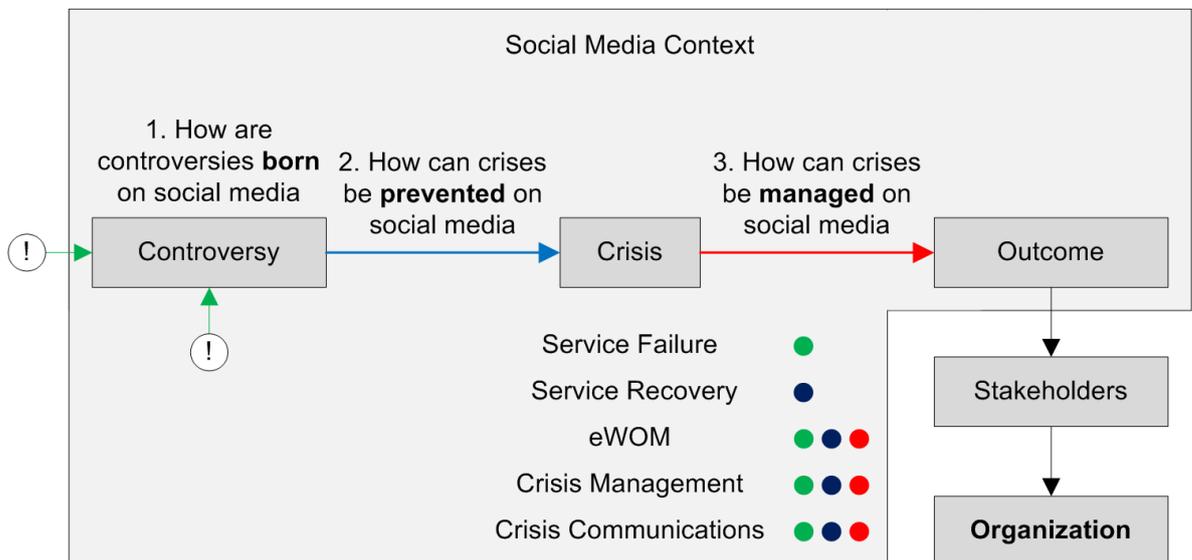


Figure 2. Theoretical framework.

Figure 2 shows the three relations that form the core of the thesis. These relations are represented by the coloured arrows. The !-circles represent the sources of negative information that initiate a controversy. As seen from the figure 2, sources of information outside and inside the social media context are considered. The green arrows represent the

process that turns negative information into a controversy. Blue arrow represents the process that turns controversy into a crisis and the red arrow represents the process where the organization battles the crisis, ultimately leading to a more or less satisfactory outcome. The outcome of the crisis then has an effect on the stakeholders who in turn have an effect on the involved organization.

## **1.9 Delimitations**

This thesis intentionally leaves out many related studies in order to focus on the preventing and addressing a crisis on social media. The selected organizational view of a crisis limits the applicability of the results, as does the lack of the geographical distribution of the sample. Previous research on social media and crisis communications done in Asia hints that cultural differences may play a significant part in the extent of which the results may be generalized. It may well be that the findings and practices presented as a result of this study can be successfully applied only in western cultures.

In addition, social media is developing quickly and while the major guidelines presented in this thesis may well be applicable in the more distant future, the concrete actions and means of preventing and responding to a crisis will likely be at least partly obsolete in five years' time.

### **1.9.1 Theoretical Limitations**

Crisis communication theory in which social media's effectiveness is studied in delivering crisis information in the cases of natural disasters or large-scale accidents from government organizations to the public is not included nor will this thesis aim to contribute to such research. Results of the thesis offer little insight on how to address traditional media during a crisis on social media and theory on the use of traditional media in crisis situations was largely excluded. In addition, several related social media marketing articles are not presented in this paper and they were left out as redundant or were perceived to add only to the paper on a general level. Including these would draw out the content of this paper and dilute the focus of the study.

### **1.9.2 Practical Limitations**

The format of the paper limits the amount of content that can be included in the thesis affecting the scale and scope of this study. As a Master's thesis, this paper only includes a limited amount theory as well as a small sample of which conclusions are drawn.

The qualitative nature of this paper offers much needed contemporary data from practitioners which is used to improve understanding on how to act in order to avoid social media crises and how to minimize negative impact of social media crises. Downside of the selected methodology is that it offers no statistical data, meaning that effectiveness of these actions cannot be quantified. Results of the thesis will also not aim to provide any additional information on the causality of social media crises and poor business performance.

### **1.10 Structure of the Study**

The structure and form of the study follow the Master's thesis guidelines set by the Lappeenranta University of Technology with the exception of the theory section which is composed of a single chapter instead of being divided into two or more. This study consists of five main chapters. The content of each chapter is summarized at the beginning of each chapter. In general, the structure of the study aims to follow the principle of nested homology as defined by Alasuutari (2011, 244) meaning that each chapter is similar in structure and flow. The first chapter will focus on describing and justifying the study. The second chapter explains how crises on social media are born and what the consequences might be as well as introduces relevant methods and practices that can help in crisis management and prevention. The third chapter will explain the used methodology. The fourth chapter will introduce the results of the study and fifth chapter will conclude the thesis by comparing theory and empirical section and drawing conclusions of these. Sources are presented following Lappeenranta University of Technology's version of Harvard-style referencing and reference dates are presented in the European format in the case of electronic sources.

## **2 THEORY**

Dealing with public relations is a challenge that has been around thousands of years. One of the oldest examples of a PR-challenge originates from the ancient Egypt where priests had to persuade the public of the pharaoh's divinity and position. These practices were criticized by laymen in the writings that have been recovered from the area. (Bernays, 2013, 23-24) Recent developments in communication mean that news can be created and shared by anyone and instantly delivered to a significant amount of people, often to those most affected by the news. This environment has called for the creation of theory and frameworks that help companies to manage their public image on the social media as well as suggest ways of dealing with consumer feedback on this challenging environment.

In this chapter, central contributions of contemporary studies in online crisis management will be presented. Many of the presented practices focus on different aspects of crisis management in the social media and support each other; however, as the presented theories and frameworks are created by various authors, there is inevitably some overlap.

With these frameworks, companies should better understand their stakeholders and the social media platforms that are most crucial to the company. The insights from these studies also aim to explain how social media content should be interpreted and what actions should be taken in different situations. This chapter also introduces frameworks which demonstrate the directions the conversations can be lead to as well as what to expect after a crisis has taken place.

Crisis management can be divided into three phases according to Coombs (2014) which are pre-crisis, crisis response and post-crisis. This chapter provides central research on all three phases of crisis management in the social media context. A social media crisis can be born from numerous underlying issues both in and outside social media. It is paramount to address initial critique correctly in order to avoid escalation of the potential crisis. This is why it is beneficial to discuss various scenarios and ways of responding. Theory section will start by explaining the connection between social media and crisis communications in chapter 2.1. Chapter 2.2 explains elements that differentiate various social media platforms and their audiences. In chapter 2.3, pre-crisis measures are discussed. Chapter 2.4 addresses ways of leading conversation on social media. Reputational crisis, planning and selecting responses are discussed in more detail in chapter 2.5, whereas chapter 2.6 focuses

on service recovery on social media as well as how to address consumer feedback. Chapter 2.7 contains advice on the style the response is best delivered and also touches the issue of modifying adverts during a crisis. Chapter 2.8 explains how a crisis escalates and discusses the role of traditional media in a social media crisis. Chapter 2.9 presents relevant research on the effects of an organizational crisis. Theory will end in chapter 2.10 where the effect of pre-crisis reputation on the outcome of a crisis is discussed.

## **2.1 Social Media and Crisis Communications**

If an organization is to understand the concrete means and practices it can use to prevent a crisis and to battle the crisis at hand, it is good to possess a broader picture of crisis communications process in the social media context. In order to provide a holistic approach to social media crisis management, all phases of a crisis need to be accounted for (Seeger, 2006). Companies not currently partaking in social media activities may find social media to be very beneficial in treating traditional organizational crises. On the other hand, it should also be remembered that poorly managing social media may also lead to a crisis on social media (Maresh-Fuehrer & Smith, 2016) that then escalates to a full blown organizational crisis. (Siah et al. 2010) In addition, relying only on company's websites to convey information to the public during an organizational crisis is not an efficient strategy. In the paper by Austin et al. (2012) authors found out that less than one fifth of their sample had sought additional crisis information from the website of the involved company.

### **2.1.1 Crisis Communications Process**

Recently Canhoto et al. (2015) crafted a simple framework of the general process and the main elements that social media crisis communications should take into account. In this paper, several other components of the crisis communication process are recognized but the framework presented below provides a good skeleton to build on.

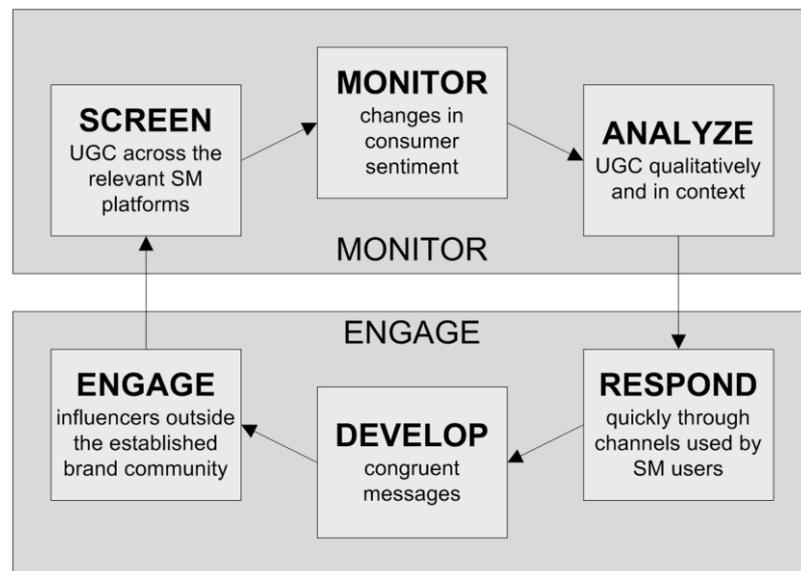


Figure 3. The role of social media in crisis communication (Canhoto et al. 2015, 5).

According to Canhoto et al. (2015) identifying and handling of crises follows figure 3 where the iterative process is divided into six stages. In the first three stages, crisis is monitored and analyzed and in the latter three stages, company is to react to the crisis. The six stages are as follows:

At first in the *Screen*-stage the company should learn what the social media environment is and what sort of content can be shared on different platforms. The company should also recognize social media platforms that are important to the company and those that its stakeholders are active in. After this, the company should put in place systems that monitor the massive amount of information available on these platforms. These systems can help in crisis recognition as well as gather marketing information. (Canhoto et al. 2015)

In the *Monitor*-stage the company should look for changes in the stakeholders' perceptions of the company rather than the general attitude towards the company. Use of automated software in opinion shift recognition may help to deal with large amounts of information and quickly identify changes in attitudes. An on-going monitoring of content enables the company to look for changes in perceptions from positive to negative, which is important as company's reputation may vary independently from company's actions. (Canhoto et al. 2015)

Where the previous two steps have been rather quantitative, the *Analysis*-stage consists of an in-depth analysis of selected conversations in a qualitative manner. Attention should be paid to the actual topics that are being discussed. If the company is using only software in

identifying issues, it may miss some relevant clues of a brewing crisis. Software tools are poor at detecting irony and other contextual clues that may change the nature and tone of the actual message. Companies should look especially messages that are triggering emotional responses. (Canhoto et al. 2015)

The fourth is the *Respond*-stage in which the company decides whether to move on to respond or not. The response should be swiftly delivered once the user generated content is deemed to be potentially harmful. It may be a good idea to deliver the company's response in the channel the potential crisis is taking place if company's own channels are not popular among the stakeholders. (Canhoto et al. 2015)

During the *Develop*-stage company is to produce the actual response it is going to use. Company's response is to take into account stakeholders' expectations and is to be composed in a manner that fits company values. The company's response should also meet the format requirements of the platform that it is planning on using. (Canhoto et al. 2015)

The last phase of the process is the *Engage*-state which entails seeking support from influencers in trusted parties that may provide credible positive views of the company. Ideally, the company should aim to get the support of the opinion leaders within the online community from which the crisis is originating to truly influence the stakeholders' perceptions of the company. (Canhoto et al. 2015)

The framework by Canhoto et al. (2015) is very similar to the previously published "New Media Crisis Communication Model" by Siah et al. (2010) where elements from existing research were combined to create the model which provides means for preparing for a crisis on social media. Among other points, the authors proposed that in order to avoid situations where a company is falsely presented by individuals that have no position in the company; the company should register all Internet domain names that are related to the company. Continuing on this same principle, a crisis prevention method that may be beneficial for a company, would be to occupy most common social media platforms in order to avoid the situation where crisis enraged individuals are creating fake company accounts and then posting on the social media. It should be noted that having an account on a certain social media platform, may be considered by the stakeholders as an obligation for a company to communicate and respond on that specific media platform (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and Ward and Sweetser (2014) indicate that during a crisis not having an account on a certain platform may be better than having an account and being only slightly

active. If a company decides to open an account on a certain media, it should be active on that particular platform or clearly redirect communication efforts from that platform to another platform.

### **2.1.2 Popular Social Media Platforms**

As reminded by Vásquez (2011), social media crises extend to several platforms of which many may be such where the company is not active. Especially Facebook users tend to partake in conversations which do not directly concern them (Schwarz, 2012). Limited resources are an obvious hindrance to following and responding to conversations on various social media platforms, yet doing so may well be beneficial. An organization should publish its response on several platforms without worrying about the fact that their stakeholders see the same message several times. Acting this way may actually be a beneficial according to Moons et al. (2009), who stated that if stakeholders receive the same message from various channels, it may have a self-reinforcing effect as long as the amount of repetition is reasonable.

Statistics on the most popular social media sites differ between sources and calculations often include different kinds of data or the data is interpreted in a way that is different from other sources. Finding reliable and contemporary data on the matter is truly difficult. An imperfect but good general picture of the most popular social media platforms is given by Mehra (2015) who lists a total of 91 social media platforms that are globally used the most. The following table 1 includes platforms that have at least 100 million active users. Platforms are listed in descending order starting from the most popular.

*Table 1. Most used social media platforms in 2015 (Mehra, 2015).*

Name	Users (million)	Name	Users (million)
1. Facebook	1400	11. Twitter	300
2. QQ	800	12. Viber	250
3. WhatsApp	700	13. Tumblr	200
4. QZone	600	14. Snapchat	200
5. WeChat	500	15. LINE	200
6. LinkedIn	350	16. Sina Weibo	150
7. Skype	300	17. VK	100
8. Google+	300	18. Reddit	100
9. Instagram	300	19. YY	100
10. Baidu Tieba	300		

It is good to keep in mind that if an organization has a global customer base, customers in different geographic areas may use entirely different social media platforms due to regulation or preference. Platforms popular in the western world may differ greatly from those used in the east. Companies in the US focus increasingly on Facebook and Twitter (Wright & Hinson, 2015), whereas for example, consumers in Russia prefer VK over other platforms (Rogozhnikov, 2014) with nearly 80 million user accounts in Russia already in 2012 (Lunden, 2012). Chinese interact on platforms such as QQ and WeChat, as direct access to many social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, has been blocked in the country (King et al. 2013).

## **2.2 Knowing Your Stakeholders and Social Media Platforms**

Customers leaving the company due to dissatisfaction are more likely to engage in negative word-of-mouth than those that leave due to e.g. high pricing (Wangenheim, 2005). As it is virtually impossible to retain all customers, companies that wish to retain good reputation and minimize negative word-of-mouth should really interact with their

customers and address their concerns. In order to interact with their customers and other stakeholders in general, companies should know the channels that their stakeholders interact in. Schultz (2011) even argues that the channels used are more important than the messages conveyed.

It should be noted that if the customers of a company are very homogenous by demographical standards – especially by age – changes in the preferences in social media platforms may take place somewhat quickly. This behavior has been documented for example in a 4 500 respondent survey, conducted by a strategic consulting company called Frank N. Magid Associates in 2014. In this study, Twitter use of a certain age group grew from 2% to 48% in two years while Facebook use declined from 95% to 88%.

Social media platforms are different from each other and specialize often in certain kinds of information formats. Realizing this is paramount as it defines to a large extent what sort of content the company can deliver through a specific platform which in turn defines what sort of a response the company can make. For example currently Instagram provides the possibility for posting only 15-second videos (Instagram, 2016) and Twitter limits video length to 140 seconds (Medhora & Sadam, 2016), which mean that if a company is to create an apologetic video, it has to conform to these limitations or consider publishing the apology on a platform that allows for a longer video, such as Facebook or YouTube.

Social media platforms are numerous and new ones are constantly being created. Instead of trying to compare all available social media platforms, a framework for characterizing these platforms is arguably more beneficial and will likely stay useful longer. Kietzmann et al. (2011) introduced a honeycomb-framework which evaluates different social media platforms on seven dimensions which they refer to as building blocks (figure 4). This framework may help companies understanding differences of social media platforms and help to choose the most suitable ones for their purposes. All blocks may not be present in all social media platforms and the purpose of the framework is to highlight differences in various social platforms and the implications that these building blocks have for companies (Kietzmann et al. 2011).

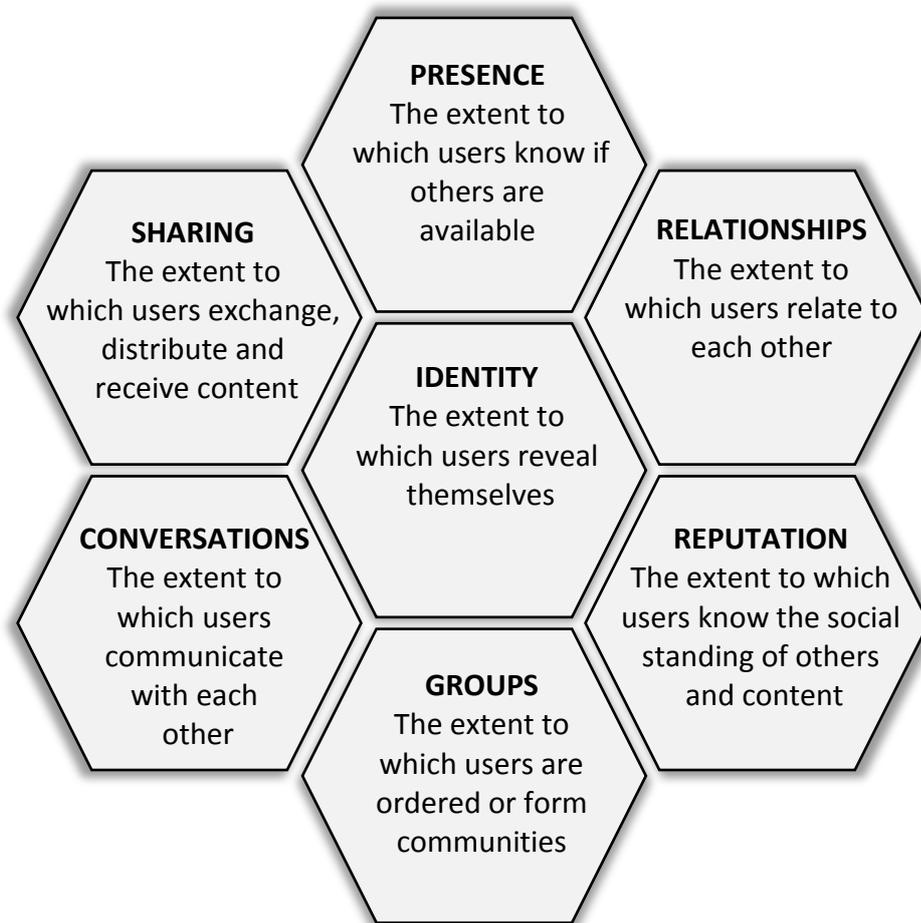


Figure 4. The honeycomb representation of social media platform attributes. Adaptation from Kietzmann et al. (2011, 243).

The first building block is called *Identity*. It includes personal attributes that a user divulges to others such as their real name, age and profession. In addition, users may create different identities on different platforms. Users may share their free-time activities on Facebook, whereas their LinkedIn content may have a more professional focus. On some platforms, users may want to remain completely anonymous for example on a platform called 4chan where one can share and view humorous content. (Kietzmann et al. 2011)

The second building block, *Conversations*, describes how users communicate with other users. On some platforms, a dialogue may be the desired form of communication and on others, one-way communication or informing is more central as is in the case of Twitter. Twitter users also focus more on the *Conversations* instead of *Identity*. (Kietzmann et al. 2011)

The third building block is called *Sharing*. Social media connects people through the objects they share on the network. The purpose, amount and the type of shared formats vary between platforms. It is good to understand the purpose of the platform, for example for LinkedIn the purpose is clear, the community is connected through job creation. Today YouTube is a general video sharing platform but initially was created for individuals to share their personal experiences in video format. It is beneficial for a company to understand the common factor that connects their customers on the social media. (Kietzmann et al. 2011)

The fourth building block, *Presence*, represents the ability for users to see if other users are accessible and where they are physically or virtually located. Many platforms such as Foursquare enable users to add location to their user generated content and inform others of their location at the moment along with their message. Some platforms also inform the user if user's friends are in the area. If a company's customers wish to interact with the company in real time, using a platform that allows this sort of instant communication and has an indicator that company representatives are online would make sense. (Kietzmann et al. 2011)

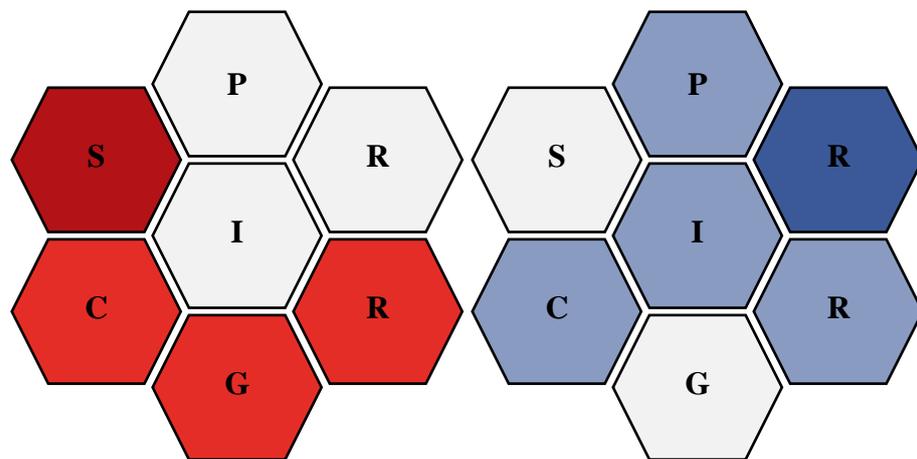
The fifth building block is titled *Relationships*. It refers to all forms of association and connectedness between users, even listing another user as a friend or a fan. The relationships between users often dictate what sort of content and information these individuals share. Some platforms such as LinkedIn are more focused on relationship expansion, whereas others focus on relationship maintenance and some lack this aspect altogether. Often platforms that do not value *Identity*, also do not value *Relationships*. Individuals that have a large and dense network on a certain social media platform have likely a large influence on that network. The type and strength of the relationships are also important. Individuals may even share several different types of connections between each other. (Kietzmann et al. 2011) From a crisis management perspective, it is beneficial for a company to know the most influential users of a certain social media platform, as they can impact a large amount of company stakeholders (Jin & Liu, 2010). These are not necessarily the same organizations and individuals than those in the offline setting. (Canhoto et al. 2015)

The sixth building block is called *Reputation*. This is how the users' position and status are displayed on the platform. Reputation can be measured in various ways such as by the

number of followers a user has, amount of endorsement from other users or by some form of a voting system. This building block is often essential in monitoring how a company is perceived in a community. (Kietzmann et al. 2011)

The seventh building block is named *Groups*. It describes the extent to which users can form communities and sub-groups on a platform. Groups may be open to everyone or they may be more intimate and even require an invitation to join. These groups may help users to filter content that is relevant to them and they may have a certain agenda. If a company has their own group within a social media, it may wish to impose some rules on the members. This building block ties potentially together other blocks of the framework as the group may have for example its own identity. (Kietzmann et al. 2011)

The comparison of social media platforms can be done graphically using this tool as seen in figure 5, where darker colours represent more central building blocks to the platform in question.



*Figure 5. Comparing functionalities of YouTube (left) and Facebook (right). Adaptation from Kietzmann et al. (2011, 248).*

A company should deliver a consistent message in all communication channels. (Utz et al. 2013; Balakrishnan, 2011) This obviously includes various social media platforms that a company is using. If social media management has not been externalized, a company could benefit from recognizing the members of its staff that have the ability to listen stakeholders and create content that is appropriate for company's social media platforms (Kietzmann et al. 2011) and form a team to deal with the challenges of social media (Coombs, 2014). The

crisis management team should also be then properly trained (Coombs, 2014) and the whole crisis management system should be tested before implementation (Ucelli, 2002).

### **2.3 Finding Conversations**

Finding conversations and negative word-of-mouth aka *environmental scanning* (Siah et al. 2010) on social media is a prerequisite for crisis prevention (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). In addition to staying on top of company's own social media channels, allocating some resources to monitoring various other social media platforms and communities could be the difference between being able to act on time averting a crisis and a controversy escalating into a crisis. Fortunately, several text mining tools (He et al. 2013) and social media monitoring tools (Grégoire et al. 2015) exist which can help companies in recognizing threats on social media. It should be remembered that while these tools help to filter seemingly endless content, they are not perfect and are poor at for example recognizing irony used in the comments (Canhoto & Clark, 2013) and some extent of human input is required (Mandelli & Mari, 2012). Text mining tools mainly rely on the user to gather and input data into the software and may serve better in trend recognition and in measuring customer attitudes. Social media monitoring tools are arguably more useful tools in crisis prevention. The list of available tools for social media monitoring is lengthy. Grégoire et al. (2015) mentioned in their study several tools including Google Alerts that is perhaps one of the most known tools for following various platforms and informing companies on set intervals about new social media mentions. Authors also pointed out the utility of TweetDeck, a tool that can make following several Twitter feeds and used hashtags much simpler. Social Mention –service was also included in their paper. It enables companies to follow how much media attention certain keywords have been getting lately, as well as the emotions attached to these posts. The service gathers data from several platforms including posted pictures and videos. Information can be received in the form of daily reports as well as via an instant search.

One novel tool that which works well also as a social media monitoring tool is IFTT. Although it has not been primarily designed for social media monitoring, with minor adjustments it may be modified to provide valuable data. It enables one to set own events that take place when certain conditions are met. For example, if boycott and Coca-Cola are written in a Twitter post, a notification will be sent to a Coca-Cola representative or if

Coca-Cola's stocks are crashing on Nasdaq, the representative of the company will be alerted.

Selection of social media monitoring tools is constantly changing. In 2010 a monitoring service called Webclipping was the optimal tool for the job according to Van Laer and De Ruyter (2010). Today the service in question is not only out of vogue, it is out of business. Quick online search for social media monitoring tools will return the most advanced and contemporary tools for a company to use. Pricing of the tools varies but many of the services are free or of very low cost. Currently, there is no consensus on a single best tool for social media monitoring amongst the academics and companies would do well to go with tools that suit best their individual purposes and resources. In case a company is aware of a mishap but has decided to keep it a secret, it may want to add certain keywords to its social media monitoring services, for example, CEO and speeding ticket. This way the company in question will receive instant notification if information of the incident has become available to the public and it can deliver a pre-planned response.

Coombs and Holladay (2012) studied *paracrisis* in their paper. They suggested that after a reputation-threatening conversation has been identified by a monitoring tool or found by a company representative, the company should assess the influence power of the author, legitimacy of their claim and willingness of other stakeholders to act based on the comment. Lee and Song (2010) also found that if the author has previously engaged in negative word-of-mouth online, it is likely that the author will likely feel that the company is responsible for the wrongdoing, even if this was not the case. All these factors contribute to the crisis potential of negative word-of-mouth found online. In addition, when evaluating if or how to respond, the company should check if the conversation has already gathered responses and whether these responses support the company or the author (Coombs & Holladay, 2012)

## **2.4 Dialogue Strategy**

Romenti and Murtarelli (2014) developed four dialogue strategies that can be used in planning the social media communications during a crisis. Authors presented a framework which they used to categorize companies' reactions to crisis situations on social media. The proposed dialogue strategies in figure 6 were identified in the study post-crisis to describe

dialogue choices companies made during a crisis. The four dialogue strategies may benefit academics when describing information management choices made by a company as well as company representatives themselves who may plan how to manage information in their crisis responses according to this framework.

		Orientation	
		Centripetal	Centrifugal
Organizational Approach	Inside-out	<b>Concertative</b>	<b>Transformative</b>
	Outside-in	<b>Framing</b>	<b>Generative</b>

Figure 6. Four online dialogue strategies (Romenti & Murtarelli, 2014, 14).

The framework is divided into four dialogue strategies. These strategies present the direction to which the company going through controversy or a crisis wants to take the online conversation. Each of the dialogue strategies has a certain goal. Obviously, the ultimate goal of crisis management is to minimize the negative effects of crises or avert a crisis altogether but these sub-goals that dialogue strategies provide may aid the company in its efforts during a crisis. It is good to know what the goal of the conversation is. By selecting a dialogue strategy, a company may guide its statements and direct the dialogue in a coherent manner. From a managerial perspective just engaging in conversations with stakeholders is less interesting. Managing the public conversation to achieve certain goals, however, should be very interesting.

The dialogue strategies consist of four different options:

The first online dialogue strategy of the framework is called a *Concertative* strategy. The goal of this strategy is to facilitate the online community to form a consensus on a topic. In this strategy, the company engages actively in the online conversation drawing attention to itself. The strategy may be useful when there is little consensus between stakeholders and lack of converging opinions. In the initial study, this strategy was used when a company

felt only slightly responsible for the crisis and therefore was not really placing themselves in harm's way by actively engaging in discussion. (Romenti & Murtarelli, 2014)

The second option is a *Framing* strategy. The goal of this strategy is to guide the online conversations to focus on certain topics or issues. This strategy is beneficial in situations where the online conversation has divided into several sub-topics or veered off to a different subject altogether. Such conversations are hard to follow and respond to. Companies may also benefit from this strategy in situations where the stakeholders are engaging on various platforms or on such platforms of which the criticized company is unfamiliar with, guiding the conversation to platform(s) where the company is comfortable interacting. The strategy may also be of use when the company is deciding to refuse to take blame and therefore it benefits from redirecting stakeholder attention. (Romenti & Murtarelli, 2014)

The third option is the *Transformative* strategy. The goal of this strategy is to participate in online conversation and to seek acceptance from the stakeholders by introducing solutions to the issue at hand or by gather knowledge from stakeholders and finding solutions from the online community. The strategy may prove to be useful when stakeholders feel that they are left out of the conversations and not being heard. This strategy is of greater volatility as the result may be a good solution which the stakeholders agree on or just unconstructive criticism that damages the company image. (Romenti & Murtarelli, 2014)

The fourth option is the *Generative* strategy. This is a strategy that while it could be consciously selected, it is often more of a result of not acting than actually deciding not to take part in the online conversation. Although the authors of the framework did not see any examples of this strategy being used by the case companies in their study, the strategy can be selected in certain situations. In this option, the company leaves the online conversationalists to discuss with each other and retains from partaking in the discussion. This may or may not lead to a unified opinion among the stakeholders. This strategy is dangerous as it may give the impression that the company is not interested in its stakeholders. This approach may prove useful when the online conversation is had by a small group of individuals and when the conversation is misguided, incoherent and done by using inappropriate language. (Romenti & Murtarelli, 2014)

Situational factors play a major role in dialogue strategy selection. It should also be acknowledged that different dialogue strategies can be applied sequentially. (Romenti & Murtarelli, 2014)

## 2.5 Response Strategy

Where dialogue strategy is about leading the conversation to a certain direction, response strategy can be seen as the stand that company takes in a crisis or a controversy which then ties together communication and action. According to Coombs (2014), response strategies were not only an important part of managing crises before social media but they are also an important part of crisis management in the social media context. Response strategies hold a vital role in modifying the effects a crisis has on the amount of negative word-of-mouth (Chang et al. 2015) as well as future behavioral intentions of the customer (Coombs, 2007). This is displayed in figure 7 which shows the much cited *Situational Crisis Communication* theory by Coombs and more recent findings of Chang et al. where the effect of response strategies is quantified and conveyed through attributions of locus and controllability.

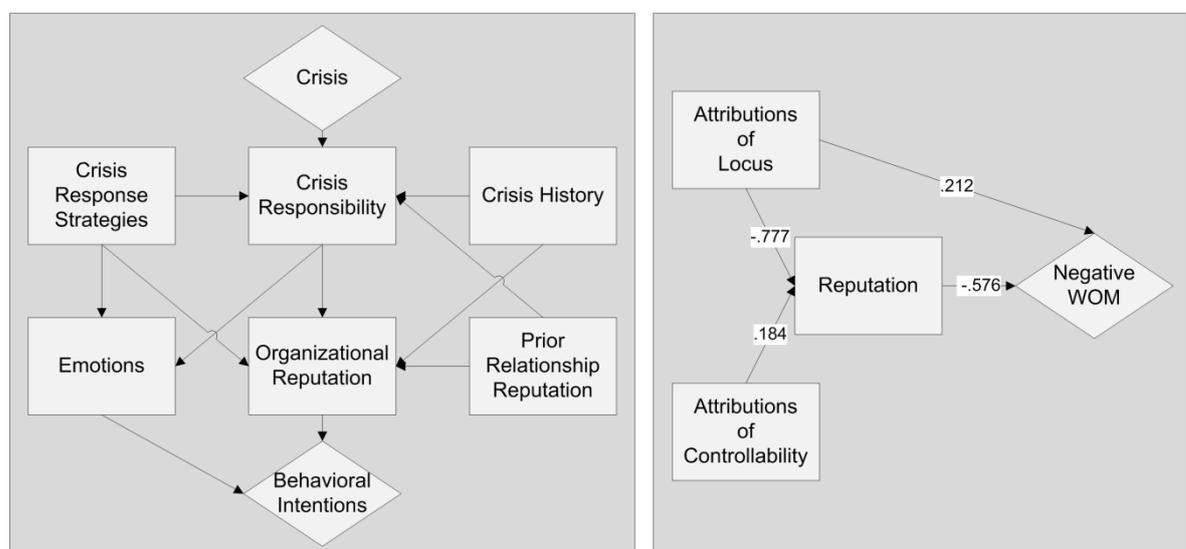


Figure 7. Comparison of elements of SCCT on the left (adaptation from Coombs, 2007, 166) and statistically significant modifiers affecting negative word-of-mouth (adaptation from Chang et al. 2015, 56) on the right.

Figure 7 shows that several components ultimately contribute to the outcome of a crisis and that these components themselves are affected by the crisis. Effects of on-going crisis are therefore long lasting and even affect the outcome of the next crisis. Addressing the on-going crisis by applying the optimal crisis response strategy is of paramount importance. All of the following observations are displayed in a more approachable form in figure 8 which is provided below. Figure 8 also explains the functions of various response strategies as they are described by Coombs (2014).

Much of the literature on response strategies divides actions to the two general categories called *defensive* and *accommodative*, introduced by Marcus and Goodman (1991). Some include not acting at all as a category (e.g. Lee & Song, 2010; Romenti & Murtarelli, 2014) but such strategies can be seen as part of defensive strategies (Chang et al. 2015). Accommodative strategies are those that recognize the problem and respond with an apology, compensation or other such recovery action, whereas defensive strategies deny the existence of the problem or do not take responsibility for it (Chang et al. 2015).

Division of crisis responses is quite clear-cut but crises themselves are divided in various ways in crisis management literature. The type of the crisis is the defining factor when selecting whether to choose an accommodative strategy or a defensive strategy. Some such as Jin et al. (2014) divide crises into *external* and *internal*. Internal crises are those that originate within the organization such as mismanaging funds and external crises are those that are caused for example by product tampering in a store. In the case of internal crises accommodative strategies tend to work better and defensive strategies are seen to fit better to external crises (Jin et al. 2014). Some such as Grappi and Romani (2014) divide crises into *competence crises* which are initiated by performing poorly and *integrity crises* which are initiated by performing questionably. Similar to external and internal crises, Coombs (2014) divided crises into *victim crises*, *accidental crises* and *preventable crises*. In victim crises, companies have minimal crisis responsibility. Victim crises include natural disasters, false rumours, workplace violence and product tampering. In accident crises, companies hold low crisis responsibility. Accident crises include stakeholders' claims of inappropriate behavior, technical-error accidents where technology failures have caused an accident, or technical-error product harm situations where technology has failed and as a result, products have turned into defective or harmful. Preventable crises are those, in which the company holds high responsibility, these include human-errors resulting in

harmful products or accidents and organizational misdeeds where management has violated the law or put stakeholders at risk. If the company has been involved in a similar crisis before, stakeholders will likely attribute more responsibility to the company. (Coombs, 2014) Crisis responsibility is an important modifier in any crisis, as attribution theory dictates that the more company is seen responsible, the more negative stakeholders are towards the company (Coombs, 2015).

Coombs (2014) describes nine general response strategies that are shown in figure 8. Crisis response strategies are presented from defensive to accommodative. Just like Jin et al. (2014) found that defensive strategies suit better external crises, and accommodative strategies internal crises, Weber et al. (2011) found that the larger the reputational threat, the more accommodative the response strategy should be. Grappi and Romani (2014) concluded that in extreme integrity induced crises where a company is clearly at fault, taking full responsibility and delivering an apology leads to least amount of negative word-of-mouth and the least amount of negative feelings towards the company. Many authors also agree (e.g. Chakravarty & Tridib, 2010; Fisher & Reuber, 2007; Tripp & Grégoire, 2011) that loyal customers react to negative information more forcefully than casual customers, therefore, if a crisis affects also loyal customers, the issue may likely require a more accommodative response strategy, however, Chang and Wu (2014) found that high level of brand commitment makes it hard for customers to form a negative consensus towards the company in question and customers perceive negative information less credible, suggesting that if a company possesses high brand commitment, it may better compete with a disagreeing information sources and may utilize more defensive response strategies such as denial or scapegoating. This is supported by Xia (2013) who found that if customers had a strong relationship with the brand they were less affected if the company responded defensively and brands that were enjoying high customer trust were more likely to successfully use defensive strategies.

Defensive strategies should be applied with high caution, as if a company decides to accept only low level of responsibility for a crisis but is later found responsible, the damage of the crisis is intensified (Coombs, 2015). This being said, Lee and Song (2010), Schwarz (2011), as well as various other studies and authors, state that the more accommodative the company's response is, the more responsible stakeholders perceive the company to be.

Figure 8 generalizes how various response strategies suit to different kinds of crisis situations.

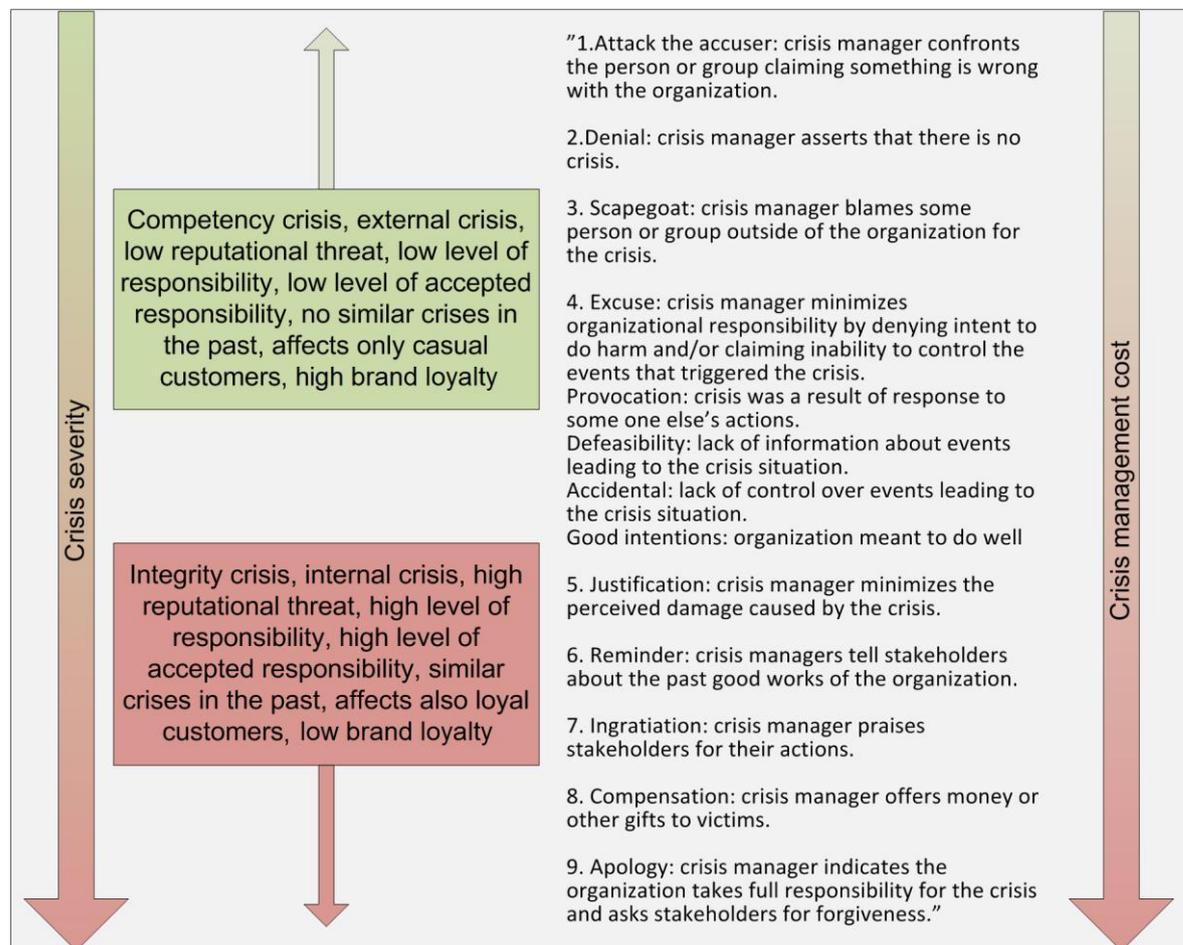


Figure 8. Coombs's (2014) general response strategies combined with various response strategy studies. (Chakravarty & Tridib, 2010; Chang et al. 2015; Chang & Wu, 2014; Coombs, 2005; Coombs, 2015; Fisher & Reuber, 2007; Grappi & Romani, 2014; Jin et al. 2014; Lee & Song, 2010; Schwarz, 2011; Tripp & Grégoire, 2011; Weber et al. 2011, Xia, 2013)

It should be noted that Kim et al. (2006) stated that mitigating blame is better for reputation in integrity based crises then taking responsibility, which is in conflict with figure 8.

Coombs (2005) points out that the more accommodative the company's response is to a crisis, the higher the immediate costs of the crisis are. Actions related to accommodative strategies such as product recalls or victim compensation are more costly options in short

time frame than for example denial. A bit outdated study by Lee (2005) concluded that companies accepting blame instead of denying it for events they have been part of may well increase consumer trust and future purchase intentions.

### **2.5.1 Preventing Additional Damage**

In addition to having a certain response strategy, in some scenarios, companies may want to release information that helps stakeholders to physically protect themselves in a crisis situation aka *instructing information* by Coombs (2015). This is useful in situations where for example products have gone bad but are still available or when customers' passwords have been compromised and the company needs to inform clients to create new passwords. Stakeholders can easily follow particular events on Twitter due to the use of hashtags, which makes it an excellent platform for relaying short news or providing updated information. These messages also spread faster than in the traditional media. (Gruber et al. 2015) This makes Twitter generally an excellent platform for releasing instructing information. This being said, Austin et al. (2012) found that during a crisis, stakeholders prefer to converse through Facebook, rather than Twitter.

Another strategy that the company may want to use in minimizing crisis damage is called *Stealing thunder*. This means that the company itself releases the negative information that may ignite a reputational crisis (Coombs, 2015). Stealing thunder may be beneficial in situations where the company is aware that sensitive information is about to reach the public. The effect that stealing thunder has on a potential crisis may be significant and some authors (e.g. Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005; Claeys et al. 2013) even state that it can affect the outcome of a crisis just as much as the response strategy itself.

Crisis responses and information should be delivered to important stakeholders in some form, not just customers as companies often seem to be doing as the study by Johansen et al. (2012) concluded. According to their study, companies are rarely including employees in their crisis communications efforts, even though it could be beneficial. Employees want to be informed of the actions and stances a company is taking during a crisis (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2014).

### **2.5.2 Crisis Management Plan**

Selecting an actual response strategy should be an informed decision based on the current situational factors, instead of a rigid crisis management plan (Coombs, 2014). Although the crisis management process should not follow a restrictive plan, there is a place for a plan also in the social media context. Previous, more dated crisis management literature has emphasized the importance of a pre-made plan for crisis situations (e.g. Mitroff, 1988). Coombs (2014) states that crisis management plan still has an important role but its purpose is to support and expedite the process of responding, rather than being a step-by-step guide. Crises, as well as optimal responses, differ (Seeger, 2006; Mandelli & Mari, 2012) and a very constraining plan could prove useless or even harmful. Instead, the plan should contain pre-planned responses (Van Laer & De Ruyter, 2010; Coombs, 2014) and templates that have been approved by the legal department, which can then be instantly used in certain crisis situations (Coombs, 2014). Organizations may also benefit from recognizing worst-case scenarios and preparing general responses for such events (Taylor & Kent, 2007). Involvement of legal department can be a good idea as admitting guilt in a wrong way may lead to unwanted liabilities (Tyler, 1997) but this is rarely the case and it should not deter companies from apologizing (Patel & Reinsch, 2003).

### **2.6 Reacting to Customer Complaints and Reviews**

The previous chapter presented what factors companies should consider when choosing a stand in a reputational crisis. The focus of this chapter is to present how companies should respond to reports of service failure and related negative feedback before they have a chance to escalate. This chapter also illustrates how the dialogue with the opposing side may evolve.

Customer complaints are a complex issue, which can have horrific consequences if mishandled. The response from a company is practically always needed in the online context (e.g. Breitsohl et al. 2010; Homburg & Fürst, 2007). If the company's response is poor, it can actually lead to a crisis on the social media (Tripp & Grégoire, 2011). In the case of customers' negative reviews, things get complicated. According to Zhang et al. (2010), if positive reviews are abundant, the introduction of a few negative reviews may actually be good for sales. Sorensen and Rasmussen (2004) found that in the case of book reviews, negative reviews increased sales, whereas, in the case of movies, the correlation

seemed to be inverse (Basuroy et al. 2003). If the reviews are posted on platforms that the company in question has control over, the company should consider twice before removing negative reviews and instead consider responding to these. In addition, the credibility of reviews has often been questioned (Qiu et al. 2012) and it has been shown that many online reviews are fraudulent and created by others than consumers (Hu et al. 2011). Manipulating reviews may well lead to a larger loss of brand reputation than what the potential gains are.

Grégoire et al. (2015) gathered a comprehensive framework on how to respond to various consumer complaint situations on the social media in the case of service failure. Figure 9 demonstrates how different complaint situations are related. The framework is explained below.

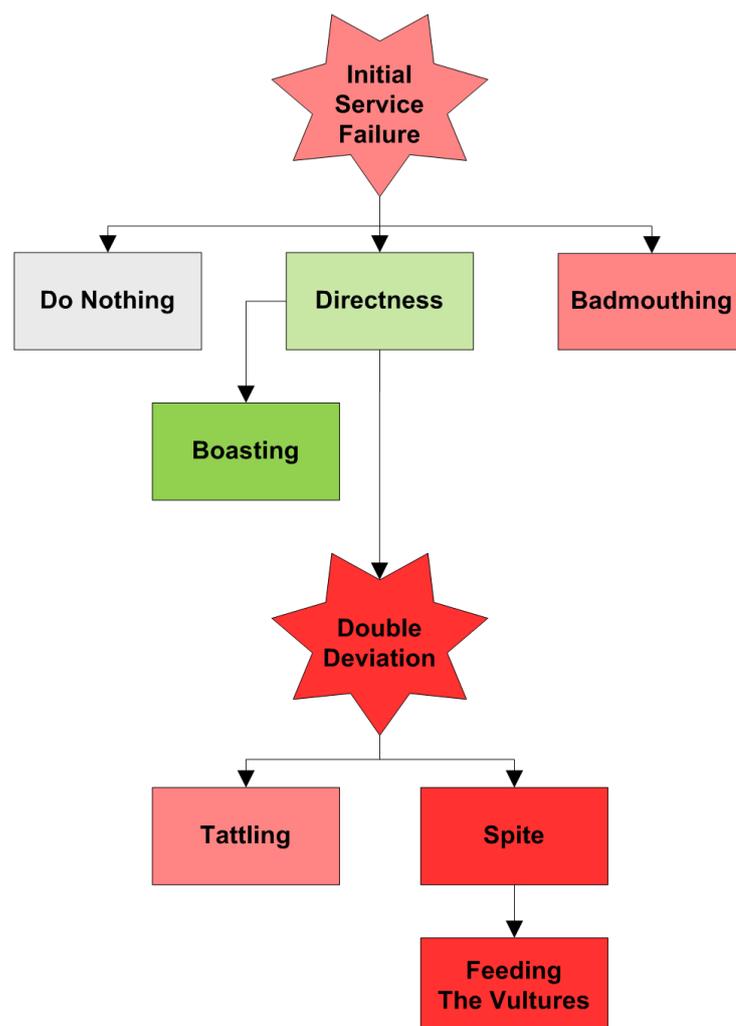


Figure 9. Customer complaining process on the social media. Adaptation from Grégoire et al. (2015, 174).

After the initial service failure, customers may decide to complain directly to the company. This directness is the ideal option from the company's perspective as it can improve its processes and compensate the unsatisfied customer. When the customer summons the company, it should reply swiftly, preferably within an hour. (Grégoire et al. 2015) Previously Siah et al. (2010) suggested that responding within four hours would be sufficient. Zhou et al. (2014) saw in their service recovery study that in the online context people may not expect immediate compensation after a service failure. It is still generally accepted that a company's response should be delivered swiftly.

The customer is not motivated by revenge at this point and if the issue is simple it can be solved publicly. If the issue is more complex, the negotiations should be done privately but the solution should still be posted on the social media. This can result in the most favorable outcome, boasting. This is where the customer posts his or hers positive experience of the complaining process online in which the company is portrayed in a positive light. The company should gratefully acknowledge customers post on the social media and it may share it on its own channels, yet it should not overplay this card as it is the public that will decide whether the company's recovery effort is shareworthy. (Grégoire et al. 2015) Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) also found that a company should always respond to negative word-of-mouth online regardless of the form of the complaint or the platform where the negative word-of-mouth is voiced if the company is summoned to respond. This process of *reactive webcare* may well end up improving consumer brand evaluation (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012).

It is also a possibility that the customer chooses to do nothing after the service failure. This option is selected increasingly rarely. Aside from these two options, the customer can share their negative experiences on social media without contacting the company. This makes timely responding difficult and such complaints may quickly escalate into a crisis on social media. This is one reason why following social media with automated tools is important. In addition to using automated tools, larger companies may want to assign employees to monitor online conversations e.g. JetBlue Airways has an 11 person full-time team dedicated to monitoring and controlling its Twitter feed. (Grégoire et al. 2015) In addition, if a company responds to negative word-of-mouth without being asked to aka *proactive webcare*, it is only effective if done on company's own social media platforms Van Noort and Willemsen (2012). This implies that the company facing criticism may

want to direct the conversation to its own social media channels for its responses to have the desired effect. The benefit of similar actions was suggested already in 2001 by Harrison-Walker in her study of negative word-of-mouth online.

The concept of *double deviation* has been part of the crisis management literature at least since the 90's (Bitner et al. 1990). It is the event that should be avoided at all costs. This takes place when a customer experiences that the service recovery attempts by the company have failed. After double deviation has taken place, the customer may react by *tattling* if they still seek to obtain reparations from the company. Consumers do this by contacting a third party such as a consumer agency or an organization that then publishes the consumer's complaint. The situation is often still very salvageable as a late but appropriate response from the company may still defuse the situation. If a third party offers a solution for the company, it is likely more convenient for the company to agree even to an imperfect solution than to face the worst possible option, spite. If the complaint is posted online, the company should also publish their response on the matter. (Grégoire et al. 2015)

The worst option is that the customer decides to share their experience of the initial service failure as well as recovery failure on the social media. In this case, the customer is emotionally driven, often motivated by revenge. The customer is trying their best to get back at the company and seeking to gain as much publicity as possible. In this case, the company should post online the process that it is going through with the complainant and the actions it is taking to make sure that the mistake made is not repeated. This response should be delivered by a high-level manager or the president of the company. It is not guaranteed that the customer's complaint will go viral; sadly these kinds of complaints have a high likelihood of doing so. (Grégoire et al. 2015)

The crisis may still escalate one step further which is referred in the framework as feeding the vultures. Competitors may take advantage of the maturing crisis on social media and post humorous or mocking comments, trying to portray themselves as a superior choice. In this case, the company should try to have the last word through an appropriate response on the social media, in some cases using a witty retort in a form of a video or a picture may be suiting. (Grégoire et al. 2015)

## 2.7 Response Style

A company must know what it represents to its stakeholders in order to respond correctly to their expectations (Balakrishnan, 2011; Xia, 2013; Janssen et al. 2015). This includes the actual response, the channels used and the response style. A company may have a certain style in their social media posts, but at when facing negative content that is threatening to the company's reputation, a response composed keeping following points in mind may yield more favorable results.

In order for companies' social media entries to be received properly, they have to be credible, personalized and humane (e.g. Kelleher, 2009; Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). Traditional ways for corporations to neutrally portray information – as it would be done for journalists – is most likely not anymore a relevant approach as in crisis situations readers often act strongly based on feelings (Haj-Salem & Chebat, 2014) and as they are often not trained in classic journalism (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009, 238). Neutral information based response is more likely to receive a poor reception than a more personal and emotional communication approaches (Van Der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). In addition, the credibility of responses is paramount (Greysen, 2009). The vividness of the message increases the credibility of the message (Chang & Wu, 2014).

The vividness of the message is discussed by several authors in crisis communications. It seems that in order for a message to have the desired effect, it needs to be credible, humane and vivid. Vividness is about exciting readers' imagination by providing attracting information that is simulating sensory dimensions (Lee & Song, 2010). Vividness is a rather abstract term but vivid content is described as "imagery provoking" and "emotionally interesting" (Chang & Wu, 2014, 208). If consumers have already formed a high consensus i.e. shared, mutual attitude towards a company on the issue, responses done using high vividness are no longer efficient (Lee & Song, 2010). This again suggests that companies should act quickly after recognizing a controversy or they will risk losing potency of their response.

Another theme in crisis communications that academics emphasize is using a conversational human voice. While erecting a face from a company to represent it in the times of crisis is not a new idea, such activity seems to be especially beneficial when communicating in social media, having truly positive effects on stakeholder perceptions (Dijkmans et al. 2015). Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) concluded that conversational

human voice increases the effectiveness of corporate responses to negative word-of-mouth. Park and Lee (2013) showed that conversational human voice reduced the amount of negative word-of-mouth effectively in Twitter. According to Park and Lee (2013), conversational human voice means that a company is represented by a member of the company who uses their own name and perhaps even their own picture in company's responses. Kelleher (2009) adds to the definition that part of conversational human voice are also openness to dialogue, welcoming additional conversations, prompt feedback and uncritical approach to criticism. Conversational human voice seems to be more effective when used by for-profit organizations than when used by non-profit organizations (Park & Lee, 2013).

### **2.7.1 Defensive Responses**

Van Laer and De Ruyter (2010) found that when a company's integrity and trustworthiness are in question, the company should use different delivery styles depending on its response strategy. In the case of denial, delivery should be done in analytical fashion meaning that the content of the denial should be logical and factual. If the company is truly innocent, the form of the denial should be more than just a few sentences and explain comprehensively to stakeholders why the company is not to blame (Dutta & Pullig, 2011). Although defensive responses should be analytical and factual, conversational human voice should also be applied at least in some cases to defensive responses according to Kerkhof et al. (2011) who found that when a company has selected denial response strategy and communicates it via Facebook, it is highly beneficial to use conversational human voice.

### **2.7.2 Accommodative Responses**

Apologies can be a harmful option in an integrity related crisis (Van Laer & De Ruyter, 2010; Coombs, 2015) as they increase the perceived guilt and negative feelings towards the company as established previously. If the company is clearly to blame it really has no option and if a defensive strategy cannot be used and the company is resorting to an apology, it should be expressed in a narrative manner, meaning that the apology should be presented as a first person story that is easily empathizeable. Also when delivering an apology in the case of integrity or trust related issues, company representative(s) involved

in the crisis should be the ones doing the apologizing in order to maximize the effect of the message. (Van Laer & De Ruyter, 2010) If Twitter is used in communications, short tweets seem to be resulting in the best reception (Shultz, 2011). So if an apology is delivered on Twitter, it may be a good idea to include only a short apology and a link to a longer apology published for example on Facebook. The study by Claeys and Cauberghe (2014) supports engaging in emotional response style if the company is highly involved and responsible for the crisis. Xia (2013) adds that brands that are seen as sophisticated, classy and upscale can benefit from showing vulnerability as this portrays them as sincere and may surprise customers positively, however, if the quality is questioned, sophisticated brands should show no vulnerability.

Contradicting many previous studies, Schultz et al. (2011) concluded that an information-based approach to a crisis may be more beneficial than messages of sympathy or apologies. It may well be that there are factors in the online context that are affecting stakeholders' crisis reactions which crisis communications literature is yet to fully understand such as the type of the organization as proposed by Park and Lee (2013).

### **2.7.3 Modifying Online Adverts Before an Imminent Crisis**

Companies' efforts to lessen the negative effects of the on-going crisis are not limited to responses or styles of responses. Companies can also affect crisis outcome by modifying their advertisements as discovered by Avnet and Laufer (2015). The interesting finding was made by aforementioned authors who studied *regulatory fit* and future purchase intentions in two independent studies. Regulatory fit, in this case, was consumers' exposure to advertising that fit well with individual consumer's personal values from a brand that was going through a crisis. The results showed that it was not beneficial to expose a consumer to advertisements that the consumer agreed with before the consumer found out about the negative news. Instead, it was, in fact, beneficial to show the consumer advertisements that the consumer disagreed with aka that were of *non-regulatory fit*, in order to minimize the negative effect on future purchase intentions. For organizations that have found themselves in a crisis, it can then be beneficial to immediately replace online adverts with adverts that are of non-regulatory fit to lessen the impact of the crisis to those stakeholders that are yet to discover the crisis. For an example if a car manufacturer has a customer base that values safe cars over everything else and it would normally advertise

using NCAP test results in their commercials, the adverts should be modified to project some other attribute during the crisis that has a non-regulatory fit such as car performance to minimize negative effects on future sales.

## **2.8 How a Crisis Develops**

Sometimes companies are not given a chance to settle an argument before the other party makes the issue public. Joireman et al. (2016) found that in case of service failure, some customers may need to get revenge in order to forgive the company; however, hope was stirred in the mix by Tripp and Grégoire (2011) who concluded that companies have a good chance of avoiding a social media crisis if they act promptly and properly. According to them, only 4% of consumers complain instantly on social media after their service failure experience and 96% only after double deviation. Jurgens et al. (2016) argue that introduction of social media has made interacting with secondary stakeholders – those without a direct financial connection to the company – more reasonable, but it is also good to remember that even though reputation and exposure are the main drivers for content sharing on social media, many social media sites such as YouTube offer monetary rewards for users that post content that becomes popular (Tang et al. 2012). This may work as an added incentive for individuals to immediately post videos that have potential to cause a crisis for a company, instead of approaching the company directly with their issue.

Crises evolving from service failures are illustrated in more detail in figure 9, however, crises on the social media may spawn from a larger variety of subjects including integrity related mishaps (Liu, 2010) as well as rumours and purely malicious intents (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2010). Rumours and malicious intents can also worsen a crisis on social media (Austin et al. 2012). Crises may be born on social media or they may develop from an underlying organizational crisis (Booth, 2000). Crises predating social media may also resurface and create a controversy (Champoux et al. 2012). In addition, crises can spill over. Roehm and Tybout (2006) concluded that if a similar competing company with similar products and similar values is going through a crisis, stakeholders may associate the issues with a competing company that may actually have nothing to do with the crisis. Sufficient similarity was also found to be a prerequisite for crisis spill over by Janakiraman et al. (2009) and Dahlen and Lange (2006). If such competitors are facing a crisis, it should be addressed in the form of informative denial (Roehm & Tybout, 2006). Siomkos et al.

(2010) studied product-harm crises and found that if the competing company facing a significant crisis had a good reputation before, the crisis is more likely to affect negatively its competitors but if it had a poor reputation before a crisis, this opens opportunities for competition. Companies may feel the need to benefit from competitors crisis by mocking the competitor. Although conducted by some companies, attacking competitors when they are going through a crisis is not recommended and may backfire (Cleeren et al. 2013). Roem and Tybout (2006) state that even denial strategies may boomerang if used against companies that are not similar enough.

Companies do have a time frame within which they may attend to a controversy. Controversies in discussion forums may take longer to mature, giving the involved company up to several days to consider their reaction, whereas crises brewing on Twitter or Facebook may escalate within a day. Especially posts including video and picture content require immediate attention. (Pang et al. 2014) Responding in a timely fashion is paramount as in addition to poor communication efforts (Grebe, 2013), procrastinating on responding can also lead to double deviation (Grégoire et al. 2015).

One of the factors exposing the organization to double deviation is *defensive organizational* behavior. Defensive organizational behavior is the irrational behavior of the members of the organization when facing complaints. Defensive organizational behavior theory is based on decades of psychological research and is a phenomenon which stems from the fact that organizations are made of people and therefore, have same faults as humans. Defensive organizational behavior leads to denial of the existence of the complaints, hostile behavior towards complainants, inadequate complaint analysis as well as reluctance to make changes based on the complaints. (Homburg & Fürst, 2007) It could be assumed that defensive organizational behavior applies to various sorts of controversy handling and not just customer complaints. Company managers should try to recognize this phenomenon and create such an environment which discourages defensive organizational behavior in order to minimize the chances of double deviation taking place.

### **2.8.1 How a Crisis Spreads**

Interplay turning a controversy into a crisis on social media is complex and encompasses elements from both inside and outside social media. Austin et al. (2012) created a

framework to demonstrate this interplay (figure 10). If consumers have had previous negative experiences on the same matter, a crisis may trigger more quickly (Pang et al. 2014). Individuals' motivation to use social media in a crisis situation is subject that has received little academic attention (Grégoire et al., 2015). Research done after 2004 for individuals' motives to engage in social media seems to show that self-image validation, information seeking, personal fulfillment, showing affiliation, political surveillance, social functions, adding knowledge to a community and emotional support motivate social media users (Grégoire et al., 2015). Motives between users seem also to vary significantly and companies may benefit from mapping what motivates their customers to act (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). This could be argued to be especially important when customers are composed of a very homogenous group.

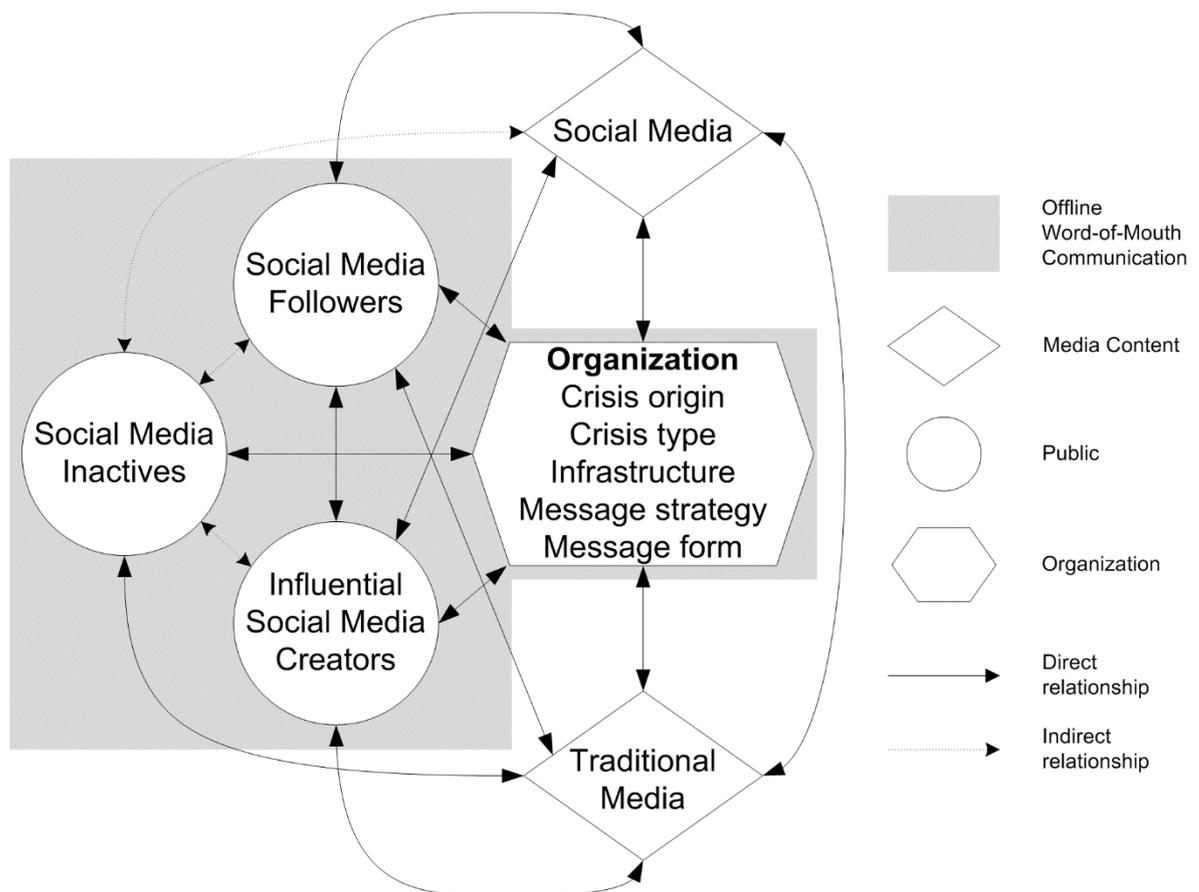


Figure 10. Social-mediated crisis communication model (Austin et al. 2012, 192).

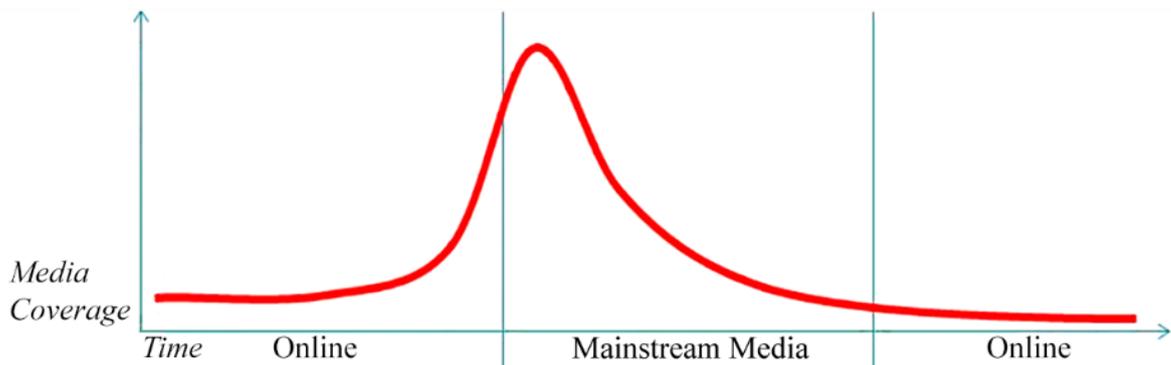
The two studies presented in the paper by Austin et al. (2012) increased understanding on how individuals prefer to interact. If a company reveals information with negative implications to their stakeholders using their own channels, they are more likely to be able

to contain the following conversation. Individuals were more likely to seek more information about the crisis from the same channel where they first learned from it except from the offline word-of-mouth activity in which they engaged after learning from the crisis via social media (Austin et al. 2012). Containing controversy introduced by a third party is likely more difficult. Austin et al. (2012) found that when informed of a crisis by a third party on social media, individuals wanted to learn more about the crisis on social media and when informed by a third party on traditional media, individuals were more likely to seek more information on traditional media. Authors also found that if crisis information was received straight from the company involved, individuals were less likely to seek more information at all. (Austin et al. 2012) These findings contribute to the importance of stealing thunder approach.

Organizations would also benefit from ensuring that stakeholders receive information from trusted sources in addition to the organization (Austin et al. 2012). Recognizing influential social media users may help in this aspect and companies should pay particular attention to the output by these individuals during a crisis, to ensure that the messages are coherent with the company's messages resulting in optimal reception.

### **2.8.2 Crisis Evolving to Traditional Media**

Crises on traditional media cross over to social media and vice versa. Pang et al. 2014 studied when traditional media started covering issues on social media (figure 11). In the examples used in their study, it took on average one day for the crisis to expand on the traditional media channels since its inception. Traditional media covered the issue if it was deemed newsworthy and had a dimension such as novelty, celebrity factor, human interest or relevance to the public. After traditional media had ceased covering the story, conversations continued on the social media. It was also noted that traditional media referred to the crisis during future events when other similar crises took place with other companies.



*Figure 11. Crisis life cycle - Social media and traditional media. Modified for added readability from Pang et al. (2014, 108).*

Utilizing social media properly at the start of the crisis and understanding the interaction between traditional media is an antecedent for minimizing negative effects on reputation (Mandelli & Mari, 2012). A company may do well to produce a response to a crisis on social media before the crisis gains coverage in traditional media channels. Carefully selected and coherent responses on social networks are very likely to be broadcasted as such by the traditional media as indicated by a large study made by Alejandro in 2010 in which 90% of journalists said that Tweet or Facebook comments are valid quotes. This way the company is likely to get their response in social media out along with the news of the controversy, which can be very beneficial if the response has been well planned and thought through. Responding before traditional media covers the issue is also important from the perspective of stakeholders' reception of the response as evasive responses were best received if stakeholders learnt of the issue straight from the organization and accommodative responses were best received if obtained via word-of-mouth (Liu & Jin, 2011) which is how some stakeholders will receive company's response as they learn about it from a peer.

Results of the paper by Austin et al. (2012) emphasize the importance of conveying the company's response also via traditional media as stakeholders often go to traditional media sources to find more information after they have noticed a discussion trend on the social media because many perceive traditional media to be a more credible source of information. Schultz et al. (2011) found that online newspapers are also an important media for social media crisis communication as Twitter users and blog users preferred sharing information from online newspapers rather than other tweets or company blogs.

This may be because organizational sources can be considered more trusted sources than user generated content (Freberg, 2012).

In some regions, traditional media sources may not be as trusted and many conclusions of the studies conducted in the west may be poorly applicable in the eastern part of the world. As highlighted by (Yang & Jiang, 2015), biased traditional media may take a side on a crisis and distort the actual truth in some geographical areas such as China. The importance of timely and properly responding to potential social media crises is heightened in such areas as they may escalate to have enormous effects even if the company had actually done nothing wrong. Chinese value opinions on social media much more than social media users in the US and are also more active (Chiu et al. 2012). Austin et al. (2012) noted that previous research has implied that heavy social media users may see social media as a more credible source of information than traditional media during a crisis.

## **2.9 Effect of Negative Publicity on Future Business**

Five most commonly studied aspects of business affected by a crisis are reputation, emotions, purchase intention, stock prices and word-of-mouth (Coombs, 2015). Brand equity is related to all of the above. Companies that fail to respond to crises properly are likely to see a drop in brand equity. BrandIndex by YouGov is a tool that measures daily changes in brand perceptions. In the case of Nokia, 1000 persons were interviewed daily to produce the measurements. In 2008 Nokia went through a PR-crisis which gathered much attention in the social media via various blogs and forums in Germany. Nokia failed to respond to these conversations in the social media and as a result, lost a tremendous amount of brand equity in just a few days as seen from figure 12. (Sarstedt, 2009) Responding to a crisis causes larger reputation and loss of stock value at the beginning but companies doing so seem to recuperate also faster than those that react less forcefully (Moran & Gregory, 2014).

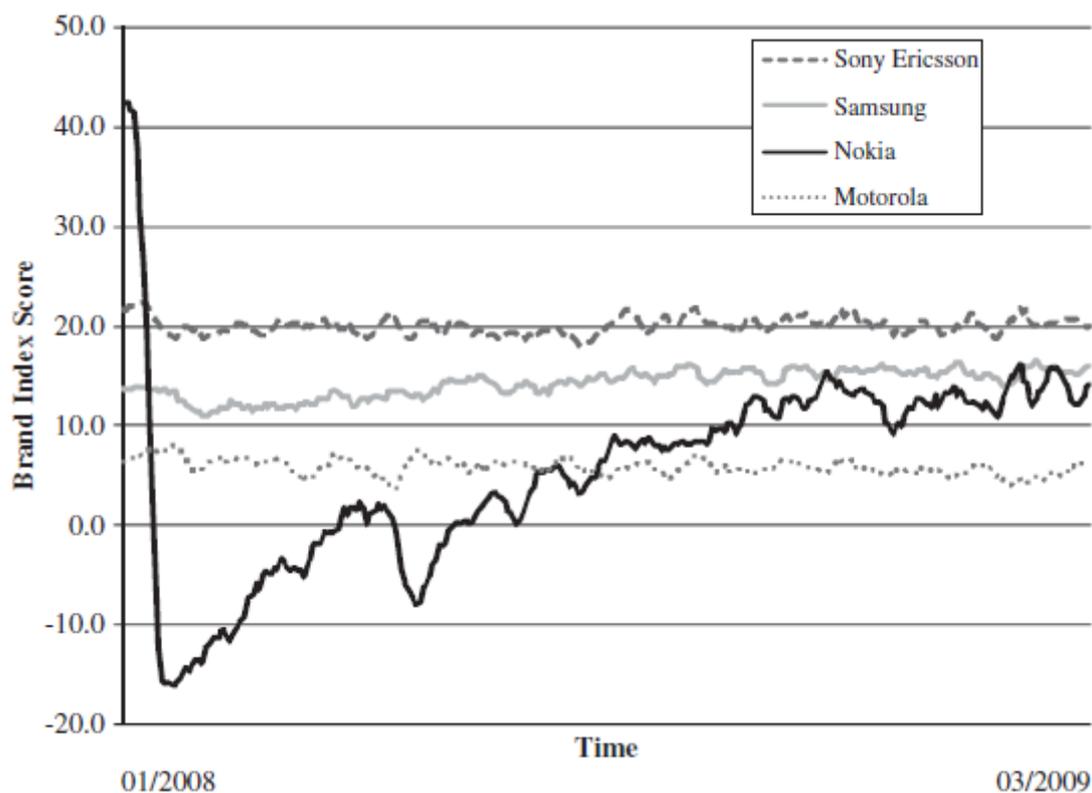


Figure 12. BrandIndex measurements of Nokia and other mobile manufacturers in Germany (Sarstedt, 2009, 500).

In addition to a significant drop in brand equity, Nokia was also very slow to regain lost brand equity as can be seen from figure 12. Even after more than a year it had managed only to grow brand equity on par with other manufacturers but was still far from the position it had held before the crisis. The financial losses caused by the lack of social media responses were likely significant. It is well established that brand equity and financial performance of a company correlate positively (e.g. Roberts & Dowling, 2002) and a questionnaire made in 2011 in the US even suggested that as much as 88% of potential consumers will be less likely to purchase from a company that ignores consumer complaints (Leibovitz, 2011). Poorly handled crises may even have legal consequences (Ucelli, 2002) and especially in a product-harm crisis, negative word-of-mouth seems to affect purchase intentions of other consumers (Bi et al. 2014).

In addition, company reputation has a positive correlation with the number of job applications received (Turban & Cable, 2003). It could be argued that this aspect is paramount for medium and large companies in the long run. The absolute amount of employee turnover in larger companies is higher and selecting employees from a more

extensive pool will likely result in a more capable workforce, thus enabling a more competent organization. Well-known brands have more to lose in a social media crisis from a brand equity perspective and in fact, authors such as Fournier and Avery, (2011) recommend that well-known brands should move from brand building to brand protection, which is essentially what a social media crisis management is about.

Outcomes of crises vary but in their analysis of 16 well-known crises of Fortune 500 companies, Moran and Gregory (2014) found that after a crisis, brand equity is the quickest to recover and taking roughly a year, followed by stock value that recovers after around two years, whereas company reputation takes four years to totally recover from a reputational crisis on average. Time seems to heal wounds to some extent in the long run and it was found to be the most important factor in improving consumers' attitudes towards a company that had gone through a crisis by Vassilikopoulou et al. (2009).

## **2.10 Effects of Pre-Crisis Reputation on the Outcome of a Crisis**

Different stakeholders and users of a service may react to negative information very differently (Chakravarty & Tridib, 2010; Fisher & Reuber, 2007; Mandelli & Mari, 2012). However, demographic variables such as age, gender or online shopping experience seem to have very little effect on whether an individual engages in negative word-of-mouth (Chang et al. 2015). Rather the level of involvement with the company seems to be the moderating factor on the effects of a crisis. More involved users may give less emphasis on the negative information and users that are less involved (Fisher & Reuber, 2007) or just considering customership (Chakravarty & Tridib, 2010) are likely to be more affected by negative news. This being said Tripp and Grégoire (2011) concluded that in the case of personal poor experience loyal customers react more forcefully than casual customers.

Pre-crisis reputation plays a significant role on how much of an effect a crisis has on a company's reputation. Building brand reputation is important from crisis management perspective (Greyser, 2009). The reputation works as a buffer against a crisis and its efficiency depends on the severity of the crisis (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015) and the type of the crisis (Sohn & Lariscy, 2014) but reputation by itself is not enough to deal properly with a crisis (Grunwald & Hempelmann, 2011). In the case of stock prices, good pre-crisis reputation is likely to shield the company to some extent (Jones et al. 2000).

Negative word-of-mouth affects differently less familiar brands and well-known brands. In the case of unfamiliar brands negative word-of-mouth may have a significant impact on customers' perception of integrity and competence. (Lim & Chung, 2011) In addition, if a company had a poor reputation before the crisis, customers are more willing to partake in negative word-of-mouth during the crisis (Chang et al. 2015)

Social responsibility has been lately in vogue in company branding. According to Janssen et al. (2015), if a company has been portraying itself as a socially responsible actor, the stakeholders may expect certain reactions in a crisis situation. This sort of image practically obligates the company to react to the crisis and the response should be delivered swiftly, as socially responsible companies tend to receive more media coverage (Janssen et al. 2015). This is especially true if the crisis in such a company is related to social responsibility as Dawar and Lei (2009) found that the effect a crisis has on brand evaluation is increased if the theme of the crisis is relevant to the central values of the company.

According to Sohn and Lariscy (2014), the academic community disagrees to what extent the positive reputation of a company works as a buffer in a reputational crisis aka the *halo effect*. The authors state that differences of opinion concerning the halo effect can be settled to a large extent by dividing crises into corporate ability crises and corporate social responsibility crises. Corporate ability crises are essentially competence related crises where the crisis is initially caused by a failure in product or service, whereas corporate social responsibility crises are those that are caused by poor business conduct. The authors' findings indicate that halo effect is only present if the crisis is a corporate ability crisis, which means that companies experiencing a crisis related to service failure, can benefit from their previously established good reputation but those that are finding themselves e.g. from a crisis initially caused by questionable company practices cannot shelter themselves using good reputation to the same extent.

An attribute that is often seen contributing to customer retention in the times of crisis is switching costs, which are the costs that the customer will have to pay when transferring customership from one company to another. However, whereas high switching costs normally increase the barrier of switching to competing product or service, during a crisis high switching costs may not work as a tool for customer retention. High switching costs may in fact actually cause the customer more stress and lead to *triple deviation* where

customers become enraged and start acting irrationally trying to harm the company. (Haj-Salem & Chebat, 2014)

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This study is composed and conducted in a way which aims to benefit mainly practitioners. From a practitioners view the value of this study and academic studies, in general, can be questioned. Indeed the link between academic research and individuals taking action in the field can occasionally be difficult to fathom. Creating theory and practitioners applying it is a process that involves multiple parties. Jussila (2015, 45) clarifies confusion around the issue and illustrates how knowledge is created and applied in the interactive and iterative process between individuals, organizations and the scientific community (figure 13).

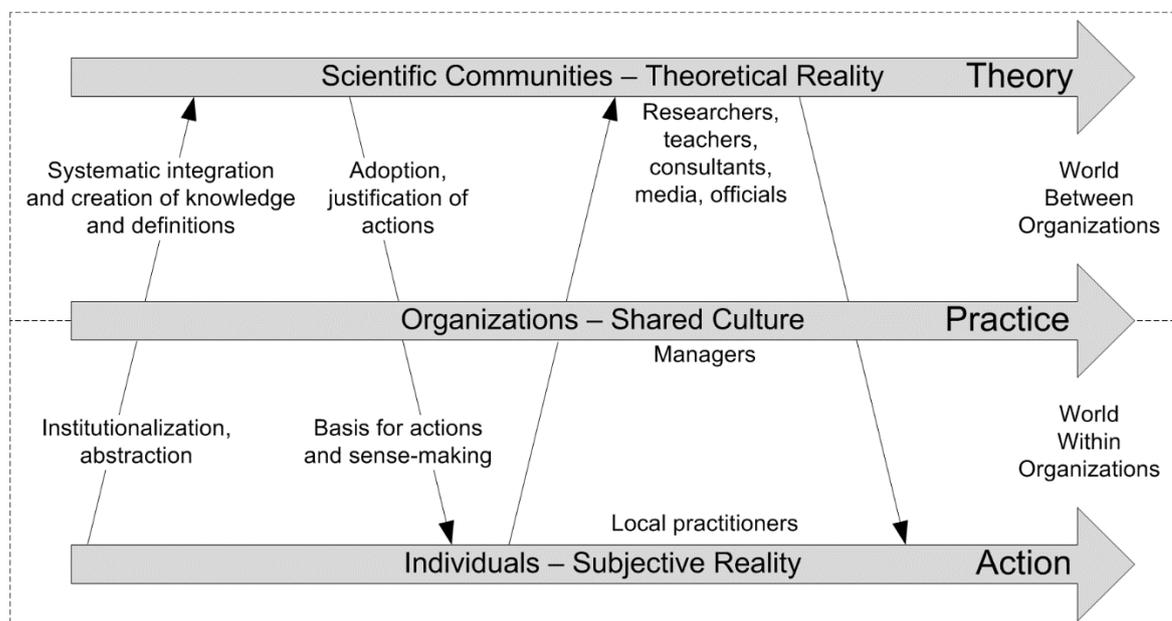


Figure 13. The big picture: Theory, practice and action (translated and adapted from Jussila, 2015, 45).

Above figure should help to visualize the role of academic community in general and the role of this study in advancing the knowledge on social media and crisis communications. Knowledge stems from the actions of practitioners, which then becomes a local practice within an organization. Then these practices are gathered by the academic community to form theory, which then organizations adopt and of which practitioners will act upon.

This chapter will focus on explaining the reasoning behind the selected methodology and how this thesis aims to find answers to its research question, expanding current theory on the issue. This chapter will begin with a brief overview of the chosen research method. Second sub-chapter will discuss the empirical section and how the interview questions

were formulated. Third sub-chapter will display the interview process and most relevant characteristics of the sample. Assessing the validity and reliability of the study and data will conclude the main chapter.

### **3.1 Research Method**

This thesis was conducted using qualitative methodology as the need for studies of qualitative nature were voiced in previous research. Two different analysis methods were used to produce answers to the rather broad research question of this thesis. The first used analysis method was Content Analysis, which is an analysis method that can be utilized in all qualitative studies (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002, 93). More specifically Theory Guided Content Analysis method as defined by Tuomi and Sarajärvi, (2002, 95-99) was used to analyze the first set of questions (appendix 1). The questions were composed so that the data gathered with these interview questions could be analyzed using this analysis method. The data was interpreted by the researcher and patterns and answers for certain questions were searched which is also part of the Content Analysis method (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The second used analysis method was Grounded Theory. During the formulation of the interview questions, it became clear that some of the questions that seemed central to answering the research question had little ground on previous theory or lacked credible previous research. This made it obvious that the data gathered using these interview questions was to be analyzed using Grounded Theory as the goal of the analysis was to generate new theory. These questions were organized as the second set of questions (appendix 1). Data from these questions was compared and classified which is characteristic of Grounded Theory (Dey, 2004, 80).

An optimal tool for gathering data and getting the answers for the set research question and sub-questions was seen to be an open-ended half-structured interview which is typical for qualitative research (Metsämuuronen, 2008, 14). The research question is answered using both existing research and by gathering primary data from social media active organizations operating in Finland. In the case of qualitative research, saturation point can be argued to form differently than in quantitative research (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 62-64). Recurring themes were identified from the sample as well as consistent answers to

certain questions. Saturation point was not reached in all questions but in the case of a few questions in the second set, the saturation point was clearly reached, which is important when applying grounded theory (Dey 2004, 80-81).

All of the data was not transcribed, although, much of it was. The parts of the interviews that were considered common chatter or that had little to do with the interview questions were left out. Much of the transcripts were prepared so that they represented the opinions or views of the representative of the organization but were not transcribed literally. Some excerpts of audio were transcribed literally in order to enable quotation of the material in order to provide support for the conclusions made from the data.

### **3.2 The Interview Questions**

In order to provide a contemporary view on how to prevent and manage social media crises, a set of interviews was conducted. The first set of the interview questions was derived from previous research. Operationalization was used in composing the interview questions which is the act of reshaping existing theory to a form that is measurable by empirical evidence (Lehtinen, 1991, 17). Operationalization also enabled presenting the questions in a manner that was more easily understandable by practitioners who are not necessarily well acquainted with all of the jargon used by academics. The presented questions can be found from appendix 1. All of the questions in the first set are based on previous research and stem from one or several different journal articles. In order to retain the link between previous research and operationalized interview questions, the links between journals and interview questions are displayed after each question in appendix 1. The second part of the interview was composed of questions which were created based on contemporary conversation concerning social media and were influenced by non-academic sources. Interview questions seemed to encompass the subject of preventing and managing crises on social media quite comprehensively as in majority of the interviews the interviewee had little to add to the last open question and in a few instances, they had absolutely nothing to add.

Aside from the preliminary questions, the interview questions are semi-structured and open-ended. This is in concert with the definition of well-cited authors Eskola and Suoranta (2008, 86) who state that semi-structured interview is similar to the structured

interview with clearly ordered and stated questions but these can be answered openly without ready-made options.

*Table 2. Size classification of companies based on the criteria used by European Commission (2003, 39).*

Company Size	Staff Headcount
Micro	<10
Small	10-49
Medium	50-249
Large	>249

In addition to the main to question categories, the interviewees were asked to provide some information about their organization to be able to better characterize the sample. The interview form (appendix 1) starts with six preliminary questions. The purpose of the first and second preliminary question is to define the organization's industry and whether its clientele consists of businesses or individuals. The purpose of the third preliminary question is to define the organization's size. Size is defined purely by using the staff headcount, disregarding annual turnover and balance sheet (table 2), which was seen sufficient for the purposes of this thesis. This also streamlined the interview process, leaving time for more relevant questions. The purpose of the fourth question is to define whether the organization has externalized social media management. Fifth and sixth preliminary questions were composed to investigate the extent of which the organization had been involved in challenging social media situations or all out crises as defined in chapter 1.5, as well as to investigate the underlying causes for controversy on social media.

### **3.3 The Sample and Interview Process**

Primary data was collected over the phone during May and June of 2016. Discretionary sampling was used to select organizations that were active on social media to be interviewed, which is justified in qualitative studies (e.g. Silverman, 2006, 43). Organizations that had experienced a large controversy on social media that had escalated to traditional media were given priority, but organizations that had only minor no or recognizable social media controversies were also approached. All included organizations are active on at least two social media platforms. The number of potential organizations is huge and only a fraction of these were contacted.

Facebook still remains the largest social media platform (table 1) and it was assumed that organizations that are generally active on social media are likely using Facebook. Organizations were primarily approached privately via Facebook. This approach was selected as the inquiry was guaranteed to be delivered to a person that is involved with social media in that particular organization. In large organizations, it may be difficult to reach the right personnel. If the organization had not enabled Facebook-messaging, they were contacted via email or through messaging platforms that they had created. Many of the organizations that replied did so first on Facebook which then lead to email dialogue. Three organizations granted an interview right away on Facebook. Initially, 40 organizations were contacted but this yielded an unsatisfactory amount of interviews, after which another 62 organizations were contacted. Out of the total 102 organizations contacted, 87 organizations were initially contacted via Facebook and 15 via email or other electronic contact forms.

Out of 102 organizations that were approached, 12 organizations granted an interview, resulting in a response rate of 11.8%. The response rate was expected to be low as the subject is quite sensitive and it is understandable that organizations may not want to discuss past crises or reveal information concerning issues they may have had.

All of the interviews were one on one interviews, but many of the interviewed expressed that answers for the interview questions were gathered from additional personnel working in the organization. Many of the interviewed – in the case of larger organizations – were high in the organizational hierarchy. These two facts enabled the interviewees to provide a broader picture of the issue as well as include some managerial perspective. The interviews were conducted in Finnish but the interview questions are translated into English to

increase the accessibility, transparency, ease of peer review of the results and to make future research easier (see appendix 1). Interview questions are also included in Finnish for the same aforementioned reasons (see appendix 2). All interviews were recorded with the interviewee's consent. The interviews produced roughly 11 hours of recorded audio.

Two of the interviews were rescheduled and one organization cancelled their interview session due to upcoming arrangements with shares which dictated that they could not divulge data that may have led to information asymmetry. Aside from the aforementioned, no surprises or other events took place that would have affected data gathering process or analysis.

The sample included interviews from various industries and both traditional for-profit corporations, as well as from non-profit organizations. The sample consisted of organizations operating in the following industries: Amusement Park, Charity, Consumable Goods, Education, Energy, Finance, Information Technology (x2), Insurance, Marketing and Media (x2).

Only one of the included organizations had outsourced social media management to a significant extent and others collaborated only occasionally with external partners, mainly during product launches or other large marketing campaigns. The sample included B2B, B2C organizations and variations of these. Also, a marketing agency was included as it was assumed to possess the most contemporary knowledge on social media management for obvious reasons.

The majority of the sample consisted of large organizations with more than 249 employees, three organizations were of medium size and one was small by the definition shown in table 2. No micro organizations were included in the sample. Seven out of the 12 interviewed organizations operated internationally and five domestically. Most of the interviewed organizations have had significant coverage in both traditional and social media.

Almost all of the organizations had experienced some sort of controversy on social media. Most common causes for controversies on social media in the target organizations were by far product or service related issues, which were brought up in the majority of the interviews. Other causes that had stirred controversy in the sample were employee conduct, contemporary subjects such as immigration related issues and issues relating to business

conduct. Discontinuing products had also stirred controversy. A few very specific reasons for social media controversies were brought up, these reasons are related to malicious intent but they cannot be described in more detail as this would risk giving away the involved organization. Although the spectrum of controversies organizations had experienced was somewhat narrow, the organizations recognized a variety of other causes that they are preparing for and assume that might cause controversy. Such causes along with a more detailed list of potential sources of controversy are presented in chapter 5.1.

Although almost all organizations had experienced controversies, only five of the interviewed organizations can be said to have gone through a crisis on social media by the definition used in this thesis (see chapter 1.5). One of the interviewees emphasized that one of their crises had had a significant negative impact on the number of customers. Other four organizations said that they had experienced mainly short term impacts to the organization's image. It was also voiced that managing a crisis can drain a lot of resources which temporarily disturbs the organization's operations in other areas.

The organizations are characterized by an assigned number further on when quoting or presenting findings that are source relevant. The sample is not characterized in more detail as the subject is delicate and the interviewed were promised anonymity.

### **3.4 Reliability and Validity**

Reliability of a qualitative study stems differently than that of a quantitative study (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 208) according to whom, the analysis stage and assessing reliability are connected more closely and cannot be assessed easily as separate subjects. This being said the reliability of this study is still evaluated to increase transparency. Self-evaluating reliability is rather dubious and may be better achieved with triangulation as proposed by Opperman (2000) but as university guidelines dictate that the content of this paper must be produced by a single individual, reliability can only be evaluated by the author.

Reliability of data is perceived to be good as the interviews were conducted in Finnish which is the native language of both the interviewer and the interviewees, minimizing misunderstandings related to lingual difficulties. It can also be assumed that interviewees are more enabled in expressing themselves when using their native tongue, resulting in more information rich interviews. Cultural differences are also likely to play only a tiny

role in the reliability of the data analysis as the author and interviewees reside in the same geographic area with arguably a rather homogenous culture.

The main factor affecting the validity of the theory and the overall study is the fact that articles were subjectively selected for evaluation. The author of this paper comprehensively researched the selected relevant fields and included a variety of articles until it was perceived that additional articles had only little to add to the included theory and presented practices. Although the selection of journals and books encompasses many or even most relevant articles that relate to the phenomenon of social media crisis, it would be naive to state that all relevant articles were found.

The low response rate can be argued to have little effect on the validity of the study as the study is of qualitative nature and the goal set in the beginning was to perform roughly 10 interviews for a satisfactory dataset. Non-response bias plays only a small role as the thesis seeks support for previous research and aims to identify novel practices. Such evidence can be found from a small sample. The effect of the small sample size to the validity of conclusions on the part of novel practices and applicability of past theory was limited by presenting the conclusions as indicative instead of definitive.

The validity of the study was seen to be good as the methodology was perceived to suit the research questions and goals and the study. Finnish practitioners were seen to be on par with their peers in other countries and there is no reason to assume that their practices would be less contemporary than that of their peers which should make the sample valid for the purposes of this study.

## **4 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

This chapter will present the results of the empirical research. Data from the first and second set of questions was analyzed for patterns and similarities. Commonalities in data, as well as conflicting views, are presented below. Also, information that is not relevant to the respective interview question but relevant to the topic is written out. Preliminary questions that characterized the data were analyzed in chapter 3.3. Much of the answers to questions six, seven and nine in the second set expectedly included repetitive answers and such information is not written out. Answers to each question are presented in the same order as they were presented to the sample (see appendices).

### **4.1 First Set**

1. Does your organization have a specific person or a team that is responsible for social media activities?

Social media management was organized in teams or handled by a single individual or few individuals in some organizations. Even some of the larger organizations had only a few people responsible for their social media activities. When organizations had teams in place, the teams were in many cases cross-functional. These teams often had a manager or managers who were ultimately responsible for social media activities. In some organizations, tens of people had access to the organization's social media accounts. When teams were used, the responsibilities were divided in two distinctive ways. First possible way was to make members of a certain department responsible for a certain social media platform that supported their function. For example in one organization, Communications was responsible for Twitter, Marketing was responsible for Facebook and Human Resources were responsible for LinkedIn. The second way was to manage social media platforms under a product name, so that all major products had their own team or an individual that took care of all the related social media platforms. Only one of the organizations had an individual whose main job was to manage social media. In all other organizations, this was done as a part of other work activities.

2. Have you issued guidelines to your employees regarding social media use in subjects that concern your organization?

Three organizations expressed that they had special social media training for their employees. Organizational guidelines for posting on social media varied. It was clear that social media posts that include sensitive information concerning clients were strictly forbidden. Only one of the organizations imposed no guidelines on social media use for its employees. Many of the organizations had some form of written rules on social media conduct. The guidelines were seen either restrictive or encouraging. Many of the organizations were in the process of developing new guidelines that were promoting their personnel to include organizational matters in their social media entries. A clear trend was seen to develop guidelines towards facilitating employee social media posting that involved the organization. One organization even expressed a concern that introducing written rules on social media use could severely deter their employees from including the organization in their posts. Another stated that it was a greater challenge to motivate employees to talk about organizational matters than making sure that employees do not talk out of turn on social media. One of the organizations with a more restrictive policy explained their policy by indicating that traditional media is quick to quote employees' comments which may be harmful for the organization as a single employee rarely possesses all the relevant information about an incident and should, therefore, refrain from commenting. Even though the sample was small, there were indications that leeway on social media conduct was not dependent on the organization's size or whether the organization's focus was on businesses or individuals.

One of the organizations had a clear demarcation on allowed topics: everything that the organization had made public was a potential subject for conversation on social media. Another rule of thumb that several organizations brought up was that when employees participate in conversations that concern the organization or post material that concerns the organization, the employees should make clear their involvement with the organization.

### 3. Are you active on several social media platforms?

Organizations used various social media platforms. All of the interviewed organizations were using Facebook and 11 out of 12 were also using Twitter. Nine of the organizations were using Instagram and six were using LinkedIn. Other social media platforms that were used actively by several organizations were YouTube and Snapchat. Other mentioned platforms were Flickr, Vimeo, Pinterest and Periscope. On average, the organizations were active on 4 2/3 social media platforms, not including various blogs.

It was expressed by several organizations that certain social media platforms were better in reaching certain audiences. For example, blogs were used by several organizations to deliver information to corporate clients and Instagram was a good tool in reaching active, young adults.

### 4. How actively do you follow and engage in your social media channels?

All of the organizations were publishing content at least once a week in their social media channels. Eight of the 12 organizations said that they were posting social media entries daily. It was also clearly expressed in four interviews that posting frequency is related to the platform used.

All of the organizations monitored their social media accounts several times a day or followed them constantly during work hours. Six organizations were also following their social media channels outside office hours. In addition to the aforementioned six organizations, two organizations said that they follow their social media channels outside office hours if a potential crisis has been identified. In this case a person or persons will be appointed to follow how the situation develops.

One organization stated that tools such as *Slideshare* and *SmartShare* help them in sharing information between employees concerning social media posting on the organization's accounts.

5. Are you utilizing social media monitoring tools? (e.g. Hootsuite, Social Mention, Google Alerts)

Even though the amount of social media monitoring tools is staggering, the tools used by the target organizations were rather similar. Five organizations were currently using or had used a social media monitoring tool called *Meltwater*. Two of these organizations said that when the organization is getting less attention on social media, using monitoring tools can become expensive when comparing to the value that they bring. Tools called *Falcon Social* and *Hootsuite* came up also in several interviews. Other mentioned tools were *M-brain*, *Sprinklr*, *Tweetdeck* and *ampparit.com*.

One organization stated that they could not reveal the name of the tool that they are using in social media monitoring.

The importance of social media monitoring tools was emphasized by many and one organization stated that the role of such tools is to grow in the future. Despite the aforementioned, two of the organizations said that they are not using any tools to monitor social media and the native notifications that social media platforms provide have been sufficient for their needs. In one of these organizations, the organization had employees located in different time zones, so they felt that they are able to constantly monitor social media without any tools.

Only a few organizations were using several social media monitoring tools. The majority of the organizations saw social media monitoring tools as beneficial and used them to follow what sort of conversations revolved around the organizations. Two organizations stated that social media monitoring tools were also used as a marketing aid providing data on how the target audience was receiving organization's social media entries and advertisements. One organization stated that monitoring tools are also used to follow certain themes or topics regardless whether these include the organization.

One organization was managing all its social media accounts under the social media managing service called *Sprinklr*. This enabled the organization to monitor all its social media accounts as well as to post content so that it would only have to use this interface instead of various native interfaces that social media platforms offer by default.

6. How swiftly should you react to negative information concerning your organization on social media?

Organizations made it clear that all negative information concerning the organization does not warrant a response. Generic complaining without any goal was an example of such negative information. If a response is to be delivered during the day, 10 organizations stated that it should be delivered within a few hours. Three organizations stated that some cases warranted an immediate response, such as false negative information that was published by an influential and well-known individual.

Many organizations emphasized that it was more important to quickly identify potential crises than to actually quickly respond to these. More complex issues needed more in-depth responses and it was seen paramount to formulate a comprehensive response before addressing the issue. One organization also stated that they will not respond in any way to the potential crisis until they have a well-structured response. In the case of the marketing agency, that managed other organizations' social media activities, some controversies were addressed by the agency itself but in more severe cases it was essential to inform the client swiftly of the identified concern.

7. How do you respond if a client publishes a complaint concerning company product or service on social media?

Product related issues were the most common cause for crises on social media in the sample. Product related controversies were also difficult to handle in some cases. In many organizations, the organization was not able to address publicly issues voiced by their customers as their contracts prevented them from revealing identity of their clientele. The only form of response they could deliver was a request informing the customer to seek support privately from the organization. This practice of redirecting complainers to private communication was also popular among the organizations without strict client confidentiality contracts that would prevent them from addressing the voiced issues publicly.

Commonly the author of the complaint was thanked in apologetic manner for contacting the organization after which the complainant was ushered to sort out the issue in a private channel. One of the organizations stated that if the customer is just seeking fair compensation, the initial contact by the customer will be done privately, indicating that publicly complaining individuals may be less motivated to accept reparations.

According to Organization 11, all negative product-related complaints do not warrant a response, "When you have roughly a million customers, you can't answer to all the feedback". Instead, consumer feedback was addressed if several customers were posting similar complaints or if the issue was seen to be escalating.

8. If a customer would publish a complaint concerning your service or product on social media and would find your response to be very satisfying, would you consider posting the complaint process on social media?

The opinions on sharing publicly a successful complaint process were divided. Eight organizations were in favor of the practice. Out of these eight, two organization stated that they had publicly shared such processes e.g. in the organization's blog. A third organization stated that they are leaving complaint processes visible online which the organization perceived to be the same as sharing the process. Other organizations in favor of the practice saw that the practice had potential, but they had not implemented it yet. The interviewee from one of the organizations that had not yet utilized the practice but saw it feasible expressed that if sharing the successful complaint process would benefit other clients, it would definitely be shared on the organization's channels. Four organizations stated clearly that they would not engage in such activity. Two of these organizations expressed this practice is not viable due to their contracts relating to client confidentiality. A third from the group that did not see complaint sharing process as a viable option expressed that they are updating their FAQ list as a result of complaint processes, but would not share individual cases.

9. If you were accused of a wrongdoing on social media, in which sort of situations would you consider taking the following stand?

*Confronting the accuser* was not seen as a viable response strategy by most of the organizations. Only 2 organizations considered using this strategy in cases where accusations are clearly lies and they are harmful to the organization. One of these two organizations emphasized that finesse is needed with this approach and that customers must never be offended.

*Denial* was an acceptable response strategy to 11 of the 12 organizations. Using denial was seen acceptable only if the organization had nothing to do with the claimed wrongdoing. Lying was not an option to any of the organizations and in fact transparency and truthfulness were themes that came up constantly during the interviews. An organization stated that they will not engage in frivolous bickering on whether they were responsible for claimed wrongdoing but rather engage when they are clearly in the right by posting a corrective statement. It was also voiced that denial is more easily used between organizations. One organization stated that using denial in a context where the accusation is conducted by an individual towards an organization is more challenging and another stated that if an individual is in trouble, the organization should try to help even if it is not to blame.

*Scapegoating* was a response strategy that many saw applicable but three organizations were quite adamant that such a strategy will simply not work in the social media context “99% of such cases would turn against [our organization]” (Organization 1). Other two stated that they will take responsibility even if they are not to blame. The rest who saw the strategy as viable had a lot to add on how the strategy should be applied. Most of the organizations added that Scapegoating should be used alongside with another response strategy and it may manifest only as a small part of a larger response such as a single sentence or a few sentences. One organization said that they may publish a statement together with the third party that was responsible. The third party accepting responsibility was a prerequisite for many for using this strategy. The marketing agency added that scapegoating is easier if the third party is well known.

*Excuse* was seen by eight organizations to be a viable option but they added that it could be applied only in force majeure cases or when the presented reason for organization’s inability to prevent the incident was true. Again transparency and openness were repeating themes “lying only causes more problems” (Organization 3). One of the four organizations

that were not using the excuse response strategy specifically stated that it would not consider using this strategy even in force majeure cases. Curiously one of the organizations that favored this response strategy stated that even though being truthful is absolutely necessary, small white lies are acceptable when responding to accusations.

*Justification* was a response strategy where the sample was quite clearly divided for no obvious reason. Seven organizations stated that they would not consider using this strategy. The other five stated that they may use justification if a customer has clearly contributed to the incident or the customer is clearly to blame. Many expressed that the used terminology must be carefully selected when composing a response using this strategy. One organization saw this strategy to be important in order for the traditional media to get the full picture of the situation, enabling it to portray the issue more favorably for the involved organization.

*Reminder* was a response strategy that no organization ruled out. Some were less keen on using this approach as they were worried that if the positive reminders are artificial “[...] people see quickly through them” (Organization 1) or that introducing new positive topics may backfire “[...] strikes back fast if [organization] tries to force another subject” (Organization 2).

Two of the organizations stated that if the controversy has sparked from a decision made by the organization, the organization may “[...] try to highlight the good things” (Organization 6) that come out of the decision or “[...] explain the positive sides [...]” (Organization 4) of the decision.

Many organizations implied that bringing up the good past deeds of the organization only works if the organization indeed possesses a good track record and the negative event is very rare. One organization even said that they will only refer to the good history of the organization if the controversy is the first of its kind.

Multiple organizations also stated that contemporary positive news can be introduced on social media during a controversy. In general, it seemed that within the sample this strategy was one of the more popular and one organization stated that an on-going controversy should not be allowed to affect organization’s normal communication activities too much and posting positive content should continue regardless of the controversy.

*Ingratiation* was also one of the more popular response strategies among the organizations. If the issue that was brought up by an individual led to organizational changes or if the organization was clearly to blame 10 out of 12 organizations were willing to ingratiate the social media user and nine out of 12 were willing to enhance their blandishing activities with physical or electronic gifts.

*Compensation* was seen as a good response strategy by nine organizations. Two of these stated that they would not publicly compensate. The nine organizations stated that compensation can be used in clear product or service failure situations. One organization stated that if a customer has been bounced around unnecessarily much between the organization's channels resulting in a poor customer experience, the customer may be compensated. One organization saw potential in this response strategy to work also as a good publicity stunt in cases where it was clear to all that the organization was not responsible, no one expected the organization to compensate and even the complainant may not have been expecting the organization to answer. In such cases, the organization could unexpectedly publicly compensate and in this way turn the initially negative information positive, hoping that the event would go viral.

*Apology* was for many organizations the most used response strategy. Four organizations were ready to take responsibility for events that were not their fault. One organization said that it was better to put a stop to the negative event by taking blame instead starting to look for the guilty party "Bouncing around an unsatisfied individual is harmful to all involved parties." (Organization 1). This response strategy was selected by all organizations when the organization was at fault and responsible for the accused wrongdoing that had caused harm. Three organizations said that this would definitely not be their initial response choice and before applying, they would need to either find out all the facts relating to the incident or get orders from higher up the organizational hierarchy to deliver the apology. One of these three organizations stated that it would use apology only in a case of product or service failure, not in controversies involving employees or organizational practices. Only two organizations stated that they may use the help of lawyers when composing an apology.

10. Do you proactively plan responses to various difficult situations on social media? Are you including your legal department (if you have such a department) in the planning process?

Three organizations responded that they use only previous experience to compose responses to controversies or do it “case by case” (Organization 1). The remaining nine had some sort of a crisis management plan. These nine organizations had answer templates for various situations and had made pre-made decisions on what the organizations stand will be in potentially surfacing issues. The plans contained only in a few instances ready-made responses but most of the plans included responses that had only the major statements without any of the details. Four organizations stated that they may include the law department in the planning process in some way. More specifically one of the organization stated that they will seek consultation from their lawyer with the wording of some of the responses and another stated that they will check the law department on what sort of information they are allowed to release.

Some of the organizations had prepared rather comprehensively to potential crisis situations. They had prepared initial replies, to which they formulated potential reaction from social media users to which again they had prepared responses. Organizations also tested their crisis plans by doing drills in which their employees had to put their crisis plan to work. One organization even practiced potential crisis situations with their partner organizations that were active on social media. Organizations were preparing templates especially before product launches and when they had identified issues that may provoke a controversy. “many issues that we prepare for do not turn into a controversy [...] but we still prepare for those” (Organization 7)

In addition to templates, the crisis plans included traditional crisis communication preparations such as roles of the employees during a crisis and channel-specific responsibilities.

11. If your organization has been involved in an event that potentially has negative effects on the organization’s public image, do you consider revealing information

of such an event on social media before the information becomes publicly available from another source?

Out of the 12 organizations, four thought that publishing negative information on social media was a bad idea. One of these four organizations said that they would prepare to address the issue in case it was brought up on social media but they would not initiate the controversy themselves. The remaining eight organizations saw potential in pro-actively releasing and addressing negative information aka *stealing thunder*. Some of the organizations had already implemented the stealing thunder strategy. Many organizations said that they recognize the benefits of such practice e.g. it was believed that containing the following controversy would be easier. Almost all eight organizations also expressed that successfully stealing thunder was challenging in the present media environment. If an incident involved other parties in addition to the organization, it was seen difficult to be the first to release news of the negative event.

An organization also added that if they became aware of an event that may cause their clients harm in the future regardless of whether the organization is involved or not, they will release information of this on social media. Two organizations stated that they perceive posting negative information as a service.

12. Once you have become aware of a controversy on social media and have responded to the controversy, do you inform your stakeholders of the controversy and of your response?

Stakeholders were in many cases informed of the on-going controversy. All of the interviewed had some sort of internal communication practices in place. The majority of the organizations also had some sort of intraorganizational service in use in addition to email. Only a few organizations had their own structured solutions for handling internal communications. The most frequently mentioned publicly available tool was *Slack*, which was perceived beneficial by many organizations. Personnel were informed of the contemporary issues either periodically or when seen necessary. In case a controversy involved a member of the organization, they were also immediately informed either

personally or via email. One of the organizations also had a private Facebook group which provided additional information about contemporary events. Two of the organizations stated that they would inform also other parties such as partners during controversies that include or might affect partners. The organizations had wildly different views on what sort of controversies warranted internal briefing.

13. If your competitor was involved in a controversy on social media, would you consider taking advantage of the situation?

All of the organizations were adamant that directly attacking a competitor having a crisis was out of the question. An internationally operating organization added that in Finland the audience is very sensitive to such actions, however, if a competitor was having issues relating to a certain theme, the organization could utilize this theme in its advertisements, but never with a direct reference to the competitor. Another organization said that if a competitor is having a crisis, they may increase their advertisement efforts. A third organization said that media is often keen on getting comments when competitors are having issues but a gentlemen's agreement dictates that no one goes giving out comments in such situations. The exception to this rule was if competitors were having a crisis that was very closely related to their organization or could be understood to affect also their organization. In such a case the organization would post a neutral statement that they are not having similar issues.

14. If you were involved in a controversy on social media and your competitor was trying to take advantage of the situation on social media, how would you respond?

Many organizations expressed that if a competitor was humorously addressing the ongoing controversy, no actions were warranted. If action was deemed necessary, by far the most popular measure was to contact the competitor or in some cases competitor's top management to sort out the issue and discuss the possible removal of the competitor's content. Most of the organizations would not publicly address competitor's mocking content. A few exceptions did surface from the sample. If the competitor's content included false claims, misinformation relating to products or was seen as especially

harmful, seven organizations stated that they could publicly react to the issue by releasing a statement in their own channels. Only one organization clearly stated that they would engage competitor on any channel and take part in conversations that competitor's actions may have sparked.

15. In your organization's response to negative information on social media, is the messenger portrayed as the organization, a member of the organization or some other identity?

In total, four organizations stated that their public responses to negative information are done by using only the organization's name. "[...] we always use only the [organization's name] so that we retain clarity in our communications." (Organization 10). Eight organizations were using also employees' own names to some extent. Many of the organizations were using a combination of an individual's first name and organization's name together in responding to negative information. One organization emphasized that if negative information was addressed on other channels than the organization's own channels, the link between the commenter and organization must be very clearly displayed. Almost all organizations were using employees' own names in private conversations when dealing with negative information. Several organizations stated that public responses to negative information composed by top management are often done with their full name as are responses done by employees such as product managers or customer managers that have their personal information already available publicly.

The crisis severity influenced the portrayed entity that was used to deliver the organizational response in many cases. More severe situations warranted managerial identity in delivering the message.

16. In your organization's response to negative information on social media, do you apply a specific style or principles in your response or do you rather focus on the information content of your response?

Aside from one organization, all members of the sample stated that they had some sort of a style in their responses. There were two distinct styles that organizations used in

responding to negative information on social media. The first group of five used a very formal style in their responses that included only the essential information. “The more you explain, the more there is things that [...] a tendentious individual can grab a hold of” (Organization 10).

The second group of six applied a more informal style which was characterized as “relaxed and friendly but clear and in line with other communications” (Organization 1), “Humble and humane [...] put ourselves in the other person’s shoes” (Organization 2), “[...] talk like a person to a person [...] using words that people normally use” (Organization 6), “[...] keep it personal and warm [...] can’t just state facts that a person does not necessarily even understand” (Organization 8), “relaxed and approachable [organization’s name] style. Playing with facts does not work and may create accusations of arrogance and unwanted reactions.” (Organization 12). The informal style also included, informal addressing of the other party, giving a face to the response, being emphatic, using the hamburger method, giving the picture that the organization was listening and stating that it is ok to feel anger and have opinions.

In general, organizations had a lot to say about their response style and it was seen important. Some also stated that the situation dictates much of what kind of style should be used, more dire situation may warrant less relaxed approach “the wrong style of communication may cause more dissatisfaction than the content itself” (Organization 7).

17. Do you take part in social media conversations outside your own social media channels? (For example by commenting client’s blogs or by responding to tweets)  
If so, do you partake in the conversation before you have been asked to respond?

All organizations thought that participating in conversations outside the organization’s own channels was feasible. Those that did not practice this, did so due to lack of resources and even then shared posts made by others. Eight organizations were actively participating in conversations outside their own channels. Organizations got involved in conversations on various social media platforms, most common being Twitter and Facebook. Organizations also engaged or would engage proactively before they were invited to the conversation. Just one organization stated that it is merely following conversations and will participate only after it has been tagged in a conversation.

One organization stated that its goals in participating in a conversation are to add information and to help other parties by e.g. forwarding these to organization's customer support.

18. Do you aim to identify influential social media users (such as bloggers or YouTube personalities) that are relevant to your organization?

The sample was quite active in scanning and identifying social media influencers. Only one organization said that due to lack of resources, it is not conducting such activities. All the rest had either an on-going process where they mapped influential social media users or had conducted such research in the past. One organization stated that they had conducted two network analysis where they identified several influential Twitter users and bloggers. Some organizations had also opened a dialog with social media influencers where they had asked these to post content which involves the organization or even invited the influential social media users to the organization's facilities to get to know how they operate. Politicians were mentioned by several organizations as influential social media users, other mentioned users included video bloggers and other organizations. For some organizations, the influential social media users were practically the same individuals or organizations as in the offline context, but this was not the case in all organizations. An organization stated that it is also important to map which sort of conversation the social media influencers generate and that social media monitoring tools are useful also in this regard. Another organization also stated that if they find a conversation in which several social media influencers are participating, this warrants special attention from the organization.

19. If you are involved in a controversy on social media, do you publish information relating to the controversy on your website?

Two organizations would not add controversy related information on their websites. One of these organizations saw websites as an obsolete channel for delivering information concerning negative events and was using only social media channels in such events.

10 organizations would utilize their websites in communications during a controversy but many expressed that the controversy has to be quite significant in order for them to do so. Organization 12 stated that many organizations “get too excited” about controversies and they do not want to invoke controversies any further than necessary and only post content on their website when it is seen absolutely necessary. Others were also reserved in modifying their websites but not necessarily to the same extent. One organization had a clear rule of thumb; they would add controversy related information to their website only when it was seen to cause more clarification than confusion. Others stated that they could even post an article addressing the controversy or add a link to another source of information.

Even though one organization saw utilizing organizations website obsolete in this regard, another stated that during a crisis their organization’s websites were receiving many times their normal traffic and had even crashed due to the sudden demand, indicating that websites may well still hold an important role in relaying crisis related information.

20. If an individual repeatedly publishes complaints concerning your organization on social media, does it affect how you react to the complaints?

Only one organization stated that it reacts no differently to repeat complainers but added that such activity still causes different reactions behind the screen. Another added that if the complainer is behaving properly but asking the same question and expecting an answer, an answer will be delivered “[...] even if the person would’ve asked the same question 50 times already.” (Organization 12).

The rest of the sample reported that repeat complainers were treated differently than occasional or first-time complainers. In general, organizations applied less effort in addressing such complaints. In some cases, the organizations ignored the complainant all together and did not respond in any way “There is no shortage of these chaps who have the energy to crack a comment daily.” (Organization 8). The complainant’s motives seemed to influence greatly on how the organizations responded. If the complainant had a concrete problem and was in need of a solution, the fact that he was a repeat complainer had little effect on the organizations’ response.

In case the complainant was only seeking to get attention, mock the organization, had an issue that could not be solved or was clearly hostile, organizations disregarded such complainers, removed or hid their comments or even blocked the user. A few also stated that answering to such complainers only aggravates the situation and did not want to respond as they felt that there was “[...] nothing to win.” (Organization 7).

It was also expressed that in case the repeat complainer was an influential social media user, the organization’s responses were more comprehensive.

21. Do you aim to steer conversations on social media? (For example towards a certain subject or to be had on organization’s own social media channels)

The majority of the organizations stated that they aim to steer conversations on social media. This could be either to forward the conversation to organization’s own channels, lead the conversation towards a certain topic or towards a more positive image of the matter. Only three organizations would only introduce topics on social media but would not partake in conversation or aim to control the following conversation. They would rather let the conversations take their own paths freely. One of these organizations expressed that they do not manage conversations due to lack of resources.

Many said that they often forward the conversation to the organization’s own channels. One organization stated that if a topic gathers a lot of similar negative comments from clients they may try to end the conversation by expressing that further help can be found from the organization’s customer care. Many organizations added information to conversations or linked in other sources of information. Multiple organizations also expressed that while they do try to manage conversations, it can be very challenging: “conversations [...] have a life of their own” (Organization 10).

22. Do you include social media users in solving issues that have arisen on social media?

The majority of the organizations did not see seeking solutions from social media users as a feasible option to solve issues. One organization stated that individuals may be approached privately but if an announcement would be done publicly that social media users are allowed to provide solutions to a problem, this would escalate into a flurry of comments that would become quickly impossible to contain. One organization had sought customers help to solve another customers problem. A second organization stated that it aims to reward customers that help other customers in the future. Even though a few organizations had utilized this method, it was generally seen as unpredictable and organizations would not actively engage in such activity.

23. If you are advertising on the Internet, would you change your advertisements if you are facing a crisis on social media? How would you change them?

Only one of the interviewed would not change their online advertisements when facing a crisis. All others stated that they may remove or modify advertisements that are related to the upcoming or ongoing crisis. Many had also done so in the past. "Situational awareness [...] must be maintained." (Organization 7). Two organizations even stated that they may increase advertising to do damage control. One organization clearly stated that they may remove advertisements channel specifically during controversies. For example, they never stop banner advertising but in the case of Facebook advertising, the adverts gather much negative comments so they may be put on hold. Another organization operated exactly the opposite manner, stating that they remove advertisements from all channels, not just from the one that the controversy is currently taking place.

## **4.2 Second Set**

1. Are you using additional devices to follow social media in addition to laptops and desktop computers?

Mobile devices such as phones and tablets were used to follow and monitor social media in addition to laptops and desktop computers. Two organizations mentioned that some of

their employees were using smart watches but the role of smart watches was not seen important in social media monitoring.

2. Have you investigated what social media platforms your customers are actively using?

Only three organizations had not conducted any analysis on what platforms their customers were using. The remaining nine organizations had done some level of analysis from a more general estimate of their customers' social media use, to actively asking their new customers what social media platforms they are using. Many had done some sort of network analysis and mapped the demographics of the followers in each of the platforms that they were publishing in. Many were actively engaging in segmentation in their publishing activities. As certain platforms were seen to reach certain audiences, the content published on a platform was customized for the segment that was most active on the platform. Especially young adults were reported to be a difficult segment to reach by several organizations. One organization stated that they have spent a significant amount of time in trying to find channels that would reach their potential young adult customers.

3. Would you delete your previous social media posts or modify scheduled future posts if you were involved in a social media crisis?

The sample was quite divided on removing past posts. All of the organizations were ready to modify scheduled posts if they were related to an on-going controversy or would not be appropriate in that particular situation. Five organizations stated that in some cases previous posts could be removed. Past posts which were compromising customer confidentiality, included false information, were found insulting by some party or included a third party that was experiencing a controversy, could be removed. The majority of the organizations were not ready to remove past publications and many were quite adamant that they would not do so under any circumstances.

4. Do you hide or remove posts made by others in your own social media channels?  
In what situations?

All of the interviewed organizations allowed constructive criticism and many even allowed social media users to use swear words in their posts. Posts that included confidential information, pornography, were racist, included direct threats, were clearly commercials or completely inappropriate were removed or hidden when possible. In addition, one organization had stricter rules concerning their paid Facebook advertisements. The conversation under a paid advertisement was to be kept positive and content that would not support this would be hidden so that only the individual that posted it and the individual's friends would see the post.

One organization also mentioned that they have included a code of conduct on their Facebook page. In case they have to remove content posted by other users, they may then refer to the code of conduct. One of the organizations also expressed that they may disable the option to write reviews of the organization on Facebook during controversies.

5. Are social media management responsibilities clearly divided in your organization?

The majority of the organizations felt that responsibilities were very clearly or fairly clearly divided and overlapping responses on social media were either very rare or had taken place only when the organization initially started utilizing social media. Many organizations used intraorganizational communication tools such as *Slack* to seek more information or to sort out unclear situations.

One organization also expressed that successful social media management is a process rather than a state that the organization achieves. In order for the organization to stay on top its social media use and channels, constant developing must take place. The way organization operates changes with customers' needs; when customers' expectations towards social media change, the organization's social media use must also change, thus affecting the areas of responsibility.

Organization 12 expressed that the only way to maintain clearly divided responsibilities is to limit the amount of individuals with the access to organization's social media accounts. The representative of the organization stated that many would like to have access to social media accounts but this would lead to a "wild west" situation.

Two organizations stated that responsibilities concerning social media were not clearly divided. One of these two organization stated that many individuals inside the organization had overlapping responsibilities and it was not rare that multiple individuals engaged simultaneously in responding to an issue. This was seen to cause a lot of problems. The organization was trying to solve the issue by applying standard answers in initial responses to make communication efforts more coherent.

#### 6. How do you aim to prevent social media crises?

Identifying, following and especially analyzing situations before reacting were seen important. Staying calm and not getting provoked was key. Proactive measures such as planning responses and getting ready for potential issues by e.g. practicing various situations with communication personnel were also mentioned by several organizations.

Planning posts was mentioned by many and one stated that they would never improvise posts. An organization stated that if they include celebrities in their posts, they plan answers to the questions that may spawn from the inclusion of these celebrities. A few organizations stated that they only post positive content that does not include controversial issues and refrain from taking a stand on issues not involving them. An organization also mentioned that reminding personnel of social media rules may be beneficial during certain events for example before co-operation negotiations. Although pre-planning social media posts was seen important, many organizations also recognized that controversies more often spawn from other issues than organization's own posts.

Quick action was also mentioned by several organizations. In some cases, this was not necessarily organization responding to a social media issue externally, but rather, internally. Information of potentially harmful content was often quickly communicated upwards within the organizational hierarchy so that a timely analysis could be done by the correct personnel on if or how to react. Two organization stated that if they find harmful

posts on social media, they may ask the author to remove such content. Such action had been taken in the past.

One organization had several cases where they had been extorted with social media. Individuals said that they would publish some negative content if their demands would not be met. The organization's policy was to inform such individuals to publish their information if they so wanted.

*Glassdoor* was mentioned by one organization as a service that organizations may want to keep on eye on. This is a service where current or ex-employees may publicly review their workplace. Cumulation of many negative reviews was seen to be a threat to organization's image.

7. What sort of actions should an organization take to calm down a controversy on social media?

In addition the previously mentioned actions, the organizations brought up a few points. An organization expressed that even though situations change rapidly during controversies, it is often more beneficial to take a few extra minutes and think up a response in a group, instead of one individual instantly going and reacting in a way that the individual sees best. Another organization also highlighted the importance of taking a few minutes before responding to make sure that the sent messages are flawless. According to this organization, even small mistakes can sometimes aggravate the issue and create the need for further clarification. A third organization brought up a point that the organization avoids using links in their replies and instead aims to include the information behind the link in their reply, whenever possible. A fourth organization stated that in case they feel that they cannot handle a crisis alone, they are not afraid to ask help from a PR-company.

8. If you have experienced a social media crisis, do you analyze the crisis afterward?

All of the interviewed organizations would analyze crises and significant controversies afterward. The amount of people included in the analysis process varied greatly. Some included as little as two people in the process where others included all parties in the organization that had taken part in the crisis communications.

Analysis processes varied from informal sit-downs to comprehensive and longer lasting sessions. Issues such as, the source of the crisis, the reason for escalation, organization's actions, the timing of the organization's actions, the effectiveness of the actions, the used channels and the personnel that communicated, were analyzed. One organization also stated that it constructs a report of the crisis including specific amounts of hashtags used, the amount of comments on each social media platform and sentiment, which formed the base for the post-crisis analysis.

Only one organization stated that it will wait for a few weeks after a crisis before conducting the post-crisis analysis as this was seen to facilitate more objective and factual analysis without emotional distractions.

All other organizations stated that their post-crisis analysis process will take place very soon after the crisis has ended, usually within a few days after the crisis. Two organizations also expressed that it is not always clear when a crisis is over and that they gather to debrief when the situation has calmed down enough so that the employees have actually time to attend the meeting.

In general, post-analyzing crises was seen as a good method for improving organizations' social media management activities, "Every day we learn [...] in the case of larger controversies we learn a bit more" (Organization 11) and "Yes, having two similar crises on social media is very embarrassing, you should learn from the first time" (Organization 1).

9. Is there anything else relevant in preventing and reacting to crises and controversies on social media?

Many organizations emphasized that it is important to choose one's battles. Many situations seem like a crisis but are not. Sometimes it is better "not to stir up a hornet's

nest” (Organization 8) meaning that partaking in conversations when there is nothing to gain is counter-productive.

According to Organization 1, all organizations should have a crisis management plan on social media and policies on social media use but measures taken should not discourage personnel to use social media. Social media should not be seen as a “jungle of risks” (Organization 1). If organizations fear social media and overly prepare and overly regulate use of channels and allowed practices, this will diminish the benefits and joy that use of social media brings. Recognizing possibilities is also important. (Organization 1)

Organization 12 provided a bit opposing view stating that there is a pressure to make all matters open and transparent and to allow all personell to communicate and express their opinions publicly but organizations must still implement rules on social media use keeping a coherent style and limiting the amount of people that can publish as well as regulating what, when and how matters are conveyed.

The importance of correct and competent personnel was highlighted by many. ”What can go wrong on social media, [...] will go wrong” (Organization 7). The personnel that work with social media must understand how people interact on social media, how different social media platforms work, how an organization’s messages are interpreted on these, and what the organization expects from these employees as well as what other social media users expect from them. These employees must also be available when needed. It was also expressed by one organization that elderly employees may require more guidance on social media use and what they must take into account when operating on social media.

Lastly, ongoing communication was mentioned by a few organizations. Even though the organization would not have a lot of information on an issue, they should still share this in order to prevent social media users’ frustration to ”become dammed” (Organization 11). In organization 10, it was believed that traditional media is often quick to publish incomplete and even misleading news and that sorting out issues caused by such news is time demanding. This issue was seen to be alleviated by providing a more complete picture to traditional media by continuous and quick release of information.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter begins by answering the first sub-research question in the form of table 3 in chapter 5.1 which displays common causes for controversy on social media. The chapter will not go into detail on how crises develop, as this has already been covered in chapter 2.8. Kent (2010, 705) voiced the issue that previous academic crisis management literature has had a “post hoc” approach to crises, meaning that the field has focused much on the aftermath of crises. Chapter 5.2 will have *a priori* approach and will answer to the second sub-research question by explaining various measures with which organizations can prepare to and prevent crises on social media. Chapter 5.3 has an *ad hoc* approach and will answer the third sub-research question explaining how to address crises on social media. Chapter 5.4 presents additional findings to managers and chapter 5.5 to academics. Limitations are discussed in chapter 5.6 which is followed by suggestions for further research. In order to adhere to academic etiquette, conflict of interest (or lack thereof) is stated in chapter 5.8, ending the main chapter.

### 5.1 How Controversies are Born on Social Media

The previous research had covered the potential sources for controversy quite comprehensively. Almost all previously identified causes for controversy got further empirical support. Some novel causes for controversies were also identified from the sample. The various reasons that may spawn a controversy on social media are shown in table 3 below, where controversy triggers are divided into four categories which originate from previous literature and are explained in chapter 2.5. It could be argued that using two different classification systems for crises simultaneously in table 3 results in overlap, but combining these two systems were seen to provide in a more holistic and accurate categorisation of controversy triggers.

*Table 3. Common sources of controversy on social media.*

Competency Crises	Integrity Crises	Internal Crises	External Crises
Service Failure	Tax Optimization	Employee Practices and Conduct	Contemporary Issues
Product Failure	Environmental Issues	Financial Incentives	Crisis Spill Over
Double Deviation	Ethical Issues		Old Crisis Resurfacing
Launching or Discontinuing Products			Malicious Intent
Own Communications			

The sources of controversy listed in table 3 are far from being complete and it could even be argued that almost anything can trigger a controversy on social media but table 3 presents the sources of controversy that have been identified from previous research and/or the sample, so they are likely to contain some of the more common causes for controversies on social media. As organizations are preparing for potential issues on social media, it is good to know from which issues the potential problems may spawn. Table 3 shows topics that organizations may want to consider when crafting their pre-planned responses and when practicing crisis situations. Many of the issues originate from the offline context and then surface on social media. The sample also recognized that some controversies take place only on social media and originate from social media but many believed that controversies spawn more often from the offline context.

### **Competency Crises**

Service failure is a very well established source of controversy in the social media context in past research. Service failure was also referred comprehensively by the sample. It was considered the most common cause for controversy along with product failure.

Controversy spawning from product failure was considered common in the sample. It was also the initial reason for the crisis that resulted in a loss of significant amount of customers as reported by one of the organizations. Controversy that is caused by a service or a product failure may also be very difficult to address publicly as in many instances, organizations are not allowed to reveal whether involved customers are actually customers or not.

Double deviation plays a significant role in the context of social media. According to a study by Tripp and Grégoire (2011), 96% of customers would not initially post a complaint on social media after a poor experience but rather only after double deviation. Unsuccessful service recovery attempts, slow responses to customers and ignoring customer feedback may result in double deviation.

Discontinuing products was mentioned in the sample to have sparked some controversy. A more common source of controversy that many were preparing for was, however, product launch. Preparing for controversies that may start as a result as well as during a product launch is well advised. Okazaki (2007) found that during a launch of a new product attitude towards the brand at that time outweighs brand loyalty when consumers were deciding whether or not to spread information about the new product.

Although mentioned only by one organization in the sample, it was evident that much of the practices that organizations had in place, whether it was to focus only on publishing positive content, limiting the amount of people that had access to organization's social media accounts or having strict rules on social media use, was to avoid creating controversy with organization's own posts. As reminded by Valentini (2015), being active on social media also has a flipside and posts, advertisements or other organization's communications may become the source of a controversy themselves.

### **Integrity Crises**

Integrity related issues had caused less concern in the interviewed organizations. A few organizations mentioned taxation related issues as a potential source of controversy on

social media. One interviewee mentioned that the previous organization, that had employed the individual, went through a controversy on social media that was taxation related. Two of the multinational organizations in the sample brought up also ethical issues as a potential source of controversy. Environmental issues had also stirred some charged conversations

### **Internal Crises**

Employee conduct is recognized in past research for example by Coombs (2014) as a source of controversy. Also, one organization mentioned that actions of its employees had generated controversy on social media. Employee practices were a significant concern for one of the organizations. They were concerned that employees criticize the organization publicly, which will hurt the organization's image. The organization in question had had a negative experience with a service call *Glassdoor*, in which current and ex-employees can review the organization and its management. Financial incentives to top level management were recognized by a few participants as a potential source of controversy, but no participant had yet had a significant controversy due to this reason.

### **External Crises**

Contemporary issues that were not directly connected to the organizations' operations had caused much controversy in the sample, although organizations that had been caught up in the controversy may have had nothing to do with the issue.

Crisis spillover was a significant threat that was well recognized in the sample. Many organizations in the sample separated themselves from another similar organization that was having an issue in case their customers were likely to think that the issues affected the whole industry or if the organization having issues was indicating that these issues were not limited to their organization.

Champoux et al. (2012) suggested that old crises predating social media may resurface in the social media context. Organizations did understand that the Internet does not forget "Everything remains on the Internet forever." (Organization 10) but not a single organization had experienced any significant controversies due to past crises. Many did express that some complainants will not let go of past issues.

Malicious intents were a significant source of worry for organizations as well as a potential source of controversy. Several organizations had examples of individuals that were motivated to work against the organization in question. In addition to blackmail and various kinds of commenters that kept on spreading inappropriate content, organizations had also had other severe issues that such individuals had caused, that cannot be described in order to maintain participants' anonymity.

## **5.2 How to Prevent Crises on Social Media**

Much of the previous practices were empirically supported and in many cases, the empirical evidence extended the previous findings. Proper preparation, competent personnel and right tools seemed to be essential in preventing controversies from developing into crises.

### **5.2.1 Teams**

Past research has emphasized the importance of teams in social media management. Sample suggests that the amount of employees responsible for social media should be proportional to organization's level of activity on social media, rather than just the sheer size of the organization. If several people are responsible for social media activities, it seems to be a good idea to have one individual that is ultimately responsible for the team's actions. Dividing responsibilities clearly between individuals is paramount in order to maintain congruent communications, which is emphasized by various crisis management studies. Although other ways of organizing social media teams surely exist, the sample had two distinctive configurations for social media teams as displayed in Figure 14.

The first option was to allocate responsibility of certain platforms to relevant departments. In platform specific model, certain platform(s) are followed by a member(s) of a certain department. For example, the responsibility for platforms where paid advertising can be published could be allocated to marketing and platforms that are designed for employee recruitment could be human resource's responsibility. The second option to organize social media teams was to have a cross-functional team or an individual that was responsible for all the relevant social media platforms that were connected to a single product or service. This product specific approach can be applied to a product or a family of products.

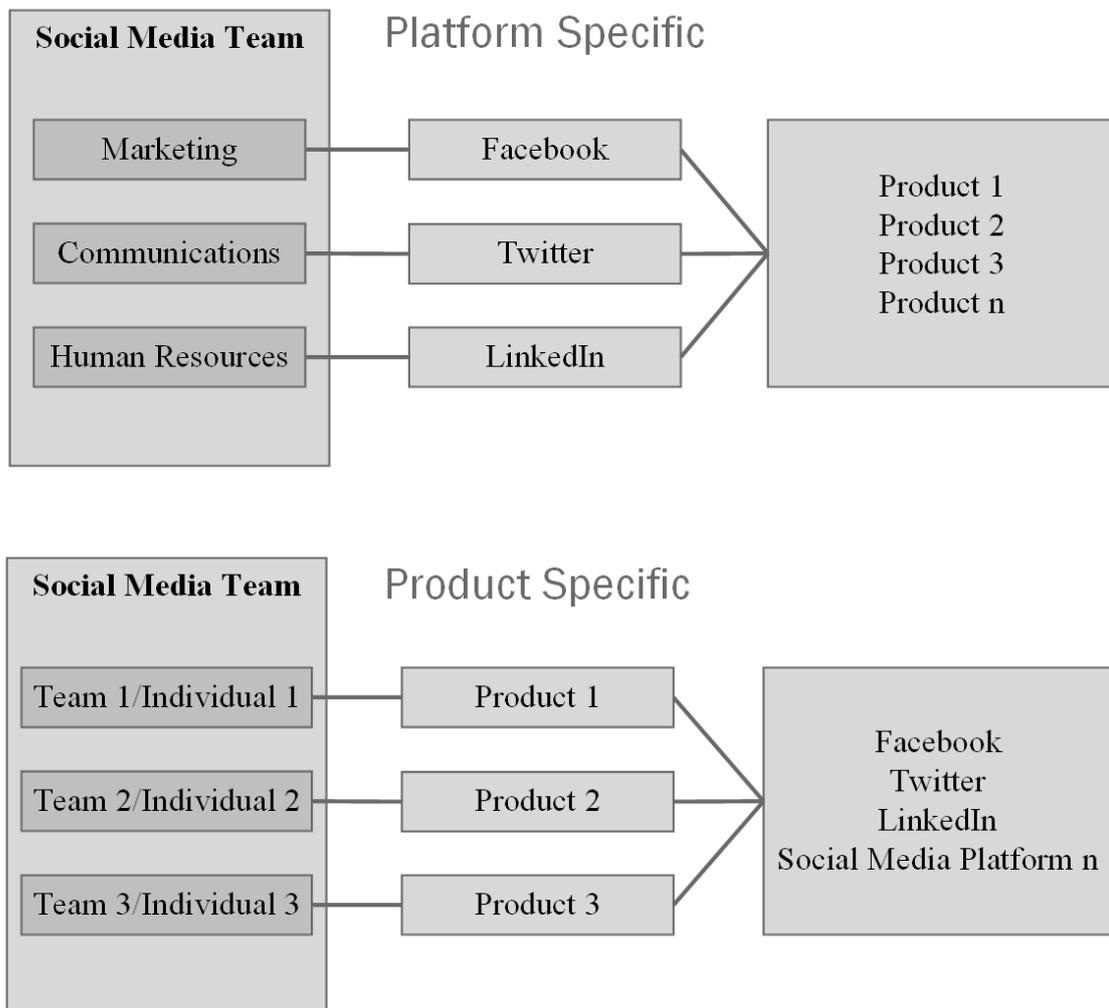


Figure 14. Organizing social media teams.

As mentioned in previous research, the individuals that are responsible for social media activities should be well trained. Empirical research also added that the teams may benefit from periodical training exercises in which various crisis situations are simulated enabling teams to refine their responses. Partner organizations may also be included in these exercises.

The culture in the teams should allow for easy delivery of information upwards in the organizational hierarchy when deemed necessary. Defensive organizational behavior (as described in chapter 2.8) should be weeded out by the management. Information flow within the team(s) can be facilitated by utilizing an intraorganizational system such as *Slack*. Communication between team members is crucial and especially larger

organizations that are active on social media will most likely need additional internal systems to stay on top of social media in addition to email and phone calls.

Members of organization's social media team should be available when needed. As the tasks concerning social media are often carried out along with other work activities and on many occasions outside official office hours, the organization should try to identify such employees that have flexible schedules and are willing to contribute to some extent also during their free time. If an organization is operating in several time zones, it may try to benefit from its presence in these various geographic locations when considering their social media roster. Optimally an organization could have members of the social media team on the opposite sides of the globe to enable constant social media presence.

### **5.2.2 Selecting the Right Social Media Platforms**

If an organization is yet to venture into the social media environment, it may want to select its social media platforms carefully. Social media preferences differ by country and by demographical variables, perhaps the most important being age. Chapter 2.2 provides a tool which can help to understand differences between various social media platforms. Sample suggests that organizations should be active on social media platforms which in they feel comfortable acting. This is obviously linked to selecting competent employees to handle organization's social media activities. Organizations may want to include employees that are active on several social media platforms on their free time. The majority of the organizations clearly wanted to be present where their clients were, which was enabled by conducting some sort of a network analysis. Such analysis can be a simple estimate or go as far as asking every new customer what social media platforms they are using.

Those organizations that are active already in social media would do good to remember that having a presence on a social media platform creates expectations from other social media users. Organizations need to be able to answer when they are summoned on social media platforms where they have an account. Organizations may also be expected to post content and according to the sample, the posting frequency is platform specific. Some platforms are better suited for occasional posting, wherein others, organizations may be posting daily or several times a day. Letting down stakeholder expectations is never good

and may even lead to double deviation. If an organization is present in several social media platforms, it may benefit from a tool for example *Sprinklr* that combines several social media user interfaces into one.

### **5.2.3 Crisis Management Plan**

Crisis management plans were essential guidelines in facilitating faster responses and guiding the replies made in organization's name. The plans that sample used followed the recommendations of previous research being often mere templates, although ready-made responses were also crafted for some situations. Crisis management plans may also include elements from traditional crisis communications such as dividing roles for crisis situations so that for example, one person is in charge of answering questions presented by traditional media, another is responsible for organization's own outward communications during the crisis and a third one for internal communications.

### **5.2.4 Social Media Monitoring**

Monitoring tools enable the organizations to use their precious resources more efficiently. Spending employees' time to monitoring social media can easily be questioned and using monitoring tools enables organizations to focus on issues that will most likely need attention. Social media monitoring tools offer various features depending on the service. Selected organization representatives may choose to receive a report every morning where all conversation where the organization is mentioned on certain platforms are presented along with sentiment which represents the feeling associated with each conversation. *Meltwater* was the most common service that was utilized by the sample. *Falcon social* and *Hootsuite* were also utilized by several organizations.

Monitoring tools may also prove beneficial in cases where an organization expects for a certain controversy to take place. Organizations may set the tools to look for certain keywords in conversations to see if information of an event has reached the public for example organization's name and tax fraud.

Many organizations in the sample had identified influential social media users that can have an impact on their organization. Such users were often politicians, celebrities and other organizations. Recognizing relevant entities on social media and following their

activities is a good practice, these entities may differ from those that are relevant in the offline context (Canhoto et al. 2015).

Social media monitoring should also extend to posts made by the employees. *Glassdoor* is a service that offers employees and ex-employees a chance to evaluate the organization they are or were working for. Large international organizations have amassed in some cases even thousands of reviews. *Glassdoor* also contains reviews of more than 500 Finnish organizations. Possibility to review management and organization is not limited to *Glassdoor* and similar functionalities are offered by *LinkedIn* and several other services. It is good to monitor such services so that organizations stay aware of the state of their organizational culture and may then prepare for possible controversies that may spawn due to problems within the organization.

All of the involved organizations also monitored social media using mobile devices indicating that monitoring social media should not be confined to the workplace or restricted by office hours.

### **5.2.5 Reacting to Public Customer Feedback**

The amount of customer feedback an organization receives on social media varies depending on the type of organization. B2B organizations may see very few comments from their clients, where more B2C oriented organizations may have to deal with thousands of comments and questions daily. Previous research indicates that individuals that complain publicly are less keen on actually solving the issue, which also came up in the empirical evidence.

Social media makes it very easy to leave public feedback. According to multiple articles made before 2011 (e.g. Breitsohl et al. 2010; Homburg & Fürst, 2007) response from a company was seen necessary in almost every instance. The practices within the sample varied. First of all organization's options may be limited due to strict contracts making it impossible for the organization to even acknowledge that the feedback is indeed left by a customer. Secondly, the sheer amount of feedback may make it nearly impossible to address all feedback.

In the sample in general, it seemed indeed a good idea to react to all customer feedback that was seen to require a response. If resources allow, organizations should respond to

also those commenters that repeatedly leave complaints, although the organization's replies may then be shorter. Social media has turned challenging customer situations into a possibility. By answering properly to customer feedback, the organization responding to the customer may not only just avoid double deviation, but also turn the negative into positive. As a result, the customer may spread the good service experience aka *boasting* in figure 9. Although figure 9 suggests that boasting can be achieved only when it has started from private communications, the sample had examples where boasting was achieved when it had begun from a public complaint. Many organizations also left such conversations visible as the conversations were seen as good publicity or to help other customers. In some instances, it may be a good idea to discretely share the complaint process if an organization is not constrained by strict client confidentiality, which some organizations in the sample had already done and the majority saw as a possibility.

Theory and empirical evidence also agree that removing constructive criticism or reviews is rarely a good idea. Only extreme cases warrant removal of feedback such as threats or significantly inappropriate content. Facebook allows for hiding of comments, which several organizations in the sample utilized. Hiding content posted by other users means that only the user's friends and the author can see the content, but no one else. Hiding inappropriate content may well lead to fewer problems in the future than simply removing content.

Many agreed that feedback that consists of simple problems warrants a quick response but more complex issues divided the sample. Some organizations had a habit of leaving an initial response and then getting back to the customer when they had all the facts or a solution, whereas others preferred not replying at all until they had a comprehensive answer. It remains unclear which approach is more beneficial in the online context.

The most common approach to negative feedback was a combination of thanking the customer in an apologetic tone and if the issue needed more attention, a prompt to direct the customer's future feedback to a private channel. If a post made by the organization was seen to collect a lot of negative comments, many in the sample increased their posting frequency. Such diversion of attention may work if conducted with finesse but it was also brought up by the sample that stakeholders may see through organization's attempts to divert stakeholder attention to new subjects.

### **5.2.6 Avoiding Crisis Spill Over**

A similar competitor that is experiencing a crisis is a potential source of controversy (Janakiraman et al. 2009) and was also well recognized in the sample as stated previously. When organizations establish that close competitors or highly similar organizations are experiencing a crisis of which the organization may easily be thought to be a part of or when another organization implies so, organizations can benefit from distancing themselves from the crisis. In the sample avoiding crisis spill over was done publicly in neutral and factual manner, which is in line with previous studies where informative denial is recommended (e.g. Roehm & Tybout, 2006) in potential crisis spill over situations. Potential crisis spill over situations where a competitor has a better reputation are especially threatening (Siomkos et al. 2010). This being said, it should be remembered that an organization should not distance itself from another organization experiencing a crisis if the organizations are not similar enough, as this may be seen offensive (Roem & Tybout, 2006).

### **5.2.7 Stealing Thunder**

Many previous studies (e.g. Claeys et al. 2013) emphasize the importance in of being first to break the news of an incident to the public and suggest that it may even be as important as the selected response strategy. Previous research clearly suggests that *stealing thunder* has a significant impact on preventing a crisis. The empirical evidence supported mostly previous research. The sample saw *stealing thunder* mainly as a viable strategy and some had implemented it. It was believed to make containing the following controversy easier and result in other benefits. Even though the utility of the approach was recognized in the sample, the application of the strategy was seen often difficult in today's media environment where the news are likely to be published by some other party often incomplete or portrayed very subjectively. Organizations may want to consider beforehand what sort of incidents or issues they are willing to convey to the public, as when actual problems take place, the time where *stealing thunder* strategy is applicable, may be very short.

### **5.3 How to Manage Crises on Social Media**

Managing a crisis begins ideally from managing a controversy, assuming that an organization has recognized the issue early on. It may also begin from a downpour of negative comments and media articles or even partners contacting the organization if the involved organization has missed the issue. According to previous research, organization's response to a crisis affects future purchase decisions of their customers as well as following negative word-of-mouth. This makes organization's response one of the most important aspects of managing a crisis, which is discussed in detail below. Various other actions that are part of managing a crisis on social media are also discussed further.

#### **5.3.1 Response Time**

Response to customer feedback and negative information concerning the organization that is posted on social media is often required. Past research indicates that organizations are increasingly responding to various issues on social media and that nearly all customer feedback requires a response. In practice, organizations are restricted by finite time and resources and are not able to answer to all customer feedback and address all publicly available negative information that concerns the organization.

Sample suggested that it was more important to quickly identify potential crises than to deliver a response quickly as this enabled organizations to better plan their response and to follow the issue and consider more carefully if a response was warranted. Previous research indicated that generally a few hours is enough time to deliver a response to negative information online, which was supported by the sample if the negative information surfaced during office hours. One organization stated that if negative information surfaced outside office hours and their response required a more careful analysis of the situation, the response could be delivered the following morning. Previous research indicated that the response to negative information is to be delivered more quickly if this information has been posted in a form of a picture or a video. The empirical data added that in case the negative information is false and posted by a well-known individual, a near instant response may be needed.

Competitors may take advantage of a crisis and post their own mocking content. Sample agreed that if competition is humorously addressing an on-going crisis, no action is

required. If competitions posts are seen especially harmful, action may be required. Privately contacting the competition was the favored action of the sample but if competition is making false claims or spreads misinformation of the organization's products, the organizations should address the issue publicly.

Sample indicated that traditional media is quick to pick up on subjective presentations of events and even posts that provide an incomplete picture. Previous research indicates that nearly all traditional media representatives see social media as a valid source for information, so organizations may get their side of the story and their response out on traditional media along with the negative news if they manage to deliver a swift response. Some organizations in the sample saw it as a good practice to post new pieces of information concerning a crisis to social media constantly as they became available to the organizations to prevent stakeholder frustration. According to previous research, if the involved organization comes to possess new information concerning a crisis that helps to prevent further harm to stakeholders aka *instructing information*, such information should be made quickly available as indicated also by the sample.

PR-organizations that manage social media activities of other organizations should keep their clients well aware of potential issues informing them quickly and may benefit from clear rules on when they engage surfacing negative information and when the client deals with the issue directly.

### **5.3.2 What to Respond**

Delivering responses to developing controversies or all out crisis situations is a complex matter requiring careful consideration. Even though quickly delivering organization's response is very important, the sample emphasized that it is important to keep calm and go through options and even include more members in crafting a response when needed. Crisis management plan should facilitate faster responses but some cases may need additional planning, input from lawyers, or even statements from organization's management. One organization stated that if they are approached by a lawyer, their lawyer will craft their response. Crisis situations come in various forms and may require novel responses.

Although social media has increased demand for transparency and even blurred the borders of organizations in some instances as customers have partaken in organization's operations aka *crowdsourcing*, the sample was quite clear that organizations should not ask publicly help from stakeholders in solving crises. Privately communicating with the individual that had posted the negative information on social media and seeking solutions was a popular practice and one organization had even invited an individual to negotiate in person to the organization's facilities. Asking the original poster to remove their post that presented the negative information was also a feasible action to many in the sample.

In many cases, the organization cannot solve the issue privately and has to deliver a public response. Organization can select a more defensive response strategy in some situations and more accommodative in others. Various response strategies were combined in figure 8 from defensive to accommodative. The figure also compiled findings from previous studies to show what factors should affect the selection of a response strategy. Empirical data extends the figure by providing example situations in which these response strategies can be applied and some indication of the applicability of each response strategy. Below in the table 4 are the response strategies of figure 8 from defensive to accommodative, with descriptions of the strategies as they were presented to the sample and notes from the empirical data, as well as how many organizations saw the response strategy viable. Empirical data did not conflict with figure 8 aside from two findings. Firstly, *Apology* strategy and *Compensation* strategy were used also in service and product failure initiated crisis and secondly, many thought that *Reminder* strategy fit only in crisis situations that are new to the organization or at least rare.

*Table 4. Applying general response strategies by Coombs (2014) in the online context.*

Response Strategy	Description	Notes From Data	Applicability
Confronting the accuser	Goal is to take credibility of the other party	-Can be used when accusations are clearly lies -Requires finesse -Never offend customers	2/12
Denial	Organization denies wrongdoing or existence of a problem	-When organization had nothing to do with the issue or was clearly not to blame -Might be easier to use if accuser is another	11/12

		organization	
Scapegoat	Organization shifts responsibility to a third party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Can be used with other response strategies.</li> <li>-Can be only a small part of the response, even a sentence</li> <li>-The third party publicly accepting responsibility prerequisite for many</li> <li>-Can be done with the third party</li> <li>-Third party being well-known might help</li> </ul>	9/12
Excuse	Organization explains that it could not affect the outcome of the issue due to some reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-To be used only in force majeure cases</li> <li>-Never lie</li> </ul>	8/12
Justification	Organization states that no harm was done or that the portrayed victim is to blame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Can be used if customer is clearly to blame</li> <li>-Requires finesse in terminology</li> <li>-May be needed to convey full picture of an event</li> </ul>	5/12
Reminder	Organization reminds stakeholders of their past good actions, shifting focus from the recent event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Can be used in situations where organization has made a decision causing the controversy by highlighting positive sides of the decision</li> <li>-Should fit context</li> <li>-Past actions can be referred but good track record necessary</li> <li>-Negative event should be first of its kind or rare for the organization</li> </ul>	12/12
Ingratiation	Organization praises stakeholders for their actions and may even reward them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-If organization makes changes due to issues brought up by individuals, these may be rewarded with gifts</li> </ul>	10/12 9/12 ingratiate with gifts
Compensation	Organization gives out monetary compensation or gift	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Suits product and service failure situations</li> <li>-Can be used when possibility of double deviation</li> </ul>	9/12 7/12 compensate publicly
Apology	Organization takes all responsibility and seeks forgiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-May be used after some other response strategy</li> <li>-Used when organization has</li> </ul>	12/12

	from the stakeholders	clearly caused harm -Might need help from lawyers -Can even take blame if organization is not to blame	4/12 when not at fault
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### 5.3.3 How to Respond

Some organizations in the sample had a formal style that they would maintain in all replies. Previous research and half of the sample indicate that factual responses are rarely the best option in the social media context. Those organizations in the sample that applied a more informal response style, intentionally tried to avoid formal corporate style and it was expressed stated that being too formal could be seen as being arrogant. Instead, these organizations preferred using common language in a friendly manner.

Certain styles may yield better results in certain situations. Research suggests that in general, vivid messages are better than neutral messages in responding to negative information if stakeholders are yet to form a consensus on the issue, so if an organization is quick to act, it may benefit from creating a vivid message. Vivid messages are those that are imagery provoking and emotionally interesting. Much of the empirical evidence and past research also strongly agree that portraying the organization’s response as humane is a good idea. It was also suggested that whenever possible, the organization’s replies should not include links additional information, but this information should rather be written in the response.

*Conversational human voice* is another aspect of the response style that is central to responding to negative information online. Conversational human voice is openness to dialogue, welcoming additional conversations, prompt feedback and uncritical approach to criticism (Kelleher, 2009). In addition, conversational human voice entails portraying the messenger in a certain manner. It can be beneficial to include the first name of the of the organization’s representative in addition to the organization’s name when organization responds to negative information, which is what many organizations in the sample did. In cases where a top level manager has crafted the response, the manager should use their full name with the organization’s name. Past research suggests that even responder’s picture could be used in the response and that conversational human voice seems to work better for for-profit organizations than non-profit organizations.

Many organizations in the sample indicated that the response style should differ depending on the content. Previously conducted studies have found that in integrity and trust related issues, organization's manager should be the voice behind the organization's response. Previous studies also suggest that apologies should be crafted in a narrative manner, as a story. If the organization is highly responsible, a more emotional response style should be applied.

Defensive responses should be more factual than accommodative responses, although they may still contain humane elements, especially when delivered in Facebook (Kerkhof et al. 2011). Empirical evidence and previous research agree that in the case of denial, the messages should be very logical and factual. Dutta and Pullig (2011) add that messages of denial may benefit from being longer than few sentences.

As a last remark from previous research, in case the crisis involves a brand that is portrayed as sophisticated, the involved organization can benefit from showing vulnerability unless the crisis concerns product or service quality, in which case the organization should show no vulnerability.

#### **5.3.4 Where to Respond**

Previous studies suggest that wherever an organization is asked to deliver a response, it should. This is especially true in organization's own channels. Previous research states that organization should not participate in conversations outside their own channels until they are asked to respond. The sample disagreed with this notion as seven out of the eight organizations that included themselves in conversations outside their own channels, did so before they were asked to participate. When participating outside organizations own channels, the link between the commenter and organizations should be made clear.

Organization may post its response on several social media platforms without having to worry that the response is seen many times by the same individuals. In fact, a study by Moons et al. (2009) suggests that as long as the amount of repetition is reasonable, receiving the same message several times is self-reinforcing. Different social media platforms allow for posting of varying kinds of formats and varying lengths of messages, so the organization has to modify its message to suit the format requirements of each platform. Previous research emphasizes and empirical evidence agrees that whichever

social media platforms the organization uses to posts their response, the organization's communications should be coherent, as mistakes in replies may require a lot of explaining later on and congruent, as mixed messages can lead to further controversy.

Optimal places for controversies to be born are obviously organization's own channels as organizations are able to moderate these. Crises do not remain in one place and the sample expressed that trying to move conversations to another platform or channel is highly difficult. This is why organizations may want to respond to a crisis on whatever platforms it is taking place.

In addition, empirical evidence strongly suggests that using websites in delivering organization's response is in no way an out-dated practice. One organization stated that traffic on their website is many times higher during a crisis than normally. Organization's website should not be the only source of information however, as high amounts of traffic may cause websites to go down, which one organization in the sample had already experienced during a crisis. Websites should be involved in crisis management when modifying them causes more clarification than confusion.

### **5.3.5 Leading the Conversation**

As the organization partakes in conversation on social media, possibly with the help of several individuals, it may want to achieve certain goals with its input and it can try to lead the conversation to a certain direction. Having shared goals within the social media management team may benefit the organization during a crisis. Previous research on dialogue strategies by Romenti and Murtarelli (2014) suggests that organizations can apply certain strategies when doing dialogue with stakeholders. More detailed information on these four dialogue strategies can be found from chapter 2.4.

The majority of the sample were trying to steer conversations on social media during a crisis. Out of the four dialogue strategies, three were identified from the data. *Framing strategy* was used the most, as organizations were trying to redirect and converge conversations from all over social media to their own social media channels as well as get the stakeholders to focus on a certain topic. Nine organizations practiced some form of framing strategy and one more stated that it would if it had the resources. Framing strategy seems to be most useful in the social media context. Having the social media conversations

taking place on organization's own channels is beneficial as these are easier to monitor and if needed, these can in many cases be moderated.

Three organizations were applying the *Generative strategy* as their primary dialogue strategy. It was expressed by these organizations that they would only introduce topics on social media, but they would not take part in the following conversations. Other organizations also stated that not all battles can be won and thus, organizations should choose their battles. It was stated that including oneself in certain controversies would likely only worsen the situation.

Good examples of applying *Concertative strategy* were not found from the sample. Many tried to get the stakeholders to form a more positive image of a topic or try to get the stakeholders to see the organization's side of the story, but situations where stakeholders would have been very divided on a matter and organization could bring the stakeholders to agree on a certain issue, could not be found from the sample. One organization expressed that majority of the stakeholders usually form a consensus on social media quickly and only a very small fraction of stakeholders will take the organization's side on controversies.

*Transformative strategy* was used by many in a way that organizations enabled conversations to evolve on their own channels and tried to facilitate conversation and allow people to have opinions. Many organizations also posted additional information or links to additional information outside their own channels to allow for a more informed discussion. Although transformative strategy was used by many in this aspect, the sample expressed that asking stakeholders for solutions to issues the organization is having, is not a viable option.

Even though organizations in the sample managed the social media conversations, it was expressed by many that in reality, managing conversations can be very difficult and redirecting them can be very challenging if the controversy has matured.

### **5.3.6 Other Actions**

In addition to formulating a response to a crisis and trying to manage the verbal commotion, there are other actions that the organization can use to minimize the impact of a crisis.

Firstly, an organization may want to check its social media accounts and tools for scheduled posts that may not be suitable to be posted in the midst of a crisis. All of the interviewed organizations would remove unsuitable scheduled posts under such circumstances.

Secondly, organizations may want to modify adverts on the Internet that are related to the crisis. Previous research suggests that online adverts should be replaced by adverts that represent other values than what the organization usually tries to market itself with aka *non-regulatory fit* (see chapter 2.7.3) but such example could not be found from the sample. Instead, majority of the sample either removed adverts or modified adverts.

Thirdly, most social media active organizations have an account on Facebook and many organizations can be reviewed on their Facebook channel. Example from the sample indicated that stakeholders are not acting rationally during a crisis and review organization poorly without any personal experience. Temporarily disabling review possibility on Facebook and other platforms where such action may be taken is an option worth considering but it should be kept in mind that deleting reviews is most likely a bad idea.

Fourthly, individuals or other organizations that are involved in the crisis should be informed. Two members of the sample reported that they will inform partners if they are involved in the crisis. The sample also indicated that in case a crisis involves a member of the organization, it may be a good idea to inform this individual directly, otherwise, internal briefing is warranted only periodically or when a crisis affects the daily work of the employees.

Fifthly, organizations should keep an eye on social media influencers and try to make sure that they are informed of the organization's side of the story.

Lastly, organizations can always ask help from a PR-company if they feel that they cannot handle a crisis by themselves as reminded by the sample.

#### **5.4 Additional Managerial Implications**

Firstly, many in the sample had experienced issues relating to incoherent or overlapping communications when first venturing into social media. In order to deal efficiently with controversies and avoid controversies spawning from overlapping or conflicting

communications, responsibilities and roles between team members should be divided clearly. Two organizations of the sample were still to achieve this. Previous research emphasized the importance of coherent and congruent responses, which may be difficult when an organization is large and active on several social media platforms. In addition to dividing responsibilities clearly, it is important that internal communications work properly and that organization's rules on social media use are available to all workers to further decrease the chance of mixed external communications. While social media rules were imposed by many, it was also emphasized that they should not be too restrictive and a trend of making social media rules more permissive was clearly identified in the sample. Overly complex and restrictive rules may deter employees from posting and diminish potential positive effects of social media use.

Secondly, *instruction information* which protects stakeholders from further harm was used in the sample also in situations which the organizations had no part of but which likely affected the stakeholders. Instructing information can well extend to events outside the organization's own influence. Organizations may benefit from posting information on social media that helps their customers and other stakeholders to avoid further harm. Two organizations actually perceived posting negative information as a service. When organizations are engaging in environmental scanning, they may benefit from following also events that may not concern them directly but may still concern their stakeholders.

Thirdly, it was indicated in the sample that *compensation* response strategy may be used as a publicity stunt in cases where a stakeholder is asking an organization for compensation but the organization is clearly not to blame and is not expected to possibly even respond to the stakeholder's request. In such a case, organization may react by compensating and hoping that their overly generous response is picked up by social media, generating lots of inexpensive good publicity for the organization.

Finally, very few subjects are immune to change and social media is certainly one of the aspects of doing business that evolves very quickly. It was recognized in the sample that evolving needs of the customers require the organizations' social media use to evolve with them. Learning from one's mistakes is perhaps one of the most efficient ways for improvement. All of the organizations in the sample analyzed crises afterward in some manner. Aspects such as the source of the crisis, the reason for escalation, organization's actions, the timing of the organization's actions, the effectiveness of the actions, the used

channels and the personnel that communicated can be included in the analysis. Utilizing social media monitoring tools can allow for more in-depth analysis of the crisis that an organization has gone through. It may often not be clear when a crisis has passed but nearly all of the sample analyzed controversies and crises as soon as a crisis stopped requiring constant input from team members, allowing them to gather to analyze the crisis.

### **5.5 Additional Theoretical Implications**

Firstly, the definition of a crisis still varies from author to author. Many such as Coombs (2007) attribute an element of surprise to the definition of a crisis. While this might be often the case, the sample used in this thesis agreed that some crises can be foreseen, which should be included in the definition of a crisis as it was done in this thesis.

Secondly, Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) recommend participating in conversations outside organizations own channels only after the organization has been summoned by the stakeholders, aka *reactive webcare*. Actions of the sample questioned this advice as seven out of the eight organizations injected themselves in conversations outside their own channels before they were asked to participate, i.e. practiced *proactive webcare*.

Thirdly, the possibility of attacking competition in the online context when they are experiencing a crisis may not be an entirely poor idea. Many organizations in the sample were ready to leverage the situation by engaging in some form of indirect mocking by using a certain theme or just ramping up advertising efforts. Siomkos et al. (2010) also hinted that if a competitor has a poor reputation before a crisis, competitors may take advantage of this

.

### **5.6 Limitations**

This paper avoids using the term “best practices” when talking about potential measures that organizations may utilize in preventing and managing crises on social media, as it is in no way shown that the organizations in the sample would be outperforming their peers, although they are all doing well in their respective fields. This being said, in two organizations clear signs of defensive organizational behavior could be identified during the interviews.

Sample ended up consisting of organizations from various industries, so the results offer no insight on what practices may be most suitable for a certain industry. Industries may have an effect on the actions an organization should take as suggested by Park and Lee (2013) but it is impossible to say from a sample of this size. Differences in industries and organizations being for-profit and non-profit may also explain some opposing views in the sample. One aspect that surely has an effect on response strategies is the extent that organizations want to retain their customers' anonymity, making it harder for them to deliver certain public responses.

### **5.7 Suggestions for Further Research**

Out of the 87 organizations contacted via Facebook, 41 did not respond at all during the writing of this thesis. This included both multinational and domestically operating organizations. This may question the applicability of using Facebook as a tool to contact organizations when doing academic work but such widespread inactivity in responding to direct messages sent on the most popular social media platform may also warrant more research on the level of competency in social media use of organizations both international as well as those who operate only in Finland. As stated previously, having a presence on a social media platform may generate expectations from stakeholders and not meeting these expectations may lead to unwanted consequences.

Second subject that warrants further research is leveraging a competitor's crisis in gaining market share. It is unclear if it is beneficial to mock competitors going through a crisis and how this should be done. All respondents of this study stated that they would not engage in such activity, but one interviewed representative of an international organization stated that culture in Finland affected this conclusion. Previous research also suggests that such practices may easily backfire but they are far from definitive. Mocking advertising is implemented e.g. in the rivalry between Audi and BMW. Attacking competitor when they are having a crisis could be an underutilized source of publicity for certain type of organizations or it may be that the practice is just out of the question. Further research is warranted in the social media context.

The third subject that would warrant more research is the definition of a social media crisis. It would be beneficial for organizations to know when they are actually experiencing

a crisis and when the situation is no more than a mundane controversy. A scale could be of use that would allow for objective comparison of different controversies. For example, such a scale could start from a level one controversy and end up to level three controversy after which the controversy would turn into a crisis. Figure 8 could be of some use in providing some metrics. Additional metrics could be derived from for example the number of posts/the number of customers, sentiment score as defined by social media monitoring tools, duration of the controversy and cross-over to traditional media.

### **5.8 Conflict of Interest**

Author has been creating content and managing social media activities for a for-profit organization during research but has not received any financial support nor data or recommendations from the organization for the content of the thesis.

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## APPENDICES

### *Appendix 1. Interview questions in English.*

#### **Preliminary**

1. In what industry are you operating?
2. Are you mainly a business to business or business to consumer organization?
3. How many employees do you have? Less than 10, 10-49, 50-249 or more than 249?
4. Have you externalized social media management to some extent or in its entirety or are you co-operating with a PR-company in this regard?
5. Controversy may be caused by a variety of issues such as product performance, organizational practices or management bonuses. If you have experienced controversies in social media, what have been the underlying causes?
6. If you have been involved in a controversy on social media, do you feel that it has had negative effects on your organization?

#### **First set**

1. Does your organization have a specific person or a team that is responsible for social media activities? (Coombs, 2014; Grégoire et al. 2015)
2. Have you issued guidelines to your employees regarding social media use in subjects that concern your organization? (Johnsen et al. 2012; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2014)
3. Are you active on several social media platforms? (Siah et al. 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)
4. How actively do you follow and your social media channels and how actively do you post content on these? (Ward & Sweetser, 2014)
5. Are you utilizing social media monitoring tools? (e.g. Hootsuite, Social Mention, Google Alerts) (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Grégoire et al. 2015)
6. How swiftly should you react to negative information concerning your organization on social media? (Grégoire et al. 2015; Pang et al. 2014; Zhou et al. 2014)
7. How do you respond if a client publishes a complaint concerning company's product or service on social media? (Grégoire et al. 2015)
8. If a customer would publish a complaint concerning your service or product on social media and would find your response to be very satisfying, would you consider posting the complaint process on social media? (Grégoire et al. 2015)
9. If you were accused of a wrongdoing on social media, in which sort of situations would you consider taking the following stand? (Chakravarty & Tridib, 2010; Chang et al. 2015; Coombs, 2005; Coombs, 2015; Fisher & Reuber, 2007; Grappi & Romani, 2014; Jin et al. 2014; Lee & Song, 2010; Schwarz, 2011; Tripp & Grégoire, 2011; Weber et al. 2011)
  - a. Confront the accuser: Goal is to take credibility of the other party
  - b. Denial: Organization denies any wrongdoing or existence of a problem
  - c. Scapegoat: Organization shifts responsibility to a third party
  - d. Excuse: Organization explains that it could not affect the outcome of the issue due to some reason
  - e. Justification: Organization states that no harm was done or that the portrayed victim is to blame for the issue
  - f. Reminder: Organization reminds stakeholders of their past good actions, shifting focus from the recent event

- g. Ingratiation: Organization praises stakeholders for their actions and may even reward them with discounts or coupons
  - h. Compensation: Organization gives out monetary compensation or a gift
  - i. Apology: Organization takes all responsibility and seeks forgiveness from the stakeholders
10. Do you proactively plan responses to various difficult situations on social media? Are you including your legal department (if you have such a department) in the planning process? (Coombs, 2014; Mitroff, 1988; Van Laer & De Ruyter, 2010)
  11. If your organization has been involved in an event that potentially has negative effects on the organization's public image, do you consider revealing information of such an event on social media before the information becomes publicly available from another source? (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005; Claeys et al. 2013; Coombs, 2015)
  12. Once you have become aware of a controversy on social media and have responded to the controversy, do you inform your stakeholders of the controversy and of your response? (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2014).
  13. If your competitor was involved in a controversy on social media, would you consider taking advantage of the situation? (Cleeren et al. 2013)
  14. If you were involved in a controversy on social media and your competitor was trying to take advantage of the situation on social media, how would you respond? (Grégoire et al. 2015)
  15. In your organization's response to negative information on social media, is the messenger portrayed as the organization, a member of the organization or some other identity? (Park & Lee, 2013)
  16. In your organization's response to negative information on social media, do you apply a specific style or principles in your response or do you rather focus on the information content of your response? (Dijkmans et al. 2015; Kelleher, 2009; Noort & Willemsen, 2012)
  17. Do you take part in social media conversations outside your own social media channels? (For example by commenting client's blogs or by responding to tweets) If so, do you partake in the conversation before you have been asked to respond? (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012)
  18. Do you aim to identify influential social media users (such as bloggers or YouTube personalities) that are relevant to your organization? (Jin & Liu, 2010)
  19. If you are involved in a controversy on social media, do you publish information relating to the controversy on your website? (Austin et al. 2012; Siah et al. 2010)
  20. If an individual repeatedly publishes complaints concerning your organization on social media, does it affect how you react to the complaints? (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Lee & Song, 2010)
  21. Do you aim to steer conversations on social media? (For example towards a certain subject or to be had on organization's own social media channels) (Romenti & Murtarelli, 2014)
  22. Do you include social media users in solving issues that have arisen on social media? (Romenti & Murtarelli, 2014)
  23. If you are advertising on the Internet, would you change your advertisements if you are facing a crisis on social media? How would you change them? (Avnet & Laufer, 2015)

## **Second set**

1. Are you using additional devices to follow social media in addition to laptops and desktop computers?
2. Have you investigated what social media platforms your customers are actively using?
3. Would you delete your previous social media posts or modify scheduled future posts if you were involved in a social media crisis?

4. Do you hide or remove posts made by others in your own social media channels? In what situations?
5. Are social media management responsibilities clearly divided in your organization?
6. How do you aim to prevent social media crises?
7. What sort of actions should an organization take to calm down a controversy on social media?
8. If you have experienced a social media crisis, do you analyze the crisis afterward?
9. Is there anything else relevant in preventing and reacting to crises and controversies on social media?

## *Appendix 2. Interview questions in Finnish.*

### **Alustava osio**

1. Minkä alan organisaatio olette?
2. Koostuvatko asiakkaanne pääsääntöisesti yritys- vai yksityisasiakkaista?
3. Kuinka monta henkilöä organisaatiossanne työskentelee? Alle 10 henkilöä, 10-49, 50-249 vai yli 249?
4. Onko organisaationne ulkoistanut sosiaalisen median hallinnan kokonaan tai osittain tai teettekö yhteistyötä jonkun PR-yrityksen kanssa sosiaalisen median osalta?
5. Kohu sosiaalisessa mediassa voi aiheutua monesta eri syystä kuten tuoteongelmasta, organisaation käytännöistä tai johdon palkitsemisesta. Jos olette olleet kohujen kohteena sosiaalisessa mediassa, mitkä asiat ovat laukaisseet kohut?
6. Jos olette olleet kohun kohteena sosiaalisessa mediassa, koetteko että siitä on ollut haittaa organisaatiollenne?

### **Ensimmäinen osio**

1. Onko organisaatiossanne tietty henkilö tai tiimi joka vastaa sosiaalisen median toiminnasta?
2. Ohjeistetaanko työntekijöitänne sosiaalisen median käytöstä organisaatiotanne koskevissa asioissa?
3. Onko organisaationne aktiivinen useassa sosiaalisen median palvelussa?
4. Miten aktiivisesti seuraatte sosiaalisen median kanavianne ja kuinka aktiivisesti julkaisette sisältöä näissä?
5. Seuraatteko keskustelua internetissä hyödyntäen jotain seurantatyökaluja? (esim. Hootsuite, Social Mention, Google Alerts)
6. Kuinka nopeasti organisaationne tulisi reagoida sitä koskevaan negatiiviseen tietoon sosiaalisessa mediassa?
7. Miten reagoitte jos asiakkaanne valittaa huonosta tuotteenne tai palvelunne käyttökokemuksesta sosiaalisen mediassa?
8. Jos asiakkaanne valittaisi tuotteestanne tai palvelustanne sosiaalisessa mediassa ja olisi hyvin tyytyväinen vastaukseenne, harkitsisitteko jakavanne valitusprosessin sosiaalisessa mediassa?
9. Mikäli olisitte syytöksen kohteena sosiaalisessa mediassa, millaisissa tilanteissa harkitsisitte käyttävänne seuraavia vastausstrategioita?
  - j. Syyttävän osapuolen konfrontointi: Tavoitteena viedä uskottavuus syyttävältä osapuolelta

- k. Kiistäminen: Organisaatio kiistää väärinkäytöksen tai ongelman olemassaolon
- l. Syntipukki: Organisaatio siirtää vastuun kolmannelle osapuolelle
- m. Tekosyy: Organisaatio kertoo ettei voinut vaikuttaa tapahtumaan kertomastaan syystä
- n. Oikeutus: Organisaatio kertoo ettei tapahtumasta aiheutunut vahinkoa tai että tapahtuman esitetty uhri aiheutti tapahtuman itse
- o. Muistutus: Organisaatio kertoo hyvistä kokemuksista siirtäen huomion pois negatiivisesta tapahtumasta
- p. Mielistely: Organisaatio onnittelee asianomaisia heidän toiminnastaan ja saattaa jopa palkita esim. alennuksin tai kupongein
- q. Korvaus: Organisaatio antaa rahallisen korvauksen tai lahjan
- r. Anteeksipyyntö: Organisaatio ottaa kaiken vastuun tapahtuneesta ja pyytää anteeksi asianomaisilta

10. Suunniteltteko ennalta vastauksia erilaisiin hankaliin tilanteisiin sosiaalisessa mediassa? Osallistatteko lakiosastoanne (jos sellainen on) tähän prosessiin?
11. Jos organisaationne on ollut osallisena tapahtumassa, jolla on todennäköisesti negatiivisia vaikutuksia organisaation julkikuvaan, harkitsisitteko tuovanne esiin tiedon tapahtuneesta sosiaalisessa mediassa ennen muita?
12. Kun tietoonne on tullut kohu sosiaalisessa mediassa ja olette vastanneet kohuun, informoitteko muita asianomaisia kohusta ja siihen liittyvistä toimenpiteistä?
13. Jos kilpailijanne olisi kohun kohteena sosiaalisessa mediassa, harkitsisitteko käyttävänne tilaisuutta hyväksenne?
14. Jos kilpailijanne hyödyntäisi sosiaalisen median nostattamaa kohua organisaatiotanne vastaan, reagoisitteko ja jos kyllä, niin miten?
15. Jos organisaationne vastaa sitä koskevaan negatiiviseen informaatioon sosiaalisessa mediassa, esiintyykö organisaationne edustaja käyttäen omaa nimeään, organisaation nimeä tai jotain muuta identiteettiä?
16. Onko organisaatiollanne jokin tyyli jolla se vastaa negatiiviseen informaatioon, vai keskitytäänkö vastauksen tietosisältöön?
17. Osallistutteko keskusteluun sosiaalisessa mediassa muualla kuin organisaation omilla kanavilla? (Esim. kommentoimalla asiakkaan blogia tai kommentoimalla muiden Twiittejä) Jos osallistutte, osallistutteko ennen kuin teitä on pyydetty osallistumaan?
18. Oletteko tunnistanee tai pyrittekö tunnistamaan mielipidevaikuttajia (kuten suosittuja bloggaajia tai YouTube-kanavan pitäjiä) sosiaalisessa mediassa, miten?
19. Jos olette sosiaalisen median kohun kohteena, lisäättekö verkkosivulenne tietoa kohuun liittyen?
20. Jos huomaatte että yksilö valittaa organisaatiostanne toistuvasti sosiaalisessa mediassa, muuttaako tämä reagoitianne yksilön palautetta kohtaan?
21. Pyrittekö johdattelemaan keskustelua sosiaalisessa mediassa? (Esim. keskustelun kohdistaminen tiettyyn aiheeseen tai keskustelun ohjaaminen organisaation omille sosiaalisen median kanaville)
22. Haetteko sosiaalisen median yhteisöltä ratkaisuja sosiaalisessa mediassa esille tuotuihin ongelmiin?
23. Mikäli teillä on internetmainontaa, muuttaisitteko sitä organisaatiotanne koskevan kohun aikana? Miten?

## **Toinen osio**

1. Käytättekö sosiaalisen median seuraamiseen muita päätelaitteita kuin tietokonetta?
2. Oletteko selvittäneet missä sosiaalisen median palveluissa asiakkaanne ovat aktiivisia?
3. Poistaisitteko omia aikaisempia sosiaalisen median julkaisujanne tai muokkaisitteko ajastettuja julkaisujanne, mikäli olisitte kohun kohteena sosiaalisessa mediassa?
4. Piilotatteko tai poistatteko muiden julkaisuja omilla sosiaalisen median kanavillanne? Missä tilanteissa?
5. Onko organisaatiossanne jaettu selkeät vastualueet sosiaalisen median hallinnan suhteen?
6. Miten pyritte ehkäisemään kriisin syntymisen sosiaalisessa mediassa?
7. Miten organisaation tulisi reagoida jotta kohu sosiaalisessa mediassa saataisiin laantumaan?
8. Jos sosiaalisessa mediassa on päässyt muodostumaan teitä koskeva kriisi, analysoitteko sitä jälkikäteen?
9. Liittyykö sosiaalisen median kriisien ja kohun hallintaan ja ehkäisyyn muuta oleellista?