



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Communication in times of crisis: The stakeholder relationship under pressure

van der Meer, T.G.L.A.; Verhoeven, P.; Beentjes, H.W.J.; Vliegenthart, R.

DOI

[10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.02.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.02.005)

Publication date

2017

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Public Relations Review

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

van der Meer, T. G. L. A., Verhoeven, P., Beentjes, H. W. J., & Vliegenthart, R. (2017). Communication in times of crisis: The stakeholder relationship under pressure. *Public Relations Review*, 43(2), 426-440. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.02.005>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.



Full length article

Communication in times of crisis: The stakeholder relationship under pressure



Toni G.L.A. van der Meer*, Piet Verhoeven, Hans W.J. Beentjes, Rens Vliegthart

Amsterdam School of Communication Research, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 February 2016

Received in revised form 23 August 2016

Accepted 2 February 2017

Available online 16 February 2017

Keywords:

Crisis communication
Stakeholder relationship
Stakeholder pressure
Time pressure
Uncertainty

ABSTRACT

This paper studies how stakeholder relationships change when an organization undergoes a crisis as compared to routine circumstances. During crises, the stakeholder relationships are under pressure, and therewith the organization's reputation and the crisis intensity. This paper's purpose is to investigate how, during a crisis, pressure from both internal stakeholders (i.e., management and employees) and external stakeholders (i.e., news media and interested citizens) influences public-relations professionals' communicative relationships with these stakeholders. 444 PR European professionals, who experienced crises, were surveyed about crisis and routine times. Special focus was on the mediation role of time pressure and uncertainty. Structural-equation models revealed that, in crisis, the increased pressure from news media, citizens, and employees negatively affects the communicative relationship with these stakeholders, whereas management pressure was found to have a positive effect. This observation might point to organizational isolation on a managerial level in the initial crisis phase, partly as a result of stakeholder pressure.

© 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

No organization is immune to the occurrence of a crisis. Indeed, public relations (PR) professionals report to frequently encounter a crisis, defined as an unpredictable organizational event that potentially generates negative outcomes for the stakeholders of the organization and its performance (Ulmer, 2012; Verhoeven, Tench, Zeffass, Moreno, & Verčič, 2014). Examples are the well-studied BP's Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 (Kleinnijenhuis, Schultz, Utz, & Oegema, 2013) and the more recent 2015 Volkswagen emission scandal. During such crisis situations the reputation of the organization is at stake (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Stakeholder relationships are considered crucial for the formation of the organization's reputation, in normal times as well as during and after a crisis. Therefore, organizations should work and communicate closely with their stakeholders in order to prevent or decrease the emergence of negative consequences of a crisis (Porter, 2012; Ulmer, 2001; Ulmer, Seeger, & Sellnow, 2007; Veil & Ojeda, 2010). Scholars have argued that an organization's ability to prevent or effectively respond to a crisis depends on stakeholders' relationships and the accuracy of an organization's understanding of how its stakeholders might behave in the context of crises (Alpaslan, Green, & Mitroff, 2009; Ulmer, 2001). Therefore, this paper investigates how stakeholder relationships change when an organization undergoes a crisis as compared to routine circumstances.

* Corresponding author at: University of Amsterdam, Nieuwe Achtergracht 166, 1018 WV Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
E-mail address: G.L.A.vanderMeer@UvA.nl (T.G.L.A. van der Meer).

A research deficit remains regarding the understanding of the *interplay* between the organization and its stakeholders during an organizational crisis, especially considering the media and interested citizens (Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2013; Schultz, Kleinnijenhuis, Oegema, Utz, & van Atteveldt, 2012; Van der Meer, Verhoeven, Beentjes, & Vliegenthart, 2014). So far, crisis-communication research is mainly approached from an organization-centered perspective and has experimentally studied the effects of communication strategies on organizational post-crisis reputation with limited consideration of individual stakeholders' role in the communication process (Coombs, 2007; Kim & Cameron, 2011). As a first step to obtain a more complete understanding of the complex communicative dynamics during a crisis and go beyond the predominant focus on organizational performance variables, this study emphasizes the relationship with multiple individual stakeholders. Also, understanding of this process, and the attendance and consequence of crises, may be advanced by a comparison between normal circumstances and crisis times (Avery, 2010). Therefore, a survey study is designed among organizations' PR professionals addressing the communicative relationship with and influence of news media, interested citizens, and internal stakeholders during an organizational crisis compared to normal circumstances¹.

During a crisis, stakeholders are likely to increase the pressure on the stricken organization and its PR professionals through various media. Due to the high news value of crisis situations (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2013; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003) organizations might be pushed by journalists and mass media (Neuwirth, 2010; Veil & Ojeda, 2010) to provide information quickly. Moreover, since social media have become an integral aspect of organizational crisis communication (Freberg, Palenchar, & Veil, 2013; Hallahan, 2010), interested citizens also are able to put more and direct (online) pressure on the organization (Avery, 2010; Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2014; Perry, Taylor, & Doerfel, 2003). Additionally, PR professionals might also be pushed by the management and other employees (David, 2011; Frandsen & Johansen, 2011) to act or communicate in a certain way. These various forms of pressure might alter the stakeholder relationships in a crisis. The question is how the organizations' PR professionals deal with the various forms of pressure and if this results in the organization isolating itself from its stakeholders or if the pressure improves the collaboration. Furthermore, other characteristics of an organizational crisis-situation, being time pressure and uncertainty, might affect the communication between PR professionals and stakeholders (Fleischer, 2013; Stephens, Malone, & Bailey, 2005).

The current study incorporates the interplay of the organizations' PR professionals and internal and external stakeholders as a starting point to study the effect of stakeholder pressure on stakeholder relationship in times of crisis and in normal situations. The research question reads as follows: *How do communicative stakeholder relationships differ when the organization undergoes a crisis, compared to routine circumstances?*

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Stakeholder relationships

Organizations operate in unstable environments where they must constantly evaluate how to interact with stakeholders (Stephens et al., 2005). To be successful, organizations need to acknowledge the importance of their relationships with stakeholders (Lewis, Hamel, & Richardson, 2001; Tampere, 2007; Ulmer, 2001) and recognize stakeholders' ability to negatively impact the organization's performance (Lerbinger, 1997). This is in accordance with the well-established stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Fassin, 2008). The fundament of Freeman's original stakeholder theory has been conceptualized into a stakeholder model, which focuses on the legitimate interests of any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the organization. This stakeholder model shows the relationships among various groups of actors in and around the organization (Freeman, 1984), emphasizing the influence of numerous internal (e.g., employees, management, and financiers) as well as external stakeholders (e.g., mass media, interested citizens, and governments) (Fassin, 2008).

Stakeholder theory has been criticized because it fails to cover specific situations such as crisis events (Alpaslan et al., 2009). Nevertheless, this stakeholder-relation approach has frequently been recommended as a useful perspective to study crisis communication (Patterson & Allen, 1997; Ulmer, 2001). It is argued that in the context of crises, adopting the principles of stakeholder theory will lead organizations to engage more frequently in proactive and/or accommodating crisis management behavior, explaining why stakeholder relationships can help organizations prevent crisis escalation and recover more successful from them (Alpaslan et al., 2009). The relationship with stakeholders shapes the perceptions of the crisis and the reputation of the organization and therefore affects the crisis situation (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Good stakeholder relationships can advance a collective sense-making process among an organization and its stakeholders when faced with a crisis. Such a collective process might enhance the organization's and stakeholders' understanding of the crisis situation (Lee, 2004). This collective understanding will help to minimize confusion, panic, reputational damage for the organization, and crisis escalation (David, 2011). Thus, strong relationships with stakeholders, constructed and nourished by communication, are a condition to limit negative crisis consequences.

To understand the evolution of stakeholder relationships in crisis times, they can be compared to normal circumstances. First, the stakeholder model acknowledges that stakeholders are identified by their interest in the organization (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Compared to normal times, crises change the salience of affected stakeholders and increase urgency and the degree to which stakeholders call for immediate attention (Alpaslan et al., 2009). Internal and external stakeholders cross over boundaries as they become involved in the crisis. Their involvement increases stakeholders' ability to negatively affect organizational performance (Lerbinger, 1997). Accordingly, many organizations make positive assumptions about their stakeholders only to find they were mistaken when hit by a crisis (Stephens et al., 2005). For example, key stakeholders

might abandon the stricken organization in order to protect their personal reputation or avoid poor depiction by the media (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Second, compared to ongoing and non-emergency routine situations, crisis situations are more critical, with greater immediacy and possible negative outcomes (Avery, 2010). The urgency of a crisis, especially during the so-called acute phase in the beginning (Gilpin & Murphy, 2010; Heath & O'Hair, 2010; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2010) might confound the organization's ability to maintain intensive forms of stakeholder communication because a crisis leaves little time for certain practices like stakeholder dialogue (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2010; Verhoeven et al., 2014) and therewith puts pressure on the relationship.

2.2. Pressure from stakeholders

Both the relationships with internal and external stakeholders are of significant importance to an organizations' reputation (e.g., Fassin, 2008). Therefore, pressure from the outside as well as from the inside of the organization needs to be addressed in crisis communication. To gain a comprehensive overview of stakeholder pressure this study focuses on different stakeholder types, namely diffused publics, functional publics, and enabling publics (Dougherty, 1992; Ray, 1999). Diffused publics emerge when organizational activities, such as a crisis, result in external consequences – e.g., news media, environmentalists, and citizens at large. Functional publics are responsible for the organizations' input and output – e.g., employees, unions, customers, and crisis victims. Enabling publics provide the organizations' resources to exist – e.g., shareholders or management. Specifically, for external stakeholder pressure this study looks at news media and interested citizens, for internal pressure the management and employees are emphasized.

Since the PR function of the organization includes the communication with both external and internal stakeholders, the PR function becomes central in organizational-crisis communication (Guth, 1995). Therefore, an organization's PR function takes on a mediating role between the organization's internal and external stakeholders (Grunig, 1975). PR needs to form a bridge between the different stakeholders with often contradicting aims and interests (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). With the central role of organization's PR function, this function holds responsibility for stakeholder management. It is a key task of the PR function to meet internal and external stakeholders' needs and resolve problems in the stakeholder relationships during a crisis to help prevent escalation and damage to the reputation (Ulmer, 2001; Coombs, 2014). Thus, during a crisis situation, organizations' communication and the PR function might be pressured from both ends – i.e., internal and external stakeholders. In order to enable the examination of pressure from both the internal and external stakeholders, this paper emphasizes the in-between role of organizations' PR professionals. Thus, in this paper, the concept stakeholder relationship refers to PR professionals' perception of the relationship the organizations has with its stakeholders.

2.2.1. External pressure

Media. Organizational crises are likely to be covered by the media because they fit so well with news factors (Neuwirth, 2010). In their coverage of organizational crises, media are known to be most influential in creating initial awareness and framing of the crisis at hand (Neuwirth, 2010; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2010; Schultz et al., 2012). By failing to be aware of and respond to the power and speed of (online) news media, the organization allows the crisis situation to escalate with all its consequences (Gilpin & Murphy, 2010; Neuwirth, 2010; Veil & Ojeda, 2010; Weick, 2001).

Journalists demand detailed information from the organization and its PR professionals that is undergoing a crisis (Heath & O'Hair, 2012; Sellnow & Seeger, 2001; Schwartz, 2010). Especially in the initial crisis phase the demand for timely and accurate information is high (Seeger, 2006; Veil & Ojeda, 2010). A good communicative relationship with the media might be crucial for the organization to limit reputational damage, as news outlets will generally report negatively about organizational crises (Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2013). Hence, as crises render organizations newsworthy, the media can act as a pressure group in times of crisis (Heath, 1998).

Interested citizens. In this study interested or involved citizens include people such as consumers, crisis victims, and individuals or communities (actively) communicating online about the organization. Thus, interested citizens could be considered stakeholders as this stakeholder type refers to an individual or group of stakeholders that is seeking a 'stake' from the organization or a stake in the online discussion about the crisis event (Heath, 2006). Citizens' online communication has become crucial to organizations due to the growing role of social media and its impact on organizations. Especially during crises, organization-related social-media usage rapidly increases (Goode, 2009; Heath & O'Hair, 2010; Liu, Austin, & Jin, 2011). This increase implies that integrating interested citizens and social media into crisis management is no longer a choice for PR professionals (Austin, Fisher Liu, & Jin, 2012; Jin et al., 2014). As social media have become mainstream venues for crisis communication (Freberg et al., 2013), the role and influence of citizens in crisis communication and framing is enlarged (Hallahan, 2010; Freberg et al., 2013). The news of a crisis, as well as inaccurate or unverified information, can be easily shared online, reaching millions of people without the intervening presence of the organization or journalists (Freberg et al., 2013; Gilpin & Murphy, 2010; Grunig, 2009; Neuwirth, 2010; Hallahan, 2010; Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). Thus minor organizational problems or crisis threats might set the public agenda about the organization and can easily spiral into major crisis situations (Gilpin & Murphy, 2010; Weick, 2001).

Interested and involved citizens expect quick and accurate crisis information, which is often not readily available to the organizations' PR professionals at the onset of the crisis (Avery, 2010; Hallahan, 2010). The absence of crisis information provided by the organization may result in people relying purely on rumors to make sense of the situation, increasing uncertainty and possibly exacerbating the situation (Veil & Ojeda, 2010). Citizens' enlarged role in combination with their

demand for information in crisis times put pressure on the organization and its PR professionals. The literature regarding the external stakeholder pressure results in the following hypothesis:

H1. When an organization undergoes a crisis, there will be more pressure on the organizations' PR professionals from (a) news media and (b) interested citizens than under routine circumstances.

2.2.2. Internal pressure

In the communication with internal stakeholders, the PR professionals assert the organization's PR function and responsibility for stakeholder management (Alpaslan et al., 2009). To effectively cope with a crisis, internal communication becomes even more crucial to the organization (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Johansen, Aggerholm, & Frandsen, 2012). Internal stakeholders can act as external stakeholders to organizations during a crisis (Montague, 2006). To emphasize the different hierarchical levels in an organization two internal stakeholders can be distinguished: (1) the management as the most influential group within an organization and (2) the other employees besides PR professionals. Just like external stakeholders, these internal stakeholders also have high expectations of organizational communication during a crisis (David, 2011). Additionally, internal stakeholders are not only receivers of information, but also senders, enlarging their level of influence (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). Therefore, just like external stakeholders, internal stakeholders can create additional pressure on organizational communication during a crisis.

The literature regarding the internal stakeholder pressure results in the following hypothesis:

H2. When an organization undergoes a crisis, there will be more pressure on the organizations' PR professionals from (a) the management and (b) other employees than under routine circumstances.

2.2.3. Pressure on stakeholder relationships

Stakeholder relationships are closely associated to how an organization reacts to stakeholder pressure in a crisis (e.g., Stephens et al., 2005). Organizations' PR professionals often have limited resources to communicate and react to pressure from the outside environment (Stephens et al., 2005). Especially in response to a crisis, when stakeholder salience and relationships can shift, it must be decided which stakeholder to attend to and which to ignore (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Previous research found that various stakeholders separately make sense of and frame a crisis situation at the beginning of a crisis (Leydesdorff & Hellsten, 2005; McCammon, 2012; Snow, Rochford Jr, Worden, & Benford, 1986; Van der Meer et al., 2014). Subsequently, studies revealed that organizations differ in their initial understanding and frame production of a crisis situation compared to stakeholders such as the media (Schultz et al., 2012), and interested citizens (Van der Meer, 2014). These different frames could indicate a weakened relationship between the organization and its stakeholders in the initial phase of the crisis. The media, interested citizens, and employees might pressure the organizations' PR professionals by providing different frames than the organizational ones or claim that the organization takes responsibility for the crisis or for the communication. As the stakeholders are either victimized or become more salient as a result of the crisis (Alpaslan et al., 2009), they can influence the general perception of the crisis responsibility or even boycott or take legal action against the organization. Therefore, the pressure from the news media, interested citizens, and employees is likely to negatively affect the relationship with these stakeholders.

The relationship between the organizations' PR professionals and its management, however; is likely to be positively affected by the pressure from the management during a crisis. Especially when PR professionals are part of the dominant coalition of managers in the organization (Grunig, 1997) and therefore will have close working relationships with the top management of the organization. The distinct processes of understanding and framing the crisis by the organization and stakeholders might imply that the organization partly isolates itself from its environment prior to understanding the situation at play. Therefore, it is hypothesized that the organization first strives to internally make sense of the complex crisis situation at the highest organizational hierarchical level – i.e., the managerial level. This holds that the pressure the management puts on PR professionals will, in the initial phase of a crisis, advance the quality of the relationship between management and PR professionals, contrary to the relationships with the other stakeholders. Therefore, hypotheses 3 and 4 read as follows:

H3. The pressure from (a) news media and (b) interested citizens has a negative effect on the communicative relationship with these specific stakeholders in crisis times.

H4. The pressure from (a) the employees has a negative effect on the communicative relationship with this specific stakeholder group in crisis times, while the pressure from (b) the management has a positive effect.

2.3. The mediating role of time pressure and uncertainty

The available crisis literature identifies two main crisis components, time pressure and uncertainty, that are inherently related to the occurrence of an organizational crisis. These crisis characteristics may help to further explain the changes in stakeholder relationships during a crisis.

First, a crisis is fundamentally related to the idea of time as an external condition. The surprising and threatening nature of a crisis demands something to be done quickly before the situation will continue to worsen (Fleischer, 2013; Sellnow & Sellnow, 2010). Already in the initial phase of a crisis, an intense and immediate need for information by stakeholders is created (Sellnow & Seeger, 2001; Veil & Ojeda, 2010). The accelerating conflict between the time rationally necessary to

cope with the crisis and the appropriate time to do so (Fleischer, 2013) might result in increasing time pressure for the organization and its PR professionals (Hale, Dulek, & Hale, 2005). Not only might the occurrence of the organizational crisis already put stakeholder relationships at stake, also the urgency of the crisis might challenge an organizational practice to maintain favorable relationships with stakeholders (Claeys, Cauberghe, & Leysen, 2013; Gilpin & Murphy, 2010; Hale et al., 2005; Heath & O'Hair, 2010). Hence, during a crisis, time pressure will be higher for the PR professionals, which might weaken the communicative stakeholder relationships.

Second, crisis situations are by definition complex events that create high levels of uncertainty (Lerbinger, 1997; Turner, 2008). Crises occur by surprise and their threatening nature demands for something to be done (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2010). In this sense, uncertainty and chaos are embedded within the crisis event (Seeger et al., 2003; Seeger, Ulmer, Novak, & Sellnow, 2005), resulting in feelings of uncertainty for the organization and its PR professionals (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011), defined as absence of information and lack of predictability in work task and requirements (Leach et al., 2013). Therefore, the purpose of organizational-crisis communication is to reduce uncertainty (Stephens et al., 2005) and properly make sense of the crisis situation (Weick, 1988). The uncertainty might increase the intentions to advance the communicative stakeholder relationships in order to come to an (mutual) understanding of the situation at play. Hence, the increased uncertainty for the organization and its PR professionals in a crisis might positively affect stakeholder relationships as the need for (collective) uncertainty reduction might improve the need for good relationships. Therefore, the following is assumed:

H5. Organizations' PR professionals perceive more time pressure and uncertainty when they undergo a crisis than under routine circumstances.

H6. Communicative stakeholder relationships in crisis times are negatively affected by (a) time pressure and positively affected by (b) uncertainty.

To better explain the effect of stakeholder pressure on stakeholder relationship, time pressure and uncertainty can be seen as mediating variables. As argued above, these crisis characteristics are likely to affect stakeholder relationships during a crisis. Additionally, the level of time pressure and uncertainty might again be affected by stakeholder pressure. First, high stakeholder pressure might further push organizations and their PR professionals to timely respond to the crisis and to disseminate extensive and accurate information early on (Fleischer, 2013; Veil & Ojeda, 2010). For this reason, time pressure does not only rise due to the occurrence of a crisis, but it can also be enlarged by stakeholder pressure. Secondly, stakeholder pressure might push the organization to understand and make sense of the crisis situation to be able to respond to the rising need and pressure of the stakeholders (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Stephens et al., 2005). The pressure to understand the situation might only increase the organizational level of stress to gain a solid explanation of and response to the crisis, enlarging their level of uncertainty. Not only does the organization have to make sense of the situation for itself, it has to be able to explain and communicate to others about how they understand the situation. The related mediation hypothesis is as follows:

H7. The effect of stakeholder pressure on communicative stakeholder relationship is mediated by (a) time pressure and (b) uncertainty.

3. Method

3.1. Data collection and research design

To examine the pressure from and the relationship with stakeholders, PR professionals are surveyed because they are often responsible for communication with stakeholders during crisis and are considered to be in the position that they have, either active or passive, experienced or observed how stakeholder relationships have changed when a crisis strikes. An English language survey was administered among experienced European PR professionals. A screening question was applied at the beginning of the survey to only select PR professionals who had, at least once, undergone an organizational crisis. To recruit respondents, several professional associations of PR professionals spread the survey amongst their members. Since most organizations have a specific crisis-related working group it was possible to select PR professionals with affinity to organizational-crisis communication. Additional prospective respondents were recruited through the professional-networking site LinkedIn. This website provides users with the option to become part of professional groups of experienced PR professionals with specific interest or experience in organizational crises. Of these groups, randomly selected members received a personal invitation to complete the survey. Due to this process of recruitment this sample is a purposeful non-random sample based on those PR practitioners who have experienced a crisis event as part of their job function. As a result, the finding of this study should be interpreted with caution and statistical generalization of the findings cannot be fully assumed. The Ethics Committee of the University of Amsterdam, department Communication Science, Amsterdam School of Communication Research, reviewed and approved the design of the study. The survey was considered standard research as the research is not of a medical nature and respondents were not misled, participation was voluntarily, anonymity was guaranteed, and all participants signed an informed consent.

3.2. Respondents

In the end, 444 PR professionals volunteered to participate in the survey. The average age of the respondents was 44.67 ($SD = 10.17$) and on average they had 17.23 ($SD = 8.98$) years of experience in communication management or PR and they mainly operated on an international level (64.8%). Most had an education level of a master's degree (57.4%) or bachelor's degree (28.5%). In addition, 41.5% of the PR professionals had a position as head of corporate/organizational communication or CEO and 29.3% as team/unit leader. Furthermore, most respondents worked at communication departments of a joint stock company (26.2%) or government owned organization (21.2%). Finally, 94.14% of the PR professionals self-reported that they dealt with an organizational crisis more than once. As there is no knowledge available about the population of PR professionals who experienced an organizational crisis in Europe, the findings cannot claim representativeness. However, the current sample is mainly in line with the social demographic of PR professionals found in a macro online survey targeting PR professionals in Europe: Predominantly male, about forty years old, and most of them have over ten years' experience (Zerfass, Verčič, Verhoeven, Moreno, & Tench, 2015). Additionally, based on the sample of professionals with a thorough level of experience and education this study is considered to lay a solid ground for understanding the nature of stakeholder relationships during organizational crises.

3.3. Measurement

For each of the following concepts, PR professionals were asked to respond to each individual item twice, for normal times and crisis times (initial crisis phase). All items were assessed on 7-point Likert type scales anchored by 1 = 'never' and 7 = 'always', a common rating format for surveys that can be analyzed as interval data. Appendix A provides an overview of all included items.

3.3.1. Independent variables

Media pressure. Media pressure was assessed by three items measuring several forms of media pressure on an organization and its PR professionals. The selected statements were partly based on the study by Helmig et al. (2013), e.g., "Our organization's activities are closely monitored by the media." Exploratory principal-component analysis with orthogonal rotation (varimax) and Cronbach's alpha reliability test shows that in both normal ($EV = 1.79$, $R^2 = 59.67$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.65$, $M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.29$) and crisis times ($EV = 1.84$, $R^2 = 61.22$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.68$, $M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.26$) the three items formed one reliable concept for the measurement of perceived media pressure.

Citizen pressure. To measure citizen pressure, four items were included in the questionnaire (Park-Poaps, 2010) e.g., "There is a threat that our products/services will be boycotted." The reliability analyses in both normal ($EV = 2.16$, $R^2 = 54.01$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.71$, $M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.27$) and crisis times ($EV = 2.34$, $R^2 = 58.60$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.75$, $M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.33$) showed reliable measurement.

Management pressure. In order to measure management pressure four items were used (Helmig, Spraul, & Ingenhoff, 2013) for internal pressure. The measurement included items like: "Management interferes in our public relations and stakeholder communication." The reliability of the measurement of management pressure was confirmed for both normal ($EV = 2.28$, $R^2 = 56.94$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$, $M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.41$) and crisis times ($EV = 2.22$, $R^2 = 55.54$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$, $M = 5.58$, $SD = 1.30$).

Employee pressure. Employee pressure was assessed on a four-item scale (Helmig et al., 2013), included statements as: "Other employees monitor whether the promises concerning our public relations are fulfilled." The reliability of the measurement of employee pressure was confirmed for both in normal ($EV = 2.45$, $R^2 = 61.32$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$, $M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.45$) and crisis times ($EV = 2.59$, $R^2 = 64.75$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$, $M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.49$).

3.3.2. Mediating variables

Time pressure. The time pressure component was assessed with a four-item scale (DeVoe & Pfeffer, 2011; Zika-Viktorsson, Sundström, & Engwall, 2006). Among the items were statements as: "I have so much to do in my function as PR professional that this affects my work performance negatively." The reliability analyses in both normal ($EV = 2.19$, $R^2 = 72.98$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$, $M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.37$) and crisis times ($EV = 2.67$, $R^2 = 56.70$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.74$, $M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.24$) showed reliable measurement.

Uncertainty. To measure the PR professionals' uncertainty, four items were included in the questionnaire (Leach et al., 2013), e.g., "The supply of information I need to do my job well is reliable." The reliability analyses in both normal ($EV = 2.57$, $R^2 = 64.24$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$, $M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.25$) and crisis times ($EV = 2.51$, $R^2 = 62.68$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$, $M = 5.72$, $SD = 1.17$) showed reliable measurement.

3.3.3. Dependent variable

Communicative relationship with stakeholders. For each stakeholder, communicative relationship is individually measured using a three-item scale (Neijens & Smit, 2006). Items included for example: "The organization's relationships with journalists/news media are good." The reliability analyses showed reliable measurement for the analyses in both normal and crisis times for the news media (normal times: $EV = 1.67$, $R^2 = 55.63$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.57$, $M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.02$; crisis times: $EV = 1.71$, $R^2 = 57.13$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.61$, $M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.14$), citizens (normal times: $EV = 1.75$, $R^2 = 58.30$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.60$, $M = 4.90$,

Table 1
ANOVA test group mean difference normal times versus crisis times.

Concept	Normal times (<i>M, SD, SE</i>)	Crisis times (<i>M, SD, SE</i>)	F-test (df, F-value)
Media pressure	<i>M</i> = 4.00, <i>SD</i> = 1.28, <i>SE</i> = 0.06	<i>M</i> = 5.20, <i>SD</i> = 1.26, <i>SE</i> = 0.06	<i>F</i> (1, 886) = 191.85*
Citizens pressure	<i>M</i> = 3.82, <i>SD</i> = 1.26, <i>SE</i> = 0.05	<i>M</i> = 4.98, <i>SD</i> = 1.33, <i>SE</i> = 0.06	<i>F</i> (1, 886) = 177.66*
Management pressure	<i>M</i> = 4.83, <i>SD</i> = 1.41, <i>SE</i> = 0.06	<i>M</i> = 5.58, <i>SD</i> = 1.30, <i>SE</i> = 0.06	<i>F</i> (1, 886) = 66.91*
Employee pressure	<i>M</i> = 4.03, <i>SD</i> = 1.45, <i>SE</i> = 0.07	<i>M</i> = 4.97, <i>SD</i> = 1.49, <i>SE</i> = 0.07	<i>F</i> (1, 886) = 87.73*
Citizens relation	<i>M</i> = 4.90, <i>SD</i> = 0.98, <i>SE</i> = 0.05	<i>M</i> = 4.15, <i>SD</i> = 1.18, <i>SE</i> = 0.06	<i>F</i> (1, 780) = 93.8*
Management relation	<i>M</i> = 5.31, <i>SD</i> = 1.18, <i>SE</i> = 1.2	<i>M</i> = 4.87, <i>SD</i> = 1.30, <i>SE</i> = 0.06	<i>F</i> (1, 778) = 24.35*
Employee relation	<i>M</i> = 5.20, <i>SD</i> = 1.06, <i>SE</i> = 0.05	<i>M</i> = 4.75, <i>SD</i> = 1.14, <i>SE</i> = 0.06	<i>F</i> (1, 776) = 32.39*
Time pressure	<i>M</i> = 3.71, <i>SD</i> = 1.37, <i>SE</i> = 0.06	<i>M</i> = 5.27, <i>SD</i> = 1.24, <i>SE</i> = 0.06	<i>F</i> (1, 844) = 299.6*
Uncertainty	<i>M</i> = 4.61, <i>SD</i> = 1.25, <i>SE</i> = 0.06	<i>M</i> = 5.72, <i>SD</i> = 1.17, <i>SE</i> = 0.06	<i>F</i> (1, 828) = 174.32*

* $p < 0.0001$.

SD = 0.98; crisis times: $EV = 1.84$, $R^2 = 61.17$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.66$, $M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.18$), management (normal times: $EV = 2.07$, $R^2 = 68.95$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.77$, $M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.18$; crisis times: $EV = 2.15$, $R^2 = 71.81$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$, $M = 4.87$, $SD = 1.30$), and employees (normal times: $EV = 1.97$, $R^2 = 65.57$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.72$, $M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.06$; crisis times: $EV = 1.97$, $R^2 = 65.80$, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.72$, $M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.14$).

3.4. Analysis

For the purpose of testing several hypotheses, path models were constructed using structural equation modeling (SEM) in EQS software. SEM is a confirmatory approach to data analysis highly appropriate for testing structural models with multiple mediations (Kline, 2011). Moreover, SEM provides fit statistics that allows drawing conclusions about how well the model fits the data – i.e., how well the model explains the data. For the assessment of model fit scholars have relied on a variety of fit indices. Most commonly, the following statistics should be used (Kline, 2011); Bentler Comparative Fit Index (CFI) > 0.90 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) lower bound < 0.05; upper bound < 0.10 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993), and ultimately Chi-square (χ^2) goodness-of-fit statistic being insignificant. However, several scholars put the χ^2 as a fit indicator up to discussion and emphasize its limitations (e.g., Steiger, 2007). Therefore, the main focus for assessing the hypothesized models will be on the fit indices CFI and RMSEA combined with the effect sizes and explained variances in which parsimony and theoretical plausibility of the models are crucial.

In advance to testing the structural models, the distribution of the data was analyzed. Since the multivariate kurtosis test Mardia's coefficient (>3) suggested multivariate non-normality, Satorra-Bentler statistic as a corrected model-test fit statistics was applied (Satorra & Bentler, 1994). Moreover, the missing values are replaced by the estimations using probability models for missing values with the use of model-based multiple imputation (EM imputation).

4. Results

4.1. Mean difference normal times versus crisis times

On average, in times of organizational crisis the pressure from stakeholders as perceived by PR professionals from (H1a) news media, (H1b) interested citizens, (H2a) the management of the organization and (H2b) employees is significantly higher than under normal circumstance. Table 1 provides an overview of the results based on ANOVA tested with pooled data. Hypothesis 1 states that when an organization undergoes a crisis, there will be more pressure on the organizations' PR professionals from the external stakeholders than under routine circumstances. Additionally, hypothesis 2 stated that also the pressure from internal stakeholders would rise during an organizational crisis compared to normal circumstance. Hypotheses 1 and 2 can therefore be supported.

Additionally, Table 1 shows the difference in relationship with the stakeholders between normal times and crisis times. The results indicate that for all four stakeholders the relationship is significantly weaker in times of crisis and that the relationship with the management is the strongest in crisis times.

Furthermore, PR professionals indicated that during a crisis, time pressure and uncertainty are significantly higher than under normal circumstance, as was predicted in hypothesis 5. Hypotheses 1, 2 and 5 were supported, therefore structural equation modeling is employed to further analyze the relationships between the communicative stakeholder relationships and stakeholder pressure in combination with time pressure and uncertainty.

4.2. Structural models

For the purpose of testing the hypotheses about stakeholder pressure, time pressure, and uncertainty for each specific stakeholder a separate path model was estimated since stakeholders' pressure and relationship were measured individually among the four stakeholders. In order to acknowledge the element of time, in terms of comparison between normal times

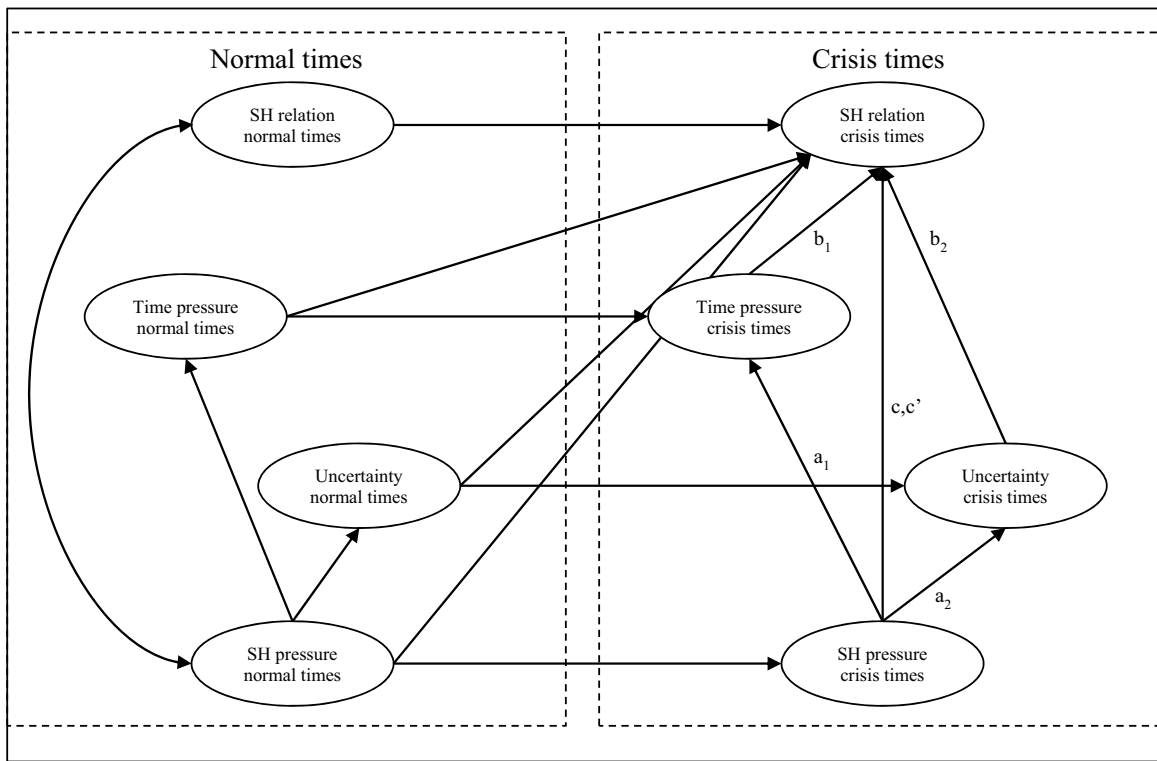


Fig. 1. Relationship between organization and stakeholders as perceived by PR professionals: General structural path model stakeholder-organization relationship.

Table 2

Fit statistics for structural path models regarding media, citizens, management, and employees.

Stakeholder	Chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic	Bentler Comparative Fit Index	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
News media	$\chi^2 (10) = 23.03, p > 0.01$	CFI = 0.99	RMSEA = 0.05 (CI: 0.025; 0.084)
Citizens	$\chi^2 (10) = 29.53, p > 0.001$	CFI = 0.98	RMSEA = 0.05 (CI: 0.039; 0.095)
Management	$\chi^2 (9) = 16.57, p > 0.03$	CFI = 0.99	RMSEA = 0.04 (CI: 0.000; 0.077)
Employees	$\chi^2 (10) = 17.45, p > 0.06$	CFI = 0.99	RMSEA = 0.04 (CI: 0.000; 0.074)

and crisis times, the models controlled for the relationship and pressure of the stakeholders under normal circumstance. In this way, the models also control for the importance of pre-crisis stakeholder relationships (Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Sohn & Lariscy, 2012) and document the pure and nuanced differences and effects in times of crisis. The structural design is inspired on meditational models with longitudinal data, routine times and normal times can be treated as two different waves where X, M, and Y are measured at both times (e.g., Cole & Maxwell, 2003). The final structural model is presented in Fig. 1. In Appendix B the complete individual models for the four stakeholders are shown along with the standardized total pathway estimates, explained variance in the endogenous variables, error terms, and error term correlations (Table 2).

4.2.1. Pressure on stakeholder relationship

The retained models indicate acceptable model fit as reflected by the fit statistics presented in Table 2, allowing interpreting the pathway estimates for testing the expectations.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that, in times of crisis, pressure from the external stakeholder, more specifically (H3a) news media and (H3b) interested citizens, has a negative effect on the communicative stakeholder relationships with these specific groups. As shown in Table 3 (c and c'), the effect of stakeholder pressure is significantly negative for the communicative stakeholder relationship for these two external stakeholders as indicated by the PR professionals. These findings support H3a-b.

Hypothesis 4 concerns the pressure from internal stakeholders. First, the hypothesis predicted that, in times of crisis, pressure from the (H4a) employees has a negative effect on the communicative stakeholder relationships with this specific group. As shown in Table 3 (c and c'), the effect of stakeholder pressure is significantly negative for the communicative stakeholder relationship for this internal stakeholder as indicated by the PR professionals. Second, the hypothesis assumed a positive effect of (H4b) management pressure on PR professionals during a crisis. The findings indeed indicate a significant

Table 3
Standardized path estimates of structural path models regarding media, citizens, management, and employees.

Stakeholder	a ₁	a ₂	b ₁	b ₂	c (total)	c' (direct)	Indirect effect 1	Indirect effect 2	R ² crisis relationship
News media	0.24*** (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	-0.19*** (0.05)	0.12*** (0.05)	-0.54*** (0.01)	-0.49*** (0.00)	Sobel = -3.91***	Sobel = -0.86	0.37
Citizens	0.18*** (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	-0.16*** (.05)	0.13*** (0.05)	-0.36* (0.67)	-0.33* (0.67)	Sobel = -2.96**	Sobel = 1.17	0.45
Management	0.09*** (0.03)	0.08*** (0.03)	-0.17*** (.05)	0.13*** (.05)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.00)	Sobel = -2.25*	Sobel = 0.43	0.47
Employees	0.09*** (0.03)	0.06** (0.03)	-0.10** (0.05)	0.11** (0.05)	-0.13*** (0.04)	-0.12*** (0.04)	Sobel = 0.50	Sobel = 0.40	0.43

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

positive effect of management pressure on the relationship between PR professionals and management in times of crisis. Hence, also H4a-b are supported.

Regarding hypotheses 3–4, a difference in effect size among the four stakeholders is observed. It was found that the pressure from the news media had the most pronounced negative effect on the relationship, followed by the negative effect of interested citizens and the employees. The positive effect of the management on relationship is found to be the smallest in terms of effect size. Moreover, the observation that only management had a positive effect on the relationship provides valuable new insight in how PR professionals and organizations relate to their stakeholders during a crisis. It seems that the organization tries to keep the media, citizens, and employees at a distance in the initial phase of the crisis.

Hypothesis 6 assumed a negative effect of (H6a) time pressure on communicative stakeholder relationships and a positive effect of (H6b) uncertainty. The findings document a significant negative effect of time pressure on the communicative stakeholder relationship for all four actors and a positive effect of uncertainty, supporting H6a-b. See Table 3(b₁ and b₂) for an overview. For all four stakeholders, the negative effect of time pressure and the positive effect of uncertainty are not equal in terms of effect size, indicating the absence of a null effect.

The final hypothesis stated that the effect of stakeholder pressure on stakeholder relationships is mediated by (H7a) time pressure and (H7b) uncertainty. As predicted, a significant mediation effect of time pressure was found in the cases of news media, citizens, and the management. However, no significant mediation effect was found in the model regarding the employees (see Table 3 indirect effect 1). Therefore, H7a can only be supported for news media, citizens, and management and needs to be rejected for the employees. Moreover, no significant mediation effect was found for uncertainty among all four stakeholders (see Table 3 indirect effect 2), rejecting H7b completely.

5. Conclusion & discussion

The key purpose of this study was to explore how communicative stakeholder relationships are different when an organization undergoes a crisis, compared to routine circumstances. The findings are in line with the stakeholder theory (e.g., Fassin, 2008; Freeman, 1984) as the importance of stakeholder relationships for an organization is observed. Also in crisis times, external stakeholders (i.e., news media and interested citizens) and internal stakeholders (i.e., management and employees) are able to put substantial pressure on the organization and its PR professionals. Stakeholder relationships, which are considered crucial for crisis involvement in general and for organizations to function successfully and to be able to survive a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2001), can be significantly altered by stakeholder pressure. Attempting to capture the mechanism behind this relation, this study revealed the mediating role of time pressure during an organizational crisis. The applied stakeholder perspective and comparison to normal times helps to understand and define the processes, antecedents, and consequences of organizational-crisis situations.

Using survey data from 444 European PR professionals who underwent organizational crises, organizations' situational differences between crisis times and normal circumstances were tested. To explore the formation of stakeholder relationships during a crisis, several structural-equation models were constructed. Due to the purposeful non-random sample, generalization of the findings to the entire population of PR professionals is problematic. At most, the findings can be generalized to PR practitioners that have experienced crises. Therefore, the findings should mainly inspire future theory formation rather than assessing some aspect of the sample and generalizing it to the population. This study expected a negative effect of stakeholder pressure from news media, interested citizens, and the organization's employees on the organization's relationship (as perceived by PR professionals) with these specific stakeholders. However, the relationship with the management was expected to be positively affected due to PR professionals' close working relationship with the top management, and organizational isolation on the managerial level to separately make sense of the crisis situation. The results indeed showed that the increased pressure from media, citizens, and employees negatively affected the organization's relationship with these specific stakeholders, while a positive effect was found for management. This is in line with the notion that, during a crisis, stakeholders' ability to negatively affect organizational performance increases while the organization's ability to maintain intensive forms of stakeholder communication decreases (Lerbinger, 1997; Sellnow & Sellnow, 2010).

The findings regarding the stakeholder relationships contribute to the understanding of how an organization and its PR professionals communicate with and relate to their stakeholders during hectic crisis times. The results imply that the organization tries to keep the news media, interested citizens, and employees at a distance in the initial phase of the crisis, despite that the stakeholders pressure the organization for communication. The employees might be seen as acting as external stakeholders to the organization (Montague, 2006). Whereas close-working relations with the stakeholders would help to deescalate the crisis, it is still found that organizations generally isolate themselves from their environment and assess their relationship with its management as most important. Thinkable, the organization might prefer to individually make sense of the crisis situation on a managerial level before they will intensively communicate about it. This managerial isolation might subsequently result in the separated production of crisis frames by the organization and its stakeholders in the initial crisis communication as was found in previous framing studies (Leydesdorff & Hellsten, 2005; McCammon, 2012; Snow et al., 1986; Scheufele, 1999; Van der Meer et al., 2014). As a crisis and its consequences are constituted in the communicative interplay between several actors (Kleinnijenhuis, Schultz, & Oegema, 2015), the absence of collective understanding and difference in crisis framing might complicate the solving of the crisis (Heath, 2006; Seeger, 2002; Weick, 1988). This frame differentiation among the organization and its stakeholders endangers the escalation of the crisis situation since mutual understanding is essential for resolving a crisis (Heath, 2006; Weick, 1988; Seeger, 2002). Additionally, the lack of information and communication might result in uncertainty among the stakeholders, or even panic (Liu & Kim, 2011; Van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013). In the initial phase of the crisis, stakeholders are forced to make sense of the situation by themselves without the active communication with the organization. Depending on the type of crisis, without detailed information from the organization, it might be difficult for stakeholders to understand the situation and assess whether they should take protective actions to avoid economic or even physical harm. Stakeholders might have to base their understanding of the crisis on speculations, potentially resulting in a spread of inaccurate information that can only be corrected by active communication with the organization. In the end, this communicative isolation of the organization and its PR professionals might further increase stakeholder pressure and might amplify the negative effect of on stakeholder relationships. In sum, the managerial isolation of the organization during a crisis might have its negative implication for solving the crisis and potentially causes confusion or uncertainty amongst stakeholders.

Additionally, normal circumstances were found to have a substantial controlling effect on stakeholder relationships, indicating that well-nurtured pre-crisis relationships with internal and external stakeholders will pay off in terms of a buffer in times of crisis. In other words, prior stakeholder relationships are found to have substantial explanatory power for the relationship in crisis times next to the stakeholder pressure. Regarding the stakeholders' influence on stakeholder relationships, the news media were found to have the strongest negative effect on stakeholder relationships, followed by interested citizens and employees.

To unravel the process of the effect of stakeholder pressure on stakeholder relationships the mediating effects of time pressure and uncertainty were tested. Only a significant mediation effect of time pressure was found in the cases of news media, citizens, and the management, whereas no significant mediation effects were found for uncertainty. Therefore, it can be stated that only time pressure helps to explain the effect of stakeholder pressure on stakeholder relationship during a crisis for certain stakeholders.

The absence of the mediating role of uncertainty is caused by the lack of a strong association between stakeholder pressure and uncertainty. Uncertainty might be more of a general consequence of the crisis occurrence rather than an effect of stakeholder pressure. In this phase, stakeholder pressure mainly increases time pressure and the organization and its PR professionals might be primarily forced to act out of concern of time. The mediation effect of time pressure might overshadow the need for uncertainty reduction in the initial phase of the crisis. As the time pressure reduces, uncertainty may gain a more central role in the effect of stakeholder pressure on stakeholder relationships in order to reduce uncertainty and come to a mutual understanding of the crisis. This expectation should be further validated using for example observational studies.

Certainly more questions await future investigations. This study was limited to the inclusion of stakeholder pressure, time pressure, and uncertainty, there are however doubtless numerous other crisis characteristics not mentioned in this study, which will yield significant differences in the results. For example, the inclusion of variables such as crisis responsibility, crisis type, crisis-response strategy, or organizational features would provide a more detailed and nuanced overview of the formation of stakeholder relationships in times of crisis. Additionally, the current study might have been limited as the units of analysis were individual PR professionals. If certain respondents have worked for multiple organizations, it might be hard for them to determine what should be the reference organization that they could base their answers on. These data characteristics could have hurt the empirical quality as the conclusions are made on the organizational level. Also, in order to truly go beyond an organizational-centered perspective and explore the interplay between the organization and stakeholders, attention should be focused on limiting the negative consequences for those who bear the risk of the crisis situations – e.g., financial, health, safety, and environment. Moreover, other methodological approaches such as observational studies are needed to gain a complete understanding of the process of organizational crises and the role stakeholders play in it. Furthermore, this study only includes four stakeholders whereas numerous others can be distinguished. Nevertheless, the PR professionals in this study did indicate that, amongst many stakeholders, the media, interested citizens, and internal stakeholders are the most essential and dominant stakeholders in times of crisis. Future research can further delve into the role of other significant stakeholders such as the government, shareholders, financiers, NGOs, environmentalists, suppliers,

and online and offline communities. However, by including the most important stakeholders and crisis features, this study fulfilled its task and provides a solid foundation for understanding organizational crises and the role stakeholders play in it.

Notes

1. In this paper, normal circumstances or normal times refer to organizational routine or non-crisis times to draw a clear distinction with crisis times. Research on “normal risk” argues that certain high-risk generating organizations deal with daily activities to minimize or prevent risk and crisis. However, it is not the aim of this paper to investigate how organizations operate in a climate of constant risk but to draw clear distinctions between non-crisis and crisis times.

Appendix A. Items included in survey

Concept	Items
Media pressure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Our organization's activities are closely monitored by the media. 2. Information about our organization that appears in news media is biased. 3. If we do not provide the media with a story they come up with an inaccurate story.
Citizens pressure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a threat that our products/services will be boycotted. 2. Citizens demand responsibility from our organization. 3. Citizens react emotionally toward information about our organization. 4. Rumors about our organization exist.
Management pressure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Management interferes in our public relations and stakeholder communication. 2. Management is concerned about the role of our organization in society. 3. Management demands responsibility from our organization. 4. Management monitors whether the promises concerning our public relationships are fulfilled.
Employee pressure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Other employees interfere in our public relations and stakeholder communication. 2. Other employees are concerned about the role of our organization in society. 3. Other employees demand responsibility from our organization. 4. Other employees monitor whether the promises concerning our public relationships are fulfilled.
Time pressure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I have so much to do in my function as PR professional that this affects my work performance negatively. 2. I feel rushed or pressed for time. 3. My work as a PR professional is characterized by lack of time. 4. I work under short deadlines.
Uncertainty	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The supply of information I need to do my job well is reliable. 2. I can rely on my suppliers (i.e., the people on whom I depend to do my job well) to deliver on time. 3. I can rely on my suppliers (i.e., the people on whom I depend to do my job well) to deliver exactly what I asked for. 4. The requirements of my internal customers (i.e., the people within my organization to whom I supply, for instance, information, products, materials, or services) are clear.
Media relationship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The organization's relationships with journalists/news media are good. 2. Good arrangements can be made with journalists/news media. 3. I experience a tension in the relationship with journalists/news media.
Citizens relationship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The organization's relationships with citizens are good. 2. We frequently have pleasant contact with citizens groups. 3. I experience a tension in the relationship with citizens.
Management relationship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The organization's relationships with the management are good. 2. Good arrangements can be made with the management. 3. I experience a tension in the relationship with the management.
Employee relationship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The organization's relationships with other employees are good. 2. Good arrangements can be made with other employees. 3. I experience a tension in the relationship with other employees.

Appendix B. Structural models

See [Figs. A1–A4](#).

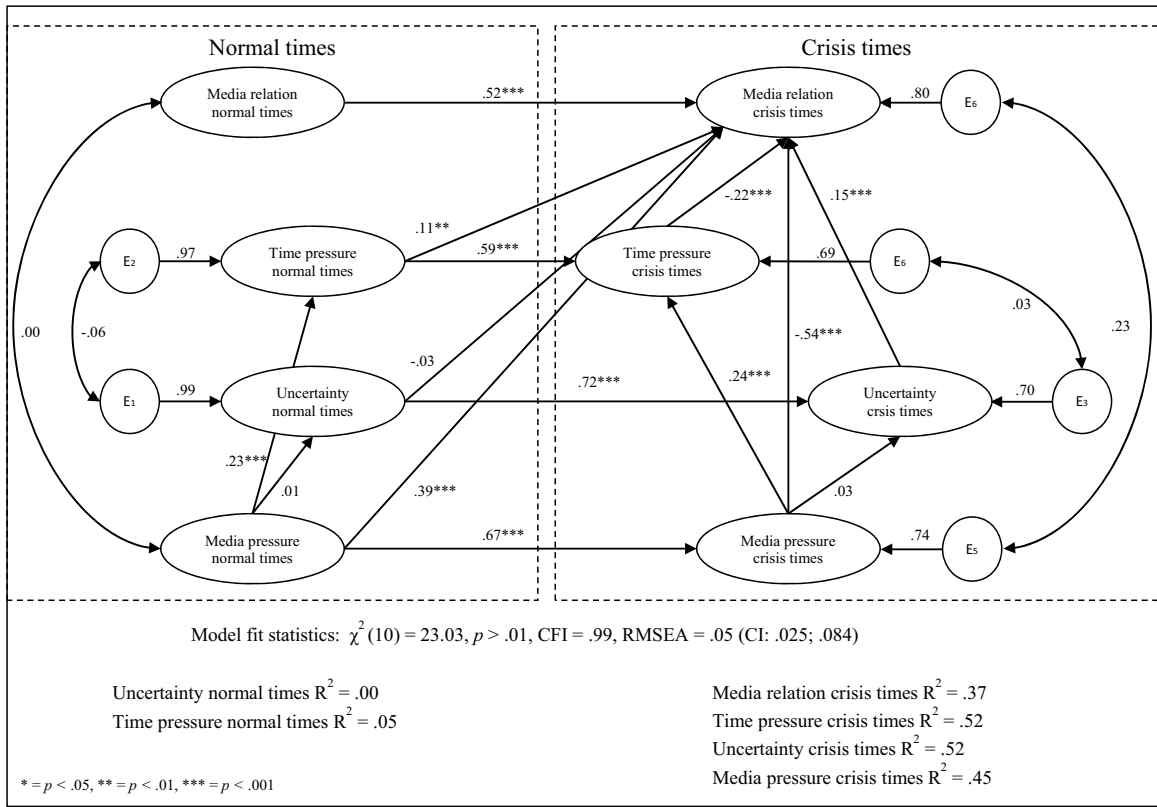


Fig. A1. Relationship between organization and media as perceived by PR professionals: Path model with standardized path estimates.

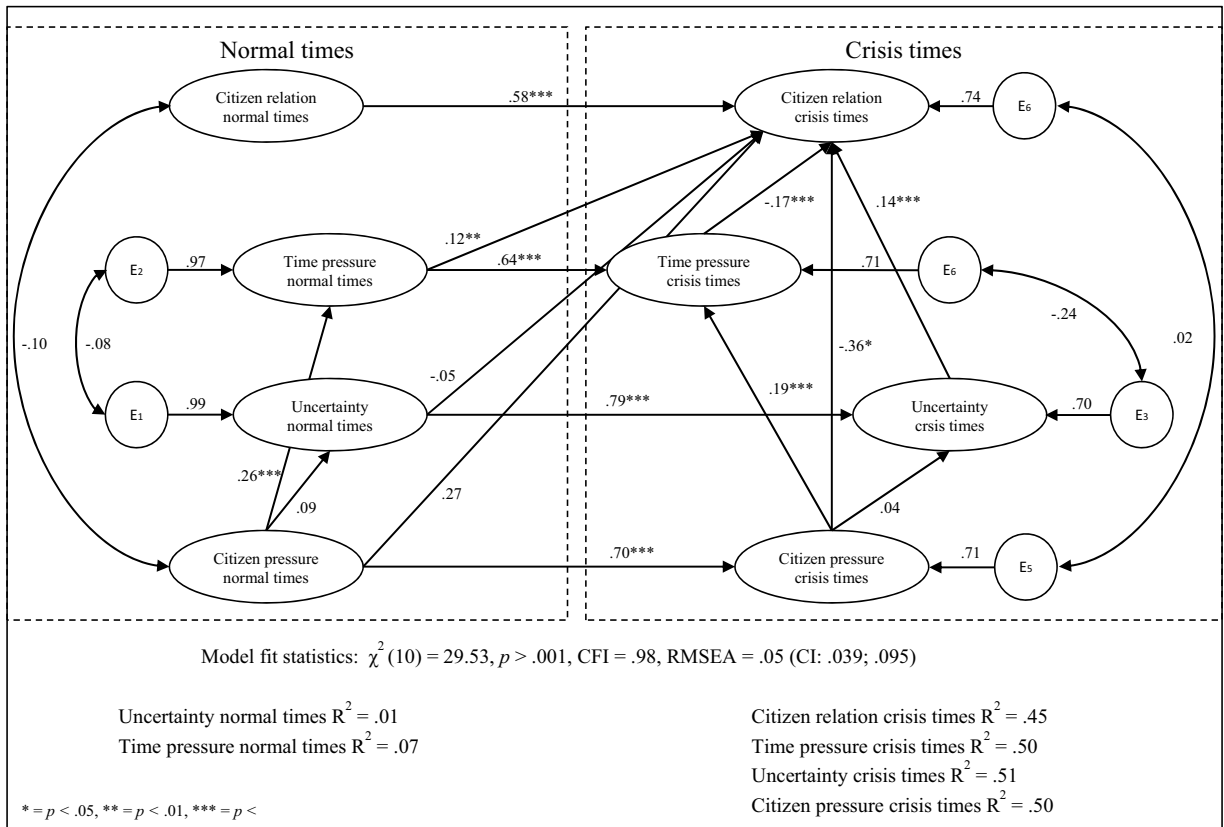


Fig. A2. Relationship between organization and citizens as perceived by PR professionals: Path model with standardized path estimates.

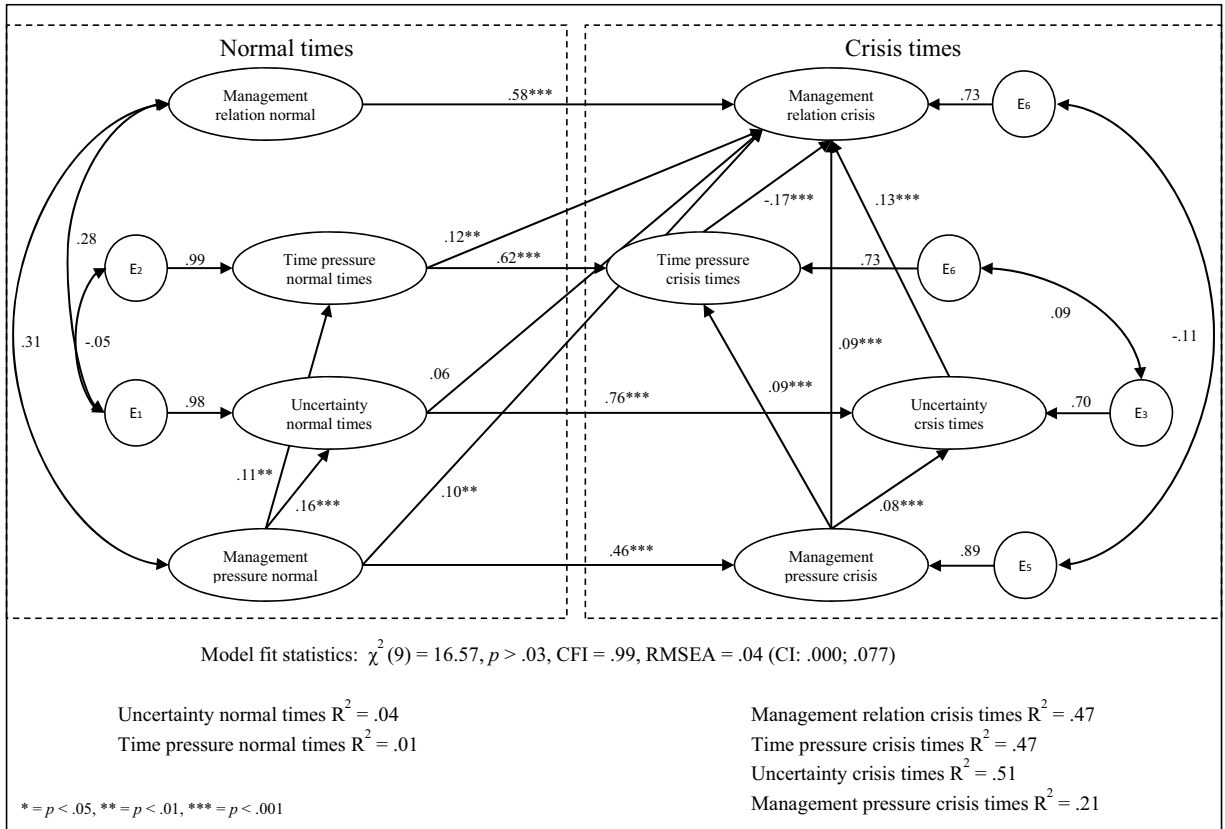


Fig. A3. Relationship between organization and management as perceived by PR professionals: Path model with standardized path estimates.

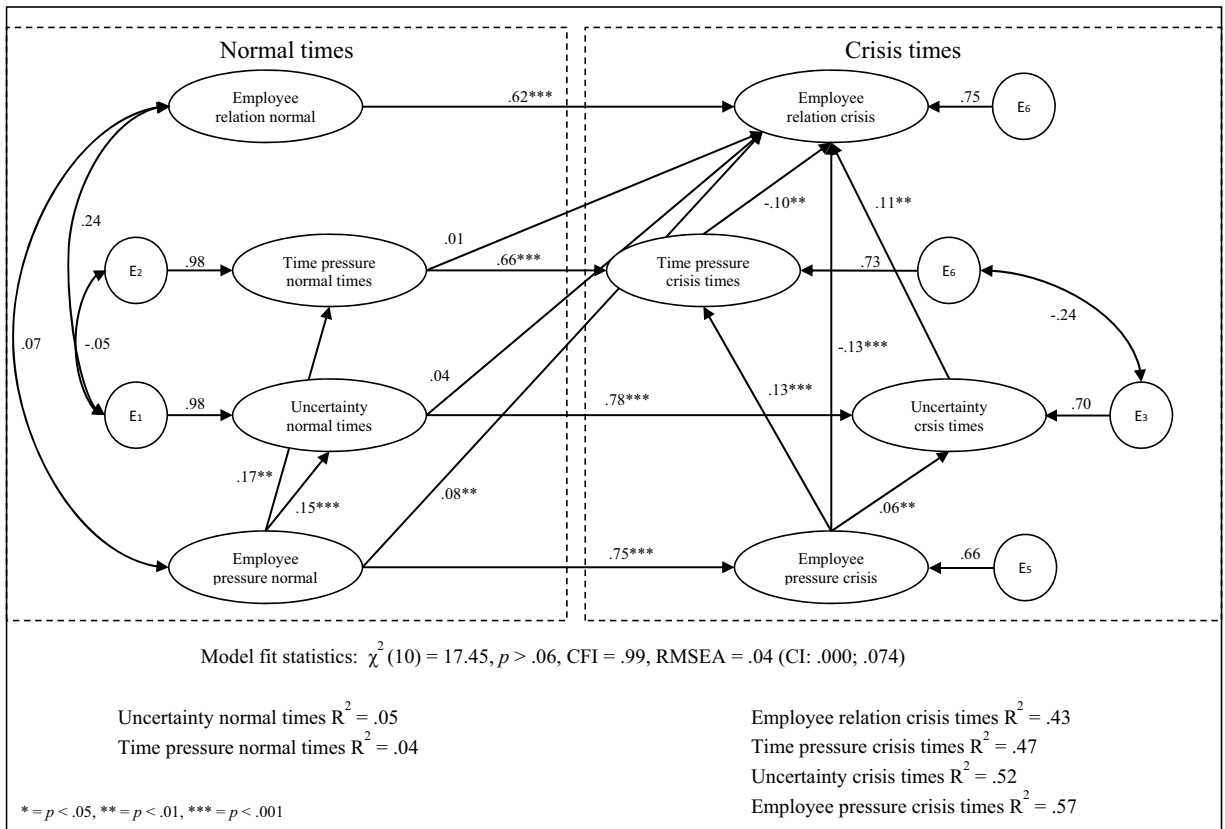


Fig. A4. Relationship between organization and employees as perceived by PR professionals: Path model with standardized path estimates.

References

- Alpaslan, C. M., Green, S. E., & Mitroff, I. I. (2009). Corporate governance in the context of crises: Towards a stakeholder theory of crisis management. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 17(1), 38–49.
- Austin, L., Fisher Liu, B., & Jin, Y. (2012). How audiences seek out crisis information: Exploring the social-mediated crisis communication model. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 40(2), 188–207.
- Avery, E. (2010). Contextual and audience moderators of channel selection and message reception of public health information in routine and crisis situations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 22, 378–403.
- Browne, M. W., & Cudeck, R. (1993). Alternative ways of assessing model fit. *Sage Focus Editions*, 154, 136.
- Claeys, A. S., Cauberghe, V., & Leysen, J. (2013). Implications of stealing thunder for the impact of expressing emotions in organizational crisis communication. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 41(3), 293–308.
- Cole, D. A., & Maxwell, S. E. (2003). Testing mediational models with longitudinal data: questions and tips in the use of structural equation modeling. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 112(4), 558–577.
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2001). An extended examination of the crisis situations; a fusion of the relational management and symbolic approaches. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 13, 321–340.
- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2002). Helping crisis managers protect reputational assets initial tests of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 16(2), 165–186.
- Coombs, W. T. (2007). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(3), 163–176.
- Coombs, W. T. (2014). *On going crisis communication; planning, managing, and responding*. London: Sage Publications, Inc.
- David, G. (2011). Internal communication—essential component of crisis communication. *Journal of Media Research*, 2(10), 72–81.
- DeVoe, S. E., & Pfeffer, J. (2011). Time is tight; how higher economic value of time increases feelings of time pressure. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 96(4), 665–676.
- Dougherty, D. (1992). *Crisis communications*. New York: Walker and Company.
- Fassin, Y. (2008). The stakeholder model refined. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 1, 113–135.
- Fleischer, J. (2013). Time and crisis. *Public Management Review*, 15, 313–329.
- Frandsen, F., & Johansen, W. (2011). The study of internal crisis communication; towards an integrative framework. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 16, 347–361.
- Freberg, K., Palenchar, M. J., & Veil, S. R. (2013). Managing and sharing H1N1 crisis information using social media bookmarking services. *Public Relations Review*, 39, 178–184.
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management; a stakeholder approach*. Boston: Pitman.
- Galtung, J., & Ruge, M. H. (1965). The structure of foreign news the presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus crises in four Norwegian newspapers. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(1), 64–90.
- Gilpin, D. R., & Murphy, P. J. (2010). Implications of complexity theory for public relations: Beyond crisis. In R. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of public relations* (pp. 261–276). New York: Sage.
- Goode, L. (2009). Social news: citizen journalism and democracy. *New Media and Society*, 11, 1287–1305.
- Grunig, J. E. (1975). A multi-systems theory of organizational communication. *Communication Research*, 2, 99–136.
- Grunig, J. E. (1997). A situational theory of publics: Conceptual history, recent challenges, and new research. In D. Moss, T. McManus, & D. Vercic (Eds.), *Public relations research: International perspectives*. London: International Thompson Business Press.
- Grunig, J. E. (2009). Paradigms of global public relations in an age of digitalisation. *PRism*, 6(2), 1–19.
- Guth, D. W. (1995). Organizational crisis experience and public relations roles. *Public Relations Review*, 21(2), 123–136.
- Grunig, L., Grunig, J., & Dozier, D. (2002). *Excellent organisations and effective organisations: A study of communication management in three countries*. Mahwah, NJ.
- Hale, J. E., Dulek, R. E., & Hale, D. P. (2005). Crisis response communication challenges building theory from qualitative data. *Journal of Business Communication*, 42, 112–134.
- Hallahan, K. (2010). Crises and risk in cyberspace. In R. L. Heath, & H. D. O'Hair (Eds.), *Handbook of risk and crisis communication* (pp. 412–445). Routledge.
- Heath, R. L. (1998). New communication technologies: An issues management point of view. *Public Relations Review*, 24, 273–288.
- Heath, R. L. (2006). Onward into more fog: Thoughts on public relations' research directions. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 18(2), 93–114.
- Helmig, B., Spraul, K., & Ingenhoff, D. (2013). Under positive pressure: How stakeholder pressure affects corporate social responsibility implementation. *Business & Society* [in press].
- Hu, L. T., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 6(1), 1–55.
- Jin, Y., Liu, B. F., & Austin, L. L. (2014). Examining the role of social media in effective crisis management the effects of crisis origin, information form, and source on publics' crisis responses. *Communication Research*, 41, 74–94.
- Johansen, W., Aggerholm, H. K., & Frandsen, F. (2012). Entering new territory; a study of internal crisis management and crisis communication in organizations. *Public Relations Review*, 38, 270–279.
- Kim, H. J., & Cameron, G. T. (2011). Emotions matter in crisis; the role of anger and sadness in the publics' response to crisis news framing and corporate crisis response. *Communication Research*, 38, 826–855.
- Kleinnijenhuis, J., Schultz, F., Utz, S., & Oegema, D. (2013). The mediating role of the news in the BP oil spill crisis 2010: How us news is influenced by public relations and in turn influences public awareness, foreign news, and the share price. *Communication Research* [in press].
- Kleinnijenhuis, J., Schultz, F., & Oegema, D. (2015). Frame complexity and the financial crisis: A comparison of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany in the period 2007–2012. *Journal of Communication*, 65(1), 1–23.
- Kline, R. B. (2011). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.
- Leach, D., Hagger-Johnson, G., Doerner, N., Wall, T., Turner, N., Dawson, J., et al. (2013). Developing a measure of work uncertainty. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 86(1), 85–99.
- Lee, B. K. (2004). Audience-oriented approach to crisis communication; a study of Hong Kong consumers' evaluation of an organizational crisis. *Communication Research*, 31, 600–618.
- Lerbinger, O. (1997). *The crisis manager facing risk and responsibility*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Lewis, L. K., Hamel, S. A., & Richardson, B. K. (2001). Communicating change to nonprofit stakeholders models and predictors of implementers' approaches. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 15(1), 5–41.
- Leydesdorff, L., & Hellsten, I. (2005). Metaphors and diaphors in science communication mapping the case of stem cell research. *Science Communication*, 27(1), 64–99.
- Liu, B. F., & Kim, S. (2011). How organizations framed the 2009 H1N1 pandemic via social and traditional media: Implications for US health communicators. *Public Relations Review*, 37, 233–244.
- Liu, B. F., Austin, L., & Jin, Y. (2011). How publics respond to crisis communication strategies: The interplay of information form and source. *Public Relations Review*, 37, 345–353.
- McCammom, H. J. (2012). Explaining frame variation; more moderate and radical demands for women's citizenship in the US women's jury movements. *Social Problems*, 59, 43–69.
- Montague, M. (2006). *Bad things, good companies: a crisis communications handbook*. Ithaca, NY: Lulu.com.

- Neijens, P., & Smit, E. (2006). Dutch public relations practitioners and journalists; antagonists no more. *Public Relations Review*, 32, 232–240.
- Neuwirth, K. (2010). Risk, crisis, and mediated communication. In R. L. Heath, & H. D. O'Hair (Eds.), *Handbook of risk and crisis communication* (pp. 398–411). Routledge.
- Park-Poaps, H. (2010). Public pressure against sweat shops as perceived by top-management of apparel and footwear companies. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 14, 300–311.
- Patterson, J. D., & Allen, M. W. (1997). Accounting for your actions: How stakeholders respond to the strategic communication of environmental activist organizations. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 25, 293–316.
- Pearson, C. M., & Mitroff, I. I. (1993). From crisis prone to crisis prepared; a framework for crisis management. *The Academy of Management Executive*, 7(1), 48–59.
- Perry, D. C., Taylor, M., & Doerfel, M. L. (2003). Internet-based communication in crisis management. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 17(2), 206–232.
- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (1978). *The external control of organizations: a resource dependence perspective*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Porter, A. J. (2012). Emergent organization and responsive technologies in crisis creating connections or enabling divides? *Management Communication Quarterly*, 27(1), 6–33.
- Ray, S. J. (1999). *Strategic communication in crisis management lessons from the airline industry*. Westport, CT: Quorum.
- Satorra, A., & Bentler, P. M. (1994). Corrections to test statistics and standard errors in covariance structure analysis. In A. Von Eye, & C. C. Clogg (Eds.), *Analysis of latent variables in developmental research* (pp. 399–419). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 49, 103–122.
- Schultz, F., Kleinnijenhuis, J., Oegema, D., Utz, S., & van Atteveldt, W. (2012). Strategic framing in the BP crisis; a semantic network analysis of associative frames. *Public Relations Review*, 38, 97–107.
- Schwartz, K. A. (2010). Red Cross crisis communication in the wake of September 11, 2001. In R. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of Public Relations* (pp. 501–508). New York: Sage.
- Seeger, M. W., Sellnow, T. L., & Ulmer, R. R. (2003). *Communication and organizational crisis*. Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Seeger, M. W., Ulmer, R. R., Novak, J. M., & Sellnow, T. (2005). Post-crisis discourse and organizational change, failure and renewal. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 18(1), 78–95.
- Seeger, M. W., Sellnow, T. L., & Ulmer, R. R. (2010). Expanding the parameters of crisis communication; from chaos to renewal. In R. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of Public Relations* (pp. 489–500). New York: Sage.
- Seeger, M. W. (2002). Chaos and crisis; propositions for a general theory of crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 28, 329–337.
- Seeger, M. W. (2006). Best practices in crisis communication: An expert panel process. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34, 232–244.
- Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M. (2001). Exploring the boundaries of crisis communication: The case of the 1997 Red River Valley flood. *Communication Studies*, 52, 153–167.
- Sellnow, T., & Sellnow, D. (2010). The instructional dynamic of risk and crisis communication: Distinguishing instructional messages from dialogue. *The Review of Communication*, 10, 112–126.
- Snow, D. A., Rochford Jr, E. B., Worden, S. K., & Benford, R. D. (1986). Frame alignment processes, micromobilization, and movement participation. *American Sociological Review*, 464–481.
- Sohn, Y. J., & Lariscy, R. W. (2012). A buffer or boomerang?—The Role of Corporate Reputation in Bad Times. *Communication Research* [in press].
- Steiger, J. H. (2007). Understanding the limitations of global fit assessment in structural equation modeling. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 42, 893–898.
- Stephens, K. K., Malone, P. C., & Bailey, C. M. (2005). Communicating with stakeholders during a crisis evaluating message strategies. *Journal of Business Communication*, 42, 390–419.
- Tampere, K. (2007). Stakeholder thinking and a pedagogical approach in public relations processes: Experience from transition societies. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 20(1), 71–93.
- Turner, M. (2008). Ulmer, sellnow, and seeger. effective crisis communication: moving from crisis to opportunity. *Mass Communication and Society*, 11, 105–108.
- Ulmer, R. R., Seeger, M. W., & Sellnow, T. L. (2007). Post-crisis communication and renewal; expanding the parameters of post-crisis discourse. *Public Relations Review*, 33, 130–134.
- Ulmer, R. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M. W. (2010). *Effective crisis communication: Moving from crisis to opportunity*. Sage Publications.
- Ulmer, R. R. (2001). Effective crisis management through established stakeholder relationships Malden Mills as a case study. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 14, 590–615.
- Ulmer, R. R. (2012). Increasing the impact of thought leadership in crisis communication. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 26(4), 523–542.
- Van der Meer, T. G. L. A., & Verhoeven, P. (2013). Public framing organizational crisis situations: Social media versus news media. *Public Relations Review*, 39, 229–231.
- Van der Meer, T. G. L. A., Verhoeven, P., Beentjes, H., & Vliegthart, R. (2014). When frames align: the interplay between PR, news media, and the public in times of crisis. *Public Relations Review*, 40, 751–761.
- Van der Meer, T. G. L. A. (2014). Organizational crisis-denial strategy: The effect of denial on public framing. *Public Relations Review*, 40, 537–539.
- Veil, S. R., & Ojeda, F. (2010). Establishing media partnerships in crisis response. *Communication Studies*, 61, 412–429.
- Veil, S., Buehner, T., & Palenchar, M. J. (2011). A work-in-process literature review; incorporating social media in risk and crisis communication? *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 19(2), 110–122.
- Verhoeven, P., Tench, R., Zerfass, A., Moreno, A., & Verčič, D. (2014). Crisis?: What crisis?; How European professionals handle crises and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 40, 107–109.
- Weick, K. E. (1988). Enacted sense making in crisis situations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 25, 305–317.
- Weick, K. E. (2001). *Making sense of the organization*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Zerfass, A., Verčič, D., Verhoeven, P., Moreno, A., & Tench, R. (2015). *European Communication Monitor 2015: Creating communication value through listening, messaging and measurement. Results of a survey in 41 countries*.
- Zika-Viktorsson, A., Sundström, P., & Engwall, M. (2006). Project overload: An exploratory study of work and management in multi-project settings. *International Journal of Project Management*, 24, 385–394.