

Intercultural Crisis Communication – Cultural Background and the Formation of Perception

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Abstract

Crisis communication is a fairly new research discipline that originated in the United States in the late 1980s. Most of the research in the field has been focused on a sender-focused strategy with the organisation in mind and neglected the audience perspective. In particular, little is known about how cultural background influences crisis message perception and how then perception influences organisational reputation. The importance of the crisis communicator, his/her capabilities and his/her unique deliverance of the crisis message to a multicultural audience has not received much attention in spite of such a significant role in informing the public and therefore in shaping the public image of the organisation. This research aimed to study crisis communication from an intercultural perspective and thus expand the field and fill gaps by investigating how cultural background truly influences perception of crisis messages and subsequently organisational reputation. Further, the study looked at how the proven benefits of multimodality in other fields can be used in crisis communication to better understand the perception creation process.

The study utilised an exploratory mixed method approach, following on from an earlier pilot study. Participants were shown two short excerpts from the crisis press conferences of Germanwings U9525 and Malaysia Airlines MH370. The research included in-depth surveys with an open-ended section and was taken by 181 participants from 6 home country groups in the summer of 2016. The data was analysed utilising descriptive statistics as well as a thematic content analysis. The study concluded that cultural background is the decisive component when evaluating crisis messages and determining organisational reputation. Evidence was found to show significant impact in regard to the following three integral parts of crisis communication: Language Used for Crisis Communication, Crisis Information Content (Names & Nationalities of Victims), Attribution of Responsibility. The use of multiple modes and the introduction of multimodality into this study has also raised awareness for the inherent cultural features of crisis communicators. This analysis has provided indicators that significantly shape audiences' perception. Those were: standing vs. sitting, speed of speaking, eye contact with audience, physical appearance, and facial expression.

Finally, the study argued for a departure from the current generic approach in crisis communication to a situation-based crisis handling approach which is underpinned by social constructionism and appropriate and responsive to audiences and crisis context.

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Dedication

To friends around the world, who cheered me on through the many ups and downs and to my mother, Claudia, to whom her son's doctoral studies taught her the true meaning of patience.

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Presentations & Publications Related to This Research

Nordic Intercultural Communication Conference, 23-25 November 2017, Jyväskylä, Finland “*Intercultural Crisis Communication in a Globalised World*”.

Global and Cross-Cultural Organisational Research Ph.D. and Post-Doc Seminar and Conference, 25-30 June 2017, Maastricht, Netherlands “*Communicating a Crisis to Different Groups of Audiences*”.

Hill+Knowlton Strategies Corporate Conference, 18 January 2017, Frankfurt, Germany “*Krisenkommunikation und kulturelle Unterschiede*”.

CIPR International Magazine, 18 October 2016, London, UK “*International Crises and Differences in Cultural Perspectives*”

New Route PhD Conference, 19 June 2017, London, UK “*International Crises Communication and Air Travel*”

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

“We have to remember that reputations are won and lost in a crisis”
(Ken Chenault, CEO American Express)

Unlike in the early 20th century, when organisational crises were only seen in the realm of domestic borders, the increasingly global world of business, the rise of humanitarianism, and new means of information technology have changed the way organisations have to deal with crises and foreign stakeholders. Today, it can be argued that all crises are global, as local incidents have global impacts on reputation and market valuation as investors and customers are spread across the world (Pinsdorf, 2004; Fink; 1986; Doorley and Garcia, 2015).

It is precisely in crisis situations that CEOs or organisational spokespersons are most likely to forget that it is not the nature of the crisis itself but the organisation’s response that changes audiences’ perceptions and organisations’ reputations: “Indeed, it is precisely in a crisis that leaders are most likely to forget that they will be judged not on the nature of the crisis they face, but on their response to it” (Doorley and Garcia, 2015, p. 305).

While communication and human interaction studies have been well established for the larger part of the 20th century, the inception of crisis communication happened only recently and thus is a relatively new field of research. Crisis communication or crisis management can be dated back to the mid-1980s when Steven Fink published his book: *Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable* which lay the groundwork

for crisis management and, later, crisis communication. Since then, various different forms of crisis communication have evolved and increasingly captured the multitude of aspects influencing perception and reputation of the given organisation experiencing a crisis. Although there has been a great deal of discussion regarding how to achieve effective crisis communication, only a few viable models have emerged, most recently Coombs' (2007) *Situational Crisis Communication Theory* /Frandsen and Johansen's (2017) *Rhetorical Arena Theory* as part of a social constructivist approach to shift the focus to the receiving end of crisis communication; the audience.

Most of the existing research, however, has been on the strategic level and thus has focused on the organisation, the sender of crisis communication. All in all, the perception creation process of audience and the divergence of sentiments due to cultural norms and understanding have largely been overlooked. This lack of research focus has been exacerbated by a Western concentration of crisis literature and an inherent essentialist view of the world and the response behaviour of audiences which dominated the field for many years.

Too often scholars and practitioners have followed a standardised process of communication analysis, derived from business school models, that have failed spectacularly when dealing with a multitude of audiences from around the world. Doorley and Garcia (2015) state that 60-70 percent of all crises are mismanaged, primarily due to poor communication. They observed that poor crisis communication leads to (1) reduction by, on average, 22 percent in an organisation's market capitalisation, (2) slowed down or halted operations, (3) decreased employee morale

and productivity, (4) worsened business relationships, (5) reduction in demand for services and products by the public, (6) loss of support by public policymakers, and (7) loss of strategic focus and lasting reputational damage.

In order to avoid those and other consequences, communication methods ought to be tailored to the respective audiences' communication needs instead of pursuing standardised communication schemes that were all too common in the past and in many cases still are. To uncover audiences' communication needs it is essential to analyse communication with respect to cultural background. While intercultural communication has been a "hot topic" of linguistics and communication for some time, it has only recently been associated with crisis communication. A predominant Western bias in the past has prevented an integration in crisis research which has been recognised by leading scholars (Coombs, 2007; Lee, 2005). However, little has been done to change that, which Johansen and Frandsen strongly criticise in the 7th Volume of *Handbooks of Pragmatics*, published in 2010.

Too little is still only known about the relation of crisis communication and cultural background and how perception of an organisation is formed. Further, it is unclear how crisis perception translates into organisational reputation with audiences of different cultural backgrounds.

1.2 Aims of Research

The purpose of the study, which builds upon findings of an earlier pilot study (Kleineidam, 2015), is to uncover the relation between cultural background and perception of crisis communication, to identify the key areas of crisis communication prone to cultural influence, to showcase the consequences of audience perception on organisational reputation, and to establish a new way of looking at crisis communicators by including multimodality, which argues for a broader conceptualisation towards communication and moves away from an over emphasis on merely what is being said. The end goal is to support a transformation of the field of crisis communication studies into intercultural crisis communication studies, if it is indeed verified by this study that culture is a more pivotal factor for crisis communication than previously believed.

1.2.1 Research Questions

The study contains two research questions with two sub-questions:

RQ1: What role does culture play in recipients' perception with regard to crisis communication?

1.1 How does a particular cultural background affect perception?

1.2 How do cultural background and audience's perception affect organisational reputation?

RQ2: What insights does multimodality offer to help better understand the relation of cultural background, perception creation and organisational reputation?

1.2.2 Research Approach

Because of the dearth of research related to intercultural aspects within crisis communication and the resulting, unanswered question of what role culture plays, the research is exploratory in nature. A mixed method approach was chosen where qualitative findings are used to support an elaborate quantitative inductive approach. The study included in-depth surveys with closed and open-ended questions and was taken by 181 participants. The basis for this survey were two short videos showing the respective crisis communication efforts by Germanwings and Malaysia Airlines immediately after the incidents of Flight U9525 and MH370.

To include as much variety as possible in terms of cultural background, the largest casualty groups of both plane crashes were selected for this study. That meant that six home country groups in total were chosen to be part of the analysis. On average, 30 participants, representing each home country group, were recruited in 2017.

Further categorisation was utilised early on in the survey to ensure that the desired demographics are indeed recruited for this study. The researcher ensured that within those cultural groups, test subjects were sufficiently skilled in both English reading and hearing to comprehend all aspects of the survey. Another categorisation in relation to cultural groups and research questions was to understand how many years the participants were living in the United Kingdom. This was important for two reasons; 1) It indicated the level of acculturation if a large number of participants were UK residents for five years or longer. 2) It allowed for further comparison between length of residents and perception of crises introduced to participants. In addition, further questions were used to safeguard that test subjects were sufficiently skilled to understand the subject matter in order to reduce redundancies. While the reporting on

the crises cases in the video came from English media sources, the researcher wanted to ensure that test subjects can not only be categorized in certain cultural groups but that a majority of those test subjects declared that they comprehend the research matter and were already familiar with the way it was presented to them. Furthermore, it was safeguarded that all participants who were willing to take the survey indicated that the subject matter of international plane crashes is to be considered a significant incident. Such a categorisation was imperative as participants who dismissed the significance of subject matter would not have been trusted to make well-conceived judgments on the survey questions as they would have failed to understand the inherent urgency of the research area. These categorisation done in the early stage of the survey made sure that participant recruitment was not reduced to mere cultural groups but that the representatives of those cultural groups were skilled and determined to play an essential part in the research and therefore would lead the researcher to obtain the most reliable data possible.

IBM's computer-aided Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), as proposed by Wagner (2012), was applied to examine participants' responses in order to determine statistical significance for the influence of cultural background on perceptions of crisis communication. The statistical findings were supported by a thematic analysis that grouped responses taken from two open-ended survey questions which led to the identification of recurring themes in the answers provided. The qualitative thematic analysis helped explain and interpret the findings of the more elaborate quantitative analysis gained through SPSS.

1.2.3 Significance

Exploratory in nature, this study will contribute to the field by casting light on the importance of culture in the field of crisis communication and, along with most recent research (Zhao et al., 2017; Frandsen and Johansen, 2017), advance social constructionism as a means to make crisis communication more effective and inclusive for culturally diverse audiences.

Specifically, the effects on perception and organisational reputation, such as maintaining reputation after a crisis, is considered the greatest achievement in crisis communication both by researchers as well as by practitioners and should therefore be of prime interest for this study. Further, the study will contribute methodological knowledge regarding the study of culture groups and add variables that have not yet been included in crisis communication, but which are indispensable when determining cultural effects on perception and reputation such as multimodality's social semiotics. On an academic level, this study will provide evidence for the importance of an audience-centred, culturally aware crisis communication and advocate social constructionism for improved sender-receiver interaction.

At a practical level, the findings will contribute knowledge which may be applied in the fields of intercultural training and development, executive/spokesperson selection and leadership development. This will enable adaptation or re-interpretation of existing tools and methods in order to more effectively communicate a crisis to a global and diverse audience if all crises are truly to be considered global crises (Pinsdorf, 2004).

1.3 Structure of Research

This report contains six chapters, including this first introductory chapter. Chapter 2 reviews the literature and research relevant to the research questions. It will discuss the development of the field since its inception and the ongoing development in crisis communication from a traditional sender-focused communication design to a more audience-focused, culturally sensitive communication structure. Another focus will also be on stakeholders and what social constructionism is. As a result, Chapter 2 will not only go through this transition process but also pinpoint several gaps in the research that motivated this study. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological approach, research design, details of the data collection and data analysis processes that were used to process the 181 participants' responses. Then, Chapter 4 presents the overall findings of the study. Section A presents the quantitative findings, followed by Section B which supports those results by supplying qualitative findings.

Chapter 5 serves as the discussion of the findings. Interpretations and conclusions will be drawn in light of the literature discussed in the second chapter. It examines the implications for academia, all major parties involved in crisis communication, including primarily the home country groups but also organisations and spokespersons as the first source of crisis communication. This will be followed by the limitations of the study. Finally, Chapter 6 summarises the study, presents recommendations for further research and concludes the report.

1.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented background demonstrating the challenges and changing face of crisis communication. It has introduced the lack for cultural implications in current crisis communication research and its potential close relation to the audiences' perception creation process. The consequences for organisational reputation have been mentioned and also the need to make the field more interdisciplinary and more inductive. In order to achieve this the prospective benefits of including the study of multimodality for a more encompassing analysis of crisis communication have been raised. The aims of the study and research questions were introduced along with a chapter-by-chapter overview of how the study is organised.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on crisis communication in terms of its *traditional approach*, *social constructionist approach*, *public perspective* and *culture embeddedness*. While the traditional approach illustrates the origins of crisis communication as an emerging discipline in the late 1980s, the more modern social constructionist approach, which gained appreciation in the 2000s, highlights the seismic shift that took place in crisis communication research. The literature review examines the different components necessary for advancing the social constructionist approach. Then, the perspective of stakeholders and the importance of the audience will be reviewed, which have been largely neglected under the traditional research approach. Due to the increased significance of audience-focused crisis communication, this chapter further explores the literature on culture dimensions, which have played an essential role in audience perception creation.

By discussing some of Geert Hofstede's controversial approaches and employing some of Edward T. Hall's contributions to anthropology, relevant ideas for intercultural crisis communication in today's globalised yet culturally fragmented world will be examined. Then, an assessment will be made on factors that are considered related to perception creation which until now were hardly researched by the existing research. Firstly, an analysis of the importance of language for intercultural crisis messaging will be discussed. Secondly, multimodality, a growing new research field in socio-linguistics, will be reviewed along with its possible

utilisation in crisis communication through analysis of modes such as gaze, speed of speaking etc. Finally, focus will be placed on inherent competencies of senders of crisis communication and how they can be a source of influence on perception creation when addressing multicultural audiences.

The focus of the literature review and this study is to analyse the many factors impacting the reputation of an organisation by its diverse stakeholders in times of crises. Therefore, the focus at this moment is exclusively on external communication. The internal aspect will not be part of this study at this time. This chapter tries to give an overview of the literature dealing with external communication and perception creation, paving the way for a more modern approach to an exchange of crisis relevant information. This chapter illustrates the major contribution of past and present research and develops some key propositions for future research. A chapter summary can be found at the end.

2.2 Historical Literature Review: The Traditional Approach

In this section, an overview of the early stages of crisis communication will be given. The traditional approach of crisis communication dominated the literature from the 1980s to the early 2000s. After outlining what is considered a *real crisis*, competing school of thoughts of the traditional approach will be examined. Timothy Coombs, Professor at the Texas AandM University and prominent figure in the field, states in the chapter *Parameters for Crisis Communication* in *The Handbook of Crisis Communication* that “no organisation is immune from a crisis anywhere in the world

even if that organisation is vigilant and actively seeks to prevent a crisis” (2010, p. 17).

If one tries to define what constitutes a *crisis*, one is confronted with plenty of definitions. Crisis originated from the Greek *krisis*, referring to “tensions that call for critical judgment, exercising critique, reflexivity, which would inform decisions reached and actions taken” (Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer, 2014, p. 8; Doorley and Garcia, 2015). The concept of crisis in crisis communication came from crisis management research which was initiated by the efforts to separate it from the usage of different disciplines, including anxiety, threat, and stress in psychology, panic in sociology and political science, and disaster in the interdisciplinary field (Hermann, 1963; Olsson, 2014).

Regester (1989, p. 38) simply defines it as: “turning points in organisational life” while other scholars see it more dramatically, such as Barton (2001, p. 2) who says it is “an incident that is unexpected, negative, and overwhelming”. Miller and Heath (2004) stress the many unknowns organisation face in a crisis: “A time of ambiguity, uncertainty, and struggle to regain control” (p. 247). A general notion that can be derived from all of this is that a crisis constitutes an unplanned event caused by a failure of communication management and calls for high-level strategic decisions (Davies, 2005; Grunig, 2011). However, it is worth noting that there is no universally accepted definition of crisis in public relations, as well as other relevant disciplines such as management and organisational communication (Coombs, 2012, 2015; Ulmer et al., 2015). Crisis communication on the other hand, can be defined as the collection, processing and dissemination of available information required for addressing a crisis situation (Coombs, 2010).

Coombs' attempt to define a crisis will guide this study because it puts an emphasis on stakeholders which will be of prime importance for intercultural crisis communication research as a whole: "The perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organisation's performance and generate negative outcome" (Coombs, 2007, p. 2-3). This definition has been prominently used and applied as a theoretical concept in crisis communication literature (e.g., Coombs, 2015; Choi and Chung, 2013; Claeys and Cauberghe, 2015; Coombs and Holladay, 2011; Kim and Lee, 2015; Van Zoonen and Van der Meer, 2015).

This suggests that communication can influence, both positively or negatively, short term reactions of stakeholders, as well as the mid- and long-term outcomes of crises (Auer et al., 2016). In the organisational sphere, crisis communication, unlike other branches of communication and public relations, has been recognised and institutionalised as a legitimate form of organisational practice with significant resources at its disposal for formal media training, preparation and execution for spokespersons, senior managers and chief executive officers (CEOs). Organisational crisis communication was first recognised as a new organisational function in the USA in the 1980s.

Andrews (2005) and Mitroff (2001; as cited in Frandsen and Johansen, 2010) state that the tainted Tylenol capsules case made by McNeil Pharmaceuticals (now Johnson and Johnson) in 1982 marks the beginning of modern crisis communication. In 1986, Steven Fink's handbook came out, which is generally regarded as the first publication to spark academic interest in the field. Crisis communication was not established

outside of the US as an independent research area until the early 1990s. Johansen and Frandsen (2007) describe the early dominance of US scholarship in the field compared to European countries such as Denmark, where basic terms such as *crisis management plan* and *crisis communicator* were not even part of the corporate terminology until the mid-1990s. Nohrstedt and Tassew (1993) were the first to point out the disparity between US research and the rest of the world and that a focus on the audience was neglected altogether.

Crisis communication is the dialogue between the organisation and its publics taking place in a crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2011). The dialogue can be “verbal, visual, and/or written interaction” and includes “strategies and tactics to minimize damage to the image of the organization” (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 680, 2011, p. 2). To put it differently, crisis communication is an activity - the actual words (verbal) and actions (nonverbal) - the organization uses to reduce and contain harm caused by significant threats, unpredictability and urgency (Coombs, 1999; Reynolds and Seeger, 2005; Seeger, 2006).

The crisis communication involves the sending and receiving of messages “to prevent or lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis and thereby protect the organization, stakeholders, and/or industry from damage” (Coombs, 1999, p. 4). Such crisis communication seeks to explain the specific event, identify likely consequences and outcomes and provide specific harm-reducing information to affected organisations (Reynolds and Seeger, 2005; Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer, 1998). Thus, crisis communication should also be defined as “the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation” (Coombs, 2012, p.

20). Traditional crisis communication has been based on linear planning models with functional-managerial dimensions of prevention, decision making, policies, planning and case studies (Boin, McConnell and Hart, 2008). Traditional crisis communication research branches out into two underlying assumptions: 1) a *vertical* assumption that regards a crisis as *one* defining event and requires crisis communication as the crisis takes place and 2) a *horizontal* assumption of crisis communication which assumes that a crisis has multiple stages (pre-crisis, crisis, post-crisis) with multiple forms of communication based on the crisis stage an organisation is currently going through.

Both assumptions have yielded very different lines of research. Nevertheless, the horizontal definition of crisis communication with various crisis stages has become the dominant view. David Sturges (1994), however, successfully established his take on the vertical *Model for Crisis Communication Content* that focuses on different forms of communication throughout an entire incident as it unfolds, which to many observers, appears horizontal at first glance. Nevertheless, Sturges' model approaches a crisis differently to Fink's (1986) horizontal proposition of a *crisis life cycle* which is inspired by Zaltman and Duncan's (1977) model for the group opinion formation process before, during and after a crisis¹. Sturges' (1994) approach, however, is to take a more differentiated look at information content itself. He proposes three methods which should be used in a strategic manner depending on how a crisis evolves. Those methods of information processing are: 1) *instructing information* – advice on how to react to those physically affected, 2) *adjusting information* – psychological support for how to cope with the magnitude of a crisis and 3)

¹ Steven Fink's publication *Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable* in 1986 was the first well-known handbook on crisis management. Fink, being a stark believer in the horizontal assumption, boosted the horizontal view with multiple crisis stages and advocated it as the dominant school of thought.

internalising information – communication that should help create an image about a reputation to counteract negative publicity from media or other sources.

Sturges' (1994) model acknowledges the existence of multiple stages in crises and hence communication should be adapted accordingly and yet his works fundamentally disagree with Fink's (1986) crisis life cycle view that every crisis goes along the same pattern.

Sturges' (1994) approach on how to fill crisis communication with content appears to be horizontal in nature rather than vertical. For Sturges' model, the larger context view is paramount rather than getting entangled in the nitty-gritty of communicating stage by stage along Fink's crisis life cycle. Frandsen and Johansen (2010) highlight that all of the three classifications Sturges (1994) discusses are to be applied in every stage of the crisis which seems to blur the lines between the horizontal and vertical assumption of crisis communication even further: "All three types of crisis communication content will always be represented to a certain extent in every stage of a crisis" (2010, p. 544).

Sturges' (1994) lasting contribution, however, could be the differentiation he made between various kinds of crisis communication and thereby highlighting the need to adapt information. Sturges understood that instructing or adjusting of crisis information constitutes a sort of internalisation of information which undoubtedly has an effect on how the organisation in question is perceived by stakeholders. The horizontal view emphasizes crisis preparedness in the pre-crisis stage and renewal of trust and reputation in the post crisis stage. Most research has utilised the horizontal approach with *Crisis response communication* (Benoit, 1995; Cameron and Hwang,

2008; Coombs, 2007a; Coombs and Holladay, 2007; Hearit, 2006), *Renewal discourse* (Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger, 2007) and *Follow-up communication* (Coombs 2007a). Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2007), in particular, state that crisis communication can only be effective if done across all stages; before during and after a crisis.

Coombs' (2006) crisis response strategies (what crisis communicators say and do during a crisis) are strategic steps based on timing and reaction. Practitioners in particular value the horizontal assumption of crisis communication as it allows for concrete step by step planning and sensemaking of crisis development. Coombs (2006) picks up on those ideas and offers practical advice that includes *do's* and *don'ts* for scholarly communication managers. However, he also uses case analysis and experimental testing (Coombs 2007, 2008; Coombs and Holladay, 2007) to formulate strategic responses that are more scientifically testable.

The traditional approach and the establishment of the horizontal recognition of different stages for crisis communication aligned research at the time. Thus, the question of how it will translate into the real world by providing organisational advice created another divide in the field regarding the influence of practitioners. Coombs (2008b) refers to the duality of crisis communication research as 1) *practitioner lessons* and 2) *rhetorical tradition*.

Frandsen and Johansen (2007, 2010) accept the benefits research holds for practitioners but reaffirms the academic merit that crisis communication research primarily offers. Schwarz (2011) shares these concerns of crisis communication scholarship and calls out its "managerial bias". Frandsen and Johansen thus established different in-depth classification of the traditional research line which

consists not only of: 1) *rhetorical and text-oriented* research but also 2) *strategic and context-oriented* research.

The strategic or context-oriented research tradition has a greater emphasis on *situational* or *contextual* factors such as crisis type, crisis history and consumer behaviour and prompted Murphy et al. (as cited in Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer, 2003) to construct a theory of crisis communication with links to game theory, chaos theory and complexity theory. Their shared weakness, however, might be that they are all still constructed as linear planning models. The strategic and context-oriented research methods include more valuables² but they all claim a predictability of crisis development and homogeneity towards stakeholder reaction.

As a result, there has been a temptation for quick fixes and creating easy solutions disguised as *practitioners' lessons*. The problem seems to be not a lack of research breadth but trying to provide a one-size-fits-all approach, and that there is not enough research in perception making and cultural background. Despite their many merits the *practitioners' lessons* should be left aside and be perceived as results derived from findings of both the *rhetorical and text-oriented* research tradition and the *strategic and context-oriented* research tradition. Other fields of research suggest that experimental research and case study analysis have always helped deliver empirically-based practical lessons which helped scholarly managers who wish to dig deeper and go beyond the surface.

² Although historically missing one in particular: cultural background which arguably fits the strategic and context-oriented research's definition of a contextual factor.

Both traditions have brought forward significant contributions to the field of crisis communication. The rhetorical and text-oriented tradition most famously includes *Image Repair Theory* (Benoit, 1995) and more recently *Terminological Control Theory* (Hearit and Courtright, 2004). The strategic and context-oriented tradition's most well-known approaches include *Situational Crisis Communication* (Coombs, 2007) and Cameron and Pang's (2010) *Contingency Theory*. All these theories have paved the way for a new approach that, unlike the traditional approach, takes cultural or contextual factors somewhat into account and assigns a more interactive role for the audience (Zhao, Falkheimer, Heide, 2017). Zhao et al. (2017) describe the traditional approach as a "positivist epistemology" that entails the need to discover a crisis as a "real thing". Crisis typologies (Coombs 2007, 2011, 2014; Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer, 2003) have led to the creation of cyclical models (Coombs, 2014; Fink, 1986; Benoit, 1995; Cameron, 2003).

Ultimately, the traditional approach has shaped the origin of an entire research discipline but also fostered a rather simple, one-dimensional view of crisis communication which regards it as something to control or manage but not something to be understood in all its facets. Coombs' (2008) duality perspective on crisis communication also reveals the management-oriented approach to crisis communication (Gilpin and Murphy, 2008; Schultz et al., 2012). Frandsen and Johansen (2012, 2017) state that the greatest drawback of the traditional approach is that the organisation is regarded as the main actor of crisis communication. As a result, the focus is placed on strategies, crisis anticipation and response techniques (*rhetorical and text-oriented*) that are applied across all borders and markets (Allen and Caillouet, 1994; Benoit, 1997). The fundamental underlying belief of the

traditional approach that there is *one objective reality* “out there” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006) in which scientific methodological will produce for all types of crises and for all types of audiences’ predictable outcomes is lacking depth (Cuncliffe, 2011).

The main purpose of crisis communication should no longer be to apply rational business school tools that are sterile and formalistic in nature (Wehmeier and Winkler, 2013). A new approach that has evolved over the last 12 years, proposed by Falkheimer and Heide (2006) has challenged this one-dimensional view of traditional crisis communication. Even though an audience-oriented approach and a shift away from the traditional approach have been suggested long before (Lee, 2004; Kersten, 2005; Sellnow, 1993) it was not until Falkheimer and Heide (2006) that this view was given serious attention. Zaho et al. (2017) justify the shift away from the traditional approach by arguing that a linear management approach to crisis communication oversimplifies a complex problem that tries to establish value-free and neutral approaches in a world full of people with values and perceptions. According to Gilpin and Murphy (2008), crisis typologies as advocated by the likes of Fink (1986, 2002), Coombs (2007), and Benoit (1995) bear the risk of misinterpreting and oversimplifying crises.

The disparity between the multi-dimensional nature of growing numbers of empowered stakeholders involved in a crisis and the absence of intercultural appreciation, present the greatest argument against the described linear interactivity of the traditional approach (Frandsen and Johansen, 2017; Visgø, 2010). Furthermore, the traditional approach has raised the question of *essentialism* or *ethnocentrism*. For

Huang and Zhang (2015) western cultural assumptions have shaped crisis communication research and raised serious concerns about the applicability of those theoretical models to a non-homogeneous, non-western environment. McChesney already suggested in his book, *Communication Revolution*, in 2007: “In view of this, all programs in communication are forced to reconsider what exactly it is they are studying and teaching” (p. 35).

Lee (2005) and Falkheimer and Heide (2006) openly advocate a new, social constructionist approach. Huang and Zhang (2015) suggest including culturally distinct characteristics as key issues and call for more scholarly attention devoted to intercultural crisis communication based on an audience approach. Huang et al. (2016) show in a follow-up study that until very recently (the 2010s), a superiority of traditional crisis communication theories has been used by most Western organisations in China following the social norms and individual psychological predispositions of their home country. The authors criticise the weakness of crisis communication in the past which has created shortcomings and exacerbated crisis related issues in stakeholder interactions. Intercultural communication, cross-cultural issues and audiences’ cultural backgrounds have not been sufficiently recognised under the traditional approach which gave rise to a new approach: social constructionism.

2.3 Contemporary Literature Review: Social Constructionism

“We are in the midst of a communication and information revolution”

(McChesney, 2007, p.3).

The new approach to crisis communication that has gained support in the last decade represents a completely new school of thought that opposes the one-dimensional, retrospective analysis of the past. This section will discuss the most recent literature in crisis research that triggered a new orientation towards social constructionism. Further, its unconventional understanding of how reality is co-constructed suggests it to be a more inclusive and holistic approach to understanding intercultural aspects of today’s crisis communication. The traditional perspective in crisis communication provided generic recommendations for the utilisation of crisis response strategies because of the linear understanding of crises. The traditional focus on case studies did not establish meaningful relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders (Stewart, 2002).

Thus, that approach was limited to fully understanding why publics perceive a crisis situation and how they respond to the crisis and the organization’s response strategies (Coombs, 2006). This critical limitation seems to be a major factor which caused this research shift from model-based to theory-based research using empirical evidence to better understand publics’ perceptions of crisis organisations that ought to aim at effective crisis response strategies developed for each given incident (Coombs 2006, 2007b; Coombs and Holladay, 2002; Gruning, 2011b; Lee, 2004). The social constructionist approach, refined by Kenneth Gergen (1985, 1998), challenges

traditional organisational research by valuing the role stakeholders play as interpretive communities (Lee, 2005) in creating social reality.

Gergen simply defines the social constructionist approach as follows: “Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the process by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live” (1985, p. 266). He further clarifies: “What we take to be experience of the world does not in itself dictate the terms by which the world is understood. What we take to be knowledge of the world is not a product of induction, or of the building and testing of generalisable hypotheses.” (p. 266). Gergen’s (1985, 1998) description of the social constructionist movement is that of a discourse about the world not as a reflection or map of the world but as a product of communal interchange and thus shared sensemaking.

What constitutes this alternative approach is understood as a never-ending and natural evolution (Kersten, 2005; Sellnow, 1993) and has been analysed by multiple researchers (Orr, 1978; Axley, 1984; Weick, 1988; Searle, 1995; Falkheimer and Heide, 2006, 2009; Zhao et al., 2017). Social constructionism has gained appreciation in several academic fields and presents an innovative approach which unlocks a truly holistic lines of effective intercultural crisis communication in a globalised world.

In a crisis management context, the social constructionist or sensemaking approach received major attention when discussed by Keith Michael Hearit and Jeffrey L. Courtright in their article “*A Social Constructionist Approach to Crisis Management: Allegations of Sudden Acceleration in the Audi 5000*” published in *Communication*

Studies in 2003. The authors discussed the insufficient crisis messaging efforts of the German car maker to an American audience, after the death of several customers due to malfunctioning cars. The authors show how a social constructionist approach would have been a much more effective method for Audi to make sense of the crisis. The authors also describe how a dominant German national culture within the organisation obstructed effective intercultural communication in that particular case.

In 2006, Jesper Falkheimer and Mats Heide pointed out in their article: “*Multicultural Crisis Communication: Towards a Social Constructionist Perspective*” in the *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* the benefits of the social constructionist perspective at length. The authors provide empirical evidence of its value with Swedish migrants whose perspective of crisis reality differed to those of native Swedes. Their approach is adapted from the organisational sensemaking research of American organisational psychologist Karl E. Weick. The authors use Weick’s concept of sensemaking and enactment as published in his book *Sensemaking of the Organisation* (2001)³ as their theoretical justification for a social constructionist perspective that can accommodate a “*contemporary multicultural context*” (2006, p. 180).

Falkheimer and Heide (2006) transfer Weick’s (1979) approach to crisis communication in order to establish a crisis sensemaking process where the reality of a given organisational crisis is negotiated with regard to the contextual environment, rather than just scattering communication from sender to receiver in a linear fashion.

³ Weick first introduced his concept of organisational sensemaking in 1979: *The Social Psychology of Organising*, Addison-Wesley, Reading MA and in 1995: *Sensemaking in Organisations*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

The authors justify their approach by also reconstructing Murphy's (1996) "environmental complexity" and "reflexive modernity" (Giddens, 1990). Combined with a stern belief in a general "risk society" (Beck, 1992), the authors imply that uncertainty levels for stakeholders have increased on a global scale and that audiences with various cultural backgrounds have increased in importance. In terms of information science, an important aspect of the process of information seeking is "creating a shared understanding of information" and a synthesised definition of sensemaking is defined in the context of the information seeking process (Paul, 2010, p. 40). Sensemaking can be determined as the "meaning construction and reconstruction by the involved parties as they attempted to develop a meaningful framework for understanding the nature of the intended strategic change" (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442); simply put, "the creation of meaning" as Degn (2015, p. 903) verified with test subjects in Danish higher education.

The concept of sensemaking can be better understood in terms of ethnomethodology which, as the science of sensemaking, refers to "a sociological investigation of the everyday life and conversational and social practices (methods) through which the members of a society socially construct a sense of shared meaning for that society and its institution" (Gephart, 1993, p. 146; Garfinkel, 1967; Heap, 1975). Ethnomethodology also provides a conceptual link between information seeking and sensemaking because it indicates that people who actively engage in sensemaking, interpret their world by seeking information from conversations, textual accounts, explanations offered and accepted, and ongoing discourse that describe and make sense of the social world (Gephart, 1993; Leiter, 1980).

Moreover, sensemaking in the context of a crisis refers to “both social processes of talk and action to make some plausible sense of cues as well as the sense that is made through connecting a cue to a frame” (Hutter and Kuhlicke, 2013, p. 296; Weick, 1995). Thus, sensemaking is a meaning construction process through communicative actions. Falkheimer and Heide (2006) suggest that research under the traditional approach has not been able to emulate those factors and therefore propagate a social constructionist approach as a new research method that places greater importance on audiences in terms of communication efforts and sensemaking.

Gergen (1998) first mentions how social constructionism is not a new phenomenon at all in various other research areas. It indicates how the aim of it in social science has always been to challenge dominant positivistic research and defy many of the existing, *taken-for-granted*, assumptions regarding culture and communication (Burr, 1998) and to investigate the underlying behaviour and principles in a given situation (Shotter, 1993). When applied to crisis communication, this new approach might not question crisis strategies but rather how crisis messaging is perceived, from which unique situational response strategies could then emerge. Hence, the social constructionist approach proposes that perception and meaning derived from crisis communication are closely linked to stakeholder interaction with the organisation in question (Gergen, 1998; Zaho et al., 2017).

Weick’s original analysis shows that misinterpreting stakeholder perception significantly worsens any crisis. As a result, social constructionism anticipates that by focusing on stakeholders, understanding human behaviour during uncertainty or equivocality (Jewitt, 2009) and accepting that perceptual aspects, come from various

different interpretations that are linked to one's upbringing (Ulmer, 2011). The words that deserve particular attention are "one's upbringing". The authors point to the fact that, even though social constructionism is quintessentially a situational analysis, cultural background and one's upbringing seem to allow for anticipating tendencies. People's actions are based on their understanding and ways of interpretation and that perception is created together with others (Maitlis, 2005). Organisational sensemaking is a fundamentally social process which mirrors complex human reality. Organisations ought to interpret their environment more diligently through interactions with others, allowing crisis communicators to comprehend the world around them and act collectively.

Maitlis' (2005) longitudinal study of the social processes of sensemaking highlights the inherent complexity but also points to a greater opportunity of saving reputation when influencing others' understanding of an issue. He concludes that effective crisis communication is not achieved by performing a certain action or solely following a pre-determined response strategy but instead by understanding the needs and background of the receivers of crisis information and how they process the particular information that is communicated to them by the organisation, the sender.

Advocating organisational sensemaking means understanding that there is no absolute truth about stakeholder reaction and hence forecasting crisis scenarios is dismissed entirely by researchers such as Tindall and Holtzhausen (2012) and Falkheimer and Heide (2010). Social constructionists argue that traditional forecasting and planning will lead to blindly relying on crisis plans, crisis handbooks and operating procedures. The authors even argue in favour of strategic improvisation instead of relying on

prewritten plans: “Strategic improvisation should be understood as the opposite of rational planning and decision taking that is stressed by classical management schools” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2017, p. 368).

Weick (1995, 1998) refers to that ability or capacity of an organisation to improvise and to thereby increase its capabilities to “*act thoughtfully*”. Weick (2010) refutes the traditional idea that organisations will react in a causal way to crises. People play an active role in the construction of social reality and thereby making the crisis a “*communication product*”. Response cues can be included, interpreted and re-evaluated based on actions, interactions and their consequences (Weick, 1995). Falkheimer and Heide (2006) use the notion of a communication product to endorse the epistemology of social constructionism so that a shift from stable crisis communication structures can be made to ever adapting processes towards a final product that is never the same. A constantly evolving and improved product offering: “We are of the opinion that social constructionism would promote a reflective approach to the field of crisis communication, integrating multicultural approaches” (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006, p. 182).

The authors imply that the reflective approach of social constructionism helps crisis managers to focus on collective cultural identity and ethnic differences in a crisis situation as shown in their Sweden case study (cf. Falkheimer and Heide, 2006). Their findings show the new approach is better equipped for effectively communicating crises to audiences with diverse cultural backgrounds. Their work signifies a strong criticism for the traditional understanding in which culture is seen only (if at all

mentioned) as a variable without acknowledging the influential power it possesses in perception creation⁴.

All in all, the contribution of the social constructionist approach in other fields, makes it very appealing for application in crisis communication. The strong case for constructionism ousts traditional tendencies to treat crises as objective phenomena with identical characteristics and identical management strategies and decision-making rules across cultures. The traditional approach led to various different concepts and response strategies, but it became clear that they all proffered the primacy of a generic approach to the study of organisational crises (Hearit, 2006). However, social constructionist literature on crisis communication has not been without critique. But the reason it is still largely under-researched is because, so far, little attention has been placed on social constructionism in relation to: *Inclusion of more key research modes besides language which are referred to as semiotics in multimodality.*

By including multimodality, social constructionism will become much more versatile and help reshape intercultural crisis communication by offering new ways of understanding the stakeholder perception creation. Consequently, this study will look at language in crisis communication as well as multimodalities that go beyond language and yet contribute to the construction of realities.

⁴ Also re-affirmed in a later publication: *Crisis Communication in a New World, Nordicom Review (2009, p. 55-65).*

2.4 The Role of Stakeholders/Audiences

“The influence of stakeholder on crisis communication is on the rise” (King, 2011). The social constructionism approach demands to put the receiver of crisis communication at the centre of attention. It is therefore useful to look at how the *public perspective*, or *audience approach*, can be seen as a prelude to social constructionism. This section will provide insights into how empowered stakeholders become crisis communicators themselves and whether there is a link between the audience approach and enhanced social constructionism. The public perspective, which proposes a less rigid top-down communication structure, provides a more detailed focus on the needs of stakeholders.

Although, in the past, the main focus of the audience approach has been to *translate* sender information without acknowledging different frames, It has not been demonstrated that sender and receiver often have different frames of comprehending a crisis where adaption and not translation is necessary to bring the desire message across. Nevertheless, advocates of the public perspective and the audience approach have brought forward models such as the multivocal approach that tries to provide to a multitude of different stakeholders.

The audience approach does not address the communicative essence and dynamic nature of the relationship between an organisation and its external publics (Lee, 2005). Betty Kaman Lee emphasizes that crisis communication is doomed to fail spectacularly if the significance of organisation-stakeholder relationships and communication is not valued. Ray (1999, p. 48) emphasises in her book *Strategic*

Communication in Crisis Management that effective communication is audience centred: “Throughout the crisis, the organisation must be sensitive and knowledgeable of stakeholder opinions and the issue which characterises the crisis”. As such, perception is the key component of stakeholder and becomes more important than reality when studying crises (Benoit, 1997; Choi and Chung, 2013; Mazzei and Ravazzani, 2011). Crisis does not exist if the publics or stakeholders do not perceive it as such (Rosenthal et al., 2001).

A crisis, however, does exist when the public’s confidence in an organization is threatened or publics believe an organisation is in crisis, and publics will react to the organization as if it is in crisis (Meyers and Holusha, 1986). Hence, the public’s perception of a crisis is of critical concern for an organization, affecting responses and outcomes (Choi and Chung, 2013). Consequently, the audience approach has some overlap with social constructionism as information is no longer just translated or linearly scattered from sender to receiver and stakeholders are fully acknowledged to play a vital role in determining whether a crisis exists or not.

The original *sender-oriented* or *management-oriented* communication structure (Fraustino and Liu, 2017) is what constitutes the notion of translating information to stakeholders instead of negotiating reality. This method is thus vulnerable to misinterpretation and failure to translate accurately according to the sender’s original intention. Deetz (1994) argues that in order to avoid that, communication should be a constitutive process in which meanings are interactively and collaboratively constructed. Deetz’s argument applies some aspects of social constructionism to stakeholder communication. However, the emphasis mainly relies on better

translating meaning instead of co-creating meaning and communication. Deetz sees the audience approach as more of a translation tool from which sender information is transformed in the audience's language or frame of comprehension. Unlike in social constructionism, the author does not discuss the shared construction of reality. The audience approach therefore remains a "*them against us mentality*" with a slightly less harsh, one-sided underpinning.

Betty Kaman Lee (2004) was one of the first scholars to point out in detail, the negative consequences of a sender-focused crisis communication. Her study investigated the responses of consumers in Hong Kong to information about an organisational crisis. Her study confirmed the significance of a rethought audience orientation and suggests that there is indeed a large disparity between the audience perception and the sender's intention if an organisation in question is strictly sender-focused in its communication efforts during a crisis, which she argues most Western organisations (at the time of her study in 2004) are.

Her study concludes that stakeholders are indeed interpretive communities and that the failure to look at an audience's perception closely before structuring crisis communication can have detrimental effects on reputation. Betty Kaman Lee's (2005) study points out that the consequences of a lack of audience focus can result in (1) *boycotts*, (2) *significant effects of causal attribution*, (3) *judgment of organisational responsibility for the crisis* and (4) *decreased impression of the organisation*.

Unfortunately, she does not make the leap to social constructionism as a solution to the problem and instead only acknowledges environmental complexity and criticises a general Western, essentialist bias. Audience focused communication was

disregarded at first in crisis research while it gained more attention in other social sciences. Dennis McQuail already stressed in his book *Audience Analysis* in 1997 that for mass communication in general the transition from viewing audiences as a disconnected and inactive mass to one that is active and responsive was made many years ago. In fact, Grunig's (1989) two-way symmetrical communication model, which focuses partly on receiver importance, was first published around the inception of crisis research but failed to have a lasting impact, unlike in other fields that were naturally more audience focused such as marketing and political science.

McLeod (2000) identified two reasons for the absence of the audience-oriented research in crisis communication in the past:

(1) *A mere lack of concern for audience conceptualisation with a focus on the message generation (sender) than on the audience,* (2) *Lack of connection between socio structural backgrounds.*

McLeod's (2000) arguments, along with Coombs' standpoint to, at least partially, cater to organisations by providing *practitioner's lessons*, shows the lack of interest for stakeholder perception creation research and instead for generic solutions. Lee (2005) examines McLeod's (2000) arguments in the *Communication Yearbook 29* (2009) and concludes that the reasons for those shortcomings can be found in the rigidity of the epistemological and methodological traditions that distinguish behavioural, critical and cultural scholars. The audience approach has only partially been applied in crisis communication, with most research focusing on one or two aspects such as crisis responses or crisis experience (Hallahan, 2002; Ihlen, 2002; Hearit, 1995). Coombs' (1998, 2005, 2007) situational crisis communication theory

(SCCT) has focused on certain aspects, recognising stakeholders' perception by considering relationship history, prior reputation, crisis responsibility.

Lee (2005) expands on that and stresses Vasquez's (1993, 1994) *Homo Narrans* theory. He believes it can offer a communication-oriented view of stakeholders as rhetorical communities that emerge through discussion, debate and arguments. Just like Weick's (2001) organisational sensemaking, Vasquez (1993, 1994, 2000) describes how, through symbolic communication processes, stakeholders try to make sense of a situation. Weick (1979, 2001, 2010), Vasquez (1993, 1994, 2000) and Lee (2005) strengthen the argument for more audience-focused research in crisis communication.

In fact, their shared conclusion that stakeholders are interpretive communities whose perception formation is very much unknown in the context of crisis communication covertly hints towards something more fundamental than audience-focused communication. According to their findings, a re-focus towards social constructionism seems like the most viable option for the field in general. Consequently, more and more researchers have concluded that the audience approach does not go far enough (Choi and Chung, 2013; Mazzei and Ravazzani, 2011), and that crisis communication research should be built on a public-based approach, providing valuable insights into how publics understand and react to a crisis (Lee, 2004). This would indeed constitute a shift to communicating to the audience in a more social constructionist fashion.

The audience-focused research has been affected by the problems stated before which are whether crisis research should deal with the question of varying crisis perception, such as found in social constructionist approaches, or to provide a quick fix for practitioners and more models with supposedly universally applicable strategies. The audience focus does acknowledge a wide range of stakeholders and their abilities to influence the crisis, but it does not go far enough as to understand where deep-rooted beliefs come from that create crisis perception and more important how to deal with them.

The multifaceted influence of stakeholders has been most recently conceptualised by researchers (Frandsen and Johansen, 2010, 2017; Zaho et al., 2017) with a determination to abandon the organisation-centric view. A wide array of scholars aimed to understand crisis communication as a multivocal process (Heath, 2012; Falkheimer and Heide, 2012; Frandsen and Johansen, 2012). If crises are seen in accordance with stakeholders' or publics' perceptions (Conte, Myer, Miller and D'Andrea, 2007) multiple interpretations of a crisis must necessarily exist because different stakeholders understand a crisis within their own perceptions (Heide and Simonsson, 2014; Ulmer et al., 2015). Crises affected by multiple interpretations can therefore trigger various responses from stakeholders and publics (e.g. multiple voices) (Ice, 1991; Frandsen and Johansen, 2009). Finn Frandsen and Winni Johansen present, in their book *Organisational Crisis Communication* (2017), the most up-to-date version of a multivocal approach, the *Rhetorical Arena Theory* (RAT). It is inspired by (1) complexity theory (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984; Gleick, 1987; Waldrop, 1992; Gilpin and Murphy, 2006), (2) arena theory (Gerhard and Neidhardt,

1990; Bentele et al., 2005) and (3) communication theory (Heath and Bryant, 1992; Luhmann, 1995).

The authors established a model that approaches crisis communication from two different, yet fully-integrated perspectives: (1) *macro perspective*, (2) *micro perspective*. The *macro perspective* is the rhetorical arena as such, illustrating all communicators who have a stake one way or another and the various communicative processes taking place in crisis communication. The *micro perspective* on the other hand, focuses on context, media, and genres that influence individual perception. Frandsen and Johansen (2017) describe the RAT as follows:

“The aim of RAT is to study the communicative complexity that characterises organisational crises, even the smallest of them, and to identify, describe, and explain patterns within the multiple communication processes taking place inside the arena. Who or what triggers these processes? Who or what keeps them going? Which constellations of actors and interactions are typical? What are the implications for practice?” (p. 142).

The *macro perspective* is essentially the sum of patterns of interaction. It indicates multiple voices which take part in the arena by contributing, responding or intervening in some way or form that could change the perception of the confirmed (or unconfirmed) information given out by the organisation. The communication can be quite disordered as stakeholders communicate about, against and past each other. Frandsen and Johansen (2017) also stress how some voices are louder and more persistent (e.g. *media vs. individual*) due to unequal distribution of resources. Nevertheless, the first meaningful information stream comes from audio-visual means

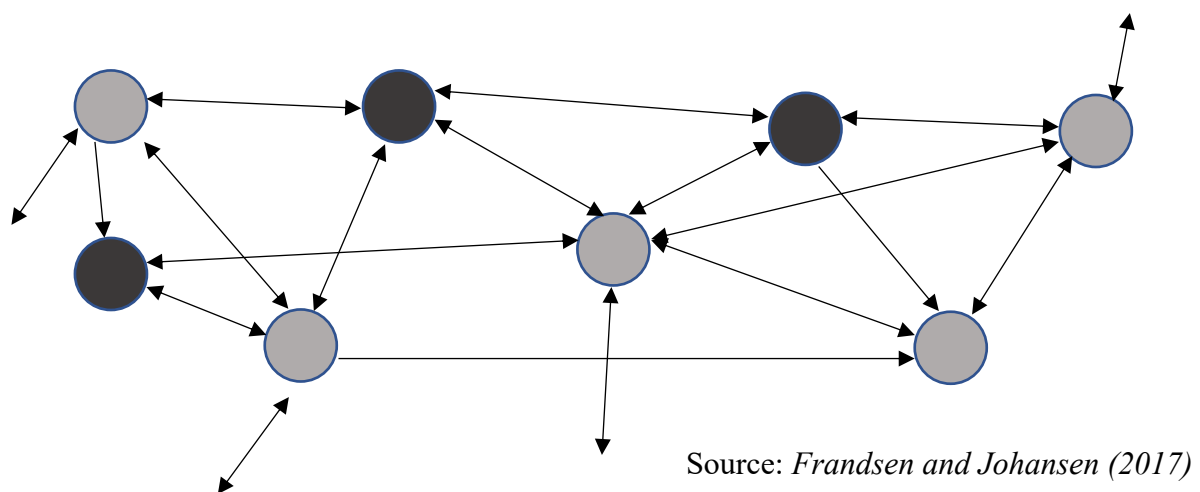
by the organisation (press conference, interviews) which Arpan and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2005) describe as the organisation's ability to "*steal thunder*"⁵. The RAT, or *multi-vocal approach*, supports the importance of the audience approach to crisis communication and how critical it is to gain stakeholder support for reputational purpose. Coombs and Holladay state: "{...} The multi-vocal approach recognises that people receiving the official organisationally sanctioned crisis message can also become crisis communicators when they communicate their reactions to the organisation's messaging" (2013, p. 42). The RAT is a simple and relatively new model in bringing the audience focus and social constructionism closer together. The RAT's application embraces the constructionist understanding of ongoing public dialogue and multiple voices who participate in the exchange.

The multivocal approach, however, only scratches the surface as it offers no explanation for how multiple voices come into existence and if they can be grouped by cultural background. It is questionable whether it can predict communication patterns across the board as Frandsen and Johansen (2017) claim, since different cultural understandings of what and how to communicate are not regarded by the authors. Despite its many merits it does not go into much detail on how those multiple voices' background affects their perception creation and method of communication. The model merely acknowledges their existence and is therefore another approach to explain complex socio-cultural interactions with a universal model.

⁵ The authors define stealing thunder as: "breaking the news about its own crisis before the crisis is discovered by the media or other interested parties" (Arpan and Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2005, p. 425).

The authors however do not address the cultural aspect even though it has been acknowledged as a vital influencer of voices and would be ideal to include into their micro analysis as an extension of the variable “*context*” (see Figure 1.2). Crisis communicators are confronted with national or regional receivers that expect unique crisis responses representing their cultural values and norms. If those needs are marginalised the risks for organisations lay in losing regions to other voices and in stakeholders disregarding the organisational voice. Communication effectiveness is based on its ability to satisfy the needs of the receiver (Heath, 2001) where extensive information and cognition of the information is high (Howell and Miller, 2010). Figure 1.1 depicts likely patterns of macro-level interactions in the arena.

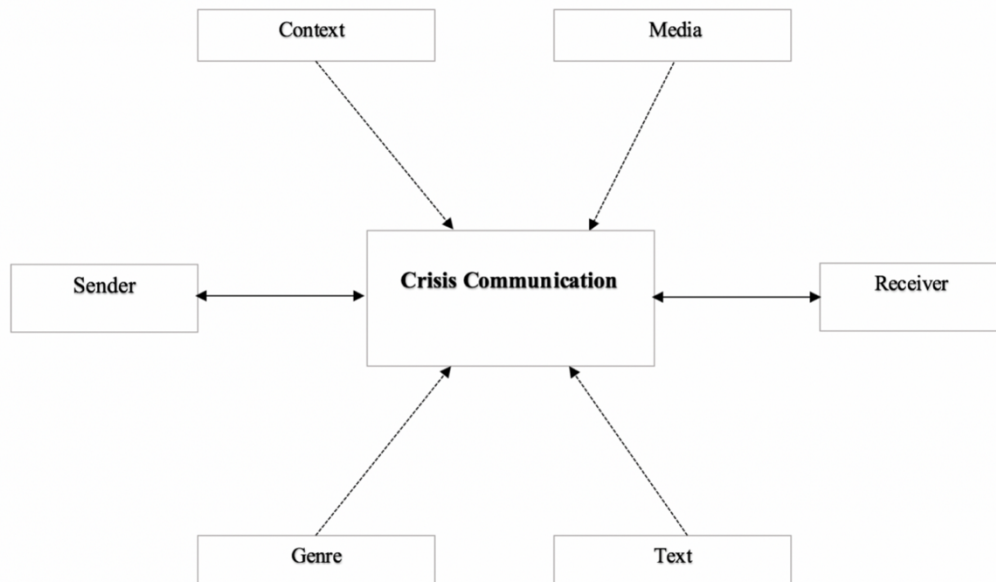
Figure 1.1 – *Macro Level of the Rhetorical Arena Theory*



The micro components, on the other hand, stress perception creation of the individual stakeholder. Frandsen and Johansen (2017) call those additional components *parameters of mediation*, and include (1) *context*, (2) *media*, (3) *genre*, and (4) *text*. The word *mediation* hereby refers to the fact that those communicative processes between sender and receiver are influenced by choices (made in relation to the four

parameters) that can affect the receiver's as well as the sender's perception of crisis communication (see Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 – *Micro Level of the Rhetorical Arena Theory*



Source: *Frandsen and Johansen (2017)*

Deep-rooted values and norms play an essential part in perceiving the crisis information provided. An analysis of the audiences therefore requires the inclusion of cultural background as the essential parameter in order to gain more detailed insight into perception building. Lee (2005) suggests that for the conceptualisation of stakeholders as interpretive units, it is essential to understand the concept of shared relevance: “{The} sense of community is cultivated by the sense of shared symbolic reality and perceived common interest” (Lee, 2005, p. 297).

Culture's significant role for understanding a community's shared symbolic reality and shaping an individual's perception should therefore be a key piece of modern crisis communication research, which makes it indispensable for social

constructionism and audience focused studies. Models such as the RAT could be improved if they were to explore cultural embeddedness of stakeholders, although this would traditionally clash with the idea of a standardised model. Regardless, the audience perspective is a popular research field and it has made many contributions to crisis research, not least the most recent one, the multivocal approach, but it is confined to the desire to present a universally applicable model for practitioners. In fact, it can be seen as an extension of the traditional approach. Instead social constructionism is advantageous because cultural and environmental complexity of stakeholders are already seen as the key component of the sensemaking processes. Further it evaluates every crisis situation anew and demands to crisis communicators to rise to each incident anew.

The audience approach acknowledges the existence of stakeholders and their importance to the success of crisis communication. However, unlike in social constructionism, not only is the existence of stakeholder and their importance acknowledged but also what motivates stakeholders to act the way they do. This points to a fundamental difference in understanding what constitutes a crisis. The traditional approach and its improved audience-focused approach use management tools and methods to tackle complex human interactions, emotions and cultural embeddedness of audiences which has been largely ineffective in the past.

2.5 Cultural Embeddedness and “Glocalisation”

“{...} Any crisis situation must take into account the rhetoric of other groups that have an effect on the ensuing discourse”

(Hearit and Courtright, 2003, p. 92).

Research has rarely tried to evaluate how cultural background of stakeholders could be seen as a decisive influencer of constructing a crisis reality. This section will consider the notion of global crises and the need to act locally – referred to as “*glocalisation*” (Barbook, 2007). With the help of some case studies the urgency for more intercultural awareness in the field will be emphasised. Further, the issues with Western crisis communication approaches in a diverse world will be highlighted as well as two decisive cultural dimensions that can improve upon social constructionism in crisis communication. Two parameters, *national culture* and *organisational culture* have been used in the past for introducing cultural aspects into crisis communication. However, this has led to generalisations and stereotyping.

Making culture an essential part of research and emphasising it to be a critical and no longer belittled aspect of modern crisis communication is contrary to common belief that we live in a globalised world, or global village (Barbrook, 2007) where all communication is streamlined such as through social media and in which intercultural difference is not overly important anymore. It is true that the innovations of the last 20 years gave rise to new information and communication technologies (ICT) which connected people around the world and created a form of exchange that is unparalleled in history. The interconnectedness that new technologies offered had Marion Pinsdorf conclude in *All Crises Are Global* (2004) that local crises are almost non-existent

anymore as they do not stay local but have global consequences in regard to an organisation's worldwide reputation, stock valuation, boycott of products.

Crises seem to have no national frontiers anymore as their consequences are omnipresent to organisations. The way they are handled however needs to be closely linked to culture and geography-specific communicative features to contain a crisis and limit consequences for an organisation in crisis. Even the most global challenge imaginable, climate change, is handled in different culture-specific ways from “*country to country and from organisation to organisation*” (Frandsen and Johansen 2010, p. 552). This indicates that national and organisational level classification still holds some merits on a basic level. Featherstone et al. first discussed the concept of “*Glocalisation*” in his book “*Global Modernities*” in 1995 suggesting that, in order to prevent global consequences, organisations need to act locally and understand the different needs of stakeholders affected.

Coombs (2012, 2014) approaches glocalisation in crisis communication by distinguishing between host crises (where a crisis breaks out) and global crises (crisis breaks out in both; home country and host country). Despite the fact that the need for cultural awareness in crisis communication reached significant contributors in the field such as Timothy Coombs, on closer examination his distinctions are somewhat tainted by the fact that the home market is believed to be the most important market for crisis communication. He argues that only once the home country is affected, a crisis can be considered a “*global crisis*”. This would be too simplistic given that host countries (e.g. China) have long been more important for many foreign organisations

in economic terms⁶. It once again reflects the existing *ethnocentric* or *essentialist* tendencies (Heath, 2010; Liu and Fraustino, 2014) in crisis communication research as stated earlier.

Lee stresses in the *Communication Yearbook of 2005* the dynamic natures of crises and the lack of attention to interpersonal and intercultural aspects: “Crisis communication theory is lacking cultural contextualisation, dominated by applied case studies and is based on a Western oriented paradigm. To date, we know surprisingly little about what publics of other cultures expect and how they evaluate and express themselves during an organizational crisis” (2005, p. 276). Moreover, the concept of cultural background, playing a part in perception creation of crisis communication, has often been dismissed entirely. McLeod described a “general trend to neglect or even deny the true nature of audiences and culture embeddedness of stakeholders as interpretative communities” (2000, p. 301).

12 years later Timothy Coombs (2012, 2015), acknowledges the fact that organisations more and more need to manage crises in different cultural contexts where different cultural values and norms are a reality and that researchers and organisations have to change in a way that reflects the cultural embeddedness of stakeholders as interpretive communities as discussed by McLeod (2000): “Crisis managers must resist ethnocentric tendencies as they cope with stakeholders in different cultures, unfamiliar media systems and online usage patterns, and different

⁶ For instance, Volkswagen Group sales in China (host country) have surpassed revenue of German sales (home country) in 2005 for the first time and thus, by definition, represents a more valuable market than the home country for the German automaker.

legal concerns. Cultures are the most complex of the factors because they influence stakeholder expectations about organisations and crises” (p. 181).

One example of a global crisis where cultural embeddedness was not adequately reviewed is the attacks against Danish dairy firm *Arla Foods* in the aftermath of the Cartoon Affair in 2005-2006⁷. Destruction of *Arla Foods*' dairy products, first in Egypt and then across the Middle East prompted the organisation to publish apologetic ads in Saudi Arabian Newspapers, half-heartedly distancing themselves from the cartoons but at the same time defending freedom of press in Denmark⁸.

Criticism from some stakeholder groups propelled controversy and led to violent attacks on property and staff of Arla Foods worldwide (Frandsen and Johansen, 2010). Therefore, it can be argued that Boin's (2009, p. 367) assumption that “*the crises of the future will be increasingly transboundary in nature*” turned out to be accurate. However, in order to manage crises locally, insights into national values, norms and stakeholder expectations are paramount. Such dimensions for international and cross-cultural audience-oriented research have largely been a blind spot in the field (Schwarz et al., 2016). Frandsen and Johansen (2017) argue that in order to strengthen cultural awareness in crisis communication and to win support for a greater inclusion of cultural background as a decisive factor for perception creation, it is wise to continue using those classifications, however with a much-sharpened perspective.

⁷ Publication of 12 cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammed in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten in 2005 led to an outcry in the Muslim world.

⁸ Arla Foods disagreed with the cartoons and recognised that religious feelings were hurt but insisted on freedom of speech in Denmark.

2.5.1 National Culture Dimensions for Crisis Communication

Cultural dimensions have been designed in the past to predict behavioural outcomes which often led to misconceptions and poorly managed crises. One of the leading cultural dimensions is that of social psychologist, Geert Hofstede. In recent years his work has been called essentialist and has particularly been rejected by supporters of social constructionism in crisis communication (Zhao et al., 2017). In fact, a significant cultural study in crisis communication, carried out by Haruta and Hallahan in 2003 showcases the risks of solely relying on Hofstede's static culture dimensions for crisis communication analysis.

Culture contains “*everything and nothing*” (Alvesson, 2013). Whether a national culture exists or not has been disputed in intercultural studies for many years. Alvesson shows that a decisive factor has been a barrier for the inclusion of culture studies in crisis communication has been the debate about methodology. The two dominant approaches that reflect the divide in measuring culture have been: The *functionalist approach* and the *interpretive or symbolic approach*. The functionalist approach focuses on values and norms that differentiate people from one culture to another (Frandsen and Johansen, 2017). Hofstede's (1991, 2001) “*software of the mind*” concept in his book *Culture's Consequences* (2001) has strongly influenced culture research in different disciplines. His argument is that “the collective programming of the mind distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from one another” (2001, p. 9).

This understanding gave rise to his cultural dimensions, (1) *power distance*, (2) *uncertainty avoidance*, (3) *individualism*, (4) *masculinity*, (5) *long-term orientation*.

Despite a windfall of criticism, summed up in Table 1-a, his study results from 171,000 IBM employees around the world did not only enter management studies but has also been commonly used to explain the concept of culture in crisis communication. Hofstede’s functionalist view of culture helped in strengthening the traditional approach in crisis communication based on national variables such as power, distance or individualism.

Table 1-a *Summary of Criticism of Hofstede’s Software of the Mind*

Criticism	Hofstede’s Response
Surveys are not a suitable way of measuring cultural differences	Surveys should not be the only method used
Nations are not the best units for studying cultures	Agreed, but they are the only units available for comparison
A study of subsidiaries of one company cannot provide information about entire national cultures	The study was only used to measure differences between cultures, not entire nations
The IBM data is old and obsolete	The dimensions found have centuries-old roots. Only data stable across two subsequent surveys were maintained
Four or five dimensions are not sufficient	Additional dimensions should be independent from the ones already defined

Source: Hofstede (2002)

Haruta and Hallahan's study of cultural issues in Airline Crisis Communication, published in 2003 is a US-Japanese comparative study which utilises Hofstede's cultural dimensions to explain differences in communication practices. The study's sole focus on cultural dimensions to explain perception creation sparked the ambition of this study to analyse cultural background more thoroughly. In particular, by comparing cross-cultural differences in crisis communication in one of the most global industries; air travel. Haruta and Hallahan's (2003) emphasis was to show the validity of Hofstede's cultural dimensions in which the temporal stability of those conclusions has not been questioned or analysed (Ailon, 2008; Baskerville, 2003; Steel and Taras, 2010).

Furthermore, Haruta and Hallahan (2003) solely analyse newspaper and magazine articles in Japan and the USA as its source for perception creation of audiences. Their greatest limitation if not misconception is that the authors regard receivers of crisis communication as a rather passive mass who act according to certain rules and hence can be predicted by Hofstede's cultural dimensions⁹. Clifford Geertz (1973) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1968) "consider culture {to be} a system of symbols created through communication among people and common to a group of people and how they understand the world" (as cited in Frandsen and Johansen, 2017, p. 126).

Hearit (2006) uses the symbolic or interpretive approach in the analysis of his book *Crisis Management by Apology* (2006) which highlights the difficulty in offering a culturally appropriate apology in crisis communication. Offering apologies has

⁹ Haruta and Hallahan (2003) take Hofstede's findings as absolute truth which hinders them to be more critical of the multitude of culture and look beyond Hofstede's cultural dimensions: "*Over two decades, Hofstede has demonstrated that differences across cultures can be explained along five dimensions*" (p. 127).

become an essential part of crisis communication. He states that apologies must adhere to a socio-cultural order, transgressed by wrongdoings. Choi et al. (1999) believe that Asian cultures are more situation-focused in their attribution of responsibility, since socialisation takes place in an environment that requires consideration of social context and hierarchy. Western cultures on the other hand, tend to be more person-focused, where social behaviour relies on internal disposition and less on social context (Choi et al., 1999). Hearit (2006) and Frandsen and Johansen (2007, 2009) conducted case studies that proved how cultural aspects shape non-tangible factors that make the apology real for interpretive communities e.g. sincere, truthful, voluntary, regret, seeking reconciliation etc. and that are manifested in national culture.

In one case study, Hearit examines the collision of the U.S.S. *Greenville* and a Japanese fishing vessel in 2001, which caused the death of nine Japanese. He highlights the challenges the American side had with living up to Japanese expectations concerning apology and compensation. The case draws attention to the weaknesses of relying solely on Hofstede's cultural dimensions during crises as the American side anticipated cultural difference based on Hofstede's suggestions such as taking responsibility and addressing apologies to a collectivist society, however not paying attention to the *how* and *who* of apologising, factors rarely mentioned by Hofstede.

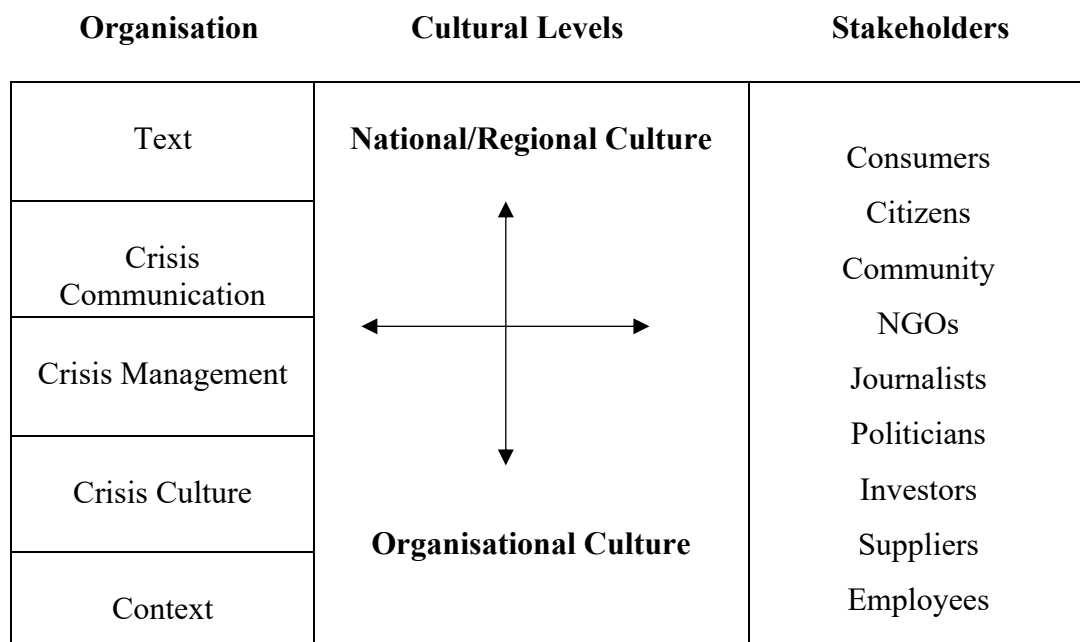
Ultimately, the captain of the US naval submarine was expected to apologise in person and in public. Failing to comply with local expectations and sending an impersonal letter written in English only escalated the crisis. The study of *apologia* in crisis

communication reveals numerous choices for a spokesperson. Hearit and Courtright (2003) list the various strategies discussed by scholarship in the past in which apologetic discourse is shown to be dependent on the environment and thereby in line with social constructionist theory. Ware and Linkugel (1973) outline four apologetic strategies, and Benoit even offers 14 (1995), while Coombs outlined five in 1995.

It can be concluded that national culture is a decisive factor in perception creation and therefore should continue to inspire crisis communication research. However, an effort to include culture into constructionism should be made to more profoundly understand the implications of the crisis environment to determine stakeholder perception. The case of apologia alone shows the many influencing factors that lead researchers to a multitude of different apologetic strategies in all shapes and forms. However, static cultural dimensions such as Hofstede's applied across the board should be used cautiously. Hofstede's ideas are essentialist in nature and crisis communication research that has used it to explain perception of stakeholders such as Haruta and Hallahan (2003) lacks a deep understanding of both national culture and intercultural crisis communication. McSweeney (2002, p. 113) astutely summarises the critique of Hofstede's approach in the journal *Human Relations*: "Instead of seeking an explanation for assumed national uniformity from the conceptual lacuna that is the essentialist notion of national culture, we need to engage with and use theories of action which can cope with change, power, variety, multiple influence, including the non-national, and the complexity and situational variability of the individual subject".

Rigid applications and reliance on Hofstede’s essentialist view of culture should not tarnish the importance of national and organisational culture concepts that shape communication and perception. Instead those variables should be rehabilitated without making the mistakes of past scholarship. Organisational culture, which is comprised of various aspects (*text, crisis communication, crisis management, crisis culture, context*), is a factor that has often determined the approach an organisation has to crisis communication in general. Frandsen and Johansen (2017) provided a simplified figure (Figure 1.3) emphasising the interconnectedness of (1) *organisation*, (2) *cultural levels* and (3) *stakeholders*.

Figure 1.3 *Simplified Cultural Dimensions of Crisis Management/Communication*



Source: Frandsen and Johansen (2017)

Marra (1998, 2003) argues that in order to have successful crisis communication, there must be an internal communication culture that fosters crisis communication before,

during and after the event. This suggests crisis managers are actively involved in crisis communication in a given incident and need the capability to demand a communication culture that has crisis preparedness continuously on its mind and does not belittle or disregard it. Marra calls this corporate attitude the organisational communication culture: “The communication culture is a far better predictor of successful crisis management than the presence or absence of a crisis communication plan” (Marra, 1998, p. 466).

She provides examples of organisational culture observations and how they contributed to shaping crisis communication. He describes how American telecommunication giant AT&T and its proactive communication culture caused the disclosure of all relevant information to all known stakeholders in the midst of a long-distance network fraud crisis the organisation was accused of in the 1990s. The organisation’s full disclosure culture (organisational culture) was in line with most stakeholders’ American culture (national culture) and greatly reduced the threat of lasting reputational damage. On the other hand, the author describes that the crisis communication efforts after the Challenger explosion in 1986 revealed NASA’s defensive and closed organisational communication culture which intensified public scrutiny, as organisational culture and stakeholder national culture were contrarian.

Airlines often failed to square the circle by trying to communicate with some cultural awareness, while at the same time portraying a streamlined one-world mentality. Ray (1999) and Pinsdorf (2004) stress the importance and challenges of airlines understanding their audiences thoroughly as reiterated by Frandsen and Johansen (2010, 2017). In the case of air travel, understanding audience, like in any other

scenario that involves fatalities, should centre around safety and caring: “A key to effective crisis management is developing a responsible corporate communication culture, which values safety and is sensitive to the stakeholder view” (Ray, 1999, as cited in Frandsen and Johansen, 2010 p. 562).

Frandsen and Johansen’s (2010, 2017) argument is influenced by management scholar Mats Alvesson (2013) who believes that a more in-depth audience orientation as part of the organisational level culture is a prerequisite for communicating with intercultural, interpretive stakeholders. The author argues that people are “*meaning-seeking creatures*” and that cultural meaning is not set but negotiated. Alvesson’s view of culture, which he sees as dynamic and contingent on situational context, goes hand in hand with Zhao et al. (2017) and Falkheimer and Heide’s (2006, 2009, 2010) proposition of the emerging social constructionism approach of crisis communication, discussed earlier. Various factors address meaning-seeking creatures, most notably language, which is not the only, but a central part, of cultural identity. It is important to understand verbal factors as well as other features of culture that become ever so visible particularly during a crisis. Crisis communication and the language employed should be relatable to stakeholders.

However, those factors in intercultural crisis communication have been studied by Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and other positivistic epistemologies. Crisis researchers, with a few exceptions (Frandsen and Johansen, 2017; Falkheimer and Heide 2006, 2009, 2010; Zhao et al., 2017; De Waele and Claeys, 2017; Claeys and Cauberghe, 2014) have not taken this most recent turn in social science seriously. Many studies in the field, certainly until the early 2000s, have shared several

characteristics; they have mostly been solely quantitative in nature, comparative and conducted by Westerners (in particular American, scholars as highlighted by Barnett and Lee, 2002). Falkheimer and Heide (2006) discuss the biases found in those studies regarding the understanding and complexity of culture. They show how this has caused previous research to overlook intertwined relations such as of context, communication and hierarchy.

2.5.2 Cultural Consequences for Crisis Language

“When people talk to each other, the world gets constructed”

(Burr, 2003, p. 8).

While most traditional literature has been placed on communication strategies, it needs to be highlighted that it is vital to understand that language itself and mere words can have a profound impact on the success of crisis communication. It is therefore important to go through the factors that constitute verbal communication and how it is culturally infused. Several cultural examples are used in this section to better relate to those participants’ responses obtained and examined in the subsequent chapters in this study.

Crises are often intensified by poor communication between organisations and the public (Schwarz and Pforr, 2011; Zoch and Duhe, 1997; Coombs, 1999, 2007). In fact, an organisation’s inability to effectively use language to direct stakeholder perception can prove disastrous and its ramification has been largely neglected by crisis

researchers. In fact, Hearit and Courtright (2003) advocate a reconceptualising of crisis management studies into crisis communication management. In the examples discussed, such as the Arla Foods case, meanings are produced in light of cultural background and how a sender's messages can be perceived as vastly different from one audience group to another. The rise of social constructionism, however, has led to a "*linguistic turn*" in the related field of organisational studies (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2001).

Jack Orr (1978), one of the earliest advocates of social constructionism stresses the interconnectedness of it with language in his publication *Reality is socially constructed through communication*. Orr (1978, p. 307) notes: "Groups create and sustain their versions of reality through symbolic interaction; that is, consensually validated symbols define reality and truth for their validating communities. Knowledge is therefore, rooted within socially derived symbolic structures. Rhetoric as symbols advocacy is a constituent element in the social construction of reality; even a scientific community's version of reality depends on rhetoric." By referring to a scientific community, Orr makes the point that even those communities that view their work to be most closely associated with evidence-based "objectivity", are profoundly affected by what he calls rhetoric and thus differ with regard to the originating (also scientific) community.

Particularly for sensemaking processes it is paramount to foster the idea of a linguistic turn in crisis communication. Hearit and Courtright (2003) argues that crises are terminological formations conceived by human agents and consequently are managed and resolved terminologically. As such, communication constitutes the quintessence

of saving reputation and thereby successfully managing organisational crises. Falkheimer and Heide (2006) stress that language should no longer be perceived by crisis researchers as a passive and mere medium of passing on information. Instead, the authors suggest that future research should place language in the centre of their interest and refer to language even as “a carrier of power” (p. 188).

Falkheimer and Heide (2006, p. 83) reason similarly and call language a decisive parameter in crisis communication under social constructionism: “Consequently, it follows that the reality of a crisis is socially constructed through language, a process whereby meaning is created and agreed upon. Thus, communication is not something that occurs by organisations in crises but rather something that constitutes the meaning that participants in that crisis come to hold.”

It can therefore be argued that in order to successfully communicate a crisis and to *glocalise* interactions, it is first necessary to understand the weight language has on social interaction processes. Stakeholders have a very active role in enacting social realities, and they do so primarily, but not solely, through language (Shotter and Gergen, 1994; Gergen, 1985).

Hence, language ought to play a key role in crisis communication as it serves as a channel to produce and reproduce the social reality of a crisis. “To modify stakeholders’ perception, a company in crisis must know how words are being perceived by stakeholders” (Ray, 1999, p. 245). Weick’s (2001) organisational sensemaking discusses the construction and bracketing of cues to be interpreted through language. In crisis communication, this can be achieved by developing a

reciprocal process in which a mutual understanding of the reality is agreed upon: A *lingua franca* of crisis communication (Pinsdorf, 2004).

This, however, begs the question of whether Pinsdorf really meant one unifying language, similarly to the role English has in commerce and academia. Evans (2003) points out how the structure of a language integrates rules, signs and values and therefore shapes a society's outlook on what is appropriate or not. Furthermore, he argues that language can mirror levels of respect which preserves a society's hierarchical categories, critical for effective crisis communication. He also refers to language as the *invisible hand of culture* and accentuates it as one major component for successfully communicating across cultures.

Eisenlohr (2004) studies show that loss of language alters society. He argues this is highlighted by a loss of culture and inevitably leads to social marginalisation. Without language, culture will fail eventually as social boundaries and distinct world views are abandoned. Linguist Kenneth Pike (1990) connected linguistic patterns with socio-cultural behaviour, which led to the widely-studied *etic* and *emic* distinction. Inspired by Pike's findings, Philipsen's (2002) conversation studies provided further insight into cultural communication. He identified two principles: "Every conversation bears traces of culturally distinctive means and meanings of communicative conduct {...}. Communication is a heuristic and performative resource for performing the cultural function in the lives of individuals and communities" (Philipsen 2002, p. 59). He believes communication to be *heuristic* because it shows how means and meaning are formed by communication in a given society and it is *performative* because communication is the tool to participate in the conversation. Philipsen (2002) views

communication as deduced to those two directing principles that, he argues, most cultures share.

Hall's foundational work is relevant and is particularly valuable to this study to better implement constructionist theory in research and cultural awareness in crisis communication. However, not all facets of Hall's findings are applicable, some such as chronemics¹⁰ are not relevant for the field, as severe crises demand immediate actions wherever they take place. Arpan and Roskos-Ewoldsen's (2005) description of "stealing thunder" has led to a certain linear crisis communication when it comes to time as most crisis communicators (both in monochronic and polychronic societies) start their efforts shortly after an incident has occurred. Hall (1983) recognises how context can be a great challenge to communication and that it is invisible for outsiders who are not aware of it. The literature in crisis communication and its models, both traditional approach and the social constructionist approach, could improve significantly by simply reflecting on Hall's findings and the importance of contextually adapted communication schemes. Unlike in crisis communication, the potential usefulness of Hall's concept of high- versus low-context cultures to international marketing has been widely discussed two decades ago (Kim et al., 1998).

According to Hall (1983), language is an arbitrary system with the prime purpose being to label and categorise things such as objects, ideas, feelings, groups, experiences, people and other phenomena. Language is also governed by a multi-layered system of rules and regulations. Although similarities exist among most

¹⁰ Hall argued that cultures differ in terms of whether they perceive time as monochronic (segmenting time) or polychronic (multitasking). Crisis communication always commences with press statements and press conference and is generally intended to be done as quickly as possible in order for the organisation to disseminate their information.

languages, variations in regard to grammar, sound and nuances of meanings have resulted in more than 6000 language varieties across cultures worldwide. Despite those many variations, verbal communication and human interactions can, to a certain extent, be analysed with the help of Hall's (1983) interaction patterns without running the risk of generalisation.

Hall (1976) first developed the *high versus low* distinction when during his anthropological studies he noticed differences in meaning of messages, setting and words that are being used in conversations across cultures. He defines *high context* communication as one where most of the information can already be found in the messenger while very little is found in the explicit part of the message itself. A *low context* culture is the opposite, where the overwhelming mass of the information can be traced to the more explicit bits of communication. Stuart Hall (1990) stresses the significance of information networks as a decisive factor for the level of context. High context cultures often maintain close relationships in the work and family life. Gesticulation, posture and body language are necessary skills that are learned by individuals to code and decode messages and, as Everett (2012) and Hofstede (1980, 2001) suggest, acquiring those skills happen before language is acquired and hence related to cultural background.

Zhu (2014) describes how low context cultures compartmentalise their personal relationships, their work, and many aspects of their day to day life where background information about for example status, body language is less needed. In general, low context communication refers to patterns of communication that are direct, have a

matter of fact tone, convey transparency, and emphasise the sender's responsibility to communicate clearly and without ambiguity.

Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) refer to it as a “*say what you mean, mean what you say*” approach to communication.

Lakoff and Ide (2005) on the other hand, in their study of indexicality and reflexivity of linguistic rituals, describe how high context cultures can be explained by three factors:

(1) *meta communication*, (2) *meta pragmatics* and (3) *propositional communication*.

She discusses the importance of who to speak to, when and where to speak (meta communication), situational/hierarchical factors and formality (meta pragmatics) and being able to understand convoluted messages and their content e.g. propositional communication. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) describe high context communication as a “*read between the lines*” approach. Table 1-b summarises the different verbal patterns in high context and low context communication. Overall, low context patterns emphasize a direct approach, informality and talkativeness while high context patterns follow an indirect style that stresses self-humbling, formal interaction, status/hierarchy and silence.

Table 1-b: *Low Context and High Context Verbal Patterns*

Low Context	High Context
Individualistic values	Collectivist values
Linear logic	Spiral logic
Direct verbal style	Indirect verbal style
Matter-of-fact tone	Understated or animated tone
Informal verbal style	Formal verbal style
Verbal assertiveness or talkativeness	Verbal reticence or silence

Source: Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012)

The style of speaking frames how communication should be understood or interpreted in a continuous sequence. Those verbal styles depend on factors such as relationship types, context of the situation, intention etc. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) refer to Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1980, 2001) and argue that the higher the level of individualism in any given country, the stronger the accentuation on direct talk. In contrast, cultures that value a high context deal more with situations where the use of indirect talk in communication is preferred. Directness and tone of voice in communication are the key differences in direct and indirect verbal styles. The direct style of communication tends to reveal the intention swiftly and in all clarity. The tone of voice of the speaker is generally forthright. Indirect speaking on the other hand, is often camouflaged and accompanied by a much softer tone of voice than in direct communication. Ting-Toomey and Chung highlight the US American style as clear

and direct communication with phrases such as: “Call it like you see it/ what’s your point/ give me the bottom line” (2012, p. 125).

The authors suggest that communication in high context countries such as China is more roundabout and implicit. The aim of Chinese communication is to not sound imposing, let alone demanding. British speakers for instance, are, according to Hall (1990) much more indirect than Americans. Nevertheless, the authors fail to see that Chinese speakers would typically not consider them in the least bit indirect. The spectrum between self-enhancement and self-effacement verbal styles as discussed by Chung and Ting-Toomey (1999) deserves attention as it can boost credibility to intercultural crisis communication. Self-enhancement emphasises boasting about accomplishments and abilities and creating a confident stance for one’s communication with others. Verbal restraint, modesty, humility and even self-depreciation are typical for self-effacement.

According to Chung and Ting-Toomey (1999) exchanging information in Asia expects meekness behaviour in verbal communication. Condon (1984) describes for instance how Japanese housewives, when serving meals, tend to downplay their efforts and even apologise when in reality they have laboured the better part of two days in the kitchen preparing the meal. Self-effacement or self-humbling is an integral part of Japanese culture. It might be vital to understand how those cultural specificities have nothing to do with the truth about what is being said but rather combine verbal communication with cultural expectation, concepts such as meekness or gratitude, politeness, appreciation form close bonds of those communicating with each other and act as gatekeepers to further interactions. Particularly in Asian countries, this leads to

behaviours where it is assumed that performance and decency will speak for themselves and boasting is considered vulgar, if not suspicious. Yet, in low context countries such as the USA individuals are encouraged to sell and boast of their achievements to others.

This Eastern-Western divide of displaying relevant virtues for successful communication has often been explained by a clash of high context communication patterns and low context environments which encourages sender responsibility. In particular, in crisis communication, ignoring these distinctions can lead to cross-cultural frictions (as seen in the U.S.S. Greeneville crisis case) when communicators use their own home country's verbal style to evaluate a tragic situation, such as a plane crash, in a host country. Although silence and pauses in communication are a feature shared across many cultures, the way this is interpreted and evaluated can differ greatly. Hall (1983) stresses that silence can be used as a device for critical communication that reflects an inner pausing. Ting-Toomey and Chung emphasize how difference in silence and its underlying contextual meaning presents another void between Asian and Western communication: "Although silence may hold strong contextual meanings in high-context cultures, prolonged silence is often viewed as empty pauses or ignorant lapses in the Western rhetorical model" (2012, p. 127).

In a high-context environment, silence can sometimes be the essence of communication. During crisis communication, the lack of adequate silence in such a context can be regarded as disrespectful to those who have been directly affected by a crisis. Social relations, role expectation and levels of ambiguity also need to be taken into consideration (Covarrubias, 2007). Lee (2004) argues that Chinese participants are more willing to accept a "*no comment*" response in a crisis scenario due to the

appreciated value of keeping silent in personal interactions in a hierarchal society. Correctly applying and interpreting different verbal communication patterns, induced by national or regional culture (Hearit, 2006; Lee, 2004; Frandsen and Johansen, 2007, 2009), can substantially impact whether the sender's crisis communication is perceived to be favourable or not, which could help minimise uncertainties and increase success for crisis communicators in stakeholder perception creation dialogues.

2.5.3 Multimodality – Beyond Verbal and Non-Verbal Crisis Communication

As crisis communication is a combination of “verbal, visual, and/or written interaction” (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 680, 2011, p. 2). It is viable to see the interrelatedness of those components. Busso et al. (2004) found evidence through a computer-based study, which Chen et al.'s (1998) findings indicated, that audio and visual expressions data present important and often decisive complementary information and should not be separated when studying the effects of communication on audiences. Unfortunately, until recently that decisive complementary information has largely been disregarded in the field.

This section will therefore discuss the importance of introducing multimodality to crisis communication research and how it can provide benefits over traditional verbal and non-verbal communication analysis (NVC).

The study of multimodality is needed in the field because it goes beyond language and non-verbal communication and thereby opens up a whole new realm for intercultural

crisis communication that should put more flesh on the bone of cross-cultural analysis. Multimodality was developed in the early 2000s (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress et al., 2004; van Leeuwen, 2005; Jewitt, 2009). It originated from linguistic ideas of communication in particular the work of Michael Halliday on language as a social semiotic system. Halliday's work shifted attention from language as a static linguistic system to language as a social system – how language is shaped by the ways that people use it and the social functions that the resources of language are put to in particular settings.

Scollon and Scollon describe multimodality as follows: “Multimodality, a new term, has become a focus of academic and intellectual interest just within the past decade or so, while language has been at the centre of such interests for millennia. The task of relating multimodality and language, then, is a task of relating this new and fresh but still largely amorphous perspective on human communication to a complex, ancient, richly developed, and historical one which is differently naturalised in different cultures” (2011, p. 170).

While there has been some consideration for a new approach for verbal communication (e.g. *linguistic turn*), multimodality has not yet been included into crisis communication research despite its many merits and revelations about intercultural interactions in other social science. Consequently, an introduction to multimodality in the crisis context and the meaning of *modes*¹¹ is necessary and can pave the way to an entirely new outlook on contemporary crisis research.

¹¹ Modes are defined as communication practices in terms of the textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, and visual resources used for the composition of messages from sender to receiver.

As some crises happen to be very visual (e.g. plane crashes, oil spills, sinking ships), crisis communication predominantly takes place through audio-visual means (Coombs and Holladay, 2009). This is important to note as organisations often use mass media to communicate their key message to stakeholders during crises (Fearn-Banks, 2016). By doing so, an organisation in question implores the opportunity to withstand a crisis and save its reputation. Verbal and non-verbal communication employed through audio-visual means, such as a press conference, can have the highest impact on audience perception creation. In order to understand those aspects within the context and factors that contribute to perception creation, it is necessary to look beyond verbal and non-verbal communication and include further semiotic cues¹² to one's analysis. First, it is necessary to mention the various different approaches of multimodality commonly employed today and adopt the one most fitting for audio-visual crisis communication.

According to Langlotz and Locher (2013), there are four central approaches to multimodality:

(1) *Multimodal discourse analysis*, (2) *Social semiotics*, (3) *Multimodal interaction analysis*, (4) *Multimodal conversation analysis*.

Multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) was one of the first scientific approaches to the field and started in the 1990s as a solution for dealing with this new approach (Zhu, 2007). Significant attention in discourse analysis has been given to the verbal system and its semantic structure, which made it very popular with applied linguists, however it also constrained it and left other ways of making meaning to be overlooked. Multimodal interaction analysis, on the other hand, is an approach that considers all

¹² The term derives from the Greek *sēmeiōtikos*, which means “observant of signs”. Its modern understanding is to detect underlying or concealed meaning of the text, imagery, sounds, etc. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved 21.03.2018.

movements and noises that carry interactional meaning when perceived by an individual (Norris, 2004). However, most research that utilises multimodal interaction deals with face-to-face interactions. Multimodal conversation analysis is founded on conversation analysis (CA) and its sociological conceptualization of the basically social nature of language use in human interaction (Drew, 2009). It seeks to discover patterns in conversations in order to find evidence of practices of conduct, in the systematic design of turn taking in dialogues.

Jewitt et al. (2004) place particular emphasis on social semiotics, which is particularly fitting for this study: Social semiotics incorporates many of the aforementioned features but also social interpretation in relation to communicational modes and culture. They state: “The starting point for multimodality is to extend the social interpretation of messaging and its meanings to the whole range of representational and communicational modes or semiotic resources for making meaning when, employed in a culture - such as image, writing, gesture, gaze, speech, posture” (2004, p. 1).

Connecting those modes with socio-cultural aspects will present crisis communication in a whole new light; the light of social interpretation of messaging and its meanings and how to derive them. However, in order to strengthen the argument for inclusion of multimodality into the field of crisis research it is necessary to answer a decisive question: *What are the new perspectives which multimodality provides for intercultural crisis communication and what additional values do they bring compared to the conventional dichotomy of verbal vs. non-verbal communication?* Firstly, multimodality starts from a position where all modes, such as gaze or posture,

contain a set of semiotic resources (capabilities that people hold and configure in certain moments, such as a crisis, to establish relations).

Consequently, the modes and semiotic resources a person holds contribute to how communication is done and perceived by various stakeholders. The importance of modes and its impact on perception creation suggests such factors should be included in crisis communication research and thereby the renewal of the field should be extended beyond a linguistic turn. The idea, however, should not be to side-line language in general but to expand the semiotic frame (LeVine and Scollon, 2004). Multimodality provides a new perspective and method for understanding language among a multimodal “ensemble of modes” (Jewitt et al., 2004, p. 16). It “steps away from the notion that language always plays the central role in interaction, without denying that it often does” (Norris, 2004, p. 3) and proceeds on the assumption that all modes have the potential to contribute equally to meaning. From a multimodal perspective, language is therefore only ever one mode nestled among a multimodal ensemble of modes.

In multimodality it is believed that all modes have the potential to contribute equally to meaning. While others have analysed “non-verbal” modes, multimodality differs in that language is neither its starting point nor its end but rather seen as one among many perception influencers. The starting point is that all modes that are a part of a multimodal ensemble, a representation and/or an interaction, and need to be studied with a view to the underlying choices available to communicators, the meaning potentials of resources and the purposes for which they are chosen.

The second assumption central to multimodal research is all modes have, like language, been shaped through their cultural, historical and social uses to realize social functions as required by different communities. Therefore, each mode is understood as having different meaning potentials or semiotic resources and to realise different kinds of communicative work. Multimodality takes all communicational acts to be constituted of and through the social realm in which they take place. This also draws attention to the ways in which communication is constrained and produced in relation to social context and points to how modes come into spaces in particular ways.

This connects with the third assumption underpinning multimodality; that people orchestrate meaning through their selection and configuration of modes. Thus, the interaction between modes is significant for meaning making. The meanings in any mode are always interwoven with the meanings made with those of other modes co-operating in the communicative ensemble. The interaction between modes is itself a part of the production of meaning. Traditional crisis communication research has mainly focused on pre-planned sender response strategies with little attention to stakeholder background and social interpretation of crisis messaging, discrediting them of their complex and interpretive nature. Jewitt et al.'s (2004) notion of an ensemble of modes should be understood as an interplay of factors influencing communication which contains linguistics and NVC but also other indicators that help interpret socio-cultural interactions in more detail. Multimodality is better equipped for an in-depth analysis of intercultural perception creation as it tries to capture the complexity of human communication.

Hence, it facilitates a newer assumption of crisis communication which is to co-construct crisis reality with audiences. The organisational voice (sender), should be encouraged to be aware and utilise factors that are inherent to those interpretive communities for the construction of organisational crisis messaging. Simply put, multimodality provides more insights into a combination of factors that influence public perception which can help spokespersons appreciate aspects as influential which have been disregarded or not even heard of in the past.

Hence, multimodality is neither a modern rephrasing of NVC nor an extension of it. Multimodality should be seen as a new tool for analysis to better understand different audience perspectives and their link to cultural background. It enables research to see circumstances clearer that help shape identity (Norris, 2004). Knapp and Hall (2010) refer in the 7th edition of *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interactions* to non-verbal communication simply as “means other than words” (p. 5) assuming that words are the verbal element of communication. However, this does not account adequately for the complexity observed in intercultural crisis communication. It should be noted that separating verbal and non-verbal behaviour into separate categories is not beneficial and frankly impossible. While many NVC researchers acknowledge the various different aspects affecting communication such as environmental structures and conditions, physical characteristics of the organisational voice, facial expression, vocal behaviour, they are individually scrutinised instead of related to one another. Unlike NVC, multimodality is meaning-seeking and paints holistic pictures of a crisis situation that simplifies an extremely complex situation by offering possible explanations of stakeholder perception within the socio-cultural context.

Research in related fields such as social psychology and political science has proven the added benefits of multimodality in studying complex interactions and thus offered new explanations to complex questions of human perception. The interconnectedness of modes became clearer as did the degree to which they influence the perception of the message and of the speaker, both positively and negatively (e.g. Tauber and Seeber, 2014; Sporer and Schwandt, 2006).

In addition, multimodality draws attention to the effect of modes on competencies such as sincerity or credibility (Bogaard et al., 2016; Reinhard and Sporer, 2008). In order to better understand this link between modes, crisis communication and sender competencies, it is essential to see the importance multimodality also places on the *medium*; mediums are modes of delivery that take the current and future contexts into consideration. In the case of a crisis press conference it is advisable to expand the meaning of the medium; the spokesperson becomes the medium for the organisation or as previously referred to; the organisational voice. It follows that the medium requires the ability of *multiliteracy*¹³ for effective crisis communication. The issue is that most organisations, as stated earlier, followed a traditional approach of crisis communication and provide pre-written statements but are unaware of multiliteracy or the effects modes can have on delivering crisis messages to audiences.

A small number of existing research has used NVC to make hypothetical assumptions about the organisation's spokesperson. Most of it seems to be limited to the impact of ethnicity (of the crisis communicator), facial expression, facial emotional expression

¹³ Comprehension of different modes in communication – not only to read text, but also to read other modes such as sound and image. Whether and how a message is understood is accredited to multiliteracy.

and visual expression of power (Arpan, 2002; Claeys and Cauberghe, 2014; Hong and Len-Riós, 2015). According to Arpan (2002) audiences perceive crisis communicators as more credible if that person shares an ethnic background that is similar to the audience. However, Hong and Len-Riós (2015) point out that this relation between communicators and audiences only holds if no other information must be processed cognitively (e.g. prior relationship, crisis history etc.) which is rather unrealistic, especially in the case of large, well known organisations and complex crisis scenarios. Gorn et al. (2008) investigate facial features and how they relate to spokesperson credibility. They found that a “*baby face*” (large eyes, small nose and chin) directly affects credibility perception. Moreover, they determined that eye contact while speaking paired with expressive body movements conveyed power and consequently more competence. Claeys and Cauberghe (2014) on the other hand, argue that less powerful display (less eye contact and less body movement) increased the perception of the crisis communicator’s sincerity. Ten Brinke and Adams (2015) analysed organisational apologies and learnt that facial expression of sadness has a favourable effect across sincerity while signs of happiness such as smiling reduces credibility and effectiveness of organisational apologies.

Another aspect of NVC that has been looked at in previous research is voice pitch; a crisis communicator speaking with a low voice pitch could be perceived to be more competent than someone with a high voice pitch (Claeys and Cauberghe, 2014). The authors’ link between voice pitch and competence is flawed from both the NVC and multimodality perspective. Their findings have a strong essentialist bias where non-verbal communication is more or less universal. Since the authors do not use cross-

cultural comparisons they also do not reflect upon the *universalistic/culturalistic* debate that is ongoing in NVC research.

Claeys and Cauberghe's (2014) research has disregarded contextual features and modes, other than voice pitch, that could affect competence and hence show serious weaknesses in determining real effectiveness of crisis messaging. Similar shortcomings can be found in the works of Reinhard and Sporer (2008) in regard to perception of deception. They claim that gaze aversion, high number of movements and frequent pauses or speech disturbances have been found to increase the perception of deception (Boogard et al., 2016; Reinhard and Sporer, 2008; Henningsen et al., 2005).

However, none of the authors have linked their finding from NVC to cultural background of the intended audiences. Their findings regarding gaze aversion, high number of movements and their association to perception of deception have not been tested in cross-cultural comparison and instead have been assumed to apply to audiences across the board. Furthermore, De Waele and Claeys' (2017) research not only took place with homogenous test subjects but also in a controlled environment with fictitious crisis cases.

De Waele and Claeys' (2017) analysis of some modes labelled "non-verbal cues" in audio-visual crisis communication, published in the *Public Relation Review* acknowledge those and other shortcomings but nevertheless see it as a "good starting point". The authors admit shortcomings and conclude as a suggestion for the future: "Further research should examine audio-visual crisis responses in other countries and

cultures. Doing so would offer insights into cross-cultural variations in crisis communication. This is crucial as nonverbal cues especially are expected to differ between cultures” (De Waele and Claeys, 2017, p. 687). Ahlsén and Lindström comment on body movement in crisis communication research: “Not only should we believe that gestures can be very useful for intercultural communication, we should also be conscious that there is a certain risk for misunderstanding of gestures that are based on different cultural conventions” (2013, p. 40).

It becomes clearer and clearer that multimodality is a real opportunity for this study and the field as whole. NVC research’s greatest weakness is seeing interactions not holistically but rather the compartmentalisation of findings and their meaning. Consequently, multimodal research’s greatest strength is simply to understand that numerous features, ranging from gaze and speaking, to gesture etc., are interconnected when analysing perception creation.

All in all, multimodality transforms our outlook on human communication in crisis situations. Metaphorically speaking, multimodality should be seen as a fine-tuned engine where all parts of the engine are essential for the engine to run smoothly. Multimodality combines various factors about communication and social interactions, which help improve intercultural crisis communication by combining them and interpreting in the light of social semiotics. It opposes essentialist assumptions and provides much more insights into communication than non-verbal unimodal or bimodal approaches have done in the past.

Hence, multimodal analysis should be regarded by crisis research as a practical new tool kit which further strengthens the move away from traditional research methods of the 1980s and 1990s and improves understanding of audiences and their reaction towards crisis communication. The combination of social constructionism and social semiotics, with a sharpened eye for cultural background, will transform crisis research into a whole new multidisciplinary field and thereby making other existing business school models and linear functionalist assumptions, that have disregarded numerous decisive features for perception creation, appear inferior in comparison.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of all current and relevant crisis communication literature. Firstly, a historic overview was presented showing the many advances in the field since its inception in the late 1980s. Those were followed by a detailed account of shortcomings, particularly essentialist views of audiences predominantly through cultural dimensions and stereotyping.

Then, the new social-constructivist approach, inspired by Orr (1978) Gergen (1985, 1998), Weick (1979, 1995, 2001) and later refined by Frandsen and Johansen (2006, 2017) specifically for the context of crisis communication, was presented along with the opportunities it bears for future research. The *Rhetorical Arena Theory* (RAT) or multivocal approach, has underlined not only how influential other “voices” (besides the organisational voice) can be at the *macrolevel* but also how factors (context,

media, genre, text) can impact crisis communication on the *microlevel*. This newer research branching off from constructivism, has plausibly set out that audiences are indeed complex interpretive communities and need to receive the outmost attention in research today, particularly in regard to cultural background and perception creation.

That lack of culture as a decisive topic and resulting variables for stakeholder perception in modern crisis research has been noted at various points throughout this chapter. The embeddedness of culture in the minds of audiences could even be argued for by also reviewing rather traditional parameters; *national* and *organisational levels* that are still well-established in modern crisis research. From Hofstede's social programming to the simplified and less rigid cultural dimensions of crisis management pioneered by Frandsen and Johansen (2017), it became clear that the view of culture in the field is either downplayed and generalised or not sufficiently incorporated in research. Cultural variations in general have been disregarded in the field which is shown in the small numbers of cultural comparative studies. The few existing studies that focus on cultural variations of audiences lack the depth of cultural understanding and often presented a somewhat biased essentialist view (Haruta and Hallahan, 2004). The linguistic turn exemplifies the increased interest however in effective audience communication and the value of language itself in crisis communication.

Some of Edward T. Hall's findings, which are particularly relevant for audio-visual crisis communication, were discussed in terms of their continuous importance for future research. Furthermore, this chapter has examined aspects that go beyond the linguistic turn. A new line of enquiry; multimodality, and in particular social semiotics including various modes for sender evaluation of diverse audiences, have been put

forward in this chapter. The difference between non-verbal communication (NVC), which has been included in crisis communication in recent years (Claeys and Cauberghe, 2014; Boogard et al., 2016; Reinhard and Sporer, 2008; Henningsen et al., 2005), and the advantages multimodality holds over NVC, which has not been recognised so far, have been presented sequentially.

This study aims to advance crisis communication by offering a renewed and in-depth analysis on cultural background and its effect on audience perception creation in crisis communication.

This should help bring forth a holistic understanding of crisis communication and its implications for perception creation and thereby advance it to a similar level of in-depth perception analysis such as is done in other fields e.g. political communication. For instance, Richard Youngs' (2017) conclusions regarding personal characteristics of political candidates, their physical appearance on television and the resulting relative impact on voters' perception regardless of political stands or party affiliation, can very well and should be related to crisis communication with today's multicultural *glocal* audiences.

By introducing multimodality into crisis research cultural complexity and perception formation, particularly in audio-visual communication techniques, will be examined. The following chapters will build upon the theoretical foundation, presented in this literature review, by analysing responses gained from participants in regard to two recent plane crashes and the corresponding crisis communication efforts in the immediate aftermath of those crashes.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological approach and research design employed to examine the research questions set out in Chapter 1. The first section provides background information, and how this research was approached from a philosophical point of view. The next section discusses the methodological approach and methods chosen, along with a description of the process of data collection. Next, an overview of the data analysis is provided, including an explanation of the analytical process. Finally, ethical considerations concerning the research are discussed.

3.2 Background

3.2.1 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy underpinning this study includes an ontological position of realist subjectivism, “the view that social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, p. 109) and an epistemological position of interpretivism, based on a belief that human interactions are complex. It requires the researcher to appreciate the differences of those human interactions and then to make interpretations. To acknowledge that the studied world is a peculiar one which follows a specific line of reasoning, a certain world view and interpretation chosen by the researcher which is best described by

Charmaz (2006, p. 11): “Any theoretical rendering offers an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it.”

Given the exploratory nature of the study however, the use of quantitative as well as qualitative data collection and the heightened awareness by the research of the threat of subjectivism, still allows it to be the most appropriate method for the research matter at hand and to achieve the purpose set out in Chapter 1. While the researcher is fully aware of the theoretical rendering that the research only deals with a portrayal (sample) of the studied world (population) as described by Charmaz, choosing to employ a sequential exploratory mixed method will allow the development of some form of general argument about the underlying population but even more important about the implications of cultural background on crisis communication.

3.3 Research Methodology: Quantitative and Qualitative Approach

The choice of approach to any research depends on many factors, including the nature of the research questions to be answered, the extent to which the topic has been previously researched, practical considerations such as recruiting participants and capabilities of the researcher. When choosing a research approach, it is important to be aware of those factors and also to understand that certain factors may be added or deleted throughout the process of data collection and sometimes even at a later stage. While this is not unusual, especially in interdisciplinary studies, basic assumptions shaped the development of the methodology of this study early on and were only

slightly modified along the way. Basic assumptions that helped choosing and shaping the research methodology were as followed:

1) The subject cases that were to be the basis of a comparative study had to be fairly similar in nature with similar parameters such as time period, intensity of crisis, casualties, instrument of communication to allow for test subjects to make comparisons and to not invalidate assumptions drawn from the research results.

2) The researcher had to make sure that participants will have to have the ability to take part in the questionnaire which meant a certain cognitive skills level as well basic English language skills, both in hearing and reading. Thus, recruitment of participants was limited to College students.

3) Given the research questions that included novel approaches to a relatively understudied field, it became clear that both quantitative as well as quantitative research would yield valuable data.

In the case of this study, a mixed method, sequential exploratory approach was chosen as the best fit for the nature of the research. In mixed method research, the analysis of the data involves analysis of quantitative as well as qualitative data (Ivankova et al., 2007). Each data set was analysed using the appropriate method of analysis. The research was divided into two sections highlighting the mixed method approach. A key aspect of the definition of mixed methods research is the “mixing” of the qualitative and quantitative components within the study (Simons and Lathlean, 2010; Maudsley, 2011). “Mixing” refers to the process in which the qualitative and quantitative elements are interlinked to produce a fuller account of the research problem at hand (Glogowska et al., 2011; Zhang and Creswell, 2013).

This method was chosen by the researcher to obtain findings from both worlds, as to achieve corroboration and to explain the phenomenon of cultural background in crisis communication from two angles. Because both subject areas, cultural background and crisis communication, were already studied individually in the past, the research design is not explanatory in nature but rather tries to bring those concepts together and explore the implications in a sequential fashion to present a new structure; intercultural crisis communication.

Like Pfaff et al. (2014), who used a mailed survey to measure perceived confidence in interprofessional collaboration amongst new graduate nurses and followed up with individual accounts, this study attempts to achieve something similar by using a sequential exploratory research design with the purpose of qualitative data collected supporting the quantitative findings. Thus, in this study the quantitative data is dominant (Section A), and frames qualitative data collection (Section B) obtained through the open-ended questions of the same survey.

Quantitative findings for Section A (see 4.2), were obtained by utilising a survey design. This was accomplished using various common descriptive ratings such as Likert scale, semantic differential questions and rankings. Thereby, collecting quantitative data from 181 participants from six different home countries that, at the time of the study, were students at the University of London. This method allowed for statistical analysis of the data. The questionnaire proved to be an efficient means of gathering data without introducing threats to reliability unlike various other collection means (Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2009).

The questionnaire used was constructed by the researcher and included 39 questions in total. The survey's 39 questions aim to reveal the influence of a participant's cultural background on perception regarding the crisis videos from Germanwings and Malaysia Airlines. The videos that were used to test for cultural differences and its effects on crisis communication were taken from publicly available media channels. The videos were structured in two parts: (1) A short introduction to the case. On the one hand, this served the purpose of introducing respondents to the context of the crisis if they were unfamiliar with the case. On the other hand, the introduction brought all respondents to the same level of information and helped reduce the preconceived notion of the respective plane crash. (2) The questionnaire was designed in three sections which related to demographics, established crisis communication theory and intercultural communication research relating to social constructionism and multimodality.

The research design used was particularly helpful for three reasons:

(1) Ease of use – participants could complete the questionnaire from the comfort of their home, at college or even on the go. The topic was regarded as stimulating by a majority of participants and therefore participants, once they committed to taking the questionnaire, enjoyed taking the questionnaire with only very few not completing it. Including two videos from the respective crisis press conferences into the questionnaire helped raise interest with potential participants for the study as it was seen as less dry than most other surveys.

(2) The questionnaire design allowed the researcher to ask participants about a range of vital variables tailored to the need of this study in making discoveries and answering the research questions.

(3) The data collected through a questionnaire was suitable for in depth quantitative descriptive analyses as well as a qualitative thematic analysis.

Qualitative findings for Section B (see 4.7) were obtained through the use of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a rarely acknowledged and yet widely used qualitative analytic method within and beyond applied linguistics and intercultural communication (Boyatzis, 1998; Roulston, 2001). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data at hand and has been praised many times for its flexibility and ease of use (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

However, it also often goes further than this, as it interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). An account of themes “emerging” or being “discovered” is a passive and frankly incorrect description of the process of analysis and it denies the active role the researcher has to play in identifying patterns/themes and in selecting which are relevant (Taylor and Ussher, 2001). The notion of themes emerging: “Can be misinterpreted to mean that themes reside in the data, and if we just look hard enough, they will “emerge” like Venus on the half shell. If themes reside anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them” (Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul, 1997, p. 205-206). The researcher’s role is therefore to understand the matter well enough to make those necessary connections that enable others to see it clearly.

It is therefore important to acknowledge the researcher's own theoretical positions and values in relation to qualitative research. It is important not to fall for a naive view of qualitative research where the researcher can simply "give a voice" to their participants as described by Fine (2002) in her evaluation of social capital vs. social theory. Instead the researcher believes his analysis can echo the motivating message that participants wished to express to him through the questionnaire. The great benefit in this study was to obtain data from both sequential phases in one go; the questionnaire produced quantitative as well as qualitative data.

The idea has always been to answer the underlying mixed method question: In what way does the qualitative data help to explain the quantitative findings? More specifically, in what way do the open answers help to explain the descriptive results about cultural background in perception creation and organisational crisis reputation? While the quantitative data is the prime focus of this study, both sections are supportive of each other and are intrinsically linked to the participants contribution and to the success of this study.

3.3.1 Validity and Reliability

Another significant role of the researcher was to ensure validity and reliability of the research design. The concepts of validity and reliability refer to the four dimensions that investigate the quality of the research which are: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Although these are criteria for the evaluation of quantitative research, they can very well be considered for qualitative research that needs to combine systematic procedures with flexible research strategies, since they help to analyse the risk of overall systematic errors of complex research designs.

Firstly, construct validity refers to the notion of conceptualising and measuring the constructs that are being investigated. If that were not to be achieved, the research would be at risk of investigating concepts other than the subject matter chosen for the study. Construct validity was verified in two ways: Multiple sources of evidence including textbook literature, lectures and journal articles as well as the latest intercultural research, presentations and peer reviews were all jointly used as an extensive analysis to verify validity. Thus, a well-defined chain of evidence between the survey questions asked, the data collected, and the conclusion that could be drawn was established.

Secondly, internal validity is designed to ensure the unambiguity of interpretation of findings made in the study. Statistical procedures were used to account for internal validity for quantitative data as well as clear research guidelines for findings regarding qualitative data. Most importantly, however, maintaining a strict chronological order

of events as well as rooting findings in existing literature protected the study from providing false explanatory research and misinterpretations. In the end, all findings were discussed and cross-checked with the supervisor of this study and fellow doctoral researchers from around the world.

Thirdly, external validity indicates the generalisability of findings. While quantitative data is best suited for generalisations, the population and sample size are noteworthy implications that affect generalisability in this study. The nature of this dissertation argues in principal against any form of generalisations and stereotyping being done in the context of perception creation and cultural background anyway, as cultural background and perception creation are closely linked, yet too complex to provide a list of things to do for crisis communicators in case of dealing with audiences x, y, z.

Further, Chapter 2 has shown how generalisation has caused essentialist outlooks to flourish in the past such as Hofstede's assumptions about cultural dimensions. Having a mixed method approach and using two cases for analysis (Germanwings U9525 and Malaysia Airlines MH370) helps nevertheless in ensuring requirements for external validity and hinting at communalities of members of the same home country group.

While the reproduction of the analysis with even larger samples and in different socio-cultural environments (beyond the University of London) would certainly be most fitting, it is not an option in this dissertation at this point in time but will most definitely be the basis for future expansions on the matter. Nevertheless, based on the home country groups chosen, the sample size is sufficient to represent the population of interest and perform statistical tests.

Finally, reliability refers to duplicability for the research findings. The use of statistics increases the reliability of findings. The ease of testing for reliability is one of the main advantages of having a sequential exploratory research design where quantitative data is dominant. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was used to test for reliability.

Cronbach's alpha is defined as $\alpha = \frac{K}{K-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^K \sigma_{y_i}^2}{\sigma_x^2} \right)$, where K is the number of

components, σ_x^2 the variance of the observed total test scores, and $\sigma_{y_i}^2$ the variance of i for the current sample of participants (Gliem and Gliem, 2003). Table 1-c shows the overall instrument reliability according to Cronbach's alpha.

Table 1-c Overall Instrument Reliability

α	N/Items	N/Cases
0.81	69	181

Santos (1999) describes how to interpret the value that results from computing a Cronbach's alpha which is summarised in Table 1-d. The author illustrates the different levels of correlation and that 0.7 is the cut-off point for a meaningful correlation coefficient as seen below in Table 1-d. 69 N/Items¹⁴ were used for the

¹⁴ Note that 69 items are the result of multi-layered questions where every option such as in Question 39) Overall, how do you rate the senior executive in terms of the following characteristics: Capable/Effective, Competent, Committed, Caring, Credible is considered an individual item for analysis.

reliability test representing the three subgroups (cultural evaluation factors, traits, reputation) in the survey and representing 80% of the data in the survey¹⁵.

Table 1-d *Correlation Coefficient*

Correlation coefficient	Strength of relationship
+/- 0.7 to 1.0	Strong
+/- 0.3 to 0.69	Moderate
+/- 0.0 to 0.29	None too weak

3.4 Data Collection Method

The purpose of survey research in explanation is to test theory and causal relations. Survey research aimed at explaining the relationships between variables. It does so from theoretically grounded expectations about how and why the variables ought to be related. The theory includes an element of cause and effect in that it not only assumes that relations exist between the variables, but assumes directionality (e.g., that the relationship is positive or negative, or that variable *a* influences variable *b* etc.). Exploratory questions may extend not only to establishing the existence of a causal relationship but also to asking why the relationship exists. The central research question in exploratory survey research is: “Does the assumed causal relationship exist, and does it exist for the reasons postulated?” Survey research is defined as “the

¹⁵ Due to the width of data derived from the survey, approximately 20% of data obtained was dropped and will be reserved for further studies, as the findings regarding the remaining 80% provided sufficient input to adequately answer the stated research questions.

collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions” (Check and Schutt, 2012, p. 160). This type of research allows for a variety of methods to recruit participants, collect data, and utilise various methods of instrumentation. Survey research can use quantitative research strategies (e.g., using questionnaires with numerically rated items), qualitative research strategies (e.g., using open-ended questions), or both strategies (i.e., mixed methods). As they are often used to describe and explore human behaviour, surveys are therefore frequently used in socio-cultural and psychological research (Singleton et al., 1988).

The data contained within this study was collected using a mixed method approach with a dominant quantitative part (see Section A, 4.2) with a complementary qualitative research strategy (see Section B, 4.5). Information testing participants’ perception with respect to cultural background and its effects on organisational reputation was collected from a self-administered online survey instrument. The survey was administered in 2016 for the focus group and then re-administered in the summer of 2017 with a significantly larger sample size.

The survey was expected to take participants approximately 25 to 35 minutes to complete. Most participants were targeted through Birkbeck College, on campus and through social media.

A link to the questionnaire was forwarded with a carefully drafted introductory text explaining the purpose of the study and the process of taking the questionnaire. While some students were approached by the researcher himself directly and offered further explanation and persuasion on campus, it holds that the questionnaire was completely self-administered by all participants.

Each participant was thanked for their contribution to science, mostly via email or in person. To demonstrate the researcher's appreciation, a raffle was included whereupon completion of the questionnaire, one participant would be drawn to win a £25 Amazon gift voucher which also helped to incentivise participants to partake. The survey results were gathered, continuously monitored and safely stored in "Google Forms". After a critical number of respondents were reached, the researcher took the collected data and fed them into the latest version of SPSS to analyse the information by applying a multitude of statistical tests that ensured reliability such as Paired tests, Wilcoxon signed-rank tests, One-Way ANOVA, Games-Howell Post-Hoc tests etc.

3.5 Questionnaire Design

A questionnaire containing 39 questions was designed for the purpose of identifying and understanding the impact cultural background has on crisis communication. The first part of the questionnaire required the respondents to provide broad information about themselves, their background, as well as other demographics and English language skills. The first section labelled Case 1 - Germanwings U9525, started with a short video of the crisis press conference of Germanwings Flight U9525 in the immediate aftermath of the crash. Then, respondents answered thirteen questions solely designed to understand their immediate reaction to the video and the spokesperson's, Thomas Winkelmann, deliverance of the information.

Likert scales and semantic differential questions were used to gather information on the pre-determined variables and how they were viewed by each home country group in this study. The following section (Case 2 - Malaysia Airlines MH370) was dedicated to the second crisis scenario. A similar video in length and setting as the first one was shown to respondents. The following thirteen questions were identical to the ones in the previous section in order to compare and contrast findings in relation to cultural background and perception formation for both crisis scenarios.

The final section contained four open-ended questions that gave all respondents space to express their individual opinion on crisis communication and was specifically designed to add qualitative findings to this study. Participants were kindly asked to offer suggestions that helped to further understand intercultural crisis communication and thereby made the research more meaningful. The Likert scale and semantic differential questions used in the quantitative part of the questionnaire were easy to construct and could easily be understood by all participants of each home country group. The wider range of choices for those types of questions allowed to gather more information than comparable modes of attitude scales, such as the Thurstone scale.

The questionnaire was self-administered. Detailed instructions on how to complete the questionnaire were provided in the beginning along with an introduction to the general theme, confidentiality assurance, as well as the objectives of the study and contact details. The full questionnaire can be found in the Appendix (p. 233-244).

3.5.1 The Pilot Study

A pilot study is usually carried out among a small sample before a full-scale survey is rolled out in order to test effectivity and to improve upon weaknesses that only become visible by pilot testing questionnaires (Hoe, 2006; Lim and Low, 1992). The pilot study, with each similar design to the final questionnaire, helped to clarify research question boundaries and make the research more focused. Before the actual survey for the study was carried out, the questionnaire was pre-tested by distributing it to twelve students from Birkbeck College and the London School of Economics and Political Science. These selected candidates varied in age, gender, home country and experience in taking scientific questionnaires. The prime purpose of the pilot survey was to test the usability of the questionnaire and to ensure that it is coherent and comprehensible to a wider range of potential respondents. Furthermore, the researcher's attention was also placed on the accuracy of the data collected; and that significant data analyses could be carried out subsequently (Hoe, 2006; Kometa, 1995; Ling, 1998).

This form of pre-testing the questionnaire design was also aimed at receiving feedback on any difficulties encountered in partaking in the survey. Altogether nine out of twelve chosen test subjects completed the questionnaire in the pilot survey, along with individual feedback for the researcher's consideration. Overall comments on the questionnaire design were very good. However, the repetitiveness of the questions for both cases meant a high level of concentration to complete the questionnaire which caused three respondents to abandon the survey halfway. Respondents of the pilot study articulated a strong liking to the theme of the study and the inclusion of short

video excerpts from the actual crisis press conferences which “brought the theme to life”.

In accordance with the researcher’s supervisor, minor changes were made that included the deletion of some questions to shorten the questionnaire and reduce participants’ fatigue when taking it. In the end, the experience gained from the pilot study largely formed the current study’s analytic approach and choice of methodology.

3.5.2 Sample

Due to the described, exploratory nature of this research, as well as the challenges outlined in Section 3.2.2 regarding participant recruitment, a probability sample, utilising some self-selection and convenience sampling techniques promised to most effectively provide reliable findings in order to answer the research questions (Saunders et al., 2009). Participants were all students at the University of London (at the time of the data collection) with a cultural background and upbringing in those pre-defined six home country groups. Participants in this study included 32 Chinese, 31 French, 32 British, 27 Germans, 32 Malaysians and 27 Australians. While participants shared those cultural backgrounds, there was heterogeneity observed within the home country groups. Gibson (2014) and Saunders et al. (2009) stress the benefits of in-group heterogeneity and make a case for as much variety as possible, within the limitations of the sample size and other restraints, when studying intercultural aspects. Heterogeneity within the groups resulted from key demographics

such as gender and age group but also level of English proficiency and years of residency in the UK.

The sample includes diversity of age (ranging from 18 to 54 years old), gender (66 males, 115 females), and number of years residing in the UK (from 1 to 53 years). A full breakdown of the sample is presented in Chapter 4.

3.5.3 Challenges of Research

Choosing to study the effects of cultural background in the given context presents a number of obstacles, perhaps the most challenging of which is locating and recruiting a large number of subjects that fit the study's requirements and that express their willingness to partake in the study. Recruitment is the dialogue which takes place between the researcher and a potential participant prior to the initiation of the consent process. It begins with the identification, targeting and voluntary enlistment of participants for a research study. It also involves providing information to the potential participants and generating their interest in the proposed study. Hence, the two essential goals of recruitment were as followed:

- To recruit a sample that adequately represents the target population (University of London).
- To recruit sufficient participants to meet the sample size and requirements of the study (Keith, 2001; Hulley et al., 2001; Patel et al., 2003).

As it was impossible to recruit a sample that would represent the target population of each home country realistically, a recruitment of, on average, 30 participants per home country group was agreed upon that represented a sizable sample from the researcher's university student body.

The recruitment process was the most challenging part of this study. In the pilot phase of this research (2016), nine out of the twelve participants' contributions yielded rich data including long responses to the open-ended questions, while only two participants' responses were somewhat unsuccessful. In comparing and analysing the nine, it appeared that the level of dedication by the participants could have been related to the length of the "relationship chain" (Gibson, 2014).

All twelve participants were recruited via the researcher's personal and academic network. The nine successful surveys were facilitated by the researcher with a personal email or phone call explaining the objective in length and in some cases meeting face-to-face with the participants beforehand. The most likely reason for the less rich data from the three unsuccessful surveys is linked to the fact that the questionnaire was forwarded to those participants not from the researcher himself but by one of the other nine participants. It was therefore considered that the additional link in the chain may have contributed to the two participants rushed and superficial responses. Having the researcher approach participants, if only virtually, increased legitimacy and yielded reliable responses. One design option considered was to expand the research team, recruiting and training a team of credible colleagues to carry out surveys with participants across college campus. Although this option proved

unworkable for the current project, it could be considered for future research to significantly enlarge sample size.

The final questionnaire consisted of 39 questions in total along with the two video excerpts from press conferences by Germanwings and Malaysia Airlines (each two to three minutes long). This meant that participants had to commit to at least 20-30 minutes when taking the survey. After locating potential subjects for the study that fulfilled the research requirements, another great hurdle was making sure they were taking the survey diligently and honestly. While London and particularly the University of London was a very good environment to find participants of various cultural backgrounds, it took great effort to convince them to participate due to the time needed to complete the questionnaire. Participants' busy lifestyles often led to them agreeing to participate at first but never actually following through.

Additional challenges to be addressed in the research design included:

- Language barriers – Although almost all participants spoke English in addition to their native tongue, taking a survey which included a substantial amount of reading and listening in English would necessarily limit the sample.
- Time limits and geographic spread – This research was conducted during the summer of 2017 in London, UK. Given the time frame and resources available, participants who were no longer students at the University of London, not within geographical reach, and/or who wanted to take the

survey at a much later stage were challenges contrary to a strict research time frame.

- Social desirability bias with some participants – Knowing that this research reflects national culture and cultural perception that will lead to academic discussion, participants could have felt the temptation to cast a favourable light on their home culture.
- Anonymity – Although having inherent benefits, anonymity of online surveys increases the challenge to recruit participants out of the blue who would willingly take time intensive and thought-provoking surveys for a comprehensive study of this magnitude.

3.5.4 Mitigation of Challenges

With all the challenges noted above and the lack of cultural awareness literature within crisis communication, it is clear why so little of the academic research in the field has focused directly on cultural background and perception creation with regard to crisis messages. As with many research projects, both the selection of the topic studied and the ability to gain access to the data are tied to the particular capabilities and experiences of the individual researcher. Just as with language teachers who study pupils' behaviour in classroom settings, applied linguists who study infant language development in their own children, psychologists who analyse their patients and

economists who study and advise their own governments. In this case, the researcher first gained experience in studying cultural differences and the relation of crisis communication and perceived reputation in a much shorter previous study, which however created an interest and an awareness of the existing gaps in the literature (Kleineidam, 2015).

The researchers' very own personal experiences such as growing up in the UK with a German cultural background helped connect with foreign participants. Being a doctoral student helped with explaining the research matter in a professional, yet understandable way. The researcher's ability to communicate in French, German and English and to appropriately use social media to professionally advertise the research helped reduce friction and facilitated the recruitment process.

The researcher's personal network due to his former role as the representative for international research students at Birkbeck, University of London also helped to identify potential candidates and to overcome access issues. All participants were either recruited on the college campus with the researcher present and equipped with a tablet computer for participants to take the survey, or through the university's own social media platforms where participants were briefed via email. Along with a carefully drafted written request and the questionnaire attached, participants recruited through social media were able to view the researcher's credentials online before taking the survey. Legitimacy of the project was further increased by including name and contact information of the supervisor of this study and the administering department. Written assurances of anonymity were well received.

The decision to use a comprehensive questionnaire instead of conducting one-on-one interviews eliminated the risk of interviewer bias and increased flexibility. However, social desirability bias remained an inherent issue for Malaysian and German participants. The only way to mitigate that challenge was to inform participants when briefed that scientific research can only bring true benefits when respondents answer questions truthfully. This was reiterated throughout the data collection process.

3.5.5 Researcher's Role

In this study, the researcher's background undoubtedly influenced the approach. Having worked at junior level at a global public relations consulting agency alongside crisis communication consultants, he brings to the project a belief that crisis communication is not nearly sufficiently covered by existing literature. Having advised a Japanese airline on potential crisis scenarios in 2016, he profoundly believes in and experienced first-hand, the impact of culture on audiences' perception. The researcher's experience working with global organisations, as well as growing up in the UK with a non-British cultural background, constituted ideal perquisites for investigating the subject matter most diligently.

These characteristics not only drove the focus of the study, but influenced the study at every stage, including the interpretations made. In analysing the data, the researcher has interpreted the statements of participants consciously in relation to what is evident to cultural background and tried to avoid any subconscious influence of his own cultural understanding of perception.

3.6 Data Analysis Methodology – Quantitative and Qualitative Data Sets

The choice of methods for data analysis is again tied to the research questions and the research approach, and to methods of data collection. To generate reliable insights from the many responses collected through the questionnaire, the 13th version of IBM's software package, SPSS was chosen for statistical analysis as proposed by Wagner (2012). SPSS 13.0 is a sophisticated piece of software used by most social scientists and other professionals for statistical analysis of large quantity of data especially for descriptive and predictive means. Quantifiable data from the questionnaire was coded into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

As there are two methods of working with SPSS, *interactive* and *syntax mode*, the researcher had to decide upon how to approach the data obtained through the questionnaire. Since no programming or transformation of the data set was needed but rather running standardised tests, the interactive mode was the most suitable for the numerical data in this study. SPSS was used to statistically express what participants chose to answer and how this could be presented in a way that would give evidence to the idea of cultural implications in the perception creation process when perceiving crisis communication. The procedure to do so was similar to the various different aspects investigated. First, descriptive statistics, including mean score and standard deviation, were calculated for each home country group. Then, based on whether or not a statistically significant difference was found, further tests such as multiple comparisons were carried out to identify culture differences between all groups analysed. While the questionnaire helped obtain numerical data, SPSS pinpointed

where significant difference between the six groups was to be found. The researcher was then able to present those proven differences and interpret them.

For the qualitative data, the researcher followed a simple, yet effective method described by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 6) as “flexible, simple and brilliantly effective at educating the audience”. The authors refer to the Thematic Analysis which should be seen in three parts:

(1) *identifying*, (2) *analysing*, (3) *reporting patterns*.

Identifying refers to pinpointing the essence of what is being said by the participants. The answers provided in this study ranged from a few words to several paragraphs. The researcher identified the core message of what participants expressed in their responses. Each response was read multiple times, scanned for the essence and remarked for the next stage of analysis.

Analysing is the process of beginning to group together those interesting things, comparing and contrasting, naming emerging themes and grouping similar responses to those themes.

Reporting patterns is the part of the process that dealt with presenting the themes and the responses that were grouped to those themes. A ranking was created to determine the number of times responses within those themes were observed and which occurred most frequently.

All of those processes were carried out by the researcher and without the help of computer programmes which could be an option for large samples in the future (e.g. ATLAS.ti).

Thematic analysis is not without its critics and, as most qualitative research, it is the rigor of the method that is called into question (Gliem and Gliem, 2003; Reicher and Taylor, 2005). In order to conduct good qualitative data analysis, Reicher and Taylor (2005) argue that researchers that engage in qualitative methods need to be clear and explicit so that the line of thought is clearly visible throughout the study without a shadow of ambiguity.

Thus, to contribute to thematic findings, a content analysis was performed. Content analysis is defined as the process of coding and identifying themes and patterns (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The authors describe three types of content analysis:

(1) *conventional*, (2) *summative*, (3) *directed*.

Conventional analysis is directly derived coding from the data. Summative analysis involves counting and comparing. The authors describe how the directed approach on the other hand, uses a theory as a guide to the analytic process and has frequently been criticised for the risk of bias.

A summative approach to content analysis of the thematic analysis was used in this study. Summative content analysis identifies and quantifies words of content. However, such quantification is not an attempt to immediately infer meaning but to be exact when exploring usage. Then, the summative process continues to interpret and discover underlying meaning. In this way, the counting process allows for the interpretation of the associated context by its frequency (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Using a summative approach to content analysis involved counting identified codes across the open-ended responses which identified the number of times an aspect was mentioned by participants.

Numbering thus helped to strengthen the weight of the argument made by the researcher and provided a check against analytic bias, which as a result, helped in answering the research questions and made interpretations of findings more dependable.

3.7 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data Sets

The analysis of mixed methods studies entails analysing both the quantitative and the qualitative findings separately through the appropriate analytical tools available: In this study the main tools of analysing quantitative data was SPSS and for qualitative data a thematic content analysis. Then, both data sets were “mixed”. The conclusions, known as interferences, are then drawn from both data set as well as across them (Ivankova et al., 2007). In Chapter 4 the findings are presented separately in Section A (see 4.2) and Section B (see 4.5) and then both jointly used for making interpretations. The qualitative data was used as a platform to inform and support the qualitative basis of the study. The quantitative SPSS findings steered the qualitative thematic analysis and conversely the qualitative results reinforced the numerical data of the quantitative section.

In this study, the mixed methods approach and thus having quantitative as well as qualitative data proved to be advantageous for explaining the effects of cultural background on the perception creation process of participants and on organisational reputation in the aftermath of a crisis from two different yet interrelated angles.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The questionnaire for this study was constructed in accordance with ethical standards of the school of social science, history and philosophy at Birkbeck, University of London. After careful consideration of all ethical aspects for the pilot study and later for the main study, a first version was evaluated by the supervisor; Professor Zhu Hua. After minor amendments, a proposal to conduct research for ethical approval was sent to the university's ethics committee. Within 2 weeks of submission the application was approved. Anonymity of participants and safe storage of data was ensured. Participants who were comfortable sharing their contact details with the researcher, were included in a raffle to win a £25 Amazon gift voucher. Contact details of the researcher, the department where the research was based, and the study's supervisor name and email address were sent to the participants.

The exact wording (see Appendix) that introduced participants to the study was as follows:

“This survey is part of a study on crisis communication and its cross-cultural implications carried out for my PhD research in the Department of Applied Linguistics and Communication at Birkbeck, University of London. Your participation will enable us to understand cultural differences & similarities in crisis communication and potentially improve corporate communication in the future.

The survey starts with general questions about your background and then finally considers two recent plane crashes (Germanwings 4U9525, Malaysia Airlines MH370), which happened in 2014 and 2015. You will be shown two clips which briefly introduce you to what happened followed by extracts from the press conferences of both airlines which took place immediately after the crashes occurred. The extracts from the press conferences will be in English and include occasional sound interference, therefore your English comprehension skills are expected to be very good.

You may wish to watch the video in full screen which can only be done on YouTube (click the YouTube icon on the bottom of the video screen). It is vital that you answer all questions straight after watching the clips as your immediate reaction is of interest to this study.

Two participants will be randomly chosen for a £25 Amazon gift voucher! Please leave your name and email address at the end of this questionnaire so we can contact you if you wish to be entered into the prize draw.

Your data will be securely stored, and no third party will have access to it. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me or the supervisor of this study if you have any further questions.”

Ensuring confidentiality of recovered data was maintained at all times, and identification of participants will not be available after the publication of this study (unless specifically indicated for the Amazon raffle). Participants were at no instant forced to participate in this study. The questionnaire could be aborted at any time and participants who initially agreed to take part in the study but for some reason chose not to do at a later stage were in no way pressured by the researcher. The protection of human subjects, their explicit consent and their confidentiality was at all times in accordance with ethical standards of the researcher's institution.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the theoretical outline for the study and shown why it is particularly suited for this study and research goals. It has done so by discussing the importance of identifying the underlying methodological principles that helped analyse and understand the data obtained. The approaches and methods for both data collection and data analysis were presented. This chapter has specified why a mixed methods sequential exploratory design has helped enrich the outcomes of the study, which are presented in detail in the following Chapter 4. The quantitative and qualitative methods employed have been explained, with detail given to validity and reliability. Finally, ethical considerations were discussed as it was paramount for the researcher to ensure comfortability, anonymity and appropriateness for those who partook in this study.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings from the data gathered through surveys with 181 participants, analysed inductively utilising the 23rd version of the computer assisted SPSS analysis (Field 2009), as described in Chapter 3 and a thematic analysis from two open ended survey questions. Chapter 4 is organised into two sections; Section A and Section B. Section A will utilise quantitative methods while Section B uses a qualitative approach. Both sections present findings from the same 39-question survey (see Appendix), which generated a multitude of findings, both quantitative and qualitative.

After a short presentation of the demographics and key variables investigated, results from the overarching question of what role culture plays in recipients' perception creation, will be presented. Secondly, a presentation of the findings will be given as to *how* a particular cultural background affects perception creation and subsequently organisational reputation. The findings presented in this chapter provide evidence for answering the research questions outlined in the literature review chapter.

Section A – Quantitative Analysis

4.2 Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher utilised data collected from surveys that were conducted within a period over six months. The survey was internet based and each participant who agreed to take part was forwarded a web link to the online survey. The survey consisted of 39 questions which includes a variety of variables of interest. The most commonly used questions utilised an interval level such as Likert scale or semantic differential questions. The survey consisted of three sections. The first part was the shortest identifying demographics such as age, home country, length of residency in the UK. The second and third part of the survey asked questions to evaluate the cultural influence on perception of crisis communication and to determine the effects it may have in the context of two plane crashes and their organisational reputation. Exhibits from two crises press conferences (Germanwings and Malaysia Airlines) were used as manipulation and shown to participants while taking the survey. Two ways of statistical methods were used: Findings are presented with mean scores *before* and *after* watching the videos and utilised Wilcoxon signed-rank test. To see differences in responses *between* country groups and thereby revealing inter-country group differences in perception of crisis communication clearer, One-Way ANOVA tests were executed, followed by Multiple Comparisons (Games-Howell Post-Hoc/Tukey HSD Post-Hoc) where applicable.

In this study, the mean and median provided the central tendency for each area studied, while the standard deviation offered an available definition to explain potential variations for each distribution. The main focus will be on results that are statistically significant. For non-normal distribution, the data was analysed using Wilcoxon signed-rank test, Paired-test and ANOVA. Statistically significant relationships were based on an alpha of .05 and .01.

4.2.1 Demographic Data

The first four questions of the survey aimed to find out vital demographic data about the participants. The frequency and percentage for participants' years of age, gender and home country distribution can be seen in Table 2-a to 2-c.

Table 2-a *Frequency and Percentage for Participants' Years of Age*

Age group	Frequency	Percent
18-24 years	85	46.9 %
25-34 years	73	40.3 %
35-44 years	16	8.8 %
45-54 years	6	3.3 %
54-64 years	1	0.5 %

Table 2-b *Frequency and Percentage for Participants by Gender*

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	66	36.5 %
Female	115	63.5 %

Thirty-two participants (17.6 %) of the population identified their home country as *China*, thirty-one as *France* (17.1 %), thirty-two as *UK* (17.6 %), twenty-seven as *Germany* (15.0 %), thirty-two as *Malaysia* (17.6 %) and twenty-seven participants stated that *Australia* is their home country (15.0 %).

Table 2-c *Participants' Home Country*

Country	Frequency	Percent
China	32	17.6 %
France	31	17.1 %
UK	32	17.6 %
Germany	27	15.0 %
Malaysia	32	17.6 %
Australia	27	15.0 %

Another factor that was determined within those introductory questions was years of residency in the *UK*. Seventy participants representing 38.6 % of the population have been residing in the *UK* for one year. Thirty-two participants representing 17.6 % have been in the *UK* for two years. Sixteen participants have been living in the *UK* for 3 years representing 8.8 % of the population, while only eleven participants (6.0 %)

state they have been living in the *UK* for four years. 52 participants which represents 28.7 % of the overall population indicated that they have been residents in the *UK* for five years or longer (Table 2-d).

Table 2-d *Years of Residency in the UK*

Years	Frequency	Percent
1 year	70	38.6 %
2 years	32	17.6 %
3 years	16	8.8 %
4 years	11	6.0 %
5 years or more	52	28.7 %

4.2.2 Instrument Reliability Analysis

This subsection aims to demonstrate reliability of the data collected. During the testing of the instrument, 181 participants took the survey containing 39 questions in total. As explained in Chapter 3, reliability of data was measured using Cronbach’s alpha which helped determine “consistency of measurement” (Gliem and Gliem, 2003). Cronbach’s alpha checks for the internal consistency of a given instrument in order to determine that all areas within the subscales (variables) correlate with each other (Gliem and Gliem, 2003). The significance of the alpha was explained in Chapter 3 (Table 1-c/1-d). The alpha coefficient of 0.81 signifies there is a strong reliability within the 39-question instrument (due to nature of answer option, 69 items tested for

reliability). To determine content validity, an in-depth continuous supervisor review yielded a satisfying result in adherence to latest academic standards.

4.3 Participants' Results: *Choice of Language*

While both airlines communicated to an international audience, the language they chose to communicate was different. In the first video German was used as the language for crisis communication. The video that the participants watched offered simultaneous translation. In the second video, Malaysia Airlines offered its press conference as well as official communication in English only. The findings show the home country groups reacted to the two different approaches to “*Choice of Language*”.

11) How appropriate is it to hold the first press conference in German and not in English? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

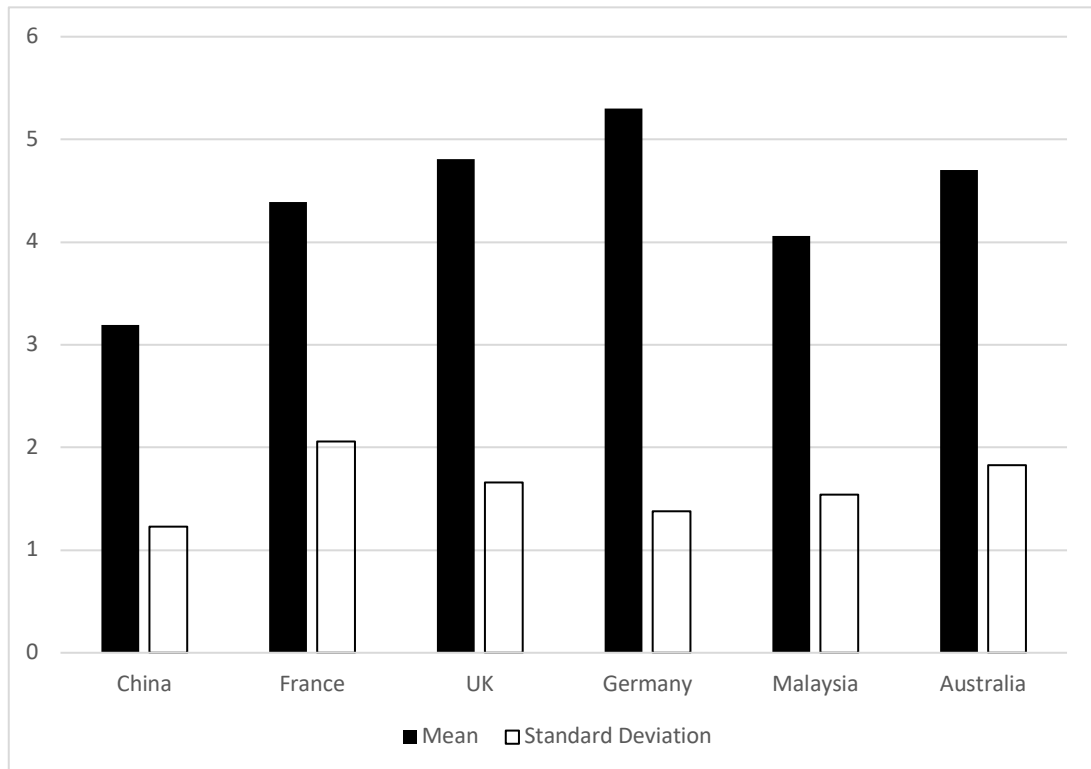
Not at all appropriate Very appropriate

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances showed that variances are not equal across groups, $F(5, 175) = 4.14, p < .01$. As the assumption of equal variances of groups have been violated, Games-Howell Post-Hoc test was used for multiple comparisons. First, descriptive statistics, including mean score (M) and standard deviation (SD), were calculated for each group, and the results are presented in Table 3-a.

Table 3-a *Germanwings Choice of Language (1/2)*

Home Country	M	SD	N
China	3.19	1.23	32
France	4.39	2.06	31
UK	4.81	1.66	32
Germany	5.30	1.38	27
Malaysia	4.06	1.54	32
Australia	4.70	1.68	27
Total	4.38	1.73	181

Figure 1.4 - *Germanwings Choice of Language (2/2)*



German participants had the highest mean score ($M= 5.30$, $SD= 1.38$) and indicated the highest acceptance of the organisation's Choice of Language, while Chinese respondents had the lowest scores ($M= 3.19$, $SD= 1.23$), showing a dislike for the Choice of Language and simultaneous translation into English. However, the between

country groups analysis revealed significant disparity (Table 3-b), signifying the effects language has on audience of crisis communication.

One-Way ANOVA indicated that there were statistically significant differences in Germanwings Choice of Language across different home country groups,

$F(1, 175) = 6.15, p < .0001, \text{partial Eta Squared} = 0.15.$

Table 3-b *Multiple Comparisons – Games-Howell Post-Hoc test for Germanwings Choice of Language*

(I) Home Country	(J) Home Country	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p
China	<i>France</i>	-1.20	.43	.08
	<i>UK</i>	-1.63*	.36	.00
	<i>Germany</i>	-2.11*	.34	.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.88	.35	.14
	<i>Australia</i>	-1.52*	.39	.00
France	<i>China</i>	1.20	.43	.075
	<i>UK</i>	-.43	.47	.94
	<i>Germany</i>	-.91	.46	.36
	<i>Malaysia</i>	.33	.46	.98
	<i>Australia</i>	-.32	.49	.99
UK	<i>China</i>	1.63*	.36	.00
	<i>France</i>	.43	.47	.94
	<i>Germany</i>	-.48	.40	.82
	<i>Malaysia</i>	.75	.40	.43
	<i>Australia</i>	.11	.44	1.000
Germany	<i>China</i>	2.11*	.34	.00
	<i>France</i>	.91	.46	.36
	<i>UK</i>	.48	.40	.82
	<i>Malaysia</i>	1.24*	.38	.02
	<i>Australia</i>	.59	.42	.72
Malaysia	<i>China</i>	.88	.35	.14
	<i>France</i>	-.33	.46	.98
	<i>UK</i>	-.75	.40	.43
	<i>Germany</i>	-1.24*	.38	.02
	<i>Australia</i>	-.64	.42	.66
Australia	<i>China</i>	1.52*	.39	.00
	<i>France</i>	.32	.49	.99
	<i>UK</i>	-.11	.44	1.00
	<i>Germany</i>	-.59	.42	.72
	<i>Malaysia</i>	.64	.42	.66

Note. Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square (Error) = 1.92. * $p < .05.$

Significant group differences were observed at $p < .05$:

China (I) and UK (J) with -1.63 (I-J) at SE = .36 and vice versa*

China (I) and Germany (J) with -2.11 at SE = .34 and vice versa*

China (I) and Australia (J) with -1.52 at SE = .39 and vice versa*

Germany (I) and Malaysia with 1.24 at SE = .38 and vice versa*

The results reveal that a disparity between China and UK home country respondents exists with large differences in mean scores. Chinese participants find it unfitting to hold the press conference in a language that needs to be simultaneously translated. The results indicate a higher importance for comprehending the explicit communication for China home group participants than for UK participants.

The findings for language confirmed Germany's appreciation for verbal assertiveness and a high importance placed on language as primary mean of transmitting explicit information as previously described by Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) in the 2nd edition of *Understanding Intercultural Communication*. The findings also reveal that in the sample of 27 Australian respondents, explicit communication is not categorically needed even in the case of crisis communication showing a more traditional Eastern acceptance of acquiring knowledge as stated by Lewis (2006). For Malaysian participants the second lowest mean score of $M= 4.06$ was seen which shows that gaining knowledge through verbal means is seen as very important and should be considered a primary aspect for perception creation in for Malaysian participants in crisis communication.

The same country comparison was carried out for Malaysia Airlines to highlight potential cultural differences in relation to “Choice of Language”. The same test, One-Way ANOVA was applied. However, since the assumption of equal variance for Malaysia Airlines (English as the language of crisis communication) was satisfied. Hence, a Tukey HSD Post-Hoc test for multiple comparisons was used:

24) How appropriate is it to hold the first press conference in English (official language) and not in Malay (local language)? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at all appropriate ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Very appropriate

Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances showed that variances are equal across groups,

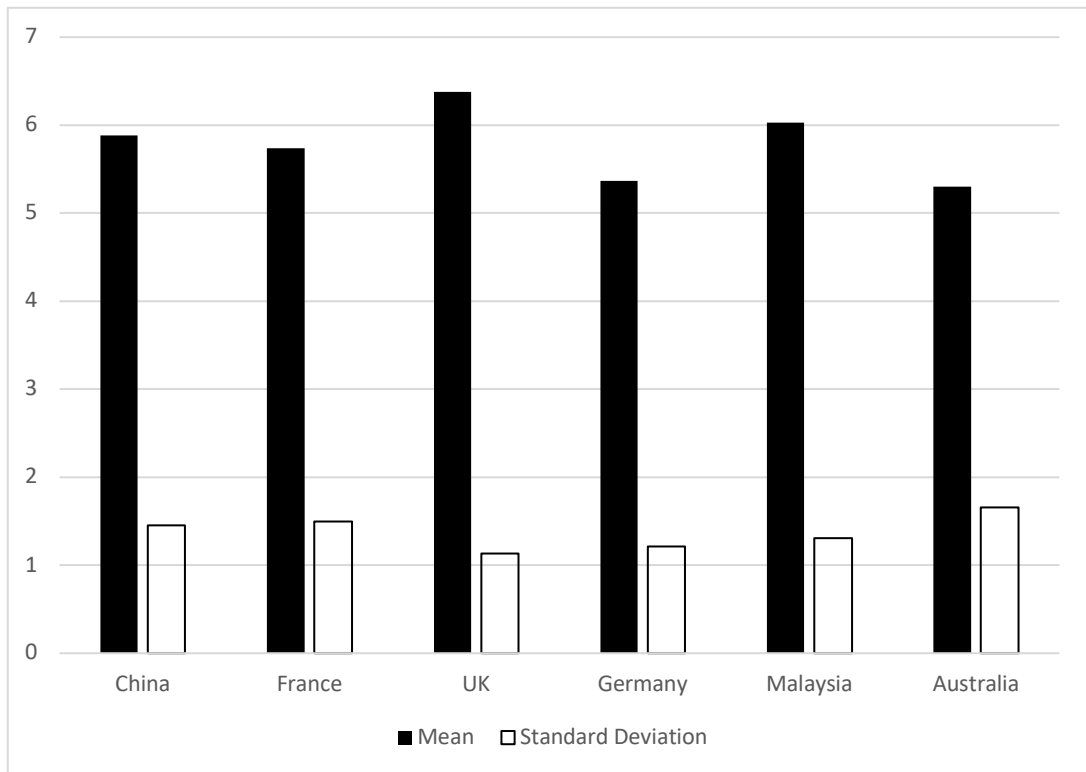
$F(5, 175) = 1.96, p > .05$. As the assumption of equal variances of groups have been satisfied, Tukey HSD Post-Hoc test was used for multiple comparisons.

First, descriptive statistics, including mean score and SD, were calculated for each group, and the results are presented in Table 3-c.

Table 3-c *Malaysia Airlines Choice of Language (1/2)*

Home Country	M	SD	N
China	5.88	1.45	32
France	5.74	1.50	31
UK	6.38	1.13	32
Germany	5.37	1.21	27
Malaysia	6.03	1.31	32
Australia	5.30	1.66	27
Total	5.81	1.41	181

Figure 1.5 - Malaysia Airlines Choice of Language (2/2)



One-Way ANOVA indicated that there was at least one statistically significant difference in Malaysia Airlines Choice of Language across different home country groups, $F(1, 175) = 2.54, p < .05$, partial Eta Squared = 0.07.

Table 3-d Multiple Comparisons – Tukey HSD Post-Hoc test for Malaysia Airlines
Choice of Language

(I) Home Country	(J) Home Country	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p
China	<i>France</i>	.13	.35	1.00
	<i>UK</i>	-.50	.35	.70
	<i>Germany</i>	.51	.36	.73
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.16	.35	.99
	<i>Australia</i>	.58	.36	.60
France	<i>China</i>	-.13	.35	1.00
	<i>UK</i>	-.63	.35	.46
	<i>Germany</i>	.37	.36	.91
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.29	.35	.96
UK	<i>Australia</i>	.45	.36	.83
	<i>China</i>	.50	.35	.70
	<i>France</i>	.63	.35	.46
	<i>Germany</i>	1.01	.36	.07
	<i>Malaysia</i>	.34	.35	.92
	<i>Australia</i>	1.08*	.36	.04
Germany	<i>China</i>	-.51	.36	.73
	<i>France</i>	-.37	.36	.91
	<i>UK</i>	-1.01	.36	.07
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.66	.36	.45
	<i>Australia</i>	.07	.38	1.00
Malaysia	<i>China</i>	.16	.35	1.00
	<i>France</i>	.29	.35	.96
	<i>UK</i>	-.34	.35	.92
	<i>Germany</i>	.66	.36	.45
	<i>Australia</i>	.74	.36	.33
Australia	<i>China</i>	-.58	.36	.60
	<i>France</i>	-.45	.36	.83
	<i>UK</i>	-1.08*	.36	.04
	<i>Germany</i>	-.07	.38	1.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.74	.36	.33

Note. Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square (Error) = 1.92. *p < .05.

Significant mean difference between country groups of participants for Malaysia Airlines Choice of Language was observed only for the following:

Significant group differences were observed at $p < .05$:

UK (I) and Australia (J) with 1.08 (I-J) at SE = .36 and vice versa*

It was observed that all participants, including Germans, favoured the use of English as Choice of Language for international crisis communication. Chinese participants showed the highest mean increase ($M_{German}= 3.19$ to $M_{English}= 5.88$) further refuting the validity of the high vs. low contextualising in crisis communication. While UK participants find it most appropriate to use English, Australian participants showed the lowest interest ($M_{English}= 5.30$) and a greater tolerance for crisis communication in language other than English.

4.3.1 Information Content: *Names and Nationalities of Victims*

A noteworthy distinction between both crisis communication approaches was the almost instant release of names and nationalities of victims to the public in one case (Malaysia Airlines) and the protection of privacy of the deceased and their families in the other case (Germanwings). Participants were asked to evaluate both approaches to see if preferences of one or the other exists within country groups.

In the first case, Germanwings - refusal to release names immediately, statistically significant difference was found:

14) How appropriate was it to NOT release the names & nationalities of the victims?

Both were published much later after every case was confirmed

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at all appropriate Very appropriate

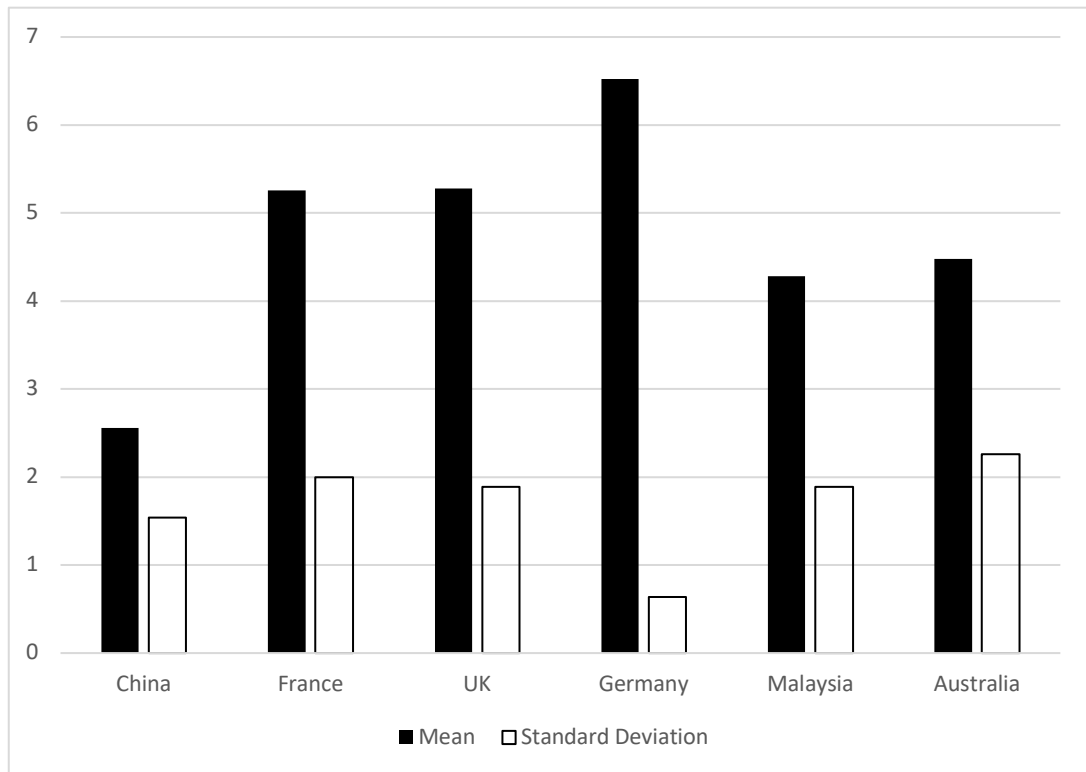
Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances showed that variances not are equal across groups, $F(5, 175) = 10.28, p < .0001$. As the assumption of equal variances of groups have been violated, Games-Howell Post-Hoc test was used for multiple comparisons.

First, descriptive statistics, including mean score and SD, were calculated for each group, and the results are presented in Table 3-e and depicted in a bar chart below:

Table 3-e *Germanwings Refusing to Release the Names (1/2)*

Home Country	M	SD	N
China	2.56	1.54	32
France	5.26	2.00	31
UK	5.28	1.89	32
Germany	6.52	.64	27
Malaysia	4.28	1.89	32
Australia	4.48	2.26	27
Total	4.69	2.14	181

Figure 1.6 *Germanwings Refusing to Release the Names (2/2)*



One-Way ANOVA indicated that there were statistically significant differences in Germanwings Refusing to Release the Names across different home country groups, $F(1, 175) = 16.48, p < .0001$, partial Eta Squared = 0.32.

Table 3-f *Multiple Comparisons – Games-Howell Post-Hoc test for Germanwings Refusing to Release the Names*

(I) Home Country	(J) Home Country	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p
China	<i>France</i>	-2.70*	.45	.00
	<i>UK</i>	-2.72*	.43	.00
	<i>Germany</i>	-3.96*	.30	.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-1.72*	.43	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	-1.92*	.51	.00
France	<i>China</i>	2.70*	.45	.00
	<i>UK</i>	-.02	.49	1.00
	<i>Germany</i>	-1.26*	.38	.02

	<i>Malaysia</i>	.98	.49	.36
	<i>Australia</i>	.78	.56	.74
UK	<i>China</i>	2.72*	.43	.00
	<i>France</i>	.023	.49	1.000
	<i>Germany</i>	-1.24*	.36	.02
	<i>Malaysia</i>	1.00	.47	.29
	<i>Australia</i>	.80	.55	.69
Germany	<i>China</i>	3.96*	.30	.00
	<i>France</i>	1.26*	.38	.02
	<i>UK</i>	1.24*	.36	.02
	<i>Malaysia</i>	2.24*	.36	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	2.04*	.45	.00
Malaysia	<i>China</i>	1.72*	.43	.00
	<i>France</i>	-.98	.49	.36
	<i>UK</i>	-1.00	.47	.29
	<i>Germany</i>	-2.24*	.36	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	-.20	.55	1.00
Australia	<i>China</i>	1.92*	.51	.01
	<i>France</i>	-.78	.56	.74
	<i>UK</i>	-.80	.55	.69
	<i>Germany</i>	-2.04*	.45	.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	.20	.55	1.00

Note. Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square (Error) = 3.19. *p < .05.

Significant group differences were observed at $p < .05$:

China (I) and France (J) with -2.70 (I-J) at SE = .45 and vice versa*

China (I) and UK (J) with -2.72 at SE = .43 and vice versa*

China (I) and Germany (J) with -3.96 at SE = .30 and vice versa*

China (I) and Malaysia (J) with -1.72 at SE = .43 and vice versa*

China (I) and Australia (J) with -1.92 at SE = .51 and vice versa*

France (I) and Germany (J) with -1.26 at SE = .38 and vice versa*

UK (I) and Germany (J) with -1.24 at SE = .36 and vice versa*

Germany (I) and Malaysia (J) with 2.24 at SE = .36 and vice versa*

Germany (I) and Australia (J) with 2.04 at SE = .45 and vice versa*

The same analysis was conducted for Malaysia Airlines and their decision to immediately release names and nationalities of passengers on board Flight MH370:

27) How appropriate was it TO release the names & nationalities of the victims? *

Names were published shortly after the press conference

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

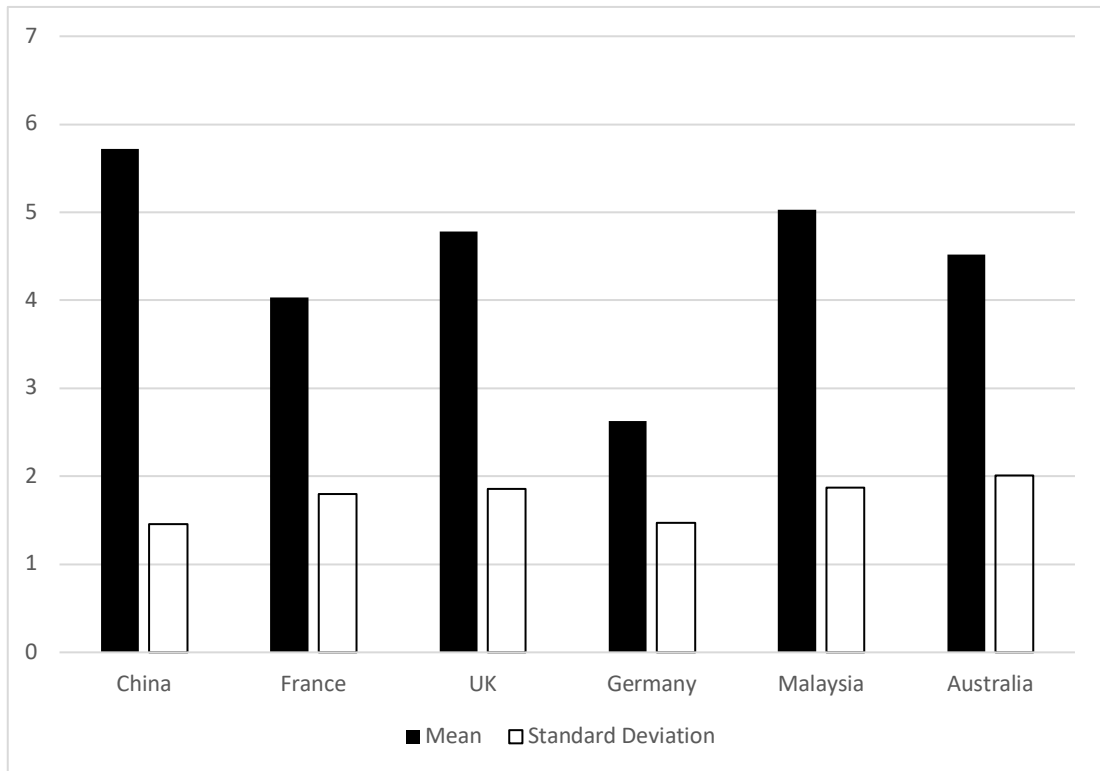
Not at all appropriate Very appropriate

Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances showed that variances are equal across groups, $F(5, 175) = 1.75, p > .05$. As the assumption of equal variances of groups have been satisfied, Tukey HSD Post-Hoc test was used for multiple comparisons. First, descriptive statistics, including mean score and *SD*, were calculated for each group, and the results are presented in Table 3-g and the corresponding bar chart below:

Table 3-g *Malaysia Airlines Releasing the Names (1/2)*

Home Country	M	SD	N
China	5.72	1.46	32
France	4.03	1.80	31
UK	4.78	1.86	32
Germany	2.63	1.47	27
Malaysia	5.03	1.87	32
Australia	4.52	2.01	27
Total	4.50	1.97	181

Figure 1.7 *Malaysia Airlines Releasing the Names (2/2)*



One-Way ANOVA indicated that there were statistically significant differences in Malaysia Airlines Releasing the Names across different home country groups, $F(1, 175) = 10.38, p < .0001$, partial Eta Squared = 0.23.

Table 3-h *Multiple Comparisons – Tukey HSD Post-Hoc test for Malaysia Airlines Refusing to Release the Names*

(I) Home Country	(J) Home Country	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p
China	<i>France</i>	1.69*	.44	.00
	<i>UK</i>	.94	.44	.28
	<i>Germany</i>	3.09*	.46	.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	.69	.44	.62
	<i>Australia</i>	1.20	.46	.10
France	<i>China</i>	-1.69*	.44	.00
	<i>UK</i>	-.75	.44	.54
	<i>Germany</i>	1.40*	.46	.03
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-1.00	.44	.22

	<i>Australia</i>	-.49	.46	.90
	<i>China</i>	-.94	.44	.28
	<i>France</i>	.75	.44	.54
UK	<i>Germany</i>	2.15*	.46	.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.25	.44	.99
	<i>Australia</i>	.26	.46	.99
	<i>China</i>	-3.09*	.46	.00
	<i>France</i>	-1.40*	.46	.03
Germany	<i>UK</i>	-2.15*	.46	.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-2.40*	.46	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	-1.89*	.48	.00
	<i>China</i>	-.69	.44	.62
	<i>France</i>	1.00	.44	.22
Malaysia	<i>UK</i>	.25	.44	.99
	<i>Germany</i>	2.40*	.46	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	.51	.46	.87
	<i>China</i>	-1.20	.46	.10
	<i>France</i>	.49	.46	.90
Australia	<i>UK</i>	-.26	.46	.99
	<i>Germany</i>	1.89*	.48	.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.51	.46	.87

Note. Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square (Error) = 3.09. * $p < .05$.

Significant group differences were observed at $p < .05$:

China (I) and France (J) with 1.69 (I-J) at SE = .44 and vice versa*

China (I) and Germany (J) with 3.09 at SE = .30 and vice versa*

France (I) and Germany (J) with 1.40 at SE = .46 and vice versa*

UK (I) and Germany (J) with 2.15 at SE = .46 and vice versa*

Germany (I) and Malaysia (J) with -2.40 at SE = .46 and vice versa*

Germany (I) and Australia (J) with -1.89 at SE = .48 and vice versa*

The findings regarding that information clearly show the high level of cultural influence on crisis communication. Chinese ($M= 5.72$) respondents strongly favoured the release of that information, while Germans on the other hand, showed the lowest interest in that information ($M= 2.63$).

The second largest between group difference was found between Malaysia and Germany. Differences were also found between Germany and the UK which also signifies a very different cultural appreciation for such personal information.

The divergence that can be observed between German results, with a strong disapproval for releasing sensitive information, and other home country groups such as UK participants strengthens the argument of a unique cultural influence for shaping perception based on what is considered core information content such as publication of names and nationalities for the home country groups in this study.

4.3.2 *Attribution of Responsibility for Crisis*

Participants were asked to evaluate the airlines' level of responsibility for the crisis. This was done twice; before watching the crisis communication efforts and thereafter. The results show a contrast when evaluating attribution of responsibility for the six home country groups.

19) How much responsibility should Germanwings take for the crash? *

1=Not at all responsible 5=Totally responsible

	1	2	3	4	5
Before watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances showed that variances are not equal across groups, $F(5, 175) = 2.40, p < .05$. As the assumption of equal variances of groups have been violated, Games-Howell Post-Hoc test should be used for multiple comparisons. First, descriptive statistics, including mean score and *SD*, were calculated for each group, and the results are presented in Table 4-a and a bar chart below. For better comparison, the before and after results are also shown in Figure 1.8/1.9.

Table 4-a *Germanwings Responsibility BEFORE watching the Video (1/3)*

Home Country	M	SD	N
China	3.84	.63	32
France	3.87	.85	31
UK	3.44	.98	32
Germany	3.44	.97	27
Malaysia	4.28	.85	32
Australia	3.96	.85	27
Total	3.81	.89	181

Figure 1.8 *Germanwings Responsibility BEFORE watching the Video (2/3)*

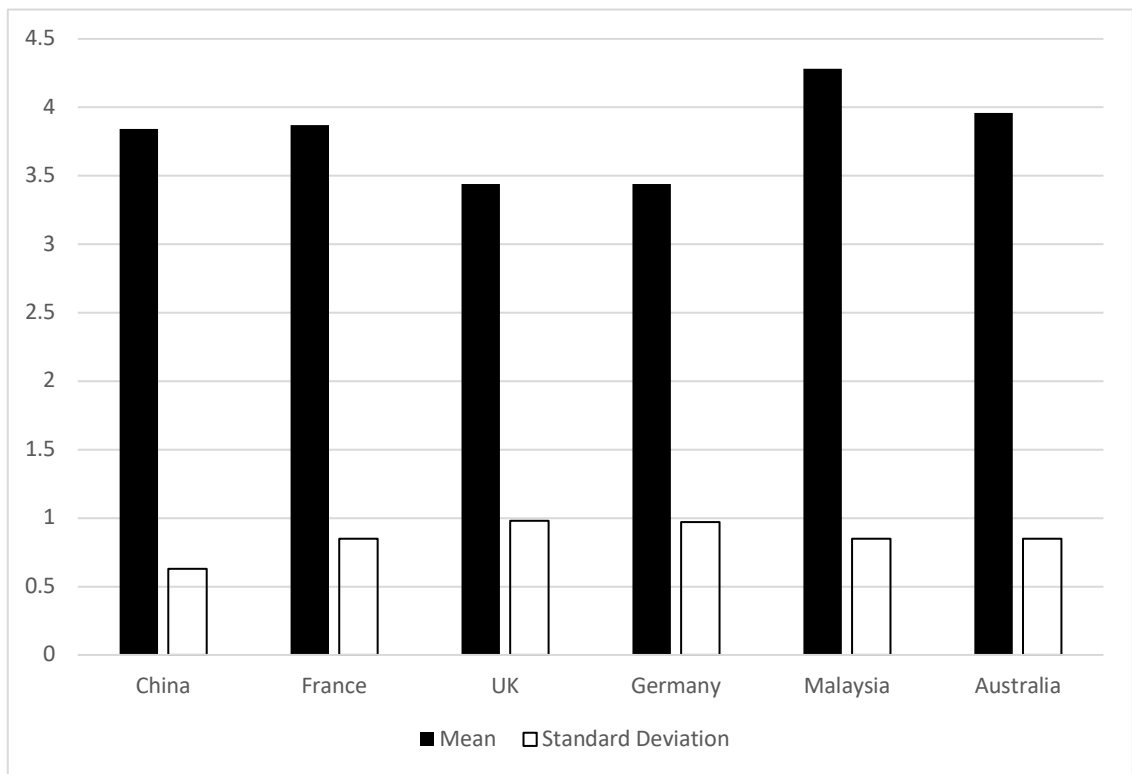
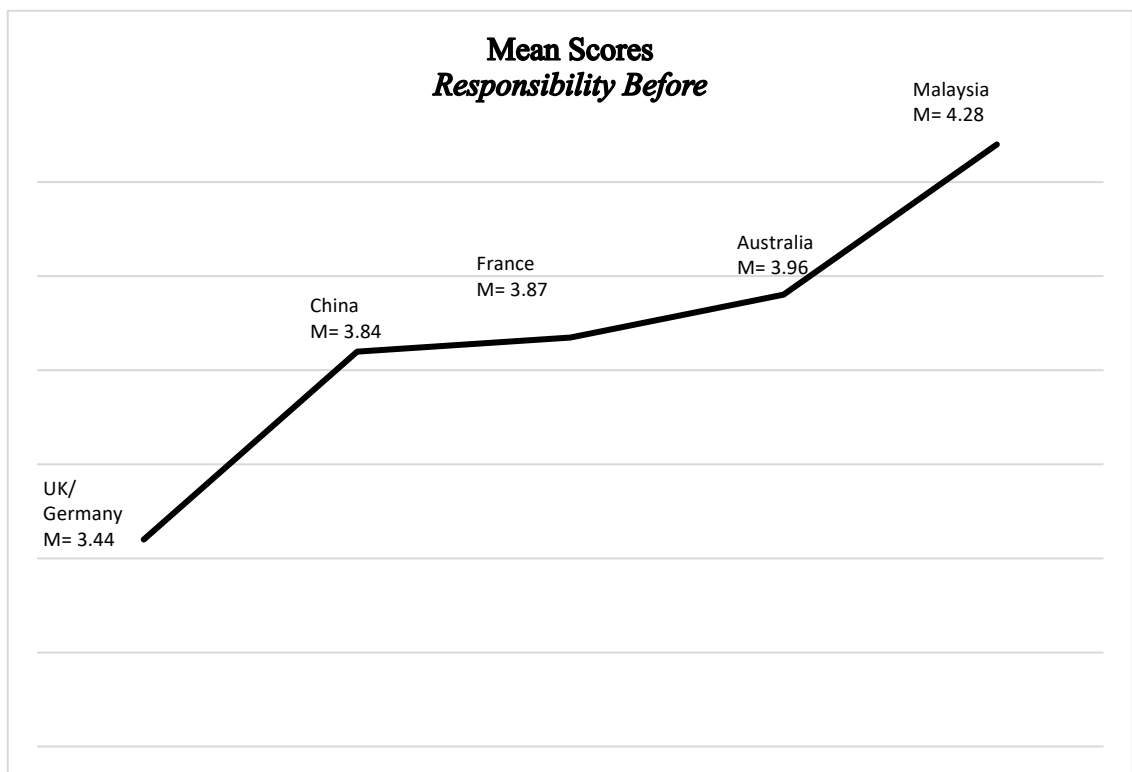


Figure 1.9 *Germanwings Responsibility BEFORE watching the Video (3/3)*



One-Way ANOVA indicated that there were statistically significant differences in Germanwings Responsibility watching the video across different home country groups, $F(1, 175) = 4.30, p < .01, \text{partial Eta Squared} = 0.11$.

Table 4-b *Multiple Comparisons – Games-Howell Post-Hoc test for Germanwings Responsibility BEFORE watching the Video*

(I) Home Country	(J) Home Country	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p
China	<i>France</i>	-.03	.19	1.00
	<i>UK</i>	.41	.21	.37
	<i>Germany</i>	.40	.22	.46
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.44	.19	.20
	<i>Australia</i>	-.12	.20	.99
France	<i>China</i>	.03	.19	1.00
	<i>UK</i>	.43	.23	.43
	<i>Germany</i>	.43	.24	.50
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.41	.21	.40
	<i>Australia</i>	-.09	.22	1.00
UK	<i>China</i>	-.41	.21	.37
	<i>France</i>	-.43	.23	.43
	<i>Germany</i>	-.01	.26	1.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.84*	.23	.01
	<i>Australia</i>	-.53	.24	.26
Germany	<i>China</i>	-.40	.22	.46
	<i>France</i>	-.43	.24	.50
	<i>UK</i>	.01	.26	1.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.84*	.24	.01
	<i>Australia</i>	-.52	.25	.31
Malaysia	<i>China</i>	.44	.19	.20
	<i>France</i>	.41	.21	.40
	<i>UK</i>	.84*	.23	.01
	<i>Germany</i>	.84*	.24	.01
	<i>Australia</i>	.32	.22	.71
Australia	<i>China</i>	.12	.20	.99
	<i>France</i>	.09	.22	1.00
	<i>UK</i>	.53	.24	.26
	<i>Germany</i>	.52	.25	.31
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.32	.22	.71

Note. Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square (Error) = 0.74. * $p < .05$.

Significant mean group differences were observed at $p < .05$:

UK (I) and Malaysia (J) with $-.84^$ (I-J) at $SE = .23$ and vice versa*

Germany (I) and Malaysia (J) with $-.84^$ at $SE = .24$ and vice versa*

The following results show how attribution of responsibility for Germanwings changed *after* watching the airlines' communication efforts:

19) How much responsibility should Germanwings take for the crash? *

1=Not at all responsible 5=Totally responsible

	1	2	3	4	5
After watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances showed that variances are equal across groups, $F(5, 175) = 1.62, p > .05$. As the assumption of equal variances of groups have been satisfied, Tukey HSD Post-Hoc test was used for multiple comparisons.

First, descriptive statistics, including mean score and *SD*, were calculated for each group. The following table with home country mean scores and the corresponding bar chart and graph visualise the results obtained from participants *after* watching the Germanwings crisis press conference.

Table 4-c *Germanwings Responsibility AFTER watching the Video (1/3)*

Home Country	M	SD	N
China	3.88	.71	32
France	3.90	.98	31
UK	3.50	.95	32
Germany	3.19	1.04	27
Malaysia	4.38	.83	32
Australia	3.85	.99	27
Total	3.80	.98	181

Figure 2.0 *Germanwings Responsibility AFTER watching the Video (2/3)*

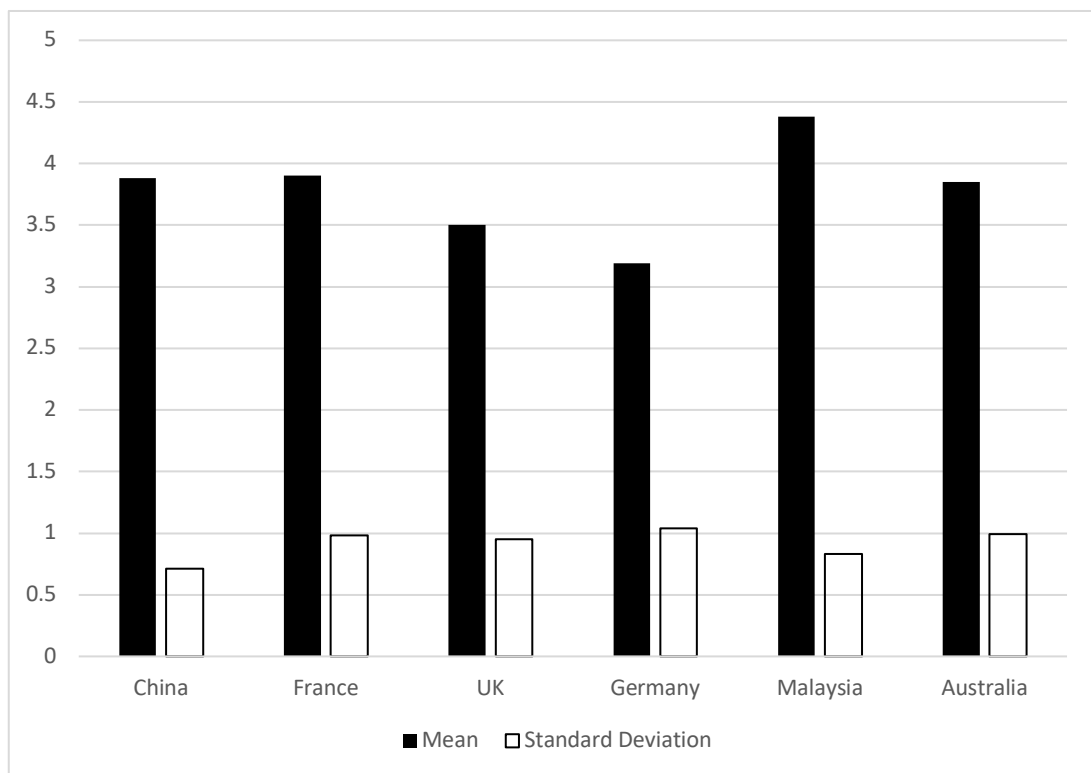
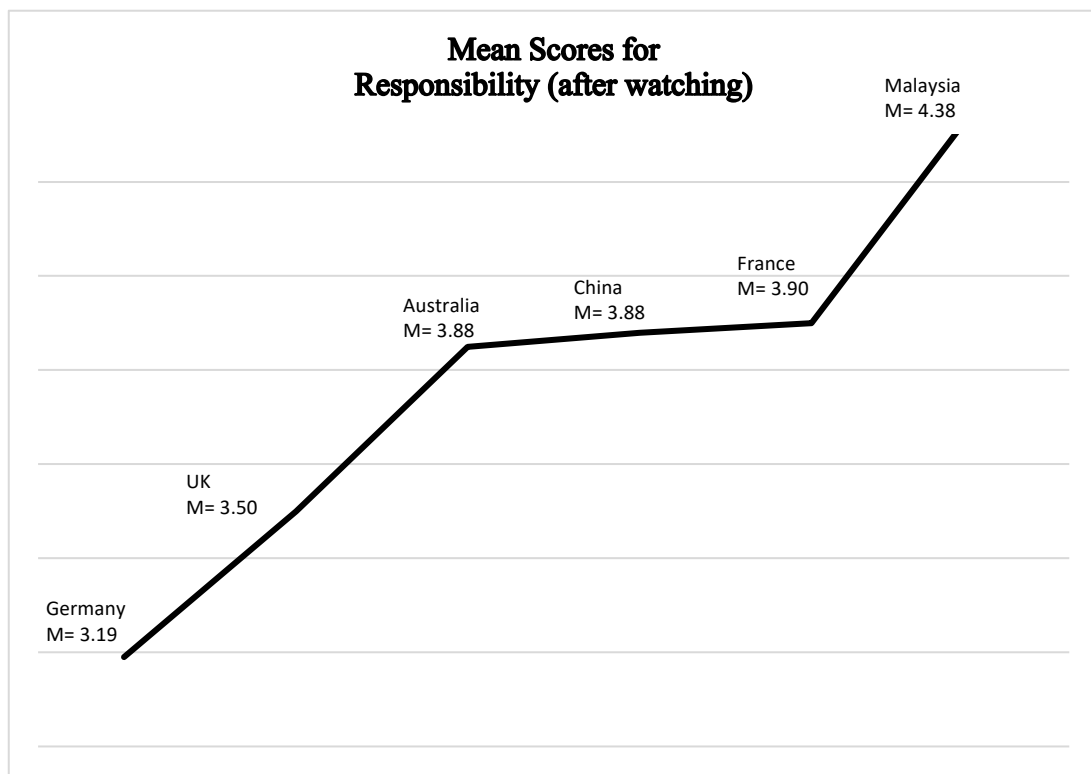


Figure 2.1 *Germanwings Responsibility AFTER watching the Video (3/3)*



One-Way ANOVA indicated that there were statistically significant differences Germanwings Responsibility after watching the video across different home country groups, $F(1, 175) = 5.77, p < .0001$, partial Eta Squared = 0.14 is shown below.

Table 4-d *Multiple Comparisons – Tukey HSD Post-Hoc test for Germanwings Responsibility AFTER watching the Video*

(I) Home Country	(J) Home Country	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p
China	<i>France</i>	-.03	.23	1.00
	<i>UK</i>	.38	.23	.58
	<i>Germany</i>	.69	.24	.05
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.50	.23	.25
	<i>Australia</i>	.02	.24	1.00
France	<i>China</i>	.03	.23	1.00

	<i>UK</i>	.40	.23	.50
	<i>Germany</i>	.72*	.24	.04
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.47	.23	.32
	<i>Australia</i>	.05	.24	1.00
	<i>China</i>	-.38	.23	.58
	<i>France</i>	-.40	.23	.50
UK	<i>Germany</i>	.32	.24	.78
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.88*	.23	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	-.35	.24	.69
	<i>China</i>	-.69	.24	.05
	<i>France</i>	-.72*	.24	.04
Germany	<i>UK</i>	-.32	.24	.78
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-1.20*	.24	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	-.67	.25	.09
	<i>China</i>	.50	.23	.25
	<i>France</i>	.47	.23	.32
Malaysia	<i>UK</i>	.88*	.23	.00
	<i>Germany</i>	1.20*	.24	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	.52	.24	.25
	<i>China</i>	-.02	.24	1.00
	<i>France</i>	-.05	.24	1.00
Australia	<i>UK</i>	.35	.24	.69
	<i>Germany</i>	.67	.25	.09
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.52	.24	.25

Note. Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square (Error) = 0.84. * $p < .05$.

Significant group differences were observed at $p < .05$:

France (I) and Germany (J) with .72* at $SE = .24$ and vice versa

UK (I) and Malaysia (J) with -.88* at $SE = .23$ and vice versa

Germany (I) and Malaysia (J) with 1.20* at $SE = .24$ and vice versa

As French participants' mean scores increased ever so slightly ($M_{Before} = 3.87$ to $M_{After} = 3.90$), they deviated from reduced German scores ($M_{Before} = 3.19$ to $M_{After} = 3.44$). The effort by the spokesperson was not sufficient for French standards to reduce

the attributed level of responsibility. Significant differences between UK and Malaysia is a continuation of attribution of responsibility as seen before.

The greatest difference observed was between Germany and Malaysia which increased further after watching the communication efforts. While German participants were the only ones who slightly lowered their view on attributing reputation to Germanwings, the between group differences increased as Malaysian participants attributed even more responsibility after reviewing the communication efforts.

The same before and after effects were analysed for Malaysia Airlines and how participants changed in their perception on the organisation’s responsibility after evaluating the corresponding crisis communication efforts:

32) How much responsibility should Malaysia Airlines take for the crash? *

1=Not at all responsible 5=Totally responsible

	1	2	3	4	5
Before watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances showed that variances are equal across groups, $F(5, 175) = 1.45, p > .05$. As the assumption of equal variances of groups have been satisfied, Tukey HSD Post-Hoc test was used for multiple comparisons.

First, descriptive statistics, including mean score and *SD*, were calculated for each group, and the results are presented in Table 4-e.

Table 4-e *Malaysia Airlines Responsibility BEFORE watching the Video (1/3)*

Home Country	M	SD	N
China	4.13	1.01	32
France	3.42	.99	31
UK	3.59	.87	32
Germany	2.85	.95	27
Malaysia	4.13	.98	32
Australia	3.67	1.21	27
Total	3.65	1.08	181

Figure 2.2 *Malaysia Airlines Responsibility BEFORE watching the Video (2/3)*

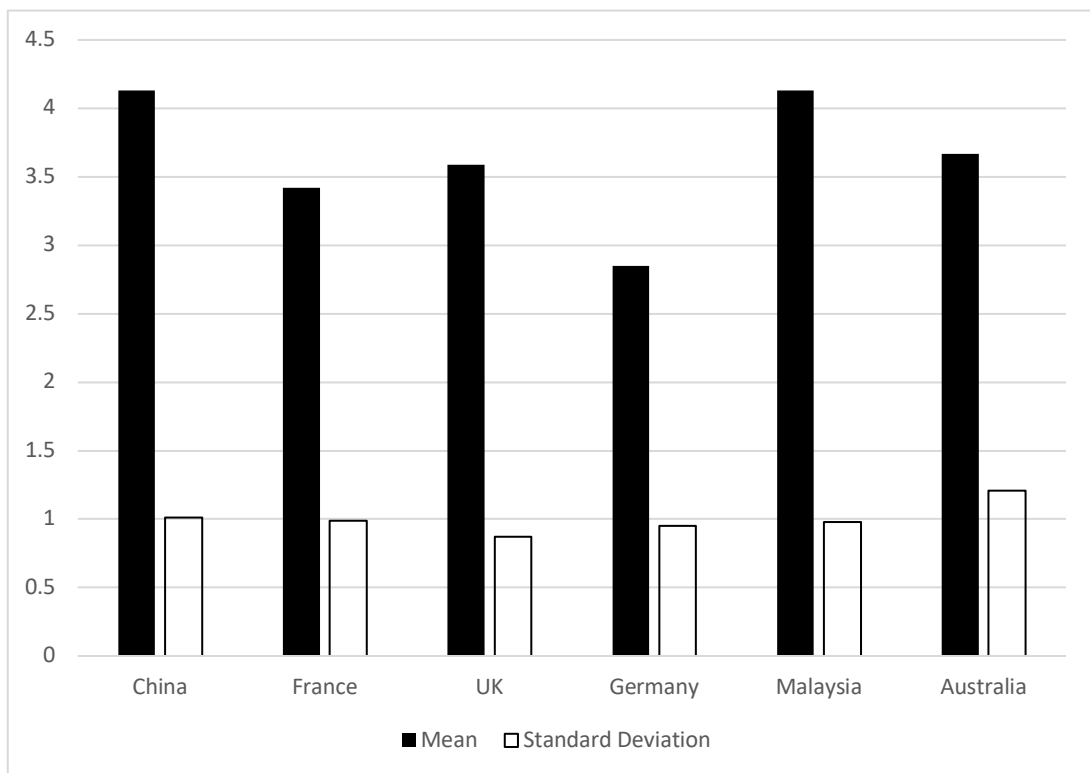
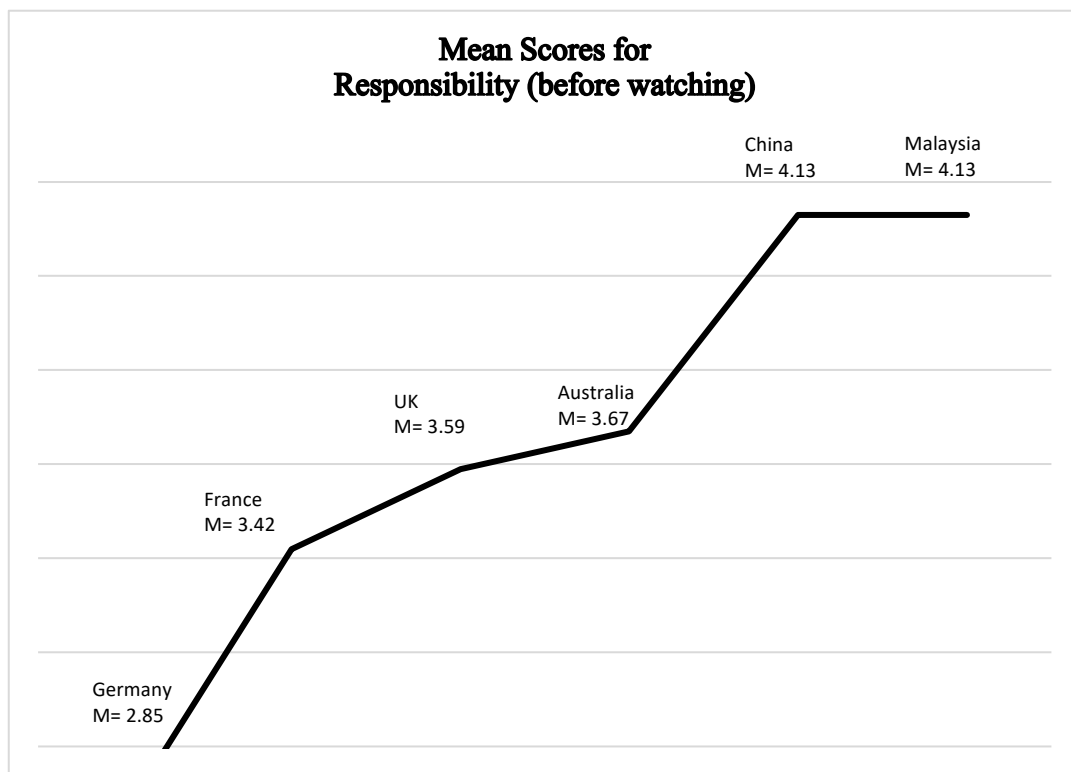


Figure 2.3 *Malaysia Airlines Responsibility BEFORE watching the Video (3/3)*



The graph before watching the crisis efforts by Malaysia Airlines shows again the attribution of responsibility by all participants in the second case. Participants most affected, Malaysian ($M= 4.13$) and Chinese ($M= 4.13$) said that Malaysia Airlines is close to being “totally responsible” for Flight MH370. German respondents perceived the airline, just like with Germanwings, to be limited responsible for a crash showing a low likelihood to attribute responsibility before watching the crisis communication efforts.

One-Way ANOVA indicated that there were statistically significant differences Malaysia Airlines Responsibility before watching the video across different home country groups, $F(1, 175) = 6.65, p < .0001$, partial Eta Squared = 0.16.

Table 4-f *Multiple Comparisons – Tukey HSD Post-Hoc test for Malaysia Airlines Responsibility BEFORE watching the Video*

(I) Home Country	(J) Home Country	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p
China	<i>France</i>	.71	.25	.06
	<i>UK</i>	.53	.25	.28
	<i>Germany</i>	1.27*	.26	.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	.00	.25	1.00
	<i>Australia</i>	.46	.26	.50
France	<i>China</i>	-.71	.25	.06
	<i>UK</i>	-.17	.25	.98
	<i>Germany</i>	.57	.26	.27
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.71	.25	.06
	<i>Australia</i>	-.25	.26	.94
UK	<i>China</i>	-.53	.25	.28
	<i>France</i>	.17	.25	.98
	<i>Germany</i>	.74	.26	.06
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.53	.25	.28
	<i>Australia</i>	-.07	.26	1.00
Germany	<i>China</i>	-1.27*	.26	.00
	<i>France</i>	-.57	.26	.27
	<i>UK</i>	-.74	.26	.06
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-1.27*	.25	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	-.82*	.27	.04
Malaysia	<i>China</i>	.00	.25	1.00
	<i>France</i>	.71	.25	.06
	<i>UK</i>	.53	.25	.28
	<i>Germany</i>	1.27*	.25	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	.46	.26	.50
Australia	<i>China</i>	-.46	.26	.50
	<i>France</i>	.25	.26	.94
	<i>UK</i>	.07	.26	1.00
	<i>Germany</i>	.82*	.27	.04
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.46	.26	.50

Note. Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square (Error) = 1.00. *p < .05.

Significant group differences were observed at $p < .05$:

China (I) and Germany (J) with 1.27 at SE = .26 and vice versa*

Germany (I) and Malaysia (J) with -1.27 at SE = .25 and vice versa*

Germany (I) and Australia (J) with .82 at SE = .27 and vice versa*

The following results show how perception on Malaysia Airlines' responsibility changed *after* watching their crisis communication attempts:

32) How much responsibility should Malaysia Airlines take for the crash? *

1=Not at all responsible 5=Totally responsible

	1	2	3	4	5
After watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances showed that variances are equal across groups, $F(5, 175) = 0.33, p > .05$. As the assumption of equal variances of groups have been satisfied, Tukey HSD Post-Hoc test was used for multiple comparisons.

First, descriptive statistics, including mean score and *SD*, were calculated for each group, and the results are presented in Table 4-g + Figure 2.4/2.5.

Table 4-g *Malaysia Airlines Responsibility AFTER watching the Video (1/3)*

Home Country	M	SD	N
China	3.78	1.01	32
France	3.45	1.09	31
UK	3.66	1.04	32
Germany	3.30	1.07	27
Malaysia	4.13	.98	32
Australia	3.78	1.01	27
Total	3.69	1.05	181

Figure 2.4 *Malaysia Airlines Responsibility AFTER watching the Video (2/3)*

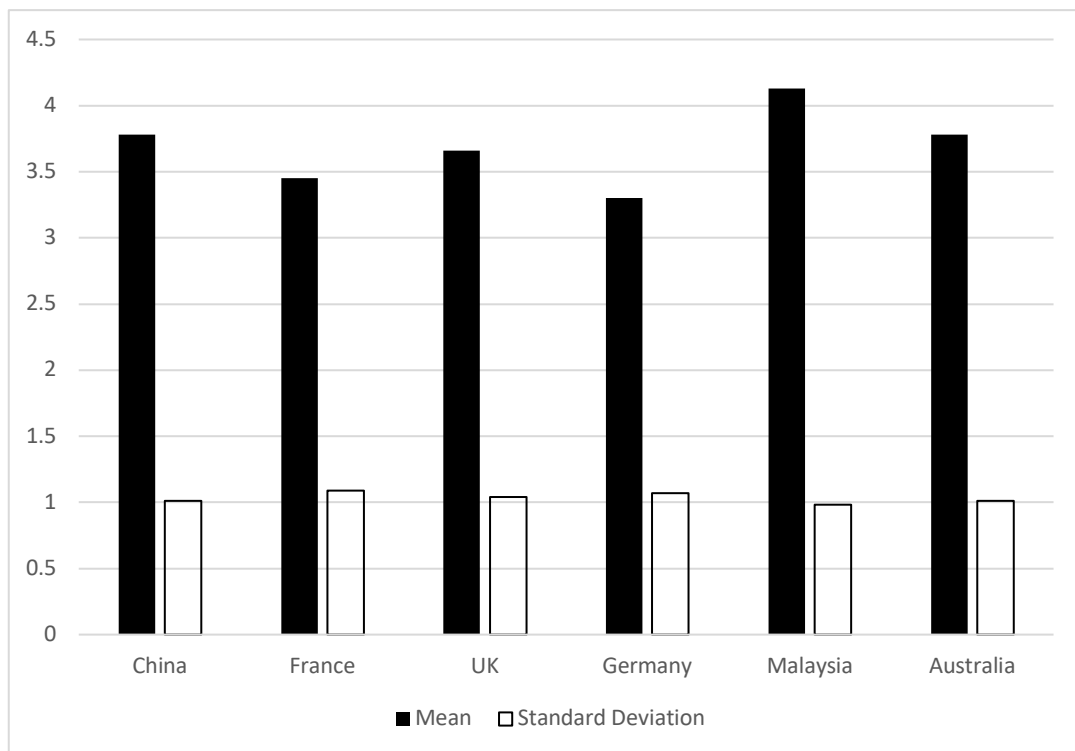
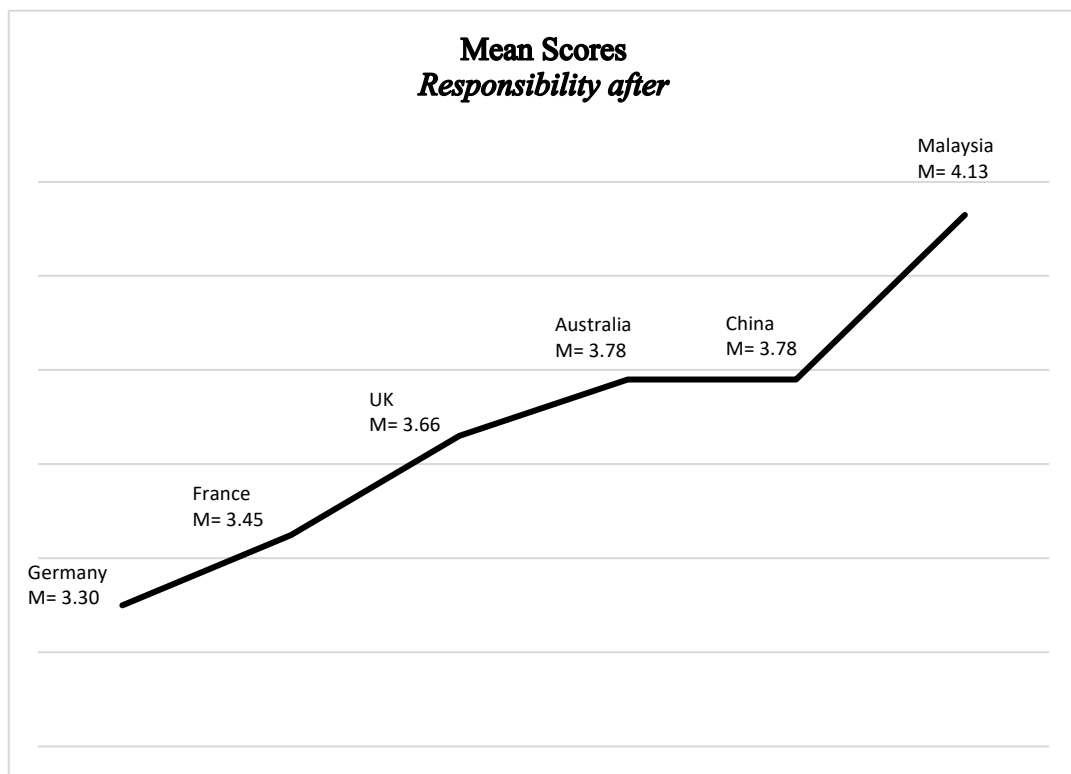


Figure 2.5 Malaysia Airlines Responsibility AFTER watching the Video (3/3)



Mean score comparison shows that the spokesperson of Malaysia Airlines reduced attribution of responsibility with Chinese participants whose mean scores dropped from ($M_{\text{Before}} = 4.13$ to $M_{\text{After}} = 3.78$). At the same time, no difference was observed for Malaysian participants; their perception regarding attribution was not affected, positively or negatively. All other scores increased marginally, showing no beneficial outcome of the communication efforts made.

One-Way ANOVA indicated that there were statistically significant differences Malaysia Airlines Responsibility after watching the video across different home country groups, $F(1, 175) = 2.35$, $p < .05$, partial Eta Squared = 0.06.

Table 4-h *Multiple Comparisons – Tukey HSD Post-Hoc test for Malaysia Airlines Responsibility AFTER watching the video*

(I) Home Country	(J) Home Country	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p
China	<i>France</i>	.33	.26	.80
	<i>UK</i>	.13	.26	1.00
	<i>Germany</i>	.49	.27	.47
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.34	.26	.77
	<i>Australia</i>	.00	.27	1.00
France	<i>China</i>	-.33	.26	.80
	<i>UK</i>	-.21	.26	.97
	<i>Germany</i>	.16	.27	.99
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.67	.26	.11
	<i>Australia</i>	-.33	.27	.84
UK	<i>China</i>	-.13	.26	1.00
	<i>France</i>	.21	.26	.97
	<i>Germany</i>	.36	.27	.77
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.47	.26	.46
	<i>Australia</i>	-.12	.27	1.00
Germany	<i>China</i>	-.49	.27	.47
	<i>France</i>	-.16	.27	.99
	<i>UK</i>	-.36	.27	.77
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.83*	.27	.03
	<i>Australia</i>	-.48	.28	.52
Malaysia	<i>China</i>	.34	.26	.77
	<i>France</i>	.67	.26	.11
	<i>UK</i>	.47	.26	.46
	<i>Germany</i>	.83*	.27	.03
	<i>Australia</i>	.35	.27	.79
Australia	<i>China</i>	-.00	.27	1.00
	<i>France</i>	.33	.27	.84
	<i>UK</i>	.12	.27	1.00
	<i>Germany</i>	.48	.28	.52
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.35	.27	.79

Note. Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square (Error) = 1.06. *p < .05.

Significant group differences were observed at $p < .05$:

Germany (I) and Malaysia (J) with -0.83 at SE = .27 and vice versa*

While German participants are still reluctant to attribute responsibility and still regard the airline as less likely to be responsible a significant difference between high levels of attribution remains between Malaysian and German participants.

Table 4-i illustrates the results calculated regarding perceived responsibility for Germanwings in the first video. Across the home country groups, mean values increase marginally after respondents watched the video. *Germany* is the only group with a statistically significant drop ($M= 3.44$, $SD= 0.98$ vs. $M= 3.19$, $SD= 1.04$, $Z= -2.33^*$) at p value $< .05$.

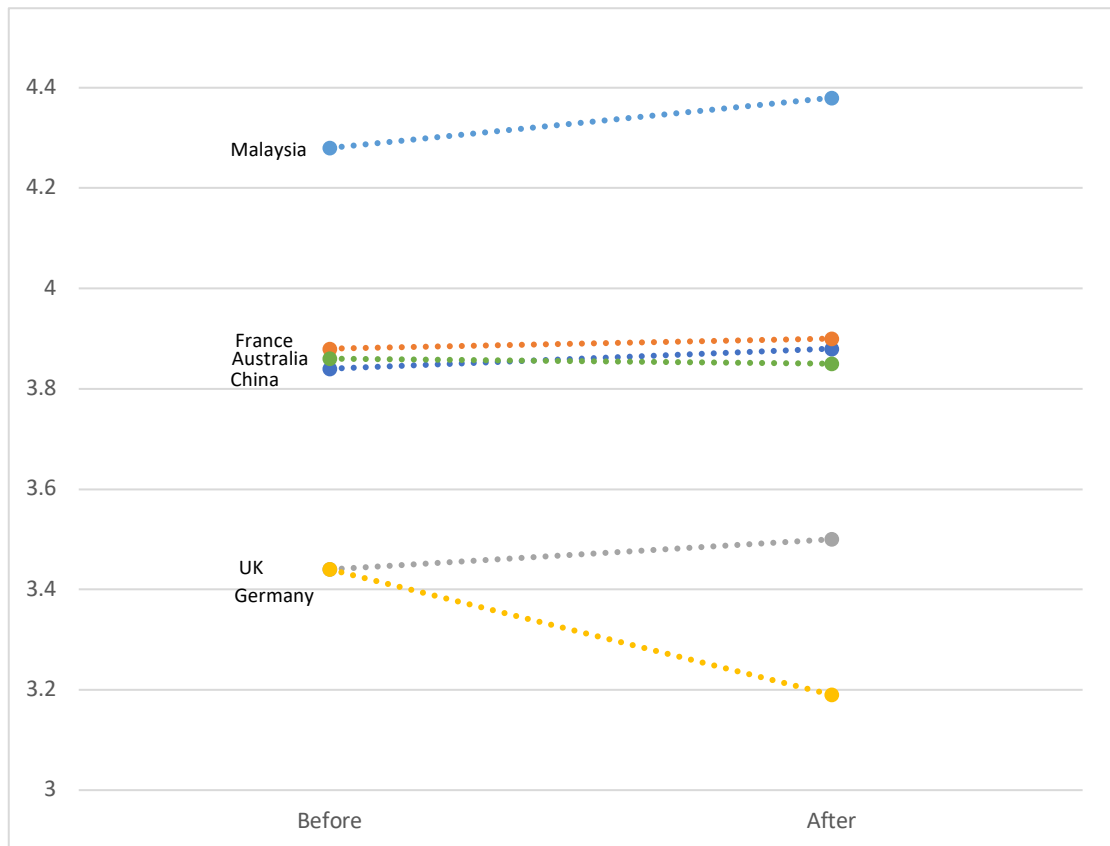
Table 4-i *Evaluation of Responsibility of Germanwings BEFORE and AFTER watching the Video*

	Before watching video		After watching video		Wilcoxon signed-rank test**
	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	
<i>China (n = 32)</i>					
Responsibility for a crash	3.84 (4)	.63	3.88 (4)	.71	-23
<i>France (n = 31)</i>					
Responsibility for a crash	3.88 (4)	.95	3.90 (4)	.98	-27
<i>UK (n = 32)</i>					
Responsibility for a crash	3.44 (3)	.98	3.50 (3)	.95	-31
<i>Germany (n = 27)</i>					
Responsibility for a crash	3.44 (4)	.98	3.19 (3)	1.04	-2.33*
<i>Malaysia (n = 32)</i>					

Responsibility for a crash	4.28 (4.5)	.85	4.38 (4.5)	.83	-1.23
<i>Australia (n = 27)</i>					
Responsibility for a crash	3.96 (4)	.85	3.88 (4)	.99	-0.64
<i>Note. *p < .05; **Test is used because there is no normal distribution according to Kolmogorov-Smirnov with Lilliefors Significance Correction.</i>					

Figure 2.6 depicts the overall results for attribution of responsibility as obtained from all home country groups for Germanwings. French, Australian and Chinese participants showed little changes in attribution of responsibility, while German scores decreased sharply, and Malaysian and UK scores increased slightly.

Figure 2.6 *Visual Comparison of Attribution of Responsibility for Germanwings BEFORE and AFTER Crisis Communication*



For the 2nd scenario *China* results proved to be statistically significant ($M= 4.13$, $SD = 1.01$, $Z=-2.50^*$, $p < .05$). Despite a strong indication of perceived responsibility, the

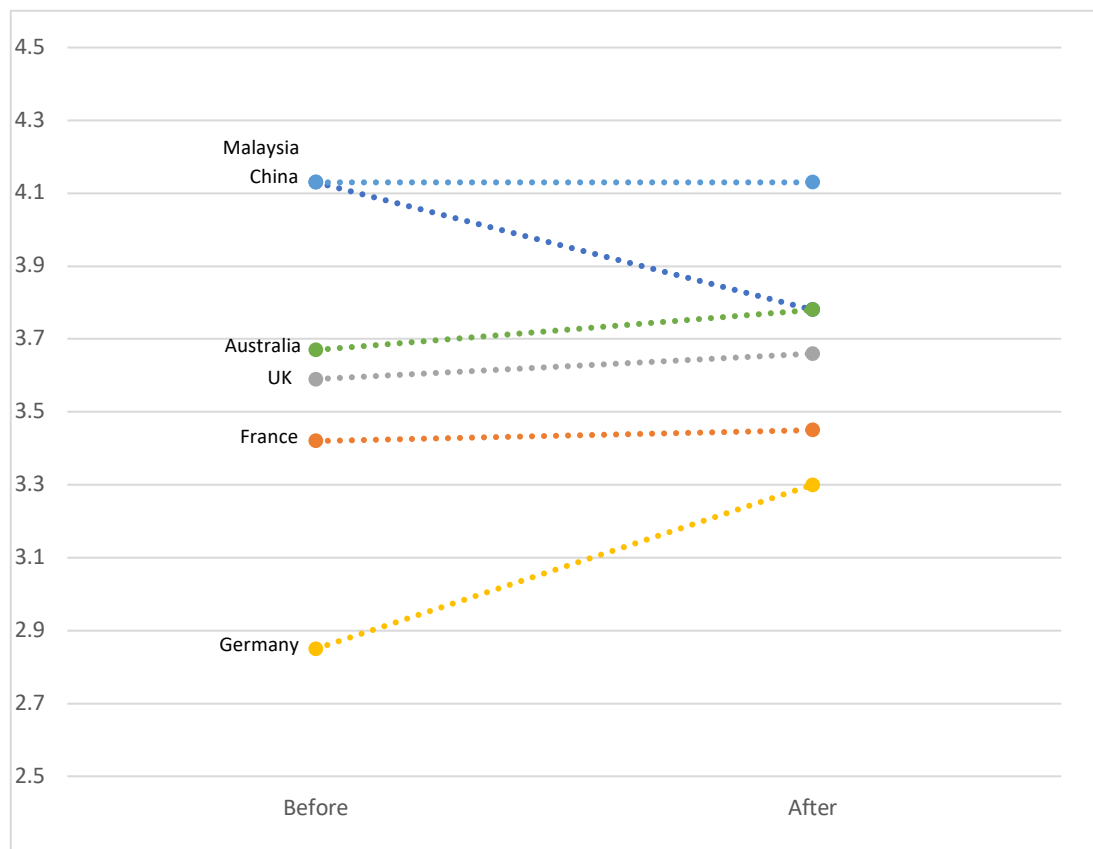
crisis communication had a positive effect on Malaysia Airline’s attribution level of Chinese participants overall after watching the video. Strongest increase with statistical significance can be observed for *Germany* ($M= 2.85, SD= 0.95$ vs. $M= 3.30, SD= 1.07, Z= -2.97^*, p < .05$) as seen in Table 4-j + Figure 2.7.

Table 4-j *Evaluation of Responsibility of Malaysia Airlines BEFORE and AFTER watching the Video*

	Before watching video		After watching video		Wilcoxon signed-rank test**
	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	
<i>China</i> (n = 32) Responsibility for a crash	4.13 (4)	1.01	3.78 (4)	1.01	-2.50*
<i>France</i> (n = 31) Responsibility for a crash	3.42 (3)	.99	3.45 (4)	1.09	-.30
<i>UK</i> (n = 32) Responsibility for a crash	3.59 (4)	.87	3.66 (4)	1.04	-.55
<i>Germany</i> (n = 27) Responsibility for a crash	2.85 (3)	.95	3.30 (3)	1.07	-2.97*
<i>Malaysia</i> (n = 32) Responsibility for a crash	4.13 (4)	.98	4.13 (4)	0.98	0.00
<i>Australia</i> (n = 27) Responsibility for a crash	3.67 (4)	1.21	3.78 (4)	1.01	-.78

Note. * $p < .05$; **Test is used because there is no normal distribution according to Kolmogorov-Smirnov with Lilliefors Significance Correction.

Figure 2.7 *Visual Comparison of Attribution of Responsibility for Malaysia Airlines BEFORE and AFTER Crisis Communication*



4.3.3 Reputational Effects: *Likelihood to Refrain from Using the Airlines' Services in the Future*

Table 4-k to 4-l show findings regarding the likelihood of participants to refrain from using the airline's services in the future thereby analysing how perception affects organisational reputation and thus translates into potential actions by passengers in the future. *Before* and *After* mean scores of all home country groups were compared for likelihood to refrain from using the airlines' services:

21) How likely would it be for you to refrain from using Germanwings services in the future because of this crash? *

1=Highly unlikely 5=Highly likely

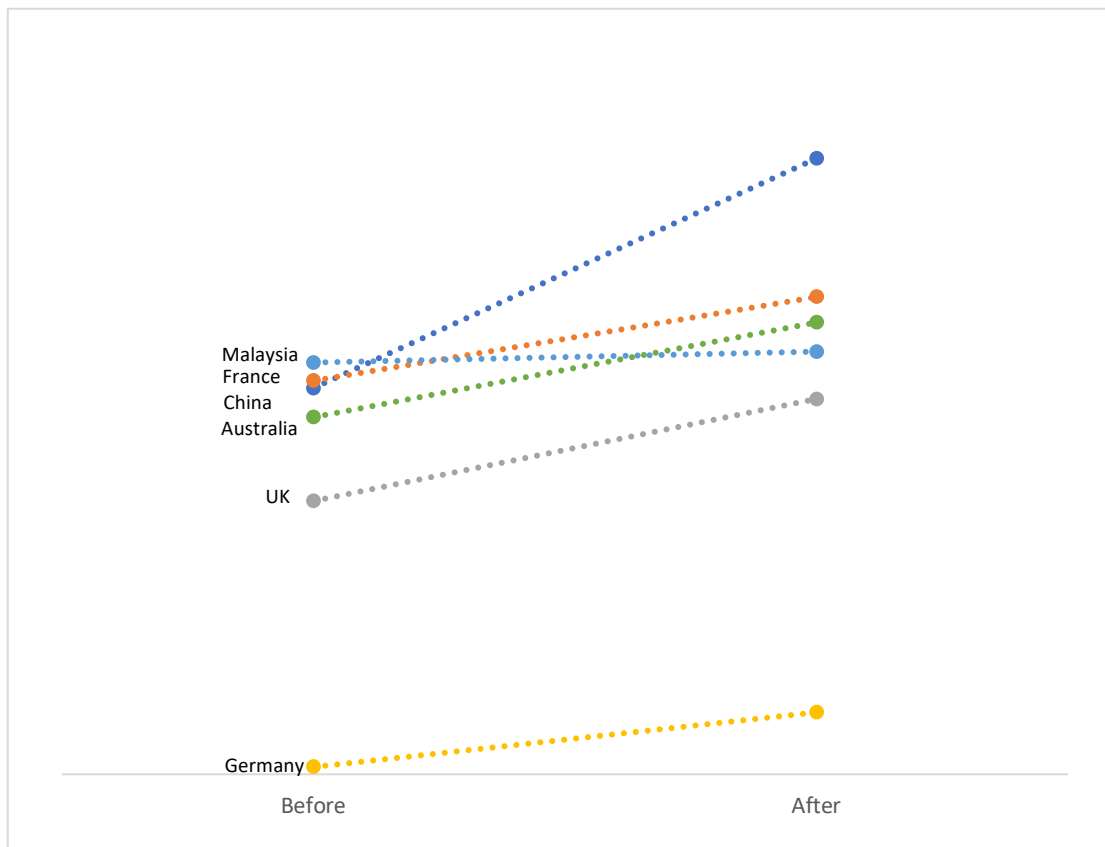
	1	2	3	4	5
Before watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Table 4-k *Evaluation of Likelihood to refrain from Germanwings services in the future BEFORE and AFTER watching the Video*

	Before watching video		After watching video		Wilcoxon signed-rank test**
	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	
<i>China (n = 32)</i>					
Avoidance of services	2.56 (3)	1.27	3.19 (3)	1.09	-2.31*
<i>France (n = 31)</i>					
Avoidance of services	2.58 (3)	1.31	2.81 (3)	1.17	-1.41
<i>UK (n = 32)</i>					
Avoidance of services	2.25 (2)	1.30	2.53 (2)	1.46	-1.39
<i>Germany (n = 27)</i>					
Avoidance of services	1.52 (1)	0.70	1.67 (2)	0.62	-1.27
<i>Malaysia (n = 32)</i>					
Avoidance of services	2.63 (2.5)	1.16	2.66 (3)	1.12	-0.06
<i>Australia (n = 27)</i>					
Avoidance of services	2.48 (2)	1.55	2.74 (3)	1.40	-1.17

Note. * $p < .05$; **Test is used because there is no normal distribution according to Kolmogorov-Smirnov with Lilliefors Significance Correction.

Figure 2.8 *Visual Representation: Evaluation of Likelihood to refrain from Germanwings services in the Future*



All home country groups indicated that they were more likely to refrain from using the airline's services in the future, signifying the airlines reputation must have deteriorated for all home country groups. German participants indicated low before score and a slightly increase in mean scores after watching the crisis communication efforts. At the same time, respondents from China showed the steepest, statistically significant rise in avoidance of services in the future from $M= 2.56$, $SD= 1.27$ (before watching the video) to $M= 3.19$, $SD= 1.09$ (after watching the video) with $Z= -2.31$, $p < .05$.

34) How likely would it be for you to refrain from using Malaysia Airlines services in the future because of this crash? *

1=Highly unlikely 5=Highly likely

	1	2	3	4	5
Before watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

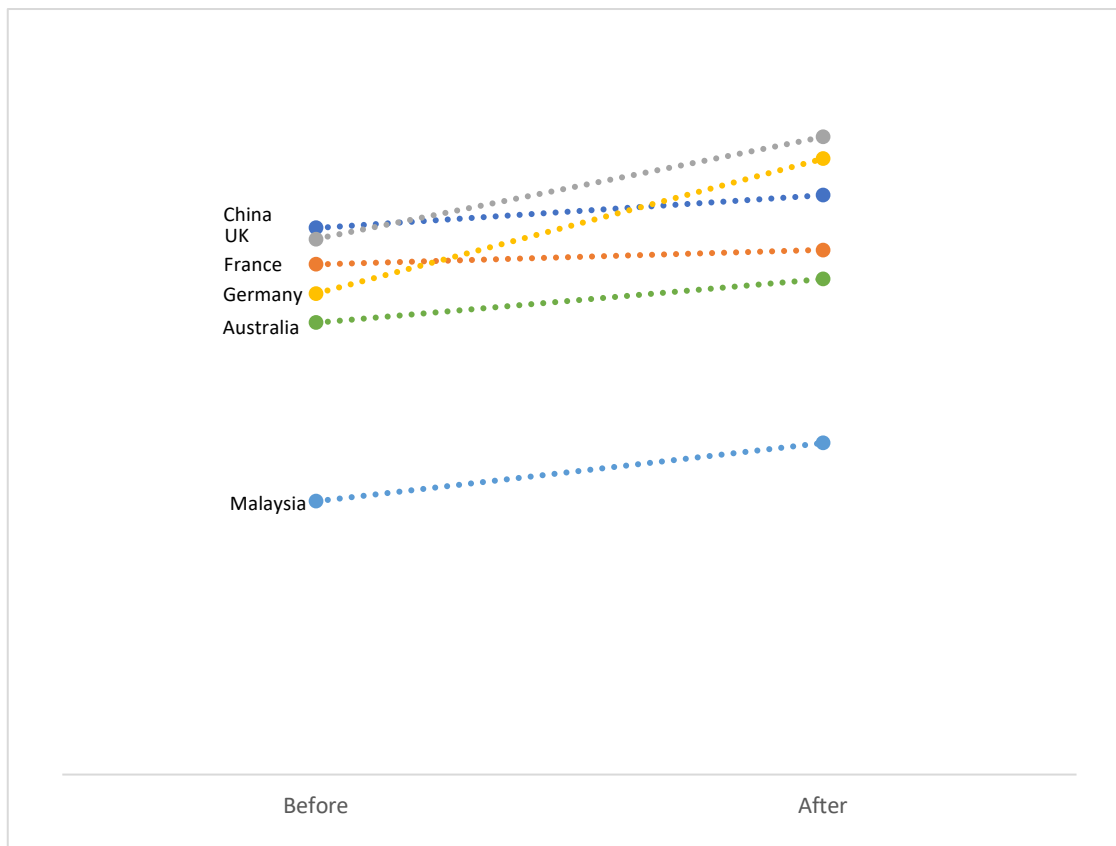
A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to check for differences between measures regarding reputation. It shows, all mean scores for the 1st video (Germanwings) were lower than for the 2nd video (Malaysia Airlines) as shown in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1 *Evaluation of Likeliness to refrain from using Malaysia Airlines Services in the Future BEFORE and AFTER watching the Video (1/2)*

	Before watching video		After watching video		Wilcoxon signed-rank test**
	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	
<i>China (n = 32)</i>					
Avoidance of services	3.00 (3)	1.34	3.09 (3.5)	1.44	-.44
<i>France (n = 31)</i>					
Avoidance of services	2.90 (3)	1.19	2.94 (3)	1.29	-.18
<i>UK (n = 32)</i>					
Avoidance of services	2.97 (3)	1.33	3.25 (3.5)	1.27	-1.55
<i>Germany (n = 27)</i>					
Avoidance of services	2.82 (3)	1.21	3.19 (3)	1.44	-2.00*
<i>Malaysia (n = 32)</i>					
Avoidance of services	2.25 (2)	1.34	2.41 (3)	1.16	-.78
<i>Australia (n = 27)</i>					
Avoidance of services	2.74 (3)	1.41	2.86 (3)	1.45	-1.01

Note. * $p < .05$; **Test is used because there is no normal distribution according to Kolmogorov-Smirnov with Lilliefors Significance Correction.

Figure 2.9 Evaluation of Likelihood to refrain from using Malaysia Airlines Services in the Future BEFORE and AFTER watching the Video (2/2)



For the 2nd video, Malaysia Airlines, *UK* respondents showed the highest likelihood of not using the services in the future, $M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.33$ (before watching the video) and $M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.27$ (after watching the video), while *Malaysia* respondents showed the least likelihood to dismiss Malaysia Airlines services in the future, before and after watching their communication efforts ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.34$ vs. $M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.16$).

4.3.4 Reputational Effects: *Evaluation of Doubts Regarding Quality and Safety*

Germany participants have a smallest doubt about Germanwings safety and quality with only a marginal increase after watching the video. ($M_{Before} = 1.63, SD = 0.79$ vs. $M_{After} = 1.85, SD = 0.72$). Respondents from *China* ($M_{Before} = 2.84, SD = 1.17$ vs. $M_{After} = 3.50, SD = 0.95, Z = -2.31, p < .05$) and *Malaysia* ($M_{Before} = 2.50, SD = 1.08$ vs. $M_{After} = 3.06, SD = 1.16, Z = -2.26, p < .05$) showed the strongest increase in doubt:

20) Do you have doubts about the quality and safety of Germanwing's planes and services? *

1=No doubt 5=Highly doubtful

	1	2	3	4	5
Before watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

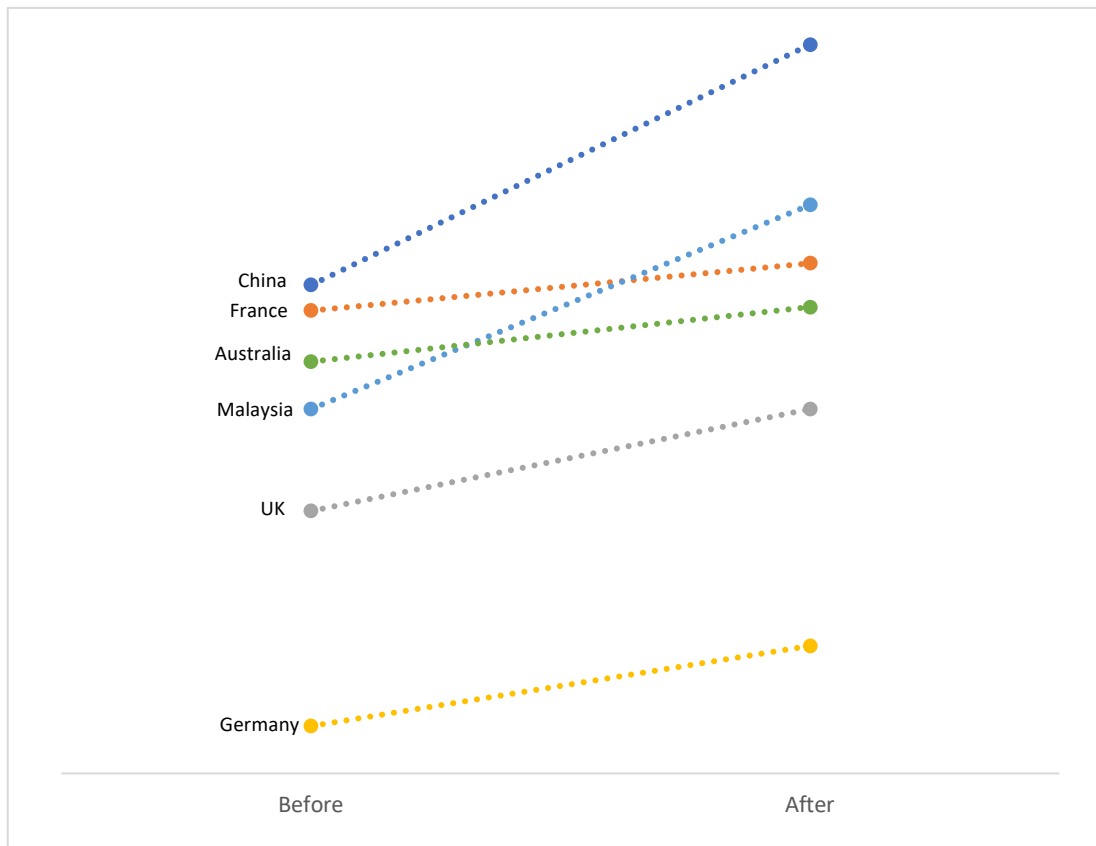
Table 4-m *Evaluation of Doubts regarding Quality and Safety of Germanwings Planes and Services BEFORE and AFTER watching the Video (1/2)*

	Before watching video		After watching video		Wilcoxon signed-rank test**
	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	
<i>China</i> (n = 32)					
Doubts about quality	2.84 (3)	1.17	3.50 (3)	0.95	-2.28*
<i>France</i> (n = 31)					
Doubts about quality	2.77 (3)	1.18	2.90 (3)	1.11	-1.41
<i>UK</i> (n = 32)					
Doubts about quality	2.22 (2)	1.13	2.50 (2)	1.14	-2.07*
<i>Germany</i> (n = 27)					

Doubts about quality	1.63 (1)	0.79	1.85 (2)	0.72	-1.73
<i>Malaysia</i> (n = 32)					
Doubts about quality	2.50 (2)	1.08	3.06 (3)	1.16	-2.26*
<i>Australia</i> (n = 27)					
Doubts about quality	2.63 (3)	1.33	2.78 (3)	1.28	-0.64

Note. *p < .05; **Test is used because there is no normal distribution according to Kolmogorov-Smirnov with Lilliefors Significance Correction.

Figure 3.0 *Evaluation of Doubts regarding Quality and Safety of Germanwings Planes and Services BEFORE and AFTER watching the Video (2/2)*



Chinese participant results show a high level of genuine distrust and doubt in the abilities of the airline to deliver a safe service. While French and Australian participants display small increases in doubts about safety and quality and German

scores, despite experiencing an uptick, remain low ($M_{Before}= 1.63$, $M_{After}= 1.85$). Particularly strong increases were observed for China ($M_{Before}= 3.59$, $M_{After}= 4.00$), UK ($M_{Before}= 2.84$, $M_{After}= 3.31$) and Malaysia, all showing statistical significance. Table 4-n highlights the results for Malaysia Airlines on perceived quality and safety. Most respondents indicated a statistically significant rise in doubt after watching the video for Malaysia Airlines except for France and Australia group respondents:

33) Do you have doubts about the quality and safety of Malaysia Airlines' planes and services? *
1=No doubt 5=Highly doubtful

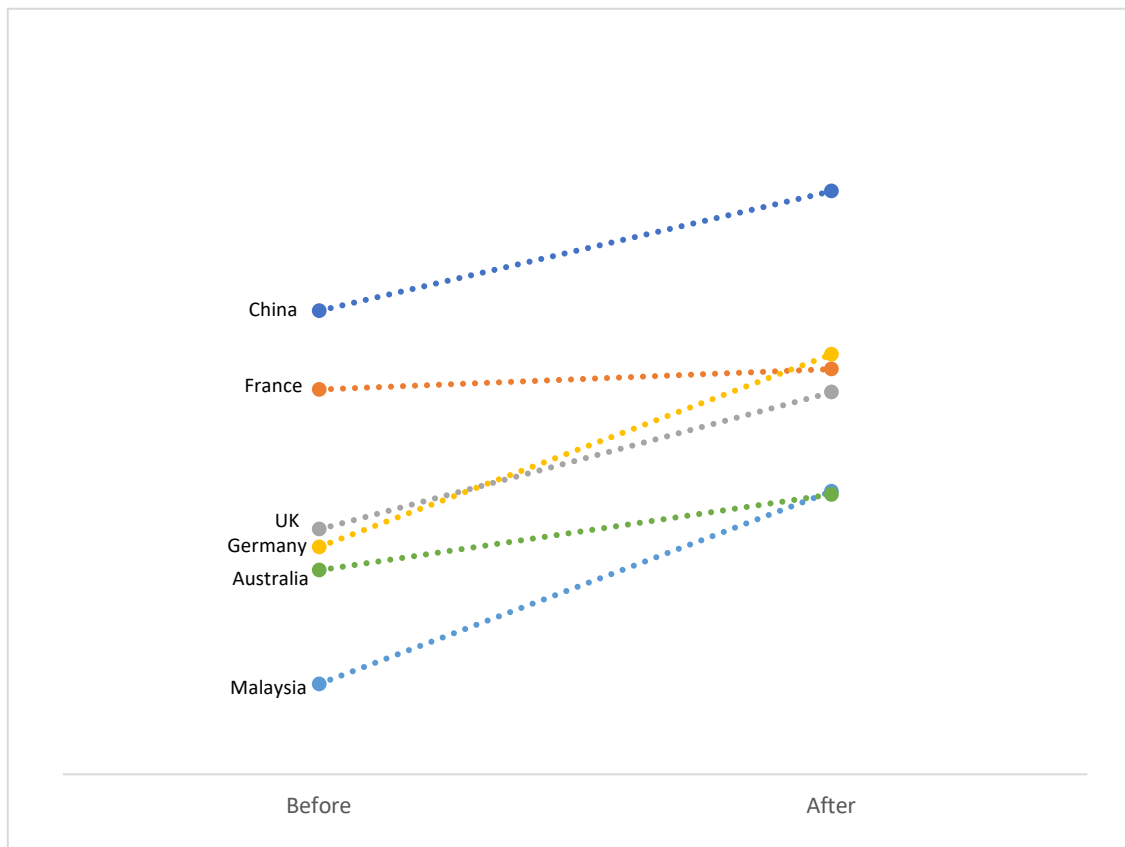
	1	2	3	4	5
Before watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Table 4-n *Evaluation of Doubts regarding Quality and Safety of Malaysia Airlines Planes and Services BEFORE and AFTER watching the Video (1/2)*

	Before watching video		After watching video		Wilcoxon signed-rank test***
	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	
<i>China (n = 32)</i>					
Doubts about quality	3.59 (4)	1.16	4.00 (4)	.95	-2.07*
<i>France (n = 31)</i>					
Doubts about quality	3.32 (3)	1.05	3.39 (3)	1.05	-.37
<i>UK (n = 32)</i>					
Doubts about quality	2.84 (3)	1.25	3.31 (3.5)	1.28	-2.72*
<i>Germany (n = 27)</i>					
Doubts about quality	2.78 (3)	.85	3.44 (3)	1.05	-2.99*
<i>Malaysia (n = 32)</i>					
Doubts about quality	2.31 (2)	1.23	2.97 (3)	1.23	-2.96*
<i>Australia (n = 27)</i>					
Doubts about quality	2.70 (3)	1.38	2.96 (3)	1.22	-.93

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***Test is used because there is no normal distribution according to Kolmogorov-Smirnov with Lilliefors Significance Correction.

Figure 3.1 *Evaluation of Doubts regarding Quality and Safety of Malaysia Airlines Planes and Services BEFORE and AFTER watching the Video (2/2)*



The results for Malaysia Airlines, as seen in Table 4-n/Figure 3.1 regarding participants perception on quality and safety show an even greater lack of trust in the airline’s abilities. Chinese scores ($M_{Before} = 3.59$, $M_{After} = 4.00$) are particularly disconcerting, as an already high level of doubtfulness was further increased after the crisis efforts have been observed.

A statistically significant shift for German participants is equally remarkable as it became the second highest score. However, the fact that Malaysian scores increased sharply uncovers the spokesperson lack to deal with audience’s doubtfulness about the organisation.

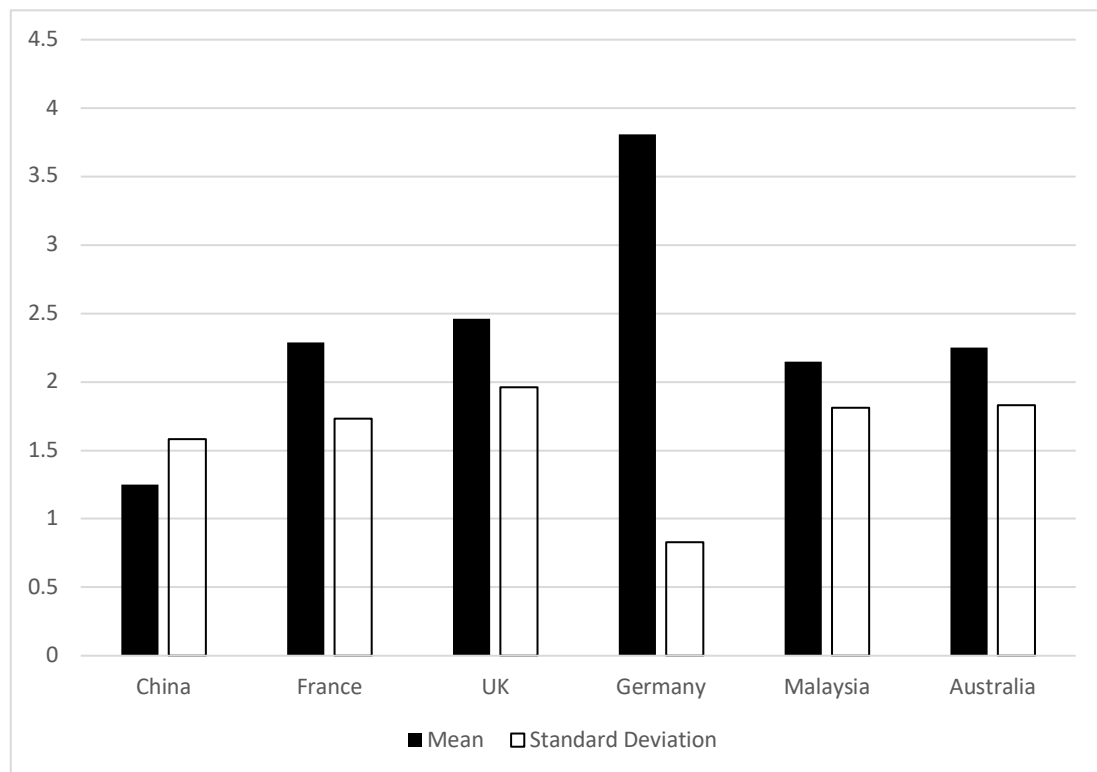
4.3.5 Reputational Effects: *Overall Impact of Crisis Communication on Home Country Groups*

When evaluating crisis communication, reputation has been the key determinant of success across most studies. The end goal is always to maintain/ repair or even improve organisational reputation among stakeholders. Variance in reputation scores as a result of crisis communication can be a direct indicator for cultural influence in perception creation, affirming that there is no one right way of crisis communication. To further analyse this, participants were asked to evaluate the organisations' reputation *PRIOR* and *AFTER* they viewed the corresponding crisis communication efforts:

Table 5-a *Germanwings Reputation PRIOR to Plane Crash (1/2)*

Home Country	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>China</i>	1.25	1.58	32
<i>France</i>	2.29	1.73	31
<i>UK</i>	2.46	1.96	32
<i>Germany</i>	3.81	0.83	27
<i>Malaysia</i>	2.15	1.81	32
<i>Australia</i>	2.25	1.83	27
Total	2.33	1.81	181

Figure 3.2 Germanwings Reputation PRIOR to Plane Crash (2/2)



One-Way ANOVA indicated that there were statistically significant differences in Germanwings reputation *prior* plane crash across different home country groups, $F(1, 175) = 6.96, p < .0001$, partial Eta Squared = 0.17. Subsequently, Games-Howell Post-Hoc test was carried out for the 1st video (Germanwings) to analyse differences between groups in greater depth (Table 5-b).

Table 5-b Multiple Comparisons – Games-Howell Post-Hoc test for Germanwings Reputation PRIOR to Plane Crash

(I) Home Country	(J) Home Country	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p
China	<i>France</i>	-1.04	.42	.15
	<i>UK</i>	-1.22	.45	.09
	<i>Germany</i>	-2.57*	.32	.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.91	.45	.29
	<i>Australia</i>	-1.01	.45	.24

France	<i>China</i>	1,04	.42	.15
	<i>UK</i>	-.18	.47	1.00
	<i>Germany</i>	-1.52*	.35	.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	.13	.45	1.00
	<i>Australia</i>	.03	.47	1.00
UK	<i>China</i>	1.22	.45	.09
	<i>France</i>	.18	.47	1.00
	<i>Germany</i>	-1.35*	.38	.01
	<i>Malaysia</i>	1.31	.47	.99
	<i>Australia</i>	1.21	.50	.99
Germany	<i>China</i>	2.57*	.32	.00
	<i>France</i>	1.52*	.35	.00
	<i>UK</i>	1.35*	.38	.01
	<i>Malaysia</i>	1.66*	.36	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	1.56*	.39	.00
Malaysia	<i>China</i>	.91	.43	.29
	<i>France</i>	-.13	.45	1.00
	<i>UK</i>	-.31	.47	.99
	<i>Germany</i>	-1.66*	.36	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	-.10	.48	1.00
Australia	<i>China</i>	1.01	.45	.24
	<i>France</i>	-.03	.47	1.00
	<i>UK</i>	-.21	.50	1.00
	<i>Germany</i>	-1.56*	.39	.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	.10	.48	1.00

Note. Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square (Error) = 2.83. * $p < .05$.

Significant group differences for Germanwings, were observed between Germany and all five other home country groups at $p < .05$.

Significant group differences were observed at $p < .05$:

China (I) and Germany (J) with -2.57 (I-J) at SE = .32 and vice versa*

France (I) and Germany (J) with -1.52 at SE = .35 and vice versa*

UK (I) and Germany (J) with 1.35 at SE = .38 and vice versa*

Germany (I) and Malaysia (J) with 1.66 at SE = .36 and vice versa*

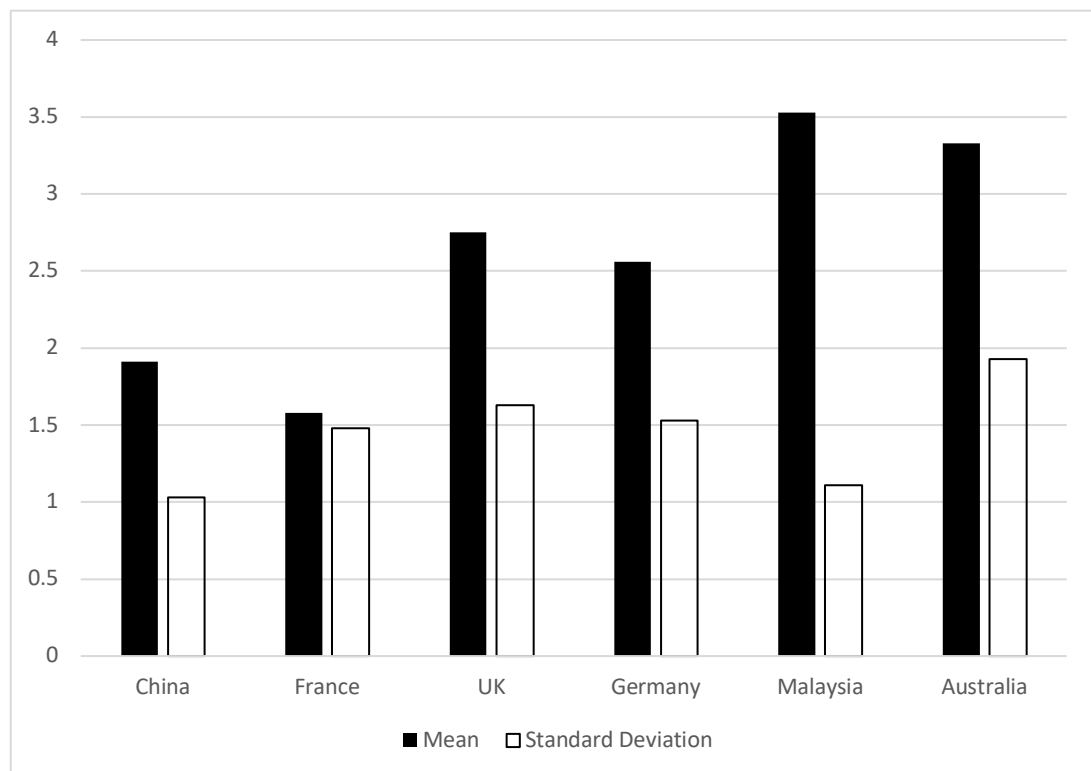
Australia (I) and Germany (J) with -1.56 at SE = .39 and vice versa*

Prior Reputation for Malaysia Airlines was calculated in a similar fashion:

Table 5-c *Malaysia Airlines Reputation PRIOR to plane crash (1/2)*

Home Country	M	SD	N
<i>China</i>	1.91	1.03	32
<i>France</i>	1.58	1.48	31
<i>UK</i>	2.75	1.63	32
<i>Germany</i>	2.56	1.53	27
<i>Malaysia</i>	3.53	1.11	32
<i>Australia</i>	3.33	1.39	27
Total	2.60	1.53	181

Figure 3.3 *Malaysia Airlines Reputation PRIOR to Plane Crash (2/2)*



One-Way ANOVA indicated that there were statistically significant differences in Malaysia Airlines reputation prior plane crash across different home country groups, $F(1, 175) = 9.64, p < .0001, \text{partial Eta Squared} = 0.22$.

Subsequently, Games-Howell Post-Hoc test was carried out for the 2nd video (Malaysia Airlines) to analyse differences between groups in greater depth.

Table 5-d *Multiple Comparisons – Games-Howell Post-Hoc test for Malaysia Airlines Reputation PRIOR to Plane Crash*

(I) Home Country	(J) Home Country	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p
China	<i>France</i>	.33	.32	.91
	<i>UK</i>	-.84	.34	.15
	<i>Germany</i>	-.65	.35	.43
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-1.63*	.27	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	-1.43*	.32	.00
France	<i>China</i>	-.33	.32	.91
	<i>UK</i>	-1.17*	.39	.05
	<i>Germany</i>	-.98	.40	.15
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-1.95*	.33	.00
	<i>Australia</i>	-1.75*	.38	.00
UK	<i>China</i>	.84	.34	.15
	<i>France</i>	1.17*	.39	.05
	<i>Germany</i>	.19	.41	1.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.78	.35	.23
	<i>Australia</i>	-.58	.39	.67
Germany	<i>China</i>	.65	.35	.43
	<i>France</i>	.96	.40	.15
	<i>UK</i>	-.19	.41	1.00
	<i>Malaysia</i>	-.98	.35	.08
	<i>Australia</i>	-.78	.40	.38
Malaysia	<i>China</i>	1.63*	.27	.00
	<i>France</i>	1.95*	.33	.00
	<i>UK</i>	.78	.35	.23
	<i>Germany</i>	.98	.35	.08
	<i>Australia</i>	.20	.33	.99
Australia	<i>China</i>	1.43*	.32	.00

<i>France</i>	1.75*	.38	.00
<i>UK</i>	.58	.39	.67
<i>Germany</i>	.78	.40	.38
<i>Malaysia</i>	-.20	.33	.99

Note. Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square (Error) = 1.88. * $p < .05$.

Significant group differences for Malaysia Airlines, were observed at $p < .05$:

China (I) and Malaysia (J) with -1.63 (I-J) at SE = .27 and vice versa*

China (I) and Australia (J) with -1.43 at SE = .32 and vice versa*

France (I) and UK (J) with -1.17 at SE = .39 and vice versa*

France (I) and Malaysia (J) with -1.95 at SE = .33 and vice versa*

France (I) and Australia (J) with -1.75 at SE = .38 and vice versa*

Table 5-e *Average Score of Overall Reputation of the Airline AFTER watching the respective Video (1/2)*

	After 1 st video		After 2 nd video		Paired-test**
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
<i>China (n = 32)</i>					
Average reputation score	2.93	.57	3.24	.79	-2.05*
<i>France (n = 31)</i>					
Average reputation score	3.25	.95	3.04	.89	1.00
<i>UK (n = 32)</i>					
Average reputation score	3.74	.78	3.37	1.00	1.51
<i>Germany (n = 27)</i>					
Average reputation score	3.76	.69	2.82	.74	4.33*
<i>Malaysia (n = 32)</i>					
Average reputation score	3.02	.92	3.23	.82	1.02
<i>Australia (n = 27)</i>					
Average reputation score	3.52	.80	3.32	.95	.77

Note. * $p < .05$; **Test is used because there is no normal distribution according to Kolmogorov-Smirnov with Lilliefors Significance Correction.

Figure 3.4 Average Score of Overall Reputation of the Airline AFTER watching the respective Video (2/2)

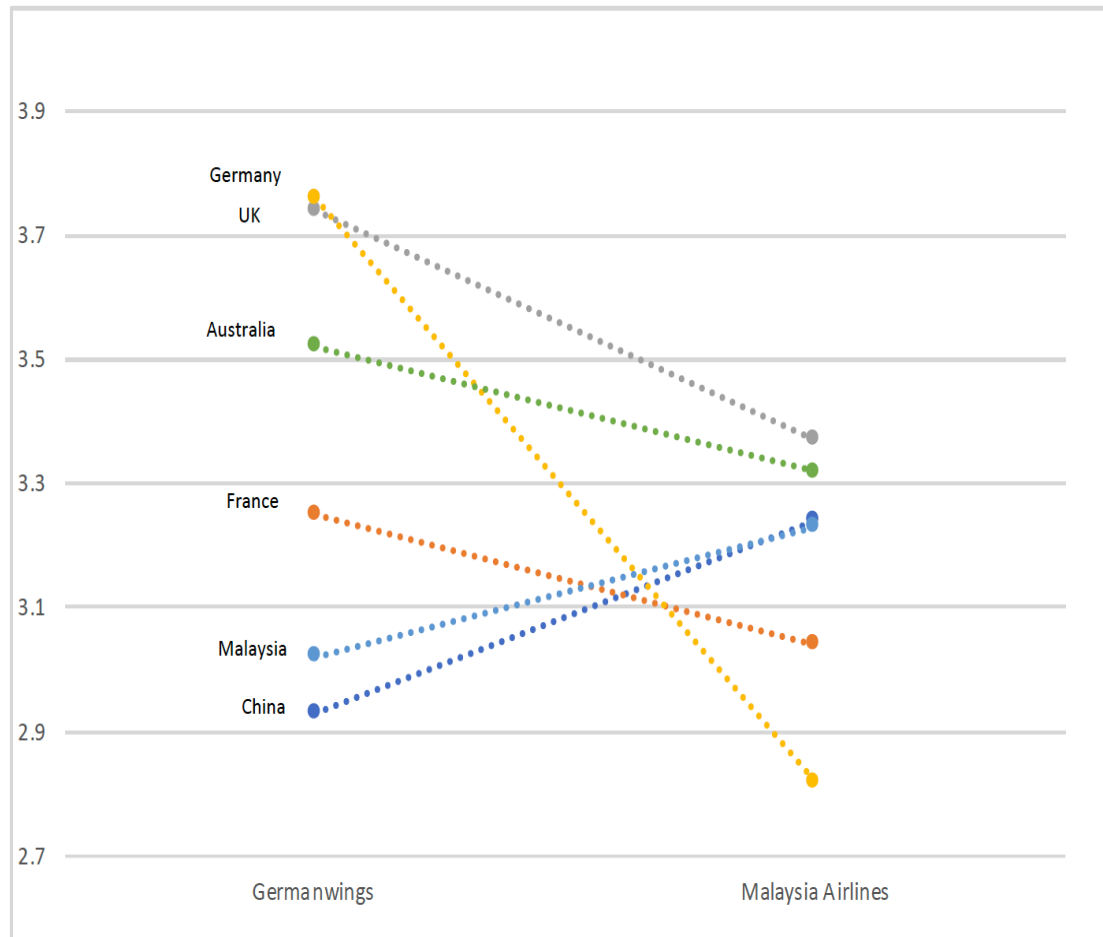


Table 5-e + Figure 3.4 show combined overall reputation scores for both airlines from all six home country groups in this study. Figure 3.4 presents the reputational consequences of organisational crisis efforts in both videos as indicated by all participants. China and Malaysia respondents favour the 2nd video's crisis handling overall in terms perceived reputation with mean scores of $M= 3.24$, $SD = 0.79$ ($Z= -2.05^*$, $p < .05$) and $M= 3.23$, $SD= 0.82$ respectively versus $M= 2.93$, $SD= 0.57$ and $M= 3.02$, $SD= 0.92$ for the 1st video. France ($M= 3.25$,

SD= 0.95), *UK* (*M*= 3.74, *SD*= 0.78), *Germany* (*M*= 3.76, *SD*= 0.69, *Z*= 4.33*, *p* < .05) and *Australia* (*M*= 3.52, *SD*= 0.80) respondents rated Germanwings to have an overall better reputation management.

4.4 Multimodality and The Spokesperson’s Impact on Perception

Question 10 + 23 of the survey asked participants about how they see the pre-defined social semiotics during the press conference. A 1-to-4 bipolar scale: 1 = *not at all appropriate*, 2 = *somewhat appropriate*, 3 = *appropriate*, 4 = *very appropriate* was utilised.

23) How appropriate is the senior executive's delivery in terms of posture and body language? *

	Not at all appropriate	Somewhat appropriate	Appropriate	Very appropriate
Standing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speed of speaking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eye contact with audience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Appearance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facial Expression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Table 6-a *Evaluation of Appropriateness regarding Senior Executive's Delivery in Terms of Posture and Body Language in the FIRST and SECOND Video*

	1 st video		2 nd video		Wilcoxon signed-rank test***
	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M (Mdn)</i>	<i>SD</i>	
<i>China (n = 32)</i>					
Sitting vs. Standing	1.06 (1)	.84	2.13 (2)	.71	-3.53**
Speed of speaking	1.94 (2)	.44	1.94 (2)	.50	-0.33
Eye contact	1.72 (2)	.46	1.53 (2)	.88	-1.19
Physical appearance	1.50 (1.50)	.62	1.69 (2)	.89	-1.17
Facial expression	1.34 (1)	.55	1.50 (2)	.62	-1.29
Total Multimodal Score	1.51 (1.40)	.26	1.76 (1.90)	.54	-2.42*
<i>France (n = 31)</i>					
Sitting vs. Standing	1.61 (2)	.92	2.00 (2)	.77	-1.58
Speed of speaking	2.13 (2)	.67	2.07 (2)	.77	-0.44
Eye contact	2.23 (2)	.85	1.77 (2)	.92	-2.12*
Physical appearance	2.29 (2)	.64	1.32 (1)	.98	-3.60**
Facial expression	1.97 (2)	.84	1.65 (2)	.88	-1.39
Total Multimodal Score	2.05 (2)	.56	1.76 (1.8)	.69	-1.77
<i>UK (n = 32)</i>					
Sitting vs. Standing	1.97 (2)	.69	2.16 (2)	.77	-0.81
Speed of speaking	2.00 (2)	.80	2.03 (2)	.74	-0.07
Eye contact	2.06 (2)	.80	1.59 (2)	.95	-1.86
Physical appearance	2.31 (2)	.59	1.41 (1)	.76	-4.00**
Facial expression	2.00 (2)	.84	1.63 (1.5)	.87	-1.70
Total Multimodal Score	2.07 (2)	.55	1.76 (1.8)	.64	-2.12*
<i>Germany (n = 27)</i>					
Sitting vs. Standing	1.96 (2)	.59	1.56 (2)	.80	-1.82
Speed of speaking	2.37 (2)	.69	1.78 (2)	.70	-2.72*
Eye contact	2.30 (2)	.61	1.30 (2)	1.03	-3.02**
Physical appearance	2.00 (2)	.68	1.22 (1)	.80	-3.14**
Facial expression	1.67 (2)	.55	1.37 (1)	.79	-1.58
Total Multimodal Score	2.06 (2)	.38	1.44 (1.6)	.67	-3.08**
<i>Malaysia (n = 32)</i>					
Sitting vs. Standing	1.63 (2)	.87	1.94 (2)	.62	-1.67
Speed of speaking	2.06 (2)	.76	1.81 (2)	.64	-1.48
Eye contact	1.88 (2)	.79	1.50 (2)	.72	-2.22*
Physical appearance	2.06 (2)	.67	1.63 (2)	.75	-2.84**
Facial expression	1.56 (2)	.84	1.71 (2)	.68	-1.01
Total Multimodal Score	1.83 (2)	.68	1.72 (1.8)	.52	-0.89
<i>Australia (n = 27)</i>					
Sitting vs. Standing	1.74 (2)	.71	2.11 (2)	.93	-1.44
Speed of speaking	2.04 (2)	.76	2.15 (2)	.77	-0.54
Eye contact	2.11 (2)	.75	1.92 (2)	.88	1.21
Physical appearance	2.37 (2)	.63	1.74 (2)	.76	-3.02**
Facial expression	1.96 (2)	.76	1.96 (2)	.71	-0.03
Total Multimodal Score	2.04 (2)	.52	1.96 (2)	.66	-0.20

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; ***Test is used because there is no normal distribution according to Kolmogorov-Smirnov with Lilliefors Significance Correction.

The data shows that fundamental beliefs about perceived modes such as posture and body language in crisis communication with regard to country group. Manipulation through two distinct videos proved effective. There were statistically significant differences in mean scores for variables; *sitting vs. standing* and *average posture and body language* for China after watching 1st and 2nd video, $Z = -2.42^*$, $p < .05$. Average posture and body language for China were $M = 1.51$ for the 1st video and 1.76 for the 2nd video with a $SD = 0.26$ and $SD = 0.54$ respectively.

Participants with home country *France* yielded significant results for variables; *eye contact and physical appearance* ($Z = -4.00^{**}$; $Z = -2.12^*$).

UK results showed statistically significant results for physical appearance and the averaged posture and body language ($Z = -2.12^*$; $Z = -3.60^{**}$).

Germany respondents yielded several statistically significant results, including: speed of speaking ($Z = -2.72^*$), eye contact ($Z = -3.02^{**}$), physical appearance ($Z = -3.14^{**}$), posture and body language score ($Z = -3.08^{**}$).

Respondents from Malaysia scored on average $M = 1.83$ (1st video) with $SD = 0.68$ and $M = 1.72$ (2nd video) with $SD = 0.52$, $Z = -0.89$. Eye contact and physical appearance score showed statistical significance ($Z = -2.22^*$; $Z = -2.84^{**}$). Overall posture and body language results for respondents from Australia showed $M = 2.04$ with $SD = 0.52$ (1st video) and $M = 1.96$ and $SD = 0.66$ (2nd video). For Australian participants the key mode that impacted their view of the spokesperson and crisis communication was physical appearance. It was proven to be statistically significant at $Z = -3.02^{**}$.

Section B – Thematic Analysis

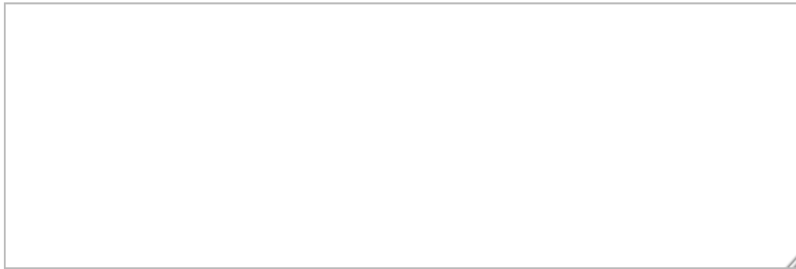
4.5 Data Analysis Procedure

With the questionnaire data at hand a quantitative analysis was conducted as well to investigate the research questions. Question 37) + 38) in the questionnaire were open-ended and explored whether participants see the need for airlines to apologise and to be more culturally sensitive, particularly in times of crises. A thematic analysis was chosen to analyse participants responses. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight a variety of different advantages of thematic analysis such as its flexibility and its ability to educate the public. However, the reason the method was chosen in this study was to highlight similarities and differences across the data set and to support results found in Section A.

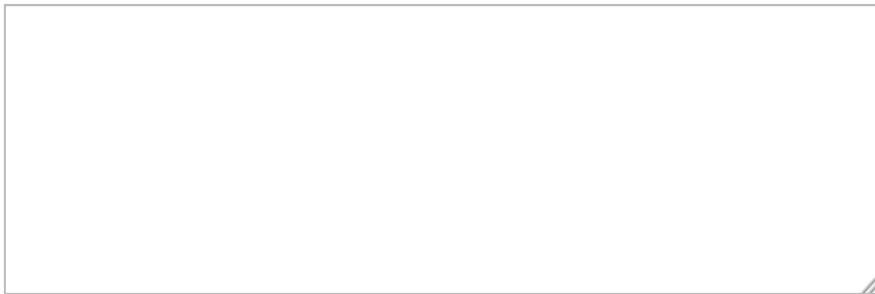
As described in Chapter 3 the constructionist perspective of the thematic analysis seeks to theorise the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that lead participants to answer the open-ended questions as they did. The thematic analysis aims to identify key themes deemed of sufficient significance for the understanding of this study. In other words, the thematic analysis of Section B aims to add flesh to the bone of quantitative research carried out in Section A and further discuss cultural difference in crisis communication perception.

The open-ended questions 37) + 38) were as follows:

37) Do you think executives should apologise at the press conference regardless of whether the airline has been judged responsible for the crash at the time of press conference?



38) Do you see a need for airlines to be more culturally sensitive when engaging in crisis communication? If so what are the most important factors to consider?



Of all 181 participants, 92 answered both questions. However, only 67 responses were considered fit for analysis¹⁶. This represents 37.0 % of the data corpus.

Although some participants wrote at length about cultural sensitivity, what it means and how it can be achieved, other wrote very little. The longest contribution was 238 words and the shortest only six words. On average participants used 36 words for their answer. The analysis of these responses revealed four key themes that seem to be of prime importance to perception creation as shown by participants:

- Verbal response
- Action
- Non-verbal/emotional response
- Install Prevention Methods

¹⁶ Yes/No answers and other very short responses were disregarded.

The themes were developed only after all initial codes were reviewed. Several codes showed a pattern within the data set and therefore capturing something important in relation to the overall research questions. The result from the four key themes a) - d) are presented one-by-one with references to the answers given by the participants. Themes that were associated with many text units are shown in bold. Themes that received few mentions are shown in plain type.

Some original responses will be given as quotations and serve as example of the categories identified for each theme.

Table 6-b *Themes and Categories (Codes) – Theme 1*

Verbal Response
Language of choice in crisis communication needs to be adapted to family/audience/stakeholders (33x)
Universal language and no adaption – universal approach (8x)
Slow down and speak up indifferent of Choice of Language (3x)

Most participants indicated that the communication about a crisis should be tailored to those most affected: the victims’ families. Some believe that language and wording is paramount and has a direct effect on the success of crisis management:

“Yeah, I think it’s pretty important [cultural sensitivity]. Many cultures are different and have different ways of dealing with grief or unexpected events. Wording, and what language receives information first I think is definitely the most important factor. If a Chinese flight fell out of the sky and the majority of the countries speaks Chinese, the news shouldn’t be mentioned to them in English or Korean...It should be Chinese. Family should also be informed above anyone else, there should never be a time a member of a victim’s relations finds out through the media instead of in person and before the world takes a piece.”

“Language seems to play a big role in crisis communication, to ensure the right message is conveyed especially to the media who will then interpret the news to the public.”

“It [airline] should consider the local’s language as well as a language that is understood according to the victim’s nationality. It is also useful to provide subtitle.”

“They need multiple speakers there to repeat the speech on behalf of the airline company – just because someone speaks a language more popular than another, doesn’t mean their life is more important.”

The dilemma of multiple stakeholders became imminent to participants, but the prime focus participants see for the airline in crisis communication remains the victims’ families and potential linguistic barriers that should be avoided at all costs when lives are lost. Most participants across all home country groups see linguistic barriers and propose a localised approach as more culturally sensitive. The question of which language to use should be adapted based on the victims’ families and where the incident took place. However, simultaneous translation was only seen as the least appropriate option:

“One factor should be communicating in local language. Use of translator is a minimum requirement.”

“It is important to consider the nationalities of those on board for example the majority of the passengers on MH370 were Chinese, so there could have been a conference in Chinese rather than English, or in Malay and translated as the Germanwings footage was Although I felt simultaneous translation to be a cheap way out.”

“At least translated but better spoken in language with nationalities most affected.”

Other respondents saw a middle ground when dealing with a multitude of different cultures when facing crisis communication:

“{...}. *Why not have multiple press conferences in different languages?*”

“I think it should take at least two conferences, one basic for the international public in English, another for the victims’ families in local language.”

Many participants connected the theme *Verbal Communication* with another theme: *Action*.

The codes *taking responsibility immediately* (20x) and *demonstrate respect for victims and provide logic explanation* (12x) were identified repeatedly by the researcher.

Table 6-c *Themes and Categories (Codes) – Theme 2*

Action

Take responsibility immediately (20x)

Demonstrate respect for victims and provide logic explanation (12x)

Be honest/sincere (8x)

Offer condolences (6x)

Clarity, transparency and regular updates (4x)

Hire cultural experts (3x)

Focus on confirmed facts (3x)

“They must consider more human factors and not only factual elements like time, financial numbers or even dry facts about the incident such as how old the plane or the captain was or the crew number. Who cares? This is not important immediately after and can be mentioned much later...I think people and relatives of the victims want apologies and see a sense of responsibility. In my country we show the greatest sympathy by taking responsibility without questioning it or one’s own consequences of taking it.”

“Taking responsibility for a crisis as an airline which operated the aircraft? Yes. Most important factors are to take responsibility and start

reacting to the crisis asap. In my country you are seen as an adult if you are taking responsibility without whining about the harmful consequences to you”

“Yes, be sincere, provide as much info as possible, provide the rescue/search plan, take responsibility and offer assurance. - To me that is strong crisis leadership”

“In any position of leadership or authority (CEO), I personally believe that accepting complete responsibility and apologising for the repercussions is the first point of duty. As a leader, accepting responsibility and demonstrates strength, competency and empathy, allows you to maintain control of the situation or any similar that may arise in the future.”

“Let me put it this way; An organisation that does not demonstrate respect for Chinese victims (especially if its foreign) or taking actions to better the current situation or any other situation like that in the future. It can close its operations in China.”

“Taking responsibility and showing strength in a crisis is seen in my culture as desirable traits and honourable leadership style.”

Participants who provided those answers made clear that actions such as taking responsibility and communicating transparently what happens next is expected from high-ranking leaders of multinational organisations. In addition, a high degree of honesty and accuracy is paramount. *Taking responsibility immediately* (20x) and providing some form of acknowledgement and involvement was more often mentioned than *focus on confirmed facts* (3x) which was seen as cold, dry and inappropriate for an emotional event that involved fatalities.

Table 6-d *Themes and Categories (Codes) – Theme 3*

Non-verbal /emotional response
Show empathy (28x)
Display control of the situation through body language/posture (17x)
Show unity and determination (7x)
Create a sense of comfort and relief for victims’ families by being informal (2x)

Emotional responses were found to be of high importance for participants. In fact, *show empathy* (28x) and to reflect compassion in non-verbal communication was mentioned almost as often as *adapting verbal communication* (see Table 6-b). Empathy and the ability to show vital characteristics such as *display control of the situation through body language/posture* (17x) to the circumstances was widely recognised as essential by participants.

“Yes, more empathy needs to be shown, and caring about the victims’ family, and taking confidentiality about victims’ names as priority, unless the victims’ families are willing to publicly disclose the name of the victims.”

“I think more empathy should have been shown in both press conferences. While it was not known, what had caused the crash I do feel they could have been sorry for all those involved. I grant that it is mighty difficult to show strength as in being in control and also empathy. But...many people died and out of empathy and duty you can gain strength and determination to help and increase security for the future. Very little in those press conferences. For me- not good enough.”

It was indicated by some participants that apologising is key to demonstrating empathy:

“Yes, when apologising the CEO shows empathy and he should apologise to the relatives of those that died. For that it is irrelevant if they are responsible or not.”

“It is important to show empathy and present a feeling of shared grief. The airline should apologise to families, employees and the country because it has hurt all of them. No matter why the crash happened, the airline officials are closest to preventing a crash from taking place {...} Their duty!”

Details such as eye-contact with audience has also shown in the thematic analysis to be essential to participants and if done incorrectly even being regarded as insincere which can affect meaning and reputation of the crisis communicators in the long run:

“More eye contact would be better. It’s really bad and insincere to constantly be looking at the document when addressing the public. I don’t like him.”

Table 6-e *Themes and Categories (Codes) – Theme 4*

Install Prevention Methods
Familiarise with cultural background of stakeholders (30x)
Hire multicultural spokespersons (18x)
Understand basic religious beliefs and customs of audiences (12x)

Several participants acknowledged the need for cultural sensitivity and put forward two approaches: *Familiarise with cultural background of stakeholder (30x)* and *hire multicultural spokespersons (18x)*. Both approaches go hand in hand as the latter can be seen as a logical consequence of the former. Also, *understand basic religious*

beliefs and customs of audiences (12x) seems to be recognised by participants as a profound part of one's cultural background.

One participant stressed that it might not always be politically correct but nevertheless religious beliefs should be respected by crisis communicators to create a sense of comfort for the victims' families:

“Victims religion must be regarded. So yes. Airlines need to account for culture, religions, customs and upbringing- as politically incorrect as it sounds in some cultures the death of a father and husband would be more tragic to the family as a provider than to the mother and potential 3rd wife. The airline needs to account for family structure and compensate accordingly. Not saying that men are worth more than women but if that means that the sole source of income is killed in the crash the airline need to be aware of that especially in a crisis like that. Communicating that clearly is a sign of respect. I would appreciate it.”

“Victims religion and upbringing should be regarded. Airlines should talk to the families and act accordingly. Maybe even organise Christian/Muslim etc. ceremonies for the victims. One needs to communicate that, so the airline is seen as trustworthy, sincere, respectful and so on.”

The question of cultural sensitivity and how it can be achieved highlighted how crisis communication can fail in the eyes of someone with a particular culture background that leads the person to expect something entirely different in the press conference:

“I think so. As a Frenchman, I was very angry hearing the Malaysian CEO as he seemed to be not affected by it or maybe hiding it due to his culture. I be honest, I would prefer to see him with tears in his eyes and speak his heart than to read from a document. He and the airline need to show they hurt many families from foreign countries. Some want money, so they should offer that, others want privacy. Maybe publishing names of passengers is wrong as some families want privacy and morn without everyone knowing. I think it would be nice to just assure everyone that the airline acknowledges different cultures and their needs and that they will deal with them in the process.”

In another statement, the difficulty of demonstrating cultural sensitivity, yet the need for it is being admitted. Some factors that are nevertheless essential such as grief, traditions, communicative norms are again highlighted:

“Absolutely, though it is difficult to impossible given myriad cultural norms and responses to death, accidents, and crises. Certainly, airlines should consider mourning rituals, privacy issues, differing cultural responses to grief, and communicative norms and expectations associated with these events and concerns. The press conference is when the world watches and they should at least show that they are aware we are all influenced by different backgrounds. A way to achieve that is to hire multicultural spokesperson(s) or have a team that represents a multitude of different nationalities so that they advise what is needed how, when and where.”

A Chinese respondent mentioned mourning rituals in her home country and how she sees the need to make it a communal of mourning:

“I’m Chinese and I get affected if I hear other Chinese died in a tragic accident like that. I want to know, and I appreciate publishing names of victims and share the families’ grief. We mourn together as one nation.”

4.6 Country Context and Thematic Analysis

The open-ended responses from the questionnaire allowed to show how themes were chosen in relation to home country groups. Table 6-f gives an overview of how the open-ended answers can be seen in light of the dominating themes and home country groups:

Table 6-f *Thematic Analysis and Home Country Group*

Home Country Group	Verbal Response (Theme 1)	Action (Theme 2)	Non-verbal/ Emotional Response (Theme 3)	Prevention Methods (Theme 4)
<i>China</i>	13	12	7	12
<i>UK</i>	5	9	10	8
<i>Australia</i>	4	5	9	13
<i>Malaysia</i>	10	15	12	9
<i>France</i>	7	7	9	11
<i>Germany</i>	5	8	7	7

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a short introduction followed by Section A, the qualitative analysis which provided an overview of the data analysis procedures, a description of the demographic characteristics of the 181 participants and a detailed presentation of statistically significant differences of the effects of crises communication (Germanwings in the 1st video and Malaysia Airlines in the 2nd video) on the six home country groups studied. The insights gained by the results in Section A provide quantitative data to the field of intercultural crisis communication and showed a clear relation between cultural background and perception creation of participants in this study.

Section B utilised the qualitative thematic analysis to determine themes emerging from two open-ended questions of the questionnaire. It became clear that verbal and non-verbal responses as well as taking actions and prevention methods were the four predominant themes mentioned by participants. The findings and conclusions drawn from Section A and B will be discussed in the next chapter, along with how the findings can be related to existing research, theory and practise.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the key research findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to the research questions and the literature, discussed in Chapter 3. The first section discusses the findings in relation to each of the research questions and sub questions. The second section discusses the study's contributions to the field, followed by a discussion of the limitations of the research. The final section provides a summary of all the findings and explanations made throughout the chapter.

5.2 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

5.2.1 Impact of Culture

RQ1: What role does culture play in recipients' perception creation with regard to crisis communication?

There are major differences in how to conduct crisis communication between the two cases. It became clear that spokespersons used different approaches on how to relay their messages to audiences. The fact that these plane crashes are similar global crises with a multitude of audiences of different cultural backgrounds provide an ideal context for analysing the role culture plays in the recipients' perception creation process. The findings provide a clear indication that for those home country groups studied, culture indeed plays a significant role, and this can be shown in three key areas in particular:

- Language Used for Crisis Communication
- Crisis Information Content (Names and Nationalities of Victims)
- Attribution of Responsibility

The extent to which each of these areas are significant and patterns evident for the influence of cultural background is discussed in the following sections.

5.2.2 Perception Creation

RQ1.1: How does a particular cultural background affect perception?

The study found evidence for three distinct but interdependent criteria of crisis communication that significantly influenced perception; language used, information content and attribution of responsibility. The way the perception was formed and the justification for it given by participants showed a close link to cultural values. It can be said that based on the findings and also differences observed, this study uncovers new facets of perception creation of a diverse group of audiences in the context of crisis communication.

However, it is important to mention that not one key area alone or even all three key areas studied together completely determines participants' perception of an organisation in crisis. A significant part of perception and ultimately an organisation's reputation in the aftermath of a crisis depends upon the audience-to-spokesperson relationship which can be analysed through multimodality and social

semiotics in particular. By analysing the key areas mentioned (crisis language, crisis information, attribution of responsibility) and examining the influence of multiple modes, a new approach to understanding the impact of cultural background in crisis communication is being offered by this study.

5.2.2a Language Used in Crisis Communication

When examining the findings regarding crisis language, it becomes clear that language is undeniably a significant influencer for perception creation as well as an indicator for cultural influence with participants in this study. Further, the different approaches to crisis language for Germanwings and Malaysia Airlines in both videos signifies different mentalities and different perspectives on the importance of crisis language. The fact that both crisis communicators used different languages (video1: German with translation/video2: English) to communicate to an international, multicultural audience is a strong indicator of cultural influence on the part of the crisis communicator themselves. The findings showed that the decision regarding crisis language used by executives influenced perception: The overwhelming majority of participants favoured English over German as the lingua franca for crisis communication (Pinsdorf, 2004). An obvious reason for that would be that more people speak and understand English as opposed to German. However, this argument is not convincing enough, as simultaneous translation for Germanwings' spokesperson was used for the entire press conference. The fact that Chinese participants in particular were disgruntled with the language choice in the first video

refutes essentialist literature such as Hall's and Hofstede's view of implicit communication styles suited to Chinese participants where words have little meaning.

Instead the findings for crisis language reveal an underlying perception of participants; the desire for the organisation to appreciate audiences as interpretive communities in creating social reality. Those findings for crisis language reveal that it is not just understanding the spoken words that is important but reaching the audience as interpretive communities through language as advocated by the social constructionist approach, referred to as a linguistic turn, (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2001; Gergen, 1998; Falkeimer and Heide, 2006, 2009; Zhao et al., 2017).

The importance of language therefore, not as a mere understanding of words but to define truth and to socially construct reality is a valid conclusion supported by the findings of this study. Germanwings' spokesperson failed to see that words are being perceived unfavourably if they are delivered through an impersonal medium, an unknown translator, who does not capture the emotion, intensity and attitude that only someone directly involved transmits. Weick's (2001) understanding of organisational sensemaking where language does not transport mere words but cues that shape perception has been found to be accurate. The results obtained for Chinese participants in the first video exemplify those findings in a very profound way, such that language is seen as so important that it must be personalised and implicit to be seen as convincing.

Pinsdorf's proposal of a lingua franca in crisis communication can therefore not be seen as a call for a one-world crisis language but as an effort by the organisation in

question to foster a reciprocal process in which a mutual understanding of reality is agreed upon. In light of the findings by Pinsdorf, lingua franca should be seen as the common language of constant adaptation based on the spokesperson's audiences. German participants for instance, showed a preference for English over German which does not reduce the importance of understanding the outmost of what is being said but simply shows the audience's desire is not primarily to necessarily understand each and every word but to detect the underlying message of the crisis efforts and that the organisation demonstrates awareness of the magnitude of a multidimensional and multicultural plane crash.

It must be said, however, that any language used that differs from the one spoken by a group of audiences will not be able to mirror all those rules, signs and values that shape perception. However, the findings for crisis language used reveal that most participants preferred Malaysia Airlines' approach (English) because it better acknowledged the direct involvement of audiences as interpretive communities. The Germanwings approach, to hold the press conference in German and have simultaneous translation in English, not only disregarded the interpretive nature of audiences but also created an unnecessary barrier between the audiences and the organisation in which a shared sensemaking was obstructed. By doing so, Germanwings' attempts to mirror levels of respect, as discussed by Evans (2003), for any of the home country groups' societal standards through language, was not achieved at all.

Germanwings' artificial barrier in the form of a simultaneous translator also diminished the performative nature of their crisis communication efforts and did not

present the heuristic resources of their efforts as described by Philipsen (2002). Germanwings' approach to crisis language, not only failed to anticipate cultural distinctiveness and meaning of communicative conduct but also blocked their own linguistic and socio-cultural behaviour which could have appealed to certain home country groups.

Ide's (2005) study of indexicality and reflexivity of linguistic rituals and Ting-Toomey and Chung's (2012) descriptions of low context and high context verbal patterns offer explanations for observed failures in directly communicating to audiences. The use of an intermediary (translator) by Germanwings as seen in the first video, reduced the chance to directly address values, verbal styles or tone used by interpretive communities to create a shared context to the situation between crisis communicator and audiences. Effective crisis communication that is culturally aware anticipates those cognitive processes of interpretive communities and tries to reflect upon them through crisis language. Based on the findings' overall low scores however, it is also clear that crisis language was not placed at the centre of interest by Germanwings in particular.

Therefore, examining the incidents in this light in the future might serve as the "ah-hah moment" for organisations to aid in the development of intercultural competencies for crisis language employed in press conferences when, through more cultural awareness, the organisations realise the confusion caused by misusing language and its consequences on audience perception creation and thus organisational reputation.

5.2.2b Crisis Information – Names and Nationalities of Victims

The findings regarding crisis information provide further indications for the existence and influence of cultural background on perceiving information. They indicate to which home country group communication was or was not appreciated. The decisive information that uncovers cultural influence on perceived crisis communication is the absence of (what some participants perceived to be) vital crisis information: the names and nationalities of victims.

While Germanwings' spokesperson did not mention nationalities, let alone names, his counterpart from Malaysia Airlines did provide that information right away. The findings not only attest to different cultural perceptions of what is considered essential information but further indicates that the lack of cultural awareness can lead to reduced approval of home country groups with the organisation in question:

German participants indicated that such information is too private to be communicated to the public and even worthy of persecution if leaked to the public¹⁷. Results from other home country groups showed that this is viewed very differently and, in some cases, even caused grave disappointment and anger towards Germanwings for holding back the names and nationalities of victims. The importance of crisis information, especially when it deals with information that, to some, is essential and, to others, confidential, it can be helpful to reflect on Choi and Chung's (2013) argument that in

¹⁷ German media hardly ever mention the full names of individuals even when they report about convicted criminals. If the person's name reported on is John Doe the media would refer to him as John D., J.D. or simply as "the suspect/convicted criminal".

the end stakeholder perception is more important than reality or that perception determines reality. In the Germanwings case, the method of not publishing that information goes hand in hand with the choice of crisis language.

The findings towards Germanwings' choice to not communicate that information and the adverse reaction by some home country groups signifies a disparity between sender and receiver on multiple levels and indicates a typical sender or management-oriented focus as discussed by Fraustino and Liu (2017). The authors describe that this is not only counterproductive for social constructionism but also easily misinterpreted. The findings of this study confirm the authors' evaluation. A sender orientation, where crisis language and information content are not based on the audience but instead what the sender desires to communicate is incompatible in such a scenario as displayed by the negative reaction of different home country groups.

Whilst a gap between organisational culture and expectation of audiences regarding information content of crisis communication cannot be bridged or explained by essentialist cultural dimensions such as carried out by Haruta and Hallahan (2003), the findings show that national dimensions still remain valid measurements for classifying differences for those core variables, as the question of including sensitive information such as name and nationalities of victims or not is deeply ingrained in a common societal understanding of what is right and what is wrong.

5.2.2c Attribution of Responsibility

The findings have shown that perceived responsibility for a plane crash varies based on the home country groups studied. The *before* results indicate the initial attribution of responsibility significantly varied across home country groups and indicates a completely different concept of perceived responsibility for a crisis. Those before results reveal the level of responsibility audiences assign to an organisation involved in a plane crash before seeing the video containing general information as well as the organisation's attempt to address the question of responsibility through the respective press conference.

The *After* results in Section A, the quantitative analysis, also show that crisis communication had no beneficial effect on most home country groups in this study. Most participants attributed equal or greater responsibility to the organisation in question after watching their crisis communication efforts. It follows that, for most participants, the question of responsibility is indeed decided upon even before watching the press conference (Coombs, 2007, 2012). The intensification of attribution of responsibility after watching the press conference shows a lack of the observed spokespersons to address the home country group needs. The original high levels of ascribed responsibility could be explained by Coombs' arguments that responsibility is linked to prior reputation, crisis history, personal involvement etc. These factors certainly play a role, but the findings of this study do not support them in their entirety:

First, Malaysian participants attributed a similarly high level of responsibility to Malaysia Airlines, both before and after watching the video, as they did for Germanwings even though they were more likely to have had some form of personal involvement with Malaysia Airlines before. Those participants indicated that the organisation operating the plane has a high level of responsibility regardless of other factors e.g. cause of the crash or prior reputation, and prior relation. Responses by Malaysian and Chinese participants favour communication that is forward looking in terms of how to improve the situation rather than overly focusing on apologetic communication. These participants expressed that the airlines must be seen here in the context of their duty to care for customers first and foremost and to learn from it as in to serve the transportation need of society with a heightened sense of safety. These results hint to a situational decision making about attribution of responsibility as advocated by Choi et al. (1999). Attribution of responsibility, however, is not situation-focused for all participants as found for German or UK participants. In particular, Australian participants have shown a small degree of willingness to attribute responsibility based on no further knowledge other than what was communicated at the press conference.

However, the findings clearly indicate that the question of responsibility must be considered in light of the socio-cultural order of audiences' home countries as advocated by Frandsen and Johansen (2012) and other social constructionists. Knowing these factors ahead of the press conference can mitigate the question of responsibility to a place where it is not seen by the organisation or the audiences as wrongdoing. The argument for crisis communication to reflect national culture values is discussed by Hearit's (2006) and affirmed by Frandsen and Johansen (2007, 2009)

as all three authors believe that national cultural aspects make an apology feel “real” for different interpretative communities (e.g. U.S.S. Greeneville apology to the Japanese people).

The different reasoning behind attribution of responsibility reflects national-cultural standards and has been shown to be more influential than prior reputation, crisis history etc. Crisis communicators should therefore include cultural background and socio-cultural standards resulting from norms known to the home country groups regarding attribution of responsibility as an indicator to address potential expectations. Both spokespersons have failed to mitigate potential long-term consequences which highlights the difficulty for crisis communicators to deal with the difficult and individual question of ascribed responsibility and the following implications for organisational reputation.

5.2.2d From Audience Perception to Organisational Reputation

RQ1.2: How does perception lead to favourable or unfavourable organisational reputation?

The study found evidence that participants’ cultural background not only perception of crisis communication viewed but also forward-looking statements such as quality and safety concerns as well as likeliness to refrain from using the affected airline in the future. To see how perception affects organisational reputation participants were asked about possible future actions in particular about their view and behaviour of the airline, not just crisis communication, as a whole:

- Evaluation of Doubts regarding Quality and Safety of the Airline
- Likelihood to Refrain from Using the Airlines Services in the Future

The total reputation scores calculated on the basis of those findings illustrate the communication end product. The extent to which each of these areas is significant and patterns evident is discussed henceforth.

5.2.2e Evaluation of Doubts Regarding Quality and Safety

The findings suggest that participants' concerns regarding quality and safety increase after watching the press conferences for both organisations, Germanwings and Malaysia Airlines. The visual crisis like a plane crash with the resulting crash site such as in the mountains (Germanwings) or with debris floating in the ocean (MH370) significantly increased doubts about safety and quality to a degree where the observed communication approaches, could not maintain or improve perception. However, the degree to which home country groups diverge in intensity of doubts supports the argument that differences in cultural background influence perception from which reputation is formed. Some home country groups were more prone to loss of confidence in the airline's ability to assure quality and safety standards. In the case of the first video, from Germanwings, participants from China continued to show the greatest disappointment just as with other parameters as stated before.

However, comparing all home country groups, the findings show a real divergence between European and Asian respondents. Even though a higher number of victims were German and British aboard Germanwings Flight U9525 than Malaysian or Chinese, the increase in doubt after watching the crisis efforts reveal that Asian participants in this study did not feel sufficiently included and addressed, which is exemplified by the severe negative change in mean scores after evaluating the Germanwings crisis message. The strong increase of distrust for Malaysian and Chinese participants shows their discomfort about not being properly acknowledged and that, to them, failed crisis efforts directly affected reputation for the organisation as exemplified by the “After watching” mean scores. It can be concluded from the steep increase in doubtfulness by those two home country groups in particular that quality and safety measures need to be included within the first response when communicating to audiences with Eastern cultural backgrounds. This is something which, according to the findings, does not have to be so urgently addressed with other participants, such as those from Germany.

Not addressing such matters or depicting a way in which this can be prevented in the future is detrimental to those participants that have a long-term outlook. A possible explanation is that home country groups such as those from Germany, the UK, and France see the crisis as a singular event in time while the Asian home country group in this study are looking for the “lesson learned” moment as they feel certainty that this will eventually happen again and crisis management should be about how society will be protected from this in the future. If crisis communication wishes to successfully address Malaysian and/or Chinese participants, it must be forward-looking and immediately address the question of how this can be prevented in the

future to moderate a steep increase in doubtfulness as could be observed in both: Section A and Section B of the findings chapter.

The findings for the second video, from Malaysia Airlines, show an even greater lack of trust in the airline's abilities. The fact that Malaysian participants showed a sharp increase in doubtfulness after watching the press conference indicates that the spokesperson's communication was not sufficiently geared towards domestic audiences. Furthermore, the fact that findings for other home country groups such as those from Germany, the UK, and Australia showed increases in doubtfulness too, illustrates how perceived ineffective crisis communication can result in lack of trust in the airline's quality standards and the organisation's inability to communicate to a diverse group of audiences.

It can be said that doubtfulness about services and qualities is not the result of a plane crash per se, but the findings showed crisis efforts in both videos overlooked the communication needs of home country groups and thereby alienated them, which they express in doubtfulness about whether the airline can provide adequate services for them in the future. This shows how ineffective crisis communication and unfavourable perception directly translate into reduced reputation. While the intensity between home country groups again varied, the trend observed towards increased doubtfulness in services performed, is the same.

The lack of both airlines applying shared sensemaking and not including the audiences' socio-cultural norms as part of the communication effort have caused a steep rise in doubtfulness for all home country groups. The discrepancies between

home country groups can be related to Lee's (2005) and Frandsen and Johansen's (2017) findings that reputation and stakeholder belief in the organisations in crisis are severely damaged and dealt with differently given the audience's cultural background. The results also support a greater need for social constructionism in crisis communication as it is the only reliable way to respond to the communicative needs of various interpretive communities and thereby effectively confronting doubtfulness in the organisation's ability to perform future operations safely.

The spokespersons need to be screened for intercultural competencies and trained to include some components within the press conference that addresses different home country groups' individual information needs and yet transport the same message which assures the airline's commitment to managing the crises and reducing harm as good as they can. The fact that this has not been accomplished at all for any of the home country groups in this study attests to the lack of cultural awareness even in the two recent crisis cases and to a continued reliance on outdated sender-focused communication style.

5.2.2f Likelihood to Refrain from Using the Airlines in the Future

The subjects in this study overwhelmingly decided that they are more likely to refrain from using both airlines' services in the future. Through perceptions and cognitions, a majority of participants have come to this conclusion.

Chinese participants indicated a significantly reduced willingness to use Germanwings in the future. The impersonal communication, the lack of desired information regarding passengers aboard, and their perception of not being addressed, had a

profound impact on Chinese participants which can be observed in the “likeliness to refrain” scores. The strong unwillingness to use Germanwings by that home country group is a clear indication how perception affects reputation. Those findings could support Lee’s (2005) notion of cultural interpretation of responsibility and face saving. The results have shown that Chinese and Malaysian participants were more likely to quietly dismiss an organisation’s services than German, French or UK audiences as a result of ineffective crisis communication.

The findings for German participants show that reputation is not shaken as they are willing to use the services again, regardless of the situation at hand or the way it is communicated to them. If their concerns were addressed more effectively through social constructionism for instance, spokespersons could, without much effort, improve reputation as German participants showed no sign of complete disgruntlement or total loss of trust in the given scenarios per se.

Results for other home country groups such as France or Australia only showed little differences and highlights confusion about the observed communication efforts. The error in communication to those home country groups must therefore primarily be seen in the inability to communicate sufficiently information that allows them to form perception in a, for the organisation, preferable way. While this is not an immediate problem as seen in the findings for likeliness to refrain from services in the future, it distorts perception, which can easily be affected by other voices in the crisis environment, as demonstrated by the *Rhetorical Arena Theory*.

The findings at hand nevertheless show that Germanwings did not manage to accomplish what crisis communication is intended to do; to safeguard reputation and reduce anxiety about the organisation's ability to successfully operate in the future. This discloses a lack of communicative control over the situation and over those groups of audiences in particular.

The findings also confirm the shortcomings of the sender-oriented method with a diverse group of audiences of different cultural backgrounds, as the airlines speak with one pre-defined voice that fails to convince the audiences. The findings show how no home country group was truly reassured by Germanwings' crisis communication efforts. The confusion and chaos that a crisis brings was not alleviated by the spokesperson. Thus, Germanwings' approach has failed to address the crucial matter of reducing anxiety and rebuilding trust in the organisation and the findings should be seen as a warning of how a weakened reputation could lead to reduced passenger numbers in the future.

The findings of this study indicate that Germanwings faces various negative audience responses ranging from boycott and protest in France to utter disregard with Chinese audiences. Whilst the communication methods chosen by Germanwings are genuinely ineffective in reducing anxiety about the future, social constructionism could have helped the organisation to understand those fears better and how different groups of audiences are more prone to a loss of trust in the airline's abilities. Social constructionism and greater interaction with audiences through communication efforts would have allowed tailor made responses to be found for each home country group. Familiarisation with cultural background of stakeholders beforehand or even hiring

multicultural consultants/spokesperson as proposed by several participants of this study (see Table 6-c/Table 6-e of Chapter 4, Section B) could have significantly improved perception.

The findings regarding the second video show that the five home country groups had a similar, pessimistic outlook of Malaysia Airlines. UK participants showed the highest likelihood to refrain from flying with Malaysia Airlines. This was followed by German participants who were also unwilling to pick Malaysia Airlines as a carrier in the future. When looking at those reputational parameters it becomes clear that Malaysia Airlines' spokesperson was also not successful at reducing potential fears. Findings from the thematic analysis have shown that French and Australian participants see a lack of emotional involvement as a decisive reason for not being convinced the crisis is dealt with accordingly.

The factors that define effective crisis communication, which vary with home country groups, disclose the real cultural distinctions where for one home country group crisis communication is judged as successful if it shows awareness of the multicultural situation (German group), and for another (Malaysian/Chinese group) if communication conveys credible bettering of future operations. Here, we clearly see an Eastern/Western divide for how organisational reputation is formed. Western perspectives deduce inability to operate from failure to handle the crisis, while Chinese participants accept the occurrence of it but not the inability to demonstrate that the organisation is in the process of learning its lesson to prevent a crash from happening again. Betty Kaman Lee's (2005) arguments have been found to be particularly true for Chinese participants and that a relationship exists between ineffective crisis

communication, attribution of responsibility and judgement of the organisation. The findings of this study subsequently hint at significant overall decreased image of the organisation by Chinese people after watching the press conference.

This also applies for German participants in the second video as their perception changed much more than for the first video's crisis efforts. Lewis' (2006) findings about German cultural factors are relevant here. He argues that German culture is very direct and fair, however if trust has been lost once, it is very hard to re-establish relations. By publishing those names and nationalities German participants saw a violation of mutual trust which makes them feel more likely to renounce the organisation.

This is not at all the case for French and Australian participants who have not yet made up their mind about whether perceived shortcomings in crisis handling will lead to taking action in the future as a result. At this point, if social constructionism was truly embraced and reflected in the communication efforts, Malaysian Airlines could have established good terms with those undecided home country groups much quicker and made sure that any doubts they may have had answered appropriately. Social constructionism in fact, would make crisis communication more efficient and the airline would be able to prioritise their efforts based on which home country group is more likely to deal with doubtfulness about the organisation and likeliness to refrain from using their services in the future. Such a ranking would make ongoing communication after the first press conference more oriented towards achieving milestones with audience groups and thus concentrate communicative resources more efficiently.

Malaysian participants have shown to be the least likely not to use Malaysia Airlines in the future. However, an increase in anxiety has been observed for Malaysian participants as well. If one were to assume a national bias, it must be said that this can only be seen as a small advantage for the organisation in crisis, as Malaysian participants also showed an increased probability not to choose their national carrier in the future. This is indeed more surprising for Malaysia Airlines than it is for Germanwings due to the national significance of the Airline for Malaysia. Huang et al. (2016) describe Malaysian culture as traditionally hierarchically structured with a patriarchal political structure. This is important to note, as Malaysia Airlines is a fully state-owned national carrier, unlike Germanwings, and therefore the increased level of doubtfulness towards a governmental organisation and thus refraining from using their national carrier exemplifies a stark difference with past scholarship's evaluation of Malaysian cultural background and perception creation in the past.

The findings for those Malaysian participants in this study also challenge Salleh's conclusion about his countrymen, which was that Malaysians would rather pay a premium and fly with Malaysia Airlines just to support and participate in the socio-cultural system.

He bases this assumption on Hall's (1990) high contextual understanding of Malaysian culture and the high value that is placed on personal relationships and support for the domestic hierarchical structures. He describes his interaction with participants as follows: "Malaysia Airlines (MAS) air tickets are generally more expensive than some other airlines, and so I was curious to know why Anuwar (participant) had chosen MAS when he could have purchased a lower-priced ticket. Anuwar answered, "I feel

like I'm at home when I travel with MAS. The environment is familiar." I [Salleh], too, feel the same emotional attachment flying on Malaysia Airlines because there is warmth and hospitality, just like home" (Salleh, 2005, p. 8).

The findings indicate that the crisis scenario, MH370 as seen in the second video, and an overall deficient crisis communication has also changed perceptions for the Malaysian home country group in this study. Malaysian participants' higher possibility of refraining from using Malaysia Airlines' services in the future is the logical consequence of increased doubt regarding quality and services and underlines the impact unfavourable perception of crisis communication has on an organisational reputation regardless of socio-cultural structures or prior favourable relationships as advocated by Coombs (2007).

Having said this, it does take more for Malaysian or German participants to dismiss an organisation altogether that they have cultural ties with. Even though distrust increases with perceived ineffective crisis communication, these organisations appear to have reputational bonuses with their own home country groups when the organisation faces an international crisis. It provides them with a buffer when participants make forward looking statements about the organisation in question.

5.2.2g Overall Reputational Impact of Crisis Communication on Home Country Groups

The statistical findings show that European participants (Germany, France, UK) have found Germanwings' approach to be overall more favourable, while findings for Malaysian and Chinese participants tended overall more towards Malaysia Airlines' communication strategy. Australian scores are indeed interesting as they favour the Germanwings approach over Malaysia Airlines. The findings show that the notion of an Eastern/Western divide as stated by Hall or Lewis can be supported if Australia is counted as part of the West in this dichotomy. The reason why Australia should be seen as a Western nation may be explained by some fundamental beliefs held by a majority of Australian participants which represent fundamental national values that are endorsed by all subgroups within that national culture.

Despite its immigrant sub-cultures, indigenous population and mass immigration in the 1980s and 90s, Australian norms and values still very much mirror a Western Anglo-Saxon tradition as stated by Lewis (2006). Fundamental belief systems of Australian society are a deep-rooted shared symbolic reality that is closely knitted to British values in key determinants such as political, economic and judicial institutions (Lee, 2005). However, strengthened sub-cultural influences in recent years could be one reason why findings regarding language have not been in line with past scholarship (Richard D. Lewis, 2006). He states, in his revised edition of his book *When Cultures Collide – Leading Across Cultures*: “There is no better clue to the 200-year development of Australian society and culture than the Australian language itself.

Australia is the largest English-speaking country in the southern hemisphere” (2006, p. 206).

Instead, British and Australian participants share key determinants in perception creation and reach similar conclusion when evaluating an organisation’s reputation. Although the UK shows a slightly higher appreciation for Germanwings and the first video, they do not differ in their view on Malaysia Airlines in the end. UK participants do not indicate a similar dismissal of Malaysia Airlines in the second video as seen by German participants. Despite the many shortcomings in effective intercultural crisis communication indicated by Chinese and Malaysian participants, the findings still show that overall reputation scores by those home country groups are higher for Malaysia Airlines than Germanwings.

Looking at reputational impact on both airlines as a direct result of their crisis communication efforts and the way participants perceive it has revealed how circumstances are viewed differently by six different distinct home country groups and hence captured the impact of culture in the field. In order to not only acknowledge those specific differences but to better understand the origins of how those differences come into existence, a new method of assessment is used in this study. While this study has so far demonstrated that cultural background is indeed a key determinant with impact in multiple areas of crisis communication, it is essential to make those findings matter by making them more widely applicable and to give direct advice to organisations on how to choose and train crisis communicators to better transfer information to diverse groups and to better manage reputation through customised crisis communication.

In order to do so, a completely new form of assessment was used, to deepen understanding of how the spokesperson's delivery beyond language, information content and sense of responsibility, influences their relation to the audiences and to uncover how the individual spokesperson's delivery of crisis communication contributes to audiences' perception creation.

5.3 Multimodal Nature of Crisis Communication

RQ2: What insights does multimodality offer to help better understand the relation of cultural background, perception creation and organisational reputation?

As stated in Chapter 3, multimodality was chosen as a new method to gain insights into crisis perception of multicultural audiences because of its success in related fields. The past findings have shown where and how cultural background affects perception and organisational reputation. Understanding the value of multimodality means that the spokesperson can understand and make use of components in which he/she can more directly adjust his or her communication efforts towards a certain home country group. Making use of multimodality in crisis communication can significantly reduce the previously discussed consequences to reputation such as doubtfulness or likeliness to refrain from using the airlines' services in the future. As overall reputation scores have shown, the spokesperson in both videos was not able to influence perception successfully through communication efforts alone, and correctly using multimodality and social semiotics in particular, could change that.

Multimodality goes beyond verbal and non-verbal communication. Multimodal interactional analysis has a strong social approach and looks at the dynamics of how crisis communication is perceived, which cannot be explained by models or universal response strategies. A better understanding of the advantages of multimodality and how it can uncover deeply rooted beliefs will help bridge existing communication gaps, make crisis communication more well-rounded and offer serious approaches to help organisations and their spokespersons to improve their relations with multicultural audiences in times of crises. Multimodality can be considered as an antidote to outdated cultural dimensions as it never generalises but inquires about the situational factors that form perception with the given audiences. Social semiotics represent a group of modes that were used as variables to better investigate the audience's sensemaking process. Hence, an improved understanding of the usefulness of social semiotics and how it can be used in crisis communication will offer direct benefits to existing crisis communication models such as *Rhetorical Arena Theory*, in particular on the micro level (RAT, Figure 1.2).

Table 6-a shows the multiple modes (*sitting vs. standing, speed of speaking, eye contact, physical appearance, facial expression*) that were chosen for participants to evaluate. It was found that each home country group identified at least one mode that was found to be statistically significant and thus had a profound impact on perception creation. The findings directly support the third assumption underpinning multimodality which is that people orchestrate meaning through their selection and configuration of modes.

5.3.1 Chinese Participants

The multimodal perspective has uncovered that Chinese participants showed a strong preference for *standing* (Malaysia Airlines) over *sitting* (Germanwings). This supports the core belief that language and, by extension, crisis perception is formed by more than just verbal communication. The findings confirm Scollon and Scollon's (2011) assumption that communication is shaped by a rich and complex overabundance of factors where some aspects are more emphasised than others due to different upbringings in different cultures. The preference of Chinese participants for this primary and controllable activity can also be explained by what Granström et al. (2002) refer to as *Dimensions of Content*. The fact that Malaysia Airlines' spokesperson stands with his aides behind him (see Appendix, p. 226) affirms the sociocultural identity and his role in the activity of communicating and managing the crisis. The findings for Chinese participants further support Marra's (1999, 2003) assumptions about a communication culture in which a standing and supportive entourage unifies communication and creates an organisational communication culture. This behaviour can also be more and more observed by politicians too¹⁸.

The multimodal findings provide evidence for required practices when conducting crisis communication to this specific group. For Chinese participants, presenting crisis messages standing which corresponds to the previous findings that this groups desires a focus on continuity in crisis messaging and demonstrating actions such as to prevent

¹⁸ This has often been observed in China and countries that have a traditionally strong group sense (e.g. important political speeches held in China will be done at communist party meetings to emphasise unity in leadership). It has been adopted in the 1990s in the USA and in more recent years could be observed in the UK and continental European countries.

future crises. Standing appears to this home country group as more action-oriented while presenting crisis communication sitting is seen as less dedicated in respect to the complexity and urgency of a plane crash scenario. The multimodal importance of presenting crisis communication standing instead of sitting along with other significant findings for Chinese participants in regard to information content and crisis language allows spokespersons to be much more knowledgeable and capable when dealing with audiences of a Chinese cultural background.

5.3.2 French Participants

French participants attributed a higher overall reputation to Germanwings with the variables *eye contact* and *physical appearance*, being key influential semiotics. The findings support Granström et al.'s (2002) conclusion that appearance represent attitudes and emotions and are one of the most important content-related contributions in particular for this home country group.

As previously mentioned, multimodality does not wish to side line language but to expand the semiotic frame. The findings for this home country group emphasise in particular how language does not play the central role in perception. For this home country group, the modes of eye contact and physical appearance have been shown to be decisive contributors to meaning.

Reinhard and Sporer (2008) stress the value of eye contact and how some cultures see gaze aversion as negative for perception. This can be related to the findings for French participants who have indicated how continuous eye contact is an essential mode for

meaning creation in crisis communication when addressing them. Ting-Toomey and Chung's (2012) description of how self-effacement and humility is transmitted in Malaysia through reduced eye contact can be observed in the second video.

French participants did not decode this typically implicit way of demonstrating humility which is similar to Hearit's (2006) and Frandsen and Johansen's (2007, 2009) findings regarding non-tangible factors that make an apology appear real for different cultural groups. The authors also describe the dilemma of how certain physical appearances are paramount when communicating an apology and that those are directly connected to the audience's cultural understanding of it. Similarly, this can be seen with eye contact where a method of signalling humility is not only not noticed by French participants but leads to a less favourable perception in the end. Further, the findings can be associated with Lewis' (2006) analysis of French culture as he confirms how prolonged silence, lethargic body posture, and limited eye contact should be avoided when communicating to French audiences as these are regarded as signs of dishonesty.

At the same time, the findings contradict Claeys and Cauberghe's (2015) assumptions that less eye contact means less power display and would increase perceptions of sincerity. The multimodal perspective instead shows that for French participants it is necessary that spokespersons embody a for French participants highly-regarded deterministic physical appearance and continuous eye contact in order to gain a favourable perception.

5.3.3 UK Participants

UK participants showed a high appreciation for *physical appearance* and favoured that of Germanwings' spokesperson. The strong preference of UK participants for overall physical appearance in the first video due to a more controlled physical appearance challenges Hearit and Courtright's (2003) arguments that crises are terminological formations and therefore solved terminologically. The findings with respect to social semiotics show that this is not accurate as, in this case, physical appearance has influenced the way this home country group perceives crisis communication and its effectiveness beyond the previously mentioned parameters. Multimodal analysis revealed that for the UK home country group, physical appearance was a predominant factor for creating a mutual understanding which goes beyond terminological problem-solving as stated by Hearit and Courtright (2003).

For UK participants, the second video showed a Malaysian approach to crisis communication where frequent body movement was associated with less honest communication if not even seen by some as forms of deception as discussed by Bogaard et al. (2016) and Reinhard and Sporer (2008). The UK results highlight the interrelatedness of how physical appearance and verbal communication must be combined when addressing this home country group. The deliverance of crisis communication and, in practice, a spokesperson with the capability to physically personify the crisis efforts spoken of is of utmost importance for UK participants. The emphasis on physical appearance as the decisive mode for meaning, highlights the particular need for a certain multiliteracy where the spokesperson not only speaks

English but physically embodies the gesticulation that goes hand in hand with the chosen communication style.

5.3.4 German Participants

The multimodal findings for Germany underline the importance of non-verbal modes for perception creation for this particular group. *Physical appearance* was seen as the most influential mode and a contributor to why Germanwings spokesperson, Thomas Winkelmann, was more effective for German participants than his counterpart in the second video. The findings do support Gorn et al.'s (2008) assumptions that expressive and firm body movement is seen to some as an indicator of competence. The findings also support Lewis' (2006) citing of a cultural appreciation for disciplined appearance in Germany and that weak physical appearance can be seen as lacking in control.

Further, a preference for a slowed down speaking style is relatable to accepted astuteness of German culture in relation to language and speaking. Multimodal analysis has shown that no other home country group in this study valued *speed of speaking* as much as this one. German culture and the complicated syntax of German allows for detailed yet weighty arguments. Therefore, the average speed of speaking in Germany is slower than in other European countries such as France or Spain (Nettle and Nettleton, 1999), which explains the emphasis placed by participants in this group on the mode and speed of speaking. The findings further show that frequent *eye contact* is also desired by German participants which confirms Lewis' (2006) description of German directness and Gorn et al.'s (2008) assumption of perceived

competence through gaze. Both researches concur that close physical contact and/or using strong eye contact affects authenticity and indicates competency to manage crisis situations. The findings show that this is particularly true for German participants who have indicated those modes to be of prime importance for their perception of organisational crisis communication.

The importance placed on speed of speaking, eye contact and physical appearance have confirmed that those guidelines for everyday interactions with German audiences, as described by Lewis, are amplified for crisis communication.

5.3.5 Malaysian Participants

The multimodal perspective indicates a different picture than what could be assumed by existing literature on Malaysian cultural characteristics. According to Lewis (2006), Malaysian audiences' expectation for formalness is a deeply ingrained cultural aspect which increases with hierarchical status. The first video showed a very formal CEO acting as spokesperson who, at the same time, followed a slow and courteous style of speaking. The *eye contact* behaviour that was seeking people present in the room indicated a direct approach to reaching audiences which Malaysian participants valued. It was perceived as honest and humbling and preferred to the second video attitude which was hardly regarded as such. Malaysian participants preferred Germanwings' spokesperson's uninterrupted eye contact and his *physical appearance* showed willingness to deal with a situation than can be described as a loss of face for the organisation. A potential reason why Germanwings' spokesperson dealt better on

the basis of those two modes for Malaysian participants could be found in the immediate display of shame through body language which is unusual to a CEO's hierarchical status in Malaysian culture.

Thus, it was seen by this home country group as a convincingly sincere approach to communicating a crisis. The modes of physical appearance and eye contact and how they were employed in the first video appear to have signalled a more virtuous behaviour to Malaysian participants. The findings for Malaysian participants strongly support Ten Brinke and Adams' (2015) analysis of organisational apologies. The saddened, almost desperate attitude displayed by the spokesperson and CEO in the first video had a favourable effect on most participants in this home country group, which confirms that sadness is linked to sincerity, while signs of contentment such as smiling reduce credibility and effectiveness of organisational apologies which modal analysis has confirmed specifically in the case of Malaysian participants.

5.3.6 Australian Participants

The multimodal analysis has uncovered a similarity between Australian and UK participants in terms of modal preferences. As genuine correlations were observed in other parameters but especially in multimodality it can be argued to include Australia in a potential Eastern/Western cluster where Australia is regarded as a Western country with Western communicative characteristics (Lewis, 2006; Rösch and Segler, 1987).

Physical appearance plays a significant role for Australian participants to determine meaning in crisis communication. This marks an interesting finding because, contrary to such findings of the importance of physical appearance with that group, Lewis (2006) argues that informality and little regard to physical appearance is a fundamental part of Australian culture: “Australians love informality” (p. 211). While Germanwings’ spokesperson showed a much more formal approach, i.e. wearing a black suit and black tie, Australian participants found the first video to show a more appropriate physical appearance. The so called “Pacific Rim” approach to communication, described by Lewis (2006) also stresses informality in physical appearance and Australians’ openness to Eastern philosophy’s ambiguity and implicit communication patterns. Multimodal information has found that those assumptions do not hold for crisis communication when engaging with an Australian audience. Australian participants see physical appearance as a predominant factor for crisis sensemaking and thereby this study argues on the basis of the findings obtained, that Australia, despite its geographically distant location and previous immigrant tradition, is to be considered UK-esque in terms of crisis communication and shared sensemaking. The multimodal perspective in this matter has shown a correlation to British expectations of meaning creation which will help organisations and spokespersons to merge communicative aspects when dealing with those two audience groups during an international crisis.

5.4 Contribution to the Field

This study's contributions are primarily centered on providing evidence for the effects cultural background has on crisis communication perception and organisational reputation and that interdisciplinary methods such as multimodality can provide greater insights into how spokespersons influence perception. This study also tries to provide support to the contemporary approach to crisis communication and, in particular, social constructionism, which is the most successful proposition for crisis communicators when addressing multicultural audiences. By linking the findings to reputation and identifying multimodality as a new powerful tool to "dig deeper" into how those complex feelings towards an organisation are created by the respective spokespersons' actions, this study aims to acknowledge and address the needs of global, multicultural audiences in crisis communication research.

Findings with regard to how perception is linked to cultural background and that it should not be derived from popular cultural studies could provide the basis for further research and the development of intercultural training and coaching methods that would benefit practitioners and scholarship alike. Based on the current state of research within intercultural crisis communication, this study filled in this research gap in terms of cultural influence on perception creation in crisis communication and its consequences of organisational reputation.

The introduction of multimodality into crisis communication should continue to spark interest by researchers and hopefully make the usefulness of this approach more widely known in the field. The study provides a basis upon which established

assessment instruments, such as the *Rhetorical Arena Theory* could be adapted to the needs of global organisations facing international crises. Through multimodality, the importance of the spokesperson has to be raised and organisations need to apply the findings by employing spokespersons who are trained and aware of multimodal influences on audiences.

5.5 Limitations of the Research

While the small can be considered sample¹⁹ for the overall population size, the study comprised a decent size of each cultural group in the realm of mostly young, cosmopolitan, educated adults studying at the University of London. Nevertheless, limitations to the generalisability of findings from this study have to be mentioned. A larger-scale study conducted by a group of researchers or in collaboration with institutes with existing access to a large number of participants from a wider range of home country groups could overcome this limitation.

The first limitation is that the study was conducted with participants who are all students at the University of London and were, at the time of the research, living in the United Kingdom. This is indeed a limitation common to dissertation like this one with a controlled time frame and trivial funding. While this certainly does not dismiss findings, it does limit findings to a demographic that is privileged and a minority within each cultural group. It is therefore important to note that those findings

¹⁹ The total number of participants in this study is very small and indeed unrepresentative compared to other longitudinal studies such as Hofstede (171,000) or GLOBE Project (950 organisations in 60 countries).

represent an elite group of test subject, which can call into question the generalisability of findings to the overall cultural group from which the sample was drawn.

Another limitation of that sample of participants, which affects the generalisability of the findings, is participant bias. Those participants who agreed to take part in the study may not share characteristics or attitudes of the wider population they represent, as they have a better education, and more international exposure which are all factors that could reduce the influence of cultural background and affect perception creation and outlook. Those described factors, particularly the difference between residency and home country could have influenced their perception, which is described by Zhu (2014) as acculturation. While early categorisation try to account for possible acculturation, a survey method is not sufficient to detect acculturation. In fact, a focus group or interviews would be a much better way to account for such limitations to a cultural study such as this one. A more elaborate study in the future with greater resources, closer attention to the individual and his/her biography, could help reduce most limitations encountered in this study. Including participants residing in the corresponding home countries would forgo the risk of acculturation to a large extend along with participant bias and yield results from a much less limited circle of participants as it was the case in this particular study.

Furthermore, another factor that could have distorted the answers provided, is the question of how much participants knew about the incidents of Malaysia Airlines MH370 and Germanwings U9525 before taking the questionnaire. If one of the participants would have studied the cases intensely before, worked in any of the mentioned organisations, or even personally known a victim, the answers given could have been compromised. Personal experiences and knowledge of the crises reduces

the desired initial reaction of test subjects (Coombs and Holladay, 2011) and could upset those involved in the research to a level where individuals feel mistreated which could risk research results in their entirety. Likewise, Malaysia Airlines had a second incident²⁰ involving a plane crash shortly after the incident discussed in this study which could have caused a negative enforcement in the minds of participants, regarding the airline or negative crisis history, as Coombs (2007) points out.

The research method used, in-depth questionnaires, also has inherent limitations, including the possibility of participant bias as in their reluctance to answer questions truthfully either to save time, please the researcher by anticipating what they may or may not like to obtain, or by casting the airline and their country in a favorable light (social desirability). In this study, the limited time frame and funds exacerbated those limitations as the researcher collected the data on his own and did not change the airlines names which could have minimised participant bias and eliminated social desirability. Future research could utilise additional methods to triangulate findings for greater reliability and disguise the crisis cases which would render them unrecognizable for participants.

²⁰ Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, scheduled flight from Amsterdam, Netherlands to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia was shot down on 17 July 2014 by pro-Russian rebels while flying over eastern Ukraine, killing all 283 passengers and 15 crew members on board.

5.6 Chapter Summary

The aim of this study was threefold: First, to assess the role of culture in participants' perception when evaluating two very different approaches to crisis communication in the airline industry. Second, the relation between cultural background, perception and organisational reputation. Third, how a new to the field unknown approach, could be used as a new assessment tool for understanding how the organisation's spokesperson is shaping crisis communication. Substantial evidence was produced for the validity that, based on the sample size of 181 participants, cultural background that can be linked to nation states does play a substantial role in perception creation. The findings highlight the impact culture has on perception and thereby supports the efforts of some scholars to transform crisis communication into a multi-disciplinary intercultural crisis communication research field (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006; Frandsen and Johansen, 2007, 2010; Huang et al., 2016).

At first, the importance of language was evaluated. The results turned out to show that language is not a passive vehicle of passing along information but a "carrier of power" (Falkheimer and Heide, 2006) that is perceived differently in regard to one's cultural background. The findings also show that Hall's (1976, 1990) popular high vs. low classification for different cultures cannot be applied to crisis communication without reservation. This was found to be particularly true for so-called high context cultures that have shown adverse behaviour to Hall's beliefs in those cultures' implicit information seeking behaviour through language.

Another indicator of the significance of cultural background in perception creation was uncovered by the findings in regard to “Names and Nationalities of Victims”. The variance observed across home country groups in releasing sensitive information as part of the communication efforts refuted common beliefs about the validity and reliability of known cultural dimensions. Chinese participants’ high disapproval in terms of not having a specific kind of information communicated to the public in the first video signifies the cultural importance of explicit knowledge. Similarly, German participants’ little emphasis to know the names and nationalities of those victims is contrary to Rösch and Segler’s (1987) national context mapping which stresses Germans’ thorough reliance on explicit information for perception creation.

Another factor that was studied to understand the role of culture in perceiving crisis communication, was the concept of responsibility. The findings have shown a meaningful cultural influence when participants attributed responsibility. In crisis communication, attribution of responsibility is a well-known concept (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1995). Lee’s (2004) assumption that crisis communication with Chinese audiences is more meritorious when keeping silent, “no comment”, can be refuted given the high desire for implicit information by Chinese participants. Germanwings’ effective no comment option regarding names and nationalities effectively led to much lower mean scores. Further, attribution of responsibility decreased when receiving that desired information in the second case of Malaysia Airlines. Overall, the lack of clearly addressing responsibility in both videos worsened perception of both airlines by all other home country groups.

Nevertheless, Hearit and Courtright's (2003) assumptions that apologetic discourse and, by extension, attribution of responsibility, is dependent on the environment in which it is performed or to whom it addresses remains a valid point that the findings of this study support. The question of how perception translates into reputation should be of interest for the business world and scholarship alike. Based on that central interest, participants were asked about their assessment of quality and safety as well as their willingness to fly with that airline in the future. While, in the beginning, the analysis focused on backward-looking questions (evaluation of past incidents), forward-looking questions (participants' own choices for the future) were then asked and represented the logical next step from the role culture plays to how it tangibly affects an organisation's public image and its reputation.

Total reputation scores disclosed those consequences for both airlines and supported Huang et al. (2016) idea of an Eastern/Western divide in crisis communication, with the exception of Australia, where China and Malaysia awarded a better overall reputation to Malaysia Airlines, despite the shortcomings those home country groups clearly identified over Germanwings. This is indeed remarkable, as those two home country groups also represent the two nationalities with the largest number of victims aboard Flight MH370. To understand those findings better, multimodality's social semiotics approach was applied which represents a new assessment tool for crisis communication. Specific modes indicated a strong influence on perception creation. Chinese participants showed a strong preference for the spokesperson to address them standing instead of sitting. This statically significant difference contributed to higher total modal scores for Malaysia Airlines, which impacted total reputation besides other factors such as language or responsibility.

While the results for France, the UK, Germany and Australia support the theory of direct relation between multimodal scores and reputation, it is not so conclusive for Malaysia. Eye contact and physical appearance showed a statistical significance, influencing total modal scores to ever so slightly favour Germanwings' approach in that matter and yet overall reputation scores indicated a commitment to Malaysia Airlines in the end.

Nevertheless, insights gained from multimodality, and in this study specifically social semiotics, presents a new way of looking at the deliverance of crisis communication and should find its way in comparative studies in crisis communication. The use of multimodality helped the research to go deeper into understanding the impact of cultural factors on crisis communication and organisational reputation. Norris (2004) and Jewitt et al.'s (2004) theory of the importance of a range of modes for assessment, referred to as an ensemble of modes in communication studies can only be embraced and ought to become an integral part of the field.

In the end, contributions to the field as well as limitations and implications inherent to this study were mentioned and reflected upon. This chapter concluded with a summary of the key research findings and discussed them with reference to the research questions and in relation to previous research.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents a summary of the study. It reiterates the aims and methodology of the research and summarises the key findings, followed by a consideration of the implications. Finally, recommendations for further research into the field of intercultural crisis communication are discussed.

6.2 Aims of Research and Methodology

This study's aim was to gain insights into how cultural background of audiences of crisis communication affect their perception and subsequently organisational reputation. Further, the study sets out to advocate social constructionism and introduce a new approach of multimodality, to show how the spokesperson shapes perception beyond purely linguistic cues, which has hardly received any interest in the research until now. At the same time, this started the expansion of the field into a multidisciplinary research area with an addition from behavioural linguistics and intercultural communication.

The underlying aims were thus to facilitate a new chapter in crisis communication research: Firstly, to show the shortcomings of the outdated traditional view of crisis communication in a global world with no regard to cultural specificities when today local morals and norms seem to matter more than ever as organisations face

stakeholders around the world. Secondly, to foster the transformation of the field from crisis communication to intercultural crisis communication.

In order to achieve this, the study set out to answer the following questions:

- What role does culture play in recipients' perception with regard to crisis communication?
- How does a particular cultural background affect perception?
- How does cultural background and audience's perception affect organisational reputation?
- What insights does multimodality offer to help better understand the relation of cultural background, perception creation and organisational reputation?

Utilising an exploratory, mixed method, inductive approach, the study included an in-depth questionnaire with a heterogeneous sample of 181 students divided into six home country groups. For data analysis, IBM's SPSS, as proposed by Wagner (2012), was used to deal with quantitative findings, methodology combined with a qualitative thematic analysis to analyse open-ended survey questions as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006). As a result, the constructionist perspective of the thematic analysis helped to theorise the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that lead participants to answer the open-ended questions as they did.

6.3 Summary of Key Findings

6.3.1 Culture as the Main Influencer for Perception

With regard to the first research question, the findings clearly indicate that cultural background challenges conventional crisis communication beliefs and that verbal as well as non-verbal factors influence different areas of crisis messaging that shape an audience's perception and eventually organisational reputation. Evidence was found that there is a significant impact of the following three integral parts of crisis communication: Language Used for Crisis Communication, Crisis Information Content (Names and Nationalities of Victims), Attribution of Responsibility.

- Language Used for Crisis Communication

The study has shown that the importance of language in crisis communication is not to safeguard a general understanding of each word communicated but to define truth and make sure the truth of a given incident is transmitted correctly to various audiences/home country groups. This has been shown in this study as both videos communicated almost identical information. However, perception significantly varied as such that some groups judged Germanwings' approach a false attempt to communicate the truth. One mistake here was to focus too much on a German audience by communicating in German and having a mediator translate simultaneously for non-German speaking audiences. The strongly unfavourable responses for that method by some home country groups showed that it is not English per se (as used entirely in the second video) which was seen as more favourable but

the fact that the spokesperson in the second video communicated directly; from sender to receiver transmitting deeply held beliefs and opinions in which meaning was clearer than in the first video. The findings for crisis language therefore reveal that it is not just understanding the spoken words that is important but reaching the audience, which is an interpretive community, through the power of modulating language as advocated by the social constructionist approach, often referred to as a linguistic turn (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2001; Gergen, 1998; Falkeimer and Heide, 2006, 2009; Zhao et al., 2017).

The findings support Weick's (2001) understanding of organisational sensemaking where language does not transport mere words but cues that shape perception and hence reality. Ultimately, the findings show the power of words and language as a bearer of meaning and truth. The study showed that the misapplication of language, such as using an intermediary that focuses on word-for-word translations who are neither visible to the audience nor personally present, considerably diminished effectiveness of the intended crisis message.

- Crisis Information Content (Names and Nationalities of Victims)

Information content provided showed how cultural specificities of home country groups influenced perception and more specifically what information is regarded as critical or rather inappropriate if not insensitive and offensive. A particular stark contrast was observed between German and Chinese participants. While the one group thought this information is considered private and too sensitive to be made public, the other group demanded such information and considered it to be essential for forming

an opinion. Cultural background and resulting norms of what is considered suitable or not for the two spokespersons and airlines are also the only sensible explanations for the difference in information policy.

Further, the fact that those matters are reflected in national laws also supports the idea of using home country groups as a basis for analysis e.g. the strong dislike and sense of inappropriateness of German participants for Malaysia Airlines' policy of publishing supposedly private information is reflected in strong German data privacy laws. Chinese participants' opinion on the other hand, who felt the opposite, is reflected in very lenient privacy laws in China. At the same time, the non-awareness by both spokespersons of those grave differences and perception influencers highlights the essentialist view and dominant sender-oriented organisational culture still present in the handling of two fairly recent crisis scenarios. Both spokespersons and their communicative approach reflect their own national and organisational culture instead of focusing on their audiences. In that regard, this study found a clear gap between the various audiences' desire for information and the respective senders' willingness and limitations to share information.

- Attribution of Responsibility

Participants were asked to attribute responsibility to the organisation/spokesperson before and after watching the respective efforts to explain the incident. The findings showed that a majority of participants attributed equal or greater responsibility after watching the videos. These findings further show the ineffectiveness of both airlines' approaches to communicating a crisis as the main aim of an organisation should be to

ideally reduce attribution from the start. While findings can be explained in the light of Coombs SCCT model where things such as prior reputation, crisis history etc. are an integral part of the perception creation process, it became clear that those are not the only explanations that make sense. Instead, the findings were linked to a closely related and much studied topic: Corporate Apologia (Hearit, 2006; Frandsen and Johansen, 2007, 2009). Previous studies have shown the difference in cultural acceptance of self-defence or apologia. This is important to mention as it hints towards the importance of culturally-adapted communication and thus the benefits of constructionist theory as it evaluates every situation uniquely to the context of the crisis environment. While the literature shows how the feeling of what is considered a real, heart-felt apology is entirely up to national and local standards, it can also be argued that attribution of responsibility is a socio-cultural phenomenon. The inability to address the question of attribution of responsibility, both spokespersons failed to reduce ascribed responsibility for the respective crash; a core objective of any crisis communication campaign (Fink, 1986; Benoit, 1995; Hearit, 2006).

The findings demonstrate the importance of ascribed responsibility and that in order to reduce attribution, awareness of cultural background and socio-cultural, national factors, as applied in social constructionism, can be seen as a way to achieve the fundamental goal of crisis communication which is and should always be to moderate attribution of organisational responsibility in the aftermath of a crisis.

6.3.2 From Perception to Reputation

The findings indicate two primary means by which reputation was affected as a result of culturally influenced perception. Unfavourable perception after watching the videos resulted in changes in: Evaluation of Doubts regarding Quality and Safety of the Airline; Likelihood of Refraining from Using the Airlines Services in the Future.

- Evaluation of Doubts regarding Quality and Safety of the Airline

The findings showed a real increase in doubt by almost all participants after watching the videos, which showed a lack of cultural awareness by both spokespersons in both videos. This increased doubtfulness by participants resulted in a loss of trust and reduced reputation scores. Comparing the findings for all home country groups, a real divergence was observed between European home country groups and Asian participants. Especially, the communication efforts in the first video, Germanwings, resulted in an increase of distrust for Malaysian and Chinese participants who showed their discomfort at not being properly acknowledged.

The findings for the second video, Malaysia Airlines, show an even greater lack of trust for several home county groups in the airline's quality and safety standards. The fact that Malaysian participants showed a sharp increase in doubt after watching the press conference indicates that the spokesperson's messaging was not well enough geared towards domestic audiences. Furthermore, findings for other home country groups such as Germany, the UK and Australia marked increases in doubtfulness as

well. The findings indicate how perceived ineffective crisis communication translates into lack of trust in the airline's quality standards and reveals the airline's inability to communicate to a diverse group of audiences by addressing matters of safety standards.

The reputation scores confirmed in both incidents that doubts regarding quality and safety measures arise if communication fails to include culture-specific reassurance. Chinese participants in particular, demanded a more pragmatic crisis messaging that is quite forward looking and addresses the question of continuity. The findings strongly indicated that reputation, for both airlines, decreased with participants of this study as a result of the spokespersons' inability to provide or even address culture-specific needs of reassurance.

- Likelihood of Refraining from Using the Airlines Services in the Future

Another significant observation made in this study was the willingness of participants to make forward-looking statements about their willingness to actively engage with the airlines as a passenger in the future. The findings revealed that many participants were more likely to refrain from using the airlines' services in the future. Whilst in the first video, a clear fall in reputation and increase in refusal to use Germanwings services was observed for Chinese participants, some support remained from German participants. An overall perceived lack of sufficient information for Germanwings from French and Australian participants caused them to be undecided about whether to commit to the organisation in the future or not.

All in all, the findings showed German participants to be affected negatively and yet remained supportive while Chinese and Malaysians were concluded to become unsupportive and not committed to using Germanwings in the future as a result of reduced reputation. While the degree of reputational damage varied, a void in the audience's perception about future commitments was created among those that were undecided, such as French participants. This revealed a real implication for not paying attention to cultural background: Firstly, those undecided audience members could certainly be persuaded into having a more favourable outlook, if they felt information was sufficient but instead were left alone. Secondly, as a result of information insufficiency, those audience members are prone to turning to other "voices". This can further worsen reputation and therefore would not be in the best interests of any organisation in crisis which should always try to be the dominant voice, as illustrated by Frandsen and Johansen's (2017) *Rhetorical Area Theory*.

The findings regarding the second video show that five home country groups had a similar, pessimistic, outlook to Malaysia Airlines. UK participants showed the highest likelihood to refrain from flying with Malaysia Airlines in the future due to worsened perception and reduced reputation. When looking at those reputational parameters it becomes clear that Malaysia Airlines' spokesperson was also not successful at reducing reservations. Findings from the thematic analysis have shown that French and Australian participants saw a lack of emotional involvement as a decisive reason for not being convinced this crisis is dealt with accordingly.

Finally, it can be argued that, although a lowered reputation score was observed for German and Malaysian participants, they were nevertheless the least likely groups to refrain from future services for the respective national airline, indicating a potential social desirability or patriotic bias in order to support the organisation they share a connection with or have frequently travelled with in the past.

6.3.3 Benefits of the Multimodal Approach in Crisis Communication

Multimodality has brought innovative insights to the study and served as a new stepping stone for the field of crisis communication. The findings revealed similarities and differences for each and every home country group of what decisive perception influencers are.

Multimodality, and in this study, social semiotics, presented a new way of looking at the deliverance of crisis communication and highlighted clear cultural difference in regard to the different factors influence perception which go beyond mere verbal means. The attention needed for non-verbal factors and beyond, and to truly deduce how a multitude of factors shape perception has been made more visible through the inclusion of multimodality into this study. Therefore, the findings urge us to look beyond language when studying crisis communication and that cultural preferences can be seen and explained through a multitude of factors. Multimodality, and in particular social semiotics, have been a very helpful tool to do so. The findings have yielded first insights into multicultural perception creation of audiences and broadened the scope for researching and understanding crisis communication in its entirety for scholars and practitioners alike. It can therefore be reasoned that

multimodality should be seen as a decisive factor that makes social constructionism more attractive for future research, as it offers insights into individual and unique crisis situations that standardised models and other commonly used theories do not.

6.4 Recommendation for Future Research

Further research is desirable to validate, test and expand upon the findings of this study. A larger-scale study conducted by, or in collaboration with, fellow researchers and departments with existing access to a large number of participants worldwide could overcome many of the limitations of this exploratory study. By increasing the sample size and contacting participants that reside in the country they would be grouped in, would automatically reduce the risk of acculturation and social desirability biases. Focus groups and interviews would complement a larger study, reduce the inherent limitations of the survey method and allow for more insights from personal interactions with participants.

Particularly useful would also be to expand the modal frame and to further produce evidence of the importance of including multimodal analysis into the field of crisis communication as this study only served to introduce multimodality to crisis communication research and to expand the research frame. It is vital that this will continue to be investigated as it has already shown significant value to the field and hence should become an integral tool for identifying and understanding the expectations of different groups of audiences.

In the end, this should place the spokesperson's role more into the spotlight of research and ascertain how awareness and intercultural competencies can be trained in order to more effectively transmit the crisis message to a plethora of culturally diverse audiences. A new and improved sender-focused research could be revived, and research could, instead of focusing on business school strategies and models like in the past, investigate organisational culture and intercultural competencies of spokespersons. This sender-focused research should be more critical and discuss why global companies consciously or unconsciously fall back to an essentialist approach all too often when dealing with a crisis.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This final chapter has reiterated the aims and methodology of the research and summarised the study's key findings. It has discussed the contributions made by this study and the implications they entail for crisis communicators and their organisations, as well as made recommendations for further research.

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Cultural Crisis Communication & The Aviation Industry

This survey is part of a study on crisis communication and its cross-cultural implications carried out for my PhD research in the Department of Applied Linguistics and Communication at Birkbeck University of London. Your participation will enable us to understand cultural differences & similarities in crisis communication and potentially improve corporate communication in the future.

The survey starts with general questions about your background and then finally considers two recent plane crashes (Germanwings 4U9525, Malaysia Airlines MH370), which happened in 2014 and 2015. You will be shown two clips which briefly introduce you to what happened followed by extracts from the press conferences of both airlines which took place immediately after the crashes occurred. The extracts from the press conferences will be in English and include occasional sound interference therefore your English comprehension skills are expected to be very good. You may wish to watch the video in full screen which can only be done on YouTube (click the YouTube icon on the bottom of the video screen).

It is vital that you answer all questions straight after watching the clips as your immediate reaction is of interest to this study.

Two participants will be randomly chosen for a £25 Amazon gift voucher! Please leave your name and email address at the end of this questionnaire so we can contact you if you wish to be entered into the prize draw.

Your data will be securely stored and no third party will have access to it. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me via email if you have any further questions.

Claude-Patrick Kleineidam

PhD candidate (cklein02@mail.bbk.ac.uk)

Supervised by Zhu Hua (zhu.hua@bbk.ac.uk) and Barbara Gibson (b.gibson@bbk.ac.uk)

* Required

Consent *

I have read the introduction and would like to complete the questionnaire. I understand that I can stop at any time.

1) What is your gender? *

Male

Female

2) To which age group do you belong? *

Choose ▼

3) Which do you consider as your home country? *

China

France

United Kingdom

Germany

Malaysia

Australia

Other: _____

4) On a scale from 1 (least proficient) to 5 (fully fluent) how do you rate your listening and reading skills in English? *

	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5) How many years have you been in the UK? *

1 year

2 years

3 years

4 years

5 years or more

6) How well do you understand the subject matter/ story from the news on British TV in general? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I do not understand it at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I fully understand it

7) Would you consider an international plane crash to be significant news? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not significant at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very significant

8) Please list in order of importance what YOU expect a senior executive to do/ say after a plane crash? *

A ranking aims to understand your personal preferences 1st=Most important 5th=Least important

	5th	4th	3rd	2nd	1st
Apology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assumption of responsibility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Investigation into the cause of accident	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Corrective actions (grounding all planes/ safety checks etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial reparation to the victim's families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9) How would you rate the Airlines reputation PRIOR to the plane crash? *

	Poor	Below Average	Average	Good	Excellent	No opinion
Germanwings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Malaysia Airlines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Case 1 - Germanwings U9525



10) How appropriate is the senior executive's delivery in terms of posture and body language? *

	Not at all appropriate	Somewhat appropriate	Appropriate	Very appropriate
Sitting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speed of speaking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eye contact with audience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Appearance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facial Expression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>


11) How appropriate is it to hold the first press conference in German and not in English? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all appropriate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very appropriate

12) How do you evaluate the information provided by the senior executive? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all sufficient	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally sufficient

13) Who do you think the senior executive is addressing first and foremost in this press conference? *

Choose 

14) How appropriate was it to NOT release the names & nationalities of the victims? *

Both were published much later after every case was confirmed

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all appropriate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very appropriate

15) On the basis of what you saw in the press conference do you think the senior executive helped minimise damage to the airline's reputation? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all helpful at minimising damage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very helpful at minimising damage

16) The sense of responsibility by the senior executive at the press conference is... *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Low	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	High

17) How do you perceive the statement given by the senior executive in terms of the following qualities? *

1=Not at all 5=Very much

	1	2	3	4	5
Apologetic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Direct	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Formal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Convincing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Empathetic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appropriate to the context	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18) Overall, how do you rate the senior executive in terms of the following characteristics? *

1=Not at all 5=Very much

	1	2	3	4	5
Competent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Credible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Committed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Caring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Capable/Effective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19) How much responsibility should Germanwings take for the crash? *

1=Not at all responsible 5=Totally responsible

	1	2	3	4	5
Before watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20) Do you have doubts about the quality and safety of Germanwings's planes and services? *

1=No doubt 5=Highly doubtful

	1	2	3	4	5
Before watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21) How likely would it be for you to refrain from using Germanwings services in the future because of this crash? *

1=Highly unlikely 5=Highly likely

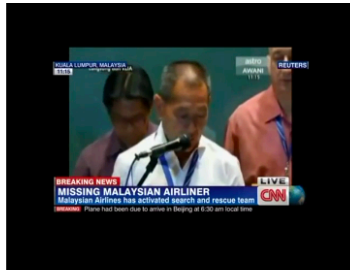
	1	2	3	4	5
Before watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22) Is Germanwings an injured party in this crisis? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

Case 2 - Malaysia Airlines MH370



A FULL LIST OF PASSENGERS AND CREW WERE PUBLISHED AFTER THIS PRESS CONFERENCE

23) How appropriate is the senior executive's delivery in terms of posture and body language? *

	Not at all appropriate	Somewhat appropriate	Appropriate	Very appropriate
Standing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Speed of speaking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eye contact with audience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Appearance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facial Expression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

24) How appropriate is it to hold the first press conference in English (official language) and not in Malay (local language)? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all appropriate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very appropriate

25) How do you evaluate the information provided by the senior executive? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all sufficient	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally sufficient

26) Who do you think the senior executive is addressing first and foremost in this press conference? *

Choose ▼

27) How appropriate was it TO release the names & nationalities of the victims? *

Names were published shortly after the press conference

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at all appropriate Very appropriate

28) On the basis of what you saw in the press conference do you think the senior executive helped minimise damage to the airline's reputation? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at all helpful at minimising damage Very helpful at minimising damage

29) The sense of responsibility by the senior executive at the press conference is... *

1 2 3 4 5

Low High

30) How do you perceive the statement given by the senior executive in terms of the following qualities? *

1=Not at all 5=Very much

	1	2	3	4	5
Formal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Empathetic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appropriate to the context	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Convincing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Apologetic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Direct	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

31) Overall, how do you rate the senior executive in terms of the following characteristics? *

1=Not at all 5=Very much

	1	2	3	4	5
Competent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Committed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Credible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Caring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Capable/Effective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

32) How much responsibility should Malaysia Airlines take for the crash? *

1=Not at all responsible 5=Totally responsible

	1	2	3	4	5
Before watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

33) Do you have doubts about the quality and safety of Malaysia Airlines' planes and services? *

1=No doubt 5=Highly doubtful

	1	2	3	4	5
Before watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

34) How likely would it be for you to refrain from using Malaysia Airlines services in the future because of this crash? *

1=Highly unlikely 5=Highly likely

	1	2	3	4	5
Before watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After watching the press conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

35) Is Malaysia Airlines an injured party in this crisis? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

36) Based on your personal evaluation of both press conferences and their respective senior executives, which airline is more effective in communicating the plane crash? *

Choose ▼

37) Do you think executives should apologise at the press conference regardless of whether the airline has been judged responsible for the crash at the time of press conference?

Your answer

38) Do you see a need for airlines to be more culturally sensitive when engaging in crisis communication? If so what are the most important factors to consider?

Your answer

39) As a thank you for your participation, two individuals who complete the questionnaire will be randomly chosen for a £25 Amazon gift voucher! If you wish to be entered into this prize draw please leave your name and email address so we can contact you.

Your answer

SUBMIT

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.