“A company is never better than its latest mistake”

A consumer perspective on crisis communication
Bachelor Degree Project in Business Administration

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Abstract

The existing literature has discussed crisis communication as a tool to minimise reputational damage to a company in the event of a crisis. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) provide guidelines for managers in times of crises on how to protect their reputational assets and their corporate image in specific crisis situations with a set of communication strategies. The theory emphasise the importance of stakeholders in a crisis since they could oppose as a threat to companies’ reputation. Despite the realisation of stakeholders’ role in crisis communication, explorative studies aiming at understanding the consumer's perspective and how they prefer to be communicated are limited.

The purpose of this thesis is to understand, from consumers’ perspective, how companies should communicate in a time of crisis. This was done through using the existing Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) as a basis. The purpose was accomplished by conducting focus groups were crisis scenarios and strategies based on the SCCT played a fundamental role in generating results.

The findings from the research suggest that there is a cycle explaining preferred crisis communication from consumers’ perspective. The suggested cycle includes three influencers that is: responsibility, communication, and reputation. This cycle suggest how consumers prefer to be communicated, what influences them to making that choice, and how it reflects back on the corporate image. The main finding of the research was the preferred communication in specific situations. The study showed that there is a set of generally applicable strategies, which consumers prefer in all crisis situations whereas additional preferences are added based on attributed responsibility.
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Introduction

This chapter introduces the background and problem of crisis communication. In addition, the purpose of the research and the research question are presented in this chapter. Finally, the delimitations of the research are identified and a list of definitions is provided to the reader.

1.1 Background

Target became a victim of a cyber-attack in 2013 where 40 million customers’ credit and debit card information was stolen. The hackers carried out their operation through the heart of the crucial Christmas holiday sale season that started the day before Thanksgiving and lasted for 19 days. Target, who was the third-largest U.S retailer when it happened, did not detect the attack on its own but instead, a credit card processor informed that their system had been compromised. Complaints from customers started to surface on social media together with negative associations with the company (Finkle & Skariachan, 2013). Another example of a crisis was 2016, when a massive Ikea dresser recall was made. The decision was made since six children had died and 36 children were injured since 1989. The children were injured by Ikea chests and dressers, which were prone to tip over when they were not anchored to the wall. This even though Ikea had communicated at the end of every product manual that the chests and dressers needed to be anchored to the wall (Dooley, Kerley & Steinberge 2016). Another company who has experienced a crisis is H&M, who is one of the world’s largest fashion retailers. It was reported in 2015 that a factory owned by one of H&M suppliers, used child labour and were paying workers less than the minimum wage (Neville, 2015; Pitel, 2016). This despite their clear statement of being sustainable and their claims to be against child labour (H&M, nd). It was shown that the supplier of H&M hired children as young as 14 years old and had them work for more than 12 hours a day. Further, it was reported that this had been an issue since 2013 and that the employees in the factory had one of the lowest minimum wages in the world (Pitel, 2016).
The examples above are all different crises that companies have experienced and the crises can be categorised based on how much responsibility stakeholders perceive a company to have for the crisis (Coombs, 2006). There are three different roles a company could have in a crisis. Firstly, a company could be seen as a victim as demonstrated in the example about Target, where the company has little to no responsibility for the crisis. Secondly, a crisis could be seen as accidental, as in the example about Ikea where the company have little to medium responsibility for the crisis. Lastly, a company could be seen as a perpetrator, which is shown in the example about H&M where the company has high responsibility for the crisis. Companies can be affected by a crisis in different ways however, a crisis could cause reputational damage to companies who experience, or are exposed. Some crisis will affect a company's reputation more than others since every crisis has unique features and the responsibility that a company has when a crisis occur might vary.

Consumer awareness of company activities has increased due to the increased activity of interactive media and media in general. This results in more educated purchases and behavioural decisions (Freberg, 2012). Nevertheless, the way media in general chooses to report about an event can be a challenge for companies because it influences consumers’ points of view (Coombs, 2007a). It has therefore, become vital for companies to listen to consumers and to act with caution in their business activities if they are to gain profit and keep their customers. Thus, crisis communication is viewed as more of a reputation management tool (Bahl, Black & Murphy, 2014).

Many researchers have mentioned the importance of communicating a crisis to consumers. Consumers have considerable power when it comes to corporate reputation (Coombs, 2007a; Dean, 2004; Grappi & Romani, 2015). Different types of crises such as victim, accident and perpetrator together with strategies have been developed and identified as a result of researches on how to best manage crises. (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2006; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Dean, 2004; Grappi & Romani, 2015; Van der Meer and Verhoeven, 2014). When a crisis occurs, why it occurs and to whom it occurs makes every crisis unique. Yet Coombs (2007a) has found similarities among crises and developed different crisis strategies, which has led to the Situational Crisis
Communication Theory. Following theory divides crises into three different group based on how much responsibility consumers consider a company to have (Coombs, 2006). Which communication strategy a company should chose to communicate to their consumers will vary depending on which group of company responsibility a crisis fall beneath (Coombs, 2007a). In summary, there are several reasons for companies to understand consumers when choosing how to communicate a crisis. A few of them related to protection of reputation are: i) Crises often give consumers a reason to think less of a company (Coombs, 2007a). ii) It can determine the attitude of consumers since, reputation is a reflection on how the public, i.e. the stakeholders evaluate the past and present behaviours of a company and how they meet their expectations. iii) Consumers hold great power when it comes to post-crisis corporate reputation as mentioned in point two, their evaluation is a measurement of organisational reputation (Wartick, 1992). iii) Reputation is a valuable intangible asset in any company since it can attract consumers and might generate an increased investment interest (Coombs, 2007a)

1.2 Problem discussion

Managing and anticipating a crisis in a company is complex task, however something all crises have in common is the following three stages: pre-crisis, during crisis and post-crisis (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015). Precautions can be taken by companies during the different stages to prevent or minimise damage (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015; Coombs, 2006). Consumers’ negative reactions to an event during the post-crisis stage are viewed as a threat to a company and its reputation (Gappi & Romani, 2015). Thus, when managing a crisis, communication with stakeholder preferences adapted to situational circumstances is crucial (Grappi & Romani, 2015). A crisis may threaten the reputation of companies, which is seen as a valuable asset (Coombs, 2006).

Research has looked further, into corporate crises and the power consumers hold when it comes to damaging corporate reputation after a crisis and how those crises can be managed (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2006; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Dean, 2004; Grappi & Romani, 2015). A study on crisis communication strategies in specific crisis situations, from a consumer perspective, with limited pre-chosen options has been made (Coombs, 2006; Grappi & Romani, 2015). This study did however, not allow the
respondents to speak freely on the topic of crisis communication or how they would like to be communicated to.

In the SCCT theory, which is based on main concepts from the Attribution theory, it has been suggested that stakeholders, i.e. consumers, etc. level of attributed responsibility to a company in a crisis is connected to the choice of strategy managers should make. It also suggests that there is a possible crisis type cluster and crisis strategy cluster match (Coombs, 2006). The SCCT theory and the theory it is built on have been developed through quantitative data gained from consumers. This suggest that information such as other intensifiers for example, in depth information on the current intensifiers, and other unknown relevant information might have been lost in translation.

With the knowledge of stakeholders’ importance in crisis communication, there is a discovered lack of explorative studies on consumer preferences regarding crisis communication in crisis situations. Information found in explorative studies regarding consumer preferences in crisis communication, might prove to be important for managers to take into consideration when deciding how to approach consumers in a crisis to minimise reputational damage. In studies connected to crisis communication strategies and their applicability to crisis situation, quantitative approaches with pre-selected answer options have been made.

In summary, crisis communication strategies mainly aim to manage consumers’ perceptions of a crisis in a way that minimises damage to a company's reputation (Coombs, 2007a). This suggests that consumers hold great power in times of crisis when it comes to level of reputational damage. Therefore it is crucial to gain a thorough picture from the consumers perspective on crisis communication, and how they prefer to be communicated to in a crisis and why.

1.3 Purpose and research question

The overall purpose of this thesis is to gain an understanding from the consumer perspective on how to maintain corporate reputation through communication in a time of crisis. This will be done through using the existing Situational Crisis Communication
Theory (SCCT) as a basis for conducting the research from consumers’ perspective. We want to gain knowledge about how consumers reason regarding crisis communication by applying scenarios in accordance to the crisis types identified by Coombs (2007a). To fulfil the purpose and approach the problem statement of this study we will answer the following research question:

- How do consumers prefer to be communicated to in different retail crisis situations?

1.4 Delimitation

1.4.1 Choice of theory

There are different theories on crisis communication that has been applied in past quantitative academic material regarding this subject. They all aim on explaining different things in the context of crisis communication with the end goal of managing corporate reputation. Yet we have chosen to only base the scenarios in this thesis on the SCCT by Coombs (2007a), this since it focuses on specific research question asked of communication in specific situations. SCCT is built upon the Attribution theory with strong links to the Image Restoration Theory (Benoit, 1997) and has been the basis for majority of research done regarding crisis communication. All scenarios are based on real life events from the retail industry and each one of them represents one of the crisis type clusters; victim, accidental and preventable created by Coombs (2007a). The scenarios will be based on data collected from newspaper articles, which could result in different interpretations of the event depending on who the author is. Further there will be no opportunity for the companies involved in the scenarios to give their view of the crisis.

1.4.2 Focus groups

The research question was answered through focus groups with consumers of various ages and gender however, all participants were over 18 years old and from Sweden. Focus groups were chosen since the authors made the choice of focusing on information and not the individual who is giving the information. The sample in this thesis is not
large enough to represent the entire population but will give an understanding of consumer reasoning and preferences regarding crisis communication. Since the tool for gathering data is through focus groups where people interact with one another there will be a risk for them being influenced by each other. This could result in participants not expressing their own opinions. The focus group as a tool for gathering data is however, seen as the optimal choice in this case since it allows for an open discussion without interference from moderators. This will allow participants to go deeper in the topic and discuss without interference from the moderator. Additionally the brands were removed from the scenarios to eliminate possible band bias. The goal of this study was not to link preferences to specific individual but preferences to specific situations, thus the individual saying the things are not considered as important as what they are saying.

1.4.3 Stimuli

The three crisis communication types derived from the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007a) are another delimitation since it is consciously chosen to categorise the scenarios in the study conducted in accordance to that. Nevertheless, the crises chosen to represent each crisis type in the scenarios all occurred in the retail industry. The choice of having them all from one industry was made since it decreases possible bias towards specific industries.

Initially the strategies included in the SCCT were not supposed to be used as stimuli during the focus groups because they might cause bias when participants answered how they would prefer to be communicated to. However, after having done one pilot of the questions in one interview it became clear that the topic was too complex without adding suggestions on how companies could communicate. Having one individual only led to limited non-elaborated answers. Adding the strategies, as suggestions only, were not ideal as discovered in another pilot, this time with a focus group, since the participants then only chose from that list. Instead we asked how each of the 10 listed strategies, one at the time, suited as communication strategy in that situation. By doing that on every strategy, own opinions, thoughts and solutions were discovered by the respondents and helped them go outside the box in their answers.
1.4.4 Translation

Translation of the transcripts from the focus groups from Swedish to English is another delimitation. This since translation is seen as an interpretive act where meaning may get lost in the translation process. Concepts in one language may be understood differently in another language since qualitative research is about words. However, all participants were not comfortable expressing themselves in English. Having focus groups in all participants’ native language could make them more comfortable and give them opportunity to express themselves without any language barriers.

1.5 Definitions

1.5.1 Crisis

There are many different definitions of a crisis. One definition is that a crisis is “a specific, unexpected and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organisation’s high priority goals and possesses the potential of financial and reputational damage” (Kaul & Desai, 2014, p. 241). A crisis does not have to be seen as a bad thing, but as a radical change either for better or for worse. However, a crisis in this thesis is a non-routine organisationally based event, which creates high level of uncertainty and threatens an organisation's goals and reputation. It is a radical change for the worse and something that a company has to address.

1.5.2 Stakeholders

Coombs (2007a) defines stakeholders as ”any group that can affect or be affected by the behaviour of an organisation” (p.164). Stakeholders in this thesis will include consumers, investors, employees and business partners, they are all affected by a company's’ behaviour. The most important stakeholder in this thesis will be the consumer since they will be in focus of how to communicate in a crisis.
1.5.3 Crisis communication

Communication with stakeholders during or after a crisis is referred to as crisis communication, which can be used in order to repair a company’s image and prevent reputational damage (Coombs, 2007a; van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). Crisis communication in this thesis will refer to how companies communicate with their consumers after a crisis in order to prevent reputational damage.

1.5.4 Reputation

“A reputation is an aggregate evaluation stakeholders make about how well an organisation is meeting stakeholder expectations based on its past behaviours” (Coombs, 2007a, p. 164). Reputation will in this thesis refer to how well a company meet their consumers’ expectations in their communication.

1.5.5 Strategy

Strategy is a plan towards a long-term aim or it could be a major activity. McKean (2009) define strategy as “defining the best future for your team or organisation, mapping the route to achieve it and communicating it clearly” (p.5). Strategy in this thesis will refer to the different ways that companies can handle and communicate a crisis, one example are different communication strategies. Which range from denying that there has been a crisis to taking full responsibility.

1.5.6 Attribution of responsibility

Attribution of responsibility is linked with terms such as fault and blame. It explains whom individuals hold accountable for unwanted experiences (Yoon, 2013). This thesis will refer to attribution of responsibility in the context of who the consumers perceive to have responsibility for a crisis, whose fault it is and who should be blamed.
2. Literature review

This chapter provides an overview of existing literature and research material relevant to this research paper. This includes crisis communication, consumer-role in a crisis and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory.

2.1 Crisis

2.1.1 Crisis Communication to protect corporate reputation

Crisis management and communication have been extensively studied for several decades. Researchers have found that companies need to communicate with stakeholders during and after a crisis and (Benoit 1995; Coombs, 2006, 2007a; Ray, 1999) communicating in an appropriate way and in line with circumstances has proven to be effective in crisis management. Further, communication with stakeholders could minimize reputational damage caused by crisis or give companies reputational protection. It has also been proven that perceived reputation prior to a crisis mattered in terms of post reputation and attribution of responsibility (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). A study claimed that if a consumers have a positive corporate image before a crisis, a halo effect is likely to set in. This means that consumers are more likely to overlook events leading to a crisis and diminish companies’ responsibility for a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2006).

Previous research has also shown that communication can alter consumers’ perception of a crisis and of the company involved in the crisis (Coombs 1995). Coombs (2007b) argue that consumers need to hold someone responsible when it comes to corporate crises that is, someone must be blamed for a crisis consumers have identified. More specifically, if consumers perceive a company as unethical, irresponsible, and dishonest or thought a company was breaking a law it could result in consumers doubting the company. This could affect profitability and consumer behaviour in the future (Dean, 2004; Huang & Su, 2009). A company's behaviour, actions and communication towards its customers during a crisis could influence the level of potential reputational damage post crisis (Dean, 2004). Subsequently, this can for example affect a company's market
shares, sales and purchases negatively. These negative post crisis consequences can however be minimised or eliminated by applying a crisis communication strategy that fit the situation (Coombs, 2007b).

2.1.2 The rise of interactive media

Today, information is more accessible for consumers due to social and technological developments, in particular, the rise of interactive media. A many-to-many communication, which means that multiple users contribute and receive information, results in more accurate information and possibility for consumers to interact with companies (Maresh-Fuehrer & Smith, 2016; Raaij, 1998). Consumer interaction through interactive media increases during a crisis and has proven to have noticeable influence on crisis communication. As a result, the power has shifted from sender (company) to receiver (consumer), making crisis communication more challenging (Freberg, 2012; Jin, Liu & Austin, 2014; Raaij, 1998). Thus, consumers play a central role in determining the effectiveness of crisis response. However, consumers are more likely to support organisations involved in crisis communication, (Racer & Johnson, 2001) interactive media can therefore, be used as an effective tool for companies in their communication after a crisis. Since interactive media naturally create social platforms where many-to-many communication takes place, a short feedback interval can help companies to establish an improved relationship with their consumers (Freberg, 2012; Maresh-Fuehrer & Smith, 2016; Raaij, 1998; Racer & Johnson, 2001).

2.1.3 Negative information and reputation

Researchers have shown that corporate reputation can differentiate companies from their competitors and could affect a company's operating performance (Fombrun & Riel, 2003; Griffin, 2008; Shim & Yang, 2016). Further, researchers have expressed that a positive reputation could attract more consumers and create a business-friendly environment along with a positive public opinion (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Fombrun & Riel, 2003; Shim & Yang, 2016). However, it has shown that media has a tendency of reporting bad news which consequently, often results in companies receiving bad press rather than positive press (Dean, 2004). Publicity from interactive media is
considered to have high credibility and a negative effect, which could alter how consumers perceive a company and affect corporate reputation (Coombs, 2007a; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Additionally, research has shown that negative information has a greater impact on consumers when making decisions than positive information has. Negative information about a company could cause negative associations, which could affect consumers’ attitude and behaviour (Jeon & Baeck, 2016). Studies has therefore, expressed that how consumers react to negative information and how they want to be communicated to is vital information for companies (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant & Unnava, 2000; Dean, 2004).

2.1.4 Consumer attribution of blame

Consumers seek a causal explanation and someone to blame when unexpected negative events happen such as a crisis. This process involves determining the likelihood of the crisis reoccurring and whether a company had control over the outcome (Whelan and Dawar, 2014). Moreover, research has shown that consumers are more likely to develop a negative image of companies that they assign more responsibility to in a crisis. An, Gower and Ho Cho (2011) express that mass media tend to frame companies as main actors of crises, which could influence consumers when evaluating and forming perception of crisis responsibility. Consequently, this could result in consumers perceiving the crisis as non-accidental that could lead to the degree of blame to increase (Vassilikopoulou, Chatzipanagiotou, Siomkos, & Triantafillidou, 2011). Further, research has shown that consumers’ emotional response and ethical beliefs influence who to assign responsibility in a crisis (Vassilikopoulou et al., 2011) where direct exposure to an intentional crisis or crises that result in harm of a third party increase the level of responsibility towards a company (Vassilikopoulou et al., 2011; Yoon, 2013). Unintentional events lead has shown to result in less attribution of responsibility towards companies while intentional action lead to blame and blame results in more powerful strategies needed by a company for handle a crisis (Yoon, 2013).
2.1.5 Theory on crisis communication

Within the research field of crisis communication, there are papers suggesting guidelines that will lead managers to choose an appropriate strategy for a specific crisis (Coombs, 2006; Grappi & Romani, 2015). The literature field of crisis communication strategies is a long-going researched topic where a great deal of studies has been made on when a specific strategy should be used (Coombs, 2006; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Dean, 2004). The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) says that specific crisis communication strategies match specific crisis situation (Coombs, 2006).

The SCCT is suggested to work as a guiding tool for companies to understand what strategies will best fit in a specific crisis situation. This is based on how much responsibility stakeholder’s attribute to the company (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). The guidelines in the SCCT aim to guide companies in crisis situations, to gain understanding of responsibility assigned to them in that situation and then guide them in finding a suitable strategy (Grappi and Romani, 2015). The SCCT has been developed from an earlier theory with the purpose of becoming a research-based guide for selecting crisis response strategy in corporate crises (Coombs, 2006). Further, the level of responsibility assigned to a company is analysed in the theory and matched to specific strategies depending on the crisis situation. This in order to find the optimal crisis communication strategy (Coombs, 2006).

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory suggest three factors which managers should consider in a crisis in order to assess the degree of reputational threat. The first, factor is initial crisis responsibility, which is presented as the most fundamental factor in this theory. It means, how responsible stakeholders find a company to be for causing a crisis. The media framing, i.e. they way media has chosen to report a crisis is suggested to play a great role in the amount of assessed responsibility since media has a tendency to shape personal frames in thoughts. Secondly, is crisis history, which can be seen in figure 1, this is also considered as an intensifier of attributed responsibility. It suggests that if a company has had similar events occurred in the past it is likely to enhance the attributed responsibility. Lastly, there is prior relationship history, which is considered to be an intensifier of crisis responsibility and a factor to assess the degree of
reputational threat of a crisis. The SCCT suggests that if a company has treated their stakeholders badly in other context, which are not related to a crisis, the attributed responsibility for a crisis will increase. (Coombs, 2007a). A company crisis will be categorised in different crisis types after assessing the different factors that affects company responsibility. The SCCT suggests different crisis communication strategies that can be applied to the different crisis types, solely based on attributed responsibility (Coombs, 2006).

Figure 1. SCCT Concepts and Relationship between Concepts


A crisis can according to the SCCT be clustered into three different categories of crisis situations, this based on the stakeholders attribution of responsibility (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Coombs, 2007a; Grappi & Romani, 2015).

- The first category is *victim cluster*, where a company has little or no assignment of responsibility. This is considered to be a mild reputational threat towards a company. Crises that fall under this category are for example natural disaster, rumours, workplace violence or product tampering.
- The second category is *accidental cluster*, where a company's actions cause the crisis was unintentional. Hence, assignment of responsibility is low and reputational threat is considered to be moderate. Examples of accidental clusters are technical–error accidents and product harm.
- The third category is *preventable cluster*, where a company assignment of responsibility is high and reputational threat is severe. Company misdeeds,
human-error accidents, human-error product harm and organisational misdeed are some of the crisis that counts within the preventable cluster.

2.1.5.1 Crisis communication strategies

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) suggests that when a corporate crisis occurs companies should firstly provide certain information to stakeholders. This information most often is safety information, also known as instructing information (Coombs, 2006). Secondly, companies are provided with a range of options on how to further communicate depending on which category their crisis falls beneath. The options range from denying a crisis to accepting full responsibility for a crisis (Coombs, 2006).

Communication strategies, which are often used to minimise reputational damage to a company or an organisation, has been studied from various aspects even though the stakeholders have played a crucial in most of them (Coombs, 2006; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Grappi & Romani, 2015). Researchers such as Coombs (2006) and Grappi and Romani (2015) have done questionnaires in the researches they have conducted. This resulted in confirmative rather than elaborative answers where the researchers did not allow the respondents to reason their choice (Cornell, Johnson & Schwartz, 2013). The SCCT suggests a connection between situation and strategy within crisis communication that based on attribution of responsibility, some crisis strategies were more suitable than others. Grappi and Romani studied a real case meanwhile Coombs used a fictive list of strategies and crises (Coombs 2006; Grappi & Romani, 2015).

Benoit developed crisis communication strategies in 1997 as a part of his Image restoration theory that aims to restore a company's reputation in the event of a crisis. SCCT has adapted those strategies with some alterations (Coombs, 2006). The SCCT suggests that the level of responsibility that stakeholders holds a company accountable for is what separates the categorisations also known as clusters of strategies from one another. In 2006 Coombs found that the strategies could be clustered together in a
similar way as the crisis situations, into three groups with a rank of low responsibility, mediate responsibility and high responsibility.

- Low responsibility: Denial strategies & victim crises
- Mediate responsibility: Diminish strategies & accidental crises
- High responsibility: Deal strategies & preventable crises

Those strategy clusters was then suggested to match the crisis type clusters. Presented below in figure 2 is the crisis communication strategies developed from the SCCT: Deny cluster, which consisted of the strategies denying, attack accuser and scapegoat. Diminish cluster, which consisted of excuse and justification and deal cluster, which consisted of concern, regret, compassion, ingratiation and apology (Coombs, 2006). The denial cluster strategies were grouped together because they all mean that in one way or another an organisation takes no responsibility for a crisis. The diminish cluster strategies all tries to convince and inform stakeholders that an organisation holds little to no responsibility for a crisis and the deal cluster strategies which all in some manner seem to accept a great deal of responsibility together with responding to victim.
Victim
Deny Response Option

*Attack the accuser:* Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization.
  *The organization threatened to sue the people who claim a crisis occurred.*

*Denial:* Crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis.
  *The organization said that no crisis event occurred*

*Scapegoat:* Crisis manager blames some person or group outside of the organization for the crisis.
  *The organization blamed the supplier for the crisis.*

Accident
Diminish Response Option

*Excuse:* Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.
  *The organization said it did not intend for the crisis to occur and that accidents happen as part of the operation of any organization.*

*Justification:* Crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis.
  *The organization said the damage and injuries from the crisis were very minor.*

Preventable
Deal Response Option

*Ingratiation:* Crisis manager praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization.
  *The organization thanked stakeholders for their help and reminded stakeholders of the organization's past effort to help the community and to improve the environment.*

*Concern:* Crisis manager expresses concern for the victims.
  *The organization expressed concern for the victims.*

*Compassion:* Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims.
  *The organization offered money and products as compensation.*

*Regret:* Crisis manager indicates the organization feels bad about the crisis.
  *The organization said it felt bad that the crisis incident occurred.*

*Apology:* Crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.
  *The organization publicly accepted full responsibility for the crisis and asked stakeholders to forgive the mistake.*

Figure 2. Crisis Response Strategies by Response Option


The Coombs (2006) suggest a crisis strategy cluster, crisis type cluster match, i.e. a match between:

- Low responsibility strategies and crises
- Mediate responsibility strategies and crises
- High responsibility strategies and crises
These matching suggestions are made based on the amount of attributed responsibility. If scientifically proven to be correct the authors claim that this could change the way to think and process regarding choosing the right strategy for the right crisis (Coombs, 2006). At the same time the author highlights the possible implications wrongly assumed attributed responsibility for a crisis can have if choosing a strategy such as denial and it later turns out that a company are responsible for a crisis. This could then result in a loss in reputation (Coombs, Holladay & Claeys, 2016). Hence, the authors question the use of denial in any situation. Furthermore, Ray (1999) argues that the implications of certain types of crises may stall the realisation of an appropriate crisis response. This since crises such airplane accidents is unpredictable and may take several months to investigated in order to determine the cause of accident hence, it is only afterwards the assigning of responsibility can be made accurately. It has been scientifically proven that by implementing concern in communicated message to stakeholders, there will be less reputational damage than what it would have been without the expressed concern (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Dean, 2004).

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory focus on the specific situation a company finds itself to be in when a crisis has occurred. To guide managers in those situations factors, guidelines, crisis types and strategies has been identified and developed with the goal to manage reputational damage. Those crisis types are victim, accidental and preventable and rank from low attributed responsibility to high (Coombs, 2006, 2007a).

3. Method and Methodology

In this chapter there will be a discussion of research methods used when conducting research. Firstly, there will be an explanation of different methods that could be used for gathering and analysing data together with a motivation of chosen methods and the methodology of the study. Secondly, there will be an explanation of the stimuli used in focus groups. Lastly, the chapter will finish with a discussion regarding the trustworthiness of the research.
3.1 Method

3.1.1 Search for literature

Even though the primary data gathered in this study is viewed as the most important source of information to explore how consumers would prefer to be communicated to in specific retail crisis situations, data and information on existing literature is important too. Literature concerning the Situational Crisis Communication Theory is an essential part of the literature framework since this study uses that theory as a basis for collecting data. The bibliographic databases where the literature has been retrieved from are Google scholar and JU Library. In order to find relevant and current information to include in this paper the keywords used in the search started very topic specific and then from the number of keyword used were broaden in order to gain sufficient information. The keywords used in this search for relevant literature were: crisis communication theory, crisis communication strategies, reputation in crisis communication, consumer in crisis communication, crisis communication, crisis situations, crisis management, crisis, crisis communication social media, consumer knowledge, social media crisis, company reputation, organisational reputation and bad reputation. To complement the scientific articles found, books from the Jönköping University library were borrow, mainly for the method and methodology section of the paper.

3.1.2 Primary data

3.1.2.1 Focus groups

The primary method for gathering data for this study is through focus groups. Focus groups will allow, follow and encourage discussion among the respondents regarding open-ended questions asked by the researchers. Even though personal experiences and opinions of respondents’ matter, their demographic will not be taken into account in this study. The information relevant to this study is what the participants say and what is said during the discussions, not specifically who says it. Since the research question is exploratory and seeks to gain information on how consumers prefer to be communicated to in specific retail crisis situations, open-ended questions are chosen since it allow the respondents to discuss exactly how they think and elaborate their answers (Bell, 2005). That likely provides more material that contribute to an
elaboration of the SCCT. The moderator retained from interfering and steering the participants in directions. They did however ask follow up questions on statements made to clarify discussion and gain more in depth information.

The focus groups consisted of 3 different crisis scenarios, which can be found in appendix 1, representing the three crisis situations identified by Coombs and the different crisis strategies in a more simplified and objective manner (Coombs, 2007a). Simplified and objective in this case mean removing negative and positive words, keeping the description of the strategies as neutral as possible to not decrease the possibility of unconsciously influencing consumers. Additionally, headings suggested by Coombs (2007a): Denial, apology, etc.: are removed from the study since they suggest why the strategy is used and thus would steer the participants and thereby not allowing them to make up their own mind. Thus, stimuli is a great part in collecting data from the respondents and being able to answer the research questions (Bell, 2005). The focus groups were recorded and the most relevant points were written down. Discussions from the focus groups were transcript and then coded into categories, which simplified the identification of relevant data. The researchers organising the focus groups and giving the instructions are humans and not machines; this means that there is an increased risk of unconscious bias in the results (Bell, 2005). With regards to this it was important that data gathered is being analysed critically so that results presented are influenced to a minimum by the researchers.

The participants were informed that they would be anonymous and asked if they were comfortable with being recorded. Additionally, participants were told that the perspective they should have in the discussion was that their perception of the corporate image should change as little as possible to the negative. They were told that because the goal of the focus groups was to gather data on how the participants would prefer to be communicated in specific crisis situations with the aim of their corporate image not changing to the worse.

After the participants, had been given the instructing information on how the focus group session was to be carried out they were given the first scenarios to read through, see appendix 1. They then got to read one of Coombs (2007a) developed communication strategies, presented in an objective way, at the time. Their task was then to discuss the strategy before them and how they thought it fit or did not fit as
communication strategy towards them. This was repeated with all of the ten different strategies, which can be found in appendix 2.

After having gone through all of the communication strategies their next task was to discuss how they would like to have been communicated to in that specific crisis so that their corporate image would change as little as possible to the worse. They were encouraged to take support from their previous discussion on all of the suggested strategies but also come up with their own ways of communicating. The next step in the focus groups was to discuss how a change in previous held corporate image would change how they preferred to be communicated to in that specific crisis. After that they were asked to discuss how much responsibility they thought that the company in question had for the crisis since the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is built upon the basis of responsibility and how it is distributed in a crisis. The last task that was scenario specific was how they think that media would come to impact and change the way they prefer to be communicated to. After all of the scenario specific tasks had been done, the participants were given the second scenario and were asked to repeat the tasks above. When they were done with the second, they were given the third scenario and then asked to repeat the same tasks again.

After all of the scenarios were done the participants were given a few general tasks including all of the scenarios. They were asked general question regarding what decides, how they prefer to be communicated to in a crisis, how they generally would like to be communicated to and some time to reflect over everything that they had discussed and what they thought to be most important.

3.1.3 Selection of respondents

Four focus groups with four participants in each was conducted, all participants were above 18 years old and considered as adults by society and was selected on convenience. This broad group to select from makes it easier to find respondents, whom which will be based on the age criteria, which suggest that there will be a variation in demographics in general among the respondents.
3.1.4 Scenarios

3.1.4.1 Creation of scenarios

The scenarios and each crisis type they represent are retrieved from Coombs Situational Crisis Communication Theory (2007a) and presented in appendix 1. Coombs (2007a) identified three different crisis types running on a scale from low attribution of responsibility towards an organisation, to high. These types are included in this study as stimuli for gathering data and provide a basis that the gathered data will be built upon.

All of the scenarios origins from the retailer industry, a choice made by the researchers of this paper in order to remove possible industry bias respondents may have. The crises were chosen based on the characteristics of the crisis, and weather or not if fitted in the description of the crisis categories made by Coombs and Holladay (2002). One of each crisis type (victim, accident and preventable) identified by Coombs (2007a) was needed and the ones chosen fits clearly into those as describe in his paper. Information regarding the crises is derived from media that reported on the crises at that time, statements of the companies and crisis management experts and their statement regarding it. The different scenarios consist of an explanation of the crises and what happened. Based on the information given they should be able to answer the questions asked as if it is something that is happening right now in time. The brands of the companies involved in each crisis will not be revealed for the respondents nor will they be included in this paper since at this initial stage of research, possible brand bias will be removed.

3.1.5 Creation of strategies

The strategies presented in appendix 2 are derived from Coombs study (2007a) where he suggests them to be crucial in protecting and repairing reputation in a crisis. These strategies are one of two parts that make the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), where the other one is the crisis types presented in the scenarios in appendix 1. It became clear through a pilot made on the focus group questions that “how would you like to be communicated to” was too broad for the respondents to know what they were supposed to answer, thus the strategies was incorporated as stimuli. The strategies are described in an objective way and provided to the respondents in random order on the
same paper as they read the scenarios. The strategies are guidelines and the participants are encouraged to create other strategies or combine several ones. The description of strategies included in the focus groups is presented in appendix 2.

3.1.6 Data analysis method

In using this theory it suggest that the researchers are not beginning their project with the creation of a specific theory in mind, unless they intend to elaborate or extend an existing theory, which is what will be done in this paper. By applying the grounded theory to this study, the data gathered has a greater chance of resembling the actual state of reality, than if the data would just have been put together concepts based on experiences and speculations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The aim of the data collected is to view situation based crisis communication from a consumer perspective. Thus, there is a need for collecting relevant data. To do that, three different coding methods will be applied to the data. Grounded theory is considered the best option because it allows starting from scratch and analysing the data without any predetermined codes. The data gathered and presented in the transcripts was broken down, examined, labelled based on area of usage, compared to other transcripts and labels. Then it was conceptualised by breaking the data down into ideas, acts, etc. and then name them. This stage of analysis represented the process of interpreting data with the goal to discover relationships and concepts and then organising them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Notes were taken throughout the focus group session, which helped in discovering interesting information early on.

The first step was the most time consuming one and is known as open coding and is the process of analysing and narrowing down the data. The data presented in the transcripts was be broken down into ideas, events, acts etc. and then named with a representative name that explains or hint the purpose of its existence. This act of labelling was the initial step of recognising significant data important for the extension and elaboration of the existing theory. By labelling them it simplified the future grouping of similar discrete objects, events and ideas, also known as axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The labelled data was categorised based on similarities. The last step in analysing the data in this paper was to create dimensions, which meant identifying variables in the
categories that linked them altogether despite their heterogeneity, also known as selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Research philosophy

Research philosophy is an "Overarching term relating to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge and that nature of that knowledge in relation to research" (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 1997, p. 726). There are five different main strands of research philosophies that should be considered when conducting a research. These are positivism, realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). A positivist researcher might use existing theory to develop hypothesis or use observations and experiments to discover theories (Saunders et al., 1997; Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Realism entails that what our senses show as reality is the truth and that there is a reality independent of the mind. Interpretivism relates to the study of social phenomena in their natural environment. Postmodernism emphasise the role of language and of power relations and pragmatism argues that the researcher adapts their philosophy to the research.

Interpretivism is the research philosophy in this study since it is the most suitable for exploring how consumers prefer to be communicated to in a crisis. Interpretivism can be defined as “a research philosophy, which advocates the necessity to understand differences between humans in their role as social actors,” (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 106). Interpretivists studies emphasise on that human are different from physical phenomena because they create meanings and allow a deeper understanding of social actors. The purpose of interpretivist research is to create new, rich understanding, interpretations of social world and contexts where the results tend to be interpretations rather than statistical (Saunders et al., 1997; Saunders & Lewis, 2012). This paper has collected data in order to further understand participants’ own reality to gain an understanding of consumers’ own thoughts and understanding of crisis communication. It has been possible to explore consumers’ attitude and feeling towards crisis communication by adopting an interpretivist philosophy.
3.2.2 Qualitative research approach

Data can either be split into qualitative or quantitative (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The main difference between them is the procedure of gathering data (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010). With regards to the research question asked in this paper a qualitative strategy is the only option since an explorative approach is needed.

Qualitative research put emphasis on understanding and exploring respondents’ point of view. The data for such research could be collected through non-standardised ways, such as interviews and/or experiments (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Findings through qualitative method are not gathered through statistical or any other procedure of quantification (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010). Instead it focuses on facts and or reasons for social events (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010). Qualitative approach has been adapted since this paper is exploring respondents’ point of view when it comes to crisis management and want to gain a deeper understanding of the subject. It has further, allowed for collecting in-depth data from focus groups.

3.2.3 Abductive research approach

There are three different ways of gaining knowledge about if something is true or false and from that knowledge draw conclusions. This is done either through induction, deduction, or abduction. Induction is based upon empirical evidence; deduction is based on logic (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010) and abductive is a mix of both and thus consists of logical reasoning and the discovery of new knowledge. With regards to the purpose and research question of this paper, the abductive approach is viewed as optimal. Meaning that both deductive and inductive approaches will be used. Thus a combination of a method that aims to define relationships and draw conclusions through logical reasoning (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010) and a method that aims to develop a theory through explanations for phenomenon’s that came to light during the focus groups (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Having applied a hybrid version of these two approaches, i.e. an abductive approach, it enables the existing Situational Crisis Communication Theory to lie as a basis for this study, yet a new perspective on the matter will be provided.
3.2.4 Cross-sectional research approach

The research approach used in the study is cross-sectional. This since it is a qualitative approach that is characterised by its low costs, time restraint and a greater sample than a longitudinal research approach. Cross-sectional data is obtained at a certain point in time, meanwhile longitudinal data is retrieved from the same sample of the population repeatedly at different times (Hilton & Patrick, 1969). Since this paper want to know the state of the respondents at the moment and not aim to see changes in opinions the cross-sectional approach is the superior one in this case.

3.3 Trustworthiness

3.3.1 Credibility

Credibility is the parallel criterion to internal validity and ensuring credibility within a research is considered to be an important factor to establish trustworthiness (Saunders et al., 1997). Shenton (2004) states that “One of the key criteria addressed by positivist researchers is that of internal validity, in which they seek to ensure that their study measures or tests what is actually intended” (p.2). Within qualitative research this leads to the question ”How congruent are the findings with reality?” (Merriam, 1995 cited in Shenton, 2004, p.64) There are a number of phases where researchers can ensure credibility.

Shenton (2004) mentions the importance of peer scrutiny of the research project. Feedback from colleagues, peers and academics serve as an important part of gaining credibility within the research. This to gain a new perspective that could potentially challenge assumptions made by the researcher, since it could be challenging viewing the project with real detachment (Shenton, 2004). It is important for a lengthy research to build trust and to collect sufficient data. Further, an opportunity to refuse to participate for each person who is approach in the research should be considered. This will ensure the data collection is only from those who are willing to take part of the study. Triangulation is a way of increasing credibility within a research; it involves using more than one source of data and method collection or having a wide range of respondents. This in order to eliminate that one individual will have an effect in the final result of the
study and to gain depth, breadth, complexity and richness to a research (Saunders et al., 1997; Shenton, 2004).

This thesis will provide credibility through peer scrutiny of the research project and feedback. Feedback has been given by our peers and mentor throughout the thesis process, which has resulted in gaining a new perspective of the thesis. Data from various sources has been collected together with primary data to gain depth, breadth, complexity and richness to the research. Further interviews with a wide and randomly selected range of respondent was conducted and all participants had opportunity to refuse to participate.

3.3.2 Transferability

Transferability is the parallel criterion to external validity or generalisability and it could within qualitative studies be describes as referring to the same concerns as reliability within quantitative studies (Saunders et al., 1997; Shenton, 2004). They both describe to which extent the findings can be applied to other situations. This is more difficult in qualitative studies since findings are specific to a small group of people (Shenton, 2004). However, being descriptive of the research question, design, context, findings and interpretations could be done in order to reach a level of transferability. This stated together with organisations involved in the research, geographic area and time space (Saunders et al., 1997; Shenton, 2004). Readers will get a possibility to find aspects and concepts in the findings that can be transferred to similar situations by fulfilling the steps (Shenton, 2004).

This thesis will help readers to relate the finding to similar situations by giving a description of the research question, design and context. The general theories are explained together with a broad perspective of the problem. Readers are given a thorough description of the result in the thesis. Further, examples of similar situations related to the topic are being investigated.
3.3.3 Dependability

Dependability, which is further known as reliability in quantitative research, state that the results in two investigations that use the same method and context should be similar or the same. This could be seen as a problem in qualitative research since the context of the phenomena addressed in the study change. However, there are steps to take in order to address the issue of dependability. The research has to clearly state the procedures in the entire process, which includes recording all changes. This to produce a reliable/dependable research which other researchers have the ability to understand and evaluate. Another researcher should be able to conduct the same research regardless of the result (Saunders et al., 1997; Shenton, 2004).

Each step of the research is clearly described and explained in order to gain a clear picture of the entire process of the thesis. A change that has been made during the process has been recorded to produce a dependable research that other researchers can understand and evaluate. Further, to make sure that a similar investigation that use the same method and context should gain a similar or same result.

3.3.4 Confirmability

Confirmability covers the same matters as reliability and objectivity does in quantitative research. It refers to ensure that the research is accurate of truth and meaning expressed. There are steps to be taken in order to ensure that the findings of the research are the results of participants’ experience and not from the characteristics and preferences of the research. This could be done through researchers admit their predisposition and being honest about any biases (Shenton, 2004).

The thesis will strengthen confirmability of the study by referring to literature and findings by other authors together with information and interpretations by participants of focus groups. Weaknesses of the selected method have been acknowledged in the thesis along with reasoning for favouring one method over the other.
3.3.5 Ethical concerns

Research ethics could be defined as “the appropriateness of the researcher's behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of the project, or who are affected by it” (Saunders & Lewis, 2012 P.74). The participants have been participated voluntarily and have been notified beforehand that participation is optional they have therefore, had the opportunity to decline being a part of the study or withdraw during the focus group. The purpose of the thesis and how the data will be used has been clearly described to all the potential participants. All participants have been notified that they will be anonymous in the thesis (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Previous findings, method and theory have been taken into account when conducting the empirical data to construct a valid research design (Sieber & Solomon, 2004).

4. Empirical findings

The received data will be presented in this section of the thesis. Each paragraph will be based on questions asked and contain a summary as well as quotes that represent each summary.

4.1 Introduction

The result has been collected from 4 focus groups, containing 4 participants in each. All the participants were over 18 years old. The questions asked during the focus groups are presented in appendix 4 and the strategies used are presented in appendix 2. The participants as well as the moderator asked follow-up questions in every focus group. Each focus group lasted between 90 minutes to 120 minutes and was held in Swedish. The brands in every scenario remained anonymous.

4.1.1 Scenario 1: Victim

4.1.1.1 Scenario specific questions: strategies 1-10

The company say that there is no crisis:
"No it is a crisis" F4. All focus groups agreed that if the company denies that there is a crisis it would negatively influence the corporate image that the participants have. They stated that "they can really not say that it is not a crisis if someone has started to use people's cards" F2 and "no, It is money, It is serious" F3.

**The company say that it is not as severe as it may appear:**
All groups agreed that this was not the way to communicate the crisis, one participant stated "no, it is serious" F2 and they expressed in two of the focus groups that “it is not okay to diminish that 40 million customers credit cards has been stolen" F3 and that it is “pretty insufficient when it is credit card information, your whole life is based on money so if that data is stolen, how can you not say that is serious" F4

**The company take full responsibility and ask for forgiveness:**
"This is perfect, start with this. We have made a mistake, we apologise that we did not have a better security system, we will compensate you in full" F1 and one participant in the same focus group continued "as you know, we have always been a nice company and it’s hard to protect security systems in today's society against people who want to hurt us" F1. The other focus groups agreed that they were responsible for the crisis and stated “I think that it is their responsibility to have sufficient security, so they are responsible in that way. So I think that they should definitely take full responsibility" F4. The participants mentioned that an apology is something they expected from a company in their crisis communication.

**The company reminds you that they are also a victim in the crisis:**
The participants agreed that this statement was not something that should be included in the crisis communication towards consumers. One participate stated "yes they are a victim, but for me it has nothing to do with the situation, they still need to take responsibility" F1 and that same was expressed in the other focus groups, "they are a victim in a way, but that is not what I want to hear. I would not want to hear that in this case" F4 and "I cannot imagine a scenario where this would be a good approach" F2.
The company say they did not intend harm anyone and/or that they could not see the crisis coming:

The focus groups had different opinions on this statement, one participant expressed that "this could be an explanation: we have done wrong, it was not our intention, we have been the victim of a crime" F1 while another one stated that "I don't think this is appropriate" F2. Focus group three agreed after a discussion and stated that "I think the first part fits however, the second is bad, and they should be safe when they are dealing with money transactions daily” F3.

The company praise you and remind you of the good work the company have done in the part:

All the participants agreed that “this does not work" F3 and stated that "I do not think this is relevant" F4 and “this one was not good at all, there is nothing they can say or praise that could make it better” F2.

The company confronts the person/group/media who have claimed that something the organisation has done is wrong:

"No they can't do this" F3, one participant stated that "in this case, it is impossible for the company to say that it our fault, it is their fault” F4 and another said that “this is wrong” F1.

Company offer gifts, money, etc. to the victims in the crisis:

The participants did not agree about this statement, one participant stated that "I think this is sweeping under the carpet, I would be angry" F4 while two said that "this and an apology" F3 would be good and “I think that you can offer compensation” F1.

The company say that someone else, outside of the company is responsible for the crisis:

"I don't think that you can do that, they have a responsibility for their security system" F1, the focus groups agreed that this is not how the company should communicate. One participant mentioned that "it is their responsibility in the end to be up to date and make
sure that everything work as usual and that they are safe” F4 and another one stated “you cannot say that someone else is responsible however, you have to tell about the situation” F2. They agreed that the company could explain the circumstances of the situation however, they still have to take responsibility.

The company tell you about all of the good work they have done in the past:

“If they would communicate this then I would think, is this relevant?” F2. The participants agreed that this was not the way to communicate, one participant said "not interested, you are never better than your latest mistake" F1, another one stated that this would be "irrelevant, it’s 40 million we are talking about, it does not matter what they have done before" F4.

4.1.1.2 Scenario specific questions: 11-16

How would you want to be communicated to in this scenario so that your image of the company will not change for the worse? You are allowed to take inspiration from the approaches above and add ways that are not on the list:

The participant said they wanted a fast message through reliable channels with a broad audience and follow-up communication in this scenario, especially if they were personally involved. All participants wanted information about what they could do to protect themselves and that they would prefer a personal communication from the company if they were affected. One participant stated that “I do not want to know what happened in the newspapers if I was involved so I would like personal contact from the company” F4. In addition the participants said they wanted an apology and to know what they should do to get their money back, one participant explained that “I want to know what happened, why it happened, what the company will do about it and what can I do F1.

In what way would a positive/negative image of the company before the scenario happened change how you would like to be communicated to?

The participants said that they would want the company to take more responsibility if they had a negative corporate image before the crisis and one participant stated that “I
want more information, more measures and a personal contact” F1. It was also stated that “I would not listen to the communication if I had a negative picture from before” F2 and “I would never shop there again” F4. All participants would prefer the same communication as stated before if they has a positive corporate image of the company.

**In what way do you believe that the company is responsibly or not responsible for the occurrence of this crisis?**

The participants discussed that it would depend if the system where the credit cards was stolen was in house or outsourced. The company would be more responsible if the system was in house however, they are always responsible even if it was mentioned that this could happen to any company. One participant mentioned that “I don't really think that they are responsible, it just happened to be them, it was just randomness that they were affected, could have happened to anyone. However, they are responsible to take actions” F2 and another one stated “I would say 8 out of 10, they should have better security” F4.

**Is there anything that could reinforce how much responsibility the company has in this scenario?**

All participants said that the degree to which they were affected would matter, the closer the crisis got to them the more responsibility they would put on the company, one participant stated that the company would be more responsible “if they had taken money from my account and I would have been directly affected by the crisis” F1. The participant stated that “how many people that are involved in the crisis” F4 and “if it happened more than once and it is common so they should have been prepared” F3 would affect them. The focus groups also mentioned that if the company knew they had a weak system or someone had told them that a cyber-attack is coming then they would be more responsible where one participant stated “how much money and energy they had put into their security system before the crisis would matter, the more, the less responsibility” F4.

**In what way would how media frame the scenario change how you would like to be communicated to:**
The participants mentioned that you should not listen to everything media says however, they also said that they easily get influenced by media. One participant said that “The company have to answer the negativity from media, you get very affected by what media says” F4 while another one stated that “Media has a large influence if the company does not take initiative and leave it to the media to create their own story” F1. The focus groups did not agree if the company should act in the frame of the media and respond to the information stated or if they should create their own frame.

4.1.2 Scenario 2: Accidental

The second scenario presented to the participants was the accidental crisis with Ikea. However, the company was not mentioned to the participants. The ten first questions that the participants were asked were related to existing strategies, which managers could use in crisis communication based on the Situational Crisis Communication Theory.

4.1.2.1 Scenario specific questions: strategies 1-10

The company say that there is no crisis:
"It is extra sensitive when it comes to children, it is always very insensitive to say that there is no crisis” F4. The participants mentioned that they would react negatively or even stop consuming the company's products if they would communicate in this way. The shared expression through the group could be explained by the quote “It is a crisis because children have died, making it wrong to say that it is not a crisis” F1. Further, a concern all focus group shared was a concern of the safety of the rest of the company’s products.

The company say that it is not as severe as it may appear:
The statements "It does not fit to say that it's not so serious that a child has died of something that has happened due to their products.” F3 and “It is serious since people have died however, but the company does not have 100% responsibility” F1 express the common beliefs of the focus groups that saying that it is not as severe as it may appear is not suitable in this scenario. Further, all focus groups expressed that they did not
believe that the company was entirely responsible however, that is not something that should be communicated to the consumers.

The company take full responsibility and ask for forgiveness:
"It fits, but I'm not sure about full responsibility, the parents have a responsibility to follow the manual” F3. The participants in general agreed that by communicating that they were fully responsible would make them assume that the company take fully responsible for the crisis and thereby careless. Communicating this would result in a loss in faith and corporate image in the company since the participants believed that they are not entirely to blame. “The parents have a responsibility to ensure that the dresser is anchored and to follow the instructions when building it and then the company have to take responsibility for not providing sufficient information” F3. The quote “it's better that the company says or write something than blaming the parents for not reading the instructions. So I think it's better for the company to take responsibility for it,” F2 explains the agreed view of the participants that they would not be able to view the company as a serious business if they did not take any responsibility. Some participants explained that it was not enough to ask for forgiveness when people are involved. However, they came to the conclusion after discussion that apologising would not cause a negative impact on corporate image when used in any situation.

The company reminds you that they are also a victim in this crisis:
All participants agreed that the company is not a victim in this case, yet they express that the company is not sole responsible either for the crisis. One participant stated that "o, you can say that when children have died, you cannot say that you are a victim too” F1, the same was also stated by another focus group “I feel that, as a family, I would have been offended if they said that they were victims. It would have definitely worsened my view of the company” F4, something the rest of the participants agreed with.

The company say that they did not intend harm anyone and/or that they could not see that the crisis coming:
The participants all agree that they understand that the company did not intend to harm anyone however, it was mentioned in every focus group that the second part of this
communication should not be communicated to the consumers. “I would also say that the first part is great, that they did not intend to harm anyone, I think everyone can assume that. But they could not predict that this would happen. Is a bit like saying we are stupid since they have said that people should anchor it to the wall” F2 and "the second part in the sentence, that they could not predict that it would happened gives me the feeling that they do not test their products” F3. The participants mentioned that the first part of this statement would neither leave a positive or negative mark on their corporate image.

The company praise you and remind you of the good work the company have done in the past:
The participants all agreed that this was not a good communication strategy in this scenario. One participant stated "no, I do not think you can say this when it has gone this far and people have died” F1 and another expressed “yes, it feels like sweeping it under the rug” F3. However something that emerged from the discussions in all focus groups was that it would be an advantage to praise the people who acknowledge the problem, it was expressed by one of the participants "however, if they would say that they are grateful for the ones letting them know about the problem so that they can constantly get better” F4.

The company confronts the person/group/media who have claimed that something the organisation has done is wrong:

All four focus groups mentioned that evidence is needed if the company is confronting another party that have claimed organisational wrongdoing. However, the focus groups mentioned that using this approach is the same as blaming someone else and acting aggressively, which could result in their corporate image being negatively influenced. “I think that it is never a good idea to start complaining to parents who have lost their child.” F3 and "yes, they have a communication responsibility and have made a communication mistake, but you cannot put the responsibility on someone else” F1. Further on participant in the focus group 2 suggested instead that a sit-down with everyone involved where the crisis is discussed would be a much better solution than confronting. Another participant agreed and stated “if they try to compromise then I
would feel that they spend time on this and want to make to best out of the situation for their customers and their brand” F2.

Company offer gifts money, etc. to the victims in the crisis:
The participants in all focus groups mentioned that offering gifts or money suggest that the company takes full responsibility of the crisis one stated “it feels like they take on the entire blame by doing that” F4. Further they stated that it "feels wrong to offer money when someone has died” F3 and "you don’t address the problem, it does not fit in a context where people have died” F1. The focus groups all mentioned that a gift would not be appropriate in this scenario. It was also mentioned that the size of the company was significant in what the participants expected in terms of measures after a crisis.

The company say that someone else, outside of the company is responsible for the crisis:
All participants in the focus groups agreed that they would lose faith in the company and get the sense that they did not have control if they could say that someone else was responsible for the crisis. To blame the ones affected by the crisis was considered even worse way to communicate and send the message that the company does not care. One participant expressed that “I do not think there is any case where it is positive to blame the parents” F3 and another stated that "I think that it is insensitive to blame the parents” F4. The focus groups all mentioned when discussing that the circumstances of what happened could be mentioned to diminish the impression of responsibility that the company has however, the company is always responsible.

The company tell you about all of the good work they have done in the past:
The participants mentioned that if the company would communicate this it would affect their corporate image negatively, if the statements were not closely related to the crisis. One participant stated that “this feels insensitive” F3 and another one states that "it does not weigh up what happened” F2. They also mentioned that it would appear as the company was trying to shift focus one participant stated that “changing focus completely and not looking at what happened, show no interest in what has happened”
F3. However, one focus group mentioned “it could be a part of the communication, if you say it in a smart way, but definitely not as the main crisis communication” F1.

4.1.2.2 Scenario specific questions: 11-16

How would you want to be communicated to in this scenario so that your image of the company will not change for the worse? You are allowed to take inspiration from the approaches above and add ways that are not on the list:

The participants all agreed that no strategy used as stimuli could stand by themselves as a crisis communication strategy. They mentioned that full transparency from the company is needed and that quick information about what has happened and why it happened was important. However, it was mentioned in two focus groups that communication from the company had to be through a reliable source. One participant mentioned that “I would have wanted a plan and also for them to communicate that we will do this, this and then keep the customer updated of what they have done” F3 something that the rest agreed with. One participant expressed that “they should apologise, it is unfortunate that this has happened, we have done everything in our power so that this would not happened, we have stated in our instructions but we will of course look it over to see if we can do it better.” F2. All focus groups agreed that the company need to communicate how to anchor the dresser better, one participant expressed that “I want the company to say that they are sorry for what has happened and that they will investigate why it happened and improve if something is wrong” F4.

In what way would a positive/negative image of the company before the scenario happened change how you would like to be communicated to?

None of the participants in the focus groups said that they would want the communication to change. However, they mentioned that the way they perceived the company before the crisis would determine how much they would listen to the communication, one participant stated that “I would want them to communicate in the same what, what differ is if we listen or not” F2. Some participants of the focus groups mentioned that “more measures and show the result, is what has to improve if my image was negative” F4, they wanted more information and follow up communication if they have a negative image of the company. However, they mentioned that the retail industry
has multiple substitutes and that they are not loyal if they have a negative image of the company.

**In what way do you believe that the company is responsibly or nor responsible for the occurrence of this crisis?**

All participants agreed that the company was responsible for the crisis in the form of insufficient information about the security risks, one participant stated that “they have responsibility in the form of communication and information. Clearer with the risks and how to anchor the dresser” F1. However, the difficulties in who to put responsibility on was discussed in each focus group, one focus group stated that the company has “not full responsibility” F3, “since they have given information on how the product should be built and used” F3 and the conclusion that the focus groups expressed was that it was a shared responsibility between company and parents.

**Is there anything that could reinforce how much responsibility the company has in this scenario?**

The participants all mentioned the extent of the crisis “how serious it is” F3, which would increase responsibility towards the company. All focus groups also mentioned that the company would have more responsibility if they were personally involved in the crisis. One participant stated “it would make them more responsible if they do not address the problem” F2, a statement other focus groups discussed as well. The participants all mentioned that the crisis history mattered, a company with more crisis in the past or bad crisis communication would perceived to have more responsibility.

**In what way would how media frame the scenario change how you would like to be communicated to?**

The participants expressed that media often report in a negative way, which the company has to address, “go back to the source and answer media” F3. Additionally, one participant explained that “it depends what I know from the company from before, if I know more of the company from before the crisis then it would be harder for media to change by view” F4. However, they all mentioned that they would be affected to some extent. One participant stated that “it would impact if the company does not take
4.1.3 Scenario 3: Preventable

The third scenario presented to the participants was the crisis categorised as preventable, which in reality was an H&M crisis. The company was however not mentioned to the participants. The ten first questions that the participants were asked were related to existing strategies, which managers could use in crisis communication based on the Situational Crisis Communication Theory.

4.1.3.1 Scenario specific questions: strategies 1-10

**The company say that there is no crisis:**
"Does not fit, it is definitely a crisis” F3, “it is clear that there is a crisis or a problem, so there is no reason to deny it” F1. The participants discussed that if they would use this communication strategy then it would imply that the company support and accept the conditions the workers at their supplier have. One participant stated that this "does not fit because they say they are against child labour and still they have it, they cannot say that there is no crisis” F2, "does not fit, it is definitely a crisis” F3.

**The company say that it is not as severe as it may appear:**
The participants said that if the company communicated this then it would appear as if they did not value other humans the same as themselves, one participant stated that ”it´s like lowering someone's human value because it feels like it's not that serious” F4 and another one said that “it´s not good to say this when it´s child labour and since it has happened before” F1.

**The company take full responsibility and ask for forgiveness:**
All groups agreed that the company was responsible for the crisis however asking for forgiveness was mentioned to be irrelevant, the focus groups wanted measures instead. They stated that "I want more concrete what they are doing and what they are going to do, what is the long-term solution because taking responsibility is the short-term solution” F1, “they have full responsibility, even if it´s their suppliers, they have
The company reminds you that they are also a victim in this crisis:
The participants all agreed that this was not a good strategy for a company to communicate to their customers. One participant said "you can't say this when the crisis is about people" F1 while another one stated "they need to have 100% control that their suppliers follow their terms" F2.

The company say they did not intend harm anyone and/or that they could not see the crisis coming:
“That they could not predict that this could happened feels like bullshit” F4, the participants in the other focus groups agreed and stated that by communicating this “shows that they have zero control over their suppliers” F4 and “it has occurred for 3 years, they can’t say that they could not predict that it could happen” F2.

The company praise you and remind you of the good work the company have done in the part:
"No, then it feels like they are trying to hide something or compensate” F1
"I would wonder what else they have been hiding if they said this, are you really environmentally friendly” F2.

The company confronts the person/group/media who have claimed that something the organisation has done is wrong:
The participants express different thought on this strategy however, they all mentioned that proof was needed if the company was going to confront someone else. One participant stated that" if they can show that they actually did not make a mistake, then fine but it does not feel genuine” F4 while another one said "no you can't say this, you can't put the blame on someone else in this situation, they have to solve it” F2.

Company offer gifts, money, etc. to the victims in the crisis:
"Then you have to do something extreme, like building a school or raising their wages which shows that you are serious. Decide minimum wages etc. Do something for real”
F1 was expressed from one of the participants, another mentioned the same in another of the focus groups, "if they offer education or invest in the society” F4.

The company say that someone else, outside of the company is responsible for the crisis:
The participants all agreed that this was not the best way to communicate to the consumers, one participant stated that "this is like we said before, they can mention the circumstances but not blaming someone else and removing their own responsibility” F1 and another said “it does not work in this case, they are the ones who are responsible, they can’t blame anyone else. It is not possible” F2. The size of the company was also mentioned in all focus groups and was expressed by one participants that "the bigger the company, the more responsibility F3.

The company tell you about all of the good work they have done in the past:
The participants mentioned that this could be relevant if the good work they have done was related to the area of the crisis and was an attempt to improve the area. However, if that was not the case then they stated "they diminish the crisis” F4 and "no, they can't talk about this in a crisis, it feels like they are hiding something” F2.

4.1.3.2 Scenario specific questions: 11-16

How would you want to be communicated to in this scenario so that your image of the company would not change for the worse? You are allowed to combine approaches above or choose ways that are not presented:
The participants mentioned that they wanted a long-term solution to this crisis and transparency by the company. They wanted the company to express what has happened and how it could happen. All focus groups mentioned measures and that they would like to know what measures will be taken and continuous communication when the company update the consumers on what they have done. One participant mentioned that “they should do a project to show that they show that they mean to change for real” F1 and another one stated that “I want them to take responsibility and ask for forgiveness, tell the consumers what they stand for and that we are working to prevent it. They need
to do something for real in this case and to offer gifts would have been very positive, to give the children compensation” F3.

**In what way would a positive/negative image of the company before the scenario happened change how you would like to be communicated to?**

The participants expressed that they would like to be communicated to in the same way, “the best way is always the best way” F2. They mentioned more continuous information and updates on measures taken together with total transparency was needed if they had a negative image of the company, “they have to do a long-term plan to show that they will change” F1. However, some focus groups mentioned that “I would be angry and I would not shop there again if I had a negative image from before” F3 and that “if I don't like them, then I will choose something else” F2.

**In what way do you believe that the company is responsibly or nor responsible for the occurrence of this crisis?**

All the participants agreed that the company was responsible, they stated “full responsibility” F3, “responsible, they have not had a clue in 3 years” F2, “they say that they are against child labour but they still have it, they are responsible” F4 and “if they would found out it themselves then it would have been a different situation” F4.

**Is there anything that could reinforce how much responsibility the company has in this scenario?**

All participants mentioned that it would matter how far down the supply chain the supplier was where one participant expressed “how far down in the supply chain the supplier is matters” F4. The responsibility would be greater if it was a direct supplier to the company. However, some participants still believed that the company was fully responsible. All the participants agreed that the company had more responsibility since it had happened before and one participant stated “how long the company wait to address the problem” F2 which other participants agreed with. The participants also mentioned that the company’s responsibility increase since they had stated that they were against child labour, one participant expressed “that they have stated the opposite before, how long it has been going on for and the size of the company” F3.
In what way would how media frame the scenario change how you would like to be communicated to?

The participants expressed that media would affect them to some extent in terms of preferred communication, “the company should be honest and give their view of the problem” F2. One participant mentioned “media want to make headlines, it is therefore important for companies to fast communicate with the consumers” F1 and another one stated “media plays on emotions in this case, it is children so I think it has a large impact on people F4.

4.1.4 General question including all scenarios

What in general influenced you in how you wanted to be communicated to?

Some of the participants mentioned that they were emotional people, so if the victims of a crisis where people, especially kids the crisis would be more severe, the participant stated ”I am a sensitive person, in the first scenario it was a child who was the victim, the second was not as emotional and the last was emotional as well” F4 and ”the crisis impact on human suffering” F1. Some of the other participants added that how personally involved they were in the crisis would determine how they perceived the crisis and would want to be communicated to. Career and education was also mentioned as an influencer, where the participants expressed ”personal knowledge, if I would have worked with people then I would might have more compassion” F3 and ”that I have studied marketing, so you think from a marketing perspective” F3.

How in general would you like companies to communicate a crisis?

Participants stated that ”if they address it fast then you know that they believe that it is important as well” F2 and ”as much information as possible” F3. Some of the participants said that they would like to have a timeline, information about what happened and how it could happen. They expressed that fast and extensive information including the most urgent information, such as what the consumers should do and what measures the company will take was important. The participants all expressed that they would like follow-up communication after the crisis explaining the measures the company had taken. If the participants were personally affected then they explained that more information was necessary and a personal communication from the company.
Please take a moment and discuss what you think has been the most important thing you have brought up during this focus group:

The participants expressed that it was important how companies choose to express themselves in crisis communication, one participant stated that the company should be “genuine, it is important how they formulate the message” F4. Transparency was expressed as an important factor in all focus groups and for the company to treat every crisis with top priority. Moreover, one participant stated that “big companies have more responsibility, I have more expectations for a big company then a small” F3.

5. Analysis

The results presented in the section above will in this section be analysed in order to gain a deeper understanding in how consumers think of crisis communication in given situations.

The goal of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is to predict what level of reputational threat that a crisis oppose and then suggest suiting crisis response strategies based on the crisis (Coombs, 2006). In this section an elaboration and alterations of the SCCT will be suggested as a product of the analysis done on the results. In appendix 5, table 1 the second step in the coding process is displayed. It shows how the comments made during the discussions became a vital part of the findings and what comments that formed the categories presented in this analysis. Those categories was then grouped together based on a common variable, which is at what point during a crisis they affect consumers’ assigned responsibility and their corporate image.
5.1 Elaborating the Situational Crisis Communication Theory

All of the existing suggestions from the SCCT (Coombs, 2006) are after this study further suggested remaining relevant even though it is suggested from a new perspective. Basic fact is that communication that is to be used in a given crisis situation is determined by the amount of responsibility that the stakeholders attribute to the company. Additionally it is confirmed that communication should vary depending on the crisis situation based on the amount of responsibility that a company is perceived to have for the event leading to a crisis. This is a confirmation of the suggestion made by Coombs and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory even though the results from this study suggest alterations of the existing crisis communication strategies and their applicability to different crisis situations and additional intensifiers of crisis responsibility.

5.1.1 Situational Crisis Communication Cycle

Based on the results from the focus groups, a cycle of events and circumstances influencing one another appears. A cycle consisting of: Responsibility, communication and reputation. The findings in this study, can be seen in figure 3, suggest that the attributed responsibility influence the preferred communication and that the communication chosen by the company lead to reputation and corporate image of a company. Reputation is then suggested to lead back to responsibility, sealing the cycle into an ever on-going process for all organisations and businesses. In the subsections below each of the influencers will be explained and connected to one another until the cycle is completed. The main suggested elaboration of the SCCT is that the intensifiers of responsibility are placed in different dimensions based on when in time they occur. Pre-crisis, during crisis and post communication.
5.1.1.1 Responsibility

Responsibility is just as in the original Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) here suggested to be crucial in understanding and explaining appropriate communication in context of different crises in different situations. Coombs (2006) built upon the attribution theory on how managers should act in crisis situations based on how responsible the stakeholders found them to be. Then based on the level of responsibility they are viewed to have, a set of different communication strategies are suggested. The strategies suggested by Coombs (2006) are however questioned, as the applicability according to consumers is not relevant in cases they are suggested to be. That lack of applicability will be further analysed in the “communication” section below.

The responsibility that consumers attribute is mentioned to be crucial to understand and predict in times of crises in order to apply a suiting communication strategy (An et al., 2011; Grappi & Romani, 2015). Coombs (2006) claimed that crisis history of the company and the relationship history that the consumers had with a company were intensifiers of responsibility. Crisis history is based on the results in this study,
suggested to be important too and so is the relationship consumer has with a company. The study made in this paper has identified additional intensifiers of responsibility, yet also reputation. These are divided by the time in a crisis process, which they are happen.

5.1.1.1.1 Pre-crisis intensifiers

Pre-crisis intensifiers are the first set of influencers on responsibility in a time of crisis. The pre-crisis intensifiers are things about a company that consumers are aware of before a crisis occurs. As can be seen in figure 4, the crisis history and the company relationship are listed as intensifiers, but added to the mix are company size and company values/statements too.

Company relationship is suggested to be the main pre crisis intensifier since participants in the focus groups mentioned that they would not even listen to a company if they did not like them and find them to have more responsibility for a crisis. This relates back to relationship since they also claimed that they would not be shopping from a company that they did not like. Hence company relationship is suggested to be a crucial influence on crisis responsibility. Crisis history is further suggested as an intensifier in this paper since participants expressed that “a company is never better than their latest mistake” and “if it has happened repeatedly before then they are probably responsible”. Further stated was “how they have handled crisis before, affect how much I trust them now” and “I trust them less now, since it has happened before”.

There are further, company statements/values and company size. The size of a company was mentioned during the focus groups to influence the participants in assessing responsibility that a company have and thereby what communication they would prefer. It was said that the bigger the company the more expectations they have on a company to take responsibility, since the bigger the corporation, the greater control they should have. Thus, the size of a company, whether it is a big or a small, is suggested to be an intensifier of responsibility in the context of crisis communication. Moreover, company statements and values were mentioned to increase the sense of responsibility if they did not do what they were claiming to do. A company statement/values were a discussed topic during the preventable scenario since the company made the choice to supply from
a company using child labour. Despite that it only came to be discussed during the preventable scenario, the reasoning around the topic of not complying with what is claimed or what a company stands for, are suggested to be intensifiers of responsibility for all crises were the company has the ability to choose differently.

Figure 4: Pre crisis responsibility intensifiers

5.1.1.1.2 During-crisis intensifiers

In addition to pre-crisis intensifiers, a few intensifiers that came to light during the crisis are identified too. These are called during crisis intensifiers. This is where the situation of a crisis, which is the fundamental basis for the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2006), comes into play. In the SCCT severity of a crisis is listed as an intensifier of organisational responsibility in a crisis. It does however not distinguish severity in what way. During the focus groups it became clear that the human suffering and degree of personal involvement in the crisis were important intensifiers of responsibility. In addition to those two whom are categorised as crisis circumstances as can be seen in figure 5, social influence is suggested to intensify the sense of responsibility. Both crisis circumstances and social influence are things that become aware, or happen when a crisis has happened. Human suffering is the degree to which people are hurt or suffer from a crisis or the repercussions of a crisis. If the result of a crisis is death, or a child is involved, the attribution of responsibility is suggested to
increase. Personal involvement is another subcategory of crisis circumstances. The participants said during the focus groups that the closer to home a crisis strikes, the more involved, or affected they are by the crisis, they would likely tend to blame the company to a greater extent than if they were not involved at all. Thus the degree to how involved the consumers are in a crisis is suggested to be an intensifier.

Social influence consists of two subcategories as seen in figure 5, media and peer pressure. Media and how they chose to frame a crisis was suggested to have a huge influence on the way a crisis initially is perceived and thus on responsibility that a company have for a crisis (Coombs, 2007a). The results from the study made in this paper suggests the same but list it as an intensifier in the theory, which was not done by Coombs (2007a). The participant said that the way in which media chose to report on a crisis, which most often is in a negative way, is the point from which they wishes a company’s communication to start. Hence if a media provide information on the crisis, then a company should go out and answer and explain that information further. If they do not comment on information given by media, they would assume that it is correct and since media often frames companies negatively in crisis situations, the sense of responsibility would increase.

Figure 5: During crisis responsibility intensifiers
5.1.1.2 Communication

The next step in the cycle, as can be seen in figure 3, is communication which consumers are communicated and in this case how they prefer to be communicated to. The pre-crisis intensifiers has a direct impact on communication which consumers prefer, which aligned with Coombs (2006) idea that responsibility should steer managers in making a decision based on consumers. Also suggested by this study is the idea that different crisis situations transgression between categories of crisis situations. The scenarios used during the focus groups each fit into each of the three categories and worked as representatives. The results however suggest that the categorisation of crises might not be as easy as suggested by Coombs (2007a), but more complex. Primarily the pre-crisis intensifiers play a great role in why the suggested categorisation by Coombs (2007a) might become blurry, yet also the during crisis intensifiers. The during-crisis intensifiers of crisis circumstances and media might initiate that a crisis can be categorised as a specific crisis type. Take the victim scenario for example. That crisis, due to the degree of personal involvement of the consumers, they said that the responsibility that the company have would increase, despite the fact that they also considered them to be somewhat a victim in the crisis. Additionally to the personal involvement, participants mentioned that the size of the company matter greatly, since a bigger company is expected to be more responsible and secure. Thus the crisis situation, which as suggested is determined by the during crisis intensifiers and then intensified by pre crisis intensifiers, plays a fundamental role in how consumers like to be communicated to in a crisis.

The findings in this study regarding communication strategies are not the same as the ones suggested by Coombs (2006) where the crisis communication strategies developed by Benoit (1997) as a part of the Image Repair Theory. Even though Coombs (2006) suggest that those strategies are applicable in cases of organisational and business crises, this study hint differently. As can be seen in table 2, appendix 3, the consumer opinions regarding how well they thought the developed strategies in the SCCT suited the crisis scenarios were rather similar. Just as Coombs (2006) said, going with taking
on responsibility is a safe communication strategy, which is further suggested in this study. That strategy is the only one that is suggested to have a positive influence on the reputation of a company, even though it sometimes might be a bad choice too. All of the focus groups agreed that the companies have to take on a great deal of responsibility in all of the scenarios, even though the amount varied from full to less responsibility. Also said was that if a company take on too much responsibility, they might find themselves in a compromised situation and it might result in a negative impact on corporate image. Clear is it though that the issue of responsibility is fundamental when consumers assess a crisis and how they would like to be communicated to.

General for all of scenarios, as can be seen in table 2, appendix 3 was that the consumers cared a great deal about actions. What the company will do to prevent it from happening again and that they actually do what they then claim to be doing. In the cases where the consumers personally were involved in the crisis, they also emphasised the importance of information on what they can do and should do to protect them. The information is also known as instruction information and is a strategy that Coombs (2006) said is removed from the list since he viewed it as crucial in all crises and not to be an option but mandatory. This study fully supports that suggestion. The preferred general communication based on the focus groups include:

- Instructing information
- Measures the company will take
- Accepting responsibility
- What has happened

The general preferred communication is based on this study suggested to affect consumers in a preferable way, according to themselves. Based on other crisis circumstances however, additional communication might be favourable to add. For example as seen in table 2, appendix 5 in the case of preventable scenario, investing back in a community where a crisis occurred would influence corporate image positively. Thus adding other strategies to the general ones might influence reputation in
a positive way. As for general communication, information and extent of measures taken would increase more responsible consumers find a company to be. For example it was mentioned that the bigger the corporation the greater measures are expected.

5.1.1.3 Reputation

The way that a company chooses to communicate to consumers in a crisis will impact image of a company in consumers’ mind. Which will then relate back to crisis history and how they have handled crises in the past. Thus communication directly influence reputation but also responsibility in an indirect way. In this stage, after communication has been initiated, an executed there are a few things, except the chosen communication strategy that may affect reputation in a negative way and hence be intensifiers of crisis responsibility in an indirect way.

5.1.1.3.1 Post-crisis intensifiers

The post communication intensifiers identified from the results of this study are displayed in figure 6. Those are time and measures. One participant mentioned, “how fast the company communicates is extremely important”. The data suggests that by communicating fast after a crisis, companies minimise reputational damage and being perceived as trustworthy. If they on the other hand wait too long to respond, the corporate image of a company would likely be influenced negatively, just as their crisis history. The second post communication intensifier identified was measures. Measures are one of the suggested general communication strategies in this paper. Thus how the company follow through on promised measures come into play and is suggested to affect reputation and responsibility indirectly. Consumers want to know that companies are doing what they claim they are going doing. These two post communication intensifiers does not have an impact on the communication preferred in the same crisis as they are in, but on the next one. These two categories thus complete the cycle displayed in figure 3. And in the next crisis the cycle is suggested to start all over again.
6. Conclusion

In this section a conclusion will be presented and the research question will be answered.

The existing Situational Crisis Communications Theory developed by Coombs (2006) aims to predict the level of reputational threat a crisis oppose and suggest communication strategies for those crises. Coombs identified responsibility as a main factor to decide reputational threat. That means that stakeholders’ attribution of responsibility is what the theory builds upon. Coombs (2006) then suggested that crisis and relationship history is intensifiers of attributed responsibility, which then could negatively impact the way stakeholders perceive a company’s role in a crisis. The findings in the research made in this paper supports that. That is however with some alterations, additions and elaborations since this paper examine crisis communication in specific situations from the consumer perspective, with their thoughts and opinions. Whereas the goal was to maintain their corporate image of the company so it does not become worse.

The idea of categorisation of crisis and communication strategies, if accurate would be highly valuable to all companies and organisations. This paper however questions that
simple categorisation at the same time as confirming the importance of identifying crisis situation and the crucial role of attribution of responsibility in doing so. As a result of this study a suggestion of three timely different groups of responsibility intensifiers are suggested in order to understand consumer's perspective, reasoning and preferences regarding crisis communication in specific situations.

The purpose of this thesis was to gain an understanding from the consumer perspective, on corporate reputation in the context of crisis communication. Through answering the research question: ‘How consumers prefer to be communicated to in given retail crisis situations’. This was done by using the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) as a basis to build upon. In a crisis situation this study indicates that consumers prefer quick communication where the company takes responsibility, explain what has happened, how it happened, what the consumers should do to protect themselves and what measures they will take to prevent it from happening again. How and what a company or organisation then chooses to actually communicate to consumers is suggested to affect the reputation of the company. Reputation is here suggested to take a turn for the worse if the initial communication takes too long and if promised measures are not executed. Reputation then links back to crisis history, which is identified as a pre-crisis intensifier of responsibility. Hence the cycle of responsibility influencing communication, communication influencing reputation and reputation influencing responsibility completed.

7. Discussion

This section will finish the research paper by discussing possible implications and the findings contribution to science. Lastly, this section present the reader with limitations and suggestions for research within the field of crisis communication.

7.1 Implications and contribution to science

This study contributes to the field of crisis communication, specifically, crisis communication from consumers perspective. This study contributes with an elaboration
of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory with new dimensions, new categories of responsibility intensifiers, and a cycle of situational crisis communication from consumers’ perspective. It was found in the paper that how consumers wanted to be communicated to after a crisis in the different categories created by Coombs (victim, accident, preventable) were more complex and did not vary as much as described in the theory created by Coombs. This shows that every crisis is unique and that how consumers prefer to be communicated to in a crisis is affected to greater extent by pre-crisis and during-crisis intensifiers. Further it was shown that post-crisis intensifiers, how the company communicated to the consumers in a crisis had a large impact on how they perceived the company in the next crisis. These findings will work as a complement to all of the findings made by Coombs (2006) and provide a unique insight into crisis communication from the consumer perspective. That means that this paper and the cycle of situational crisis communication can work as a guideline for managers when they face a crisis and seek to interact with consumers but want to do so within their preferences. Managers are however not to adapt this cycle and the elaboration of the SCCT blindly and rely only on those to guide them in their crisis communication since the results remain untested on a greater population, and on the actual impact it has on corporate reputation. At this stage they are suggested to work mainly as considerations to make informed decisions.

7.2 Limitations and further research

This paper provides a new fresh perspective on a rather old topic. That new perspective does however come with some limitations. The findings cannot be generalised to all crises since the study only include three extremely specific, yet different scenarios in the retail industry, and every crisis situation has features and circumstances that makes them unique. The focus group mostly included individuals that belonged to generation Y and can therefore, not be generalised to all age groups. Further, the data is gathered from people living in Sweden which could mean that there might be cultural differences and not applicable to other countries. A small sample only make suggestions for how consumers prefer to be communicated, not a guaranteed explanation for it. This thesis has limitations, which subsequently could result in opportunities for further research. There are a great deal and necessarily opportunities in researching the consumer
perspective in the data found in this paper to confirm the suggestions made and to be able to apply it on the public. Additionally, a study with participants or respondents from another country and then compare the finding there to the finding in this paper could either confirm cultural differences in preferences in crisis communication or contradict them.
8. References


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9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Scenarios

Swedish

Scenario 1
Detta företag blev utsatt för en cyberattack i mitten av julhandeln år 2013. I attacken stals över 40 miljoner kreditkortsuppgifter tillhörande deras kunder. Attacken upptäcktes inte av företaget själv utan det var en tredje part som hanterar kundernas kreditkort och transaktioner som gjorde upptäckten. Detta var den första seriösa attacken detta företaget var involverad i som påverkade en stor mängd av deras kunder.

Scenario 2

Scenario 3
Detta företag har en historia av låga löner, dålig arbetsmiljö och barnarbete hos deras leverantörer. detta trots att de gång på gång uttalat sig om att vara ett hållbart företag som är emot barnarbete. Nyligen rapporterades det att en av deras leverantörer anlitat barn så unga som 14 år och lät dem arbeta mer än 12 timmar per dag. Detta avslöjades även att detta har varit ett problem i mer än 3 år hos leverantören i fråga och att arbetarna där har bland de lägsta minimilönerna i världen.
**English translation**

Scenario 1

This retailer was victim of a cyber-attack in the middle of the holiday season in 2013 where over 40 million credit card details were stolen. The company itself did not detect the attack. The discovery of the compromised system was made by a credit card processor who had noticed an increase in fraudulent transactions of credit cards used at the retailer in question. This was the first serious crisis at this retailer that affected a wide range of stakeholders.

Scenario 2

The retailer in question had received concerns and complaints about the stability of their dressers. The instability has resulted in a high risk of falling over, something that had happened a few times when toddlers have climbed on the dresser or tried to stand up using the dresser as help. There have been several cases, one reported recently, where toddlers have been trapped underneath a dresser and died. Yet, the question of who to blame has varied in media, some argues that the company is to blame, that it is their responsibility and that the production of the dressers should be cancelled or improved. Meanwhile, others argue that the parents are to blame. They have both responsibility of their toddlers but also to carefully follow the instructions on how to assemble the dressers where it is clear stated that a dresser should be anchored to the wall.

Scenario 3

This retailer has had a history of low wages, unsafe working condition and child labour at the factories they supply from. This despite their clear statement of being sustainable and their claims to be against child labour. It was reported in 2016 by the book; fashion slaves in English that one of the suppliers to this company hired children as young as 14 years old and had them work more than 12 hours a day. Further, it reported that this had been an issue present since 2013 and that the employees in the factory had one of the lowest minimum wages in the world.
Appendix 2: Crisis communication strategies

Strategies Swedish

1- Företaget säger att det inte finns någon kris.
2- Företaget säger att skadorna orsakade av krisen inte är så allvarliga som de verkar.
3- Företaget säger att de tar fullt ansvar för det som hänt och ber om förlåtelse.
4- Företaget påminner dig om att de också är offer i det som inträffat.
5- Företaget säger att de inte menade att någon skulle råka illa ut och att de inte kunde förutspå att detta skulle komma att inträffa.
6- Företaget berömmer er konsumenter och påminner dig om allt bra arbete som de gjort innan denna kris uppstod.
7- Företaget konfronterar den person/grupp/media som har hävdat att företaget gjort något fel.
8- Företaget erbjuder pengar, gåvor, etc. till de som är offer i krisen
9- Företaget säger att det är någon annan, utanför företaget som är ansvariga för krisen.
10- Företaget berättar om alla bra arbeten som de gjort i det förfutna.

Strategies English

1 - The company say that there is no crisis.
2 - Not as severe as it may appear.
3 - The company take full responsibility and ask for forgiveness.
4 - The company reminds you that they are also a victim in this crisis.
5 - The company say they did not intend harm anyone and/or that they could not see the crisis coming.
6 - The company praise you and remind you of the good work the company have done in the past.
7 - The company confronts the person/group/media who have claimed that something the organisation has done is wrong.
8 - Company offer gifts, money, etc. to the victims in the crisis.
10 - The company tell you about all of the good work they have done in the past.
Appendix 3: Focus group questions

Scenario specific questions:

1. How do you think that approach 1 fit or does not fit as a communication way in this crisis?
2. How do you think that approach 2 fits or does not fit as a communication way in this crisis?
3. How do you think that approach 3 fits or does not fit as a communication way in this crisis?
4. How do you think that approach 4 fits or does not fit as a communication way in this crisis?
5. How do you think that approach 5 fits or does not fit as a communication way in this crisis?
6. How do you think that approach 6 fits or does not fit as a communication way in this crisis?
7. How do you think that approach 7 fits or does not fit as a communication way in this crisis?
8. How do you think that approach 8 fits or does not fit as a communication way in this crisis?
9. How do you think that approach 9 fits or does not fit as a communication way in this crisis?
10. How do you think that approach 10 fits or does not fit as a communication way in this crisis?
11. How would you want to be communicated to in this scenario so that your image of the company would not change for the worse? You are allowed to combine approaches above or choose ways that are not presented.
12. In what way would a negative image of the company before the scenario happened change how you would like to be communicated to?
13. In what way would a positive image of the company before the scenario happened change how you would like to be communicated to?
14. In what way do you think that the company is responsibly or nor responsible for the occurrence of this crisis?
15. Is there anything that could reinforce how much responsibility the company has in this scenario?

16. In what way would how media frame the scenario change how you would like to be communicated to?

After all three scenarios:

1. What in general influenced you in how you wanted to be communicated to?

2. How in general would you like companies to communicate a crisis?

3. Please take a moment and discuss what you think has been the most important thing you have brought up during this focus group
### Appendix 4: Result

#### Table 1 Focus group 1, 2, 3 & 4

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Statement (Victim)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The company say that there is no crisis.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&quot;They are lying&quot; &quot;Full denial is worse&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;No, this does not fit&quot; &quot;They can really not say that it is not a crisis if someone has started to use people's cards&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;No, It is money, It is serious&quot; &quot;It is a crisis and that is why this does not fit&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;No it is a crisis&quot; &quot;No this does not fit&quot;</td>
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</table>

**Discussion:** Focus group 1 states that this is, that they are lying if they say this. If it is true then they need more information for example the crisis is not as severe as it looks, we have it under control. Focus group 3 express that the company cannot communicate this a lot of people are involved and it is about money. Focus group 4 all agree that this is not a good way of communicating to the company’s consumers.

| The company say that it is not as severe as it may appear. | 1 | "I don’t like this one" "They are blaming something else and do not take responsibility" |
| | 2 | "No, It is serious" "No, this does not work" |
| | 3 | It is not okay to diminish that 40 million customers credit cards has been stolen |
| | 4 | "Pretty insufficient when it is credit card information, your whole life is based on money so if that data is stolen, how can you not say that is serious" "One thing is thought of was that the company did not discover it, but it was a third party, that is scary" |

**Discussion:** Focus group 1 all agrees that this is wrong; they think that this is blaming someone else and not taking responsibility. Focus group 2 express that it is important to inform and not diminish the crisis. Focus group 3 have both discussed that it would make them feel like the crisis was not severe if they would communicate this and that it would be like diminishing that 40 million credit cards was stolen. Focus group 4 express that this is not enough and the way to communicate.

<p>| The company take full responsibility and ask for forgiveness. | 1 | &quot;This is perfect, start with this. We have made a mistake, we apologise that we did not have a better security system, we will compensate you in full&quot; &quot;As you know, we have always been a nice company and it's hard to protect security systems in today's society against people who want to hurt us&quot; |</p>
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| 2 | "This is better"  
I would like to point out again that it depends what happens after. The problem is that they do not have enough protection since they have been cyber-attacked. I would like them to take measures after this" |
| 3 | "In this case, they can take full responsibility, it is their duty to ensure that their systems work"  
"They cannot blame anyone else here" |
| 4 | "I think that it is their responsibility to have sufficient security, so they are responsible in that way. So I think that they should definitely take full responsibility"  
They can of course apologise, but it should be done in every crisis’s situation where you are fully responsible" |

**Discussion:**

Focus group 1 think that this one is perfect however, it can still not stand alone, they have to add measures and more information to make it better. Focus group 2 believes that this strategy is better than the last one since it is not the customer's fault and that this statement together with measures would be good start. Focus group 3 express that full responsibility is a good thing especially since they did not discover it themselves. One participant in focus group 4 does not believe that the company has full responsibility however; the others disagree and believe that this is completely on them and apologising is a something they should do.

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| 1 | "Yes they are, but for me it has nothing to do with the situation, they still need to take responsibility"  
"I feel the same way, that they get attacked and not can handle it is not my problem, it is their problem" |
| 2 | "I cannot imagine a scenario where this would be a good approach"  
"You want say this, it will not help anyone" |
| 3 | "No, it is completely their responsibility"  
"They are victims, but they cannot blame the ones that attacked them" |
| 4 | "They are a victim in a way, but that is not what I want to hear. I would not want to hear that in this case"  
"I would be anger, my picture of the company would be a lot worse, I would not want them to play victim" |

**Discussion:**

Focus group 1 discuss that this has nothing with the crisis to do, they still need to take full responsibility. However, they all recognise that the company is a victim but they still think that this is their responsibility. That they have been attacked and could not handle it is not their problem. They keep discussing that it would not be as severe if it were a company that did not have credit card information. Focus group 2 express that they believe that the focus should not be on the company but on the consumers. Focus group 3 express that they can absolutely not communicate this, it is their responsibility and that they do not care that they are a victim as well. Focus group 4 thinks that they are a victim, but they do not want the company to communicate that they are a victim. They want the company to take responsibility and take charge of the crisis.

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| 1 | "This could be an explanation: we have done wrong, it was not our intention, we have been the victim of a crime"  
"It could be good if it is a message in a bigger context" |
| 2 | "I don't think this is appropriate"  
"It does not fit" |
| 3 | "I think the first part fits however, the second is bad, they should be safe when they are dealing with money transactions daily"  
"This happens all the time, so it should be of interest for them" |
| 4 | "I can agree with this"  
"It is clear that they did not mean for this to happen" |

**Discussion:**

Focus group 1 discussed that they understand that the company did not intend to harm anyone since it was a fraud, that this could be an explanation and that it is important to make the consumer feel safe again. Focus group 2 all things that this statement sounds like they have planned it and that it does not fit in this context. Focus group 3 discussed that the first part works however, they do not believe that the second did not fit they should have enough security. They also mentioned that it was a catastrophic that they did not notice it themselves. Focus group 4 believe that this would be a good way of communicating however, they would not really notice this statement.
The company praise you and remind you of the good work the company have done in the past.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&quot;This could be an also be in a bigger context&quot; &quot;In the next step, where they thank the ones that notice the problem so that they can be better&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What are they going to praise the consumer for, it seems really strange&quot; &quot;This one was not good at all, there is nothing they can say or praise that could make it better&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;This does not work&quot; &quot;They have not done anything good before&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;I do not think this is relevant&quot; &quot;No, very irrelevant&quot;</td>
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Discussion: Focus group 1 says that this is a nice strategy and that they can do this as a part of the communication. As a way of saying thanks for noticing the problem. Focus group 2 things this is weird that there is nothing they can praise the consumers for. Focus group 3 all agreed that this was not the way to communicate to the consumers in this scenario. Everyone in focus group 4 believes that this strategy is irrelevant.

The company confronts the person/group/media who have claimed that something the organisation has done is wrong.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&quot;That is wrong&quot; &quot;If you would see that it was not right later then you would never buy from the company again, I would have seen then as dishonest&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;They cannot confront everyone&quot; &quot;The others in addition to the company who made mistakes are those who took the money, but it will not pay off to go around and blame someone else. You have been unprepared, what you have done wrong is that you have not protected our credit cards good enough, they will not gain anything from confronting&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;No they can't do this&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;In this case, it is impossible for the company to say that it our fault, it is their fault&quot; &quot;They are quite responsible in one way that this has happened, so this statement does not fit&quot;</td>
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Discussion: Focus group 1 discussed that if the company communicated that there is no crisis and it turns out that they lied later then they would never shop from that company again. They also talked about media and how different media are more reliable than others. Focus group 2 express that they can’t confront everyone, that the company is to blame since they could not protect the credit cards. Focus group 3 expressed that they cannot use this as a communication; they cannot confront the ones who have noticed it because that is really good for them. Focus group 4 does not think that this is relevant.

Company offer gifts, money, etc. to the victims in the crisis.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&quot;I think that you can offer compensation&quot; &quot;But it is not the first that the company does, it could then fell like a bribe&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;If they have opportunity, then absolutely. But it depends what type of gift&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;I think they can do this&quot; &quot;This and an apology&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;It does not fit in this industry&quot; &quot;I think this is sweeping under the carpet, I would be angry&quot;</td>
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Discussion: Focus group 1 thought that the company could offer a compensation for what happened however, they also mentioned that this is not the first thing that the company should do. They mentioned that they first want to know what happened, what the company will do so that it will not happen again and what the consumers can do to not be affected. If they do not do that, then it would feel like a bribe. Focus group 2 partially express that absolutely not and some express that it depend on what the gift was. Focus group 3 agreed that this was a good way of communicating for the company to give the people affected some free stuff. Focus group 4 expressed that they would not want any gifts, they want their money back.

The company say that someone else, outside of the company is responsible for the crisis.

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&quot;I don’t think that you can do that, they have a responsibility for their security system&quot; &quot;I would feel that I could not trust them if they said this&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;You cannot say that someone else is responsible however, you have to tell about the situation&quot;</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| 3 | "No they can't attack, it is their responsibility" "The company has a responsibility to have as safe payment as
Focus group 1 discussed that they first have to take responsibility and then work internally to figure out who is responsible for what happened. They mention that the company is the face towards the customers and that is why they need to take responsibility. If the company would communicate this focus group 1 felt like they did not have control over the situation and that they could not trust them. Focus group 2 mention that you can’t blame someone else but you can explain the circumstances, what happened and why. Focus group 3 all agreed that the company could not communicate this strategy they can however, explain the circumstances. Focus group 4 believes that this could be used if they have outsourced the security it is however, still the company’s responsibility.

The company tell you about all of the good work they have done in the past.

1. Focus group 1 mentioned that they were not interested in hearing what they had done in the past, which is more interesting to know what they will do about the crisis. After a discussion about the strategy they mention that this strategy could be something to highlight with, that we are a nice company, we have a policy to always do the right thing. They believe that it is easier to bounce back from a crisis if you are a nice company. Focus group 2 expressed that this was not relevant, that the past does not matter and this would just be weird to communicate. Focus group 3 expressed that this does not work at all, it would be as putting their head in the sand. Focus group 4 expressed that this strategy is irrelevant to this scenario.

Discussion:
Focus group 3 wanted transparency; to know everything and measures the company will take. They want the company to apologies, address the problem fast and do a step-by-step list on how they will act and what the customers can do. Focus group 4 expressed that the company to take measures, have a personal contact with the victims and give a lot of information to their customers.

In what way would a positive/negative image of the company before the scenario happened change how you would like to be communicated

1. Focus group 1 discussed their possibility" it is their responsibility in the end to be up to date and make sure that everything work as usual and that they are safe" "Yes, this feels a bit wrong"

Discussion:
Focus group 1 discussed that they first have to take responsibility and then work internally to figure out who is responsible for what happened. They mention that the company is the face towards the customers and that is why they need to take responsibility. If the company would communicate this focus group 1 felt like they did not have control over the situation and that they could not trust them. Focus group 2 mention that you can’t blame someone else but you can explain the circumstances, what happened and why. Focus group 3 all agreed that the company could not communicate this strategy they can however, explain the circumstances. Focus group 4 believes that this could be used if they have outsourced the security it is however, still the company’s responsibility.

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How would you want to be communicated to in this scenario so that your image of the company would not change for the worse? You are allowed to combine approaches above or choose ways that are not presented:

Discussion:
Focus group 3 wanted transparency; to know everything and measures the company will take. They want the company to apologies, address the problem fast and do a step-by-step list on how they will act and what the customers can do. Focus group 4 want the company to take measures, have a personal contact with the victims and give a lot of information to their customers.

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Discussion:
Focus group 1 discussed that they first have to take responsibility and then work internally to figure out who is responsible for what happened. They mention that the company is the face towards the customers and that is why they need to take responsibility. If the company would communicate this focus group 1 felt like they did not have control over the situation and that they could not trust them. Focus group 2 mention that you can’t blame someone else but you can explain the circumstances, what happened and why. Focus group 3 all agreed that the company could not communicate this strategy they can however, explain the circumstances. Focus group 4 believes that this could be used if they have outsourced the security it is however, still the company’s responsibility.

The company tell you about all of the good work they have done in the past.

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“The communication way would not change for me but if I listen or not might change”

“I would never shop there again”

“If I had a negative image then I would want them to take full responsibility and change their security system”

Discussion: Focus group 1 discussed that if they had a negative view of the company, they would want to see the company take more actions. Focus group 2 stated that they would want to be communicated in the same way however, they might not listen or buy if they have a negative picture of the company from before the crisis.

In what way do you believe that the company is responsibly or nor responsible for the occurrence of this crisis:

1. “They are responsible since they do not have enough security”

2. “I don't really think that they are responsible, it just happened to be them, it was just randomness that they were affected, could have happened to anyone. However, they are responsible to take actions”

3. “If negative, then the company have to take it one step further “

4. “I would say 8 out of 10, they should have better security”

Discussion: Focus group 1 discussed that the company is responsible however, being hacked is something that happens often and even the pentagon and military have been hack so you know that they are one step ahead. Focus group 2 express that if the company has done everything in their power then that would be sufficient if it did however, turn out that they have not been updating their security then the responsibility would be higher.

Is there anything that could reinforce how much responsibility the company has in this scenario:

1. “If they had taken money from my account and I would have been directly affected by the crisis”

2. “If more companies had been affected, then I would feel more sorry for the company”

3. “If it happened more than once and it is common so they should have been prepared”

4. “How many people that are involved in the crisis”

Discussion: Focus group 1 mentioned that they think that the company has more responsibility if they would have been personally involved and that the company would have less responsibility if more companies were affected. Focus group 2 express that if the company has done everything in their power then that would be sufficient if it did however, turn out that they have not been updating their security then the responsibility would be higher.

In what way would media frame the scenario change how you would like to be communicated to:

1. “Media has a large influence if the company does not take initiative and leave it to the media to create their own story”

2. “Yes and speculate”

3. “That is hard it depends on how they frame it”

4. “The company have to make their own frame and tell how it is”

Discussion: Focus group 1 discussed that media has a large influence if the company does not act or answer the media's accusations. It will leave the consumers to speculate and therefore will influence. Focus group 2 express that if the company has done everything in their power then that would be sufficient if it did however, turn out that they have not been updating their security then the responsibility would be higher.

Strategy Focus group Statement (Accident)

The company say that there is no crisis:

1. “It is a crisis because children have died, making it wrong to say that it is not a crisis”

2. “They have to own the crisis, they have not been sufficiently clear
"In their communication that it needs to be anchored”

2  "No, that does not feel correct at all”
   "You cannot just sweep the problem under the carpet, that makes people think more about the problem and why it has occurred”

3  "This does not fit”
   "To say that there is no crisis is like putting your head in the sand”

4  "No it is obvious that it is a crisis since a child has died”
   "It is extra sensitive when it comes to children, it is always very insensitive to say that there is no crisis”

Discussion: The participants mentioned that they would react negatively or even stop consuming the company's products if they would communicate this. Further, they mentioned that they would be suspicious to the rest of the company's products and the safety of them. Focus group 1 all agreed that this is not the way to communicate since children have died, it is therefore a crisis. They have to own the crisis and that their communication about how to anchor the dresser has not been good enough. Focus group 2 all agreed that this neither is nor correct and that it would be like sweeping the problem under the carpet, the problem that a child has died. They discuss who is responsible and agree that it is the parents' responsibility since the company have instructions however; the company still has to take responsibility. Focus group 3 all agrees that this is a crisis and that the responsibility is both on the parents and the company. Focus group 4 express that this is obviously a crisis since a child have died and that it is extra sensitive when it is a child involved.

The company say that it is not as severe as it may appear.

1  "It is serious since people have died however, but the company does not have 100% responsibility”
   “Everyone is responsible for this”

2  "It is as serious as it can be”
   "Yes it really is, what can be more serious than that people dies”

3  “Does not fit, you can't say that it is not severe”
   “It’s about children and since they have been injured seriously, it is not about getting burnt on the stove, it is about people getting squeezed, it’s dangerous for real”

4  "It does not fit to say that it’s not so serious that a child has died of something that has happened due to their products.”
   "It is serious when a child has died and obviously a crisis”

Discussion: Focus group 1 express that it is serious when people die and that both the parents and the company is responsible. Focus group 2 all agree that this is a bad way of communicating and they state that this is as serious as it can be. They add that this would be a worse way of communicating then strategy 1. Focus group 3 all agrees that this is not a good communication way since children have died. Focus group 4 all agreed that this does not fit when someone has died and since it has happened before.

The company take full responsibility and ask for forgiveness.

1  "No, it is not entirely their responsibility, since they have in the user manual that you should anchor it”
   "Apologising is always a good beginning and then partly taking on the responsibility”

2  “They cannot say that they take full responsibility because they have communicated that they should anchor the dresser in the wall”
   "It's better that the company says or write something than blaming the parents for not reading the instructions. So I think it's better for the company to take responsibility for it.

3  "It fits, but I'm not sure about full responsibility, the parents have a responsibility to follow the manual”
   "The parents have a responsibility to ensure that the dresser is anchored and to follow the instructions when building it and then the company have to take responsibility for not providing sufficient information”

4  "I think this partly fits, they ask for forgiveness which I think is amicable of them but then, I don't know how I feel about full responsibility. I’m a bit hesitant about that part, I do not think it’s their full responsibility”
   “There are instructions in this case, which makes taking full responsibility not necessary”

Discussion: The participants in general agreed that by stating this they assume that the company is fully responsible for the crisis and thereby careless which result in a loss in faith and corporate image in the company. However, by taking on no responsibility the
participants said that they would not be able to view the company as a serious business. Focus group 1 expressed that apologising is always a good start and that they should take on some responsibility. Focus group 2 discuss that it is not a good idea for the company to take on full responsibility but have to take responsibility since it was because if their product. Focus group 3 believe that this is a good communication way however, they do not believe that the company has full responsibility in the crisis. They express that the company have to communicate that the dresser needs to be anchored better. Focus group 4 feels that this partially fits, it fits to apologise but not to take full responsibility since the parents are partially to blame.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The company reminds you that they are also a victim in this crisis.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>&quot;No, you can say that when children have dies, you cannot say that you are a victim too&quot;  &quot;I totally agree&quot;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;No, the company can’t play victim&quot;  &quot;No, this is not something you should remind people about&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;Saying this would only make it worse&quot;  &quot;This is almost the worst that they can say&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;I feel that, as a family, I would have been offended if they said that they were victims. It would have definitely worsened my view of the company&quot;  &quot;It is insensitive&quot;</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Discussion: All participants agreed that the company is not a victim in this case, yet the company is not sole responsible either. Focus group 1 expressed that the company cannot communicate this when children have died, that you can't replace humans the same way as you can replace a product. Focus group 2 express that this strategy is worse than strategy 2 and that this would be a public relations suicide. Focus group 3 express that this is not a good communication strategy because it is a company against an individual, their view of the company would be worse. Focus group 4 agree that this is wrong way to communicate with the consumers and they feel that it is insensitive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The company say they did not intend harm anyone and/or that they could not see the crisis coming.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>&quot;But it happened, they had communicated that it could happen. The company is not good enough in their communication and therefore they are responsible&quot;  &quot;It would have been better to anticipate the problem&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;It sounds like this could be combined with something else, but they cannot just leave it like this&quot;  &quot;I would also say that the first part is great, that they did not intend to harm anyone, I think everyone can assume that. But they could not predict that this would happen. Is a bit like saying we are stupid since they have said that people should anchor it to the wall&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;They could say this but I would not care that much&quot;  &quot;The second part in the sentence, that they could not predict that it would happened gives me the feeling that they do not test their products&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>&quot;I like the first part, it is clear that they did not mean to harm anyone&quot;</td>
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</table>

Discussion: Focus group 2 express that this could be a part of the communication, that the first part is good but not the second part. They explain that they could predict that this could happen since they have a manual where they explain that you need to anchor the dresser. Their picture of the company would not be as negative as strategy 4 but they would get a negative picture if they stated the second half, 50/50. It would be positive that they show respect so the first half is good. Further, their trust would disappear and they would question the other products. Focus group 3 agreed that this could be said as a communication in a bigger communication context however, they would not really notice the statement and the last part of the statement would affect them more negative than positive. Focus group 4 express that they like the first part of the communication strategy however, not that they could not see it coming, it feels like a fill out sentence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The company praise you and remind you of the good work the company have done in the past.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>&quot;No, I do not think you can say this when it has gone this far and people have died&quot;  &quot;I feel the same, you cannot say this&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;I don’t think this is a good strategy&quot;  &quot;Feels like they are pushing away the responsibility&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus group 1 say that this is not a good way of communicating when someone has died. Focus group 2 agrees that this is not the way to communicate, that it feels like they are blaming someone else since they are not addressing the problem. Focus group 3 express that this is like putting your head in the sand and to sweep it under the carpet. However, it could work if they praise the consumer who addressed the problem. Focus group 4 don’t think that this is a good way of communicating when people have died however, they could mention that the company is happy that people have brought the problem to their attention.

The company confronts the person/group/media who have claimed that something the organisation has done is wrong.

Focus group 1 say that this is not a good way of communicating when someone has died. Focus group 2 agrees that this is not the way to communicate, that it feels like they are blaming someone else since they are not addressing the problem. Focus group 3 express that this is like putting your head in the sand and to sweep it under the carpet. However, it could work if they praise the consumer who addressed the problem. Focus group 4 don’t think that this is a good way of communicating when people have died however, they could mention that the company is happy that people have brought the problem to their attention.

Company offer gifts, money, etc. to the victims in the crisis.

Focus group 1 express that offering gifts or money suggest that the company takes on full responsibility of the crisis. Focus group 2 all agree that this is not the way to communicate and that it feels like a bribe. Focus group 3 express that that this does not work at all however, they could offer therapy for the families who have been affected to show that they care.
**Discussion:** All participants in the focus groups agreed that they would lose faith in the company and get the sense that they did not have control if they could say that someone else was responsible for the crisis. To blame the ones affected by the crisis was considered even worse way to communicate and send the message that the company does not care. The circumstances of what happened could be mentioned to diminish the impression of responsibility that the company has however, the company is always responsible. Focus group 2 express that it does not matter if it is the parents or the manufacturers fault the company still needs to take responsibility. However, it depends on how you say that it was someone else, they can explain the circumstances but not blame. Focus group 3 said that this is not good, that they need to take their responsibility. Focus group 4 mentioned that it feels like they are blaming someone else especially since it has happened more than ones, this would give them a negative image of the company.

**The company tell you about all of the good work they have done in the past.**

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</table>
| 1 | "They cannot go out and say this straight away"  
"It could be a part of the communication, if you say it in a smart way, but definitely not as the main crisis communication" |
| 2 | "It does not weigh up what happened"  
"By saying that we have done everything good before which means that we have not done wrong this time either, that’s how I would have reacted" |
| 3 | "This feels insensitive"  
"Changing focus completely and not looking at what happened, show no interest in what has happened" |
| 4 | "Feels like the same as approach 6"  
"My opinion would be unchanged" |

**Discussion:** The participants mentioned that if the company would communicate this it would affect their corporate image negatively, if the statements were not closely related to the crisis. Focus group 2 express that this does not weigh up what has happened and that it feels like they are blaming someone else. Focus group 3 express that this is insensitive and feels like they are shifting focus, that they do not show interest for what happened.

**How would you want to be communicated to in this scenario so that your image of the company would not change for the worse? You are allowed to combine approaches above or choose ways that are not presented:**

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</table>
| 1 | "Make sure to look at the last communication process on how to anchor the dresser, one way could be to go out in media and do a commercial"  
"Give information, what have happened and that we take responsibility" |
| 2 | "They should apologise, it is unfortunate that this has happened, we have done everything in our power so that this would not happened, we have stated in our instructions but we will of course look it over to see if we can do it better." |
| 3 | "I would have wanted a plan and also for them to communicate that we will do this, this and then keep the customer updated of what they have done"  
"I would want them to inform the ones who already have the product to tell them that it is really important for them to anchor the dresser" |
| 4 | "I want the company to say that they are sorry for what has happened and that they will investigate why it happened and improve if something is wrong" |

**Discussion:** Focus group 1 mentioned that one important thing for the company is to communicate better how to anchor the dresser, to
provide information about the crisis and to take responsibility. They also mentioned that they can say that they are a responsible company in the past. Focus group 2 discuss who is responsible and how to handle the situation, they agree that they are all responsible and that the company should address the problem straight away. They talk about the importance for the company that consumers explain what they believe the company can improve. Important for focus group 3 was information, measure and follow-up. Additionally it was important to stress that the ones who has a dresser already that they need to anchor it to the wall. Focus group 4 express the importance of seeing results, they want to see and hear what have changed with the product after the crisis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In what way would a positive/negative image of the company before the scenario happened change how you would like to be communicated to:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>“It does not matter, the crisis is serious, but you would probably not be surprised if you had a negative image”</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“I would want them to communicate in the same what, what differ is if we listen or not”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I don't think that they could save it if you have a negative image of the company from before” “But I would want them to be more transparent if I had a negative image from before”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“I don't think that what we have stated above would be enough if I had a negative image” “More measures and show the result, what has improved if my image was negative”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion:** Focus group 1 express that it does not really matter if it is negative or positive when the crisis is this severe. That you might expect it from a company you have a negative image form and be more disappointed if you had a positive image. Focus group 2 explains that they would like the same communication but that how they choose to absorb the information could be affected of their image of the company before the crisis. Focus group 3 mentioned that it would be hard to recover if their consumers had a negative image from before however, they should be more transparent and do a full investigation; they have to take the crisis more seriously. Focus group 4 express that they want fore measures and it is more important with follow-up and show what has changed if they have a negative image of the company.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In what way do you believe that the company is responsibly or nor responsible for the occurrence of this crisis:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>“They have responsibility in the form of communication and information. Clearer with the risks and how to anchor the dresser” “More clear instructions with pictures and maybe in the beginning of the manual would make it clearer”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“The company have to know that people don't read the manual”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Not full responsibility” “Since they have given information on how the product should be built and used”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I would say a 6 on scale 1-10. I don’t think that they have full responsibility”</td>
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</table>

**Discussion:** Focus group 2 express that the company have a manual where they explain that you need to anchor the dresser however, they discuss that they should have known that people don't read the manual. Focus group 4 all mentioned that the company does not have full responsibility but they still have to take on responsibly and take measures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is there anything that could reinforce how much responsibility the company has in this scenario:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>“The crisis impact on human suffering”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“It would make them more responsible if they do not address the problem” “Group pressure matter, what other people say about the case”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“How many times” “How serious it is”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Discussion:
Focus group 2 mentions group pressure and what people say as one of the influencers that would reinforce how much responsibility the company has. They also mention how long it takes for the company to address the problem.

In what way would how media frame the scenario change how you would like to be communicated to:

1. "It would impact if the company does not take the steering wheel and media steer because then it could be interoperated to saying that media's picture is correct."

2. "Go back to the source and answer media."

3. "It depends what I know from the company from before, if I know more of the company from before the crisis then it would be harder for media to change by view."

## Discussion:

### Strategy | Focus group | Statement (Preventable)
--- | --- | ---

**The company say that there is no crisis.**

1. "It is clear that there is a crisis or a problem, so there is no reason to deny it."
   - "This is not a good start."

2. "Does not fit because they say they are against child labour and still they have it, they cannot say that there is no crisis."

3. "Does not fit, it is definitely a crisis."
   - "Especially since it's been going on for so long."

4. "My picture of the company would be worse if they say this."
   - "They can't say that because it is a humanitarian crisis."

**Discussion:**
Focus group 1 all state that it is obvious that this is a crisis so there is no need to deny it, it is not a good start to state this because then you don't know if you can trust them. They discuss that media and how media frame the crisis would have a large impact because they want to create headlines. Focus group 2 express that this communication way does not work since they say that they are against child labour and then have it. Focus group 3 all agree that this does not fit, especially since it has been going on for so long. Focus group 4 think that this is a humanity crisis and an identity crisis for the company where they say they stand for something and then show the opposite.

**The company say that it is not as severe as it may appear.**

1. "It's not good to say this when it's child labour and since it has happened before."
   - "It's serious when people are involved, I would get angry if they said this, that means that they are not taking this seriously."

2. "Same with this one."
   - "They are against child labour but have it themselves, hypocrites."

3. "Does not fit either."
   - "It would be like putting your head in the sand and not grasping the problem if they would say this."

4. "It's like lowering someone's human value because it feels like it's not that serious."
   - "My view of the company would get worse."
### Discussion:
Focus group 1 express that the company cannot communicate this when it is about child labour and especially since it has been going on for three years. They discuss that it is serious when humans are involved and that they would be angry and feel like they are not taking the crisis serious if they would communicate this. Focus group 2 express they the company would be hypocrites if they would communicate in this way, that it is as bad as strategy 1. Focus group 3 express that this does not fit since it is child labour, it feels like they are diminishing child labour if they say this. Focus group 4 discussed that their view of the company would be worse and it would feel like the company diminished human life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The company take full responsibility and ask for forgiveness.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
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### Discussion:
The company take full responsibility and ask for forgiveness.

| 1  | "This is a good start" |
| 2  | "It feels a bit like they are trying to be a victim by asking for forgiveness" |
| 3  | "This works pretty well" |
| 4  | "I would not believe them if they asked for forgiveness" |

### Discussion:
The company remind you that they are also a victim in this crisis.

| 1  | "You can’t say this when the crisis is about people" |
| 2  | "No, I think that the company should have known" |
| 3  | "No" |
| 4  | "No, not in this case" |

### Discussion:
The company remind you that they are also a victim in this crisis.

| 1  | "You can’t say this when the crisis is about people" |
| 2  | "No, I think that the company should have known" |
| 3  | "No" |
| 4  | "No, not in this case" |

### Discussion:
The company state that they did not intend harm anyone and/or that they could not see the crisis coming.

| 1  | "It might have been that they did not see it coming however, they should still have been aware of it, it is their responsibility" |
| 2  | "It has occurred for 3 years, they can’t say that they could not predict that it could happen" |

| 1  | "It might have been that they did not see it coming however, they should still have been aware of it, it is their responsibility" |
| 2  | "It has occurred for 3 years, they can’t say that they could not predict that it could happen" |

| 1  | "It might have been that they did not see it coming however, they should still have been aware of it, it is their responsibility" |
| 2  | "It has occurred for 3 years, they can’t say that they could not predict that it could happen" |

| 1  | "It might have been that they did not see it coming however, they should still have been aware of it, it is their responsibility" |
| 2  | "It has occurred for 3 years, they can’t say that they could not predict that it could happen" |

| 1  | "It might have been that they did not see it coming however, they should still have been aware of it, it is their responsibility" |
| 2  | "It has occurred for 3 years, they can’t say that they could not predict that it could happen" |

| 1  | "It might have been that they did not see it coming however, they should still have been aware of it, it is their responsibility" |
| 2  | "It has occurred for 3 years, they can’t say that they could not predict that it could happen" |
"I would lose my credibility for the company, I would not believe what they said."
"They say that they are sustainable, then they can’t say that they could not predict this could happen, they have predicted and thought about it before."
"That they could not predict that this could happened feels like bullshit."
"That shows that they have zero control over their suppliers."

Discussion: Focus group 1 said that this could have been the case, which would make a difference how far down in the supply chain the supplier was. However, they mentioned that should still have control but that it could be a one-time thing and then it is more okay. They continue to discuss how media influence in this case and all agree that they would influence since media wants to create headlines. Focus group 2 mention that this is as bad of a communication way as strategy 1 and 2. They continue to express that it would be wrong to say that not see the crisis coming when it has happened during 3 years. Focus group 3 expressed that it has been going on for 3 years so they cannot state that they could not see this coming. Focus group 4 expressed that they feel that the company could see it coming and that this would not be a good way of communicating.

The company praise you and remind you of the good work the company have done in the past.

1

"No, then it feels like they are trying to hide something or compensate."
"I feel that this sounds like greenwashing that they are trying to wash off the bad stamp after the crisis."

2

"I would wonder what else they have been hiding if they said this, are you really environmentally friendly?"

3

"No"
"The last part is not relevant since it’s been going on for 3 years"

4

"What kind of good work should they highlight it’s been going on for 3 years."
"If they have done something in the area to try to prevent this then they could say that”

Discussion: Focus group 1 believes that the company have not done anything good before but if they had and would have communicated that then they said that it would feel like they were trying to hide something, which would feel like greenwashing. Focus group 2 that this statement would make them more suspicious of other things that the company could hide for example if they really are sustainable. Focus group 3 express that the last part is not relevant since it has been going on for 3 years. Focus group said that this could be relevant but only if the company had done something in the same area as the supplier was in as a way of trying to prevent it from happen. Additionally if they were building schools and raise salaries so that the children can get an education instead of working.

The company confronts the person/group/media who have claimed that something the organisation has done is wrong.

1

"They can confront the media if their feet are dry, but they will never win the fight against media, so what's the point"
"It doesn’t look good if they start to confronting, it’s better to explain what happened, apologise and take responsibility”

2

"No you can’t say this, you can't put the blame on someone else in this situation, they have to solve it”

3

"This is embarrassing”
"It would be bad if they confronted without any proof”

4

"If they can show that they actually did not make a mistake, then fine but it does not feel genuine”
"I think that they should be aware that it's bad working environment”

Discussion: Focus group 1 states that this could be communicated if they have not done anything wrong however, they will never win against media. They add that it does not look good to confront so it is better to explain what has happened, apologise and take responsibility. Focus group 2 stated that this something that the company can’t say in a situation like this that the focus should be on solving the problem. Focus group 3 expressed that this would just be embarrassing for the company and that it could get worse after. Focus group 4 express that this could be used only if the company can show that they have not done anything wrong.”
| Company offer gifts, money, etc. to the victims in the crisis. | 1 | "It does not feel right to give them anything in this situation, it's like humiliating them"  
"Then you have to do something extreme, like building a school or raising their wages which shows that you are serious. Decide minimum wages etc. Do something for real" |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;No, you can't do this when the children are the victims&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3 | "Gifts should be related to the problem"  
"It would be positive if they gave the families compensation so that the children could go to school" |
| 4 | "It would be good if they changed the working environment and keep the supplier"  
"It they offer education or invest in the society" |

**Discussion:**
Focus group 1 mentioned greenwashing when they saw this strategy again; that the company has to take stronger measures because to give gifts would be to humiliate them. Some in Focus group 2 express that gifts and money is not a good way to communicate while others says that this could be a way for the company to show that you did not know and care. Focus group 3 discussed that they can give things to the children however, that it should be gifts related to the problem for example give the families money so their children can go to school. Focus group 4 discussed that this depends since the victims in this crisis are the children; this would only be good if they offered education or an investment in the community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The company say that someone else, outside of the company is responsible for the crisis.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>&quot;This is like we said before, they can mention the circumstances but not blaming someone else and removing their own responsibility&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2 | "No, they can't say this"  
"It does not work in this case, they are the ones who are responsible, they can't blame anyone else. It is not possible" |
| 3 | "They can't blame their suppliers"  
"The bigger the company, the more responsibility" |
| 4 | "I think that how far down in the supply chain the supplier was matters a lot"  
"If the company didn't know and that it is the supplier's fault they are however, still responsible" |

**Discussion:**
Focus group 1 all agrees that the company can mention the circumstances but they can't blame anyone else. Focus group 2 express that this is not a good way of communicating, that it is only the company who is responsible in this situation. They add that the company should know who their suppliers are since they have hired them. Focus group 3 express that they cannot blame the suppliers however, they can explain the circumstances. Focus group 4 said that this was okay if they really did not know however, they also said that the company should know their suppliers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The company tell you about all of the good work they have done in the past.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>&quot;This could be step number two in the communication&quot;</th>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;No, they can't talk about this in a crisis, it feels like they are hiding something&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;Their crisis history is ruining it for them&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4 | "It is not suitable in this situation"  
"They diminish the crisis" |

**Discussion:**
Focus group 1 mentioned that this could be step number two in the communication. Focus group 2 mentions that they have not done anything good since this has happen for 3 years and that you can't compare planting trees with child labour. Focus group 3 express that it is the company's history that ruins it and that this would not be relevant. Focus group 4 all agrees that this is not relevant in this scenario, they believed that it would be to diminish the crisis.
How would you want to be communicated to in this scenario so that your image of the company would not change for the worse? You are allowed to combine approaches above or choose ways that are not presented:

1. They should do a project to show that they show that they mean to change for real.
   “Yes a long-term solution”

2. They need to have a plan on how this will disappear forever”
   “Take responsibility and tell what they will do”

3. “For them to take responsibility and ask for forgiveness, tell the consumers what they stand for and that we are working to prevent it. They need to do something for real in this case and to offer gifts would have been very positive, to give the children compensation.”
   “I want them to be super transparent”

4. “I want to see that the company is open and that they want to make a change”
   “I want to know that they actually take measures”

Discussion:
Focus group 1 express that the company have to do something big, that they have an employee at the supplies factory. That they not only concentrate on money but also show that they want to change, that this will not happen again. Focus group 2 mentioned measures and that they wanted to know what the measures was that the company will take and they wanted information. Focus group 3 wants full transparency and real measures, they mention that the company needs to be super open, take responsibility and ask for forgiveness. Focus group 4 all wanted to see transparency and measures. They wanted a place where they could follow the changes and see that it is a long-term plan.

In what way would a positive/negative image of the company before the scenario happened change how you would like to be communicated to:

1. “They have to do a long-term plan to show that they will change”
   “They have to do something big since it has happened before, you don’t expect anything more since it has happened before but if they have to do something big if they want to win back the trust”

2. “The best way is always the best way”

3. “Would not matter as much if the company was not interesting to me, if it was a company which I liked then I would want an explanation. If it was negative then I would not shop there”
   “If I don’t like them, then I will choose something else”

4. “I would be angry and I would not shop there again if I had a negative image from before”
   “It would be hard to change my mind if I had a negative image and this happened”

Discussion:
Focus group 1 all agree that they have to take large measures no matter if they have a negative or positive image of the company before the crisis. They continue discussing that how they have handled the crisis before will affect how much trust they have to fix it now. Focus group 2 expressed that it did not matter if they had a negative or a positive view of the company; they wanted to be communicated to in the same way. Focus group 3 expressed that if it was a company who they have a negative image of then they would choose another company. Focus group 4 expressed that it would be hard for the company to come back from this crisis if they had a negative image since before. They wanted more measures and follow-up.

In what way do you believe that the company is responsibly or nor responsible for the occurrence of this crisis:

1. “Responsible”

2. “Responsible, they have not had a clue in 3 years”
   “You think that they should have known”

3. “Full responsibility”
   “They have hired the company, they should have done visits”

4. “They say that they are against child labour but they still have it, they are responsible”
   “If they would found out it themselves then it would have been a different situation”

Discussion:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything that could reinforce how much responsibility the company has in this scenario?</td>
<td>1  “How long it has been going on for” 2  “That it happened before, crisis history” “How long the company wait to address the problem” 3  “That they have stated the opposite before, how long it has been going on for and the size of the company” 4  “How long it has been going on for” “How far down in the supply chain the supplier is”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what way would how media frame the scenario change how you would like to be communicated to:</td>
<td>1  “Media want to make headlines, it is therefore important for companies to fast communicate with the consumers” 2  “The company should be honest and give their view of the problem” 3  “If someone have filmed inside where the children work then the company has to address the problem, if not then they can communicate more general. Everything depends on how media frames it” 4  “I think that they should answer the questions that have emerged from media” “Media plays on emotions in this case, it is children so I think it has a large impact on people”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What in general influenced you in how you wanted to be communicated to?</td>
<td>1  “The crisis impact on human suffering” “If people were affected” 2  “How serious and how is affected” “I feel more when it is children” 3  “Personal knowledge, if I would have worked with people then I would might have more compassion” “That I have studied marketing, so you think from a marketing perspective” 4  “I am a sensitive person, in the first scenario it was a child who was the victim, the second was not as emotional and the last was emotional as well” “What serious or the level or seriousness”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How in general would you like companies to communicate a crisis?</td>
<td>1  “Honest and information” “Measures so that it will not happen again” 2  “Honest and fast” “If they address it fast then you know that they believe that it is important as well” 3  “As much information as possible” “If I’m a victim in the crisis, I would want more information if I was a victim”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please take a moment and discuss what you think has been the most important thing you have brought up during this focus group:

1. "Communicate what has happened in an honest way"  
   "Have a strategy"

2. "Measures, how they are moving forward"  
   "Big companies have more responsibility, I have more expectations for a big company then a small"

3. "Be transparent in today’s society, we want a lot of information. It is really easy to get a hold of information."  
   "We are not loyal anymore"

4. "Genuine, it is important how they formulate the message"  
   "That they take it serious"

Discussion

Focus group 2 all agreed that it was important for the company to be respectful, that they wanted to be there and handle the crisis. The company should know everything about the crisis and answer people questions. They should see the crisis as serious.
Appendix 5: Analysis

Table 1 Categorising the labelled data

This table illustrate the categories of intensifiers that was made as a result of the data collected during the focus groups. This was the second stage of the coding process in this paper. The comments listed are a sample of the ones that were labelled in the transcripts. They have all been categorised based on homogeneous characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Measures        | - In this case it is important to me to be communicated how they aim to solve this and actually see what they have done and are doing to prevent it from happening again. Taking responsibility is a short-term solution and that ok, but I want a long-term solution too.  
- For me, it is a lot about what comes after the crisis has happened. I mean measures and such. That they actually commit to changes and execute those. If they don’t it would be really bad.  
- In terms of measurements I would expect more drastic ones the more resources the company have. |
| Peer pressure   | - If I am going to be completely honest, peer pressure matters. The more people who blame the company; it increases the likelihood that I will do the same.  
- What other people say or think would influence me a lot in my perception of the company and the crisis. |
| Crisis History  | - The fact that the issue that led to this crisis has been active during three years without being detected absolutely enhances the responsibility the company have and makes it harder for them to come out of this unscathed.  
- What the company previously has done to prevent crisis like this from happening. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Positive:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- If I had a positive picture of the company pre crisis and they managed the crisis in a good way with precautionary measures, my trust in the company might be able to remain rather same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I would like to have the same transparency in the communication even if I like the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- It would not have mattered if my view of the company were positive beforehand. I would still like to know what has happened, how it happened, what they will do to prevent it from happening again and follow-up communication on those measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative:</td>
<td>I would have wanted more facts, information and measures taken after this crisis if I had a negative corporate image before the crisis happened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Personal contact is something I would have appreciated in this case to an even greater extent if I did not like the company beforehand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I would like to company to communicate in the exact same way as if I would have a positive image. The only thing that would change is the degree to which I am susceptible of the information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I do not think that I would have listened to the communication from the company if I had a negative picture of the company; there are so many substitutes in retail so I can just shop somewhere else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The best way is always the best way no matter my previously held image of the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- For me I think that I would have wanted for the company the take a greater extent of measure, more communication and more information. But the way of communication would have reminded the same. I would just have wanted it to be more intense. I mean I am suspicious already; they do not want to give me more material to enhance that right?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Crisis circumstances | - The more companies that are involved in a crisis where the company is not totally to blame, the less responsibility I would think that the company have. You know since it happened to several ones. |
|                      | - In this case there is a supplier where the error has happened the responsibility I think the company have absolutely depend on if it is a direct supplier or a 5th in line suppliers. The further away the less responsibility. The closer the more. |
|                      | - When someone dies, as a result of company activities in some way the responsibility I think the company have absolutely increases |
|                      | - Because the dresser fell over in so many different occasions and nothing has been done until now, the company becomes even more responsible for not addressing it sooner. |
|                      | - A child has died, it is obviously serious and a crisis. |
|                      | - The more affected by the crisis, the more responsibility the company have for letting it happen. |

| Media | - If the company do not take the initiative in communicating the crisis but lets the media do so, the way media chose to tell it would affect the perception of the crisis. |
|       | - Choice of a credible media and making sure it reaches all consumers affected is important when communicating the crisis. |
|       | - Go back to the source from where the crisis was reported on. If it was on social media, address it on social media too. |
|       | - The communication should be delivered fast through a channel that reaches a broad range of people fast. |
|       | - Media tend to play on our emotions and talk about the crisis in a way that reflects negatively on the company. And it works. I get more reserved. |

<p>| Human suffering | - The circumstances of the crisis are an important influencer for me. When it involves humans that suffer and when it involves me, my opinion of corporate responsibility would increase I think. |
|                | - The worst thing that could happen is a child dying. |
|                | - The message of the communication matters more than the channel in which the communication reaches me. As long as it is a reliable source I am happy. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>It is important to communicate a crisis like this quickly since it opposes as a safety issue for the others and me. We have to know what we can do.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If a company wait to tell their story of what happened it is likely that rumours start going around and influence us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For me it depends on what kind of media that reports on the crisis. Some I know I cannot trust and rumours from unreliable sources are something that I try to not read into.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think that the company should act fast when an event that might come to cause a crisis has been brought to attention. There are absolutely extra points if the company make a statement before the media do one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The initial communication have to be fast. If they wait too long my mind about the crisis will be set and it will be extremely difficult for them to change my mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How fast the company communicates is extremely important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal involvement</td>
<td>The company are responsible for taking care of my credit card details and protect them. And if they try to minimize their responsibility for the event, it would be like they have no control of what has happened and what is happening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am personally involved in this crisis; someone has taken my credit card detail, which is a huge part in making my life work. This means work for me in ordering a new card, etc. I put my trust in them and in the aftermath, I should not have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal contact is something I would have appreciated in this case since I am involved. I want them to talk to me and not generic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If they have taken my money, I am directly affected by the crisis and that would enhance the responsibility I think the company have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If I had this dresser I would like to have direct and personal communication that tell me about the consequences owning it might have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The more personal the crisis is the more information I want.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication strategies</td>
<td>Victim:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I want the company to be honest, include a lot of facts and tell me what measures they will take to prevent it from happening again. And then follow-up communication that reassures that the measures are taken and the results of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I want to have fast information on what I personally should do to protect myself. I would also like for the company to go out and explain what has happened and how it could happen and what they will do about it. And if it is personal communication and not generic, it would be even better.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                       | The things I should do to protect myself is important. Also all of the information about the crisis. How it happened, what happened and what will be done to make sure it never happens again. Accidental: | |}

- I think that they should express that they are so sorry that something like this happened, that they had done so much as they thought they could to not let it happen and that they will take measures resulting in preventing it from happening again.
- I would like them to present a plan on what they will be doing step-wise.

- Preventable:
  - Show that you take the crisis seriously
  - Show that you are aiming to make a change
- I would like to hear their long-term solutions
  - They should take responsibility and explain the measures that they will take.
- Take of their clothes and be open about it. Rebuild trust through measures.
| Responsibility | - In this case with the dresser falling over, the company do not really hold direct responsibility for it happening, but they are responsible in the sense that they obviously did not communicated the instructions of attaching it to the wall.  
- Saying that you are totally responsible for a crisis almost makes the corporate picture worse. It would make me think that they are not in control of their business. There are several factors that play in when deciding how responsible I think the company is.  
- Acting in aggression in the communication increases the sense of responsibility the company have and would reflect badly on their corporate image.  
- Giving the victims gifts immediately after the crisis would happen, I think I would see that as an attempt to bribe the others and me who are affected. I do not like it, it is bad.  
- All parties involved in the crisis have to take their responsibility but the company's share should always be the biggest.  
- Being caught in a lie will always be a bad thing for companies. |
| Company | - For me I think that how big the company is would come to play a significant role into which degree I find them responsible. If it was a small company, I would understand that they do not have control over everything and that mistakes happen. It is a large corporation however I think that they should have total control over everything that happens. And if they have not, it would definitely be negative and my opinion of the company’s responsibility would increase.  
- The company should be responsible for everything “from farm to fork”.  
- The bigger the company, the more responsibility. |
<p>| Company statements/values | - Not doing what they claim they are doing, or do what they stand for reflects badly on the company. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis situation</th>
<th>Positive strategies</th>
<th>Neutral strategies</th>
<th>Negative strategies</th>
<th>Preferred Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>The company take full responsibility and ask for forgiveness.</td>
<td>The company praise you and remind you of the good work the company have done in the past.</td>
<td>Saying there is no crisis.</td>
<td>What has happened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The company say that they did not intend to harm anyone and/or that they could not see the crisis coming.</td>
<td>Company offer gifts, money, etc. to the victims in the crisis.</td>
<td>The company say that the crisis is not as severe as it may appear.</td>
<td>Why it happened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The company say that someone else, outside of the company is responsible for the crisis.</td>
<td>The company tell you about all of the good work they have done in the past.</td>
<td>The company reminds you that they are also a victim in this crisis.</td>
<td>How could it happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidental</td>
<td>The company take full responsibility and ask for forgiveness.</td>
<td>The company say they did not intend harm anyone and/or that they could not see the crisis coming.</td>
<td>The company say that there is no crisis.</td>
<td>What are the company going to do to make sure it will not happen again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The company praise you and remind you of the good work the company have done in the past.</td>
<td>The company say that it is not as severe as it may appear.</td>
<td>The company reminds you that they are also a victim in this crisis.</td>
<td>What can consumers do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide necessary information on what has happened and take responsibility.</td>
<td>Apology.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal communication since the consumers are involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The company should take on a great deal of responsibility and apologise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventable</td>
<td>The company take full responsibility and ask for forgiveness.</td>
<td>The company say that there is no crisis.</td>
<td>A long-term solution of change to prevent it from happening again</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Company offer gifts, money, etc. to the victims in the crisis.</td>
<td>The company say that it is not as severe as it may appear.</td>
<td>Take responsibility and ask for forgiveness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The company reminds you that they are also a victim in this crisis.</td>
<td>Invest and take sustainable measures in the area the crisis happened</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The company say they did not intend harm anyone and/or that they could not see the crisis coming.</td>
<td>Be transparent with information concerning the crisis</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The company praise you and remind you of the good work the company have done in the past.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The company confronts the person/group/media who have claimed that something the organisation has done is wrong.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What can the consumers do.</td>
<td>The company tell you about all of the good work they have done in the past.</td>
<td>The company confronts the person/group/media who have claimed that something the organisation has done is wrong.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Company offer gifts, money, etc. to the victims in the crisis.
The company say that someone else, outside of the company is responsible for the crisis.

The company tell you about all of the good work they have done in the past.