Leaders Under Fire: German Armed Forces and Their Crisis Response Strategies

How crisis type and tone of voice in leader’s crisis response statements affect secondary crisis communication

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Abstract

Turbulent times entail crises, for countries, people and organizations. In uncertain situations, leaders are required to solve the crisis and above all, communicate about it. This study sheds light on the scarcely researched field of leadership crisis communication of state-owned companies and its impact on secondary crisis communication (SCC). In the general context of public agencies, the German Federal Armed Forces are the subject of investigation.

Based on a survey-embedded online experiment conducted with 249 respondents, the findings advocate that SCC remains unaffected of applied tone of voice strategies (i.e. corporate, conversational) or crisis type (i.e. accidental, preventable). In point of fact, source credibility and trust in the organization play a crucial role for SCC, as well as gender impacts attitude towards the organization. By virtue of these findings, the study provides a starting point for further exploration of the impact of leadership crisis communication and the effect on stakeholder reactions.

Keywords: Leadership crisis communication, secondary crisis communication, source credibility, attitude, trust, type of crisis
Introduction

Managing crises may well become a new normal for all businesses. It’s no longer a matter of if they’ll hit; rather a matter of when. [...] An overwhelming 91% of CEOs said they are in charge when a crisis hits. That certainty is a key element of strong leadership (PwC pulse, 2016).

The plethora of crisis scenarios in the world likely lead to leadership and companies in distress. Amidst the negative implications, public support of an organization during a crisis is indispensable. The corporate crisis response plays a pivotal role for influencing the public’s perception and reaction. Especially, the tone of voice (Kelleher, 2009), ergo the rhetorical, emotional component in organizational responses affects the public’s behavioural intentions (Kim & Cameron, 2011; Park & Cameron, 2014) and reputation evaluations (Jamal & Abu Bakar, 2017; van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). Crisis responses depend on the organizational responsibility, hence on the type of crisis (Coombs, 2007; Jin, 2010). Even though the literature dealing with crisis communication is extensive (cf. Austin, Liu & Jin, 2012; Grappi & Romani, 2015), far too little attention has been paid to leadership crisis communication and if so, the focus lies on employee retention (King, 2007) or media framing (Horsley & Barker, 2002).

The way in which leaders communicate with the public is particularly influential since they are seen to be the most powerful individual in an organization and simultaneously the figurehead (Love, Lim & Bednar, 2017; Jaques, 2012). Since 2013, Dr. Ursula von der Leyen is the first female defence minister in Germany and thus the commander-in-chief (von der Leyen, 2016). Her goal is to establish the Federal Armed Forces (“Bundeswehr”) as a modern employer with family-friendly flexible work designs, following private sector companies’ incentives (BMVg, 2017; Spiegel, 2014). In 2011, a new era began for the Bundeswehr, when the mandatory service requirement (“Wehrpflicht”) was suspended in order to become an all-volunteer force (Fogarti, 2015). As with any business, the military has to secure workforce
and relies on the approval of the public to ensure its legitimacy and reputation (Deverell, Olsson, Wagnsson, Hellman & Johnsson, 2015; Poppo & Schepker, 2010). In the spirit of these efforts, organizations should pay attention to certain influencing factors: The effectiveness of crisis response strategies and source credibility is intertwined (van Zoonen & van der Meer, 2015) and further, stakeholders want their expectancies of leaders acting as “trustworthy sources of information” to be met (Boin, ’t Hart, Stern & Sundelius, 2016, p. 90). Otherwise, if stakeholders develop a dismissive attitude towards the organization, they will likely spread negative word-of-mouth (McDonald, Sparks & Glendon, 2010).

A general term of engaging in (digital) word-of-mouth and distributing corporate crisis communication is “Secondary Crisis Communication” (SCC; Schultz, Utz & Göritz, 2011). Only recently, research in this field increased (Luo & Zhai, 2017). Still, SCC remains understudied, which is surprising since leadership responses are assessed and disseminated by the public as key stakeholder whose benevolence ought to be gained in order to ensure firm survival (Boin et al., 2016; Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). The Bundeswehr, an institution with von der Leyen as its leader, is an interesting and relevant subject to investigate since the vast majority of crisis research focusses on private sector companies but little has been done to understand leadership crisis communication of public agencies. This study examines experimentally, how (tone of voice) and when (depending on the type of crisis) leaders should respond to a crisis and thereby, paves the way for establishing practical guidelines. The research question is formulated as follows:

To what extent is the public’s intention to forward organizational crisis communication influenced by the leadership crisis response and the type of crisis?

Theoretical Background

The theoretical basis of this thesis starts with explaining crisis implications for organizations. Next, crisis communication and stakeholders’ reactions, such as secondary
crisis communication, will be outlined. Third, the role of leadership in times of crisis is described. Finally, the processes through which secondary crisis communication will be enhanced are discussed.

**The implications of crises for organizations**

Crises irrevocably have a negative connotation. In terms of an organizational crisis, Pearson and Clair (1998) conceptualize it as a “low probability, high-impact event” (p. 59) that is entwined by ambiguous causes and require immediate action. Moreover, financial means and intangible assets, such as reputation, are negatively affected (Coombs, 2007). A reputation evolves through information stakeholders gather about the firm by interacting with it and the news media, but also through (digital) word-of-mouth (Coombs & Holladay, 2009; Fombrun, Gardberg & Sever, 2000).

Company control of a crisis was found to be the most powerful predictor of stakeholder reactions (Helm & Tolsdorf, 2013; McDonald, Sparks & Glendon, 2010), even though the subjective evaluation of the firm’s responsibility is more essential than the actual reality (Benoit, 1997). When it comes to public organizations, their effort in managing perceptions is compromised by the agencies’ inability to decide upon their function and directives themselves (Deverell et al., 2015; Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). Even in times without crisis, the inherently political nature of public agencies complicates stakeholder relationships on an emotional level and makes it difficult to maintain favourable reputation (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). These underlying conditions and the lack of research in the field of state-owned companies’ crisis communication makes public institutions an exciting object of investigation.
The importance of crisis communication

Crisis communication comprises “the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation” (Coombs, 2010, p. 20). Organizations develop rhetorical strategies in order to choose the most appropriate response that will diminish the likelihood of blame, accusations and reputational damage (Coombs, Frandsen, Holladay, & Johansen, 2010). Hereby, the strategies suggest an effort to encourage dialogue with the public (Fearn-Banks, 2002), influence public judgement (Coombs, 1999; Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2012) and emotions (Boin et al., 2016).

Several concepts have been established for the benefit of crisis management: The Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model is rather receiver-based, as it examines the organization’s involvement along with the public’s emotions and coping strategies (Jin et al., 2012). The Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) model (Jin & Liu, 2010) scrutinizes the digital era of crisis communication and focusses on social media users. The Synthesis model of crisis communication (Horsley & Barker, 2002) addresses PR professionals and describes the relationship between the public sector and the media.

This study draws on the widely acknowledged Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT; Coombs, 2007). The theory has been criticized (Austin, Liu, & Jin, 2012; Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013) and modified (Jin & Liu, 2010; Jin et al., 2012), but nevertheless provides a solid basis for depicting organizational crisis circumstance.

SCCT offers a framework for predicting the reputational threat by a crisis and responding accordingly by giving situation-based response recommendations, which rest upon the organization’s locus of control. The model builds on Image Restoration Theory (Benoit, 1997) and Attribution Theory, proclaiming that attributions and the connected evoke of emotions cause actions (Weiner, 2006). Coombs (2007) split different crisis types into three clusters, distinguishable by the amount to which organizations can be held accountable: the accidental cluster, the victim cluster and the intentional cluster. A minimal amount of
responsibility is adjudged to the accidental cluster, which concerns incidents that could have not been controlled by the organization or happened unintentional, such as technical-error accidents. Similar judgements are made in case of victim crises, such as natural disasters. In contrast, incidents that could have been prevented, such as human-error accidents, fall under the intentional cluster and can cause high reputational damage.

**Stakeholders reaction to organizational crisis communication**

Given the public’s role as a key stakeholder for governmental agencies, because they “have long-term interests and influences on the organization’s reputation and operation” (Jin et al., 2012, p. 270), crisis communication has to be carefully implemented. Depending on people’s intention to pro-actively search for crisis information, they differ in their degree of supportive behaviour (Kim, Miller & Chon, 2016). Obviously, spreading an unfavourable opinion can have bad consequences on the business, such as provoking a boycott of products and services (Choi & Lin, 2009; Fombrun & Gardberg, 2000; Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011; Kim, 2016), and negative evaluations of the company in general (Claeys, Cauberghe & Leysen, 2013; Grappi & Romani, 2015).

Schultz, Utz and Göritz (2011) established a term for sharing crisis communication in a digital era: Secondary Crisis Communication (SCC). They define SCC as “the recipients’ intentions to tell friends about the crisis, to share the received information with others and to leave comments” (Schultz, Utz & Göritz, 2011, p. 21). The concept of SCC evolves around the public’s emotions and reactions, depending on the type of crisis (Utz, Schultz & Glocka, 2013). Compared to a crisis caused by external circumstances, a preventable crisis will encounter strong disapproval of social media users (Utz et al., 2013). In their study about a tourist boycott, Luo and Zhai (2017) found that emotions transported by SCC not only promoted the dissemination of crisis information, but lead to a new crisis.
Expressing an emotional state with verbal, vocal or facial cues can trigger the receiver’s empathic reaction (Garelik & Wang, 2017). In terms of facial expressions, meaning is transported about the thoughts and possible following actions the sender might take (Ekman, 1997). Consistently, the combination of written text and emotional pictures has proven to have an influence on news receivers (Smith-Rodden & Ash, 2017).

To ameliorate the public’s acceptance and positively affect behavioural intentions, it is advisable to speak in the first person and use personal narratives in crisis statements (Park & Cameron, 2014). By communicating emotions, the company appears more human and appealing to stakeholders, strengthening their bond (Kelleher, 2009). As opposed thereto, corporate voices tend to sound more like “profit-driven machinery” (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, p. 398). Consequently, it seems important to endow crisis responses with a more human voice. This includes admitting mistakes and treating the public as conversation partners (Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Searls & Weinberger, 2001). Kelleher (2009) describes a conversational human voice as “an engaging and natural style of organizational communication” (p. 177), which can positively impact trust and crisis severity perception of the public. On the contrary, an emotionless message implies the absence of corporate involvement and insincerity (van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014), translated as corporate tone of voice.

However, not every emotional appeal in crisis communication leads to the same appraisal of the organization. Anger conveyed in media news frames has proven to affect consumer’s evaluation negatively (Claeys et al., 2013; Grappi & Romani, 2015; Kim & Cameron, 2011). Expressing regret in crisis communication has a better impact on post-crisis reputation than a more rational approach (Claeys et al., 2013; Kim & Cameron, 2011), and consumers will consider spokespersons more sincere (Claeys et al., 2013).

Kim and Cameron (2011) demonstrated that people show more positive behavioural intentions when an organizational message includes intensive emotional cues. They suggested
that practitioners should embed direct quotes of the CEO in profound emotional appeals. Moreover, corporate reputations are not only an intangible asset created in the mind of the public but also at least partially a reflection of the organization’s leaders (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Love et al., 2017). Following this line of reasoning, a way to show the public that the organization is taking the crisis seriously is by letting the leader present a response. While research on emotional communication lends credence to this notion of impact on behavioural patterns, evidence of emotional leadership crisis responses on behavioural outcomes remains scarce.

**Leadership in times of crisis**

Research on internal leadership communication has shown, that followers make attributions of their leaders’ effectiveness by inter alia sharing their superiors’ emotions (Eberly & Fong, 2013). Robinson (2001) defines leadership as exercised “when thoughts expressed in talk or action are recognized by others as capable of progressing tasks or problems which are important to them” (p. 93). Therefore, leadership communication is perceived formulation of such communication or actions (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017; Stephens, Malone, & Bailey, 2005). To be successful, leaders react accordingly to specific situations (Argenti, 2014; Zaccaro, 2007) and “solve novel, ill-defined organizational problems” (Mumford et al., 2000, p. 90). Executives who accept crisis responsibility are evaluated more favourably than those who deny any accountability (Madera & Smith, 2009). The leader in times of crisis must be front and centre (Farmer & Tvedt, 2005; Wooten & James, 2008), which also requires political will and skill (Ferris et al., 2007) – integral aspects, especially in public agencies.

Research about private sector leadership in distress mainly investigated two emotions, anger and sadness (Damen, van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2008; Tiedens et al., 2000; Madera & Smith, 2009). Whereas anger in media news frames are evaluated negatively by the
consumers, leaders expressing anger are seen as strong, intelligent and attacking an external threat (Claeys et al., 2013; Grappi & Romani, 2015; Kim & Cameron, 2011). Contradictory, sadness is considered as a sign of sympathy and affiliation, resulting mostly in favourable employees’ assessment (Tiedens et al., 2000). As apologies in crisis communication are said to have the most comforting effect (Kim & Cameron, 2011), a leader expressing regret in the crisis response should have a positive impact on public’s intention to forward the crisis communication.

When it comes to the public sector, crisis responses have scarcely been investigated (Horsley & Barker, 2002; Olsson, 2014). This lack of research is surprising since especially the governmental agencies are dependent on the public support. Previous research did not compare emotional with non-emotional crisis coverage (Grappi & Romani, 2015; Kim & Cameron, 2011; van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014). Hence, this study complements former groundwork by comparing two different response styles, the corporate tone of voice as a non-emotional rejoinder with the emotional conversational tone of voice expressing anger or regret. Accordingly, the following effects are expected:

H1: Conversational tone of voice in leadership crisis communication stressing regret will have a positive effect on SCC compared to a corporate tone of voice.

H2: Conversational tone of voice in leadership crisis communication stressing anger will have a negative effect on SCC compared to a corporate tone of voice.

Developing the already existing research in the field of emotional crisis communication further (Coombs, 2010; van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014), this study compares two crises types:
**H3: The positive effect of a conversational tone of voice on SCC, relative to a corporate tone of voice strategy, is enhanced by an accidental organizational crisis compared to a preventable crisis.**

**Credibility of information source in crisis communication**

In addition to leadership competencies, one of the most important image dimension for politicians is credibility (Hwang, 2013). Credibility can be defined as “judgments made by a perceiver concerning the believability of a communicator” (O’Keefe, 1990, p. 130). Research on Twitter use of politicians showed that the public will adjudge representatives sincerity, reliability and trustworthiness, if they share their genuine opinions via an open public space (Hwang, 2013). This source credibility is instrumental in crisis communication (Liu, Jin, & Austin, 2013; van Zoonen & van der Meer, 2015). It is defined as the “extent to which the source is perceived as possessing expertise relevant to the communication topic and can be trusted to give an objective opinion on the subject” (Goldsmith, Lafferty & Newell, 2000, p. 43 in Haigh & Brubaker, 2010).

In delivering organizational messages, the publics’ attitude toward an organization seems to be influenced by the communicator’s believability, therefore choosing the right spokesperson is essential (Arora, Stoner & Arora, 2006; Park & Cameron, 2014). Hence, not solely the circumstances of the crisis should be taken into account for delivering crisis information, but also the credibility of the spokesperson to induce changes in attitude and behavioural response (Arora et al., 2006; Arpan, 2002).

Moreover, the most significant impact on behavioural intention occurs when a credible source delivers a negatively framed message (Arora et al., 2006). Following van Zoonen and van der Meer (2015), who showed that the source of information has a profound impact on the effectiveness of crisis response strategies, the effect of the emotional leadership crisis
communication strategy on secondary crisis communication is likely to be influenced by perceptions of credibility:

\[ H4: \text{The positive effect of a conversational tone of voice on SCC, relative to a corporate tone of voice strategy, will be more pronounced if the leader is perceived as credible.} \]

**Attitude towards the organization**

Since a favourable pre-crisis reputation can serve as a buffer for the potential prestige loss (Coombs, 2007) and limits negative consumer reactions (Grappi & Romani, 2015), attitude towards the organization plays a pivotal role. A rejective stance has been proven to result in negative word-of-mouth (McDonald, Sparks & Glendon, 2010). For crises caused by external circumstances, a positive attitude was the strongest predictor of consumer’s loyalty (McDonald et al., 2010). Of all public agencies, the military is perhaps the one who evokes the most divergent attitudes among the public because it ties up to people’s strong beliefs of the appropriateness of the means of war. In general, public stance regarding the army is said to have a direct impact on democratic control of the military (BMVg, 2017; Sarigil, 2015). Cross-country comparison shows that in the U.S., the majority trust the military and have a positive attitude towards it (Cistulli, Jacobs & Snyder, 2015), whereas in Europe, opinions are more divergent (Garb, 2015). In case of the Bundeswehr, it was National Socialism and the Second World War that led German policy makers to remain highly sceptical about the army as a tool for achieving political goals (Jedinger & Mader, 2015). In 2013, the vast majority of German respondents (77%) surveyed by military institutes were inclined to have a positive approach towards the Bundeswehr (Fogarti, 2015). Over the years, the Armed Forces communication in the U.S. and in Europe has developed from bureaucratic to more market-driven, which makes it comparable to their private counterparts (Deverell et al., 2015). This is especially true for the Bundeswehr: Since the suspension of the mandatory service
requirement, they joined the organizational hunt for scarce human resources in order to become an all-volunteer force.

Combined with the expected effects of emotional crisis communication, the public’s attitude towards the military is likely to influence the public’s intention to forward or share information about the crisis.

\textit{H5: The positive effect of a conversational tone of voice on SCC, relative to a corporate tone of voice strategy, will be more pronounced by a favourable attitude towards the organization.}

\textbf{Trust in public organizations}

In the interplay between leadership crisis communication and people’s intention to engage in SCC, trust plays an equivalent role to attitude and is closely linked with credibility. Along with attitude, reliance affects reputation evaluations (Fombrun et al., 2000) and is influenced by emotions (Schoorman, Mayer & Davis, 2007). The concept of trust evolves around the own lack of control by being vulnerable to the expected actions of another party (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). For the public, it is an essential prerequisite for leaders to appear “credible and trustworthy sources of information” during a crisis (Boin et al., 2016, p. 90). In representative public surveys, people declared to associate certain positive emotions with the Bundeswehr such as trust (Buhlmann & Wanner, 2013), 76\% indicated that they believe in the army (Statista, 2017a).

A loss of public confidence can result in negative outcomes for the military, such as a lower social position (Garb, 2015) and decline in recruitment (Berndtsson, Daneker & Yden, 2015). Government communication has to solve general public distrust (Liu, Horsley & Yang, 2012), which can also be realised by crisis communication as it is said to influence short-term organizational trustworthiness (Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011).
H6: The positive effect of a conversational tone of voice on SCC, relative to a corporate tone of voice strategy, will be more pronounced if the public trusts the organization.

The proposed hypotheses are summarized in Fig. 1 in terms of a conceptual model.

![Conceptual model: Leadership crisis communication and SCC.](image)

**Method**

**Sampling**

The convenience sample for this survey-embedded online experiment was recruited through Facebook. Creating a snowball effect, people were encouraged to share the link to the experiment among their network. Facebook has proven to be a useful tool to investigate SCC, since the intention to share or forward information is scrutinized and Facebook is the most widely used social network platform (Jin, Liu & Austin, 2014; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickuhr, 2010). The experiment remained online from 20th November 2017 until 11th December 2017. As the research issue concerns the Bundeswehr, the experiment was conducted in German to ensure respondents are familiar with the topic and therefore, all measurement scales were translated from English to German and vice versa.

In total, 402 adults responded to the experiment. Solely people who were older than 18 years of age, did not “straight-line” their answers and completely finished the survey were
included, resulting in 249 valid answers. The majority (74.3 %) were women (SD = .46). The participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 72 years with a mean age of 28.49 (SD = 11.48). Students (43.4 %) and full-time employees (40.6%) formed the biggest group, 10 % were part-time employees, 2.8% chose to not answer this question, 2.4% were retired, and 0.8% declared seeking work (SD = 2.00). One third (32.1%) proclaimed to have a (Fach-) Abitur as their highest academic degree, 28.5% obtained a Bachelor’s degree or similar, 21.7% a Master’s degree or similar, 6.8% had a professional education, 6.8% lower secondary education and 2% had a doctorate (SD = 1.29).

**Experimental design**

Participants were randomly assigned to the following: six conditions were arranged in a three (tone of voice: conversational, regret vs. conversational, anger vs. corporate, no emotion) by two (type of crisis: accidental vs. preventable) between-subjects factorial design (see Table A2).

**Procedure**

When entering the experiment, recipients were first presented with an informed consent. Secondly, attitude towards and trust in the Bundeswehr were measured. Afterwards, respondents were asked to closely read the following statement. Then, background information for either the preventable or the accidental crisis was provided to recapitulate the crisis. Next, a fictional statement from the Minister of Defence, Dr. Ursula von der Leyen, concerning the crisis was shown. Participants were randomly assigned to the six different experimental conditions. After exposure, the respondent’s reactions to von der Leyen’s statement were measured with a questionnaire, asking first about the source credibility and then the intention to engage in SCC. Finally, the manipulation check items completed the experiment, in conjunction with questions regarding demographics and a debrief about the
fictional character of the statement (see Appendix B for the operationalisation). A real crisis vignette was used in this research to increase external validity.

**Observed variables**

*Tone of voice.* The tone of voice was manipulated by adjusting existent statements of von der Leyen in the style of past years’ speeches or press conferences she gave and are admissible on news websites (i.e. Handelsblatt, 2015; Spiegel, 2015). The basic construct of her message was kept while adapting the tone: In a written, photoshopped Facebook post, von der Leyen expressed either regret (i.e. “I would like to express my deepest regrets for what happened”) or anger (i.e. “I am furious about the incident”) in the conversational tone of voice conditions. In the corporate tone of voice condition, the sentences communicating emotions were left out. A picture showing von der Leyen in a sad and respectively angry state of mind or with a neutral expression was placed at the bottom of the message. Pictures of von der Leyen were selected from news websites and from her official website (i.e. Spiegel, 2015; von der Leyen, 2016; Welt, 2017), showing mainly her upper body-part with her facial expression clearly visible.

*Source credibility.* To assess the participants' evaluation of source credibility, the five-item scale identified by Flanagin and Metzger (2000) was used. Participants indicated their support by selecting “totally agree”(1) to “totally disagree”(7) with the statements on a 7-point Likert scale, for example: “The sender of these messages is biased” or “The sender of these messages is believable” (cf. Van Zoonen & Van der Meer, 2015). The complete experiment including all scales can be found in Appendix B.

A principal component analysis (PCA) showed that the five items formed a single unidimensional scale: only one item had an eigenvalue above 1 (eigenvalue 2.83) and there was a clear point of inflexion after this component in the screen plot (*KMO* = .79). All items
correlated positively with the first component – the item "the sender of the messages is trustworthy" had the strongest association (factor loading .84). The scale apparently measured sender credibility. The reliability of the scale increased after deleting the item “The sender is biased” (from $\alpha = .784$ to $\alpha = .855$), a solid reliability of the scale was ensured. Therefore, four items were combined into a single scale with reversed items ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.32$).

**Attitude towards the organization.** To assess the attitudes towards the organization, the one-item scale established in earlier research about the public’s attitude towards the Bundeswehr was used (Spangenberg, 1998). Attitude was measured ranging from “very positive”(1) to “very negative”(7) on a 7-point Likert scale ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.32$).

**Trust in the organization.** Trust was measured with a one-item scale used in previous representative surveys in Germany (ARD-DeutschlandTREND, 2016). On a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “great trust”(1) to “no trust at all”(4), respondents indicated how much trust they place in the Bundeswehr ($M = 2.60$, $SD = .62$).

**Secondary crisis communication (SCC).** Three indicators of SCC were measured (Schultz, Utz & Göritz, 2011): Recipients were asked how likely they are to share the message with other people, to tell their friends about the incident, and to leave a comment. Answers were given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “very likely”(1) to “very unlikely”(5). PCA showed that the three items formed a single unidimensional scale; only one item had an eigenvalue above 1 (eigenvalue 1.67) and there was a clear point of inflexion after this component shown on the screen plot ($KMO = .62$). All components correlated positively with the first item – the item "I share the message with others" had the strongest association (factor loading .74). The scale apparently measured SCC. Therefore, all items were combined into a
single scale with three reversed items ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.03$). Despite the credibility of the scale being very weak ($\alpha = .586$), analysis was still conducted as it concerned the dependent variable.

Type of crisis. The two crisis types were embedded in three different tone of voice conditions (see Table A1). Each of the crises was featured in the German news during the year 2015.

As accidental crisis, the problems concerning the long-range military transport aircraft A400M were portrayed. Due to technological problems on the manufacturer’s side, the delivery of the airplane was delayed and the few that had already been dispatched were broken after just one single flight. Since the army could not have known about the technical errors beforehand, the A400M incident can be treated as an accidental crisis.

In contrast, the disclosure about the G36 assault rifle can be seen as preventable crisis. Apparently, the rifle does not shoot straight when used in hot climate zones. Since 2012, the Ministry of Defence knew, that after reaching a certain temperature, the rifle’s targeted position reduced to a minimum. This poses a huge problem since the Bundeswehr is currently deployed in countries such as Mali. The public was quite surprised to learn that their soldiers may not defend themselves properly in life-threatening situations. As von der Leyen knew about this rifle limited capability before she went public with it in 2015, this crisis can be seen as preventable.

Pre-test

First, in an informal pre-test conducted with acquaintances of the researcher, the manipulation of emotional cues was tested. On basis of the respondents’ judgement, the pictures conveying the strongest feelings were chosen to configure the manipulation. Second, 32 respondents took part in a pre-test, testing the classification of crisis types and emotional
variation of von der Leyen’s crisis response. As the pre-test of the vignette showed a successful manipulation, all scenarios were adapted for the main study. See Appendix C for detailed results.

**Results**

All analyses were conducted with IBM SPSS statistics 24.0.

**Randomization check**

To prove equal distribution of participants in each group, a randomization check was carried out using chi-square analysis, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and multiple independent t-tests. The necessary assumptions, such as homogeneity of variances, normal distribution, independence of data and all cells with an expected count greater than five, were met.

Women and men were quite equally exposed to the different types of crises, $\chi^2(1) = .65, p = .799$. They were also equally presented with three different visual and text conditions, $\chi^2(2) = 1.92, p = .383$. One-way ANOVAs were performed to make sure there are no differences between the groups who were exposed to the emotional conditions, as for the age of the participants ($F(2,246) = 1.25, p = .288$), the employment status ($F(2,246) = .229, p = .795$) or education ($F(2,246) = 2.30, p = .102$). Independent t-tests showed no significant differences concerning crises types and age of the respondents, ($t(247) = .82, p = .413$, 95% CI [-1.68; 4.06]), employment status ($t(247) = -.39, p = .698$, 95% CI [-0.59; 0.40]), or education, ($t(247) = .01, p = .991$, 95% CI [-0.32; 0.32]). The balanced distribution of participants could be ensured. Table A3, showing the mean scores ($M$) and standard deviations ($SD$), can be found in Appendix C.
Manipulation check

For the manipulated text, respondents indicated whether von der Leyen had a neutral, regretful or angry response and tied thereto, were asked to state whether she looked angry, sad or showed no emotion. The crisis type manipulation was tested by asking the respondents to indicate if the Bundeswehr could have easily prevented the crisis or if external circumstances caused the incident. Each of those statements was asked on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “totally agree”(1) to “totally disagree”(7).

To measure the success of the manipulation, cross-tabulation was performed. The two necessary assumptions for the chi-square test – independence of data and expected frequencies greater than five – could be ensured. 90.0 % declared correctly that this crisis could have been prevented by the Bundeswehr ($\chi^2(2) = 33.03, p < .001$), 60.9 % recognized the accidental crisis ($\chi^2(2) = 21.33, p < .001$). 76.8% rightly stated that the text was formulated in a regretful way ($\chi^2(4) = 22.97, p < .001$), 75.6% identified the angry text ($\chi^2(4) = 29.53, p < .001$), whereas only 54.3% attributed neutral aspects to the neutral formulated text ($\chi^2(4) = 29.62, p < .001$). 69.1% saw the angry picture as an expression of an angry state of mind ($\chi^2(4) = 68.46, p < .001$), 54.3% realised the sadness in the picture of von der Leyen, 58.3% identified a neutral expression ($\chi^2(4) = 26.46, p < .001$).

Effect of tone of voice strategies

The first hypothesis states that people will be more likely to engage in SCC if the crisis response is formulated in a conversational tone of voice stressing regret. To test this relationship, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The assumptions for the test – fairly even variances in the experimental conditions (Levene’s $F(2,246) = .07; p = .932$) and independence of observation – could be ensured. The boxplot inspection showed no outliers in the variables.
No statistically significant differences between the tone of voice manifestations
\((M_{\text{regret}} = 2.50, SD = 1.10; M_{\text{anger}} = 2.49, SD = 1.01; M_{\text{neutral}} = 2.47, SD = 1.02)\) were observed
\((F(2,246) = .035, p = .966)\). Since the results of the first hypothesis testing already
demonstrated no statistically significant differences between the different tone of voice
expressions, the second hypothesis – claiming that a conversational tone of voice stressing
anger will have a negative impact on people’s intention to engage in SCC compared to a
 corporative tone of voice – was also not supported. Whether the tone of voice was
conversational or corporate did not make any significant difference on SCC, so the first and
second hypotheses were rejected.

*The third hypothesis* claims that an accidental crisis has a more positive effect than a
preventable crisis on the relationship between conversational tone of voice and SCC. To test
this expectation, multiple regression was used. Plotting studentized residuals against
unstandardized predicted values showed homoscedasticity. A Durbin-Watson test of 1.82
showed independence of residuals and no multicollinearity was observed because tolerance
values were greater than 0.1. The variables were approximately normally distributed.
The type of crisis had no influence on the relationship between tone of voice and SCC,
\(R^2_{\text{change}} = .002, F(2,246) = .02, p = .810\). The third hypothesis was not supported.

To test the moderation hypotheses, PROCESS macro by Hayes (Hayes, 2017) was
used, examining the effect of credibility, attitude and trust on the relationship between tone of
voice strategies and SCC. With the bootstrapping procedure, a sample of 1,000 was used to
inspect the indirect effects with a 95% confidence interval. If zero is included in the
confidence interval, the indirect effect is seen as insignificant and moderation is not present.
A Durbin-Watson test of 1.82 showed independence of residuals, no multicollinearity was
observed.
The fourth hypothesis expects that the relationship between the conversational tone of voice and SCC will be positively influenced by a leader who is perceived as credible. The effect of tone of voice on SCC was not moderated by source credibility, $R^2_{change} = 0$, $F(1,245) = .44$, $p = .509$, 95% CI [-0.19; 0.09]. The fourth hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis five states that relationship between the conversational tone of voice and SCC will be positively influenced by a favourable attitude towards the organization. The effect of tone of voice on SCC was not moderated by attitude, $R^2_{change} = .001$, $F(1,245) = .02$, $p = .885$, 95% CI [-0.16; 0.14]. The interaction was proven not be significant, the fifth hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis six states that relationship between the conversational tone of voice and SCC will be positively influenced by trust towards the organization. The effect of tone of voice on SCC was not moderated by trust, $R^2_{change} = .006$, $F(1,245) = 1.12$, $p = .292$, 95% CI [-0.47; 0.14]. The interaction was proven insignificant, the sixth hypothesis was rejected.

Against the background of the initial hypotheses not showing any statistically significant results, additional analyses were conducted to explore possible not predefined effects.

Effect of gender on attitude towards the Bundeswehr

An independent t-test revealed that there is a statistically significant difference on the attitude towards the Bundeswehr based on gender. Women showed a more positive attitude towards the Bundeswehr ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 1.23$), than men ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.52$), $t(85.48) = -2.01$, $p = .048$, 95% CI [-0.86; -0.01]. Note that on the basis of Levene’s F test, equality of variances could not be assumed (Levene’s $F(1,243) = 6.74$, $p = .010$). Testing for normality showed fairly negative skewed distributions but since the groups are similarly skewed (men skewness: -0.02; female skewness: -0.06) and as a t-test can be considered as robust (Statistics, 2015), the analysis was still conducted.
To test the strength of the association, attitude was coded into a nominal dummy variable with three categories (positive, negative, undecided) and a chi-square test was carried out between gender and attitude towards the Bundeswehr, $\chi^2(2) = 13.07, p = .001$, showing a weak association, Cramer’s $V = .23$. The expected cell frequencies were greater than five.

**Effect of trust in the organization on SCC**

To test effect of trust on SCC, an independent t-test was conducted. Trust was dummy coded into a dichotomous nominal variable (trust, no trust). The assumptions for the test, independence of observation, an approximately normal distribution among the variables, and equal variances ($p = .313$), were given. The mean score on SCC was higher among respondents who trust the Bundeswehr ($M = 2.65, SD = 1.08$), compared to respondents who do not trust the army ($M = 2.32, SD = 0.94$), $t(247) = -2.51, p = .013, 95\% CI [-0.59; -0.07]$.

**Effect of source credibility, age and gender on SCC**

A multiple regression was run to predict SCC from source credibility, age and gender. The assumptions for the test were met: Plotting studentized residuals against unstandardized predicted values proved homoscedasticity. A Durbin-Watson test of 1.93 showed independence of residuals and no multicollinearity was observed because tolerance values were greater than 0.1. The variables were approximately normally distributed. These variables statistically significantly predicted SCC, $F(3,241) = 3.96, p = .009$. The strength of the prediction was moderate, 47% of the variation in SCC was predicted on the basis of source credibility ($R^2 = 0.47$). Source credibility, $b^* = .13, t(3) = 2.72, p = .007, 95\% CI [0.04; 0.23]$, had a significant weak association with SCC, while age, $b^* = .01, t(3) = 1.70, p = .091, 95\% CI [-.00; .02]$ and gender, $b^* = -.10, t(3) = -.67, p = .507, 95\% CI [-0.40; 0.20]$ did not have a significant association (see Table 1). Even though the moderation effects were not proven to
be significant, direct effects of source credibility and trust in the organization on SCC were observed.

Table 1

Summary of the multiple regression analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b*</th>
<th>SE_b</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source credibility</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-0.43**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.11***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p = .007; **p = .507, ***p = .091; b* = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE_b = Standard error of the coefficient; β = standardized coefficient

Discussion & Conclusion

Initiating secondary crisis communication is a challenging task for organizations as people mainly think about networking with others when responding to news or newsworthy incidents online (Choi & Lee, 2015; Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015). Status seeking, e.g. improving one’s credibility, is apparently a motivational factor in that sharing context (Lee & Ma, 2012). Also humour value and obtaining insider information motivates people to communicate about crises (Jin & Liu, 2010). By virtue of those aspects, a crisis concerning the Armed Forces might be a tricky sharing subject to enhance someone’s own status within their network respectively, might just be shared if the social circle is in favour of the topic (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell & Logan, 2012).

The main aim of this paper was to provide insight in the effects of leadership crisis responses on secondary crisis communication, depending on the type of crisis. The current investigation did not confirm an impact of conversational or corporate tone of voice strategies on SCC. However, in advancing the understanding of the effects of leadership crisis
communication, attention needs to be devoted to credibility of the sender and attitude towards the organization. This study revealed that source credibility influences people’s intention to forward or share the crisis response. Respondents who assessed von der Leyen as responsible in the online-experiment, also had a higher probability to engage in SCC. This finding reflects societal perceptions from a practical point of view: 84% of German adults indicated in a representative survey that they appreciate von der Leyen openly addressing problems in the Bundeswehr (Statista, 2017b). The credibility of the leader or the attitude towards the army did not interfere with the emotionality of a crisis response. Nonetheless, the trust people place in the military had an influence on their intention to forward, share or talk about the crisis, even though a moderating effect was not proven and the type of crisis was apparently not a mediating factor of the communication strategy. Additionally, women showed a more positive attitude towards the Bundeswehr than men.

**Theoretical implications**

This study shed light on leadership crisis response strategies of public agencies which has been up to now only scarcely investigated (Horsley & Barker, 2002; Olsson, 2014), contrary to the corporate focus in crisis communication. Further, this research contributed to the already existing literature of credibility in crisis communication in broadening the understanding of secondary crisis communication.

The absence of the leader’s emotional response impact on SCC fuels the discussion regarding the ramifications of crisis response strategies. On the one hand, organizations are encouraged to use a certain strategy depending on the situation (Coombs, 2007; Gerken, van der Land & van der Meer, 2016). In the case of this study, the accidental crisis response was in line with the diminish strategy (“Excuse strategies”, Coombs, 2007, p. 172) and rebuild strategy (“Offering apology”, Coombs, 2007, p. 172), whereas the anger-inducing response intentionally stood in contrast to Coomb’s suggested tactics to observe an effect. It could be
argued that perhaps the leader’s crisis strategy failed to affect the public. On the other hand, the results are in accordance with researchers who discovered that it did not matter for reputational outcomes whether organizations matched the response strategy with the crisis cluster or not (Claeys, Cauberghe & Vyncke, 2010) or found inconsistency in influences of matching strategies (Ma & Zhan, 2016). To validate these results, further exploration on impacts of leadership crisis communication of public agencies is encouraged.

Findings from this study enrich the credibility research, confirming that source credibility is associated with crisis communication (van Zoonen & van der Meer, 2015). Further, results are line with research about leadership credibility impacting public acceptance of the message (Arpan, 2002). In terms of public agencies, representatives’ believability has shown to improve the quality of crisis messaging with increased chances of political survival (Boin et al., 2016). By the same token, source credibility was found to shape positive post-crisis outcomes (Yang, Kang & Johnson, 2010). This study pursues that concept by ascertaining that credibility plays a role for the public’s engagement in SCC in the next step.

The intention to participate in information dissemination depends on trust in the organization and perceived credibility of the spokesperson. As such, future research should investigate public sector crisis responses not only from an emotional perspective but also including the holistic picture of organizational standing, leader credibility and public online sharing behaviour.

Furthermore, the current investigation revealed that women were more in favour of the Bundeswehr than men. This observation adds a new perspective to studies about confidence in the army: In an European comparison, British women took a more negative stance towards military missions than men, whereas attitudes of Swedes were roughly gender-neutral (Berndtsson et al., 2015). One explanation could be, that the new agenda promoted by von der Leyen combined with the extensive advertising, might let women to appreciate the modern side of the military in terms of the new part-time work models and a more family-friendly
approach. As this campaign was implemented only recently (BMVg, 2017), the correlation still has to be investigated in future research.

**Practical implications**

The current findings potentially have implications for crisis communication practice. If the public agency in crisis is interested in getting its response shared and intends to initiate a (digital) word-of-mouth, it should ensure that the leader who presents the statement is perceived as credible.

Trust seems to be the key to success, where the Internet community expects to be addressed in a transparent, human conversation and not corporate messaging (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2008; Sweetser & Metzgar, 2007). Moreover, trust is a vital component in predicting the public’s intention to spread the word of organizational responses. Public confidence in organizations is crucial, for state-owned companies in general, and the military particularly. Having that support, the army has a good starting position to spread the crisis responses. Since 66% of German men questioned would not want to do voluntary military service (Statista, 2011), a credible crisis statement from a trustworthy Federal Armed Forces might present the Bundeswehr as an attractive employer (Wiegold, 2017). First steps towards transformation have already been taken: About 6.5 million Euro were spent on the production and advertising measures of the newest YouTube reality show about the Bundeswehr deployment in Mali, which is additionally accompanied by a Facebook messenger chat bot (Pfannenmüller, 2017).

These facts transcribe the intention of the Bundeswehr to become a modern organization, which is closer to the public. As the Bundeswehr will have to recruit 12,000 new soldiers in the upcoming six years to achieve the desired troop strength of 198,000 (Kloepfer, 2017), the modernization work could further be enhanced.
Finally, a social media account for organizational leaders is recommended to initiate a solid follower structure since nearly half of social network users are staying up-to-date by receiving news from people they follow (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell & Logan, 2012).

**Limitations**

Though the current study advances the crisis communication literature, some limitations should be addressed. First, the character of the Federal Armed Forces as institution on a constitutional level and instrument of national security policy is part of a mediation problem where the malice lies in the topic: a complex international context and specific military terminology make it not easy for outside parties to fully understand the scope of the Bundeswehr conduct (Wagner & Biehl, 2013). On the one hand, this might explain why the different types of crisis in the manipulation check were not identified to the same extent. On the other hand, the low credibility of the scale measuring SCC could be due to respondent’s lack of interest in the Bundeswehr which might be reinforced of the sample characteristic by mainly rather young and predominantly female respondents. Since the case of the military is very specific, more research is needed to broaden the insights in leadership crisis communication of public organizations.

Secondly, SCC has not been studied extensively yet, even though in our digital era it is important to understand how online communities react to organizational crisis communication. The scale created by Schultz, Utz and Göritz (2011) might need some adaption to enhance the credibility of the scale (cf. Zhao, Wang, Wei & Liang, 2013). One approach could be adding more items and ask for instance, if the subject seems worth sharing in the first place or what kind of feedback on the shared opinion is expected. Further investigation is needed to conduct a more holistic approach to secondary crisis communication and create a more reliable scale.
Thirdly, the generalisability of the findings is affected by platform and sample. Besides Facebook, the focus can be extended to other social media platforms. A convenience sample was chosen due to the direct availability to the researcher. Because of the nature of the convenience sample, it is questionable whether it can be treated as representative for the population.

Lastly, the manipulation of displayed emotions can further be expanded. Future research may also pair the pictures of a leader expressing emotions with highly emotional arousing pictures of the crisis to investigate the difference between leaders showing emotions and crisis circumstance being portrayed to induce an attitude change (cf. Smith-Rodden & Ash, 2017).

Conclusion

The results of this study revealed valuable insight into the discipline of crisis communication by showing that organizations have to reckon with gender-specific attitudes and that trust and source credibility impact SCC. Although this investigation is inherently of exploratory nature, the two core issues of this study, the Bundeswehr as complex subject and SCC as improvable construct, remain an interesting topic for follow-up research concerning communication whilst managing companies in distress.

References


Appendix A

Table A1

*Factorial design.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of crisis</th>
<th>Tone of voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>regret (X1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidental (Y1)</td>
<td>X1Y1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventable (Y2)</td>
<td>X1Y2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Survey flow as operated in Qualtrics (translated into German)

**Informed consent**

Sehr geehrte Teilnehmerin, sehr geehrter Teilnehmer,
vielen Dank, dass Sie an dieser Umfrage im Rahmen meiner Masterarbeit an der Universiteit van Amsterdam teilnehmen möchten. Ziel der Studie ist es, die Auswirkungen von Unternehmenskommunikation auf die öffentliche Wahrnehmung zu untersuchen.
Die Beantwortung der Fragen wird ungefähr 5 Minuten dauern.
Ich stimme freiwillig zu, an dieser Umfrage teilzunehmen. Mein Einverständnis kann ich ohne Angabe von Gründen verweigern bzw. jederzeit mit Wirkung für die Zukunft widerrufen. Ich bin mir darüber im Klaren, dass ich meine Teilnahme an dieser Umfrage jederzeit unterbrechen kann. Sollten meine Untersuchungsergebnisse in wissenschaftlichen Publikationen oder auf andere Art und Weise publiziert werden, so wird stets darauf geachtet, meine Anonymität zu wahren. Falls ich nun oder in der Zukunft mehr Informationen zur Umfrage erhalten möchte, kann ich antje.laenen@student.uva.nl kontaktieren. Für Beschwerden bezüglich der Umfrage kann ich ausgewählte Mitglieder des Ethischen Komites unter folgender Adresse erreichen: ASCoR secretariat Ethics Committee University of Amsterdam Postbus 15793 1001 NG Amsterdam 020-525 3680 ascor-secr-fmg@uva.nl.

Ich habe den oben geschriebenen Text verstanden und erkläre mich bereit, an dieser Umfrage teilzunehmen.
Attitude and trust

Wenn Sie an die Bundeswehr als die deutschen Streitkräfte denken: Wie ist Ihre persönliche Einstellung zur Bundeswehr?

- Sehr positiv (1)
- Positiv (2)
- Eher positiv (3)
- Weder positiv noch negativ (4)
- Eher negativ (5)
- Negativ (6)
- Sehr negativ (7)

Wie viel Vertrauen haben Sie in die Bundeswehr?

- Sehr großes Vertrauen (1)
- Großes Vertrauen (2)
- Wenig Vertrauen (3)
- Gar kein Vertrauen (4)
Preparation for the vignette

Im nachfolgenden Abschnitt wird erst Hintergrundinformation zu einem Vorfall präsentiert, der sich bei der Bundeswehr ereignet hat. Danach sehen Sie ein von Verteidigungsministerin Frau von der Leyen auf Facebook veröffentlichtes Statement. Lesen Sie sich dieses bitte genau durch.

(The following six conditions were randomized.)
G36 angry

G36 neutral


Wir werden mit Hochdruck unsere Energie darauf verwenden, eine neue Lösung zu finden. Es ist unakzeptabel, dass unsere Soldaten nicht ausreichend ausgerüstet sind. Das G96 hat so wie es heute konstruiert ist, keine Zukunft in der Bundeswehr.
G36 regret


A400M angry

Die Airbus A400M gilt als das modernste militärische Transportflugzeug der Welt, aber auch als größter Problemfall der Bundeswehr. Politische, finanzielle und technische Probleme verzögerten die Entwicklung jahrelang. Als Konsequenz könnte die Bundeswehr nach 2021, wenn die letzten alten Transall-Flugzeuge außer Dienst gestellt werden, ohne einen Militärtransporter dastehen, der auch tatsächlich in Kriegsgebiete hineinfliegen kann.

Es ist ein Tag der gemischten Gefühle. Wir wissen alle, dass wir noch nicht am Ende der Dauerkrise sind. Die von Airbus angesiedelten neuen Verzögerungen bei der A400M treffen uns zur ungünstigsten Zeit. Hier steht weit mehr auf dem Spiel als das Image eines Industrieeinzelunternehmens, das fehlhaft an die Bundeswehr liefert. Es geht um Deutschlands Verlässlichkeit in seinen Bündnissen. Ich bin sehr wütend und erwartete, dass der Konzern alle Hebel in Bewegung setzt, um die Auswirkungen auf die Bundeswehr so gering wie möglich zu halten.
Die Airbus A400M gilt als das modernste militärische Transportflugzeug der Welt, aber auch als größter Problemfall der Bundeswehr. Politische, finanzielle und technische Probleme verzögerten die Entwicklung jahrelang. Als Konsequenz könnte die Bundeswehr nach 2021, wenn die letzten alten Transall-Flugzeuge außer Dienst gestellt werden, ohne einen Militärtransporter dastehen, der auch tatsächlich in Kriegsgebiete hineinfliegen kann.

A400M regret

Die Airbus A400M gilt als das modernste militärische Transportflugzeug der Welt, aber auch als größter Problemfall der Bundeswehr. Politische, finanzielle und technische Probleme verzögerten die Entwicklung jahrelang. Als Konsequenz könnte die Bundeswehr nach 2021, wenn die letzten alten Transall-Flugzeuge außer Dienst gestellt werden, ohne einen Militärtransporter dastehen, der auch tatsächlich in Kriegsgebiete hineinfliegen kann.

**Source credibility**

Wie sehr stimmen Sie folgenden Aussagen zu?

Die Verfasserin des Facebookposts...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stimme voll zu (1)</th>
<th>Stimme zu (2)</th>
<th>Stimme teilweise zu (3)</th>
<th>Weder noch (4)</th>
<th>Stimme teilweise nicht zu (5)</th>
<th>Stimme nicht zu (6)</th>
<th>Stimme überhaupt nicht zu (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ist voreingenommen. (1)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ist glaubwürdig. (2)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achtet auf Richtigkeit der Angaben. (3)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ist vertrauenswürdig. (4)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achtet auf Vollständigkeit der Informationen. (5)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nachdem Sie den Text auf Facebook gelesen haben, wie wahrscheinlich ist es, dass Sie einer der folgenden Aktionen ergreifen?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Äußerst wahrscheinlich (1)</th>
<th>Wahrscheinlich (2)</th>
<th>Eher wahrscheinlich (3)</th>
<th>Weder wahrscheinlich noch unwahrscheinlich (4)</th>
<th>Eher unwahrscheinlich (5)</th>
<th>Unwahrscheinlich (6)</th>
<th>Extrem unwahrscheinlich (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ich teile die Meldung mit anderen. (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ich erzähle meinen Freunden/ meiner Familie von dem Vorfall. (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ich hinterlasse einen Kommentar unter der Veröffentlichung. (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- ( ) 1
- ( ) 2
- ( ) 3
- ( ) 4
- ( ) 5
- ( ) 6
- ( ) 7
### Manipulation check

Bitte geben Sie an, wie sehr Sie den folgenden Aussagen zustimmen.

In dem Statement der Verteidigungsministerin...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stimme voll zu (1)</th>
<th>Stimme zu (2)</th>
<th>Stimme teilweise zu (3)</th>
<th>Weder noch (4)</th>
<th>Stimme teilweise nicht zu (5)</th>
<th>Stimme nicht zu (6)</th>
<th>Stimme überhaupt nicht zu (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bedauerte sie die Vorkommnisse. (1)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zeigte sie sich zornig über die Vorkommnisse. (2)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reagierte sie eher neutral. (3)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frau von der Leyen...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stimme voll zu (1)</th>
<th>Stimme zu (2)</th>
<th>Stimme teilweise zu (3)</th>
<th>Weder noch (4)</th>
<th>Stimme teilweise nicht zu (5)</th>
<th>Stimme nicht zu (6)</th>
<th>Stimme überhaupt nicht zu (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sah wütend aus. (1)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sah bekümmert aus. (2)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zeigte keine Reaktion. (3)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bitte geben Sie an, wie sehr sie folgenden Aussagen zustimmen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aussage</th>
<th>Stimme überhaupt nicht zu (1)</th>
<th>Stimme nicht zu (2)</th>
<th>Stimme teilweise nicht zu (3)</th>
<th>Weder noch (4)</th>
<th>Stimme teilweise zu (5)</th>
<th>Stimme zu (6)</th>
<th>Stimme voll zu (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Es waren externe Umstände, und nicht die Bundeswehr, die die Krise verursachten. (1)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Krise hätte von der Bundeswehr leicht verhindert werden können. (2)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographics

Zuletzt möchte ich Sie um einige Angaben zu Ihrer Person bitten.

Wie alt sind Sie?

Welches Geschlecht haben Sie?

- Männlich (1)
- Weiblich (2)
- Keine Angabe (3)

Was ist Ihr derzeitiger Beschäftigungsstatus?

- Vollzeit beschäftigt (1)
- Teilzeit beschäftigt (2)
- Arbeitssuchend (3)
- Im Ruhestand (4)
- Schüler / Student (5)
- Erwerbsunfähig (6)
- Keine Angabe (7)

Über welche schulische Ausbildung verfügen Sie?
- Kein Schulabschluss (1)
- Mittelschule (2)
- Realschule (3)
- (Fach-)Abitur (4)
- Bachelor oder vergleichbar (5)
- Master oder vergleichbar (6)
- Berufsabschluss (7)
- Doktorat (8)
- Keine Angabe (9)
Debrief

Vielen Dank für die Teilnahme an dieser Umfrage.


Falls Sie Fragen zu der Studie haben oder über die Ergebnisse informiert werden möchten, kontaktieren Sie bitte antje.laenen@student.uva.nl.
Appendix C

Results of the pre-test

A cross-tabulation and an independent t-test were conducted to assess the success of the manipulation. Of the 32 participants, 94% identified her angry emotion correctly. 88% rightfully indicated that they read the regretful text ($\chi^2(1) = 9.12, p < .001$). 91% could rightfully assign the crisis responsibility ($\chi^2(1) = 8.09, p < .001$).

Tables complementing the analysis

Table A2

*Experimental design.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone of voice</th>
<th>Crisis type</th>
<th>N</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condition 1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 2</td>
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<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 3</td>
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<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Condition 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition 6</td>
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Table A3

*Mean and standard deviations for demographic variables.*

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<th></th>
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<td>- accidental</td>
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<td>12.25</td>
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<tr>
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<td>27.91</td>
<td>10.73</td>
<td>129</td>
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<td><strong>Tone of voice:</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>29.80</td>
<td>12.22</td>
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<tr>
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