**Dialogic Communication in Faux Pas Paracrises. What do Users Want to Discuss on Brands' Official Facebook Pages?**

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ABSTRACT

This study provides an analysis of spontaneous publics' reactions to crisis statements on the official Facebook pages of two global organizations that experienced faux pas paracrises in 2017-2018, Dove and H&M. The companies were accused of being racially insensitive and "tone deaf" after publishing their advertisements and catalogues respectively. Using quantitative content analysis alongside thematic analysis, themes were identified related to spontaneous reactions to paracrises regarding accusations of cultural and racial insensitivity. The analysis supported the revisions of situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) claiming that apology and corrective action may be effective tools to handle faux pas paracrises. The study also contributes to the understanding of a dialogic communication approach to communication by demonstrating the conversational nature of spontaneous comments under the crisis statements..

Keywords: Dialogic Communication, SCCT, Paracrises, Social Media, Crisis Communication, Mixed Method Study

INTRODUCTION

Research shows that a quick response from an organization is critical when it comes to image restoration during a crisis (Ki & Nekmat 2014; DiStaso at el. 2015). To achieve a higher speed of response, communication professionals would traditionally prepare for crises by listing possible crises types and responses relevant for each type (Ki & Nekmat 2014). Today, companies are expected not only to come up with an initial response but to participate in a conversation with their crisis publics or people who are "interested in or affected by the crisis" (Coombs & Holladay 2014 p. 40). To do this effectively, communication professionals need to know common trends in user reactions to crisis statements.

Interestingly, even though the topic of social-mediated crises, i.e., crises that receive public attention on or because of social network sites, gained an increased interest

in the fields of strategic communication over recent years (e.g. Jin et al. 2011; Austin et al. 2012; Cheng & Cameron 2018), such studies tend to examine only one end of crisis communication, the one of the sender, thus ignoring the receiver, i.e. the publics. Therefore, the question of how publics react to organizations' efforts of managing crises online remains a gap that needs to be addressed.

This question is especially relevant given the affordances of the Internet that, first, involve international publics into discussions regarding a brand and, second, enable organizations to maintain dialogue with those publics. Recent crisis cases of United Airlines, Adidas, H&M, Pepsi, and Dove demonstrate that today, crises are not limited by geographical borders but rather spread across the globe, thus bringing bigger reputational and financial losses. This calls not only for reconsideration of the aspect of intercultural communication in brand promotion but also for a better understanding of how to handle crises in a globalized society. Shifting the focus from organizations to publics in crisis communication scholarship would provide scholars with insights about how to maintain a productive dialogue with publics in a globalized society in case of a crisis.

This study focuses on publics' reactions to crisis statements on official Facebook pages of two global organizations that experienced social-mediated crises in 2017-2018, Dove and H&M. The study contributes to the growing body of research focusing on the receiver's end of crisis communication. The study aims to provide a deeper understanding of publics' spontaneous reactions to crisis communication in faux pas paracrises. It also aims to contribute to existing PR and crisis communication scholarship by applying the recent revisions of the dominant theory (situational crisis communication theory) to publics' spontaneous reactions to crisis communication. An overview of theoretical frameworks that guide the current research is now provided.


LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is informed by several theoretical approaches including studies on the nature of the Internet, public relations, and crisis communication. Dialogic communication theory as well as situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) are central to this study as the study's goal is to broaden our understanding of audience reactions to the faux pas form of crises.

Dialogic Nature of the Internet
Since the invention of Web 2.0, one of the key features of the new media environment that attracted scholars' attention has been the ability of "ordinary" users to produce and disseminate content as well as to connect to other people and organizations (see, e.g., Allen 2012; Blank 2013; Blank and Reisdorf 2012; Harrison and Barthel 2009; Newman et al. 2016). This characteristic of the Internet evoked a number of questions about who creates content; why they do this; what consequences content production and connectivity between users have for the media industry, business, and government organizations; and what new communication practices the Internet introduces into our society. Several trends in answering these questions are of interest in this study.
First, scholars consider the Internet to be a way to overcome the domination of large organizations in media production (Blank and Reisdorf 2012; Blank 2013; Pečiulis 2016). In the new media environment, ordinary users become both consumers and producers of

content which changes the way information is created, disseminated, and evaluated (Warnick 2004; Croteau 2006; Blank 2013). Harrison and Barthel (2009) argue that although Web 2.0 did not radically transform communication practices, today, Internet applications enable creation and dissemination of content even by users who lack special technical knowledge. For business organizations, this accessibility of content production is a game-changer that allows their stakeholders to express their opinion about the brand online (Chewning 2015; Zheng et al. 2015; Jeon et al. 2016).

Second, scholars point out the ability of Internet users to connect "not only with friends, family and colleagues, but also with events, interest groups, companies, brands and other entities" (Newman et al. 2016, p. 591). Such connectivity results in reconsideration of PR and marketing practices as today, user-generated content about brands may affect companies' stakeholders, reputation, and sales (Newman et al. 2016; Haigh and Wigley 2015). To put it bluntly, companies profit or experience reputational and financial losses due to their followers being connected to friends and thus disseminating positive or negative information throughout their network (Newman et al. 2016; Chari et al. 2016). This is called a network effect (Newman et al. 2016) or a boomerang effect (Ki and Nekmat 2014). Such affordances of social media are receiving an increasing attention from public relations' scholars as for public relations, the ability of users to connect with brands and vice versa provides an opportunity for companies to start a dialogue with their publics. This public relations goal is reflected in the dialogic communication theory.

## Dialogic Communication in PR

Dialogic communication can be defined as "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions" (Kent and Taylor 1998, p. 325). Dialogic communication suggests that communication should benefit both parties, and this approach does not accept a forced agreement as an outcome of PR activities (Kent and Taylor 1998). In other words, when employing this approach, an organization speaks to its publics as to an equal interlocutor whose values and views are as important as the ones of the organization (Yang et al. 2015). The goal of such communication is to build mutually beneficial relationships.

From the perspective of dialogic communication, the Internet is seen as a venue for exchange of ideas and opinions between organizations and their publics (Kent and Taylor 1998). The interactional nature of the Internet, its ability to provide a venue for a dialogue is the key to understanding the changes that were brought into public relations' practice and scholarship by the new medium. Since the first attempts to reconceptualize the Internet in the late 1990s (see, e.g., Kent and Taylor 1998), scholars have been pointing out the shift from a one-way communication that was common in the era of the "old media" to a two-way (Park and Reber 2008; Rybalko and Seltzer 2010; Huang and Yang 2015; Ibrahim 2016). The approach to the Internet as a venue for a dialogue is even more relevant with the invention of social media (Bortree and Seltzer 2009; Lee and VanDyke 2015; Kent and Taylor 2016).

## Receiver Orientation in Crisis Communication

Despite the shift towards dialogic communication approach in public relations, crisis communication scholarship is still dominated by the sender orientation to communication studies (Lee 2004; Coombs and Holladay 2014; Chewning 2015). In their overview of crisis communication scholarship, Cheng and Cameron (2018) claim that today, in most cases, scholars would approach the phenomenon of social media crisis focusing on the features of crises experienced by organizations of similar types, characteristics of crises depending on social media where a crisis happens, and types of

stakeholders that get involved in social media crises. To put it differently, the audience's end of crisis communication remains understudied and requires more research with the receiver orientation.

Receiver (audience) orientation approach, as opposed to the sender's orientation in crisis communications, stands for the approach that focuses on the reactions of an organization's publics to the organization's crisis communication efforts (Lee 2004; Schwartz 2012; Coombs and Holladay 2014). The approach enables PR scholars to gain a deeper understanding of publics' reactions, motivations, and actions in case of an organizational crisis. Initially, studies employing the approach would more likely rely on experimental design to see publics' reactions to specific crisis statements (Claeys et el. 2010; Schultz et al. 2011; Liu et al. 2011; Lee and Chung 2012; Yum and Jeong 2015). For example, a study conducted by Lee and Chung (2012), examined whether responsibility admittance and sympathetic expression by an organization would affect publics' anger relief in case of a crisis. Another study, conducted by Liu et al. (2011), analyzed the effects of the information form and the information source on public perception of a crisis. This study relied on the social-mediated crisis communication model (SMCC) which describes relations between the source, the form of crisis statements, and public perception of the statements (Liu et al. 2011). Although such studies provide a valuable insight about possible publics' reactions to crisis communication, recent research demonstrated that "publics' reactions to crises especially in online spaces may not always correspond to current theorizing about these crises" (Krishna and Vibber 2017, p. 305).

The growth of social media enabled scholars to study naturally occurring (spontaneous) responses to crisis communication efforts of organizations (Coombs and Holladay 2014). This approach can increase the effectiveness of crisis communication assessment and define the most effective crisis communication strategies that would evoke positive responses and prompt a productive dialogue with organizations' publics. The existing research on spontaneous reactions to crisis communication looks at the tone of social media reactions to a crisis statement as well as at emotions expressed by publics (e.g., Choi and Lin 2009; Coombs and Holladay 2014; Brummette and Sisco 2014). For example, Coombs and Holladay (2014) studied public reactions to a crisis situation on different platforms and categorized comments according to their valence. Another way to study spontaneous reactions to crisis statements is to examine the dominant models in crisis communication such as situational crisis communication theory (SCCT).

## SCCT

Situational crisis communication theory divides crises into three clusters based on attributions of crisis responsibility: the victim cluster; the accidental cluster; and the intentional cluster (Coombs 2007). The victim cluster includes crises where an organization itself is seen as a victim and, therefore, has a minimal responsibility for a crisis. The accidental cluster includes crises in which an organization is seen as incapable of preventing or controlling the crisis, for example technical-error accidents. Finally, the intentional cluster deals with crises when an organization could have prevented the crisis but did not do it or crises when an organization purposefully caused the event. The theory suggests that "as stakeholders attribute greater crisis responsibility to the organization, their perceptions of the organizational reputation will decline" (Coombs 2007, p. 168). However, the assumptions of the SCCT theory were challenged by recent research studying spontaneous reactions to crisis statements. For instance, a mixed-method study by Krishna and Vibber (2017) demonstrated that the case of Sony's crisis goes against

SCCT expectations regarding publics' reaction to a victim cluster crisis. In addition, SCCT was revised by Coombs (2018) who added extra categories of crises describing crises coming from the Internet and social media as paracrises. Coombs and Holladay (2012, p. 409) define paracrisis as "a publicly visible crisis threat that charges an organization with irresponsible or unethical behavior". In his revision of SCCT, Coombs (2018) described three forms of paracrises: challenges, when publics question organizations' responsible behavior; customer service, when publics express negative feelings about an organization's customer relations; and faux pas, coming from misuse of social media. A unique feature of paracrises in that stakeholders can watch the development of the crisis, including organizations' efforts to handle the paracrisis and reactions of other stakeholders. Another feature of paracrises is that they pose mostly reputational threat (Coombs and Holladay 2012). A new turn in SCCT raises questions about possible insights that research on spontaneous reactions to crisis communication may contribute to the understanding of new types of crises.

This study contributes to the growing body of research of dialogic communication and spontaneous reactions to crisis communication. More specifically, the study focuses on the analysis and categorization of publics' reactions to crisis statements of Dove and H&M companies that experienced crises in 2017 and 2018 respectively. Both of the crises fall under the category of paracrises based on the revised SCCT classification of crisis types (Coombs 2007; Coombs 2018). The following section addresses background information about each of the crises.


## H&M AND DOVE CASES

### H&M's "Hoodie Crisis"

H&M is a global fashion company that was started in Sweden and includes such brands as H&M, H&M Home, COS, Monki, and others (H&M 2018). Today, the company owns over four thousand stores across the globe and sells products online (Fumo 2018a). The company promotes itself as a responsible business that values diversity and environmental sustainability. For example, on its website, it claims that today "the H&M group joins together more than 171,000 colleagues from different backgrounds and nationalities across the world" (H&M 2018). The website includes mention that H&M use renewable energy sources, recycle clothes, and create 1.6 million jobs around the world.
 In January, 2018, a picture posted on the British website of H&M became famous worldwide as H&M were accused of being racially and culturally insensitive. The picture was posted and criticized by celebrities, politicians, media, and regular users (Meyer 2018). A number of journalists and experts from the field have put the crisis into the global or even glocal contexts highlighting the need for global brands to put an extra effort into being on top of the global agenda and being culturally sensitive (see Patton 2018 who connected the H&M crisis to the pictures of black kids in Baltimore, USA).
The results of the online crisis included a damaged reputation, boycotts of the brand, loss of a celebrity partner, and even attacks at and vandalization of stores by protesters in South Africa (Barr 2018; BBC 2018; Fumo 2018b). As a reaction to the crisis, H&M issued an apology (H&MtheUS, 2018), recalled the hoodie, removed the picture from the website, and demonstrated brand's commitment to learning and doing better by hiring a diversity manager (Fumo 2018). The apology posted on Facebook received more than five thousand comments and 28 thousand reactions.

Dove "Body Wash Crisis"
Dove is a global brand which is a part of the Unilever corporation. Unilever is a British-Dutch company that includes 400 brands around the world with 169 thousand employees. Just like H&M, Unilever is committed to promoting sustainable business and diversity (Unilever 2018). In fact, diversity and inclusiveness are at the core of Dove's branding. According to the website, "Dove believes that beauty... is not defined by your age, the shape or size of your body, the colour of your skin or your hair – it's feeling like the best version of yourself. Authentic. Unique. Real." (Unilever 2018).

In October 2017, Dove posted a 3-second long advertisement of a body wash on Facebook. The video demonstrated a black woman taking off her top and transforming into a white woman. Later in the ad, the white woman would transform into a brown woman. However, users focused on the first transformation. The ad received a backlash from social media users, media, and celebrities. Similarly to the case of H&M, the advertisement was placed in a global and historical context. Some media claimed that the ad reminded users of racist soap advertisements from the 19th century (New York Post, 2017). The crisis resulted in a reputational loss and users arguing for boycotting Dove in multiple languages in the U.S. and Europe (NPR, 2017). Reacting to the crisis, Dove removed the ad and issued an apology saying that they "missed the mark" (Dove US, 2018). The crisis statement on Facebook received 5.4 thousand comments and 3.7 thousand reactions.

Paracrises of H&M and Dove. As is evident, there are a number of similarities in the crises described above. Both crises fall under the description of the faux pas paracrisis based on the revised SCCT. Both paracrises were experienced by global brands. Both of the brands were building their image around the ideas of inclusivity and diversity. Both got accused of being culturally and racially insensitive. Both crises were started on social media and received a backlash from regular users, celebrities, and media. The time gap between the crises was only several months which allows us to speculate that the crises happened within the same global political agenda. Finally both of the companies picked apology and corrective action as a response to the crises and both crisis statements received a massive feedback from their audience. This study attempts to find common trends in audience responses to such crises and poses the following research questions:
RQ1: What was the overall reaction to the crisis statement of H&M?
RQ2: What was the overall reaction to the crisis statement of Dove?
RQ3: What are the common trends in publics' reactions that were evoked by the crisis statements of H&M and Dove?


METHODS

In order to investigate the similarities and differences in responses to the crisis statements by H&M and Dove, a mixed-method study was conducted. The study consisted of two stages: quantitative content-analysis and thematic analysis. The sample included 200 randomly selected comments under the H&M crisis statement and 200 randomly selected comments under the Dove crisis statement (N=400). The need for random sampling stems from the huge population both in case of the H&M and Dove statements (5.9 thousand and 5.6 thousand comments respectively).

The data was accessed through the official Facebook pages of the companies. The comments under the H&M and Dove crisis statements published on January 9, 2018 and

October 7, 2017 respectively were analyzed. The comments were exported using Crimson Hexagon software. The software allows the researcher to export comments under a specific Facebook post. However, the software only exported initial, first-level, comments thus omitting replies to those comments. Therefore, the population included 4950 comments for H&M's statement and 3931 comments for Dove's statement. After the data were exported into an Excel file, 200 posts from each population were randomly selected using a script written for the study. The script assigned random numbers to all the comments and then picked the comments that had assigned numbers ranged from 1-200.

The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the data was coded using quantitative content analysis. A single comment was a unit of analysis. The comments were coded according to the valence, negative, positive, or neutral. In order to establish reliability scores, Krippendorff's alpha (2004) was used. A person not involved in the study coded the data as a second coder to establish reliability scores. The reliability data comprised 10% of data whose reliability is in question.  The reliability of .84 was achieved. In order to answer RQ1 and RQ2, about the overall reaction to the statements, descriptive statistics were used. Microsoft Excel was used as a statistical software. This step resulted in six categories for the second step, thematic analysis.

Second, to answer the RQ3, about the common trends in publics' reactions to the crisis statements, the data were analyzed using the method of thematic analysis. First, for H&M and Dove separately, the comments were grouped into categories based on their valence using the results of the quantitative analysis. This allowed the researcher to develop a more focused thematic analysis and to find key patterns within each category of user responses. Second, the comments were analyzed using the six-step approach to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The approach includes such steps as familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting the results. In order to broaden the list of possible themes, the analysis was inductive and data-driven. Finally, a list of themes in H&M and Dove's cases was identified. The list is aimed to illustrate reactions that would be typical for crisis situations that deal with cultural and racial issues and fall under the category of faux pas paracrises.

## RESULTS

### Quantitative Content Analysis
Research question 1. The first research question concerns the overall reaction to H&M's crisis statement. The results of the descriptive statistics (see Table 1) demonstrate that most of the comments under the crisis statement of H&M were negative (49.5%) as opposed to 42% neutral and 8.5% positive comments.  Research question 2. The second research question asked about the overall reaction to Dove's crisis statement. The results of the descriptive statistics (see Table 1) demonstrate that most of the comments under the Dove crisis statement were negative (70.5%) as opposed to 22.5% neutral and 7% positive comments.

**Table 1: Valence of User Comments under the Crisis Statements of H&M and Dove Companies**

|       | Negative | Neutral | Positive | Total |
|-------|----------|---------|----------|-------|
| H&M   | 49.5%    | 42%     | 8.5%     | 100%  |
|       | (99)     | (84)    | (17)     | (200) |
| Dove  | 70.5%    | 22.5%   | 7%       | 100%  |
|       | (141)    | (45)    | (14)     | (200) |

In sum, then, in both cases, a prevalence of negative comments over other categories was found. It is worth noting that the proportion of negative comments in Dove's case is a little higher than in H&M's case.

Thematic Analysis
Research question 3. The third research question is concerned with the particular user reactions which were evoked by the crisis statements of H&M and Dove. The qualitative analysis of user reactions under the H&M and Dove crisis statements generated two overlapping key themes within a Neutral category of comments, two overlapping key themes for the Positive category and five overlapping themes for the Negative category. It is worth noting that within each of the three categories, comments addressing both the companies and other users were found.

*Neutral comments*
Neutral comments produced overlapping themes such as History and User Chats (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: The Proportion of Themes Among Neutral Comments**
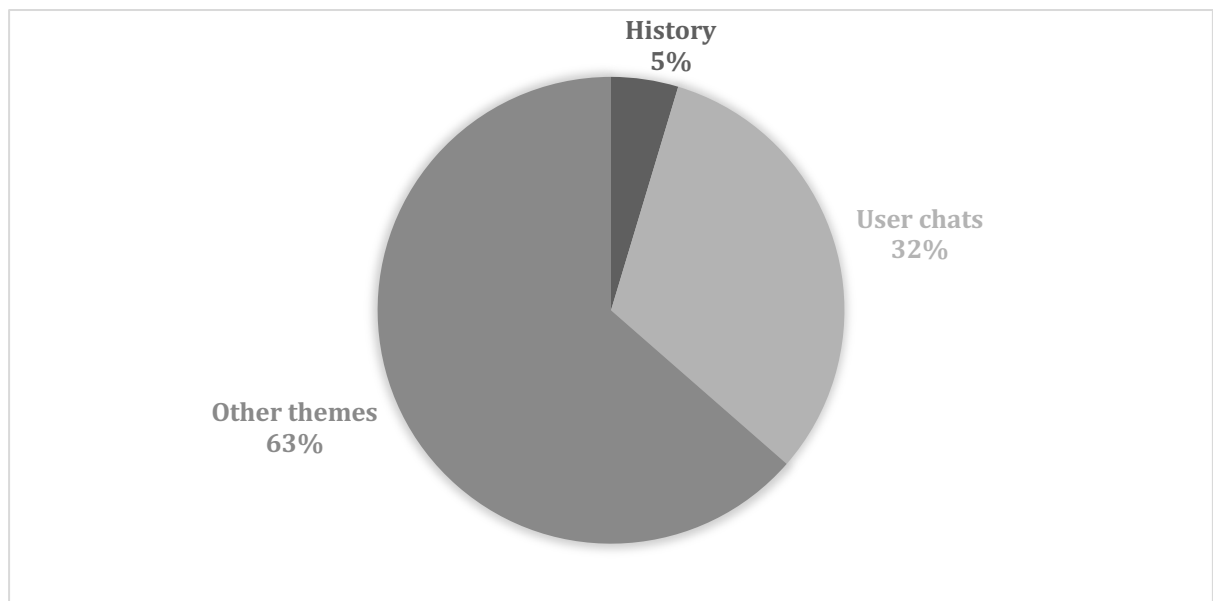
*History.* Some users brought up history when discussing the crisis cases. Interestingly, within the Neutral category, history was used to defend the companies. For example, in case of H&M, a user brought up the different histories of countries as a reason to excuse H&M's perspective on racial sensitivity, "...As far as I know, this was a Swedish ad. Sweden's history is not America's history. I am not Swedish or black, but I am a parent, and as a mother I'm not going to sit here and judge what is right or wrong in the life of that beautiful child..." (H&M_Case93). A comment under the Dove's crisis statement suggested that "to drag up history... is too harsh" for such a case (Dove_Case188).

*User chats.* This is probably one of the more interesting categories but not a theme. This sub-category includes comments that users left for each other. Some of them simply contain a name of another user which means that a person tagged someone to make them a part of the discussion. Other comments include short sentences where users express their thoughts/feelings regarding comments of the other users. This category includes such comments as "Joshua Vega a hoodie got you mad?" (H&M_Case131); "Jake Reasonover  Normal?" (Dove_Case77); "I agree with this Stacey Brown" (H&M_Case145). Positive comments. Two key themes were found both in H&M's and Dove's cases: Loyalty and the Ad (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: The proportion of Themes among Positive Comments**
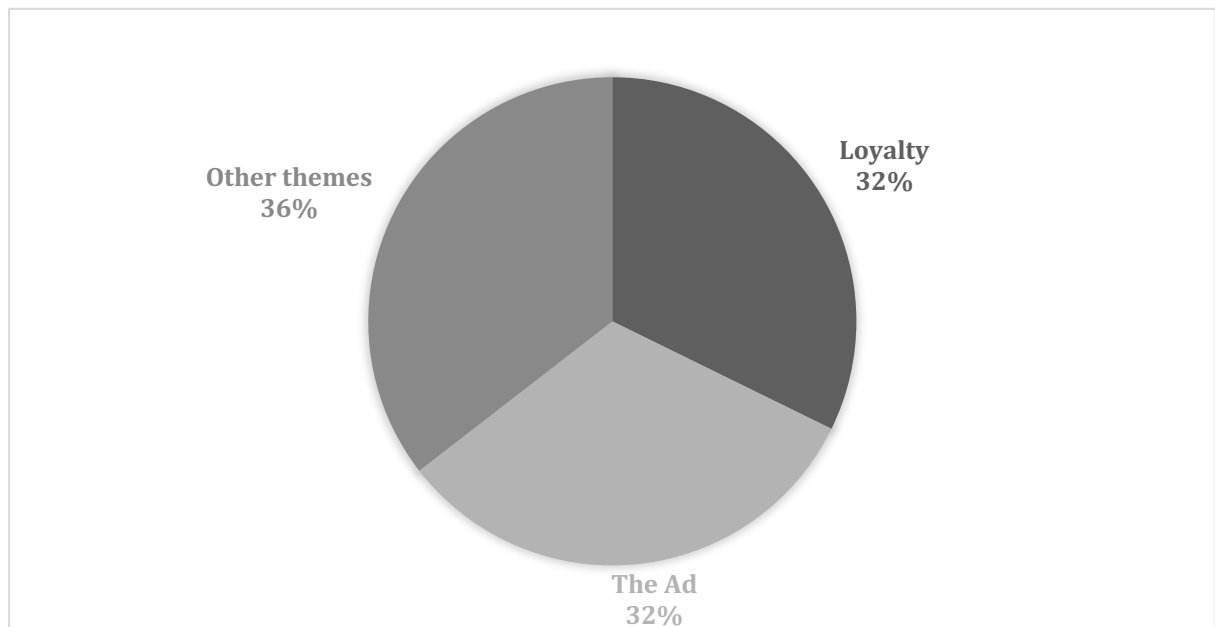


*Loyalty.* A group of users claimed that they would continue buying products of the companies going through the paracrisis. This theme may be split up into two sub-themes based on the users: those who liked and accepted the apology; and those who remain loyal to the company despite the situation. The users who accepted the apology commented both on the way the apology was expressed, e.g., "Very well said" (Dove_Case84) as well as those who simply accepted the apologies of the companies, e.g., "we forgive y'all" (H&M_Case196). Others expressed their loyalty despite the situation "❤️H&M no need to apologize" (H&M_Case118); "i still love you. DOVE❤️❤️❤️❤️" (Dove_Case165), "Still have a customer from me" (H&M_Case168).

*The ad.* A number of comments within the Positive category claimed that nothing was wrong with the ad/picture in the first place. The hoodie picture from H&M website was described in the following way: "I think it wasn't in bad taste, I actually liked the pic" (H&M_Case188); "It's a kid in a jumper" (H&M_Case66); and "I would wear it if I had one" (H&M_Case44). In case of Dove, a number of users brought up the original ad saying that they "didn't find the actual video itself to be offensive at all" (Dove_Case142); the ad sends the message that "anyone can use the soap. Any skin tone or or skin texture." (Dove_Case155); and that they "liked the ad." (Dove_Case158).

*Negative Comments*

In both cases, negative comments appeared more often than the other two categories. However, it is worth noting that both comments addressing the company and comments addressing other users or society in general were coded as "negative" if they contained negative sentiments. To develop transparent and informative themes, the researcher divided the negative comments into two initial subcategories: comments explicitly addressing the company; and those not addressing the company. Around 57% of negative comments in H&M's case were addressing the company and around 88% of negative comments in Dove's case were addressing the company. Among the comments addressing the companies, six common themes were found: The Team, Racism, The apology, History, Boycott, and Negative Feelings (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5: The Proportion of Themes among Negative Comments**
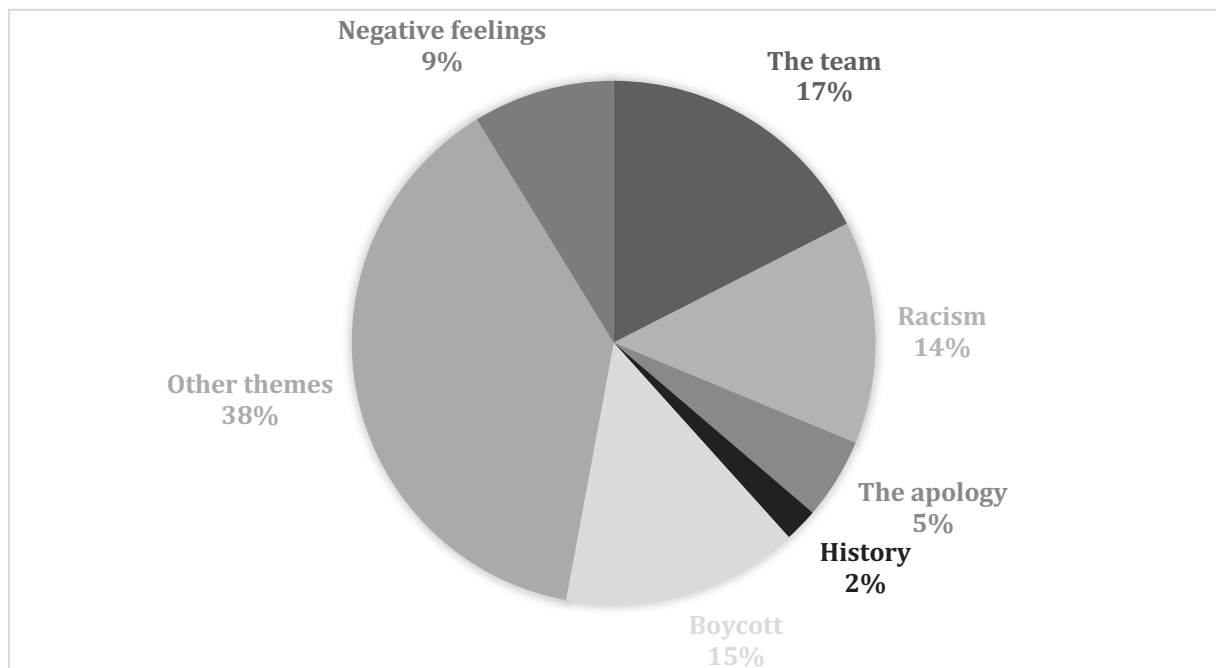


*The team.* A number of comments in both cases blamed the companies' employees for the culturally insensitive advertisements. First, users suggested that the companies lack diversity when it comes to their employees. This idea was reflected in a number of comments such as "Serve up some diversity at decision making table" (Dove_Case26); "It is evident you should emplore[sic] conscience minded people of color on your marketing team" (Dove_Case41); "If you Google their board of directors that will give you some intrinsic insight to this company. No diversity." (H&M_Case160); "Hire people from EVERY ethnicity group to educate you H&M since you don't seem to understand the basics of racial sensitivity and empathy" (H&M_Case12). Second, a number of users called for the

firing of existing teams "for lapse in judgement" (Dove_Case85) and hiring new ones to have "one person of consciousness to say no that is not cool!" (H&M_Case29). Finally, a number of users wondered how these cases even happened emphasizing the fact that the ads had to go through a process of approval by H&M's and Dove's teams. For example, one of the comments under the H&M statement says, "How could this ad go through so many people and still be published? Your marketing team failed you miserably or didn't care…" (H&M_Case81). The same sentiments may be seen in Dove's, case, "So during the make of this ad nobody stopped & thought to them self oh wow it looks like we are using are soap to wash away darkness on someone's skin let's use a dark-skinned women first then a pale skinned women for comparison of how great are soap can clean you SMH save it" (Dove_Case112).

*Racism.* The comments about racism included comments explicitly accusing companies of racism in general and of an intentional racism specifically. The comments about racism in general addressed the issue of racial insensitivity of the companies without discussing the process of decision making or possible reasoning behind the ads, "Thank a lot Dove making feel like my brown skin is ugly  as dirt..  so hateful and racist Dove soap...:( " (Dove_Case191). However, a number of comments argued that the companies "knew exactly what they were doing" (H&M_Case156). The users commented that they "Don't believe it was an accident" (H&M_Case162); that "There was no misrepresentation,  it was pure design" (Dove_Case171); and that "Dove purposefully did this" (Dove_Case163).
The apology. Some users criticized the apologies, i.e., the crisis statements themselves. In Dove's case, users really did not like the "missed the mark" wording saying that "'Missed the mark' misses the mark as an apology" (Dove_Case164). The apology was described as "half hearted" and the "missed the mark" wording was described as "an understatement" (Dove_Case153). H&M's statement was described as "written with the same cold lack of emotion typical of internal communication and not acceptable for a public-facing apology you'd like people to believe is heartfelt and real" (H&M_Case71). In addition, some users argued that an apology was not enough and the companies need to do something to fix the situation such as fire those accountable and hire new people.

*History.* Some users brought up the history to demonstrate why the companies got in trouble for their ads. For example, a comment under H&M statement says, "…For yearsssss black peoples have been referred to as monkeys to suggest they are not human… For a international company catering to diverse markets they should have known better" (H&M_Case111). In Dove's case, the history of filming black people in soap advertisement was brought up, "Not the first time a Soap company depicted blacks as dirty, or unclean. Its so important to know history, if not  it will only repeat itself. #Shame" (Dove_Case34).
Boycott. In both cases, users called for boycotting the companies. The theme includes comments saying that the person would stop purchasing Dove's or H&M's products as well as comments calling for boycotting the company. For example, a comment under the H&M statement says, "I will never shop from you guys no more. Just saw this video going viral. I shop for all my kids at your store.. But with this video that I just watched I will NEVER be a customer No MORE!" (H&M_Case173). Another comments, under the Dove statement, stated, "Black ppl boycott  this product, ull see th difference" (Dove_Case160).
The negative comments that were not addressing the companies included such common theme as Society. In H&M's case, around 43% of negative comments addressed other users or society in general; the comparative figure for Dove was 12%.

*Society.* Some users attacked other users or society in general instead of leaving negative

comments about the companies. Such comments usually depicted other users or society as overly sensitive. The comments argued that others should "quit reading hate into everything!!!!!!!!!" (H&M_Case145); that other users are "ignorant, brittle minded people [that] reacted to the ad and saw it as racist" while in fact, the ad's message was the opposite (Dove_Case65). Some comments accused those who reacted negatively to the ads of "keeping racism alive" (H&M_Case64), and also claimed that this was "a case of "reverse" racism" (H&M_Case53).

There was also a theme that could be described as Negative feelings. In most cases, it is hard to define whom the comments falling under the theme addressed. These comments would simply express negative feelings without going into details. The theme includes such comments as "Ugh..so over this generation." (H&M_Case75); "#idiot #whiteprivilege #stupidtrumpster" (Dove_Case183); "Fucc y'all" (H&M_Case123), "Liars !!" (H&M_Case191); "Stfu" (H&M_Case159); "Terrible" (Dove_Case119), and others.


DISCUSSION

This study aimed to shed light on how the audience perceived crisis statements of H&M and Dove companies, i.e., the study aimed to look at the receivers' end of crisis communication in case of paracrises. First, the study revealed that there were more negative comments than comments from other categories in the H&M and Dove cases. The result corroborates previous findings regarding the "boomerang" effect that stems from the affordances of social media. Social media users shared H&M's and Dove's crisis statements as well as tagged their friends thus making the crises visible for a bigger audience. Due to this effect, social media was described as "a double-edged sword" (Ki and Nekmat, 2014, p. 145) for crisis communication. This raises questions about the use of social media in case of a crisis. Given the affordances of social media, what online statements would allow companies to make a shift from negative comments and accusations to an effective dialogue? How can a company overcome the boomerang effect? Should a company react to comments that include tagging other users? If so, how?

Also, the results of the qualitative analysis corroborate claims of the revised SCCT (Coombs 20188) suggesting that apology and corrective action would be an effective response to a faux pas paracrisis. Although comments with such themes as Racism, The Team, The Apology, Boycott, and History blame the companies for being racially insensitive and ignorant, a number of other themes, in all the three categories of comments, focus on other aspects of the crises. Those comments portray the companies as victims of overly sensitive societies and defend the companies. This demonstrates that the apologies and corrective actions from Dove and H&M allowed the public to shift attention from focusing on how racially insensitive Dove and H&M were, to defending both companies; showing the effect corrective action can have on the public. However, it is worth noting that there were differences in reactions to H&M and Dove's statements. Interestingly, in Dove's case, some users pointed at the previous racially insensitive ad published by the company. This aligns with SCCT initial claims suggesting that a history of similar crises would worsen publics' reactions to a given crisis (Coombs, 2007). In addition, the Boycott theme raises questions about the definition of paracrises and our expectations from them. Boycotts may bring not only a reputational loss but also a financial loss to organizations. What strategies could be employed to prevent such paracrises from growing into tangible crises bringing more than a reputational loss? How should an organization (or should not) respond to comments under its crisis statements

to take control over the situation?

Finally, an interesting take-away from the quantitative analysis of the themes is that a number of comments did not address the companies at all. User Chats theme dominated the discourse when it comes to neutral comments. This raises questions about the right way for organizations to enter the conversation about the crisis instead of preparing for a one-to-one dialogue. Furthermore, when it comes to negative comments, The Team was a dominant theme. Facebook users were calling out specific people who made the insensitive ad/catalogue instead of accusing the brands as a whole of being insensitive. This raises questions about a possible request for more personal communication with people who are in charge of specific actions in organizations. It also demonstrates a request for information about corrective actions from the specific team who was in charge.

## Theoretical and Practical Implications

The study has several theoretical and practical implications. For scholars, the study demonstrates the benefits of focusing on the receiver approach to crisis communication, and, more precisely of studying spontaneous reactions to crisis communication. The reactions that were analyzed for the study were emotional, authentic, and revealed patterns in publics' reactions to crisis communication that would not emerge in an experimental study. This is especially true for such theme as User chats that demonstrated the willingness of users to start their own conversations under crisis statements. In addition, the results of the study contribute to the understanding of a new modification of SCCT.

The study also provides practical implications for communication professionals. First, the study provides a list of common reactions to a crisis that deals with racial issues and falls under the category of faux pas paracrises. This could potentially be the first step to categorizing publics' responses and easing the process of preparation for crises for communication professionals in the digital era. Second, the results of the study provide extra evidence for the boomerang effect which calls communication professionals to be extra cautious when conducting crisis communication online.

## Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations. First of all, the study is limited to two paracrisis cases thus cannot be seen as generalisable. Second, the analysis is limited by the American Facebook pages of the brands whilst the organizations have Facebook pages for different countries. In addition, only 400 comments were analyzed; results may differ with a bigger sample size. Finally, the study only covers first-level responses thus ignoring a part of the conversation under both crisis statements. Nevertheless, the study opens up a promising area for future research. Future research should focus on several aspects of the receiver approach to crisis communication. First, strategic and crisis communication scholarship would benefit from an empirical-based categorization of publics' reactions to crisis communication on social media. This would enable scholars to come up with effective suggestions regarding possible brand responses to such reactions. Second, more tests of the new modification of SCCT and its applicability to spontaneous reactions are needed. Finally, there is a need for more studies about how people's cultural background affects reactions to crisis communication given the globalization trends and the affordances of social media.

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