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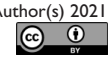
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Crisis history and hindsight: A stakeholder perspective on the case of Boeing 737-Max

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Abstract
This study assesses the so-called effect of crisis history, based on two crashes with the new Boeing 737-Max. While Boeing's responsibility was not clear cut after the first crash, the developments in the second crash led to a reinterpretation of initial responsibility for the first crash. This reinterpretation intensified the threat on Boeing's reputation, and raised doubts on the appropriateness of the initial response. This case study illustrates the importance for organizations to be wary and to anticipate developments when selecting and creating a crisis response. Otherwise, statements can backfire when new information comes to light as similar events occur.

Keywords
Blame, crisis communication, crisis history, framing, reputation

Introduction

On 29 October 2018, Lion Air flight 610 took off from Jakarta for a domestic flight. It never reached its destination, Pangkal Pinang, which is situated on the Indonesian island of Banka. Thirteen minutes after takeoff, the plane crashed into the Java Sea, killing all 189 passengers and crew (BBC.com, 2018). Only 5 months later, on 10 March 2019 Ethiopian Airlines flight 302 bound for Nairobi, Kenya crashed 6 minutes after takeoff

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from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (BBC.com, 2019). All 157 people on board were killed in the accident. The crashes renewed concerns about the brand-new model of aircraft involved in the accident, the popular Boeing 737-Max. The main concern was about a new anti-stall system that was installed in the Boeing 737-Max. Under certain conditions, the sensors of the system send erroneous data to the software system that pushes the nose of the aircraft down if it senses an imminent stall. This software error was hard to correct by pilots who were not familiar with the situation (National Transportation Safety Board, 2019).

A company that experiences a crisis, should be prepared to receive (part of the) blame. As Attribution Theory states, people seek explanations for the cause of negative events and crises (Weiner, 1985). In his Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), Coombs (2010, 2015) builds upon Weiner's research and discusses how different sets of attributions ask for different crisis response strategies. Regarding the responsibility for a crisis, the idea behind the adoption of Attribution Theory is that when a crisis happens, people try to determine why the event occurred and will make attributions of responsibility toward the organization involved (Coombs, 2010). In the attribution of responsibility, Coombs (2010) uses Weiner's (1985) theory to distinguish between internal causes (e.g. bad driver behavior) and external causes (bad weather conditions). Especially internal causes hurt the (corporate) reputation of the organization under crisis.

Coombs (2010, 2015) also argues that so-called *crisis history* is an intensifying factor in the perceived responsibility of crises and thus influences the potential damage on existing reputations. When a company or organization experiences two or more similar incidents in a row, it further shapes audience perceptions and attributions of blame. Apart from crisis history, prior reputation is another intensifying factor that shapes crisis responsibility in Coombs' SCCT. Later, Coombs (2020: 127) nuanced the intensifying factor and described "crisis history" as a contextual modifier, a factor "that can influence how much crisis responsibility stakeholders attribute to an organization."

Current research into the aspect of crisis history is limited. As far as studies were conducted, these were mostly based on experiments (Coombs, 2004; Eaddy and Jin, 2018; Lee and Kim, 2016). In order to extend our understanding of crisis history in the context of crisis communication, this article presents the results of a content analysis based on news articles on the two crises with Boeing's 737-Max aircraft. These crises are suited for an assessment of crisis history, as both involved the same type of aircrafts and the crises happened only four and a half months apart. Moreover, the incidents happened under similar circumstances. This makes the Boeing 737-Max incidents more suited for analysis than for instance the incidents with the two Malaysian Airlines flights MH370 (March 2014) and MH17 (July 2014). Even though both Malaysian Airlines incidents happened within a similar period of time, the incidents appear to be rather different in terms of circumstances. MH370 disappeared under unknown circumstances (Ashton et al., 2015), while MH17 was shot down from an area which was controlled by Russian-backed separatists (Dutch Safety Board, 2015). In sum, our research question is "*How did stakeholders respond to the two Boeing-737 Max crises and how does this relate to the concept of 'crisis history'?*"

The objective of this study is of an exploratory nature. The first section presents the dynamics of *crisis history* and the elements which are of particular value when

researching *crisis history*. The second section of the article discusses the methods, which are used for a content analysis where the two Boeing-crises are compared. The final two sections of the article present the results of the analysis and a discussion of the insights that come forward from the results. Finally, an outline is provided for organizations faced with the threat of a recurring crisis. The approach supports communication practitioners who might otherwise underestimate the threat of a future crisis and the way in which it can backfire on earlier statements made.

Characteristics of *crisis history*

Prior reputation can have both positive and negative effects on the reputation that is attributed to an organization in times of crisis. Coombs and Holladay (2006) refer to a halo-effect, where a favorable pre-crisis reputation can create a halo effect that protects an organization during a crisis. Likewise, they (Coombs and Holladay, 2006) also point to a velcro-effect, where an unfavorable prior reputation acts like *Velcro* and attracts additional reputational damage. In assessing potential reputational damage, the responsibility for a crisis is the cornerstone of SCCT and defines the most appropriate crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2004; Park and Len-Ríos, 2010). Coombs (2010) distinguishes three types of crises which represent increasing levels of attributions of crisis responsibility and threat presented by the crisis: the victim cluster (low crisis responsibility/low reputational threat), accidental cluster (minimal crisis responsibility/minimal reputational threat), and preventable cluster (strong crisis responsibility/strong reputational threat). Depending on the threat level, current theory proposes different response strategies. In the case of reputational threat, the theory emphasizes apologizing and accepting responsibility for crises as the primary communicative recommendation (Benoit and Pang, 2008).

Coombs' (2004) study showed that a history of similar crises intensified the reputational threat of a current crisis even when the crisis arose from the victimization of the organization or from an accident, rather than from the organization's intentional acts. His study also showed that the threat to reputation was primarily direct, indicating that crisis history leads to a greater reputational threat by lowering perceptions of the organization's reputation. Eaddy and Jin (2018) extended this research, by incorporating the impact of information source on publics' perceptions. Their study found that a positive crisis history does not give organizations a pass in current crises. Moreover, the experiment by Eaddy and Jin (2018) presented the insight that a fundamental element in crisis history is perceived crisis control by publics. Publics are probably less likely to attribute responsibility to an organization that experiences an act of terrorism, but still acknowledge that the organization had control over the act occurring (Eaddy and Jin, 2018). Lee and Kim (2016) urge for incorporating an industry-wide buffering effect in assessing crisis history. When an organization is faced with a crisis that is more common within the broader industry, this specific industry-related history works as a potential buffer to the reputation of the organization involved.

Rickard (2014), departing from a risk communication point of view, adds that attribution of responsibility of a given event is based on two factors: its controllability and its stability. Controllability refers to the extent to which the cause is perceived to be under

personal or situational control, while stability refers to the extent to which the cause is perceived to vary over time. Jong (2020) discusses how the impact of a final report of an investigation committee tends to be a potential *game changer* in the perceptions of the initial cause of a crisis. Nevertheless, research into crisis history tends to take the circumstances of a previous crisis as a given. This contrasts with Rickard's (2014) and Jong's (2020) observations that new insights might shed new light on the responsibility for the initial crisis. Potentially, such a reinterpretation of crises influences the choice for an appropriate crisis response strategy. In crisis literature, this is referred to as *structural incidentalism* (Muller, 2002), when crises are regarded as single incidents instead of acknowledging that these crises are symptoms of a broader and deeper crisis context.

If we want to understand how the aspect of crisis history potentially influences the threat on existing reputations, we must determine how stakeholders judged the crisis developments over time and how new insights possibly led to a reinterpretation of the first incident. Based on the above, the case study will be used to explore how stakeholders perceived Boeing and its crisis response strategies in both the first and the second crisis.

Methods

The objective of this study is to explore how stakeholders, when confronted with two similar crises, respond to the communication efforts by the company under crisis. Answering this research objective might tell us how to cope with the element of crisis history when organizations are faced with two similar crises in a relatively short period of time.

In order to categorize Boeing's initial crisis communication efforts, official statements were derived as primary text from the Boeing *newsroom* on their official website. This enabled us to understand how and why stakeholders reacted to news items that originated from the Boeing company. To analyze stakeholder reactions and opinions, we retrieved newspaper articles from the *New York Times* from the online *New York Times* archive. The *New York Times* is a renowned and influential international newspaper and its archive enables us to compare the coverage in multiple countries in a consistent manner.

In the selection, articles were searched with keywords: Boeing 737 MAX, Lion Air, Ethiopian Airlines, FAA, Boeing, United States, European Union, and/or China. For Lion Air flight 610 (Case I), a timeframe was chosen between 29 October 2018 and 29 November 2018. For Ethiopian Airlines flight 302 (Case II), a timeframe was chosen between 10 March 2019 and 10 April 2019. As such, only crisis responses four consecutive weeks after each airplane crash were included. This timeframe includes the breaking of the accidents, communication of involved stakeholders and the question of their responsibility in the media, as well as the reactions of victims' relatives during the time the crisis unfolded.

The stakeholders included are not predefined but will depend on the findings. We assume that newspaper articles would give voice to the stakeholders with a dominant role in the developing story. Based on the heuristic model by Mitchell et al. (1997), we look for influential stakeholders who show an ability to influence the perceptions of Boeing's

role in the crisis, have a legitimate relationship with the crisis context, and show an urgency to claim attention.

Stakeholder reactions were assessed by means of a codebook. We assigned three possible values to the content of newspaper articles: neutral, negative, or positive. A label was given based on the content and overall tone-of-voice of the entire newspaper article. Articles were labeled as "negative" when Boeing's performance was disliked, and "positive" when the stakeholder supported Boeing's efforts. When articles did not provide an interpretation or normative terminology, the articles were coded as "neutral." As part of the coding process, both authors added their interpretation of the findings to the table which can be found in Supplemental Appendix. All references to *New York Times* articles are presented in the same Supplemental Appendix.

The authors independently rated the set of statements on negative, neutral, or positive impact, based on an interpretation of statements by stakeholders. Cohen's Kappa ($N = 80$; $p < 0.001$) was calculated using SPSS 27 and found to be 0.929. Differences were found in cases based on three statements (Supplemental Appendix, statements 11, 19, and 74), where one of the authors coded "neutral" while the other author coded either "positive" or "negative." There were no instances where "positive" turned into "negative" or vice versa. The three different judgments were highlighted in the Supplemental Appendix.

Results

Using these search terms and demarcations, 294 articles in total were collected. Of those, 48 articles involved stakeholder reactions which could be used for analysis. In addition, 13 of Boeing's official press releases were used, which were all statements made in the chosen timeframe. The print media's reaction to the Boeing 737-Max crisis was delineated in the 48 *New York Times* articles that were identified.

Boeing's response after Lion Air crash

In Boeing's first statement (October 29, 2018), the company shared that it is deeply saddened by the loss of Lion Air flight JT 610. They provided technical assistance at the request and under the direction of government authorities investigating the incident.

Lion Air president director Edward Sirait responded that the plane "experienced an unspecified technical problem during a flight the day before" (Supplemental Appendix, statement 4). As the aircraft was in service only for 3 months, the company is very concerned about the incident. Soon afterwards, the deputy chief of Indonesia's National Transport Safety Committee comments (Supplemental Appendix, statement 18) that Boeing's manual was "incomplete" when it came to advising pilots on how to handle a situation in which false data is fed into the automatic anti-stall system.

In a statement on November 7th, 2018, Boeing repeated the sentiment that it worked closely with government authorities investigating the incident. It issued an Operations Manual Bulletin (OMB) directing operators to address circumstances where there was erroneous input. Within a week, stakeholder FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) showed that it agreed with Boeing, supporting them by reinforcing their bulletin. However, pilots started to raise their voice that the airplane could not be trusted, which

becomes a powerful message in the public arena. The head of the Indonesian Transportation Safety Committee referred to the flight manual, which did not explain what to do in case the automatic anti-stall system overruled the pilot. Boeing gave another statement on November 16th, 2018 and declares that the company was confident in the safety of the Boeing 737-Max. On November 27th, 2018, the company stated that "appropriate responses were already included in flight manuals and contained in existing procedures." An investigator from the Indonesian National Transportation Safety Committee stated that the FAA-certificate for the new Boeing 737-Max made them trust Boeing's new airplane (Supplemental Appendix, statement 25).

Boeing's response after Ethiopian Airlines crash

After the Ethiopian Airlines crash, Boeing stated that the company was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of passengers and crew (March 10, 2019). Boeing responded in similar wording compared to the Lion Air crash, referring to its heartfelt sympathies and the provision of technical assistance. In neutral terms, aviation expert Robert Stengel, professor of engineering and applied sciences at Princeton University, pointed at the similarities. He stated "If you're simply looking at circumstantial evidence, this gives you a pause, doesn't it?" (Supplemental Appendix, statement 29). Soon after, China and Indonesia started to ground Boeing 737-Max aircrafts, followed by Ethiopian Airlines. The FAA did not want to jump to conclusions and told the *New York Times* that the investigation had only just begun. As passengers and pilots started to share their doubts, Boeing repeated that pilots would always be able to override the flight control, even when sensors provided erroneous data. On March 12, 2019, the European Union followed China and Indonesia, by suspending all flight operations of the Boeing 737-Max model. The FAA stuck to its earlier remarks and repeated that there was no basis to ground the aircraft (Supplemental Appendix, statement 50), accompanied by US airlines and US president Trump who regarded the plane as safe. Three US Senators put pressure on the FAA to ground the aircraft as a precautionary measure. The following day, the FAA decided to ground the plane as a temporary measure. Boeing supports the decision. Aviation expert Richard Aboulafia claimed that the FAA and Boeing were collaborating in a relationship that became too close (Supplemental Appendix, statement 68). Pilots withdrew their trust in the aircraft, while relatives called for Boeing to admit its faults. On March 18, 2019, Boeing released a statement which reminded the public of their expertise and commitment to safety. Relatives of the Lion Air crash appeared in the media and held Boeing accountable for the accident. They filed a lawsuit, claiming that "The plane was defective and in a condition that rendered it unreasonably dangerous for its intended use" (Supplemental Appendix, statement 94). In statement 111 (Supplemental Appendix), they express their disappointment in the company, as Boeing did not learn from the first incident. According to the relatives, it is "absolutely inexcusable that it takes another crash for people to kick this investigation and improvements into high gear."

Indonesia's top aviation regulatory official and aviation experts stated that both Boeing and the FAA were slow in responding to requests on April 2, 2019. He referred to them as *The Americans* (Supplemental Appendix, statement 114). A spokesperson for

the American Airlines Pilot Union commented the system which was introduced by Boeing on the 737-Max was too aggressive (Supplemental Appendix, statement 119). On April 4, 2019, Boeing shared another statement where it commented on the preliminary report on the Ethiopian Airlines flight 302 Investigation. It repeated that flight crews will always have the ability to override the flight control system. Ethiopian Airlines confirmed (Supplemental Appendix, statement 145) that it was considering canceling its order for other 737-Max airplanes. Meanwhile, the US Transportation Secretary stated that it would not clear Boeing 737-Max for flight again until federal officials were satisfied that Boeing fixed its flawed flight control system.

Discussion

Boeing showed compassion after both crashes; both statements (October 29, 2018 and March 10, 2019) communicated that the company was deeply saddened, extended its heartfelt sympathies, and provided technical assistance to the companies involved. After the initial crash, stakeholders (Lion Air, relatives, investigators) reacted in a rather neutral manner, in which no responsibility was attributed to Boeing. Blame levels started to increase, when Boeing referred to its Operations Manual Bulletin directing operators to address circumstances where there was erroneous input from one of the sensors. At the time, the FAA showed commitment to Boeing, reinforcing the bulletin. Pilots reacted on the bulletin, claiming that the new procedure was not included in the standard operating manual and Boeing's manual was *incomplete*. Boeing denied its overall responsibility and stated that the company was confident in the safety of the Boeing 737-Max.

Boeing decided to use "denial" as their crisis response strategy after the crash on March 10, 2019. According to Benoit's typology, this is a strategy of "simple denial" (Benoit, 1995), where an organization denies any association to a disruption. In this case, Boeing did not keep the option open that there indeed might be some sort of problem with the Boeing 737-Max and erroneous input from one of its sensors. Unlike the first crisis, stakeholders reacted in a negative manner, including the decision to ground national airlines in several countries around the world. The FAA still showed a commitment to Boeing, which resulted in some of the stakeholders referring to the organizations as *The Americans*, as if employees of Boeing and the FAA all worked for the same company. The company was supported by President Trump and the American pilot association, until the President finally decided to ground the aircrafts as well.

Even though the cause of both crashes was unclear and the fatality of the flight could be caused by something other than the erroneous input from one of the sensors, stakeholders were largely negative on Boeing's role in the crisis. Journalists from the *New York Times* also interviewed relatives of victims from the Lion Air crash, an Indonesian top aviation regulatory official, an Indonesian investigator, and representatives from the Indonesian Garuda airlines company. As a result, both crises were united into one new story with an overall negative impact on Boeing's reputation as the world's primary manufacturer of commercial jetliners.

An implication of the comparison of these two cases is that it shows how the two crises were intertwined. Stakeholders from the first crisis raised their voice in the second crisis again, stressing their concerns with even clearer comments. While the crisis

responses not only influence perceptions regarding case II, the second case also results in a reinterpretation of case I. The news articles show a development of how the crash with Ethiopian Airlines sheds a new light on what happened with the Boeing 737-Max of Lion Air. Even though Boeing might have received the benefit of doubt by some of its stakeholders in the Lion Air-case, suspicion increases that the problem with erroneous data might be a structural problem, not an incidental failure. In terms of Weiner's (1985) attribution theory, the most likely cause of the crash was no longer regarded as an external but internal cause. This change on the perceived cause increased the attributed responsibility and damage on Boeing's corporate reputation.

According to Coombs (2010), denial strategies are best used only for combating rumors and/or challenges to the morality of an organization's behaviors. In this case, Boeing denied that the brand-new Boeing 737-Max was unsafe. This brought the company to a position where their statements became less convincing, where there indeed appeared to be a problem with the new sensors. In any chosen response, a company should anticipate that the company makes its crisis response strategy based on a wrong assessment of the situation (either consciously or unconsciously) and the cause of the crisis might turn out to be different than initially thought. Translated to the case of Boeing 737-Max, a crisis response strategy in which Boeing shared that a failure of the sensor data was rather unlikely but under investigation, would have kept the option open to change their position swiftly when new insights came forward from internal and external investigations.

Such a strategy might have supported Boeing in approaching the Boeing 737-Max crisis as a typical incident of product failure. When stating that the option of a product failure is kept open and advice is shared accordingly, a company shows that it takes its responsibility toward its customers. Boeing did, however, fully deny that something was wrong with the aircraft. Since the complete denial was used as a central element in its crisis response strategy, Boeing implicitly also denied having any responsibility for the cause of the two crashes. When investigations finally demonstrated that Boeing was indeed responsible, it not only hurt the reputation of the 737-Max as a product but damaged the reputation of Boeing as a company as well. As such, the crisis was elevated from a product-related crisis to a crisis which hurt the reputation and credibility of the aircraft manufacturer.

Where Coombs and Holladay (2002) suggest that an unfavorable prior reputation acts like *Velcro*, the Boeing 737-Max case-study shows that such a *velcro*-effect can also be developed in hindsight. The crash of the Ethiopian Airline 737-Max shed a different light on the circumstances of the earlier crash in Indonesia. With hindsight, this led to a reinterpretation of the initial crisis responsibility of the aircraft manufacturer. While Boeing's responsibility was not clear cut after the first crash, the developments in the second crash led to a reinterpretation of responsibility for the previous crash. This reinterpretation intensified the threat toward Boeing, as the new insights brought stakeholders to the interpretation that the Lion Air crash was not in the victim cluster, but the preventable cluster. This brings us to the insight that the *velcro*-effect can be developed in hindsight and thereby influences the perceptions during the occurrence of a second crisis. As such, our study shows a new perspective on the influence of crisis history that is at play during crises. As the perception of responsibility for past crises is not static but might be rather dynamic, organizations under crisis have to take this dynamic into account. When

stakeholders start to reevaluate circumstances and understand that two crashes should not be regarded as separate incidents, it becomes a signal that something structural is underlying, similar to what Muller (2002) refers to as *structural incidentalism*. A response on structural incidentalism transfers a company to what Coombs (2010) refers to as the "preventable cluster." Even when the individual crisis initially was regarded as part of the "victim cluster," the second crisis shows that there might be a more structural problem lying underneath the crisis that occurred.

The assessment of *New York Times* articles also shows that Boeing created a double communication crisis. This refers to the situation where the handling of communication creates a new crisis in itself (Frandsen and Johansen, 2010, 2016). Overall, stakeholders found the company's crisis response improper or inadequate. The company had seemed slow and passive in their response. Their strategy was largely defensive and lacked openness and accountability. Contradicting statements and reiterations of confidence in the safety of the aircraft were not deemed credible when evidence from investigations in the second case suggested otherwise.

The media clippings also show that stakeholders seemed to vary in their focus. While stakeholder groups such as the FAA, investigators, passengers, and the countries or governments who communicated were more concerned with the product and how it was formed and certified, stakeholder groups such as relatives of victims and aviation experts were more concerned with the way the company interacted with its publics and what it communicated. Pilots were concerned with both, as they voiced their concerns and critique about manuals and training on the plane's system being inadequate, as well as their disagreement with Boeing's statements toward the public.

From these findings it can be concluded that Boeing's crisis history in the 737-Max crisis has amplified stakeholders' negative evaluations of the company, creating a more negative reputation. This illustrates the importance for an organization to be wary when selecting and creating a crisis response, as previous statements can backfire when new information comes to light and similar events occur again. In the end, stakeholders will weigh the likelihood of coincidence and readjust the perceived responsibility for preventive measures by the company involved.

Further research

The current definition of crisis history uses a rather simplistic view of the historical aspects and does not take into account the complexity of the dynamics in the aftermath of crises. First, further research is suggested to explore the extent to which the impact of "crisis history" depends on the timeframe between the incidents. If, as an example, BP were to be faced with another oil spill, it would still be interpreted in the historical context of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico. This suggests that crisis history casts long shadows. Even though such a spill is different from the current case, where the Boeing incidents were just months apart, further research might provide us with clues on how to deal with this effect. It also closely relates to Coombs' (2020: 137) suggestion, to further explore how the disclosure of past crisis information by the organization under crisis might work as a variation on stealing thunder. Of course, potential room for maneuver is likely to depend on the level of responsibility assigned to the organization.

Also, the impact of crisis history as a mechanism might differ from one group of stakeholders to another. To some stakeholders, previous crises might fade out over time. To others, as Waymer (2013) notes on the implications of the unethical medical Tuskegee Experiments, it might be illusionary that time will heal all wounds. In the case of Boeing's 737-Max, we noted that relatives of victims expressed their wish that Boeing showed it learned from the accident. It was their main reason to raise their voice again after the second crash. In our interpretation of the statement (Supplemental Appendix, statement 111), we draw the conclusion that the relatives' perception of the first crash have worsened or amplified by the second crash—it is no more "bad luck," but incomprehension and astonishment that it has happened again. Current crisis communication scholarship does not take different perceptions among stakeholders on historical organizational behavior into account. It might give practitioners the false impression that the "crisis history" will not have disturbing effects as long as support for victims is based on current SCCT requirements and they receive their expression of sympathy, corrective actions, or trauma counseling when needed (Jong and Brataas, 2021). As not all stakeholders are equal, this requires more in-depth studies on how victims, relatives, and other stakeholders experience the concept of "crisis history." In this particular case, interviews with families directly impacted by the crisis or surveys among the general public about their thoughts of Boeing's post crisis might provide a richer analysis of this crisis context and provide a more complete, nuanced, understanding of "crisis history" than currently articulated in the literature.

Concluding remarks and limitations

This study sheds new light on the impact of crisis history as an intensifying factor in reputational damage. With the second crisis ensuing, pressure on the company increased as the number of stakeholders communicating grew from the first crash to the second crash, as well as the frequency of their reactions. Most stakeholders were balanced and neutral in their opinions of Boeing after the first crash as it was regarded as an accidental crisis and little was yet known about the cause and crisis responsibility for the plane crash. However, as the first crash became crisis history of the second crash that followed, stakeholder perceptions predominantly became more negative. The situation was no longer perceived as part of the accidental cluster, but reinterpreted as a preventable crisis.

While organizations might be tempted to respond to alleged crisis responsibilities right away, one should not underestimate the potential long-term and negative effects in terms of reputational damage (Jong, 2020). In terms of crisis communication, this implies that companies that choose a full denial response strategy in a crisis, must anticipate possible backfire when a similar crisis happens shortly afterwards. A full denial of responsibility might be a fitting strategy for a crisis that occurs once, but becomes less convincing when a similar crisis happens shortly afterwards as it raises doubts on the appropriateness of the initial response.

Two study limitations should be discussed. First, the collection of newspaper articles was limited to articles from the *New York Times*. We are aware that we excluded clippings from other outlets, although we assume that discussions in the *New York Times* reflect the international debate on Boeing's 737-Max crisis. Second, we cannot dismiss

the fact that journalists could possibly frame the stakeholders' positions in a way that does not fully represent their actual point of view. However, we believe that it is highly unlikely that the complete series of articles would give a distorted picture of the stakeholders' opinions on Boeing's crises.

From the findings of this study it can be concluded that Boeing's crisis history in the 737-Max crisis has amplified stakeholders' negative evaluations of the company, creating an overall more negative reputation. This illustrates the importance for an organization to be wary and anticipate developments when selecting and creating a crisis response. Otherwise, statements can backfire when new information comes to light as similar events occur.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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Author biographies

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