



## **And the Coolest Monkey in the Jungle**

A Case study of H&M's online Crisis  
Communication

Mette Kirk Kjærsgaard

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the crisis, which H&M experienced in January 2018 after the 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle' incident. The crisis emerged after a photo on H&M's web shop featuring an African-American boy in a hoodie with the writing 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle', sparked racist accusations on social media towards H&M. H&M's social media accounts overflowed with comments calling H&M racist and condemning the behavior and decisions, which led to this sweatshirt being put on an African-American boy, focusing on the subliminal messaging this induced. H&M therefore issued a public apology across social media channels, taking full responsibility for the crisis.

This thesis therefore deals with the uprising on social media against H&M, and how the crisis communication was constructed, leading to the following problem formulation with sub-questions:

**How may this thesis' choice of theory and methodological framework enrich the field of Crisis Communication on Social Media?**

- *How was H&M's 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle' crisis perceived by consumers on social media?*
- *Which rhetorical aspects did H&M apply in the apology issued?*

This is analyzed using a thematic analysis conducted through coding, which establishes the consumer perspective, both on H&M and the crisis, but also the perception of the crisis communication. The apology issued via a Press Release was analyzed using the Appraisal Framework, which considers the evaluative stance of the writer, and how the text establishes feelings, and lets the reader adopt a similar stance. Additionally, an analysis of rhetorical appeals was conducted, as this in combination with an Appraisal analysis helped to establish how rhetorical aspects aid crisis communication and its adoption. Henceforth, H&M's Press Release was analyzed

using the Situational Crisis Communication Theory by Timothy Coombs, to establish whether H&M adopted the best suited approach in the aftermath.

The findings concluded that 15% of consumers viewed H&M and its crisis communication in a positive light and 26% in a negative light, despite the rhetorical analysis revealing that H&M followed the best suited approach for this given crisis. The Appraisal analysis revealed a high level of *Judgment* markers towards H&M itself, and *graduation* markers enforcing the unequivocal admittance of guilt. Simultaneously, the analysis of persuasive appeals revealed a higher level of *Ethos* and *Pathos*, hence focusing on feelings rather than logical and rational reasoning. This finding is also in accordance to the ethical nature of the crisis.

Conclusively, the thesis found that despite H&M's best intentions and practices, the ethical nature of the crisis acted as a natural hedge to the results of crisis communication.

OVERVIEW OF THEMES – CODING ANALYSIS		
Theme Number	Theme	Abbreviation
Theme 1	<b>Overreacting</b>	OVR
Theme 2	<b>Racism/Race/Racial slur</b>	RAC
Theme 3	<b>Offensive act</b>	OFA
Theme 4	<b>Apology/Responsibility</b>	AOR
Theme 5	<b>Perspective</b>	PER
Theme 6	<b>Mistake (Innocent vs. Intentional)</b>	MII
Theme 7	<b>Ignorance</b>	IGN
Theme 8	<b>Forgiveness</b>	FOR
Theme 9	<b>White supremacy</b>	WSY
Theme 10	<b>Black culture</b>	BCU
Theme 11	<b>Boycott</b>	BOY
Theme 12	<b>Subliminal messaging</b>	SME

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## INTRODUCTION

Social media has made the world seem smaller and connections seem larger. We are now able to form opinions about events that transpire across the globe, and let them appear as though they had happened in our own backyard. Friendships can be kept across oceans and companies can be run from the convenience of solely your computer. Social media plays a crucial role in this respect. It lets us follow events of the world and aids in constructing our worldview. This importance of social media is also vital for companies. Having a social media presence, lets companies stay updated on people's perception of them, and aids in having an omnipresence that would hopefully benefit the company and its corporate reputation. However, social media may also be the double-edged sword, since it also provides consumers with the opportunity to rapidly respond to transgressions, before the company has a chance to alter perceptions or tone down an incident. Companies are through social media under constant surveillance and scrutiny, and crisis communication in this respect may become necessary. Crisis communication provides a company with the opportunity to alter perceptions of a crisis, or at least lessen the impact that a crisis may have on corporate reputation. This is where The Situational Crisis Communication Theory by Timothy Coombs comes into play. Such a theory may help a company establish the nature of the crisis and from this form a relevant response.

A company crisis may take many forms. A company may experience a crisis after an oil spill, bad HR Management, product recalls, or the crisis may be of an ethical nature. Questions of ethics is exactly what H&M had to address in January 2018, where they experienced a so-called 'shitstorm' after consumers saw a photo on H&M's web shop, of an African-American boy wearing a hoodie with the writing 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle'. People immediately took to social media to

express their opinions of this, claiming the photo to be racist. H&M therefore had to issue an apology. After seeing this crisis unfold, I took an interest in seeing the perception of the crisis on social media, after H&M had issued their apology. The interest in crisis communication and how this is constructed led me to establishing a case study with the following problem formulation:

**How may this thesis' choice of theory and methodological framework enrich the field of Crisis Communication on Social Media?**

- *How was H&M's 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle' crisis perceived by consumers on social media?*
- *Which rhetorical aspects did H&M apply in the apology issued?*

This problem formulation should help me to conclude on how consumers' perception of the crisis and H&M was facilitated by social media, since this will be conducted through comments on Instagram. Simultaneously, the focus on the issued apology aids in establishing a perspective from that of the company. The thesis starts out with a context chapter, to help understand the crisis and its background, moving onto a literature review which aids in establishing prominent theory within Crisis Communication. This helps to form my theoretical foundation, which serves as a backdrop for my following methodological aspects. The theoretical foundation also serves a purpose in my analysis, since this helps to form a link between the methodological frameworks and underlying theoretical implications.

## CONTEXT CHAPTER

This context chapter provides a backdrop for the thesis, by explaining the company background and how the crisis emerged in real life and on social media.

### PROFILE OF H&M

H&M is known as one of the largest clothing empires around the world, with over 4700 stores in over 28 countries. The company was founded in 1973 by Erling Persson in Sweden. The company started as a 'Hennes' store in the 1960's, later expanding into including men's clothing, adding to the name, now called Hennes & Mauritz (Cohen and Stansell 2009, 182).

During the 1970's, the company decided to look beyond Scandinavia, and opened their first store in the UK. The response was mixed, but the company remained strong, and opened its next store in Switzerland. By 1994, the company's revenue topped 13,4 billion (SEK) (Cohen and Stansell 2009, 183). During the next decade, H&M retained a focus on international expansion and continued to develop subsidiary brands with great success. Additionally, the company has done several partnerships with high-end fashion brands, such as Karl Lagerfeld, Jimmy Choo and Stella McCartney (Cohen and Stansell 2009, 184).

H&M also owns the brands Monki, Weekday, &Other Stories, Cos, Cheap Monday and ARKET. In 2018, despite having yearly revenue of 200 billion Swedish kroners, this was below the growth expectations of the brand (Ganderup 2018). The last couple of years H&M has seen a disappointing development. The H&M stock value has decreased with over 40% and H&M has had to close over 170 stores, and decrease the opening of new stores with 40% (Ganderup 2018). With such a large



impact on the global fashion industry, comes great responsibility. Corporate Social Responsibility has gained great momentum over the last decade, and as a large global brand, people all over the world are looking to H&M for high ethical standards to protect the environment and cultural values.

## CRISIS HISTORY OF H&M

With the emergence of social media, a global company is subject to a higher amount of scrutiny, since the ability to share, like and dislike actions from a company has increased. H&M has experienced this first-hand. The emergence of a high number of brands where everything is rapidly changing and consumer groups are demanding innovation along with high ethical standards, what makes a brand stand out is its story and public relations. “Everything that surrounds the brand matters, and is especially important to the young generation. Brands which show a transparent value chain are thriving”<sup>1</sup> (Wimmer in Ganderup 2018). Despite being named one of the world’s most ethical companies for the seventh year in a row by Ethisphere, H&M still received backlash for poor working conditions in its factories in the East and for being insensitive to racial issues. The latest issue is the debacle over a children’s sweatshirt, with the printed text ‘coolest monkey in the jungle’. This incident has caused a lot of drama and debate on social media, therefore, it will be subject to this thesis (H&M, *H&M named as one of the world’s most ethical companies* 2017).

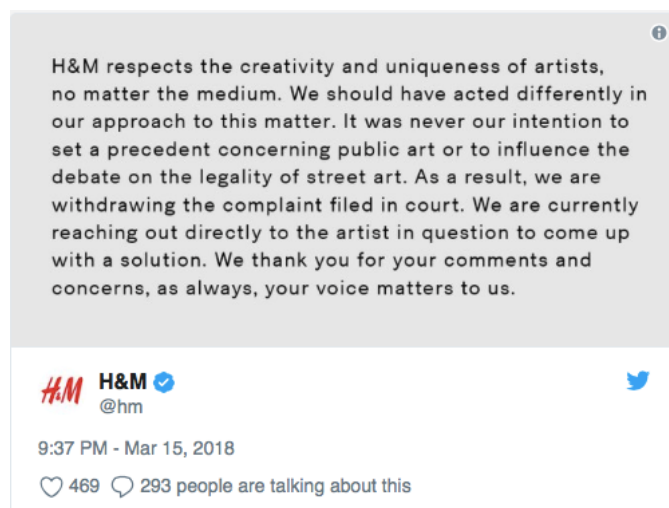
Going back in H&M’s media archives, no press release regarding crisis communication has been issued long before this incident - One must go as far back as November 2014, before a similar Press Release is published. This previous incident surrounds Ethiopian labor laws and whether H&M had any ties to land grabs in Ethiopia. H&M’s response in this regard was more fact-based and read:

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<sup>1</sup> Alt det, der ligger rundt om brandet, er ekstremt vigtigt for især den unge generation. Vi ser brands, som er transparent om hele værdikæden. De har vind i sejlene”

“We are aware that land-grabbing is a risk in Ethiopia, and we have therefore included this risk in our assessment. We always conduct a risk-analysis before entering a new market, in cooperation with the prospective market, and in this case also ILO, SIDA, UD and local organizations”<sup>2</sup> (H&M *Kommentarer til Kalla Fakta program*, 2014).

The most recent backlash H&M has received was after its use of a distinctive piece of street art made by Jason Williams in Brooklyn as the background for promoting a new active-wear line called New Routine. The artist quickly reached out to H&M based on copyright infringements, since permission had not been given to H&M. At first, H&M claimed that since street art is essentially illegal, Williams had no right to claim copyright. Ultimately H&M filed a lawsuit against Williams, which consumers did not respond well to (Bain 2018). People quickly turned to social media, and used the hashtag #boycotthm. People had even started to vandalize H&M stores, with graffiti. H&M seemed to quickly realize that this was not a battle it could win, and voluntarily issued a retraction of the lawsuit and a public apology. It resulted in the following statement on Twitter:



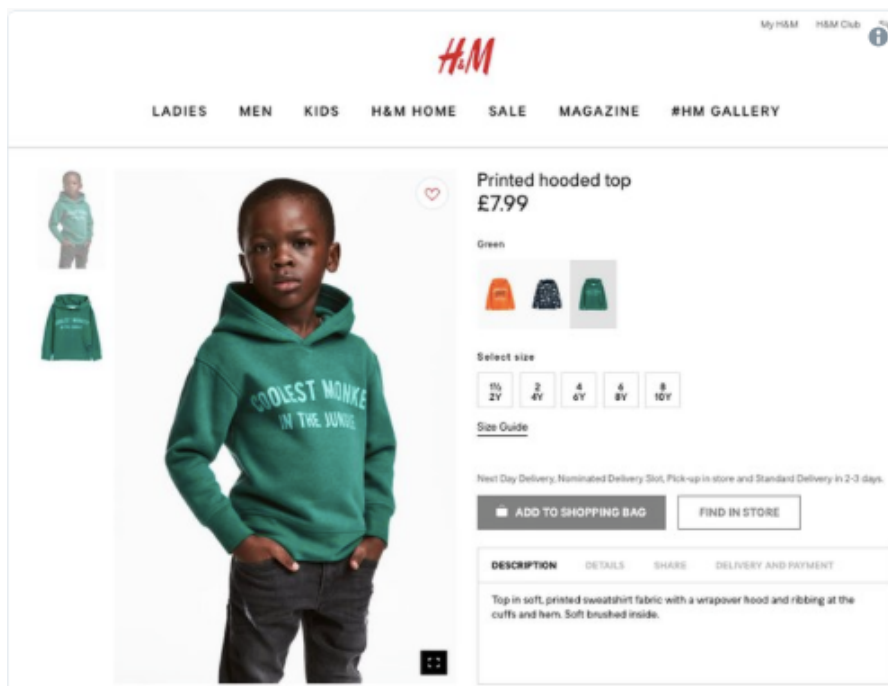
(Bain 2018).

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<sup>2</sup> “Eftersom vi vet att land-grabbing kan förekomma i Etiopen, inkluderade vi denna faktor i vår riskutvärdering. Vi gör alltid en riskanalys innan vi går in på en ny inköpsmarknad och i samband med denna har vi haft en dialog med såväl ILO, SIDA och UD som lokala organisationer”

## REVIEW OF “THE COOLEST MONKEY IN THE JUNGLE” INCIDENT

On January 8th people once again turned to social media. A product-shoot of an African-American boy dressed in a green hoodie with the phrase ‘Coolest monkey in the jungle’ printed on the front, emerged on H&M’s global B2C web shop (See photo below). Consumers were furious of the negative cultural connotations this implied and demanded for H&M to take responsibility for the unfortunate actions. How long the picture with the boy had been on the online shop is unknown, but taking into account the quick response time on the social media, it probably had not been present for long, before people started reacting.



(H&M.com)

Quickly, the picture along with captions had been shared on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and many global cultural ‘stars’ have dissociated themselves from the brand. The Canadian musician

Abel Tesfaye, better known as The Weeknd, took to Twitter and announced that he would not be working with H&M again (Poulsen 2018):



The initial response from H&M, according to people's reaction, was weak and diminishing the severity of the connotations of the sweatshirt.

Quartz Online magazine wrote in an article regarding H&M's apology, that the crisis communication in this respect was badly structured and "Instead of sincerely apologizing for creating and promoting an offensive product, H&M apologized for 'offending people with this image.' The subtle difference between saying "I'm sorry for what I did" and "I'm sorry if you feel badly" is profound" (Fessler 2018). H&M ultimately issued a stronger apology, taking full responsibility for the unfortunate incident.

## THE APOLOGIES

The apologies following the crisis were distributed on H&M's own 'Media' page, its Facebook page and Instagram. The apologies contained the same information across channels. The official Press Release contains a slightly fuller version of the apology. The apologies on Instagram and the press release are included in appendix 4 and 5, respectively.

Following the ‘Coolest monkey in the jungle’ crisis, costumers in South Africa started to react to the racial undertones and attacked H&M stores across the country. It was members of a left-wing, youth-oriented political movement who stormed H&M stores in South Africa on January 13<sup>th</sup> 2018, starting to trash the stores and demanded all respective stores to be closed within 24 hours (Chutel, 2018). H&M currently has 13 stores in South Africa, and following the incident the company issued a formal statement telling that H&M’s stores in South Africa had been temporarily closed.



A South African store after the protests (Wattles 2018).

The previous introduction to H&M’s crisis history serves as a backdrop for the empirical data, which is the issued press release on their website, and the pictures posted on Instagram with corresponding statements, following the ‘Coolest Monkey in the Jungle’ incident.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

My literature review will serve as an account for previous theory regarding crisis communication and its implications. My literature review is therefore more wide-ranging, since the purpose of this is to establish an initial of the key concepts and previous studies on the subject of crisis

communication on social media. “Crisis management has received renewed scholarly attention because of the abundance of social networks (SNS) and the fast manner information can reach large audiences” (DiStaso, Vafeiadis and Amaral 2015, 223). Weick (1995) argued before the emergence of social media that the severity of the crisis is not the critical part, but instead how fast and what type of response the organization provides the public with. Hence, if a company is able to respond quickly and in an ethical manner, it has the possibility of hedging the magnitude of the crisis. Social media aids in just that despite the challenges it also brings about (DiStaso, Vafeiadis and Amaral 2015, 223).

Crisis communication can be argued to be related to Corporate Social Responsibility, as this considers the moral values of a company. A projectionist approach to this is “based on the assumption that in order to be socially responsible, media should meet the expectations of society” (Sandoval 2014, 53). The expectations of society rely on an ethical standpoint of giving a truthful and comprehensive account of current events and to give way to comments and critics (Sandoval 2014, 53). Crisis communication on social media is highly relevant in this respect, seeing that this embodies the function of being a forum for comments and critics.

## CRISIS COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Given the scope of social media today, it is of crucial relevance for companies when managing reputation and potentially dealing with a crisis. Social media has changed the way people interact with companies, and made dialogic interaction crucial and emphasized this importance in a crisis. “Medium choice and use on the part of both organizations and stakeholders impacts communication on many levels” (Chewning 2015, 73).

A crisis may be viewed as an incident that changes and challenges corporate reputation and the communication strategies of a company. An organizational crisis has been defined as “a fundamental threat to the very stability of a system, a questioning of core assumptions and beliefs, and risk to high priority goals, including organizational image, legitimacy, profitability, and ultimately, survival” (Sellnow, Seeger & Ulmer, 2002, 126). Crisis communication should ideally be transparent, empathetic, dialogic and constant, for it to have a positive effect on the outcome and essentially the reputation of a company.

The literature on crisis communication has seen a shift because of social media, as this is where most consumers engage with a company now, hence an omnipresence of the company is needed. “Moreover, consumers have shifted their information seeking behavior with regard to products and services from offline sources to electronic word-of-mouth sources (eWOM)” (Dijkman, Kerkhof and Beukeboom 2015, 58). Because of this shift in control for the company, corporate reputation has become increasingly difficult for a company to manage, since engagement from the consumers is high on social media. This however, also presents opportunities for a company to use social media “as a vessel for authentic and transparent crisis communication directly communicated to publics instead of being filtered through news media” (Jahng and Hong 2017, 148). Dijkmans et al. argue: “The most prevalent motives for companies to use social media are enhancing trustworthiness, brand attitude, and customer commitment” (2015, 59). The purpose of their article is mainly to provide empirical evidence for a relationship between a consumer’s engagement in a company’s social media activities and corporate reputation. Hypotheses were set up and an online survey was established, using the Likert scale. This method is apparent in a large amount of theory available within the field of crisis communication. This gives value to the importance of consumer perspectives for crisis communication on social media, as the consumer may be viewed to be in power in this respect.

Generally, literature suggests that organizations need to adjust approaches, seeing that social media creates a different perspective and alternative possibilities for stakeholders.

Many scholars have applied crisis communication theory to real-life cases. Findings from Roschan, Warren and Carr (2016) suggest that when social media is used for crisis communication, organizations do not always follow the guidelines provided by crisis communication literature. Prior literature suggested that organizations would provide status updates on social media, and respond vigorously to stakeholder assumptions and questions, but this study revealed that only 15% took this position, despite the advantages (Roschan, Warren and Carr 2016, 358).

Liu and Fraustino argue “that publics use social media during crises because of convenience; based on social norms and personal recommendations; for humor and levity; for information seeking, timely information, and unfiltered information; to determine disaster magnitude (...)” (2014, 544). Additionally, corporate reputations are subject to additional scrutiny, since users expect organizations to communicate ethically and truthfully in all respects. “When confronted with social media risks, organizations generally follow one of four strategies: absence, presence, attendance and omnipresence” (Aula, 2010). Scholars agree that authenticity of voice and transparency are vital in producing and handling a crisis communication situation successfully (Ott and Theunissen 2015, 97). Ott and Theunissen analyzed three case studies of organizations, which had been subject to a crisis, where response strategies were compared to those suggested in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Coombs, which will be further explained later (Ott and Theunissen 2015, 101).

When conducting my literature review as one of the first steps in my writing process, I came across the master thesis conducted by Bowen and Kragh (2017). Their thesis is set out to analyze the response made by United Airlines in the aftermath of a crisis that went viral on social media.



Bowen and Kragh analyzed the crisis communication made by the United Airlines and the responding comments on Facebook and Twitter. What stood out in their analysis, was that the United Airlines issued three different statements over a time period, and Bowen and Kragh therefore wished to analyze if the responding social media comments and their view on the United Airlines changed accordingly. Especially their analysis apparatus stood out as interesting, since they combined coding analysis with rhetorical analysis. Therefore, I will include this type of methodological apparatus in my thesis, which is also highly relevant to my own problem statement, seeing as this regards the results of crisis communication.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Other scholars have deconstructed crisis responses to detect the core message and ultimately what type of crisis response strategy has been applied on what media. Chewning applied a semantic network analysis to determine what the overall narrative for a company was, when taking different mediums into account. “As medium theory suggests, media choice had both micro- and macro-level implications, in that BP’s use of both media releases and Facebook portrayed different, albeit complementary versions of the story” (2015, 77). Ultimately, this study provided a way to note nuance in responses across different mediums, and offered insights into the company in question, British Petroleum and its crisis response strategies (Chewning, 2015, 78).

Jin, Pang and Smith (2018) argue that strategic communication is best described as an “enactment of stance on a continuum” (43). One end of the spectra shows advocacy, meaning arguing exclusively for one’s own case, while the other end shows accommodation, meaning completely accommodating the other company’s view. To determine one’s stance, the authors have created 87 factors that lie along the continuum. Ultimately this stance should help a company in taking ethics

into account when dealing with a crisis, and using accuracy, transparency, consistency and accountability (Jin, Pang and Smith (2018, 45).

Several studies have analyzed articles of peer-reviewed journals, to determine themes and patterns in corporation's crisis communication strategies. A corrective action was found to be the most successful, especially when this was paired with an additional strategy "such as reducing the offensiveness or bolstering" (Arendt, LaFleche and Limperopulos 2017, 517). Not surprisingly, the study found that denial was the least successful strategy, probably because this goes against the ethical codes a company is viewed to adhere to – interestingly enough, denial was still the most used strategy in the study of Arendt, LaFleche and Limperopulos (2017). Denial is a reformative strategy since it does not attempt to change the audience's meaning or in any way try to affect the point of the crisis. The practical implications for this study "center on helping practitioners better utilize image repair strategies" (2017, 517). What the study ultimately concludes is that the four strategies in question – denial, bolstering, differentiation and transcendence, may help to create a persuasive crisis communication response, depending on the nature of the crisis, risks and organizational studies (Arendt, LaFleche and Limperopulos 2017, 518).

### SCCT, SMCC AND COOMBS

Within crisis communication, a key scholar is Timothy Coombs. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) has been widely applied to many cases and works well as a theoretical framework. To provide an example, Park (2017) has applied this theory to base responses in crisis communication, using a BP oil spill as a case study. A survey was constructed, leading to the conclusion that "the sole use of bolstering (reminding) strategy or no response is ineffective because it negatively influences consumers' trust in the company, attitudes toward the

company, perceived corporate reputation, and supportive behavioral intentions” (Park 2017, 190).

Park argues that a bolstering response without a supplemental crisis response may leave the impression that a company solely cares for itself.

Depending on the crisis type, scholars have established four tactics an organization may take to respond to a crisis. These are denial, diminishment, rebuilding and bolstering. The model describes the three crisis clusters, to which an organization may find itself in (Roschan, Warren and Carr 2016, 352).

Timothy Coombs, a renowned scholar within crisis communication, has also created the Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model (SMMC), which helps create desirable outcomes in a crisis, and is divided into two parts that explain “(1) how the source and form of crisis information affect organizations’ response options and (2) recommended social-mediated crisis response strategies” (Liu, Austin and Jin 2011, 346). Liu, Austin and Jin explain the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders, which may “produce and consume crisis information via social media, traditional media and offline word-of-mouth communication” (Liu, Austin and Jin 2011, 346). This model also depicts the motivations for using social media in a crisis, for instance issue relevance and emotional venting (2011, 345). An explanation of the model is seen below.

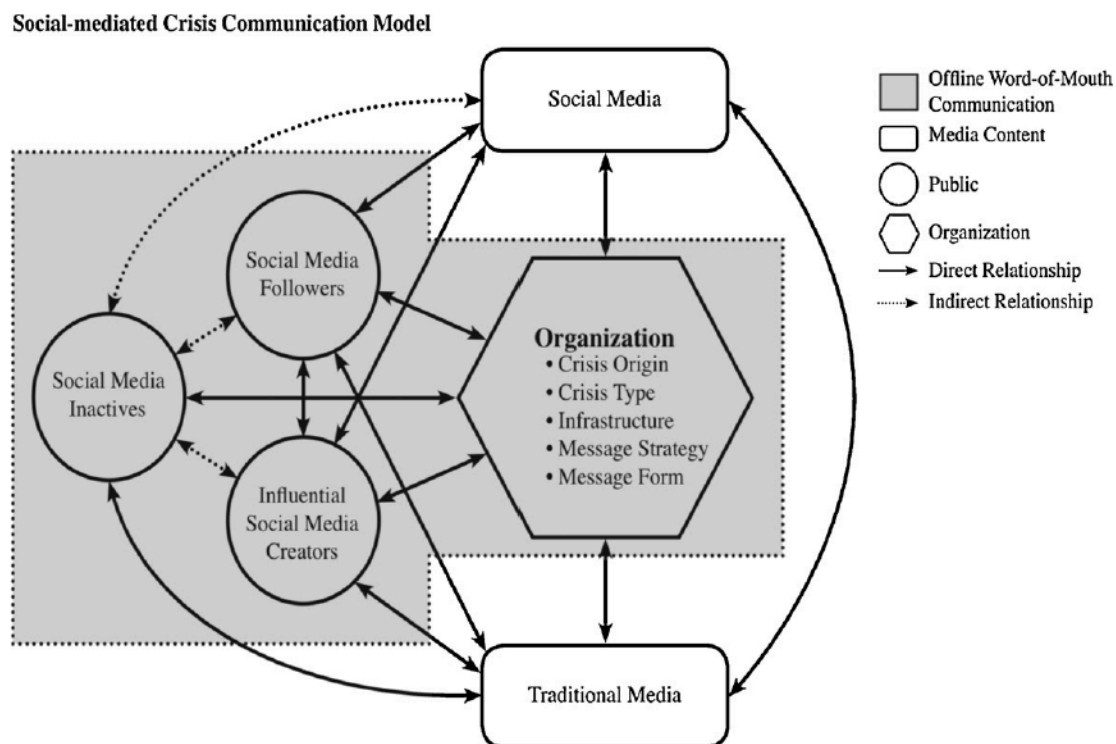


Fig. 1. Social mediated crisis communication model.

(Liu, Austin and Jin 2011, 347)

What the organization needs to consider when constructing its communication regarding the crisis, are the crisis origin, crisis type, infrastructure, message strategy and message form (Liu, Austin and Jin 2011, 346). Different strategies regarding crisis communication are apparent in literature, one of these being the concept of ‘stealing thunder’. Scholars define stealing thunder as “‘proactive self-disclosure strategy’ which refers to an admission of a weakness (usually a mistake or failure) before that weakness is announced by another party, such as an interest group or the media” (Arpan & Pompper, 2003, p. 294). Being pre-emptive about an incident may contribute to maintaining a positive corporate reputation in the aftermath of the crisis. Zhou and Shin (2017) address the SCCT regarding a ‘stealing thunder’ strategy. This theory puts emphasis on the idea that effective communication in a crisis will shape people’s perception of the incident. Response

strategies in this regard include a denial posture, a diminishment posture, a rebuilding posture or a bolstering posture.

An interesting perspective on the use of the SMMC model was created by Schultz, Utz and Göritz (2011, 20). They argue that “the impact of different media types on the effects of different crisis response strategies is still understudied” (21), and therefore set out to analyze the effects and ultimately corporate reputation emerging after traditional crisis responses versus those distributed through social media. “The results indicated that the medium matters more than the message” (Schultz, Utz and Göritz 2011, 20).

The SMMC brings about interesting points and is a valuable model for crisis communication on social media, but given the relative new insight to this model, I have chosen to include the SCCT in my thesis, as I have deemed this more valuable to my thesis, because of the mix of press release and Instagram as empirical data.

## BENOIT’S TYPOLOGY

Coomb’s typology is complementary to that of Benoit, since when they are combined, they embody most of the steps needed in an image repair situation.

The scholars argue that an effective strategy relying on SCCT in addition to Benoit’s Image Restoration Theory will ultimately help a company in a crisis. The image restoration theory is divided into 5 typologies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of the act, corrective action and mortification. This would for instance be in relation to reminding consumers and stakeholders about previous good efforts from the company to reduce the offensiveness of the crisis. In Benoit’s typology the denial stance consists of two steps, either simple denial or shifting

the blame. Evasion of responsibility is like that of denial, since it involves “provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions” (Arendt, LaFleche and Limperopulos 2017, 519).

Reducing the offensiveness of the act, Benoit breaks down into six components “bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attack the accuser and compensation” (Arendt, LaFleche and Limperopulos 2017, 519). A corrective action involves trying to fix the crisis, which would often include a public apology. After the incident has passed, the company moves onto the final category, mortification.

## APOLOGY AS CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Because of the nature of H&M’s crisis communication, and the previous focus on different approaches to crisis communication, apology stands out as important for my thesis.

Apology is an admittance of guilt, while being an expression of sympathy. Even though an apology always seems as an effective strategy, scholars agree that it depends on the nature of the crisis. Amid a crisis, the most crucial aspect of crisis communication should be settling the masses, and offer instructions on how the situation is being handled. An apology may be an additional feature in this, “but apologizing will have to be repeated when the acute phase of crisis is over” (Kesetovic, Toth and Korajli 2014, 174). In a so-called reputational crisis, Kesetovic, Toth and Korajli propose the following steps: 1) Recognize blame, 2) Allow criticism, 3) Accept responsibility, 4) Explain the cause for the blame, not only accept it, 5) Support apology with real efforts to improvement, and finally 6) Subservience and shame are the final steps to forgiveness (Kesetovic, Toth and Korajli 2014, 174). Depending on whether a crisis emerged out of an intentional, unintentional or ignorant situation, further steps may be included, which will not be further elaborated in the thesis.

## CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN A CULTURAL CONTEXT

A further aspect to include in the crisis communication review, is the cultural context. “Invisible like air, culture is a component of our everyday lives. Since it is ubiquitous, the culture is rarely noticed, just as the last thing a fish in an aquarium would notice is – water (...)” (Kesetovic, Toth and Korajli 2014, 171). Culture acts as an invisible constraint, which we only become aware of, when we encounter a different culture. In crisis situations, the question of culture becomes even more crucial, especially for a global company since it must consider numerous cultures, customs, “religion, race and nationality, communication carriers due to language differences, differences in business ethics and the values, customs regarding clothes, food, and behavior (...)” (Kesetovic, Toth and Korajli 2014, 172). Regarding communication following a crisis of whatever sort, being culturally aware is crucial for the meaning-making and perception of the event. With the rise of social media, the communication between the sender and the receiver has become a dialogic one, hence the communication regarding a crisis needs to be culturally adapted to not become part of the problem instead of the solution (Kesetovic, Toth and Korajli 2014, 172). “The thing the sender of the message intends to achieve in the communication process, what they formulate as a message and the thing that the receiver decodes can be of completely different and even opposing meanings” (Kesetovic, Toth and Korajli 2014, 173). Senders of the crisis communication therefore need to be aware of the cultural setting in which they are operating.

Despite an apology being present in all cultures, they vary, hence their reception creates differing responses and reactions. Language and culture have an impact on its reception, and it may therefore be hard for a global enterprise to issue a general statement to account for cultural misdoings, if the culture in question is not satisfied with the company’s response. “It is precisely for this reason that

the usage of apology forms inappropriate in the cultural sense may endanger reconciliation, intensify revengefulness, and prolong hostilities” (Kesetovic, Toth and Korajli 2014, 174).

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

From the basis of my literature review, I have chosen to focus on the SCCT theory by Coombs, as this takes into account many of the factors scholars argue are important when dealing with a crisis, and how to construct a favorable crisis communication. Additionally, it is a model valuable for case studies as my thesis relies on.

Firstly, my theoretical foundation will describe a rhetorical approach to crisis communication, as rhetoric will play an important role in my following analysis.

A rhetorical approach to crisis communication acknowledges “the responsibility for the crisis, its magnitude, and its duration are contestable” (Heath and Millar 2004, 5). Meaning that especially the communication surrounding the crisis can have an impact on how it is perceived, and that rhetorical problems may arise when a response is required from the organization. Heath and Millar (2004) also emphasize the need to prepare rhetorically before, during and after a crisis, and in this way shape the perception and dimension of the crisis. Two key functions before a crisis are reducing the likelihood that a crisis will occur and “communicating with key markets, audiences, and publics to prepare them for a crisis so that it can be framed and addressed when it occurs” (Heath and Millar 2004, 6). Crucial to this is communicating in a reasonable and ethically responsible way to uphold the interests of stakeholders.



During a crisis, organizations need to acknowledge that statements shape crises. This may entail blame accepting, blame placing and apologizing, thus rhetorical responses should ideally be shaped in a way that exonerates the company for further responsibilities (Heath and Millar 2004, 7).

Questions may arise during a crisis and it is up to the organization to determine what information stakeholders ethically are entitled to receive. Essentially issues should be resolved after a crisis communication, but it is still vital for their corporate reputation that the company is able to demonstrate how they will prevent a similar crisis in the future.

Aspects surrounding the rhetorical problem of a crisis involves “the possible cause of an event, the factors amplifying the event, factors attenuating the event, estimated magnitude of events and the estimated duration of events” (Heath and Millar 2004, 10-11). Taking these points into consideration, organizations are able to respond suitably to stakeholders and thereby hopefully contain the crisis, despite any social media’s influence.

Treating a crisis as a rhetorical problem relates to narratives and the abruption of these. “The story of an organization and the persons whose interests it affects are expected by those persons, to constitute a story that ‘continues happily ever after’” (Heath and Millar 2004, 11). Therefore, the rhetorical responses must show that the organization are aware of the crisis and determined to resolve it, thereby returning to the desirable narrative and dialogue.

## SCCT BY COOMBS

After having established the groundwork for the importance and meaning of rhetoric, I will move onto the explaining the SCCT by Coombs into more details. This theory is formed on the basis of attribution theory, which helps to link crisis response strategies with crisis types (Coombs and Holladay, 2004). “Attribution theory posits that people make judgments about the causes of events

based upon the dimensions of locus, stability and controllability” (Coombs 1995, 448). Locus in this regard means locus of control, hence whether a decision is based on an external or internal cause. External control refers to whether a crisis was out of the organizations’ ‘hands’ and thus not to blame, and internal the opposite. Stability regards whether this cause is stable (always there) or if it varies. Controllability refers to being in control of the outcome of events, and being in control of one’s own fate. Attribution theory therefore ultimately regards attaching meaning to other people’s behavior (or in this case companies’). Taking these causal dimensions into consideration in a crisis shapes people’s perception and subsequent feelings, and lets a person arrive at causal explanations for events and outcomes (Coombs and Holladay 2004, 97). This relates to crisis communication, as this explains how people will see the cause for a crisis and why they make set attributions to make sense of their subsequent feelings. “Greater attributions of responsibility lead to stronger feelings of anger and a more negative view of (...) an organizations’ image” (Coombs and Holladay 2004, 98).

Generally, the SCCT argues that one can divide crisis response strategies into three stages: instructing information, adjusting information and ultimately reputation repair. Instructing information is best suited if providing stakeholders with information, will prevent implications from the crisis – for instance by recalling a product and being up front about this. Adjusting information should involve sympathy, in order to help stakeholders cope psychologically with the crisis and understand the reasons and implications. Mentioning of future strategies may also be part of this strategy (Coombs 2015, 142). Finally, the reputation repair may be used as a strategy. This may be organized along a defensive-accommodative-continuum, that are divided into three postures: deny, diminish, or repair (Coombs and Holladay 2004, 99).

The deny posture lets the organization claim that either no crisis has occurred, or if there has, the organization is not to blame, thus upholding no responsibility. Diminish means reframing the

publics' idea and interpretations of the crisis, for instance emphasizing prior good relationships between the organization and stakeholders. Finally, the repair stance means improving the organization's image – similar to Benoit's Image Restoration Theory (Coombs and Holladay 2004, 99). See table 7.1 in appendix 7 (Coombs and Holladay 2004, 99). What the table explains and offers, are guidelines for choosing the correct response strategy depending on the nature and type of crisis. "The belief is that elements of the situations produce certain attributions and that these attributions represent organizational responsibility for the crisis" (Coombs and Holladay 2004, 106). A crisis communication strategy should therefore either reduce the attributions associated with organizational responsibility or the negative feelings the public may have, based on these attributions.

In a crisis, the first step should be to select an appropriate crisis response strategy. These guidelines all take the same starting point, namely the need for repairing a company's image after a crisis. The ideal way to reconstruct a company's organizational image, would be by modifying the public perceptions of the responsibility for the crisis. However, this is not always a possibility if the crisis originated from an internal locus of control. Consequently, four central factors affect the attributions the publics adhere to the crisis: Crisis type, veracity of evidence, damage and performance history (Coombs 1995, 454). Dimensions to create Coombs' classification scheme includes: "internal-external, violent-nonviolent, intentional-unintentional, severe-normal damage, technical-sociopolitical failure, remote-relevant environment, high-low deniability, and concrete-diffuse victims" (Coombs 1995, 454). By taking these dimensions into account, a matrix was established:

	<b>Unintentional</b>	<b>Intentional</b>
<b>External</b>	Faux pas	Terrorism
<b>Internal</b>	Accidents	Transgressions

(Figure 1 Coombs 1995, 455)

A faux pas means the crisis originated from an unintentional act to do harm. The actions taken from the organization have started out as appropriate from an organizational perspective, but an external agent deems them inappropriate and challenges “the appropriateness of the organization’s action” (Coombs 1995, 455). Ambiguity here is key, since the severity of the crisis ultimately relies on the public’s perception of the severity. In some cases, this ambiguity may work in the company’s favor, since it has the possibility of altering the perception of the crisis, and hence help to maintain the appropriateness of its actions. Social responsibility is often a factor in a faux pas, and may result in boycotts or protests (Coombs 1995, 455).

Accidents are unintentional by nature, and may include product defects and natural disasters. The accidental nature of such a crisis leads to minimal organizational responsibility, and an excuse strategy may be sufficient in such a case, since this serves to “reinforce the organization’s lack of responsibility for the crisis” (Coombs 1995, 456).

Transgressions means knowingly putting publics at risk, for instance selling “(...) dangerous products, withholding safety information from authorities, violating laws and refusing to award earned rewards to customers (...)” (Coombs 1995, 457). In such a crisis, mortification proves the best response, since this does not evade responsibility but offers atonement.

Terrorism is similar to transgressions, but with an external factor – meaning “the violent, outside agent promotes attributions of external locus and uncontrollability” (Coombs 1995, 457). Because of this external factor, choosing a suffering strategy will be the most effective crisis communication response, as this relies on being a victim.

Additional factors in crisis management include veracity of evidence, performance history and damage. The veracity of evidence refers to proof of whether the nature of a crisis is true, false or ambiguous. Ambiguous evidence is only apparent for a faux pas, since evidence in this respect may rely on ethics and morality. Organizations may therefore be subject to challenges when an external factor challenges the appropriateness of organizational actions.

Past performance may either be positive, negative or neutral. A positive performance history may induce forgiveness and provide a halo effect, whereas a negative performance history makes the cause of the crisis to appear stable, hence the organization is more likely to be seen as the cause for the crisis. A neutral performance history works in the organization’s favor, since this prevents negative attributions and lets the crisis manager focus on prior positive actions.

Ultimately, the performance history influences the recipient’s acceptance and forgiveness.

“Damage is a central feature in most crisis situation typologies and is related to locus of control” (Coombs 1995, 459). The severity of the crisis ultimately determines the public’s perception of the organization, hence internal or external locus. Therefore the crisis-response strategy should take into account the damage done, since for instance a severe crisis requires atonement from the organization to soothe the publics. A mortification strategy proves useful in this respect, as “the mortification strategies maximize concern for the publics, while minimizing the protection of the organization’s image” (Coombs 1995, 459). Depending on the severity of the crisis, publics may

want assurances that a similar crisis will not happen, and in such case the rectification strategy would be the best option (Coombs 1995, 459).

Coombs (1995) provided 4 decision flow charts for choosing the most effective response strategy based on the nature of the crisis. There are included in appendix 1.

## CRISIS RESPONSES

A crisis response is of vital importance, since this is the company's way of addressing counter-opinions and maybe alter the ramifications. Scholars have agreed that two aspects are vital in constructing a crisis response: Form and content.

“Form refers to how a crisis response should be presented” (Coombs 1999, 126). If an organization does not address a crisis quickly and with information, speculation and misinformation will take over and damage the organizational reputation further. Instead, organizations should provide information consistently and openly, and engage in dialogue. “Restricted disclosure creates the impression that the organization is stonewalling or has something to hide” (Coombs 1999, 127).

Content refers to the actual message issued from the organization, and information and compassion should be the dominant features. Instructing information, meaning answering questions such as “(a) The what, why, when, where, and whos” (Coombs 1999, 127). This should involve how the crisis occurred, and if any precautionary or correcting actions are taken to correct the problem. This should promote a sense of organizational control.

Furthermore, the organization should express compassion for the victims of the crisis and acknowledge their despair. Expressing concern does however not solely mean taking responsibility

for the crisis, but compassion is always a favorable route to enhance credibility. Showing compassion may ultimately increase the honoring of the crisis response and the company's remorse.

What stands out after reviewing the context of H&M's crisis and its subsequent crisis response is an apology used as a crisis communication strategy. Complementary to the SCCT by Coombs, Benoit's typology argues that a corrective action and mortification are the final strategies for image restoration. The former means promising to make amends for one's wrongdoings, or promising to make sure the offensive act does not reoccur. The latter includes begging for forgiveness, thus accepting full responsibility and hoping for the public to feel the apology to be sincere. An explicit apology in this regard may prove successful (Benoit 2004, 270).

## APOLOGY

Following the mentioned crisis response strategies, what stands out in the context of H&M is the Apology as a strategy. "At its core, an apology is marked by the organization accepting responsibility for the crisis and asking for forgiveness" (Coombs and Holladay 2008, 253). Organizations may also choose to include other factors, such as expression of remorse, sympathy, regret, addressing preventative measure and reparation. What is crucial for an apology is the accepting of blame and responsibility. A less risky approach to an apology may be compensation and sympathy, as this does not provide the possibility of lawsuits whilst still maintaining a focus on the victim's needs. These types are viewed as highly accommodative strategies, and should ultimately help an organization rebuild a favorable reputation. Expression of sympathy may fall under the category of being an adjusting information strategy instead of a reputation repair strategy,

as it still reflects a high level of accommodation and may thus provide the same outcomes as an apology.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter provides the methodological background for my thesis, taking a starting point in that of philosophy of science, in order to describe a worldview. Secondly, the research design is meant to describe the nature of my research and present how I plan to answer my problem formulation. Additionally, the data selection, collection and analysis framework are presented.

## **PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE**

This thesis is developed on the background of social research, namely the nature of social reality and how this should be examined. The thesis therefore takes its starting point from that of social constructivism. “Constructivism is an ontological position (...) that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman 2016, 29). The social world and its implications are therefore constantly being constructed and reevaluated. This is related to the fact that a scholar will always construct a specific notion of reality, and therefore there can never be a definitive social reality. Since I had decided to take on the social constructivist



approach, I am aware that my analysis and further conclusions will be a result of my choice of theory and methods, and therefore there may exist other possible conclusions.<sup>3</sup>

*“The constructionist case is that all human psychological and social phenomena arise out of social life, from the interactions between people. These interactions in turns are given structure and content by the culture in which we live, by our society’s economic conditions, and by the power relations in which we are embedded. But these social conditions are subject to constant flux.”*

(Buur 2015, 223)

Social constructivism is among other things, concerned with beliefs, facts and social relations. Historically, social constructivism can be said to be based on three historical ideas. The first dating back to Marx’s historical materialism, which argues that the economic base of a society determines its superstructure, and hence how society is constructed in terms of social classes (Detel 2015, 228). The second deals with the historical turn of science in the twentieth century and the third being the naturalization of epistemology, which argues that scientific knowledge is “(1) determined by social forces, (2) essentially contingent and independent of rational methods, and (3) should be analyzed in terms of causal processes of belief formation” (Detel 2015, 229).

In a modern society with constantly shifting possibilities and realities, constructivism is helpful in explaining how this affects how we see the world. Social constructivism also addresses culture differently – “instead of seeing culture as an external reality that acts on and constrains people” (Bryman 2016, 30), it is constantly being reevaluated and reconstructed, depending on the social reality in place at the given moment. It is however important to note, that constructivists do acknowledge social realities as points of references, but they do not see these as objective realities that are not subject to change.

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<sup>3</sup> Although both constructivism and social constructionism endorse a subjectivist view of knowledge, the former emphasizes individuals’ biological and cognitive processes, whereas the latter places knowledge in the domain of social interchange (Guterman 2006, 13)

Seeing that my thesis deals with opinion making on social media, social constructivism seemed valuable as a philosophy of science. Namely, social constructivism believes that values and opinions are constructed through social interaction, whereby one may argue that our reality is to a great extent constructed on social media. Additionally, from a social constructivist standpoint, since our sense of self, beliefs and discourse derive from social interactions, language is of high importance when analyzing social situations and cases. The macro approach to this argues that how we talk about things, for instance crises, manifests itself as discourses, and how we construct our identities, is done through discourse. The micro approach deals with discourse as “our everyday linguistic practices, particularly spoken interactions” (Burr 2015, 224) and argue that language is used to for instance justify actions, place blame and create a good impression.

Following this perspective, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) becomes apparent. CDA shows an interest in the relation between language and power, and other structural relations between discrimination, dominance and control (Wodak and Meyer 2001, 2). “In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use” (Wodak and Meyer 2001, 2). Wodak and Meyer argue that discourse is historically produced and interpreted in such a way that it displays power relationships and the subsequent oppression and uprising against them. Discourse analysis is often seen as deriving from the work of Michael Foucault, who viewed discourse as being “a term that denoted the way in which a particular set of linguistic categories relating to an object and the ways of depicting it frame the way we comprehend the object” (Bryman 2016, 531). Discourse can therefore be said to be constitutive of the social world. From this, CDA has emerged, which views language as a power resource, and is related to ideology and creation of the social world (Bryman 2016, 540). Ruth Wodak argues that CDA is as much a theory as it is a method, meaning as a theory it may be said to

be a way of understanding the world, whereas, as a method, it gives rise to analyzing language and its implications (Wodak 2001, 122).

What is important to note about CDA is the interplay between theory and method, which is also the standpoint from which I conducted my analysis. As argued by Wodak and Meyer, “CDA is an analysis of the dialectic relationships between semiosis (including language) and other elements of social practice” (2001, 123). CDA proved useful in determining my theoretical scientific standpoint, since CDA may be viewed as a philosophy of science, and will often draw on other sources in order to conduct language analysis.

From this standpoint, I chose to include Appraisal Analysis as part of my analytical framework, as “the Appraisal systems approach the linguistic resources in texts as systematic constructions of interpersonal meaning which, through close discourse analysis, reveal much about an author’s underlying positionality and attitudinal meaning – that is, the functioning of stance” (Gales 2011, 30). Additionally, an analysis of persuasive language is valuable, since this will account for the basis of crisis communication, namely persuading recipients to believe in a company’s justification/explanation for the crisis and its implications.

## APPRAISAL FRAMEWORK

Appraisal Framework provides an account of how language is used to convey interpersonal meanings, and may help to evaluate the hidden dimensions of a text, and how for instance authorial figures are apparent in a text. Appraisal theory was valid for my thesis, as it provides an account of language use, which may aid in constructing an evaluation of crisis communication and its implications.

Appraisal theory is situated within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which provides three modes of meaning, the textual, ideational and the interpersonal. SFL provides a multi-perspectival model, which aids analysts in interpreting language in use (Martin and White 2005, 7). Language may therefore be a way of “mapping ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning onto one another in virtually every act of communication” (Martin and White 2005, 7). Ideational concerns the what, where, who, when and how, while the interpersonal resources help to negotiate social relations, feeling-sharing and the interactions among people. The textual resources provide the information flow and distribute the aforementioned ideational and interpersonal resources. Hence, Appraisal Theory is located as an interpersonal system to the level of discourse semantics (Martin and White 2005, 34). This is one of three major discourse semantic resources, which aid in constructing interpersonal meaning, along with involvement and negotiation. At its core, Appraisal theory is “concerned with the interpersonal in language, with the subjective presence of writers/speakers in texts as they adopt stances towards both the material they present and those with whom they communicate (Martin and White 2005, 1). Hence, Appraisal theory provides an account of authorial voices, and how these voices vary and display intersubjective assessments. Appraisal theory may show attitudinal evaluations, help to reveal the speaker’s feelings and values, and how expressions can be related to their status/authority. Writers may encode their own attitudes in texts and hint towards a relationship between the writer and reader – whether this relationship is one of equality or inequality (Martin and White 2005, 4).

Appraisal consists of three interacting domains: *Attitude*, *Engagement* and *Graduation* (Martin and White 2005, 35). Attitude concerns feelings, emotional reactions, judgments of behavior and evaluation of events. Engagement takes into account a sourcing of attitudes and the play of voices around opinions, while graduation helps to grade phenomena and display how feelings are amplified and the blurring of categories (Martin and White 2005, 35). The three categories have

overlaps, while singularly aiding in analyzing aspects of textual features and how words ascribe meanings and co-construct the surrounding world. In appendix 2, is a gathered overview of the three domains with their internal features, constructed from figures 1.18, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The construction of a literature review aids my understanding of the given subject and the following section will explain the process of conducting a literature review, and what this entails. By drawing on pre-existing knowledge on a topic and from this deducing a hypothesis, I am using the deductive approach, which is a very common approach within social research. This hypothesis should be deduced into researchable entities and drive the data collection process (Bryman 2016, 21). After this deductive reasoning, the final step consists of an inductive approach, where I applied the findings to that of previous research to contrast and compare.

The first crucial element in a study is the gathering of information and knowledge prior to constructing one's own data. As Bryman (2016) describes, we need to know what has already been said about the topic, "what concepts and theories have been applied to the topic, what research methods have been applied to the topic, and how it is studied (...)". Additionally, there may exist controversies that are worth acknowledging and what prominent authors are present in theory.

This method of information gathering provides an extensive background knowledge, which allows you to link your own findings to that of other scholars (Bryman 2016, 6). What is essential about a literature review, is to be critical, but not negative of the literature in the field, and not solely provide a summary. According to Bryman (2012) a narrative review is a somewhat

unstructured way of gathering information, with the intention of “gaining an initial impression of the topic area that they intend to understand through their research” (Bryman 2012, 110). My literature review was therefore more wide-ranging, since the purpose of this was to establish an initial of the key concepts and previous studies on the subject of crisis communication on social media.

## CHOICE OF THEORY

By completing my literature review, I established a basis for understanding the most prominent theory on the subject, and especially the SCCT by Coombs stood out. The theory offers a good basis for determining the best response for a company in crisis, depending on the nature of the crisis and the state of the company. The SCCT has been widely applied in different settings, and especially in case studies. Therefore, I deemed it relevant for my case study as well. The different frameworks applied in my thesis, constructed by Coombs, provides different perspectives on crisis communication. The choice of using figures from 1995, 2004 and 2015 was made because of their continued relevance and different aspects. The Flow Charts from 1995 are still relevant to this day, because the nature of crises has not changed that much, since they embody so much information that even crises that arise from modern amenities such as Social Media, are still able to be coined for instance a Faux Pas. Figure 1.7 from 2004 explains the different postures a company may take, when finding themselves in a crisis. Strategies following such postures do not change significantly over time, hence the framework still proves useful. Finally, the Framework from 2015 embodies possible outcomes of chosen crisis communication strategies, and therefore the use of all three frameworks from different time-periods provide the crisis communication analysis with a well-grounded approach that takes both the nature of the crisis, the possible strategies and finally the likely outcomes into consideration.

Additionally, I chose Appraisal Analysis as the tool for my analysis of H&M's crisis statements, as this provided me with insight to how H&M chose to communicate an apology, using a method that would take for instance topoi into account. This ultimately provided an analysis that helped me to conclude which strategy H&M used in its communication, and determined how this strategy may be found in the SCCT.

## CASE STUDY

The general orientation of my research relied on a qualitative method that emphasizes words instead of measurements. More specifically, the thesis contains a case study research, which examines a single organization in a specific setting. The nature of a case study, means somewhat overlooking representativeness, since a single case cannot generalize, however the purpose of a case study is to create an in-depth analysis in order to generate theoretical arguments. Yin (2009) coins this as 'theoretical generalization' and therefore my thesis should ultimately test the implications and propositions of my chosen theory and arrive at a conclusion, of whether the case is representative of the theory implications. Yin (2009) also addresses five components of a research design that aids in establishing validity, these being: a study's questions, its propositions, its units of analysis, the logic linking data to the propositions and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin 2009, 27).

My problem formulation involves the propositions I wished to analyze. I followed the advice from Yin (2009) and charted a three-step process in determining my problem formulation, namely beginning with constructing a literature review to narrow down my focus. I looked for research done in other case studies on the topic of crisis communication on social media, which helped to articulate my problem formulation. This process also sparked the finding of propositions, since in this, I could determine where to look for evidence.

The overall units of my case study are the statements issued by H&M in the wake of the crisis and additionally the comments from Instagram, made on the pictures showing the crisis communication. The combination of a coding scheme paired with a thematic analysis, an appraisal analysis and an evaluative language analysis provided a well-rounded method for thoroughly investigating H&M's crisis communication, and whether this resulted in (hopefully) consumer's forgiveness.

Limitations of social research is the 'sticking to' script in describing the methodological process. The specific findings may be emphasized via analysis and the conclusions drawn from this does not feature the processes. Describing a methodological process will often arrive at generalities, since it would be impossible to completely describe every step in the writing process. Additionally, given the nature of a case study, it is nearly impossible to be completely objective in an analytical process, hence the conclusions drawn are somewhat a product of a worldview that may differ.

## DATA COLLECTION

Starting research with a research topic which should eventually become a problem formulation is a fundamental aspect of a research design, as this provides a focus for a paper and its research.

I initially set out to use data gathered from H&M's own Instagram page. The data consists of comments to the posts in question with the purpose of analyzing whether the apology posts obtained the expected response and reception. Instagram was chosen, because of the easy accessibility and that this media provides text-focused images. On Instagram, three images were posted at the same time, providing H&M's issued statement divided between three images (See appendix 4). Hence, comments were placed on all three images, concerning the overall message of the photos. However, after seeing that the three images had gathered 111.772 comments, I realized that my data needed to



be reduced. I therefore settled on only using the first available comments for each of the three photos, leaving me with 1360 comments to code and analyze.

Firstly, the comment section for the photos was copied into a word document in order to get an overview of all three photos. Hereafter, the comments for each photo were copied into an Excel spreadsheet, one spread for each photo. Each chosen comment was labeled with a corresponding number.

Instagram provides its own algorithm, leaving me with little control of the sequence of the comments; however, one may assume that the comments are distributed according to the dates they were posted, as there is the possibility of checking under each comment, how many weeks ago they were posted, taking a starting point from the date the pictures were posted (See Appendix 3 for Coding sheme).

The data used for my rhetorical analysis and appraisal analysis is the Press Release from H&M following the incident. The communicative purpose of a press release allows for discussions of this being a genre. Lassen (2006) constructed a discussion of this, which arrives at the conclusion that a press release may be argued to have genre basis if one relies on the textual form, however “it does not qualify for the genre label if analysed in terms of content and rhetorical objective” (Lassen 2006). Hence, the Press Release used for my thesis does not qualify as a genre, since I will be focusing on the content and the rhetorical objectives in the form of persuasive language and appraisal framework.

## CONTENT ANALYSIS, CODING, AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

A thematic analysis uses examined data to extract core themes that are present in the data. “With the analysis of qualitative data, coding is a process whereby the data are broken down into their

component parts and those parts are then given labels” (Bryman 2016, 11). By making sense of the themes that have emerged from the data, this includes finding a link between the themes and constantly testing this against the problem formulation. In this process, a large amount of data may be reduced to a more comprehensible amount, and thereby extracting meaning and analysis from the data. Data in my thesis are primary data, as I extracted the data from H&M’s post on Instagram and then applied my own coding scheme.

Doing a content analysis means conducting an analysis of documents and texts that may be available in both print and online, written or spoken, with the intent to quantify content “in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner” (Bryman 2016, 283). As argued by Bryman “In a sense, it is not a research method in that it is an approach to the analysis of documents and texts rather than a means of generating data” (Bryman 2016, 283). But because of its unique method to conducting an analysis, it may also be treated as a research method. Such a method allows my thesis to claim a mixed-methods approach, and thereby provides a well-grounded method and following analysis. A thematic analysis should provide the thesis with an objective and systematic approach because of the transparency in the procedures and the consistent application. “(...) the key point is that, once formulated, the rules should be capable of being applied without the intrusion of bias” (Bryman 2016, 284).

Bryman argues that in the context of coding mass media, the person who produced the item, the main focus of the item, alternative voices and the context of the item may be important items to code. By doing this, one is able to report the main protagonists and begin “to reveal some of the mechanics involved in the production of information for public consumption” (Bryman 2016, 289).

Repetition and occurrence of words in a thematic analysis is often valuable, and since my thesis also includes a language analysis, I chose to include this in my content analysis, given the

importance of rhetoric on social media. On the basis of my problem formulation, I also chose to code each item in terms of whether the comment was positive, negative or merely descriptive/neutral. This provided me with the means of analyzing whether the outcome of the crisis communication was as H&M would hope, namely the forgiveness of their customers.

By doing a thematic analysis, “which includes reading, rereading and rereading again” (Bowen and Kragh 2017), reoccurring themes emerge, which was used in my coding manual and coding schedule. My coding schedule was entered into an Excel spread, where the columns represented the theme emerging from the code, and each code was numbered to correspond to the sequence of comments. “When searching for themes, Ryan and Bernard (2003) recommend looking for: repetitions (...), indigeneous typologies or categories (...), metaphors and analogies (...), transitions (...), similarities and differences (...), linguistic connectors (...), missing data (...) and theory-related material (...)” (In Bryman 2016, 586). I therefore took these recommendations into account, when coding comments to the three Instagram photos.

When coding each comment, a qualitative consideration of the nature of the comment was included, concluding whether the comment was positive, negative or neutral. By doing this, I was able to quantify qualitative statements and ultimately calculate a percentage of negative, positive or neutral comments. By ultimately determining the dominant themes emerging from the comments, I was able to conclude the eventual reception of the crisis communication.

Examples of the most dominant codes (e.g a comment being negative or providing a theme) was included in the analysis, and an analysis of the data was thoroughly concluded. Please refer to the coding scheme in appendix 3 for a description of themes.

My analysis starts with the establishment of a coding scheme that would allow me to allocate themes to each Instagram comment, in order to establish the reception of the crisis communication

issued by H&M. The Instagram comments were entered into Excel, one spread for each picture and the associated comments. First off, each comment was read and it was assessed whether the comment was negative, positive, neutral or irrelevant. The irrelevant option was included, since on social media there will always be comments that either are not relevant for the specific case, or a comment is deemed incomprehensible. It is important to note that when I deemed a comment either positive or negative, it means positive or negative towards the company and the case. Of course, it is not possible for me to be completely subjective, given the nature of a thematic analysis, but I have aspired to subjective objectivity.

## RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

A rhetorical analysis may be used for various purposes, but I chose to include this to see how H&M communicated regarding the crisis. By doing such an analysis, I was able to compare this to the SCCT by Coombs and determine what crisis communication strategy had been used in H&M's communication. Hence, a specific communication strategy should help an organization to arrive at a desired outcome, and ultimately this may be compared to the results of my content analysis, to see whether the desired outcome corresponds to the actual outcome of the crisis communication by H&M. The material used for the rhetorical analysis is available in appendices 4 and 5. The fourth being the three pictures posted on Instagram and the fifth being the issued PR statement on H&M's website in the 'press section'.

The issued statement and response from H&M was analyzed using the Appraisal Framework (Martin and Winter 2005) and Higgins and Walker's (2012) approach to analysis of rhetorical appeals, since "rhetorical studies are concerned with how language and other symbolic forms influence the way an audience thinks, feels or acts" (Higgins and Walker 1012, 197).

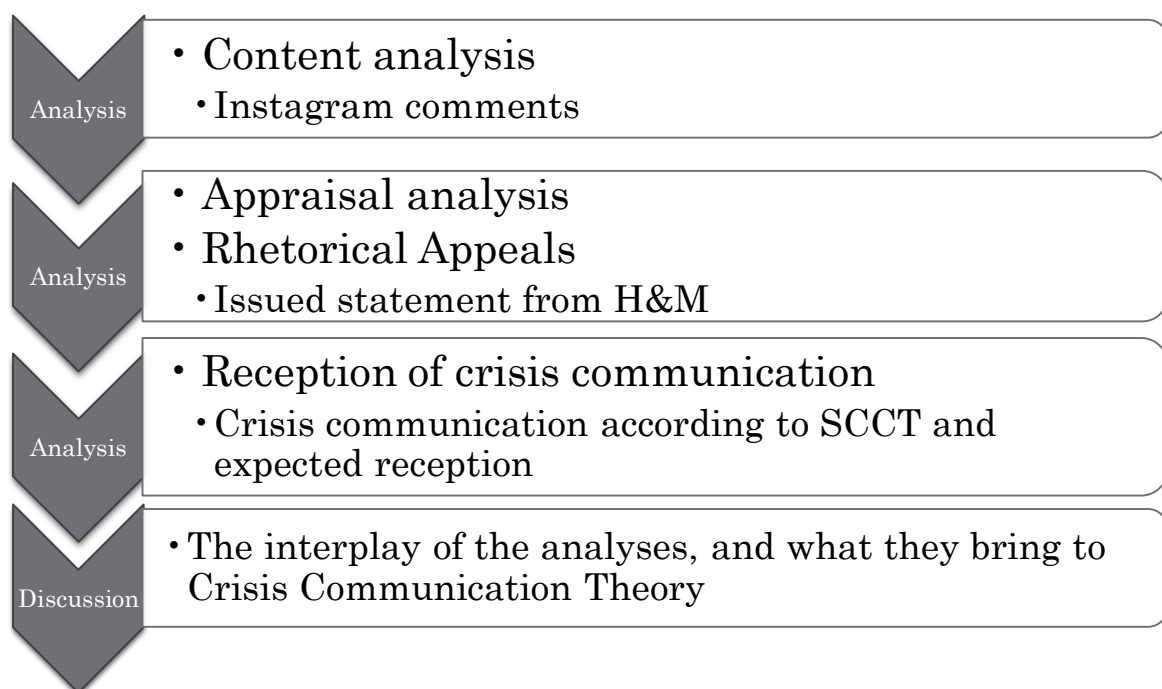
Adopting a Burkean notion of rhetoric, I addressed persuasive language and symbols from that of Higgins and Walker (2012). This takes into account Aristotle's rhetorical appeals to ethos, logos and pathos. Higgins and Walker argue "Our approach is more aligned with discourse analysis, but rather than emphasising the mechanics of discourse construction, we suggest persuasion influences social actors to accept particular discourse" (2012, 195). The validity of such a persuasion approach when analyzing social media is the fact that it takes the stakeholders opinion-making into account, and how persuasion facilitates the process of social influence. Key elements of Burke's rhetoric and rhetorical analysis are outlined in Higgins and Walker (2012), and is also what I applied to the statement from H&M in order to pinpoint the nature of the crisis communication, and ultimately compare this to that of SCCT.

A large emphasis has been put on Ethos, Pathos and Logos. Ethos refers to the credibility and trustworthiness of the character in question, and when identifying Ethos in discourse, one may also include "similitude, deference, expertise, self-criticism and the appeal to the inclination to succeed" (Higgins and Walker 2012, 197). This is often visible with the use of pronouns, since this would establish some sort of relationship and harmony with the reader. The author may also signal ethos with the respect for the rights and feelings of the reader. Searching for self-criticism may also reflect ethos, since this signals that the organization may be trying to own up to past mistakes, whereas inclination to succeed would be visible in drawing attention to future accomplishments or promises.

"Logos refers to the clarity and integrity of the argument" (Higgins and Walker 2012, 198). By appealing to reason and commonsense, organizations may be presenting Logos, in order to justify and provide defense. This is often seen in Annual Reports, since the nature of these are based on facts and figures, hence shows rationality. The final rhetorical appeal Pathos, refers to the feelings of the audience, and aims to trigger happiness, sadness, satisfaction, pity, fear etc. By constructing

such feelings, the author uses identification to relate to the needs and values of the audience and hence construct a favorable relationship.

By applying these rhetorical appeals to a text, I was able to determine how language-use aids in the audience accepting the discourse used, and hence the intent of the discourse. Ultimately, this selection of methods for conducting my analysis, provided me with the following structure:



## CONTENT AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

“When conducting data analysis, the researcher becomes the instrument for analysis, making judgments about coding, theming, decontextualizing, and recontextualizing the data” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007 in Nowell et al. 2017). Based on this premise, the establishment and grounding of themes in Instagram comments is an ongoing process, where the continued reading of comments will allow me to retract meaning and eventually develop themes that are present in all comments. The full coding scheme is available in appendix 3. After the comments were read and reread, and deemed positive, negative, neutral or irrelevant, I was able to extract themes each comment touched upon. These are shown in the coding scheme, where each comment is allocated the relevant themes. The themes retracted are shown in the table below, with their allocated abbreviation:

OVERVIEW OF THEMES – CODING ANALYSIS		
Theme Number	Theme	Abbreviation
Theme 1	<b>Overreacting</b>	OVR
Theme 2	<b>Racism/Race/Racial slur</b>	RAC
Theme 3	<b>Offensive act</b>	OFA
Theme 4	<b>Apology/Responsibility</b>	AOR
Theme 5	<b>Perspective</b>	PER
Theme 6	<b>Mistake (Innocent vs. Intentional)</b>	MII
Theme 7	<b>Ignorance</b>	IGN
Theme 8	<b>Forgiveness</b>	FOR
Theme 9	<b>White supremacy</b>	WSY
Theme 10	<b>Black culture</b>	BCU
Theme 11	<b>Boycott</b>	BOY
Theme 12	<b>Subliminal messaging</b>	SME

None of the themes are mutually exclusive, as for instance a comment may include the theme ‘Overreacting’ while still touching upon a theme such as ‘Racism’ and ‘subliminal messaging’.

The following section will be the start of my analysis. I will start out by providing examples of extracted themes and will briefly describe the meaning and how these relate to the reception of the apology issued by H&M, hence whether a theme is related to a positive, negative or neutral position towards the company and the issued apology. Just like the themes are not mutually exclusive, neither is the combination of a theme and reception. Thus, a theme such as ‘Apology’ may both be combined with a negative and a positive reception.

The theme ‘overreacting’ was selected since this was a term used often in many of the comments, referring to opposing opinions on whether the picture should be deemed racist or not. Hence, positive comments towards the company often coined the ‘fuss’ about the picture as overreacting to a situation that was never meant to be racist. @jasmine.c14 displays this theme in her following comment: “OKAY PEOPLE the sweater is fine, it’s only seen as a problem because you’re applying racial slurs towards it .... Don’t do that, just look at it for what it is...A KIDS SWEATER” (Instagram.com 2018, 428, 3). With this comment, she slights other people’s feelings of the picture being racist, by implying that people are solely overreacting and applying racial slurs. Thus she argues that the racial slurs are not present in the photo, but only apparent after people have reacted to the photo.

The opposing view was that deeming a negative reaction towards the picture as overreacting, resulted in many internal discussions in the comments that would often end in discussing personal opinions towards the incident.

The theme ‘Racism/Race/Racial slur’ was found in a large number of comments, naturally because the whole issue behind the incident was whether or not it was racist to put an African-



American boy in a sweatshirt with the term monkey on it. But what is interesting about this theme is if it is paired with a positive or negative stance towards the H&M and the issued apology, since this provides insights on the perspective in people's reactions. The previous example made by @jasmine.c14 displays this theme, but with a positive stance towards the company.

The theme 'offensive act' refers to coining the picture as an offensive act made by H&M. Many comments used this term, and hence related it to the theme of 'race', since it was often used in relation to the racist nature of the incident. What is also worth noting about this theme, is whether comments claimed that the offensive act was accidental in nature, or whether H&M should be held completely responsible for an intentional mistake. @applepennylee argues: "Maybe if H&M corporate actually initially hired black people they could have avoided this issue? Maybe not. #ignorance #blind" (Instagram.com 2018, 413, 3). The comment displays a stance of the incident being an intentional offensive act by arguing that had the company hired more black people, they could have avoided the issue – there is of course no way of knowing, if there was actually black people included in the process of taking the photo, but this comment displays the opinion that the incident was offensive.

The theme 'Apology/Responsibility' was found in terms of whether people accepted the apology made by H&M, whether they thought the apology was sincere or a publicity stunt, and whether H&M in fact should even apologize or not. This again is paired with either a negative or positive stance towards the company, and opinions on whether H&M should be held responsible for an intentional or un-intentional mistake. This relate to the following theme 'Intentional/Un-intentional mistake' since this also varies highly in the comments. Not only are people forming opinions on whether the act was racist or not, there are also opposing views on whether H&M was aware of their racist actions. Additionally, this relates to the theme 'forgiveness' since comments deeming the incident unintentional often are more inclined to forgive H&M for their transgression and vice

versa. An example of the theme ‘Apology/Responsibility’ is visible in the following comment:

“@samueldball You have nothing to apologise for @hm I look forward to a world where anyone can wear a hoodie saying monkey and no one cares - these libertarians have actually just perpetuated the stereotype” (Instagram.com 2018, 353, 3). This displays a positive stance towards the company, and at the same time views the incident as not only unintentional, but simply not a problem at all. Forgiveness is also subliminally apparent in this example, since the person argues that H&M has nothing to apologize for, hence no need to forgive either.

The theme ‘ignorance’ is both in relation to H&M being ignorant in their actions, when making such a hoodie and letting black boy model it, but also whether other comments and their stance are seen as ignorant or not. Since social media allows for interaction between strangers, there are many accusations towards other people in this comment section, and commenters reason other people as ignorant, if they display an opinion that does not deem the incident racist. @scott\_teu@iconicc25 displays this theme in the following comment:

“And this is an example of someone who is still oblivious and totally unaware of their white-privilege. Your comments highlight your ignorance. The campaign and advertisement was insensitive. H&M were right to apologise and to discontinue production and sale of the garment. Good on @hm for their handling of the situation!” (Instagram.com 2018, 242, 3).

This comment argues that the previous comment displays an ignorant opinion, but still displays a positive stance towards H&M, by accepting the apology and hence accepting the crisis communication.

The themes ‘White supremacy’ and ‘Black culture’ are somewhat related, since many comments put white supremacy against black culture, often implying white supremacy when black culture is not viewed as being respected. @shop.thecc displays this theme with the respond to @iconicc25: “Why do WHITES have so much to say? Are you a jew? were you a slave? no tragedy is greater than the other. (...) Keep your comments to yourself if your ancestors have not and still don't go

through racism today. white folks always telling ppl to get over something they never damn experienced” (Instagram.com 2018, 238, 3).

The theme ‘boycott’ follows a negative stance towards the company, saying that this act simply should issue a boycott of H&M. This theme is often viewed by using the hashtag #boycotthm, and displays an apparent theme in relation to that of the issued apology. Such a stance/theme ultimately displays a failed strategic crisis communication, which failed to serve its purpose. An example of this theme is apparent in the comment made by @hueylumumbafreeman: “Coolest racist gang in the industry @hm #boycotthm” (Instagram.com 2018, 215, 3). This comment uses the writing on the shirt against H&M and displays a highly negative stance towards the company.

Finally, the theme ‘subliminal messaging’ is of vital importance in this regard. This is because of the apparent subliminal messaging of the shirt and the model who wears it. This brings about issues of racism and historical elements that still influence culture today. Comments often describe how the subliminal message of the shirt and the model sparks and maintains racism.

“@sunaapolaat@taraannekemp yeah but you're white and you don't relate to this being an insult to you. Black people have been called monkeys for more centuries and regardless of what h&m says this is extremely racist” (Instagram.com 2018, 169, 3). This comment displays that the fact that history has shown us that racism often becomes apparent by the use of stereotypes, placing the hoodie in question on an African-American boy, will give negative connotations.

The results of themes relevant for each comment have been calculated by adding up how many comments each theme appeared in, in order to conclude which themes are dominant for each picture, and the number of pictures in total. The percentage of each theme is also included in the table. The percentage is calculated after the irrelevant comments have been subtracted.

**Picture 1: ‘We are listening’**

	OVR	RAC	OFA	AOR	PER	MII	IGN	FOR	WSY	BCU	BOY	SME
Out of 257	81	161	97	58	76	73	24	39	3	47	12	33
% of 257	31%	62%	37%	22%	29%	28%	9%	15%	1%	18%	4%	12%

**Picture 2: ‘We would like to put on record’**

	OVR	RAC	OFA	AOR	PER	MII	IGN	FOR	WSY	BCU	BOY	SME
Out of 151	10	63	43	52	35	27	21	18	11	19	37	35
% of 151	6%	41%	28%	34%	23%	17%	13%	11%	7%	12%	24%	23%

**Picture 3: ‘We understand’**

	OVR	RAC	OFA	AOR	PER	MII	IGN	FOR	WSY	BCU	BOY	SME
Out of 217	51	131	50	60	48	47	11	25	19	11	31	57
% of 217	23%	60%	23%	27%	22%	21%	5%	11%	8%	5%	14%	26%

Instagram comments Reception				
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Irrelevant
<b>Out of 1360</b>	210	359	45	737
<b>% out of 1360</b>	15%	26%	3%	54

Following this initial coding and thematic analysis, I will now provide examples from each picture, in order to conclude on the overall reception and opinions regarding the incident and following crisis communication.

Comparison in the case of social science research allows for pattern-making and contrasting one data-set with others. This is therefore also relevant in a thematic analysis, since this provides an additional level in my analysis. Contrasting a comment that mentions racism, but is positive towards the company with a comment that mentions racism, but is negative towards the company provides two perspectives on the case, and shows how a crisis and crisis communication may be perceived in highly different ways, as illustrated in comment 52,1 below.

“Only because of the way it was blown out of proportion!! Any company in fact all companies have to address a complaint or in this case a riot. It's company policy and procedure @hm obviously have to apologise because people felt offended about a kid wearing a hoodie . They did not see it as racism cause it was innocent ad being done (...)” (Instagram.com 2018, 52, 1).

Here the comment displays an understanding towards H&M and the handling of the crisis. The person acknowledges the need to issue an apology and at the same time, argues that it may not be displayed as racism because of it being an innocent ad. This comment somewhat negates the crisis and negates the issue of racism, thus takes the standpoint of supporting H&M.

In contrast, racism as a theme combined with a negative stance towards the company is apparent in example 2:

“olbdj@barrythemoongoose this is what you don’t get . Intentionally or not . The point is that IT IS RACIST. We as blacks strongly believe this idea somehow passed due to a few people within the company that is racist. We aren’t assuming the entire H&M is however for them to hire employees that maybe racist is where the problem begins on H&M as a whole” (Instagram.com 2018, 224, 2).

This comment highly dissociates oneself from the acts of H&M, and deems not only the act racist, but the people in H&M that approved of the sweatshirt. He/she also addresses problems within H&M as a whole, proposing additional racist-issues that may be apparent within H&M as an organization. Additionally, the neutral position may also be taken in this case: “@tsandi\_htunI understood that it was unintentional. At the same time, we also have to understand the sensitive issue of people around the world. Many people have suffered from different kinds of discriminations. I’m sorry for the problems and closing H&M stores in South Africa” (Instagram.com 2018, 439, 1). This comment leaves no clear negativity or positivity towards the company, but does state that he/she understands that the case was an accident, and by this also fits the theme of ‘Mistake Intentional/unintentional’.

In the following analysis part, examples of the dominant themes for each picture are covered, and these are referred to with the corresponding number in the corresponding appendix, for instance comment no. 7 in appendix 3 will be referred to as (Instagram.com 2018, 7, 1).

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## PICTURE 1

The theme ‘offensive act’ refers to the fact that H&M created such a sweatshirt, used an African-American boy as the model, and whether people see this as an offensive act or not. The theme ‘apology/responsibility’ refers to the issued apology from H&M, and whether or not they have a responsibility to do so. Additionally, this theme may also include comments that address the responsibility a company such as H&M has when being a global corporation.

The theme 'perspective' refers to the perspective people may operate from, when displaying their opinion towards the case. For instance the comment by @marlenpowery "I don't see what the big fuss was about. There was absolutely nothing wrong with your sweatshirt or with the little boy modeling it. If that child had been a white, Hispanic, or Asian child the world would have kept turning...but because it was a black child the world had to stop rotating. People need to let go and move on" (Instagram.com 2018, 7, 1). This comment displays the themes 'Overreacting', 'Racism', 'Perspective' and 'Forgiveness' and is subsequently positive towards the company. 'Perspective' refers to a particular way of viewing things that depends on one's experience and personality. Therefore, taking one's skin color and cultural background into consideration when forming an opinion on H&M's incident shows great nuance and empathy. Seeing as a person is therefore able to take objectivity into consideration, and consider how the incident may be viewed from a different perspective. A comment such as the one made by @marlenpowery shows that she somewhat lacks this. The same perspective is shown by @tannyya.\_ "I don't think it's racist depends the way you see it just because your black does not mean you shouldn't wear things that are related to your skin I know I'm going to get hate but the mom of the child even said there is nothing wrong so everyone stop spreading hate" (Instagram.com 2018, 66, 1).

The opposing view was that deeming a negative reaction towards the picture as overreacting, resulted in many internal discussions in the comments that would often end in confronting opposing opinions. Hence a focus often shifted from discussing the picture and its subliminal messaging to creating discussions on whether the person posting the comments was racist or not, based on their opinion towards the picture. This is an interesting shift, and shows an important factor of social media, namely forming opinions about strangers, based on their posting on social media channels. For instance, an internal discussion between two people in the comment section on picture 1, started

with @t\_ammea questioning @beeelllllm's statement that black people have always been called monkeys. She responds with the comment "Always is a strong word to use. I have never heard any black person called a monkey in my presence. And for the record I come from a very racially diverse community" (Instagram.com 2018, 204, 1). This sparked an immediate reaction, resulting in the comment "You sound like a racist person that says they have a black friend so that they won't be called a racist anymore. If you'd just pay attention to any type of black history you'd see that black people have been called monkeys. Just because you haven't heard I.T doesn't mean it's not happening or that it hasn't happened" (Instagram.com 2018, 206, 1). The comment made by @t\_ammea resulted in back-and-forth accusations between the two people, despite them being complete strangers. @beeelllllm somewhat addresses this by responding with a comment, where she asks @t\_ammea to not attack her character, as she does not engage in such attacks herself. She then goes onto arguing that she does not have a problem with her as a person, but deems her argument 'lame'. These two people are a good example of completely different perspectives and hence the only themes that are apparent in both, are 'Racism' and 'Perspective'.

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## PICTURE 2

One especially interesting result of theme calculation in picture 2, is the low occurrence of 'Overreacting' in comparison of picture 1 and 3. For picture 1, the occurrence percentage is 31% and 23% for picture 3, whereas for picture 2, this is only 6%. This may be explained by the initial comments not sparking discussions on whether people's reaction should be seen as overreacting, but at the same time, it cannot be fully established whether overreaction would be a higher occurring theme in the remaining comments, since I have only extracted a portion of the comments.



The second highest occurring theme is ‘Apology/Responsibility’, which is for instance viewed in the comment made by @aaron\_naml: “back you guys 100%. This was all blown out of proportion as usual. I’ve read that now you guys have issued an apology regarding your line of socks that apparently resembles Allah. I honestly feel for you guys. Seems like you can never do anything wrong. Me personally I wouldn’t have sent out an apology in the first place” (Instagram.com 2018, 131, 2). This person displays a positive stance towards the company and downplays H&M’s responsibility in the matter. He also addresses the issue of issuing an apology, saying that there was no need, hereby implying that such a strategy is not necessarily the right option.

A different perspective on the ‘Apology’ theme is @\_hero\_: “Since y’all are listening, better pay attention now to the artists and their following that you’re attempting to rip off and steal intellectual rights away from, before you have to issue another “heart felt” apology like this again as you watch your bottom line fade away” (Instagram.com 2018, 292, 2). Here he is comparing the ‘Coolest monkey in the jungle’ incident with a similar ethical issue, where H&M used the artwork of a graffiti artist without giving credit. In his comment he tears apart the issued apology using quotation marks to emphasize his actual feelings towards H&M’s handling of the incident, namely that he does not feel it is heartfelt at all, but more in the lines of a publicity stunt. This comment displays sarcasm on behalf of H&M and belittles the crisis communication, leaving the conclusion that the reception is inherently negative. Similarly, @5pointxcreatesare commented “u really listening ??? #artappropriation #boycott# stopthenonsense” (Instagram.com 2018, 299, 2), leaving a negative impression and simultaneously relating to the theme of ‘boycott’. Additionally, the comment somewhat mocks the issued apology, pointing at the chosen wording “We are listening” in H&M’s apology. The wording is used to express empathy but what the comment from @5pointxcreatesare hints at, is that when listening, one would ultimately assume this would include not repeating past

mistakes, which is what H&M can be said to have done in other cases, such as the one of art appropriation.

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### PICTURE 3

An example of how and why the issued apology from H&M might not have had the strong effect one could have hoped for, might be because of the nature of the crisis. As @sunaapolaat@taraannekemp argues: “yeah but you're white and you don't relate to this being an insult to you. Black people have been called monkeys for more centuries and regardless of what h&m says this is extremely racist” (Instagram.com 2018, 169, 2), the hoodie and the chosen model may display such strong negative connotations that no apology or admittance of guilt could change such a wrongdoing. A majority of people felt very offended by it, hence not many might be ready to ‘forgive and forget’. An opposing view is shown by @made\_in\_kenya and @gottabegoose, with the comment: “A monkey is used as a racial slur towards African Americans SO... NO, it would not have been offensive if a white, Hispanic, or Asian child wore it. However, if a Hispanic was wearing a shirt they said, “best swimmer,” which alludes to calling Hispanics wetb\*\*\*\*, (...) that would be offensive to each individual race” (Instagram.com 2018, 299, 3). The person then goes on to arguing that apologizing should not be considered spineless, since actions must be taken, and argues that H&M are smart because the company is “trying to save face” (Instagram.com 2018, 299, 3). Similarly, @scott\_teu argues that the campaign and advertisement was insensitive, and that H&M were right to apologize and to discontinue production (Instagram.com 2018, 242, 3). However the person goes onto stating that H&M handled the situation in a respectable manner, and thus displays an acceptance of apology and forgiveness, despite feeling the crisis was insensitive.

Other people felt less forgiving, for instance @pookie.imvu stating that someone in H&M would have had to have known that it was wrong, and makes the statement: “How do you make that right again anyways? Oh let me guess, money? Because money would shut anyone up these days. This is just wrong and disrespectful. Really honestly there is really no fixing it. You can’t undo it. All you could do is say sorry and move on” (Instagram.com 2018, 138, 3). In situations like this, it may be hard for corporations to handle the situation in a way that leaves forgiveness, especially since people are arguing whether the incident should be seen as racist or not, leaving opposing sides that will never come to an agreement. Hence, creating a strategic crisis communication that serves both sides is nearly impossible. Therefore, the following analysis of the issued apology, using critical discourse analysis will help to shed light on whether a different crisis communication strategy would have been more favorable or if there simply is no perfect way to handle a situation like this.

A result worth noting in the construction of my thematic analysis, is the fact that ‘only’ 22% comments for picture one, 34% for picture 2 and 27% for picture 3 address the ‘apology/responsibility’ theme, which leaves the impression that over 50% did not take a stand in relation to the H&M’s handling of the crisis and it’s way of communicating, but instead touched upon whether the act was racist or not. Therefore, I can partly conclude and support the results of many previous scholars, namely that the choice of strategic crisis communication and the results thereof, may depend highly on the nature of the crisis. The corollary is that, if a crisis for instance regards racism vs. overreacting, people are inclined to respond to the nature of the crisis, instead of the chosen crisis communication. However, if a crisis leaves no uncertainty of the problem, people may be more inclined to address the chosen strategic communication. An example would be that of an oil crisis, which many scholars have chosen as a case study. In such a case, there is no ambiguity towards the crisis, and hence no questions of whether the case is a problem or not.

What is also worth noting, is that in the comment section, almost the only times H&M responds, are to irrelevant comments such as: “hm@zaya\_178 Hey Zaheera, we'd love to assist you. What is the market/country you are shopping in so that we can further assist you?” (Instagram.com 2018, 69, 1). Many comments pose questions directly at H&M, which there are no visible responses to. “@hueylumumbafreemanSome People say @hm have nothing to apologies (...) Why @hm didnt answer when White People said don't apologize ? Why didn't you answer #hm ? You agree with them but can't tell it in public” (Instagram.com 2018, 432, 3). Whether or not H&M is smart not to answer people in the comment section is hard to decide, since people probably would scrutinize either way. Had they answered, their answers would have led to a more dispersed and complicated communication strategy, whereas not answering leaves an impression of indifference.

A further example of H&M not giving a sufficient response, where they seem to miss the whole point of the question, is when @thekenexperience poses the question ”@hm Im curious. How many on your executive team are persons of color?” (Instagram.com 2018, 421, 3). H&M then replies with “@hm@thekenexperience Hi there Kenneth. You can find out more about our board of directors in Sweden here, as well as other facets of our company should it interest you. <https://about.hm.com/en/about-us/corporate-governance/board-of-directors.html>” (Instagram.com 2018, 422, 3). Kenneth was clearly referencing the question of race in their cooperation, since such a crisis could occur, but H&M sticks to standardized responses and leaves the impression of admittance of guilt in the comment section. This may be explained by the need for a clear-cut communication strategy that leaves no open-ended answers, and may therefore be letting the issued apologies stand alone without further scrutiny in the comment section.

## PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

This crisis is one people feel strongly about and it has sparked many and differing opinions. What especially stands out is the high use of racial connotations and racist remarks, both for people viewing H&M in a negative and in a positive light. Some comments value the apology and clearly states that H&M is forgiven, where others either state that such an act cannot be forgiven, or they bring up similar acts, where H&M has acted in a less favorable manner. This leaves the impression of corporate reputation being a significant factor in the reception of an issued apology pending a crisis, since scholars agree that a favorable corporate reputation may help organizations in the wake of a crisis. This is not the case for H&M, where no statements of prior good actions are mentioned, but instead the highlighting of previous and present negative actions is present.

## APPRAISAL ANALYSIS

In this section I will analyze the Press Release issued by H&M following the crisis. The issued Press Release is also what is shown in the photos on Instagram. Combining the analysis of rhetorical appeals with an appraisal analysis, I will conduct an analysis of the issued apology/crisis communication by H&M.

As mentioned in the theory section and methodological framework, appraisal theory deals with evaluative language, which is used by participants/authors in order to incite an adoption or countering of a stance. Appraisal theory by Martin and White (2005) is divided into three main dimensions, namely *Attitude*, *Engagement* and *Graduation*. The Press Release and color-coded

analysis framework is available below, reference this for color-coding of the three dimensions  
(About.hm.com: *H&M issues unequivocal apology for poorly judged product and image*, 2018).

The color-codes are as follows:

ATTITUDE                      1= Affect, 2 = Judgement, 3= Appreciation

ENGAGEMENT                1= Monogloss, 2 = Heterogloss

GRADUATION                 1 = Force, 2 = Focus

1 NEWS ARTICLE  
2 H&M ISSUES UNEQUIVOCAL APOLOGY FOR POORLY JUDGED PRODUCT  
3 AND IMAGE

4 To all customers, staff, media, stakeholders, partners, suppliers, friends and critics. We  
5 would like to put on record our position in relation to the image and promotion of a  
6 children's sweater, and the ensuing response and criticism. Our position is simple and  
7 unequivocal – we have got this wrong and we are deeply sorry.

8 9 JAN, 2018

9 H &M is fully committed to playing its part in addressing society's issues and problems, whether  
10 it's diversity, working conditions or environmental protection – and many others. Our standards are  
11 high and we feel that we have made real progress over the years in playing our part in promoting  
12 diversity and inclusion. But we clearly haven't come far enough.

13 We agree with all the criticism that this has generated – we have got this wrong and we agree  
14 that, even if unintentional, passive or casual racism needs to be eradicated wherever it  
15 exists. We appreciate the support of those who have seen that our product and promotion were  
16 not intended to cause offence but, as a global brand, we have a responsibility to be aware of  
17 and attuned to all racial and cultural sensitivities – and we have not lived up to this  
18 responsibility this time.

19 This incident is accidental in nature, but this doesn't mean we don't take it extremely seriously  
20 or understand the upset and discomfort it has caused.

21 We have taken down the image and we have removed the garment in question from sale. It will  
22 be recycled.

23 We will now be doing everything we possibly can to prevent this from happening again in  
24 future.

25 Racism and bias in any shape or form, conscious or unconscious, deliberate or accidental, are  
26 simply unacceptable and need to be eradicated from society. In this instance we have not been  
27 sensitive enough to this agenda.

## ATTITUDE

Attitude concerns itself with our feelings and emotional reaction. This includes a judgment of behavior, in addition to affect and appreciation.

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### AFFECT

*Affect* regards how we are affected by instances in grammatical structures, and may be realized through verbs and lexical items. The sentence “We have got this wrong and we are deeply sorry” (H&M 2018, 7), displays this through a behavioral and mental process that describes the wrongdoings of H&M and the subsequent reaction. The feelings following this are negative, seeing that the mental process is one of ‘being sorry’. The feelings constructed are therefore a reaction to a specific emotional trigger, namely the wrongdoings of the company. The Emoter in this and the trigger of the emotions are participants in this circumstantial position, and leaves an impression of remorse. The phrase ‘We have got this wrong’ also displays an interesting interplay of *Affect* and *Judgement*, seeing that this indicates remorse and construes an emotional reaction to a behavior both the writer and the reader disapproves of, and in turn, this evokes evaluation even without an attitudinal lexis that tells us exactly how to feel and make sense of the situation.

A second display of *Affect* is visible in the statement “H&M is fully committed” (H&M 2018, 9) – here ‘committed’ displays a sense of trust, showing the company’s disposition as feeling confident in “playing its part in addressing society’s issues and problems” (H&M 2018, 9). What is important to note about this use of wording, is that it helps grade the depth of a feeling, and this impacts *graduation*.

Generally, *Affect* registers both negative and positive feelings, for instance with the phrase “In this instance we have not been sensitive enough to this agenda” (H&M 2018, 26-27), which displays a



reaction to a specific emotional trigger, namely racism and bias. Feelings regarding *affect* may also concern themselves with being construed by society, which is visible in the statement “and need to be eradicated from society” (H&M 2018, 26), since this displays negative connotations, but the fact that H&M is taking a stance against Racism, which is what is being referred to, lets H&M to adopt a favorable stance in terms of their readers. In terms of how the feelings are graded, this is placed in the higher valued end, since for instance H&M states that “But this doesn’t mean we don’t take it extremely seriously” (H&M 2018, 19), with marker such as ‘extremely’ and ‘seriously’ grading the feeling towards the incident.

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## APPRECIATION

The phrase “The upset and discomfort it has caused” (H&M 2018, 20) displays interplay between *affect* and *appreciation*, seeing that people have been affected by the incident and in turn feel upset as a mental reaction. In relation to mental processes, Suzanne Eggins (Martin and White 2005, 57) makes a distinction between *Reaction*, *Composition* and *Valuation*, where *Composition* is visible by the phrase “Our position is simple” (H&M 2018, 6). Composition is related to our perception (or the writer’s perception), or to textual organization, which construes a harmonious sense of reaction. Similarly, the phrase ‘Needs to be eradicated displays an abstract phenomenon, by referring to racism, and in this displays a double-coding judgement with a reference to a social sanction.

An additional feature of *Appreciation* is shown in the sentence “The incident is accidental in nature” (H&M 2018, 19), which ascribes an attitude to a thing or event, and the incident becomes somewhat commonsense by the use of ‘in nature’ and leaves the reader with a sense of naturalness, reflecting on the incident a positive light. With the use of ‘incident’ in the sentence, the writer is

able to somewhat guide the reader's impressions and judgment, since the words 'incident' and 'accidental' places blame outside the company.

Their final statement 'Please accept our humble apologies (H&M 2018, 28) displays a valuation of their apology, and the use of 'humble' in this respect may be up for discussion, since not all recipients may feel the sincerity of their apology, and hence 'humble' may not be a given.

Interplay between *Appreciation* and *Judgment* is constructed in the statement "Be aware of and attuned to all racial and cultural sensitivities" (H&M 2018, 16-17). Here *Judgment* is seen through the ethical nature of the statement, which ascribes a positive attitude to the company, whilst *appreciation* is visible in the sentence by way of the mental process there exists in being aware and attuned. The 'racial and cultural sensitivities' are therefore the target of *Judgment*, whilst also displaying *Appreciation*, as these sensitivities are rather abstract. This hybrid realization again construes an emotional behavior we approve of.

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## JUDGMENT

With regards to *Judgment*, there is a clear majority of this in the text. *Judgment* may be divided into two sub-clauses, namely *Social Esteem* and *Social Sanction*, where *Social Esteem* has to do with normality, capacity and tenacity (Martin and White 2005, 53), and *Social Sanction* has to do with veracity and propriety (Martin and White 2005, 52). The statement "But we clearly haven't come far enough" (H&M 2018, 12) displays a sense of negative capacity, showing incompetent work and the admittance of this. More positive *Judgments* are visible in the statement "But as a global brand, we have a responsibility" showing a positive sense of *Social Esteem* by referring to *Tenacity* by the use of reliability and productivity through the use of 'global'. The connotations this statement also infers are *Social Esteem* through positive *Normality*, displaying a sense of uniqueness, as not all

brands get to call itself ‘global’. Simultaneously, this phrase views a counterstatement, by the use of ‘but’ at the beginning of the sentence, hence H&M is somewhat distancing themselves from the statement, while the message still remains.

Through the use of modality and types of Judgment, a writer is able to either display *modalization* or *modulation*, which subsequently may either display a probability vs. usuality and obligation vs. readiness (Martin and White 2005, 54). This distinction and choice of lexis is seen in the statement “Fully committed” (H&M 2018, 9) showing an inclination to resolve issues that present themselves. Somewhat also visible in the sentence “playing its part in addressing society’s issues and problems” (H&M 2009, 9), since this displays a sense of obligation to society.

Regarding *Social Sanction*, the text displays several features of this. The statement “We feel that we have made real progress over the years” (H&M 2018, 11), conveys a sense of propriety by the use of humbleness, since the use of ‘feel’ is a subjective judgment, and the reader is therefore left with the feeling of being able to construct its own rendition and conclusion to this statement.

For the *Social Esteem* there are no markers of normality, which one may argue H&M has refrained from, because of their unfavorable position in the crisis, where positive normality markers may be seen as too much ‘bolstering’ and negative normality markers would leave an unfortunate impression on their actions. *Tenacity* may be present in terms of positive markers, referring to faithfulness and trustworthiness, which H&M may be said to try and bolster, for instance with the statement “Our standards are high and we feel that we have made real progress over the years” (H&M 2018, 9-10). Here they are trying to remind their readers of prior good deeds, but without being specific, hence leaving the impression of discrete admiration. In terms of *Social Sanction* there is a mix of both positive and negative expressions, both within *veracity* and *propriety* – this is also highly relevant given the ethical nature of the crisis. Hence a text that is both truthful to the

negative implications of one's action and bolsters the positive, would leave a good impression on the reader.

A final important aspect of *Attitude* is that of *inscribed* or *invoked attitude* (Martin and White 2005, 61-68). "When we suggest that a text naturalizes a reading position, we mean as far as evaluation is concerned that it will be fairly directive in the kinds of attitude it wants readers to share" (Martin and White 2005, 63). An *inscribed attitude* directs readers evaluation and may be realized through indicators of counter-expectancy, such as 'but' or the use of intrusive sentences – an example of this in the text is seen in "We have got this wrong and we agree that, even if unintentional, passive or casual racism needs to be eradicated" (H&M 2018, 13-14). With the interposed sentence, the writer intrudes the text and explicitly evaluates the readers' orientation to the incident. This in turn intensifies the feeling of remorse, whilst still implying a lesser degree of judgment. Judgement in this case displays an indirect positive judgement of the people supporting H&M. This is visible in other statements, such as the sentence "We have taken down the image and we have removed the garment in question from sales" (H&M 2018, 21). Here H&M displays a positive judgement of themselves, with reference to social sanction. The same is apparent in the statement "We will know be doing everything we possibly can to prevent this from happening again in the future" (H&M 2018, 23-34). Here they are judging their own actions and putting this against what society demands. An example of an *invoked attitude* is visible in the statement "We feel that we have made real progress (H&M 2018, 11), which construes an attitude to their own behavior, and may be treated as affectual inscriptions implying judgement towards their own ethics.

Partially conclusively, *Attitude* has displayed a high level of *Judgment*, both in a positive and negative manner, leading to the conclusion that H&M displays remorse, while at the same time, wishing to stress the un-intentionality of the incident. Whether this un-intentionality is accepted by the readers will be concluded in the discussion.

## ENGAGEMENT

*Engagement* leads the reader to adopt a stance towards value positions being referenced in the text and the people addressed (Martin and White 2005, 95). Meaning-making in this respect is of vital importance, and whether the text will be problematic or un-problematic for the putative reader, namely whether the viewpoint of the text will be shared or if the reader needs to be won over. Martin and White (2005) in this respect stresses the importance of Bahktin's/Voloshinov's notions of dialogism, which deals with the utterances that presents what has been said/written before, and whether the text allows for these sometimes alternative viewpoints.

The text's' communicative roles play a significant part in determining the dialogistic nature. Despite the text being in fact an apology with deep admissions of guilt and hence no alternative dialogue, it still displays *heteroglossic* features (A recognition of dialogistic alternatives). The opposite being *monoglossic*, which leaves no recognition of dialogistic alternatives. A *monoglossic* text displays a taken-for-grantedness, whereas the text by H&M displays a communicative objective of both explaining and recording. The taken-for-grantedness is visible by the use of *graduation* signatures such as 'Clearly' (H&M 2018, 12) and 'Simply unacceptable' (H&M 2018, 26). However, something may be *monoglossically* declared, but not taken for granted. Counter-arguments may support the value position, or the writer (H&M) will go into supplying a series of arguments that construes the value position as an issue – for instance by stating the incident as being accidental by nature or by the intrusive sentence 'even if unintentional' (H&M 2018, 14). One may argue that the text from H&M will be read by many readers with the diametrically opposite position, hence the hedge-indicators may wish to alter this view – to which one may argue that the text is at first glance *monoglossic*, but by digging deeper, the *heteroglossic* features stand out, when they acknowledge other voices.

An aspect of *Engagement* is visible in the wording “We appreciate the support of those who have seen (...)” (H&M 2018, 15), with ‘appreciate’ showing a sense of worth and a reaction to the phenomena of people supporting the company, and by this construction they are displaying a *heteroglossic* stance, with the acknowledgement of other ‘voices’.

Within the question of a text being *heteroglossic*, lies the question of it displaying dialogic contraction or dialogic expansion. Dialogic contraction explicitly reference utterances and viewpoints of others, evident by the statement “We agree with all the criticism that this has generated” (H&M 2018, 13). This displays reported speech, whilst still a closing down of dialogic alternatives. The text displays an interesting form of *heteroglossic* contraction in the shape of counter-disclaim, but the interesting thing is that this takes place within the text itself. For instance “H&M is fully committed to playing it’s part in addressing (...) But we clearly haven’t come far enough” (H&M 2018, 12). This provides an unequal writer-reader relationship in favor of the reader, conveyed via conjunctions. “Such counters are aligning rather than disaligning in that they construe the writer as sharing this axiological paradigm with the reader (Martin and White 2005, 121). Within dialogic contraction lies the feature ‘proclaim’, which are “Formulations that overtly announce the addresser as agreeing with or having the same knowledge as, some projected dialogic partner” (Martin and White 2005, 122). See full Appraisal figure in appendix 2 for reference. The text displays interactions between concur and counter, namely conceding concurrence. The writer shows a high degree of commitment to the cause of the text, which construes a putative reader, who may be presumed to be resistant to the writer’s argumentative position, which is also valid in the case of H&M, because of its unfavorable position in this crisis. Such a feature “validates the reader’s contrary viewpoint by acknowledging that it is understandable and has a rational basis (Martin and White 2005, 125). This is viewed in statements such as “In this instance we have not

been sensitive enough to this agenda” (H&M 2018, 26-27), where they are stressing their mistakes and owning up to them, hence validating the people who disagrees with their actions.

Within *Proclaim* lies also *Endorsement* and *Pronouncement*. *Endorsement* displays an authorial voice, which is somewhat visible in the text, for instance with the argument “H&M is fully committed to playing its part in addressing society’s issues and problems” (H&M 2018, 9), which presupposes a warrantability and dialogical relationship, and contractive in the respect that it wishes to align the reader’s value position. In terms of *Pronouncement*, the text displays this against itself – meaning the subjective explicitness is visible in instances such as “In this instance we have not been sensitive enough to this agenda” (H&M 2018, 26-27). Here the text is very explicit with the blame-placing and thus displays a subjective view, which at the same time acts as being dialogically contractive, leaving an impression of remorse.

Dialogic expansion on the other hand opens the dialogue by way of entertainment: “We feel that we have made real progress over the years in playing our part in promoting diversity and inclusion” (H&M 2018, 11). This mental verb projection is referenced by Halliday (1994 in Martin and White 2005), who argue that such projections are modal “rather than experimental or informational in their communicative functionality (Martin and White 2005, 105). Palmer (1986 in Martin and White 2005) also argued that such a reference indicates epistemic Judgment, and will entail a *heteroglossic* backdrop. H&M in this respect wishes to remind its readers of past good deeds, whilst allowing the reader to maintain their individual subjectivity, and thereby recognizing the opposite viewpoint. Hence, an impression of a reflected corporation emerges. Following this comes a *monoglossic* statement “But we clearly haven’t come far enough” (H&M 2018, 12), again providing an acknowledgement of guilt. This low level of modality followed by *monoglossic* utterances provides a strong admittance of guilt, and leaves an impression of a corporation maintaining a *monoglossic* view of themselves and it’s wrong-doings, with *heteroglossic* features slightly more

hidden. By construing this *heteroglossic* backdrop with *monoglossic* features, H&M are able to provide itself with the possibility of solidarity.

## GRADUATION

The semantic of *graduation* is important to the Appraisal system, as this helps a text in upscaling or downscaling its lexical features, and therefore enhance the value-system. “Graduation operates across two axes of scalability – that of grading according to intensity or amount, and that of grading according to prototypicality and the preciseness by which category boundaries are drawn” (Martin and White 2005, 137). *Graduation* may be divided into *Focus* (Mostly non-scalable items/phenomons) and *Force* (Intensity and Amount). See the full Appraisal figure in appendix 2 for reference.

Examples of attitudinal meanings are ‘Deeply sorry’ (High degree), ‘Unequivocal’ (High degree), ‘All the criticism’ (Amount), ‘Humble apologies’ (Operating as a phenomenon, which match an exemplary instance of a semantic category), ‘Fully committed’ (High degree) and ‘Everything we possibly can’ (High degree). Generally, the text displays a large use of *Focus* and up-scaling, such as the statement “Simply unacceptable” (H&M 2018, 26). A statement such as “Accidental in nature” (H&M 2018, 19), is an attitudinal term, which is sharpening and softening at the same time, since the nature of the attitude is subject to co-textual influences, for instance with the careful use of ‘accidental’, followed by the conjunction ‘but’, which sharpens the impression. The somewhat low use of softening terms indicates a high dedication to a value position that does not favor H&M, but instead the addressee and the people offended by the sweatshirt.

In terms of *Force*, an instance such as ‘Real progress’ (H&M 2018, 11) conveys a high degree of intensity, while ‘Extremely seriously’ (H&M 2018, 19) displays a pre-modification of an adjective,



which displays an isolating mode of intensification. Here the word ‘extremely’ performs the function of setting the level of intensity. Statements such as “Simply unacceptable” (H&M 2018, 26) shows maximization, both by the modalization ‘simply’, but also with the judgment-adjective ‘unacceptable’. Quantification is apparent in statements such as ‘many others’ (H&M 2018, 10), which displays a mix of concrete and abstract entities. Another abstract entity is shown in the wording “global brand” (H&M 2018, 16), which is a display of Distribution of Space and in a non-figurative manner.

Another instance of *Force* is the statement “Needs to be eradicated” (H&M 2018, 26), which conveys intensification, and displays an attitudinal assessment. The statement also provides a notion of vigor, providing the impression that H&M takes an active stance in the abolition of racism. Simultaneously, this provides a marginal between interpersonal meaning and experiential meaning, as this viewpoint combines the subjective assessment of vigor, by depicting a condition in the external world. The former instance displays an attitudinal meaning, same as the following: “Our standards are high” (H&M 2018, 10). This is viewed via an abstract entity, which in this case displays affect.

*Force* also includes the use of metaphors as intensification, however the lack of these in the text also provides an analytical point – namely that this displays a coherent and fact-based apology. The only instance of a somewhat metaphorical sense is by the statement “Everything we possibly can” (H&M 2018, 23), which displays an upscaling of attitude, which acts to construe the writer as maximally committed to the value position, and thereby aligning the reader. But what this instance does not provide, is an account of what ‘everything’ is, thus leaving a somewhat vague and metaphorical sense, which shall indirectly construe its position as highly warrantable without actually being so. Additionally, the phrase “Poorly judged product” is worth noting, since this

displays a subjective intensification, which has attained this position in the aftermath of the crisis.

Hence, the nature of the crisis has changed the intensification marker of the product.

*Force* may also be visible through use of time within distribution – where *graduation* displays when an event took place, and how this helps to grade the event. This is apparent in the use of ‘now’ in their statement regarding what they will be doing in the future to prevent similar incidents. This displays a sharp separation between their prior wrongdoings and their future good deeds. The progressive tense helps to further this argument.

Conclusively, the core value being invoked through *graduations* is one of regret and admission of guilt together with the appreciation resources analyzed.

## PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

The Appraisal analysis displayed a significant level of *judgement* and *graduation*, both in a positive and negative manner. H&M has not been hesitant to show a high admittance of guilt, which is displayed through *Judgments of Social Sanction* and *Social Esteem*. Simultaneously, this is backed up by *graduation* markers that serve to fulfill the purpose of adopting a stance and forming an opinion about the given subject.

Especially the *Attitude* markers display remorse and aids in determining the stance of the writer, namely a position of guilt and hope of forgiveness. *Affect* is also displayed in interplay with *judgement*, which uses an attitudinal lexis that shows the feelings of the writer and the reader – which again exhibits a negative stance towards the actions from the company. Finally, the mix of a *monoglossic* text with strong *heteroglossic* features construct a stance which initially would be negative, but with the connotations following the *heteroglossic* features, readers might adopt stance of forgiveness.

## PERSUASION ANALYSIS

As established in the theory and methodological framework, the Aristotelian elements – Ethos, Pathos, and Logos may act as strategies of persuasion. Seeing as crisis communication should do just that, namely alter the perception of a crisis, or at least lessen the implications, persuasion strategies seems to be the obvious choice. The Press Release and color-coded analysis framework is available below, reference this for color-coding of the three dimensions (About.hm.com: *H&M issues unequivocal apology for poorly judged product and image*, 2018). The color-codes are as follows:

ETHOS

LOGOS

PATHOS

1 NEWS ARTICLE  
2 H&M ISSUES UNEQUIVOCAL APOLOGY FOR POORLY JUDGED PRODUCT  
3 AND IMAGE

4 To all customers, staff, media, stakeholders, partners, suppliers, friends and critics. We  
5 would like to put on record our position in relation to the image and promotion of a  
6 children's sweater, and the ensuing response and criticism. Our position is simple and  
7 unequivocal – we have got this wrong and we are deeply sorry.  
8 H &M is fully committed to playing its part in addressing society's issues and problems, whether  
9 it's diversity, working conditions or environmental protection – and many others. Our standards are  
10 high and we feel that we have made real progress over the years in playing our part in promoting  
11 diversity and inclusion. But we clearly haven't come far enough.

12 We agree with all the criticism that this has generated – we have got this wrong and we agree  
13 that, even if unintentional, passive or casual racism needs to be eradicated wherever it  
14 exists. We appreciate the support of those who have seen that our product and promotion were  
15 not intended to cause offence but, as a global brand, we have a responsibility to be aware of  
16 and attuned to all racial and cultural sensitivities – and we have not lived up to this  
17 responsibility this time. This incident is accidental in nature, but this doesn't mean we don't  
18 take it extremely seriously or understand the upset and discomfort it has caused.

19 We have taken down the image and we have removed the garment in question from sale. It will  
20 be recycled.

21 We will now be doing everything we possibly can to prevent this from happening again in  
22 future.

23 Racism and bias in any shape or form, conscious or unconscious, deliberate or accidental, are  
24 simply unacceptable and need to be eradicated from society. In this instance we have not been  
25 sensitive enough to this agenda.

26 Please accept our humble apologies.

## ETHOS

Ethos works by establishing trust and credibility in the speaker-writer relation, for instance by appealing to similarities – “H&M is fully committed to playing its part in addressing society’s issues and problems” (H&M 2018, 8). This statement establishes a sense of community with the reader, uniting H&M with the people it has offended, by leaving the impression that ‘we are all in this together’. This helps to bolster identification and create a sense of similitude, and the text references ‘playing our part’ again in line 10, now with the pronoun ‘our’ which additionally helps to suggest commonality and cohesion. The statement “need to be eradicated from society” (H&M 2018, 25) also displays this bolstering of identification and similitude, since the writer wishes to establish a relationship with the reader, and create a sense of fighting for a cause together.

Additionally, the statement “But this does not mean we don’t take it extremely seriously or understand the upset and discomfort it has caused” (H&M 2018, 18-19), displays deference and ingratiation, which signals the author’s respect for the audience’s feelings and rights, while persuading them to agree with the company.

Another way of using Ethos as a persuasion tool is by appealing to expertise. This is done by drawing the reader’s attention to the organization’s qualification, experience and past good deeds. H&M also makes use of this, by referencing the commitment to “diversity, working conditions or environmental protection” (H&M 2018, 8-9). In doing so, the reader’s attention is hopefully moved away from the incident, but H&M could have made this even stronger by referencing a specific event, which would display the persuasion as less ‘fluffy’. Ethos may also be displayed through self-criticism, for instance by the phrase “But as a global brand, we have a responsibility to be aware of and attuned to (...)” (H&M 2018, 15-16). This conveys the impression that H&M knows it

did not live up to this responsibility, and that being a global brand does in fact require such a knowledge and attentiveness.

## LOGOS

“Logos refers to clarity and integrity of the argument” (Higgins and Walker 2012, 198), and in this respect should display an appearance of rationality and commonsense. Commonsense in H&M’s text is conveyed for instance by the use of “unequivocal” (H&M 2018, 7) in relation to their position in the incident. Unequivocal signals that this position is somewhat taken for granted, and that H&M would not want to or be able to take a different stance. This is also apparent by the use of “clearly” in the sentence “But we clearly haven’t come far enough” (H&M 2018, 11), which again tries to establish a favorable relationship with the reader, leaving the impression that they are fighting for the same cause. Logos may also be realized through a benefactor perspective that favors an environmental perspective as commonsense. By stating “We have taken down the image and we have removed the garment in question from sale. **It will be recycled**” (H&M 2018, 20-21), they are stressing the fact that even in the wake of such a crisis, they are still staying true to other standards, such as trying to be environmentally responsible.

Logos is also apparent by the use of apparent neutrality, justifications and claims, which H&M also makes use of, however not in the same degree one might expect – this may be argued to be because H&M has realized that it is in an unfavorable position, and hence no logic will suffice, especially in such an incident, that naturally raises questions about ethics. In a manner where H&M does employ it, is in the statement “Racism and bias in any shape or form, conscious or unconscious, deliberate or accidental (...) (H&M 2018, 24), where the use of opposites creates a sense of neutrality, showing ‘both sides of the coin’. The statement ‘Needs to be eradicated’ also

displays a high level of Logos, since this leaves the claim to be incontestable and hence something that should appeal to one's sense of logic.

Claims and justifications are also apparent in Logos, where for instance H&M claims to do everything it possibly can to prevent such an incident from happening again. In this sense, 'everything' is the source of the claim, showing a high degree of bolstering in order to lessen the implications of the incident. This is also possible through the use of justifications, like "This incident is accidental in nature" (H&M 2018, 18), where it is stressing the accident in the crisis, thus trying to diminish the anger people may feel towards its actions. Such a defense may be used as a rationale for the activity, and should help guide the reader in their opinion-making.

## PATHOS

Pathos is conveyed through feelings and relies on triggering the audiences' emotions. An example of this would be the understanding of the audiences' feelings, for instance in the statement "We have got this wrong and we are **deeply sorry**" (H&M 2018, 7), which also relates to the values and needs it should have displayed. An additional instance where pathos is realized is by the showing of gratefulness: "We appreciate the support of those (...)" (H&M 2018, 14), where H&M takes a submissive stance, being the giver of appreciation, and thus relying on others to provide them with support in order to feel grateful.

A place in the text where pathos is highly visible, is in the headline. "H&M issues unequivocal apology for poorly judged product and image" (H&M 2018, 2-3). The use of both 'apology' and 'poorly judged' demands an admittance of guilt and clearly establishes a non-favorable position of H&M. By this headline, H&M is admitting to its' responsibility and at the same time accepting the

blame posed by readers. Pathos may also be displayed through identification, for instance by being culturally or institutionally specific. In the case of H&M's text, this is visible in the statement "passive or causal racism needs to be eradicated" (H&M 2018, 13). Generally, no one would oppose to this view, however, it implies a prior knowledge and hence may be argued to be culturally specific. H&M also conveys pathos when in the first line it references "friends and critics" (H&M 2018, 4), which implies a prior relationship, while at the same time allowing for the critics to display their opinion. One may also argue that this press release is in fact most relevant for the critics, as an apology by nature should initiate forgiveness, which one would assume is also what H&M wishes to accomplish. By referencing prior good deeds, a company may also establish an impression of being a benefactor, which is also the case for H&M. By stating that the sweatshirt will be recycled, one may argue that this information is not directly related to the incident, but it displays a favorable position for H&M, which is one of being a benefactor. Negative pathos references are also apparent, for instance through "that our product and promotion were not intended to cause offense (...)" (H&M 2018, 15), which allows for critics and also deeming the incident offensive, whilst hedging the phrase by calling it unintentional. The buzz-word being unintentional, since this is ultimately what H&M has for an argumentative standpoint, since the offensiveness has been thoroughly established. Therefore, the only option is to stress the un-intentionality of the offense.

Finally, a triggering of emotions is also apparent in the concluding statement "Please accept our humble apologies" (H&M 2018, 27), which stresses the need for sympathy and the respect for readers' feelings, which may be opposing towards H&M. Hence an interplay of 'Affect' and Pathos is apparent.



## PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

Conclusively, Ethos, Logos and Pathos are highly visible in the text, providing a highly persuasive effect. There is a somewhat lower level of Logos instances, which may be explained by the ethical nature of the incident. The arguments for and against the incident are highly subjective and ethical, hence logical arguments might not suffice – perhaps might even do more harm than good. H&M has therefore probably made the right decision to stress Ethos and Pathos, from a communicative standpoint, since this would have the best persuasive effect in this case. Had the incident been less emotional by nature, Logos would have been just as useful.

## CRISIS COMMUNICATION ANALYSIS

Following my previous analyses, this section will contain a discussion of the results found, and finally an assessment of what these results indicate in terms of which crisis communication strategy has been used based on the SCCT by Coombs.

The SCCT presupposes that by linking crisis type with response strategy an organization is able to obtain the most favorable result in the aftermath of a crisis. Coombs argues that by providing instructing information and adjusting the information available, this should result in reputation repair. This may be done by expressing sympathy and providing additional information, in order to help the understanding of the crisis and ultimately explain the strategies, which the corporation employs in order to avoid the crisis in the future. What is ultimately found in the appraisal and rhetorical analysis of the press release is that these avoidance strategies are somewhat missing in the

press release. H&M somewhat addresses this issue with the statement “We will now be doing everything we possibly can to prevent this from happening again in the future” (H&M 2018, 22-23), but it does not explain what these strategies include. Interestingly, this is addressed in the caption for the first picture on Instagram, which is analyzed in the thematic analysis. This caption reads “(...) We have reached out, around the world, inside and outside H&M to get feedback. Our commitment to addressing diversity and inclusiveness is genuine, therefore we have appointed a global leader, in this area, to drive our work forward” (Picture 1 Appendix 4). The fact that H&M has appointed a global leader shows a strategy to help avoid a similar crisis in the future, so perhaps this should have been included in the press release in order to establish a streamlined communication across channels.

Regarding the 4 central factors that affect the attributions, which the public ascribe to the crisis are crisis type, veracity of evidence, damage history and performance history.

Starting with establishing the crisis type, this includes several dimensions – namely whether it is internally or externally created, the violence-level, intentionality vs. unintentionality, deniability and issue of victims.

One may argue that H&M’s crisis is a mix of an internally and externally created crisis, since the incident arose from a transgression that could have been avoided by the organization internally, but the blame-placing arose from factors outside of the organization. The crisis was in nature non-violent, however one may argue that the incident is racially abusive, hence it does cause damage. Regarding the question of intentionality, it is up for debate, since H&M argues the incident to have been unintentional, whereas for instance comments on social media suggest that such an incident must be intentional, since the argument is that being attuned to racial issues should be a given in such a large corporation. The deniability issue also influence the attributions the public ascribe to

the crisis, where H&M's crisis communication displays a very low level of deniability, accepting full responsibility for the incident, and downright apologizes.

The final factor in the crisis type includes the issue of victims, and whether these victims are concrete or diffuse. I would argue that this crisis represents both a concrete victim, namely the young boy in the picture and diffuse victims, which are black people all over the world.

Moving on to the matrix outlined in the theoretical section, I will discuss the nature of the crisis based on the guidelines provided in this. The matrix has been placed below for reference;

	<b>Unintentional</b>	<b>Intentional</b>
<b>External</b>	Faux pas	Terrorism
<b>Internal</b>	Accidents	Transgressions

Based on this matrix, the crisis could either be seen as an 'Accident' using the argument that the crisis initiator was internal. But it could also be seen as a faux pas, with the argument being that the initiator was an external factor. H&M itself presents the crisis as a faux pas, since this entails an unintentional act to do harm. H&M stresses the un-intentionality of the incident, where the actions from H&M has started out as appropriate from its own perspective, but that external agents have later deemed it inappropriate and thus initiated the crisis. A faux pas includes a high level of ambiguity, as the severity of the crisis ultimately relies on the public's perception. As mentioned in the theory section, this ambiguity may sometimes work in the company's favor, if H&M is able to alter the perception of the crisis, which is somewhat what it has tried to do by stressing the un-

intentionality. However, a faux pas often results in a boycott or protest, which is exactly what H&M has experienced in the aftermath.

The second factor in establishing the public's perception of the crisis is the veracity of evidence. In H&M's case, the evidence displays high level of ambiguity, as actual evidence is lacking and cannot be found, since it originates from actions that in no way has been recorded or publicly accessible. Instead, the evidence relies on ethics and morality.

Third and fourth factor include the damage and performance history, which in H&M's case is a mix of a neutral and negative performance history. Many comments on Instagram refer to prior transgressions, but since prior transgressions have not been included in the analysis, these factors are hard for me to establish. Following H&M's own view, prior transgressions are not mentioned in the crisis communication, and instead a slight hint towards prior good actions have been included. But what Coombs stresses is that a negative reputation in this respect has a large influence on the acceptance and forgiveness following the crisis and the crisis communication. Additionally, depending on the severity of the crisis, the public wants assurance that the crisis will not repeat itself.

Moving onto the assessment of the crisis communication, which would be the most effective based on Coombs' decision chart (Appendix 6, Coombs 2015, 145), I have concluded that the crisis is a mix of having a 'strong crisis responsibility' and being an 'integrity-based crisis', which both call for instructing and adjusting information, a compensation or apology (or both). The outcomes of such a response strategy should in turn protect the organization's reputation and purchase intentions, reduce the publics' anger and anxiety, and hopefully reduce any negative word-of-mouth. Using the faux pas decision flow chart (Coombs 1995, Appendix 1), it is revealed as expected, H&M followed a mix of ambiguous and true evidence, which would result in

mortification and clarification, following the perspective that the company have a negative performance history.

## PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

By assessing the crisis from H&M's point of view, namely that they have chosen a position of intentionality, the crisis displays a 'strong crisis responsibility' and 'integrity-based crisis'. The best strategy would therefore entail 'Repair' and subsequently an 'Apology' or 'Corrective action' based on figure 7.1 in appendix 7. Based on the Appraisal and Evaluative Language analysis, H&M chose the 'apology' as a crisis response strategy, which lets the organization accept responsibility for the crisis and ask stakeholders for forgiveness.

Comparing this crisis response strategy with the following reaction means discussing whether the communication fulfilled its purpose, namely restoring the corporate reputation and receiving forgiveness. The coding analysis revealed a majority of negative receptions, which when taking into account the nature of the crisis is not that surprising, however in terms of crisis communication this should have created a lessening of negativity, which is not completely the case. However, a time perspective should be noted to have value, since the ongoing effect of the crises will be available in the years to come, given the relative novelty of the crises.

The coding analysis did reveal that 15% of the comments displayed a positive perception of the crisis, which is conclusively not as big a step from the 26% of negative perceptions. An aspect that could have created a better result, could be stronger accounts of the corrective actions undertaken by H&M in the aftermath of the crisis. With a stronger account of what this would entail, a greater acceptance could have been present.

## DISCUSSION

As a final discussion, it reveals itself as relevant to address how the previous analysis may contribute to Crisis Communication as a strategy. Given the nature of crisis communication, namely the fact that it revolves around the use of language and achieving the ‘forgiveness’ or at least understanding of an audience, using an Appraisal Framework and Rhetorical analysis becomes highly useful. The combination of adopting a stance from the perspective of an Appraisal Framework and persuading audiences with one’s rhetoric achieves several purposes. Firstly, taking into account how monoglossic and heteroglossic features convey different attitudes, companies are able to assess the crisis based on criteria displayed by Coombs and then determine whether a heteroglossic or monoglossic approach would prove most useful. For instance, a monoglossic text would prove useful in crises where there are no questions raised about the blame-placing, and hence no need for alternative viewpoints. But still heteroglossic features lets a company acknowledge opposing viewpoints, and this often reflects positively on the company’s reputation.

Secondly, as we have seen, the Appraisal category of Attitude has many features common with persuasive language and the rhetorical approach. I therefore argue that combining the two analytical approaches would offer stronger analysis than applying either of them separately. Martin and White (2005) talk of realization, meaning “the idea that language is a stratified semiotic system involving three cycles of coding at different levels of abstraction” (8). The three cycles are phonology and graphology, grammar and lexis and discourse semantics. Especially the discourse semantics in this respect are important, since these refers to meaning beyond the clause, and deals with identification, ideation, conjunction, negotiation and finally appraisal. What my argument relies on is how my crisis communication analysis and rhetorical appeals analysis refers to the firstly mentioned aspects, where the Appraisal analysis explains how evaluation is established and amplified. This establishes

appraisal as a discourse semantic resource for meaning, and the interplay of appraisal and my other chosen frameworks, helps to provide an approach to fully determine the evaluative and textual meaning of crisis communication.

For instance, an interesting overlap may be seen in Engagement vs. Logos. Epistemically, Engagement may help to display insecurity in terms of modality, but not only by use of modal verbs. This is also valuable for Pathos, since this takes for instance hedges into account. But Logos rarely leaves room for high use of modality, given the fact-based nature of it, hence the use of all features provides a text with the ability to take all aspects into account, and thus not only persuades the audience, but also lets the audience adopt the stance the company hopes for. The importance of graduation also becomes relevant here, since the graduation markers may provide nuance to appeal-functions, such as Pathos. Pathos and consequently feelings are often not scalable when viewed from an experiential perspective, hence graduation may help to construe a positive or negative feeling, and aids Pathos in its objective. Graduations may “act to indicate increased or decreased investment in the value position” (Martin & White 2005, 155), and is also present in H&M’s Press Release, thus establishing their value position in terms of negative and positive evaluations.

As mentioned in the methodology, my initial starting point when deciding on my methodological framework, I found inspiration in the master thesis “*Up in the air – A case study of United Airlines’ online written communication vis-à-vis modern, empowered consumers on social media*” written by Bowen and Kragh (2017). This thesis conducted a thematic analysis using coding and a rhetorical analysis. But for the reasons mentioned above, I would argue that the Appraisal Framework also proved relevant for my thesis. The Appraisal Framework ‘digs deeper’ into the wording and its implications, and addresses how the audience is not only persuaded by choice of language, but how they may ultimately adopt a stance based on the chosen vocabulary. For instance the high use of Graduation markers in H&M’s Press Release, leaves the impression of significantly boosting the

apology, while simultaneously hedging the implications of the incident. This may not be visible at first glance, since the first impression of the text is one of guilt, remorse and asking for forgiveness. But the Appraisal Framework helps to establish the subjective presence of the writer as they adopt a stance towards both the crisis, but also the recipients of the communication. The Appraisal Framework in this respect helps to analyze how the writer approves and disapproves, applauds and criticizes, but also how the writer attempts to establish a relationship with the reader. H&M also in this respect uses what Martin & White (2005) refers to as grounding approval in emotion rather than assessment, where the result is an apology that relies on emotions rather than factual data, which again relates to the somewhat low use of Logos. What is also relevant in this case, is that this establishes a relationship of inequality between the writer and the reader (4).

Comparing my thesis and findings to that of Bowen and Kragh's (2017) reveals that where Bowen and Kragh's analysis concluded that United Airlines communicated the wrong thing at the right time, H&M communicated the right thing at the right time, but still with a high level of negative reception. Where United Airlines, after conclusion by Bowen and Kragh, were hesitant to take responsibility for the crisis, H&M took an unequivocal stance of full responsibility for the crisis. This might help to explain why the comments found on United Airline's social media are almost entirely negative, where in the case of H&M, this presents a 50/50 relationship. One aspect that does however present itself as similar, is the high use of Ethos in both United Airline's statements and H&M – which may let one to conclude that the nature of the crisis plays a role in the perception and reception of the company and its actions.

The main objective of Bowen and Kragh's thesis is the analysis of United Airline's crisis communication over time, seeing as the company issued three different statements over a period of time. This aspect is also highly useful, because it lets one conclude on whether crisis communication may have an effect based on the different approaches a company might employ.



Seeing as H&M only issued one apology, this was not possible for my thesis, but as mentioned earlier, seeing how people's perception of H&M might change after the dust settles, would also be an interesting analysis objective.

Combining such a perspective with that of a rhetorical analysis taking persuasive language into account, allows the analysis to be addressed from different perspectives and at different levels of lexis. Argumentation Theory by Toulmin (2003) addresses exactly this by demanding that an argument is backed up by evidence, considerations, features and data. Hence, assertions which Toulmin mostly deals with, is highly relevant for crisis communication, since Argumentation Theory posits that considerations must be in place of why in general a warrant should be accepted as having authority (Toulmin 2003, 95). I shall not go into detail with Argumentation Theory, but my argument remains that based on the needs of the Argumentation Theory, which is ultimately to construct arguments that remain authorial after scrutiny, the approach used for my thesis forms a well-grounded basis for analyzing the validity of arguments.

Finally, the coding analysis provides the missing perspective – namely that of consumers. A company may have done everything right in terms of their argumentation, but this does not guarantee acceptance on behalf of consumers. A variety of aspects may influence this, but for instance the ethical nature of this crisis may be important, since ethical issues leave a high level of subjectivity.

The final aspect of my discussion will touch upon the thesis' overall problem formulation, which set out to conduct a case study, which possibly could enrich the field of Crisis Communication on Social Media, based on choice of theory and a methodological framework, which would aid in this. In order to conduct such a thesis, I chose coding analysis, Appraisal Framework and analysis of Rhetorical appeals. Combining the results of this, with that of SCCT let me to conclude that

combining an Appraisal framework with that of rhetorical appeals provides scholars with the opportunity to fully assess crisis communication made by companies on both an organizational level, but also from a communicative standpoint. Simultaneously, the coding analysis aids in understanding the publics' perception of the crisis, and may help to conclude on whether a given crisis communication strategy might not give the desired outcome, despite following the steps outlined by Timothy Coombs. Hence, I am therefore able to conclude that the SCCT may lack consumer perspectives in order to fully comprehend how crises unfold, and additionally may need a larger emphasis on rhetorical aspects in order to fully achieve a desired outcome.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis attempted to conduct an analysis of the crisis communication initiated by H&M, in the aftermath of a so-called 'shitstorm' on social media. The crisis arose because of a children's sweater with the printed text 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle', being displayed on an African-American boy on H&M's web shop. Consumers found this extremely offensive, and H&M felt the need to issue an apology across their channels, on Instagram, Facebook and their webpage. I therefore set out to analyze H&M's apology from different angles, that would allow me to conclude on whether their crisis communication may be said to have been successful. My literature review provided me with the background knowledge of prior research on Crisis communication and Social Media, and let me to focus on Timothy Coombs and his Strategic Crisis Communication Theory. But in order to conclude on whether the chosen crisis communication could be deemed successful, I backed this up with a coding analysis of the comments written on the three Instagram photos posted on H&M's Instagram, featuring their issued apology. This coding analysis revealed recurring themes relevant for the crisis, and revealed a mix of both positive and negative stances towards the company – even within the same theme. It therefore became apparent that this crisis led to quite

opposing views. Therefore, there also emerged a low level of neutrality, which may be argued to be because of the ethical nature of the crisis. In terms of reactions to the apology issued by H&M, people did react to it, however only about 50% of the comments addressed this, and the comments argued whether forgiveness was needed – hence if H&M was to blame for the incident or not.

After the coding analysis, I conducted an Appraisal analysis of the Press Release featuring the apology. This let me to conclude on the stance taken by H&M and hence which stance H&M was hoping their readers would adopt. The analysis displayed a high level of '*Attitude*' markers displaying remorse and forgiveness. Additionally, within '*Attitude*', '*Judgement*' was highly visible, leaving the impression of admittance of guilt. The graduation markers present supported this stance and emphasized standards and attunes. The text also revealed itself as having a mix of monoglossic and heteroglossic instances. The implications of this are that people feel the remorse, but subliminally are subject to more positive stances towards the company. Additionally, it allows H&M to address negative standpoints and display itself as agreeing with these stances, perhaps creating a reverse psychology effect, where readers forgive because of H&M's admittance of guilt.

Seeing as crisis communication, and in this respect, an apology is meant to persuade an audience, a rhetorical analysis of persuasive language proved itself as highly relevant for my thesis. This analysis revealed a high level of Ethos, which helped to establish a sense of community by use of indication markers such as deference and ingratiation, whilst appealing to expertise. Logos was most apparent through use of common-sense, and not as much through use of rationality. This also fits together with the ethical nature of the crisis, and hence Logos would probably not be well-suited for such a case, where feelings are very much included. Hence, Pathos was also highly apparent, for instance through wordings such as friends, critics, apology and poorly judged. The Appraisal analysis and persuasive language analysis added a dimension to my thesis from the perspective of

H&M, whereas the coding analysis featured the opinions of the consumers. Hence I was able to conclude on the crisis communication following the SCCT.

The crisis ultimately led to a boycott, which Coombs also mentions is a risk in a Faux Pas. Based on this information, H&M did react according to the SCCT, namely by accepting full responsibility and issuing an apology. This did result in around 15% accepting the apology, however, it is worth noting that many of these responders, did not see the issue as an issue in the first place. It will therefore be interesting to see if over time, if this holds up or if H&M will find themselves in a similar crisis in the future.

Conclusively, my thesis attempted at enriching the field of crisis communication, by use of a case study. I conclude that my methodological and theoretical approach has proved highly useful and that it adds to the existing literature on Crisis Communication, which takes language and consumer opinions into account, before concluding on the results of the crisis communication.

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