

**The application of Facebook to crisis communication
management: a case study of Malaysia airlines**

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List of abbreviations and terms

BP	British petroleum
CRS	Crisis response strategy.
CRM	Crisis response message
MAS	Malaysia Airlines.
SCCT	Situational crisis communication theory.
SMCC	Social mediated crisis communication model.
IATA	International air transport association.
ICM	Integrated crisis mapping
SR	Sub-research question.

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Abstract

Our world is being jolted more increasingly by news of crisis and chaos happening globally; from natural disasters to man-made catastrophes, political revolutions and terrorism to economic woes and corporate crisis all making the headlines. Technological innovations like the social media plays a huge role in crisis communication and management of these occurrences, and allows dialogue between the audience and those effected and affected by the occurrence.

The advancement in the use of social media by organisations for their crisis communication has reformed the traditional way of crisis news reporting. Crisis communication now extends to the organisation communicating directly to their stakeholders using their social media handles, and getting response, engagement and feedback directly and simultaneously. The dynamic and transparent nature of social media communication has created a dialogue as opposed to the traditional media which had primary influence through court of public opinion.

This thesis, using observation and content analysis methods, explores how Malaysian Airlines (MAS) managed their crises with the use of Facebook for their crisis communication strategy, by looking at the two fatal plane crashes they experienced in 2014. The analysis then extends to how their stakeholders through Facebook made sense of the crisis news and crisis response messages released by MAS.

The findings indicate that Malaysia Airlines adopts and uses their social media channels as part of their crisis communication channel and also part of the organisation's overall communication channel. Their social media channels during the crisis life cycle adopts and uses similar traditional crisis communication strategies in connecting with their stakeholders.

Key terms: Crisis communication, Crisis management, Social media, Facebook, Malaysia Airlines.

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

Globally, the recurring news of crisis has been on the increase in recent times and the corporate world can be involved in and might have to manage these crises experiences. The occurrence of a crisis or an impending crisis in an organisation catches the attention of stakeholders and non-stakeholders. It also generates an increased scrutiny and attention by the media on the organisation for information on the whats, whys and hows of the crisis as they identify the need to feed the public with the crisis news and how it is being managed to prevent further intensification or reoccurrence.

The scrutiny on the organisation often goes beyond the crisis currently being experienced but extends to an enquiry in the public's opinion of the organisation. Influential to forming the public's opinion of the organisation is the organisation's pre-crisis activities (what the organisation has done before the crisis breakout) and their post-crisis actions, i.e. what is being done by the organisation in managing the crisis from further escalation, damage and future recurrence.

This added pressure from their stakeholders on the need to be provided with adequate information on the crisis, and how they are managing the crisis, emphasises the significance of having a robust crisis management strategy. A strategy which includes a plan that is executable by their crisis team using the best communication strategy in reaching the public in the prevention of or management of a crisis.

Having an effective crisis communication strategy has a huge impact on what becomes of a crisis and its long-term effect on the organisation. This is more so because stakeholders' comprehension of a crisis is based on information readily available to them either directly from the organisation or from other sources with anticipations that expects the crisis communication to be both efficient and effective.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to mention that the technological innovation of the 21st century plays a huge role and impact in today's need for an efficient and effective crisis communication strategy. Technology advancement and trends such as the adoption of internet and social media by individuals and organisation into their daily activity and operations have increased the need

for more extended research in the crisis communication field for both theoretical and practical purposes in preventing and/or managing organisational crisis.

The advancement witnessed with organisations' crisis communication strategies come with the need for the adoption and use of social media in times of crisis. These adoptions, however, have an adverse effect on the traditional channels news reporting and crisis communication. There is a move from a position whereby the management can sway the public's opinion through the media houses, by deciding on what is important and what is irrelevant in terms of how and what they communicate to their stakeholders, to a contemporary process that allows the organisation to use these new communication channels like their social media channels to communicate directly with the stakeholders in real-time but also vice-versa. The social media channels, like Facebook, provide a platform that extends the stakeholder's position from being just the informed to also being the informant in some cases i.e. citizen journalism.

This alteration to the crisis communication paradigm calls for the need for more research to explore how social media is affecting and/or changing the crisis communication study in recent times and the development and impact that this is bringing to the field as research suggests that the adoption of social media into the organisation's crisis communication strategy is no longer a matter of choice but now focuses on how to implement it (Jin, Lin & Austin, 2014).

This thesis fills this gap by focusing on the application of Facebook to crisis communication in the airline industry by exploring MAS's handling of their crisis on Facebook and their stakeholder's interpretation of their crisis response messages. This research does not only analyse the crisis communication strategy of the organisation's messages but also captures the stakeholder's reaction to the crisis information through their comments to the posts released by MAS on their official Facebook page.

This dissertation fills this gap as it uses a case study that is not North American or Eurocentric and then extends the research by using an approach that captures and analyses the stakeholder's interactions and reactions to the organisations communication strategy and how it is effective in their crisis, an opportunity that social media platform, like Facebook, affords.

For this exploratory investigation, I adopt the social constructivist philosophy as the research methodology in exploring real organisational crisis. This is achieved by using observational methods and content analysing the crisis response messages that the organisation released to the public in managing their crisis through their Facebook pages and official website. The

analysis further extends to an audience-oriented approach by capturing the stakeholders' interpretation and real-time reaction to these released messages.

The methodology choice for this thesis deviates from using the positivist objective phenomenon in studying crisis as the positivist stance has been found limiting in its ability to fully provide the best answers and understanding for this type of research. This is due to the complexity that comes with these present day crises creating a gap by obscuring the communicative character of the crisis and the crisis management process during analysis (Hearit & Courtright, 2003). The social constructivist approach is the best fit for this thesis as it will be exploring the crisis communication strategy employed by MAS from a subjective position as I acknowledge the assumption that crisis should not be limited as an objective event but one that can also be influenced by perception and shared belief of all the parties involved.

1.2 Research background

This thesis focuses on the use of Facebook in crisis communication strategy by an organisation in the airline industry using Malaysia Airlines (MAS) crisis as my case study.

The airline industry being an industry that does not only operate in an environment that is quite unpredictable but also vulnerable to crisis, is therefore expected to be crisis prepared by having an effective crisis management strategy in place at all times. This is because the outbreak of a crisis in an airline organisation comes with a complex information need that anticipates the organisation in crisis. The organisation and other affiliated companies need to be able to effectively inform their stakeholders about what happened, what is happening and what will happen in relation to their crisis.

The type of crisis that organisations in the airline industry experience sometimes does not follow the standard crisis management pattern, as they can experience sudden crisis that requires immediate attention despite the organisation's strict adherence to the pre-crisis safety and security procedures outlined for the aviation industry (Alexander, 2013; Henderson, 2003).

The propensity of an airline crisis to be complex and unpredictable is increasing (with the increase of terrorism), and is coupled with the changes that the crisis communication field is experiencing in recent times (instant social media broadcasting). An organisational crisis news may break on social media before the organisation is aware of it because of how we have made using the internet an integral part of our daily lives, and business operations.

The adoption of the internet has brought an end to the “age of deference” with the embracing of social media, both by individuals and organisations, being attributed to be one of the major instruments in accelerating these societal changes (Brown, 2009, p.3). Social media has been seen as a change catalyst that has opened up the communication process to one that empowers the organisation’s stakeholders to talk, share, scan, engage and interact with one another and with the organisation directly.

The adoption of social media channels, as an additional extension to the organisational communication strategy in communicating with their employees and stakeholders in recent times, has brought about ongoing transformation. This adoption is even more interesting as it is bringing about changes to the communication paradigm and also altering how organisations communicate, collaborate and connect with their stakeholders and vice versa. These channels now provide a communication platform between individuals and the organisations for interacting directly with one another in real time without the constraint of time, location and intermediary media, a process that conveys the impression that both the organisation and their stakeholders hear other’s opinion and are being heard.

This change has further increased the need and justification for organisations to have a comprehensive communication strategy that includes the use of social media channels in place, with an added expectation of having an embedded crisis communication strategy. This is so that communication can be transitioned seamlessly from its proactive state in peace time, to a reactive and adaptive crisis communication strategy and vice versa at any stage of the crisis life-cycle.

This new shift has created some gaps in the crisis study (Freberg, 2012) as it has brought in a change to how organisations manage their crisis, especially their crisis communication strategy, a gap that justifies this research.

In as much as the adoption of social media comes with its innovation, it has however also made the communication process more complex for organisations. Previously, the stakeholders just mainly received messages through the media with limited engagement with the organisation.

Presently in time of crisis, stakeholders do not only want to have information about the crisis through the media alone, but they also want to get engaged directly with the organisation and connect with each other during and after the crisis (Bryd, 2012; Luoma-aho, 2015) with

stakeholders expecting to have conversations with the organisation when responding to a crisis (Roshan, Warren & Carr, 2016).

They expect to have immediate information on the crisis and how the organisation is managing the crisis. The urge to have their information needs met explains why they turn to the organisation's social media channels for the crisis information. Social media channels are perceived to provide unfiltered, timely and comprehensive communication in crisis time, with Facebook being used more for crisis communication and information after hearing initial word-of-mouth reports. (Liu, Jin & Austin, 2013).

The utilization of social media in time of crisis has been found to provide a platform for the public to seek, and share information about the crisis, document their experience and communicate with each other. It also extends to providing the public psychological support, provides problem solving opportunities and a space to critique the organisation's crisis response if it does not meet up to their expectations (Liu et al, 2013). All these are made possible because the internet is now accepted as a source for reliable information and bonding as it provides both the organisation, the stakeholders and the public with a communication platform that can sustain information gathering and maintain communication in the face of crisis when other traditional channels fail (Procopio & Procopio, 2007; Roshan, et al., 2016).

This research is answering the call for the need of more research to be done on the crisis communication processes and technologies like social media in crisis management, in a different crisis prone industry (Sellnow, Seeger & Ulmer, 2002) like the airline industry. It is achieved by studying and exploring how organisations in the airline industry use Facebook, a social media channel, in their crisis communication strategy and will also capture their stakeholders' interpretation of their crisis communication strategy; a possibility that Facebook platform has made possible. The findings from this research will add to the growing knowledge as needed in the crisis management field.

1.3 Personal motivation and my research journey experience.

My professional experience in social enterprise and ICT industry exposed me more directly to the knowledge that the world has become a global village over the years which is made possible by great technological innovations that we are experiencing. This exposure made me more aware of the many problems that most emerging markets are faced with in a hostile environment, while also understanding that there is a need to have solid organisational systems

and real-time ICT that are manned and implemented by skilled managers for these countries to tackle the challenges and remain competitive.

The findings resulted in my educational pursuit for more knowledge to enhance my professional skills and I enrolled at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland for my MSc in Management and Finance with an elective course in E-Business. The course emphasis was on internet infrastructure, web evolution and virtual worlds, a revelation to knowledge that complemented my interest in communication as it merged my professional certifications in Management and Computer Network Management with my prior acquired skills.

As a student, I researched on internal communication process in the public sector using a case study approach, E-business adoption and opportunities on an airline company and reviewed the adoption of e-business by small and medium sized enterprises without any hunch that my PhD study was going to be on crisis communication in the aviation industry! Looking in hindsight, all these were tiny bits of knowledge that contributed to my research aptitude.

After the completion of my MSc, I was employed by a social enterprise in their finance department, and later progressed to be a project consultant after a reorganisation process. This position provided me the opportunities and platform to use my newly acquired abilities in a new environment and with this exposure, I now understand the changing trend of the communication process, its effect and how stakeholders are adapting to these changes and using it to their advantage especially from the organisation-stakeholder's perspective.

Over the years, my educational advancement and professional experiences has helped in identifying my strengths and weaknesses which has moulded me into an analytical and strategic-minded professional with progressive accomplishments that manages and supports sound organisational structures and policies. In the process after my MSc, I co-authored an academic paper on challenges that come with digital forensic, which broadened my interest into the crisis that organisation can experience from these challenges.

These exposures and experiences made me realise some of the challenges a crisis can bring to the organisation if not properly managed, and the influence that social media has on what becomes of a crisis and how best to manage it. When it was time for me to return for my PhD study, I was clear on what research I wanted to pursue.

However, my PhD research journey has experienced some minor changes. At the beginning of my studentship, my intention was to do a research which comparatively studied organisational crisis communication between developed and developing countries and progressed on this till the end of my first year.

The assessment and feedback from my interim assessment highlighted the challenges that come with collecting data from these organisations that are experiencing crisis, and the probability of getting a matching crisis that occurred in both developed and developing countries to provide the basis for my comparative study. Also, the possibility of gathering data in real time from these different countries made the task look enormous and likely to be impossible to achieve due to the time limit for the PhD study.

The realisation and acceptance of these challenges made me delve more into the search for a more suitable data collection method that is appropriate for crisis study. I extended my literature review and found that observation, netnography and content analysis are acceptable data collection process in the crisis field. This is more so as it is assumed to provide the researcher with the possibility of getting a feel of the response of the management of the organisation and that of those that have 'genuine' interest in the organisation. In context, the comments used in my analysis were gathered from the organisation's social media platform, showcasing voluntary and unbiased thoughts and feelings of the public. This is as opposed to sourcing the information from traditional sample/ interviewee, who might have answered my research question differently if I had asked them the same question in the 'heat of the crisis'. With this breakthrough, I progressed more deeply working towards the achievement of my PhD purpose within the acceptable time frame.

The selection of MAS as my case study was more of a happenstance, as it could have been some other type of crisis that was selected for this research. This is because at the beginning of my research journey, the decision on the selection of the type of crisis has to be a futuristic occurrence. Given the rate of organisational crisis breakout, I was confident in the belief that the organisational crisis that would fit into my aim and objective would occur/ breakout during the allocated PhD time frame. This is relevant because the achievement of using observational method is mainly possible by using real life crisis cases and making my observation as the crisis unfolds and archive how it is being managed concurrently.

This indicates that the success of my research was hinged on the assumption that organisational crises that will get intense media interest, and their stakeholders' attention would occur within the time frame of my PhD research. Furthermore, I would need to be in a position of being able to capture the crisis information needed for my data for the research process. 'Fortunately', organisational crisis that met my inclusion criteria did occur at the earlier stage of my research journey with the selection decision being discussed further in a later chapter 3, the methodology chapter. I have anecdotally referred to the increase and risk of crisis occurring and was confident that it would, highlighting the relevance of this research and the potential need for future analysis of the increase (Jin, Liu & Austin, 2014; Mitroff, Pauchant & Shrivastava, 1988).

The feedback from my supervisor and examiners after the internal evaluation examination at the end of the second year of my research journey identified the need for me to be more focused as my research was becoming too big for the time frame set for this type of research process. I was originally working on MAS crisis communication on their Twitter, YouTube and Facebook pages, I was also gathering data for the Ebola crisis that was raging at that time in West Africa and exported by tourism to United State of America. The truth is that I discerned I was being over ambitious with the huge workload and accepted the need to streamline it down to focusing on MAS use of Facebook for their crisis communication. I choose Facebook as my preferred channel as it is regarded as the best social media channel for stakeholder's engagement by the airline industry both in time of peace and crisis (The International Air Transport Association, (IATA)).

MAS crisis provided me with a comparative opportunity as I was able to study and use the MH370 as my pilot study and the M17 crash for the main study. This decision allowed me to do a comparative study and also provided me with the foundation that I needed for my future researches on crisis on organisations in both developed and developing countries. I had hoped that in the process, I would be able to develop a framework for crisis management for organisations in developing countries in the near future. There is an identified gap in existing crisis communication literature regarding developing countries. Earlier studies have found that crisis study focuses more on prescription for managing crisis in developed countries whereas developing countries received little attention, with few cross-case analyses (Mitroff, 2001).

1.4 Research aim

The research aim of this thesis focuses on the exploration of the application of social media in corporate crisis communication using the Airline industry as my case study. This aim informs the research question that is set for this thesis and discussed in the next section.

1.5 Research questions

As earlier stated that the overall aim of this research journey is to examine how Facebook is integrated in the crisis communication strategies of Malaysia Airlines in communicating with their stakeholders and in achieving this aim, the primary research question set for this study to answer is: **How did Malaysia Airline (MAS) use Facebook in their crisis communication strategy?**

I however identified the broadness of the primary research questions and the need for it to be more focused. Refocusing raised the need for having sub questions to help narrow down the wideness of question and raise questions that provide good depth and understanding.

I recognised that the first step to adequately answer my primary research question is the understanding that the possibility of integrating Facebook as part of an organisation crisis communication strategy is dependent on the fact that the organisation uses social media as part of their communication strategy. It is not possible to effectively integrate a channel that you don't have in place prior to a crisis to respond to a crisis. This generates the first sub-research question (SR1) for this research: **What tactic did MAS employ in their mediated crisis response?**

This first sub-question will help in answering this by looking at how MAS communicated their messages to the public through their official website and Facebook page when the crisis broke out. This is necessary in knowing if MAS views social media as a new/different form of their communication channel or if it is an extension of their traditional crisis communication channels.

This sub-question focuses on the various channels used by MAS for disseminating their crisis response messages to the public and in the process highlights the crisis communication strategy as a whole. This includes the communication strategies put in place by the organisation during pre-crisis stage, to see how they have adopted their social media channel for communication purposes, the crisis stage and the post-crisis stage respectively, with the aim of preventing,

responding and recovering from a crisis (Hale, Dalek and Hale, 2005) and the crisis response messages (CRM) used in responding to their crises.

The crisis stage is the phase in the crisis life cycle when crisis prevention has been unsuccessful or suddenly occurs without prior notice. It is at this stage that the management of the organisation is required to release crisis response messages to the public that informs them about the crisis that they are experiencing and the actions that they are taking to mitigate its impact, by getting to the post crisis phase and returning to the pre-crisis stage as effectively and efficiently as possible.

The answer to the sub-research question (SR1), if positive, then leads to the second sub-research question which seeks to know if the practices of traditional crisis communication differs on social media channels by exploring to see if MAS maintained the same expectations of traditional crisis communication literatures and theories or if their strategy on Facebook differs which brings in the second sub-research question (SR2): **What practice did MAS maintain in their crisis communication on Facebook?**

The second sub-research question seeks to provide answer by first analysing the crisis response messages released by MAS in managing their crisis and then will extend the investigation by exploring their crisis communication strategy as a whole, by looking at the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis communication strategy on their official Facebook page.

These first two sub-research questions focus on MAS crisis communication strategy but the third question takes a diversion from this position to seek their stakeholder's sense making of the crisis, by exploring how their stakeholders reacts to the CRS released by MAS. This will be answered by content analysis of the comments posted in response to their first notification to the public that they are in crisis which brings us to the third sub research question (SR3): **How did the public react to MAS's CRM?**

Addressing these three SRs questions will lead to the answering of the overall primary question that this thesis expects to answer and will provide better understanding into the application of social media and crisis communication and the resulting changes; a finding that will not only be beneficial to the crisis study but also offer practical consideration for management implementation in the crisis communication strategy.

1.6 Research objectives

The objectives of this research are:

- To comprehensively review theoretic and substantive literatures about crisis communication and its related subject, social media, with a focus on Facebook
- To gather data about the organisation's Facebook usage and diffusion for their crisis communication medium
- To examine the crisis communication strategy employed by the organisation and
- To analyse the use of social media with emphasis on Facebook in business crisis management before, during and the post-crisis period

These objectives will be achieved using a case study approach by exploring how MAS implemented their Facebook page as a crisis communication channel and its use in their CRMs for their MH370 for the pilot study and M17 crisis as the main study. It will then capture the interpretations of their stakeholders to the crisis response messages through their comments to the messages posted by the organisation.

The achievement of these objectives will help to fill the gap for the call for more investigation by crisis researchers and for the need for the use of the case study approach for theory testing as they advocate that this type of research will help further the crisis field and inform theory to practice (Coombs & Holladay, 2011; Sellnow & Seeger, 2013).

1.7 Methodology

Observations and qualitative content analysis methods will be used for data collection and analysis in achieving this research aim and providing answers to the research question by using the social constructivist philosophy as it acknowledges the role of social actors in the construction of social realities based on our interactions (Byman & Bell, 2011).

The adopted methods are appropriate for the data gathering and the analysis process needed for this type of crises because of the complex nature of this research focus (crisis communication), and especially with the acknowledgement that the type of crises that MAS experienced are unusual. Added to this, the study of social media, an area that is still developing, also supports the adopted methods. This complexity requires an approach that is sensitive and at the same time non-intrusive to those involved in the crisis.

Also, this choice of methodology recognises that when crisis stories and its effect are being retold, the risk of misinformation of crisis information is increased when the gathering is done in a retrospective manner and can therefore alter the data collected.

1.8 Research Assumptions.

This research process is embarked on based on some of these assumptions:

Although the data used for the research is from an organisation that is headquartered in a developing country, Malaysia, it is assumed that the organisational and communication structure that MAS has is one that is globally acceptable and applicable because it is an organisation that serves a global community with a common global expectation of excellent service.

I also assumed that MAS being an organisation that operates in a crisis prone environment has a crisis communication strategy in place prior to the onset of their crises for their crisis management.

In as much as the assumption that the use of Facebook for data collection does not give a full representative of MAS's entire stakeholder's comments and reaction, I assumed that the findings from this research will offer insights into the stakeholder's sense making of crisis as this group of samples are regarded to be significant in crisis study as their activeness and their being vocal can be a representation of the victim of the crisis opinion (Schwarz, 2012).

1.9 Research structure

This chapter gives a general overview about this thesis and the personal decisions for this research journey. The second chapter, which is the literature review, gives a review of relevant literature of crisis, crisis management, crisis communication and social media with a focus on Facebook (the social media channel selected for this study). These themes are reviewed for this thesis because of the intricate interconnectivity of this three subjects and the ability to have a good understanding of the crisis communication field rests on the foundation laid by crisis and crisis management literatures.

The literature review begins with the use of a chronological review method to give an historical view of how events had impacted and influenced the crisis research field overtime. However, due to the multidisciplinary background of crisis study and the limitations of time and resources that comes with a PhD study, the literature review concentrates on literatures that relates to earlier organisational study which is guided by the set research aims and objectives using

literatures that provide the needed framework for the research questions, methodology choice, data analysis and the discussions of the findings for this research journey.

Chapter three establishes my adopted philosophical position which uses the social constructivism approach. I presented the justification for the methodological choice of using observation and content analysis for this study and also the process used for my data collection, the ethical consideration that was observed for this research and how the reliability and validity for this research was established and sustained.

Chapter four and five provides the data analysis and results of my findings for both the pilot and main study in separate chapters.

Chapter six gives a discussion on the findings from the earlier chapters and how these findings have helped in answering the research questions set out to answer in chapter one. Chapter seven, which represents the last chapter of this thesis, gives the conclusion that was drawn from this research, the limitations that were encountered and suggestions for further future research

1.10 SUMMARY.

This chapter gives an overview of the research background, research questions with the research aims and objectives which are the foundation of this research journey. This then leads to the next chapter of the thesis, chapter 2, which discusses the relevant framework of this study by giving a review of relevant literatures to this study. The ability to answer research questions adequately, fulfil research aim and research methodology is dependent and informed by the understanding of the relevant literature of the field that the research rests on.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literatures that are relevant to the organisational crisis communication field by giving a synopsis of how crisis study has evolved over time. The evolution is demonstrated by using the chronological structuring to give an historical background of how the crisis field has developed in time from past to present due to events. It progresses to give a thematic review of what organisational crisis is to the exploration of crisis management, its generic framework and theories as this knowledge are needed in providing a good foundation for the research focus.

The review then progresses to the organisational crisis communication concept which is what this research hinges on and how it's evolved from just through the traditional media to the inclusion of social media as part of the crisis communication strategy. The review then finishes off by looking at how crisis communication is perceived in different cultures.

Theoretical background

2.1 Historical timeline of crisis study

The field of crisis study is a research field that is shaped by occurrences in the world and has evolved over time due to these occurrences. It seems pertinent to begin the literature review by providing the fundamental chronological review of the development that the crisis study has taken over time historically.

The chronological structuring of the first part of the literature review provides a logical history from when the research in the field began by date of publication to what it is and how the perspective of the researchers in this field has changed over time. The chronological literature approach is deemed appropriate for this section as it gives an explanation of how crisis research has evolved and how it has been shaped by events that take place in the world.

Its evolution can be traced back to the 1930s with studies done on the effects that resulted from the great depression to sociology of crisis due to inadequate planning and preparedness with studies exploring radio as the crisis communication channel (Kutak, 1938), leadership in crisis (Hamblin, 1958), the after effects of the World War II and the psychology of crisis (Snyder & Paige, 1958).

The events of war, social revolutions and political trends of the 1960s and 70s did increase the crisis study momentum again and at the same time had effect on the direction which the study took. This saw the altering of its focus to a military, international relations and political stand (Denis-Remis, Lebraty & Philippe, 2013; Jacques, 2009) as a result of the Cuban missile crisis which is being regarded as a critical event in crisis research history (Lagadec, 1993). These occurrences once again made crisis researchers to shift their focus to investigate the behaviour of different nations in crisis and their decision making process when it is done based on calculated, miscalculated or mere emotional elements (McClelland, 1961; McCormick, 1978; North, 1962).

It is therefore not surprising that there is no working singular definition of crisis as its multidisciplinary root and many academic field has influenced the development of diverse definition thereby making crisis ill-defined as the concept, findings and conceptualisation of crisis management is constructed by various author based on the demands of their field and events (Buchanan, & Denyer, 2013).

Research into organisation crisis, which is the focus of this thesis, nevertheless began to develop its foothold in the academic world in early 1960s with systematic studies done by Hermann (1963) and Smith (1963) who investigated corporate crisis by proffering a working definition of crisis as the occurrence of a troublesome but non-fatal event that brings changes to an organisation and discuss the causes of contemporary organisation crisis and its consequences.

These studies highlighted that there is a correlated relationship between the increase in societal changes that is being experienced in the world, which is impacting how organisations operates, and the crisis that these organisations are experiencing with Smith (1963) arguing that the recent changes in the competitive market and economic situations that the society is experiencing during these period could causes crisis for some of these organisations, should they find it difficult to adjust or adapt to meet the expectations that comes with these changes.

With organisations becoming more exposed to experiencing crisis more frequently, the need for more systematic research to be done on crisis that are specific to organisational studies was raised (Hermann, 1963). At inception, earlier studies were not precise to crisis as little distinction were made between organisational crisis and other related terms like tension, stress, anxiety, disaster, and panic. This lack of specification brought more disarray to the

organisational crisis field as the investigation being done were dependent on the discipline of the researcher (Hermann, 1963), an acknowledgement that is still valid.

Despite the call for the need for more investigation, the study of crisis in relation to the organisation went into hibernation once again until it was revived in the 1980s. This was attributed to the surge in high profile industrial and environmental crisis that were triggered by the increase in interconnectivity and technological advancement. The innovations of that decade left significant effect on not just the organisation but the society and environment thereby spurring the increase in organisational crisis research (Buchanan, & Denyer, 2013)

The 1980s experienced major crisis that had resulting overwhelming effects on the organisation. Crisis like the Tylenol poisoning, Bhopal, Heysel stadium disaster, Chernobyl, challenger space shuttle, MS herald free enterprise, King cross underground fire station, Perrow bottled water and Exxon Valdez were among the occurrences that highly shaped the crisis management research in this decade. The surge in crises breakout during this period resulted in the increase in need for more research that is specific to organisational crisis and management.

Can we say that organisations were not dealing with crisis before the early 80s? No, but the avalanche of organisational crisis that occurred during that decade reiterated the potential in this field as suggested by Hermann (1963), and re-echoed the need for more needed research to provide structure and understanding on how such crisis can be prevented and/or managed effectively and efficiently when it occurs. The call for more research in the crisis field even became more intense in the 20th century as the world became a global village thereby increasing our interconnectedness (Eid & Fyfe, 2009; Jin, Liu & Austin, 2014).

The digital revolution and innovations that evolved from the late 20th century into the 21st century with the use of internet and social media has greatly affected and changed our lives and how we communicate from what it used to be in the preceding centuries. Globalization did not just increase our knowledge about crisis and its impact (Buchanan, & Denyer, 2013) but has increased in frequency and scope due to strive to break new boundaries and make life changing innovations (Kouzmin, 2008).

It is also bringing changes and progression to crisis communication in the way crisis news and response messages are communicated and also changing the influence and the role of the traditional media in crisis communication dissemination. The advent of social media is

changing the paradigm as the public now has similar control and power in their hands like traditional media and can spin news around.

Another change that social media is bringing to crisis communication is in the determination of what makes the news and control of how much information is released for public consumption. In earlier decades, the media houses had strong autonomy on decisions of what makes the news and at what pace the crisis news are released to the public via the traditional news media outlets with the time lap giving the organisation some time to manage their crisis at a slower speed. Nevertheless, the arrival of social media is changing this communication process as organisations can now talk directly with their stakeholders and become more exposed during crisis as social media facilitates the spread of traditional crisis virally (Roshan et al., 2016).

News now travels at the speed of light with the internet empowering citizens in spreading information virtually and almost immediately. The public has taken control from the management of the organisation by not waiting for relevant agencies to give them edited, controlled and sometimes censored information that seem suitable to them. The public rather act as information agents now using social media platform in emergency, political and organisational crisis period with activist stakeholders having the potential of exacting pressure and social actions when aggrieved by the organisation (Denis-Remis et. al, 2013; Roshan et al., 2016).

This new approach is called citizen journalism which is described as a user-centered participatory type of journalism whereby ordinary people create, collect, comment and disseminate news to inform one another about happening that would have normally been reported by news agents before (Campbell, 2015; Lewis, Koufhold & Lasorsa, 2009). A change that has brought a shift to the mass communication paradigm and journalism from being a well-structured institution to one that is more of a decentralised open source communication process that also permits the public to participate in the news formation and distribution process.

Social media is not only altering the crisis communication strategy of the organisation but it is also affecting the organisation's crisis management approach as a whole by bringing a swing to how management plan, monitor and respond to crisis thereby advancing the scope of crisis management without changing its objectives and principles (Alfonso & Suzanne, 2008 ; Jin, Liu & Austin, 2014).

This change is creating a new research focus on the effect that the use of social media is having on crisis management as little is known about how organisation uses ICT to manage crisis (Jin et al., 2014; Taylor & Perry, 2005) with limited research on developing countries (Kim, Cha & Kim, 2008; Parnell, 2015). This research fills this gap by exploring the use of Facebook in managing organisational crisis in Malaysia, a non-western developing country.

Before proceeding further, it is worthy to note that though concepts like issue, incident, risk and disaster are traditionally used and interchanged frequently in implying to crisis because of their related characteristics, in actuality, they connote different meaning in the academic field when juxtaposed (Shaluf et al, 2003) and these differences are explained in the next section.

2.2 Explorations of terms similar to crisis, crisis management and crisis communication.

In order to prevent a misconception and misinformation, it is ideal to have an understanding of the research focus and scope which necessitates the need to have a clarification of the terms that are used as synonyms of this research focus but has a different meaning. This section provides a summarised description of these due to the constraints that comes with this type of research.

Issue is described as a gradual occurrence that creates a breach/ conflict between corporate practice and stakeholder's expectations which requires an anticipatory proactive monitoring of action and events termed issue management. **Issue management** aims to find a shared balance and resolution of an issue between the stakeholder's expectations and the organisation's interest (Coombs, 2014; Regester & Larkin, 2005) by using public policy process in managing organisational and community resources (Coombs, 2014; Heath, 1997:9).

Some author argues that crisis management is a product of issues management as issues are only evident at the pre-crisis stage of crisis management and if well managed can be used to prevent or redirect a crisis form occurring and not the other way round (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996; Heath, 2014). However, Jaques (2009) disputed this view by arguing that issues management can be a contributor to a crisis both at the pre-crisis and post-crisis stage. Issues management can be effective at crisis prevention (pre-crisis), in crisis, or post-crisis. A new issue can develop out of an existing crisis, on that necessitates the implementation of issue management to prevent further escalation even when the organisation is at crisis or post-crisis stage (Coombs, 2014).

Incident is also used as a synonym for crisis but has a different meaning in the academic field. It is defined as a brief minor event or episode that has little possibility of escalating into serious proportion (Reid, 2008). **Accident** is described as when the organisation is experiencing a disruption without impacting on its social identity (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1990).

Risk is another term that is sometimes assumed to imply crisis but has a different meaning. Risk is defined as the probability that a particular adverse event will occur at an expected period of time (The Royal society, 1992, cited in Harland, Brenchley & Walker, 2003). The ability to envisage a time frame or the certainty of the occurrence of the adverse event sets risk apart from crisis. Crisis as opposed to risk is more of an uncertain and unpredictable probability of the occurrence of the event. **Risk communication** is also different from crisis communication as it involves informing the public and/or specific targets about impending risk and hazards and persuading adjustments of activities. Risk communication is more about probability and precautionary communication process that informs the public or a target group about the probability of a danger and hazard occurring, reassuring and advising them on necessary behavioural adjustments (Seeger et al., 1998; Wu, 2015). Crisis communication, on the other hand, is more informative, it is a dialogue process that involves the passing of information about what is known and unknown at the time of dialogue, and all the necessary steps being taken to get more information and mitigate the specific event; an informative concept that is used to prevent or mitigate the occurrence of crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2016; Reynolds & Seeger, 2005).

Disaster is also used in referring to crisis. Disaster is defined as an identifiable social phenomenon that prevents the normal functioning of the affected society by causing wide scale disruption and harm to the society or its subdivision where demands exceed capabilities (Krep & Drabek, 1996; Quarantelli, 1985). The difference between disaster and crisis is that a disaster disrupts the community and puts huge strain on the institutions of that community, a strain that may require external support in order to meet up with the demands created by this occurrence. **Disaster management** is a more intense process than crisis management as it involves the intervention of government agencies and territorial authorities and as it is most often related a nation or a community (Jacques, 2007).

Since the focus of this thesis is on organisation crisis communication, disaster management will also not be included in this thesis as it is beyond the scope of this research. This research's

emphasis is on the organisation and its stakeholders and will therefore not include the government authorities and the community affected by the crisis used in this study.

One cannot however ignore the interferences between these terms as they can manifest individually, simultaneously and or grow to all these term in a singular case (Shaluf et al, 2003). A good example of such intertwined occurrence is the case of the of Exxon Valdez oil spill spiralled from an issue to a crisis, then to a large scale industrial and ecological disaster that resulted in the creation of maritime legislations and policies to prevent future occurrences.

The following table lists the difference between these related terms and characteristics.

Table 1: Summary of difference between crisis communication and similar terms.

	Risk Communication	Crisis communication	Disaster communication
Message content	Impending, known probability and reduction strategy	Current state and control measures detailing what is known and unknown	Current state with information on impact reduction and/ or prevention.
Principles	Persuasive	Informative	Persuasive and informative
Message frequency / format	Routine, controlled and structured	Non-routine, spontaneous and reactive	Non-routine and spontaneous
Communication origin	Public agency	Organisation and public relations personnel	Cross-functional with government agencies, organisations and territorial authorities

Table adapted from (Jacques, 2007; Reynolds & Seeger, 2005).

With the above explanation made and the term for the research focus established, the next section of this chapter proceeds to review of defining what crisis, crisis management and communication connotes as this is the concentration of this thesis.

2.3 Understanding organisational crisis

In as much that the occurrence of crisis is increasing in number, crisis still lacks a universally accepted definition as it is a field that is still evolving, and one that has developed from a multidisciplinary background as previously explained in the early part of this chapter. Its multidisciplinary background has however provided a good and rich perspective for understanding the complexity that comes with crisis study (Boin & T'Hart, 2007; Buchanan, & Denyer, 2013).

The word crisis is coined from the Greek word 'Krisis', which means a moment of decision; representing historical turning points where human choices could make fundamental difference in the future (Sellnow & Seeger. 2013).

Hermann (1963), one of the early researchers who helped to establish the crisis study in relation to the organisation, defined crisis as a surprising situation that threatens the high priority goals of the organisation and comes with a time-constraint in the decision making period. According to Herman (1961), an organisational crisis has three features: it threatens the organisation, has a short and restricted response time and is also unpredictable or unanticipated. These definitions focused on the reputational threat and damages that comes with organisational crisis.

Several authors afterwards built their definition on these footings; as an event that threatens the foundation of an organisation is a crisis. The British Standard Institution in their crisis management guideline for organisation define crisis as "an abnormal, unstable situation that threatens the organisation's strategic objectives, reputation or viability" (BS 11200:2014). The organisation-centred crisis definition comes from the standpoint of the effect that a crisis has on the organisation's operational activities, which could affect its continual existence, if left unattended to or curtailed from further escalation. This school of thought believe that the existence of threat is an important variable that is identifiable with organisational crisis, with the assumption that the occurrence of a crisis puts pressure on the organisation's continuity which can result in devastating effect if not well managed. For example, a significant consolidated crisis definition was attempted by Pearson and Clair (1998) by describing organisational crisis as a "low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organisation and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly".

The definitions come with the assumption by authors in this school of thought that the threat that creates a discrepancy between the planned goal that the organisation has previously set out to achieve (long term goals) and its current existing state that is caused by the disruption from the crisis. For this school of thought, the disruption overrides the planned goals and causes a shift in the focus of the organisation's management; from its outlined long term goals to one that focuses on managing the crisis as effectively and efficiently as possible. The crisis should be managed within the shortest possible time frame, with the aim of returning back to its original long-term goals, and its effective control will determine what becomes of the organisation in the long run (Billings, Milburn & Schaalman, 1980; KI & Nekmat, 2014).

There is a consensus among scholars in the "threat school of thought" with the assumption that since the occurrence of a crisis threatens the organisations existence and reputations, it also comes with an intense pressure, and has an urgent demand which puts time constraints on the decision making process of the management. The management respond spontaneously to this unanticipated event by racing to nip the crisis in the bud as soon as possible, and trying to prevent it from further damaging the goals that are important to the organisation's existence.

Reilly (1993) in her comparative study on different crisis in a single industry proposed a working definition for crisis, with the aim of differentiating crisis from other related similar terms. Reilly defined crisis as a sudden high-magnitude situation that is harmful and disruptive, this definition though refraining from the threat and routine context still depicts crisis as a negative occurrence with no positive context.

These authors acknowledge that although crisis is an unexpected, non-routine, surprising occurrence that create high level of uncertainty, an organisation crisis comes with a time-constrained decision making expectation, with a demand to promptly respond to and manage it, so as to reduce the adverse effects that results from its occurrence and prevent further degeneration (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2013).

Nevertheless, some researchers have exceptions to the unpredictable, common-threat definition of crisis, as they believe that crisis is not a surprising occurrence. They point out most crisis shows early warning signs that could have been prevented from occurring if managed well, as research has shown that some crises showed warning signs early enough but were ignored when analysed in retrospection. They support their claims based on research of crisis case study that most of these crises that occur are as a result of the neglect of acting on early warning signs that has been beckoned. The critique of the unpredictable characteristic of crisis is that some

crisis doesn't necessarily come as a surprise and therefore is predictable, as some crisis are not oblivious to a third party with the probability of its occurrence being seen as a threshold and ignored instead of finding a way to fix it conventionally or by its precedent (Gundel, 2005; Smith, 1963).

I also agree with this assumption that some crisis could be predictable while others happen suddenly. The case study for this research demonstrates that despite the airline industry being regarded as an industry that is prone to crisis, and so therefore organisations in this industry are expected to be prepared for all kind of crisis, including crisis due to sociopathic attack that seems to be on the increase recently (Richardson 1994), the manner in which the MAS crises occurred is quite still surprising and unconventional with no prior warning signals and precedence.

Another argument questioning the unexpected definitional characteristic of crisis stems from the disagreement that even though crisis can be unpredictable, it is not unexpected and smart organisation does not doubt if it will occur but when (Coombs, 2014). These authors maintained that crisis should be defined from an organisational management perspective by accepting the occurrence of crisis as an expected phenomenon that it is part of an organisation's normal life cycle, and therefore be understood as a natural experience of what an organisations' existence is made of.

While some authors (Bernstein, 2011; Gephart, 2007; Marra, 1998; Mitroff, 2005; Ryschka, Domke-Damonte, Keels & Nagel, 2016) projects crisis as a negative disruptive event that shares the common trait of threat, time constraint and uncertainty or surprise, others argues that crisis should be defined in the context of a normal situation required for an organisation's learning and development process. A Crisis may be untimely yet predictable and may not necessarily threaten the organisation's existence as other researcher asserts e.g. Exxon's existence was not threatened by Exxon Valdez oil spill incident because of its technological and financial fall-back provisions even though its spill-over effect caused the destruction of some other organisations (Heath, 1997:279).

Some authors however attempted to define crisis beyond the organisation's managerial perspective and extended it further to the operational or external stakeholders, for example, Pauchant and Douville (1993) attempted to define crisis from a technological viewpoint. They described crisis as disruptive situations that challenges the basic assumptions of an organisation or a system and concludes that crisis requires timely actions and decision which might bring

about changes to the affected system, and previously held assumptions. It is an urgent situation that interrupts the normal operation of the organisation, gets media interest, and poses possible financial and reputational loss as flags that indicate an organisational crisis (Bernstein, 2011; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015; Williams & Treadaway, 1992)

The shortfall of the definitions discussed above position crisis from the perception that it is a negative event that is harmful, disruptive and threatens the organisations operations and existence. These views were however refuted based on the argument that crisis, a word that naturally has a negative pre-conceived meaning by people, does not necessarily translate to a death sentence. If instead we defined crisis (in terms of perception) as a positive perception, then this will influence the organisation's crisis management preparedness positively. This can mean that when in crisis an organisation can view its occurrence as an opportunity to show their stakeholders that they are a capable and socially responsible organisation, based on the actions they take in managing the crisis (Martinelli & Briggs, 1998; Penrose, 2001; Ulmer, 2012).

The argument of viewing crisis as an opportunity comes with the assumption that a positive change and disposition can affect how an organisation perceives a crisis, as their perception can help not only in their decision making process when managing their crisis (with the aim of getting a positive outcome as a reactive strategy) but also applicable when making proactive decisions in the pre-crisis and post-crisis stages. The occurrence of a crisis becomes a critical turning point for the organisation as it provides an opportunity for making behavioural changes and reorientation that can produce positive or negative results (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2008; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2013).

Although these definition provides a more inclusive definition that goes beyond the earlier descriptions that narrowed crisis down to threat and surprise, the shortfall of their definition is that it still projects crisis as an event that only affect the organisation as the definition focuses on the organisation alone.

More comprehensive descriptions were provided by some crisis scholars that included the organisation, stakeholders and its environment as they argued that organisational crisis should not be confined to something that affects the organisation alone but should be defined from a broader perspective as its effect can extend beyond the organisation and spill-over or snowball to their stakeholders, other organisations and even people that might not have any initial

relationship with the organisation (Brummete & Sisco, 2015; Mitroff ,Shriwastava & Udwadia, 1987).

Crisis effect is not limited to the organisation and its employees alone, it can have extended rippling effect on other associated companies and even plummet stock prices, and can come with environmental and psychological damage (Brummete & Sisco, 2015; Klann, 2003). It is described as an emotional condition that can generate negative reactions from its stakeholders with these reactions impacting on its financial and business continuity (James & Wooten, 2005) that is to say that irrespective of the crisis type, an undisputable fact is that crisis has the ability to redefine a subject's reputation (Brummete & Sisco, 2015).

Coombs (2014:3) in a more holistic view attempts to fill this definition gap by describing crisis as “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organisation's performance”. Stakeholder is any group or individual who can or is impacted by the organisation's objectives. This includes the owners, advocates, customers, competitors, media, employees, environmentalist, local community and government (Strand & Freeman, 2015).

These broader definitions that embrace the stakeholders as a significant element in defining crisis are appropriate as the organisation alone does not have the full control of what becomes a crisis. This is because the stakeholder's interpretations of events determine if there is actually a crisis and what becomes of the crisis and if stakeholders believe that an organisation is in a crisis then there is a crisis for the organisation to manage (Coombs, 2011).

This assumption advocates crisis as a socially constructed event that is dependent on the perceptions and interpretations of the stakeholders. It is argued that the stakeholder's reactions and understanding of the crisis and crisis management process determines if there is a crisis or not, even in situations where the organisation is in denial that a crisis exists.

The social constructive perspective of crisis definition that includes both the organisation and stakeholders is built on the premise that even in cases where the organisation is in denial of the existence of a crisis, the collective effort of some aggrieved stakeholders can establish the existence of crisis. This eventually forces the organisation to change their stance, accept that there is a crisis and find means of resolving it. The case of Audi 5000 is a good example of how crisis can be socially constructed and be pushed forward into acceptance by the organisation, even when there were initial denials at the onset of the crisis. Audi's management

did pass off the acceleration crisis of their Audi 5000 as a driver error rather than a manufacturer's error. In the long run Audi were compelled to accept that it indeed was a crisis triggered by their product and not the driver's inadequacy, an overturn in stance due to the continuous information, perceptions and interpretations from their stakeholders about the crisis (Coombs, 2014; Hearit & Courtright, 2003). This supports the assertion that some stakeholder's interpretation of an occurrence as crisis can establish the crisis irrespective of what the organisation says or does.

For this thesis, I build on these definitions and provide this working definition of crisis for this research as *“an ambiguous occurrence that has the ability to activate an immediate shift in the focus of the organisation's management from its usual activities of fulfilling its long term goals to one that effectively manages a current adverse event from further degeneration with decisions made in the best interest of the stakeholders and the organisation”*.

The ambiguity stance on the crisis definition suggests that the cause of a crisis might not be easily identifiable at its onset, as is evident in the case of the Malaysia Airlines and even might not be triggered by earlier events that spiral into crisis. Some crises are known to defy interpretations from a single viewpoint but rather demand severe sense-making from both the organisation and stakeholder's perspective collectively (Coombs, 2007; Weick, 1988). Crisis information is seen as critical factors in the sense-making of crisis, as crisis is analysed as a social constructed phenomena based on human symbolic interventions (Hearit & Courtright, 2003).

Making sense of the Malaysia Airlines crisis using the social constructive perspective will help to shed light into how the organisation handled the crisis, their crisis communication management, and also extends the exploration to identify the stakeholder's interpretations of the organisation's adopted strategy.

2.4 Crisis management

In order to have a good understanding of the crisis communication research field which this thesis rests upon, there is the need to also discuss crisis management.

The literatures of crisis, crisis management and crisis communication are three research fields that are much related as they share similar attributes and one cannot talk about one without making reference to the other. These shared characteristics, makes it 'normal' to find the crisis management literatures to be as ambiguous and fragmented as the crisis literatures that were

discussed in the earlier section (Buchanon & Denyer, 2012; Forgues & Roux-Dufort, 1998). Nonetheless, the absence of an agreement on a homogenous definition of crisis has not prevented its analysis and the furtherance of the crisis management study (Billings et.al, 1980).

The crisis management field like crisis study has its own definitional diversity and different perspectives by its different researchers.

Some theorists define crisis management in relation to the organisation from a reactive perspective. It is described as a strategy that an organisation executes in curbing a ranging crisis that is threatening their operation. For example, Jamal and Abu Bakar (2015) defines crisis management as a set of factors that are designed to combat crises and to lessen the actual damage inflicted by a crisis occurrence. This definition leaves out the pre-crisis and post-crisis stages of crisis management of preparedness, prevention and recovery.

Another group of crisis management scholars disagrees with this reactive definitional stance and provides a more comprehensive definition of crisis management. Coombs (2014) describes crisis management as a preventive and reactive practice that reduces the negative outcome of a crisis. It is used by the organisation to prevent and prepare for a crisis (a proactive process). In the event of a crisis (i.e. reactive), the crisis management strategy is used to respond to the crisis and then revise if needed. The crisis management process then progresses to returning the organisation back to its normal operation as effectively and efficiently as possible.

This approach is based on the argument that the organisation's crisis management process shouldn't be viewed as a quick fix treatment of only responding to a crisis breakout but should be seen as a process that involves preparedness, reaction and recovery. Crisis management should be interpreted as a process that is both pre-emptive and responsive, a process that accommodates preventing, recognising, studying, forecasting and coping systems as against the limited reactive definition (Darling, 1994; Pearson, 2002). It goes beyond being a reactive process that is put in place to manage a crisis breakout, but as a process that starts earlier before a crisis occurrence. It involves strategic business planning, monitoring, ascertaining and implementation of corporate responsibility and having trained personnel to communicate efficiently (heath, 1997:301) ahead of a crisis experience.

Other authors challenge the use of crisis management as a fire fighting exercise where decisions are made hastily to fix the symptoms of an immediate / developing crisis as soon as they erupt instead of dealing with the root cause of the crisis from a systematic perspective (Muller, 1985;

Pauchant, Mitroff and Lagadec, 1991). It is defined as a management process that involves two main phases; the first phase represents the stage whereby the organisation avoids trouble and aim to prevent the breakout of a crisis by maintaining a healthy relationship stakeholders and the second phase is to react appropriately to the crisis and minimise the negative effect of the crisis on the organisation and its stakeholders (Alpaslan, Green and Mitroff, 2009; Bernstein, 2011).

Crisis management includes the procedure that is put in place to provide guidelines that prevents the occurrence or reduces the threats that may befall the organisation in crisis (BS 11200:2014; Coombs, 1999:3). It involves having a strategy of dealing with a crisis situation in a way that allows the organisation to carry on with most of its normal operation with minimal interference (Darling, 1994). An approach that efficiently prevents and mitigates crisis effect before, during and after its occurrence (BS 11200:2014), therefore should not be described in the context of fixing a crisis occurrence but also for crisis prevention and readiness.

Crisis Management involves the organisation's readiness in terms of preparedness, anticipation, response to and recovery from crisis when it occurs, an action that is different from the normal organisational routine but one that is developed, maintained and ready to use when needed (BS 11200:2014).

The goals of having a crisis management process is to prevent, resolve, protect, support and reduce the negative effect of crisis on the organisation, stakeholders, communities and resources (Coombs 2011:5; Hutchin & Wang, 2008; Kahn et.al, 2013). Another important aspect of crisis management is by recognising that the public's perception of an organisation is dependent on how effectively it prevents and manages its crisis with the aim of building a reputation that will be enhanced than what it was before the crisis breakout if well managed (Fearn-Banks, 2010:2).

As earlier highlighted in the previous section that every crisis has a potential seed of success or failure, the crisis management strategy should therefore aim to find and reap success out of their crisis (Augustune, 1995:1; Regester & Larkin, 2005:163) by aiming to protect the goodwill gained from their marketing mix, customer service, and quality control efforts (Bernstein, 2011). This can be achieved by making timely and purposeful decision based on available facts and clear thinking when operating under unusual conditions and, actions that can be possibly taken when the organisation is well prepared and has a crisis management strategy in use.

One might be tempted to undermine the significance of having a robust crisis management strategy based on the assumption that it is difficult/ impossible to plan for all known crises that an organisation might be exposed to, and also plan for the possibility of experiencing unusual and or consecutive crisis like the MAS crisis experiences.

Crisis management theorists advocate that it is easier to manage these unexpected crises by adapting and adjusting prior crisis management strategies that are similar to what the organisation is experiencing. They believe organisation crisis is believed to have discernible and similar features and hindsight (Hutchin, 2008; Veil, 2011) because prior planning helps in minimising the chaos that comes with crisis eruption (Andriole, 1983) by anticipating for the best but being prepared for the worst crisis scenario with an adaptable crisis management strategy.

However, some author argues that having a crisis management strategy in place does not mean that its application in crisis situation will guarantee outright success (Bernstein, 2011), because prior planning for crisis does not necessarily produce similar results for actual events (Quarantelli, 1988). Quarantelli (1988) found partial significant relationship between preparedness and effective crisis management in his analysis, a failure he attributed to poor planning by being too specific to certain crisis and not factoring in enough social variables which makes it difficult to adapt and use for other crisis.

There is a consensus however that an effective crisis management has a significant influence on an organisation's reputation and continuity with its importance in organisational study spurring more theoretical interest and study in recent times (Herbane, 2013; Martinelli & Briggs, 1998; Williams & Olaniran, 1998), and there are calls for the validity testing of crisis management theories and structures, especially in modern day crisis that comes with such complexity and successions (Mitroff, Pauchant & Shrivastava, 1988; Roshan et al., 2016).

Crisis management is an important aspect that is critical to the organisation's existence and needs to be taken seriously. Any competitive organisation that wants to maintain its business continuity, needs to accept crisis management as a systematic attempt by organisational members and their external stakeholders in averting crises, or being able to effectively manage crisis that do occur (Herbane, 2013; Pearson & Clair, 1998).

When an organisation finds itself in crisis, crisis management takes the position of a tussle for control of power between the organisation, stakeholders and stakeholders with the organisation

burdened with the main priority of maintaining its grip on control as anything less of this could jeopardize its continuity (Heath 1997:290; 2012).

Effective crisis management is a principal determinant of the organisation's business continuity (Herbane, 2013; King III, 1994) and the penalty of not having a crisis management strategy in an organisation can be catastrophic (Penrose, 2001) as the disruptions that it brings prevents the organisation from operating normally. These disruptions might have financial implications on the organisation's income and might even extend further to their performance on the stock market (Bernstein, 2011).

In terms of market reaction to organisation crisis, Knight and Pretty (1995) in their analysis evidenced the influence of crisis on business continuity and shareholder's value. They found that at the beginning of a crisis breakout, the organisation's share value experience a negative reaction from the financial market but recovers fully on average in the short term.

They however found that recovery from the crisis impact in the long term for these organisation is different with a group recovering and another becoming worse off than their pre-crisis value. The "recoverers" experienced a positive five percent cumulative increase on their share value after day five of trading while the "non-recoverers" experienced about fifteen percent loss of their pre-crisis shareholder's value one year after the post-crisis period.

The difference in the reaction and crisis impact to these organisation's share value is attributed to a direct and indirect factor. The direct factor is described as the economic loss that the organisation experiences due to disruptions and loss of future incoming cash flows while the indirect factor is the organisation's overall crisis management of the crisis.

The indirect factor is however suggested to be the dominate element that influences the stock market's reaction to the share price because the public and investor's perception of how an organisation manages its crisis and how effective its leadership is when experiencing a crisis are major determinants of the amount of confidence that investors would put in the future existence of the organisation and if to continue with their investment or not. An organisation needs to show investors through their crisis management actions that they are sensitive and sympathetic to the pains of the crisis victims, honest in their crisis communication and display strong crisis leadership for them to have a corresponding positive market reaction.

Knight and Pretty (1995) suggests that the fluctuations in the share price of an organisation that has experienced crisis is an indicator of how investors make sense of the organisation's crisis

management effort in handling their crisis and the financial implications that comes from the crisis experience. The organisation's share recovery is directly correlated to the direct and indirect factors and not the organisation's prior insurance cover against the crisis occurrence.

Their analysis suggests that post crisis recovery of stock value is attributed to effective crisis management which sends a positive signal to investors and not the financial loss due to the crisis experience or future cash flow.

Ill-managed crisis does not only pose financial threat but can come with social and ethical challenges and challenge the organisation's non-physical resources (BS11200:2014). These challenges can result in bad publicity that affects the image, reputational assets and legitimacy of the organisation (Allen & Caillouet 1994; Coombs, 2012; Dean, 2004; Guth, 1995).

The leadership of the organisation can also be disputed as some cultures expect that part of the management team resign when there is a crisis or the need to defend its actions and decisions on their adopted strategies, policies or culture (BS11200:2014; Marcus and Goodman, 1991). It can also bring about strained relationship and emotional concern for the employees (Dutton, 1986). The effect of a crisis is not limited to the possibility of financial loss but can also damage the reputation of an organisation and loss of competitive advantage and market share.

Therefore, a crisis management strategy should include strategies that promote ethical management action which protects the organisation from experiencing long-term reputational damage after crisis (Vergin & Qoronfleh, 1998) especially in these changing times and complex systems (Chi & Hung, 2011; Hutchin & Wang, 2008).

This view is better represented in the product tampering case of both Johnson & Johnson Tylenol tablets and Perrier Benzene contaminated bottled water. These two organisations experienced product tampering crisis. While Johnson & Johnson managed the crisis by taking responsibility by withdrawing Tylenol from the market and destroying it, an action that caused an initial estimated loss of over \$100 million, a decision that was made to reassure their stakeholders that their safety is very important to the company, also to protect their organisational reputation in the long-run, and with this were able to reclaim their market share after a year. Perrier did recall their products almost immediately like Johnson and Johnson but in contrast failed in their crisis management by denying responsibility for the contamination. They rather focused on providing conflicting reason for the cause of the contamination instead of displaying concern for the wellbeing of their consumers. The crisis damaged their reputation

and product reacceptance by consumers. Perrier lost its market leadership to Evian and ended up with an overall loss of about \$75 million for their ineffective crisis management strategy (Tsang, 2000).

This example shows that an effective crisis management can determine the businesses continuity, as a single crisis can affect the organisational image within seconds, but not dent its reputation and destroy its continuity in the long run if well managed. Corporate image and reputation, though strongly related, are two distinct constructs (Lanbalc & Nguyen, 2001). Corporate image is the immediate mental picture of the company held by its stakeholders while corporate reputations is a dynamic concept that gives an estimation of the overall evaluation of the organisation by their stakeholders (Faroud, Melewar & Gupta, 2014). This supports why management should therefore devote their resources and efforts during the pre-crisis management moments in maintaining and improving their organisation's reputation as it is critical for their survival, a focus that shouldn't be lost when preventing a crisis or handling one (Rose & Thomsen 2004; Kim et al, 2008).

Crisis theorists find it challenging that despite the suggestion on how crucial effective crisis management is to an organisation's survival some organisations are still negligent in having a crisis management strategy, Some that have a crisis management strategy do not involve their employees by discussing their crisis plan, as there is this assumption by top management that their employees are less needed in being prepared to managing a crisis; with employees in the for-profit private sector least prepared for crisis despite its ability to affect multiple stakeholders (Fowler et al, 2007; McDonald et al, 2010).

As earlier discussed that crisis management involves both proactive and reactive approach for it to be effective by being both systematically and tactically prepared for managing a crisis. It is therefore expected that a crisis management strategy should extend beyond generating a crisis manual and holding media training for management as is assumed by some (BS 11200:2014; Sapriel, 2003).

A comprehensive crisis management process should also include a combination of strategies that can spot vulnerability and analyse situations early, before they evolve into a crisis, thereby preventing crisis breakout. Prior appointment and continuous training of the crisis team members is essential, as is having an operational and robust crisis portfolio in place, with the maintenance of a good communication system that establishes and promotes strong relationship with their stakeholders at all times. The overall communication process is expected

to accommodate the organisation's crisis communication strategy when needed (Coombs, 2014; Penrose, 2000).

In crisis management research, authors have adopted various approaches for effective crisis management. Some argued that organisations are expected to have a preventive action for crisis using both action clusters and crisis clusters for their crisis management (Mitroff et al., 1988) by adopting the life-cycle approach which segments the crisis management process into different stages. It is based on the assumption that a crisis can be effectively managed not just when a crisis breakout but suggests that the organisation should have a process in place that can be used for prevention, coping, recovering and learning purposes based on the stage that the crisis phenomenon. The argument is that these different stages gives the management the option of entering and taking actions and exiting at any stage of the crisis life-cycle (Mitroff et al., 1987).

Other scholars proposed the clustering of crisis management based on types. Crisis with comparable attributes are bonded together into clusters with the assumption that similar crisis can be approached using similar method which makes the management planning process easier. The combination of these two types of crisis classification (crisis lifecycle and crisis type) is significant to the effective management of a crisis. Firstly, the public is assumed to apportion crisis responsibility based on the crisis type. This implies that the type of a crisis that occur serve as a gauge for measuring how much the public will hold the organisation responsible for that crisis. This comes with a caution that knowing the type of crisis and the crisis responsibility is not enough to effectively manage a crisis.

This shortcoming can be overcome by combining the crisis lifecycle and crisis type in crisis management planning. The crisis lifecycle entails separation of the crisis into different stages as it is assumed that such action will help the organisation in knowing which action and communication strategy to apply at each stage of the crisis as different crisis stages requires different actions and strategies (Coombs 2014; Gonzales-Herrero & Pratt, 1996;).

Researchers suggests that the typology and life-cycle categorisation can be used concurrently as the combined use makes it possible for the crisis management team to be able to apply their pre-planned strategy in managing the crisis situation. The team identifies the crisis cluster that the type of crisis they are experiencing falls into. Their ability to identify the crisis type will help them to determine the severity of the crisis responsibility attribution and hence the crisis

communication strategy to adopt. This decision is also influenced by the stage in which the crisis is, as different stages require different crisis response.

As the aim of the organisation is to have a crisis management strategy in place that will be able to keep the organisation away from experiencing crisis as much as possible, an aim that is dependent on the organisation's ability to have a proper understanding of the crisis phenomenon or portfolio that could possibly befall them (Jacques, 2007) helps in this preparedness.

The need for this understanding which is dependent on the application of the two major crisis management approaches used in crisis management literature (i.e. crisis life cycle and crisis typology) is explained in the next section

2.4.1 The staged (phased) model.

There is a consensus by researcher in this school of thought that every crisis has an identifiable life cycle with distinct stages that require different actions and solutions. These scholars suggest that the partitioning of crisis into different separate stages by management will help them to manage their crisis more efficiently and effectively (Gonzalles-Herrero & Pratt, 1996; Sturges, 1994). They advocate that each phase of a crisis come with different needs and challenges that require different dynamics and dimensions in managing it (Sturges, 1994).

Despite the agreement between these scholars on the need to divide crisis into different stages for effective management, there are still divergent views among them on how many stages the crisis life-cycle should be divided into. Some advocate that evaluating crisis from a three staged cycle approach is ideal, while other scholars considered crisis lifecycle from a four staged sequence with some suggesting that crisis should be managed using a five staged approach.

Three stage approach

The three stage approach manages crisis by dividing the crisis lifecycle into three successive phases- the period before the crisis which is referred to as the *pre-crisis stage*, when the crisis erupts which is classified as *the crisis stage* and the after crisis period which is categorised as the *post-crisis stage*.

The **pre-crisis stage** is the period in the crisis lifecycle when management aims and works towards the avoidance and prevention of crisis breakout in their organisation. They are constantly aiming to uphold the mutual interest of the organisation, its stakeholders and the

public as much as possible. They aim to avoid conflict by employing different strategies and taking proactive measures to monitor and prevent any issues from escalating further into a crisis.

This is the stage that organisations are expected to maintain at all times and when there is a shortfall in meeting up with this mutual interest, a crisis occurs with the organisation moving from its pre-crisis position to the crisis stage in the crisis lifecycle.

The **crisis stage** in the three staged model is the phase when the occurrence of an issue has grown into crisis or an event suddenly triggers a crisis. At this period in the crisis lifecycle, the management directs all their efforts to providing survival and reputational support with the aim of curtailing the crisis from further degenerating and causing minimal damage both to the crisis victims and the organisation.

This stage comes with an expectation from the management of the organisation to recognise that there is a crisis as soon as possible. The positioning of a crisis team that acts swiftly in diffusing the crisis information, crisis response messages, reputation management and recovery plans (Coombs, 2015) is necessary, with the aim of reducing the crisis impact and providing recovery to the crisis victim (Smith, 1990).

As for the case study used for this thesis, Malaysia Airlines despite their experiencing double crises that were both complex, they still had to fulfil their duty of responsibility to their stakeholders. The stakeholders expect the organisation to make best interest decisions and actions that will cushion the effect of the crisis on the victims, prevent further escalation and degeneration and then bring symmetry to their mutual interest at the shortest possible time. This implies that MAS has to initiate and adapt the crisis management in their crisis plan portfolio.

The final stage in the crisis life cycle is the **post-crisis period** which is regarded as the stage when the crisis has been managed and balance is being achieved between the stakeholder's expectation and the organisation's interest. The organisation at this stage works towards maintaining a good position that meets the stakeholder's expectations by ensuring and assuring the public that the crisis is over and that the organisation is capable of fulfilling its initial interest and goals. It portrays that it is in a position that meets the stakeholder's expectation. The organisation is expected to use this phase as a learning phase on their crisis experience and also put measures in place that maintain their place in pre-crisis stage (Coombs, 1999; 2015).

It is at this stage, also referred to as the crisis legitimation stage (Smith, 1990) that the organisation searches for scapegoats to pin the crisis responsibility on in order to restore the public's confidence in the organisational abilities.

Coombs (1999) went further by dividing these three main stages into smaller stages. He referred to the three staged model as the macro stages of a crisis life cycle and extended the macro stages into the micro sub-stages. The pre-crisis stage comprises of 3 sub-stages; *signal detection, prevention and preparedness* while the crisis stage has the *crisis recognition, containment and business resumption* sub-stages.

Four stage approach

Gonzales-Herrero & Pratt (1996) describe the crisis anatomy as a prototype of the biological process of *birth, growth, maturity and decline stages*. They suggest that that each stage can be influenced by either killing the crisis at birth early enough before it matures to growth or maturity stages by prompt management actions or crisis control by shortening the crisis lifespan to decline prematurely with minimal damages.

Fink (1986) described the crisis lifecycle from a model of the human being using medical illness for his representation. He categorised crisis succession as one that starts from the *predominal stage*, then goes to *acute phase, chronic phase* and ends at the *crisis resolution* stage. Jacques (2007) although following the four staged pattern by categorising the crisis life cycle as *crisis preparedness, crisis prevention, incident management and post crisis management* takes a divert view by arguing that a crisis does not have to occur concurrently as some phase can overlap each other.

Five stage approach

Researchers of this approach propose a model that divides crisis into five different stages for effective crisis management instead of the popular three stages: the signal detection stage, preparation/prevention stage, damage containment stage, the recovery stage, organisational learning stage (Fearn-Banks, 2016; Pearson and Mitroff, 1993).

The **signal detection stage** is described as the phase where the organisation works towards timely identification of triggers that could result into crisis. One of the challenges of this phase is that it can be difficult or impossible to differentiate between an impending crisis signal and the organisation's operational daily noise. The difficulty in differentiating the signal means

management ignore this warning signal that if recognised and acted upon could have prevented a crisis breakout. Unfortunately it is often when reanalysing these warning signs in hindsight, after the crisis has occurred, that they are identified.

The **preparation/prevention phase** of the crisis lifecycle is the phase where the organisation is systematically positioned to identify and manage little signals that could blow as soon as possible and manage it before it escalates into a crisis for the organisation. This phase accommodates the acknowledgement that not all crises can be prevented and crisis management should therefore not be seen as a preventive strategy alone, but also as a preparatory stage where the crisis team trains and test run their strategies.

When the organisation finds itself in crisis, the organisation is said to be in **damage containment stage**, where the organisation implements strategies that aims to reduce the impact of the crisis both on the organisation and the affected stakeholders. The fourth stage, the **recovery stage**, aims to reposition the organisation on the road to recovering and returning to their normal operation that aims to meet their customer's expectations.

The four stage theorists suggest that after the crisis is contained and the organisation is back to normal operations, it is essential for the management to reflect on all the preceding four stages of the crisis lifecycle and learn from the actions and decisions that were made in managing the crisis. Reflections should also be done to prevent a reoccurrence in future. This reflection stage is referred to as the **organisational leaning stage**.

The first two stages of their crisis lifecycle models are projected to be proactive strategies while the remaining three stages are reactive strategies for crisis management. They acknowledged that a crisis does not need to pass through all these five stages but can be intervened and stopped at earlier stage and/or returned back to maintain the signal detection stage of the crisis lifecycle.

One common feature of all these different staged models is that irrespective of the different number of stages ascribed to them by these authors, they can still fit into the three major identifiable phases i.e. the pre-crisis, the crisis events and the post-crisis phase. This explains why the three phased model is highly recommended because of its ability to accommodate other staged models when contracted together (Coombs, 2011:9) and is therefore adopted as the model for this thesis.

The staged model however has its shortcoming as some of its authors assume that crisis has separate identifiable stages. This assumption suggests that a crisis occurrence will follow a certain sequence and succession which can then be managed by applying distinct applicable solutions and actions to each stage of the crisis lifecycle. This assumption is questioned and viewed as misleading as crisis being a socially constructed event might not include 'simple' separate activities that can be managed one at a time as suggested by some of the stage model scholars. The argument furthered that crisis does not always occur in successive stages but could be an integrated, set of series or even parallel event that is managed concurrently with different stages intertwined together (Sturges et.al., 1991; Jacques, 2007).

Another shortcoming of the stage crisis life cycle model is its inability to provide measures and strategies that organisations can put in place to easily identify crisis signals and prevent it from further escalation. It is argued that it is only easy to identify events as crisis signals in retrospect after a crisis experience than before the crisis occurrence and suggests that the post-crisis stage should be used as a stage for the assessment of the cause of the crisis and not be used as the learning stage for reviewing earlier actions taken as such action can be filled with hindsight bias in which they learn the wrong things (Veil, 2011).

Nevertheless, this model offers a heuristic value that is useful in the process of creating a more acceptable model for crisis research in future crisis models (Johansen & Frensdén, 2011).

The second crisis categorisation focuses on studying crisis management from the causative attribute of crisis. This comes with the assumption that an organisation can manage crisis more effectively by grouping identical crisis together based on their similar causal factors and characteristics. The propounded concept of this model suggests that such grouping makes it easier for the management to plan and prepare for crisis by creating adaptable plans and simulations that can be used to manage a crisis based on their grouping. They accept that it is impossible for management to have individual plans for every potential crisis that the organisation is exposed to.

The typology model, which is based on clustering crisis that has similar attributes, causes and triggers together for better crisis management is explained in the next section.

2.4.2 The typology model

Researchers in this school of thought believe that crises can be grouped by their underlying structural similarities for effective crisis management (Ray, 1999:15). This is based on the

assumption that grouping them into similar types makes it possible for the crisis team to create a crisis portfolio that their organisation is prone to (Coombs, 1999:62). They agree that having a crisis portfolio makes preparation, planning and managing crisis possible for the crisis team, as they can use these categorisations to plan ahead for crisis using simulations for mock-up scenarios (Mitroff, 1986).

The model is built on the premise that different crises will have different impacts and effects on the victims based on the cause and how it is being managed by the management. The use of the typology categorisation of crisis is important to help the organisation predict ahead the type of reaction that will come from their stakeholder as their interpretation of what the crisis is, is constructed based on the crisis type.

The identification of the crisis type is the frame needed by the organisation stakeholder's for apportioning their crisis responsibility (Marcus & Goodman, 1991; Coombs, 2015). Despite the agreement on the need to categorise crisis based on their causative features, there is also a lack of consensus on the categories by these authors, these variations are explained below.

Muller (1985) in his study categorises crisis by assuming that the organisation is responsible for the type of crisis that they experienced and grouped crisis into three types based on their manifestation i.e. strategic, performance or liquidity crisis. He described **strategic crisis** as the type of crisis that occurs to an organisation that fails to develop, innovate or evolve due to their failure in maintaining and expanding its market place, while **performance crisis** is a crisis that erupts as a result of an organisation's inability to meet with its targets and goals. The third type, **liquidity crisis**, is a crisis that is triggered by the organisation's inability to meet up with its expected obligations.

Wooten and James (2010) on the other hand based their crisis classification using the institute of crisis management. They categorised crisis as either, **sudden crisis** which occurs quickly or one which the organisation has no control over and cannot be faulted or held responsible for its occurrence or **smouldering crisis**, which is regarded as internal crisis that starts as a minor issue and develops into big crisis that affects external stakeholders due it not receiving attention early enough.

A different group of scholars departed from defining crisis from the organisation view point and clustered crisis into groups based on their effects on victims and responsibility.

Marcus and Goodman (1991) in their study identified three types of crisis: accidents, scandals, product safety and health crisis, and described **accidents** as unexpected and unfavourable happenings that leave behind identifiable victims and an open window for the organisation to deny responsibility for its occurrence. The second category of crisis type is **scandals** which they described as disgraceful events that discredit the organisations reputation and has less identifiable victims. These characteristics thereby increase the probability of the organisation accepting responsibility for its occurrence. The third category of their crisis type is the **product safety and health incidents**, which they described as crisis that occurs as a result of series of events and revelations that overtime can result in great actual or potential suffering on its victims.

Gundel (2005) took a different stance in his own classification by clustering crisis based on their predictability, the ability to antagonise the cause of the crises, and then influence it by either taking proactive or reactive actions that are able to stop or reduce the damages. He suggests four types of crisis categories as conventional, unexpected, intractable and fundamental crises. **Conventional crisis** is described as a predictable crisis that comes with an influence that is easily identifiable by third parties and therefore makes planning and having a counter reactive measure in place easy for the management. An **Unexpected crisis** can be influenced but is an unpredictable crisis, which makes it almost impossible to implement preventable measures as there is no precedent or anticipated occurrence.

The third category of crisis type is the **Intractable crisis**, which are crises occurrence that can be anticipated and predicted but management still finds it impossible to interfere and influence when it occurs. This makes this type of crisis a rare and dangerous occurrence that comes with high damage and leaves little room for interference or intervention. A good example of an intractable crisis is the Chernobyl crisis, a crisis that can be predicted to occur as it is associated with a nuclear power plant but its occurrence left little room for the management to interfere due to the complex nature of managing it. This element makes it impossible for the organisation to be fully prepared for such crisis but rather reiterates the need for the management of such organisation to maintain and have safety measures in place that meets international standard. Their aim is to prevent such crisis from occurring knowing that the effect of this type of crisis is not limited to the organisation, but has a snowballing devastating effect on other organisations and even the environment which might call for industrial and governmental regulations.

The fourth cluster, **Fundamental crisis**, is regarded as surprising, unpredictable and unsusceptible crisis. These features make planning and the provision of countermeasure recommendation impossible as such crisis cannot be easily anticipated with high uncertainty of it occurring. The September 11 terrorist attack was a crisis that couldn't have been precisely predicted and managed singlehandedly by the organisation in crisis as they were also victims of the crisis who found themselves in a helpless situation.

Gundel argues that his crisis typology is different from other crisis scholars as it is an elastic categorization that accommodates adjustments. Each cluster can be adjusted from one type to another for example, the sinking of the titanic vessel in 1912 can be categorised as an unexpected crisis at that time since such vessels are regarded as unsinkable but such crisis in today's environment will be categorised as a conventional crisis that can be predicted and influenced.

Other contributors to the crisis typology model based their categorisation on the trigger source. Egelhoff and Sen (1992) suggests that crisis can be **externally or internally** generated due to technically or socio-political failure and suggests that externally triggered crisis is crisis that cannot be totally avoidable but can be mitigated, while internally aggravated crisis is avoidable crisis that can be prevented by proper planning and preparedness. Crisis origin can determine the crisis type.

Other authors like Coombs (1995;2014) using the attribution theory acknowledges the trigger source of the crisis and included crisis responsibility by categorising crisis as internal-external, intentional-unintentional with each dimension having four mutually exclusive types. He claims that **Faux Pas crisis** is unintentional and externally perpetuated events that results in a crisis which the organisation can deny responsibility for. **Accident** is internally originated unintentional events, which leaves the organisation to accept minimal responsibility. The third type, **transgressions crisis**, is both intentional and internally generated which makes the organisation to be held responsible for the crisis. **Terrorism** is intentional crisis that are triggered by external agents.

Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2013) categorised crisis as intentional and unintentional. Unintentional crisis are caused by uncontrollable natural factors like natural disasters, disease outbreak, unforeseeable technical interactions, product failures and economic recession. They classified terrorism, sabotage, workplace violence, bad employee relationship, risk mismanagement, hostile takeover and unethical leadership as types of intentional crisis.

Coombs went further from the norm of listing the array of crisis types to explain how to integrate a crisis response strategy to a crisis type. (Further in-depth review of Coombs theory is discussed later in this chapter as his theory is used for the result analysis).

Effective crisis management does not end by identifying the crisis type and crisis stage but comes with the need to have a crisis management team with an identifiable spokesperson.

The crisis management team is expected to develop different worst-case scenarios of crisis that the organisation is prone and exposed to and create a crisis management plan that contains various strategies and tactics on what to do, how, when, what and who to communicate with out of such scenarios (Hickman & Crandall, 1997; Marra, 1998). The team members are saddled with the responsibility of appointing a spokesperson(s) who will speak and liaise with the different stakeholders in the occurrence of a crisis (Cloudman & Hallaman, 2006).

This process however differentiates crisis communication from crisis management, as crisis communication is a function of crisis management with crisis communication strategies being embedded in the organisation's crisis management plan (Seeger at.al. 2007). There should be a crisis communication strategy that aligns with the organisation overall communications strategy and one that anticipates and manages recovery crisis.

This literature review focused on exploring relevant literatures that supports the fulfilment of the research aim and objectives and thereby justifies the review of the two crisis management models (crisis lifecycle and crisis typology) and how it influences the choice of crisis response by the management (Coombs, 2014).

2.5 Crisis Communication

Crisis communication is regarded as a subset of corporate communication function and a major contributor to how effective a crisis management strategy is (Argenti, 1996). It involves planning ahead for potential crisis and in the event of a crisis breakout, the crisis management team is expected to gather information regarding the crisis, keep the public informed and update them with actions that they are taking to prevent further reoccurrence (Fearn-Banks, 2016:2).

This infers that the sustenance of effective corporate communication is necessary at all times so as to prevent and overcome crises, as having a continuous communication process helps not only in reducing uncertainty and prepare for crisis, but also makes it possible to mitigate, coordinate and reassure stakeholders during and after crisis (Seeger at.al., 2007).

An established continuous communication process makes it easy for the organisation to transition its strategy from “peace time” to “crisis time” and vice versa easily. It provides a structure for the effective coordination of both the internal and external communication process of the organisation; build and maintain a healthy corporate identity, image and reputation between the organisation’s stakeholders and the organisation itself (Cornelissen, 2014:5; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Greyser, 2009). This lends support to several authors’ credence that communication is in fact the core of any organisation (Van Riel et.al. 2007) as it plays a very significant role in stringing the various departments with the organisation’s objectives and strategies.

This view extends crisis communication from being limited to a communication tool that is used in responding to a crisis breakout, recovery, blame and responsibility apportioning, and repositions it as a broader communication strategy. Crisis communication strategy encompasses the period that the organisation is not in crisis, when it is in crisis and when it is trying to get out of a crisis thereby establishing crisis communication as an academic research field that calls for more research (Coombs & Holladay, 2011; Frandsen & Johansen, 2011).

The crisis communication field, however, like its parents, crisis management study, also suffers from definitional divergence among its scholars.

Some authors describe crisis communication as the response of an organisation to a crisis outbreak. In this setting, these scholars describe crisis communication as the organisation’s response to a crisis situation to either reduce damage or enhance their image and reputation (Williams and Treadaway, 1992; Seeger, 2006; Barton, 1990; Fink, 1986; Mitchel, 1986). These authors define crisis communication within this context because their research was focused more on analysing the actions taken by the organisation in retrospect, after a crisis occurrence, as it was difficult to capture the organisation’s relationship at the pre-crisis stage. Their definition, nevertheless, is argued to depict crisis communication as a defensive apologetic approach as it is presented as a pacifying communication tactic that is employed during and after the crisis. A description which is claimed to be short of what crisis communication is.

Crisis communication is an encompassing, continuous communication process that is not only reactive but also proactive and is employed all through the crisis life-cycle (Fearn-Banks, 2016; Seeger et al., 2007).

Crisis communication strategy is used at all stages of the crisis life-cycle; before, during and after a crisis and therefore should be acknowledged as a vital element of the crisis management process. It is the communication process that supports the organisation at its pre-crisis stage to bond with its audience, and also to prepare for and prevent crisis from occurring. In the event of a crisis breakout, the crisis communication process aims to mitigate and contain the crisis situation from further escalation. At the post-crisis stage, it is used to promote recovery, support, assist, apologise, reassure and justify the actions that are taken and changes that are embarked on while reaffirming the organisation legitimacy in the process (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005).

It is a communication dynamic and interaction that is developed with the aim of maintaining a balanced equilibrium of expectations between the organisation and its stakeholders before, during, and after a crisis (Fearn-Bank, 1996:2).

This comprehensive description of crisis communication positions it as a managerial function as it “consists of a complex and dynamic configuration of communicative processes which evolves before, during, and after an event, a situation or a course of events that is seen as a crisis by an organisation and/or one or more of its stakeholders, one that includes various actors, contexts, and discourses (manifested in specific genres and specific texts) related to each other” (Frandsen and Johansen, 2010:431). It is a continuous process that is critical in maintaining a mutual healthy relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders.

Using a discourse focus, Sturges (1994) defines crisis communication based on what the content of the crisis response messages should contain. He described crisis communication as a cyclical process that requires instructing, adjusting and internalising of information for the different stages of the crisis lifecycle. The use of the crisis life cycle framework provides a process that involves forecasting, deciding and creating a communication plan on the best response strategy that minimises damage and promotes recovery (Falkeheimer & Heide 2009). A communication process that is both proactive and reactive.

The perception of crisis communication from this broader view discourages the management of the organisation from seeing the strategy as one that can only be applied as a quick-fix medicine when there is a crisis breakout, which might probably not be effective in the crisis period. The assumption is that prior dialogue with the different stakeholders of the organisation when the organisation is not in crisis will have a direct effect on how well the organisation can

retain their reputation in crisis situation, and how their stakeholders picture them overall (Coombs 1999: 121).

Scholars of this school of thought argue that a positive perception and relationship does not occur out of sudden reaction (fire brigade approach) to the public queries and need for information when a crisis occurs, but is as a result of a long standing bonding between them. There is evidence that how an organisation is perceived in the long-run by the public is influenced by their accumulated findings, based on their interaction, relationship and dialogue with the organisation overtime (Ray, 1999).

The existence of a positive pre-crisis relationship with stakeholders however, is not a full guarantee that the management can successfully manage a crisis breakout, as the organisation's response during the crisis is also very critical to how successful the crisis management strategy will be (Horsley & Barker, 2002; Hale et al., 2005).

When in crisis, an organisation's crisis communication should have two main objectives: keeping all stakeholders informed and appeasing third party interveners including the media and government (Sturges, 1994). The organisation's ability to effectively communicate with the media is identified as one of the best practices of crisis communication, as they have an outlet which serves as the primary information conduit in reaching the public (Seeger et al., 2007).

The assertion that having a proactive crisis communication process in place does not guarantee a successful crisis management, as is evidenced in the case of Exxon Valdez oil spill, which is regarded as one of the worst crisis management stories, as they failed in managing their crisis and getting public forgiveness, because they did not communicate in a timely and answerable manner during their crisis, despite having a communication strategy that was active and in place before the crisis. Their crisis communication approach thereby failed as a reactive process, despite having a proactive crisis communication strategy in place before their crisis.

Departing from the definitional stance of crisis communication, the field is experiencing its own paradigm shift. One of the modifications being an interesting improvement to the traditional standard of viewing crisis communication as a one-way communication process, whereby the organisation is seen as the sender and the stakeholders as the listeners, is the shift to a more contemporary two-way symmetric communication process, that accommodates a fully bidirectional communication pattern (Seeger et al., 2007).

This new process includes proactive, reactive and preventive actions (Fishman, 1999), a process that is advanced with the advent of the social media and the creation of user generated content for information sharing. This change in paradigm lends support to the excellence theory, which highlights the need of having a strategic relationship management between the organisation and its stakeholders (Dozier et.al. 1995).

The shift to a two-way symmetric crisis communication process has brought about a change that promotes dialogue with the public at all times, and not simply when there is a crisis to deal with and further supports the comprehensive, proactive and reactive description of crisis communication. It encourages management to include and treat the public more as legitimate partners of the organisation, in their overall communication strategy, because familiarity begets ease and trust in time of crisis, from their stakeholders, based on past relationship.

This two-way communication process also helps reduce the probability of making negative decisions by management when they are under tension, due to unfamiliar stress that might come with the unpredictable and hostile nature of crisis breakout, coupled with the awkwardness of having to use unfamiliar communication processes that they weren't using at the pre-crisis moments (Grunig et.al.2002:146; Gonzalles-Herrero & Pratt, 1996).

Researchers in this field are finding that dissection of the crisis communication strategy into different phases, using the crisis life cycle model, helps to make crisis management easier and not be caught unawares when a crisis breaks out (Sturges, 1994). The crisis communication strategy is argued to be the process that determines what the content of the information released to the stakeholders is. The content of the information is based on the stage at which the crisis is in its life-cycle, as the communication content for each stage has different purposes to fulfil (Sturges, 1994).

The applicability of crisis communication strategy lies in its dissection, since it helps to see how it can be applied in an effective way by not waiting till when a crisis happens, but by having one in place prior to a crisis breakout and after.

The next section discusses crisis communication strategy; at the pre-crisis stage, when the crisis is raging and the post crisis stages, using the crisis life circle model that was previously discussed in section 2.4.1 of this thesis.

2.5.1 Crisis Communication at the Pre-crisis Stage

The occurrence of a crisis if not effectively managed can impact negatively on an organisation, as it threatens its business continuity and therefore comes with an expectation that the organisation's management should not leave the affairs of their establishment to happenstance. Rather it is recommended to establish a functional crisis management plan that includes a well-structured crisis communication strategy, with which they can use to dialogue, recognise issues and spot impending crises and resolve them as quickly as possible (Coombs, 1999:11; 2011:4).

The management's ability to not rely on the precepts that it is impossible to precisely predict the timing of a crisis occurrence, scope or impact (Fishman, 2009) and their acceptance of the argument that crisis is an inevitable occurrence in an organisation's natural life cycle (Mitroff & Anagnos, 2001) makes it easier for them to see the need to have a plan ahead during peace time on how to manage crisis. This peace period is when the organisation is expected to have a crisis communication strategy that helps to build and maintain their relationship and reputation with their stakeholders.

The crisis communication strategy as a proactive process is put in place at the pre-crisis stage when the organisation is experiencing its 'quiet' moment and uses such a moment to scan and monitor their environment. It is advocated that an effective crisis communication strategy is built on the precept that most events can be detected early enough before it escalates into crisis, as evidence shows that majority of the crises that erupt are as a result of detectable causes that were left unattended to (Fishman, 2009).

A good pre-crisis communication strategy helps to grab an issue early enough before it escalates into a crisis, although having an effective crisis communication strategy in place should not be seen as a guarantee that the organisation is totally exempted from experiencing a crisis breakout.

Being able to identify an impending crisis at its early stage makes managing it easier. Boin (2005:19) in his argument for the need to have a pre-crisis communication strategy related an organisational crisis breakout to the dynamics of disease initialisation and development in the human system by first incubating in a vulnerable body due to genetic inheritance or unhealthy behaviour. It then progresses over time, overtaking the normal functioning of the body and overriding it with its own symptoms instead. He added that just like the human body, the speed of the spread of the disease is dependent on the body's immune system, stage of diagnosis and available treatment that can be used to fight it from further degeneration.

Therefore, the detection of a crisis at an early stage makes it easier to manage than when it has blown into a full scale crisis.

The possession of a proactive crisis communication strategy even before a crisis erupts is recommended i.e. a strategy that is implementable at the pre-crisis stage, because it provides opportunities for the organisation to scan and be mentally prepared for the possible occurrence of a crisis (Miller & Heath, 2004:6). Crisis scholars suggests that having a crisis plan, crisis team and a crisis communication strategy that is both proactive and reactive is essential for crisis survival (Horsley & Barker, 2002) as this helps to reduce loss of resources that are essential for the recovery process (Hurley-Hanson, 2006).

The pre-crisis stage of the organisation's crisis communication strategy, is the period in which an organisation is expected to release information that helps in building and maintaining good connection with the media and their stakeholders, with the aim of creating a relationship that can be relied upon to get their information out 'effortlessly' when the organisation moves from the pre-crisis to a crisis stage due to a crisis breakout (Horsley & Barker, 2002).

The information released by the organisation at the pre-crisis stage, referred to as **internalising information**, are messages that help to develop and maintain the organisation's image in the minds of its stakeholders, through their public relations effort, advocacy or community involvement (Sturges, 1994). It can also be messages that are sent out as a warning medium of an impending crisis or crisis build-up and reactive measures to reduce its impacts on the victims (Miller & Heath, 2004:6).

Evidenced-based research supports the need for having a proactive crisis communication strategy, as most crises send out early crisis warning signals suggesting the possibility of an outbreak. If the proactive crisis communication is dynamic then it can pick up the signals and prevent a crisis, as some crisis can be prevented if managed early enough. Crisis signals are defined as any information that shows an anomaly due to organisational imperfections from its internal and external environments (Mitroff, 2000:8; Paraskevas & Antinay, 2013).

This signal detection process at the pre-crisis stage of the crisis communication strategy involves identifying the various information sources where the management can find leads for concerns that can negatively affect the organisation and evaluating how critical they are and is

expected to be used to manage issues, assess the risks that can come from such issue and build a mutually beneficial relationship with their stakeholder (Coombs, 1999:18).

After the information gathered through the signal detection process has been analysed, the next step of pre-crisis communication strategy is the monitoring process. This is used to observe the development of the warning signs that were detected during the signal detection scanning, with the aim to know if the detected issues that were dealt with or if escalating, then, putting appropriate measures in place to prevent it from further degeneration into a crisis (Coombs, 1999:39).

One of the advantages of having a proactive crisis communication strategy is that it opens up opportunities for organisations to bond and get their employees to be involved in both their internal and external communities, it enables the employees to understand the community's needs and expectations through the relationship that they develop, with the assumption that such bonding can create avenues and spot opportunities that can prevent crisis along the way as they interact (Gonzalez-Hererro & Smith, 2008) .

Relationship and communication plays a very important role on how an organisation responds to crisis and the organisation's ability of having and maintaining a positive relationship with their various stakeholders, births good resilience when faced with stressful situations (Gittell et al, 2006). Resilience is defined as the capacity and ability to return, recover quickly or adjust positively after a crisis, strain or disturbance to the pre-crisis state (Bhamra, Dani & Burnard, 2011; Hurley-Hanson, 2006) while "Organisational resilience is defined as the organisation's anticipation, preparedness, response and adaptation to incremental changes and disruptions" (BS 65000:2014). The management of a Resilient organisation aims to maintain the organisation's viability and business continuity even when in crisis or experiencing changes that are internally or externally activated (BS 65000:2014).

The BS 11200:2014 identifies crisis management as an important feature of a resilient organisation as resilience lies in the organisation's ability to persist and progress through challenges and disruptions while making any needed adaptation and changes along the way. An organisation that does not have the capacity to manage its crisis cannot be said to be resilient.

The proactive crisis communication process also promotes a relationship with the media, which makes it easier for the organisation to be able to release timely and true information that meets the stakeholder needs, through these media channels (Martin & Boynton, 2005).

A good example of a proactive crisis communication plan is demonstrated in the case of Morgan Stanley, an investment bank, who occupied the highest number of floors (22 floors) in the world trade centre with about 2,700 employees during the 9/11 attack.

It was recorded that despite their high number of staff in the building when the terrorists struck on September 11, 2001, they only lost 7 of their employees in the unfortunate tragic attack. Their ability to record these low casualties was mainly credited to their crisis response preparedness (Coutu, 2002; Lengnick-Hall, et al, 2005; Hurley-Hanson, 2006).

Morgan Stanley had a very comprehensive crisis response plan in place, in case the organisation was faced with an unforeseen circumstance. Rick Rescorla, who was in charge of the organisation's security did not only identify the organisation's vulnerability to a possible terrorist attack due to its location by creating a crisis plan, but went a step further to communicating the crisis response plan with all the employees of the investment bank and engaged them in a mock drilling process peradventure the crisis. He, as the head of the security unit had a practicing and robust pre-crisis communication strategy that paid off later on when they experienced a crisis.

When the disaster struck, the company was better prepared and recorded small fatality, supporting the argument that planning helps to test and improve on pre-existing strategy if needed even before a crisis strikes (Hurley-Hanson, 2006). The company was able to evacuate successfully by their decision to ignore earlier reassuring broadcasts by the building security, requesting occupants to remain where they were as they are in control of the situation (Coutu, 2002; Lengnick-Hall, et al, 2005; Hurley-Hanson, 2006).

Morgan Stanley was not only able to evacuate their staff successfully but also exhibited its resilience ability after the disaster because of its having in place a very robust crisis communication strategy. This had been used to inform their employees prior to the attack of the existence of three alternate recovery sites that can be used in case there is any crisis that prevents them from operating locally in their offices. Their preparedness shows that Morgan Stanley did not only have pre-crisis plans for physical attacks alone but also have backups for technological mishaps with the company being able to resume some business activities within

24 hours after they experienced the terrorist attack despite the tragic human losses and technological failures that befell them.

The belief that prior planning based on the acceptance of possible reality of crisis increases the organisation's tenacity and survival skills in uncertain circumstances (Contu, 2002; Hurley-Hanson, 2006) is highly supported in Morgan Stanley's management of the 9/11 crisis. Its pre-crisis communication plan was easily transitioned and enabled to become an effective crisis communication strategy during their crisis period.

The next section, 2.5.2, reviews the crisis communication process in crisis.

2.5.2 Communication during crisis

As earlier explained in section 2.4.1 that the crisis stage in a crisis lifecycle is the stage when an event has triggered a crisis and its occurrence cannot be averted (Hale et al, 2005). The crisis communication strategy deployed by the organisation at this stage is the most important mechanism in crisis management (T'Hart, 1993). It is at this stage that all the prior planning of the organisation in the event of a crisis is put into use with the result having either a negative or positive impact on the reputation and business continuity of the organisation.

As I highlighted in the previous section, 2.5.1, that a proactive crisis communication strategy should be flexible enough to be easy transitioned to manage a crisis outbreak by the crisis team.

When in crisis, some of the key principles of crisis communication according to the British Standard Institution is the need for the organisation to act and communicate promptly, monitor and keep track of the crisis, maintain continuous crisis communication and give accurate information, be consistent, transparent, and take appropriate crisis responsibility (BS 11200:2014).

The organisation is expected not just to have a pre-selected crisis communication channel for communicating during crisis but also make alternative provision if their normal communication channels fails or becomes unavailable during the crisis (Argenti, 2002).

Looking at Morgan Stanley crisis communication response at the crisis stage, the management acted promptly to the crisis outbreak by activating their evacuation process. The crisis management team and the staff were prepared based on experience from their pre-crisis simulations and were well prepared for managing such crisis. The employee knew who their nominated crisis spokesperson is and followed his evacuation instructions despite conflicting

instruction from other sources that requested them to do otherwise. They knew what to do based on their preparedness.

The organisation management used alternative communication channels in reaching and maintaining contact with their employees when its normal and pre-identified communication channel failed due to the damage to their communication infrastructure (Argenti, 2002).

In terms of the message content (i.e. the crisis response messages) of the crisis communication strategy, the content is expected to change from internalising messages which are used to promote the organisation's image and reputation in their stakeholder's eye to **instructing information**.

Instructing information is crisis communication content that is used by the organisation to update the public about what to prepare for, how to react and what further action to be taken (Sturges, 1994). The crisis communication strategy at this stage should convey information about the current crisis that the organisation is experiencing and the action that is being employed to curtail it (Hale et al, 2005).

This is vital because the public's opinion of the organisation's failure and causes of the crisis is being shaped by the various information they absorb (Venette et al, 2003) and also provide concerted information that helps to quell unfounded rumours and prevent misinformation from unofficial sources (Horsley & Barker, 2002).

Crisis scholars also suggest that the content at this stage should include information that will help on responsibility apportioning for the cause of the crisis, try to capture what is being reported by the media, understand how the public is interpreting these messages based on the feedback from their environment scanning and if needed, retelling the story in a favourable perspective (Venette et al, 2003; Miller & Heath, 2004).

The organisation is advised to avoid releasing information that promotes its image and reputation at this stage as it portrays a picture of arrogance and insensitivity in the public's eyes (Sturges, 1994). The crisis management team's main emphasis at the crisis stage is on curtailing the crisis from further degeneration, preventing further harm to the victims and protecting the organisation's reputation from further damage. It is at this stage that the crisis team deploys the organisation's business communication strategy, consumer research, rhetoric, organisational communication systems and public relations and uses all this information to determine what to

say during crisis (Coombs, 1999:7) and therefore advises that their actions should portray this aim.

When the crisis subsides, then the crisis communication strategy transits to the post crisis stage although, in some crisis cases, there might be little distinction between the two stages in reality.

The post crisis communication strategy is discussed in the next section, section 2.5.3.

2.5.3 Post Crisis communication

When the raging crisis storm is over, it is at this stage that the crisis communication strategy focuses on explaining the organisation's justification for the choices made at the pre-crisis and during the crisis stage as well as the preventive measures that they have put in place to prevent future reoccurrence (Miller & Heath, 2004).

As the intensity of the crisis diminishes, the content of their messages changes to include **adjusting information** which is recommended to be the core of the crisis communication strategy at this stage as it helps the public in mentally coping with the crisis event that they have experienced (Sturges, 1994).

It is at this stage that the organisation will be able to evaluate how effective the decisions that were made during the crisis impacted on the public's perceptions of the organisation's behaviour (Hale et al, 2005). Peradventure the crisis team finds that the strategy employed falls short of the public's expectations, then they need to revise their strategies to meet up for possible future occurrences (Horsley & Barker, 2002). Only after then can the organisation resume on sending out internalizing information as they gradually return to their pre-crisis stage (Sturges, 1994).

A good example that illustrates the organisation's post crisis communication strategy as a learning and appraisal curve is exhibited in the case of the two NASA disasters that occurred 17 years apart. The challenger space shuttle tragic explosion left a very bad dent on the reputation of NASA as they were found to be unprepared to handle the crisis that befell them in 1986 despite being identified as a crisis that has a high probability of occurring in their type of industry.

The second tragic event, however, which resulted in the unfortunate loss of lives in the Columbia space shuttle explosion, received more positive media coverage. This is because the

organisation was better prepared to handle the crisis, by appointing the right spokesperson; they were more open on the information, disseminated information frequently and promptly and fed the media the information they needed. This was different to the case of the challenger space shuttle crash where the media had to scoop information from unreliable sources (Martin & Boynton, 2005).

Identifying the appraisal and learning curve in the post crisis communication strategy is also one of the justification of finding the double tragedies of MAS as a good fit for this research, as comparative analysis is done to evaluate if MAS learned from the MH370 crisis or not, based on their performance in the communication strategies for the management of the M17 crisis.

Although the discussion in this section 2.5 on the different crisis communication strategies that is expected at each stage of the crisis life cycle gives an impression that the application of a crisis communication strategy will be applicable sequentially, some phases do overlap. When managing a crisis where the phases merge more than one strategy can be adopted, the management are then saddled with the responsibility of identifying when they have finally exited one stage to another.

Having discussed on the various crisis communication strategies at each crisis life cycle and the set aims, the next section discusses how to respond when there is a crisis breakout i.e. crisis response strategy.

2.6 Crisis Response strategies

Crisis response strategies (CRS) are defined as how the organisation's address and/or reacts (verbal and non-verbal) to a crisis breakout with their reactions being dependent on who the audiences are, the crisis type, degree of damage and impact, the organisation's history and legal issues that could arise out of the crisis (Coombs, 2011:121). As the occurrence of a crisis can bring both image, reputational and financial damages to the organisation if not well managed, the aim of the crisis response strategies is to release messages that will protect the organisation from experiencing further damages based on what their stakeholders make of the crisis.

For the CRS, there are different frameworks that have been developed by some authors in the crisis field which are discussed next.

2.6.1 Corporate Apologia

The corporate apologia is regarded as one of the earliest foundations of the CRS which is described as strategy that an entity or organisation uses in self-defence to either maintain or repair its reputation and image (Chikudate, 2010; Coombs, Frandsen, Holladey & Johansen, 2010) in the event of a crisis.

Apologia is seen as a strategy that can be used to protect or redeem its image or reputation with the corporate apologia concept growing overtime to a crisis response strategy that is used to deal with problems of guilt that arises from criticism in the event of crisis and redeem the organisation's reputation in the eyes of the public.

One of the earliest theorists of corporate apologia, Ware & Linkugel (1973) describes it as a defensive mechanism while studying the rhetorical genre of how individuals who are embroiled in crisis respond to crisis and divided the response genre into four dimensions.

Denial is described as a response act used for the negation of an allegation without trying to distort the reality or bring conflict to the audience's initial beliefs **Bolstering** represents any strategy that is applied to re-emphasize a known fact, sentiments, objectives or relationship. The **differentiation** crisis response strategy involves the act of redefining crisis by separating larger conflict into smaller parts with the aim of using the smaller facts to defend oneself in a favourable way. **Transcendence** crisis response strategy involves making the audience see the bigger picture with the assumption that they will base their judgment on such broader information instead of the particular smaller accusation presented by one's accuser.

Denial and bolstering are both reformative strategies as their aim is to either reverse or amend a known fact while differentiation and transcendence are transformative strategies that alter the audience's cognitive understanding of the manipulated points.

Other authors like Hearit (1995) however extended the corporate apologia rhetorical response from an organisational perspective by linking corporate apologia to crisis communication. He suggests that it is the use of distancing and re-legitimation by an organisation when faced with a crisis is also a form of apologia response. In managing their crisis, the organisation needs to strive to find equilibrium between the organisation's goals and their stakeholder's expectation. This is achievable by either reaffirmation or dissociation.

An organisation can respond to a crisis in three ways. It can challenge the crisis claims using **opinion/knowledge disconnection** by taking a denial stance (Ware & Linkugel, 1973) and

offering information that challenges the claims levelled against them. Another corporate apologia option is for the organisation to use the **individual/group dissociation** strategy whereby the organisation rejects absolute responsibility of the crisis by transferring it to another person or group i.e. scapegoating. The third stance is to be taken when the organisation has no other option but to accept the crisis responsibility using the **act/essence dissociation** with the aim of making an effort to let the public know that such action does not represent their organisation goal.

This strategy is cautioned not to be seen as a form of the normal apology, but as a CRS that is used when an organisation is accused of wrongdoing, to reposition itself to a level that is identifiable with the expectations of the public values (Hearit 1995, 2001).

Merrill lynch, for example, is an organisation that used corporate apologia when they were investigated by the New York attorney general, Eliot Spitzer in 2001/2. The first strategy they used when indicted of gross misconduct by misinforming investors was to deny the allegation based on the lack of financial knowledge of the investigator, using the opinion/knowledge dissociation. When evidence was later produced to counter their dissociation claim, they resorted to reject responsibility by shifting blame, using the individual/group dissociation position to those that were directly in charge instead of collectively accepting the blame as a firm.

Unfortunately, these two strategies that they adopted rather fuelled the crisis instead of abating it and earned them a monetary fine by the indicting committee. Merrill lynch finally used the act/essence dissociation after coming to the acceptance that it was the only option suitable for the perceived responsibility ascribed to them by their stakeholders. This was in order to reposition their position in the financial market and protect their reputation from further damage. This action however sends an indirect signal to the public that the firm was indeed guilty of the unacceptable behaviour that they were indicted of (Hearit & Brown, 2004).

The corporate apologia is however, found limiting as it only concentrates on apology as the way of responding to crisis and ignores the concept of accountability that is used to explain one's questionable behaviour (Coombs, 1999:122), a concept that is accommodated by other CRS like the impression management which is discussed next.

2.6.2 Impression management

Other groups of scholars that found the corporate apologia CRS limiting based on its inability to accommodate the need for identifying who should be held accountable for the crisis, proposed the Impression management CRS model with its foundation embedded in social psychology (Merkel-Davies & Brennan, 2011).

It is a crisis response strategy that is used by management to respond to accountability pressure and concerns for misconduct from their stakeholders, with such pressure questioning the organisation's legitimacy, reputation and survival. The organisation's management uses Impression management CRS in the heat of pressures to reassure their aggrieved stakeholders that their organisational goals are still legitimate and achievable (Allan & Caillouet, 1994; Tschirhart, 2007).

The impression management CRS position in protecting the organisation's reputation and continuity is rooted in the legitimacy theory. The legitimacy theory is described as a dialogical interaction between the organisation's strategy and their stakeholder's expectation (Massey, 2001). This CRS focuses on promoting and maintaining the organisation's legitimacy, not just in the eyes of its various stakeholders, but also includes their stakeholders using a rhetorical strategy. The strategy's aim is to absolve the organisation of any of its failures using a discourse approach that promotes all the positive actions that they have taken in managing the crisis event to its perceived audiences (Allan & Caillouet, 1994).

One of the repercussions from a crisis outbreak is that it brings doubt to the image and reputation that the organisation is known for and has built overtime in the eyes of their stakeholders. This CRS aims to consciously and/or unconsciously control and correct the perception of their stakeholders from viewing them as an illegitimate organisation but rather spur a favourable opinion that promotes the organisation's longevity and reputation (Hooghiemstra, 2000). The content of the Impression management CRS is expected to appease the aggrieved stakeholders who doubt the legitimacy of the organisations based on the illegitimate activities that they have been accused of.

Impression management CRS uses apology, excuses, justification, ingratiation, intimidation, denouncement and factual distortion/decoupling approaches to admit a wrong doing, convince their stakeholders or even challenge accusations that are levelled against them. Using any of these approaches to respond to a crisis is expected to release the necessary and relevant information that will help the organisation to portray and relay the true picture of the crisis that

they are accused of and if liable, show what is being done to manage the crisis (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Allan & Caillouet, 1994).

This CRS also has its limitation as some authors argued that admitting fault to a wrong doing by an organisation in a neo-institutional theory situation can have devastating response (Allan & Caillouet, 1994). The challenges with using this CRS might come with legal and financial implications that the organisation might not be able to paddle through.

It has also been found to be ineffective when used in some different cultural dimensions. For example, Lee (2004), in his cross-cultural analysis of crisis found that using apology (which is one of the suggested impression management CRS) in some Asian countries might yield a lesser positive result when compared to their western country counterparts. Asians perceive apology to be a merely routine response that carries little emotional effect and would rather prepare a no-comment response, an approach in contrast, that is deemed unacceptable in the western world. In the Western world, a no-comment strategy is assumed to present the organisation as an egocentric entity that fails to communicate and connect with their victims in crisis by telling what they know as soon as possible.

Another criticism of the impression management CRS is the argument that it is being projected mainly as a strategy that is focused on strictly protecting the organisation's reputation, without any suggestions on how to manage the crisis victims. The principal suggestion of the impression management CRS is for the organisation to issue obligatory disclosure of their position on the cause of a crisis and what they are doing to manage it, so as to protect their reputation, but failed to give any suggestion on the selection process for these strategies (Merkl-Davies & Brennan, 2011).

The suggestion that the organisation should appease their aggrieved stakeholders fails to acknowledge that it can be difficult for the organisation to find an acceptable ground that accommodates and balances all the aggrieved stakeholders conflict and interest (Allan & Caillouet, 1994).

2.6.3 Image repair (restoration) theory

The Image repair theory is one of the most prominent theories used in crisis communication research (Kim, Avery & Lariscy, 2001). It uses a persuasive discourse model that considers the various rhetorical strategies of the communication process. It analyses the messages options that the organisation uses to protect its reputation when in crisis using the case study approach.

The development of this theory is based on the concept that a crisis response strategy should be constructed using the crisis responsibility attached to it and the perceived level of wrongdoing that their stakeholders is holding them accountable for. These scholars propose that the amount of risk that the organisation's image is exposed to is dependent on the perception of the gravity of a crisis by its audience.

This theory focuses on the reputational recovery of the organisation and is regarded as an audience-context model that is applicable in a situation where an individual or organisation is experiencing an attack-defend scenario that requires the reputational maximisation (Fishman, 2009). This is a crisis response strategy that is built on the assumption that the primary objective of an organisation's communication strategy is to maintain a positive image in the eyes of its stakeholders (Blaney, Benoit & Brazeal, 2002). It suggests that when in crisis, the image repair process for the organisation starts with its ability to first understand if the unacceptable behaviour levied against it is an accusation or a suspicion. It also suggests the organisation needs to identify the aggrieved audience, which might be multiple, and prioritise who to respond to first and how to.

The author of the Image repair theory builds on the suggestions of other theories like corporate apologia CRS that recommends the necessity to take an apologetic position when managing a crisis in order to protect its reputation. Benoit then extends it to an approach that fills one of the shortcomings of the corporate apologia CRS, by focusing on the message content that the organisation is expected to release to the public based on the perception of the crisis cause and perceived impact (Benoit, 1995; 2015).

The Image repair theory uses a convincing discourse instead of only using apologetic discourse, as suggested by the corporate apologia CRS which expect management to accept faults of any wrongdoing that they are accused of and respond by communicating the reactive and preventive measures that has been put in place to minimise the damage and prevent reoccurrence. The Image repair theory advises that in the event of a false accusation, the management is expected to either deny or shift the blame to those that are responsible for the crisis instead of apologising and accepting the false claim.

The model proposes five crisis response discourses that an organisation can use to either defend or accept responsibility for a crisis, depending on the perception of the offensiveness of the crisis and the apportioning of the crisis responsibility by its stakeholders. The organisation can

use either one or combine any of these five crisis response discourses based on the causative factor.

Denial that the incident did not occur, or that the firm is not responsible for the occurrence, is the first discourse. A good example of this strategy is the case of Tylenol product tampering, where the management claimed and maintained that it was a case of sabotage. This comes with blame shifting or outright denial of what the organisation is being accused of.

Evasion of responsibility is another tactic that the organisation can use to respond to a crisis by claiming that the action was to protect them from an offensive provocation, or that they lack appropriate information at the time of their action. They could also claim that the occurrence was beyond their control, an accident or that it was a good intentional act that produced unacceptable behaviour or results.

Reduction of offensiveness can be achieved by the use of bolstering to reinforce the good works of the organisation or minimise the negativity associated with their wrongful action. Differentiation or transcendence can also be adopted with the aim of removing the crisis from the bigger picture/image that the organisation represents, or by compensating the victims of the crisis to cushion their pain.

Corrective actions are taken when the company accepts responsibility of the wrongful acts and corrects the problem as their fault.

Mortification goes further by confessing, admitting and seeking for forgiveness for their audience.

The first two discourses (denial and evasion of responsibility) are recommended to be effective for rejecting or reducing the crisis responsibility. The reduction of offensiveness and corrective actions is aimed at reducing the offensiveness of the crisis act, as perceived by their stakeholders, while mortification action tries to restore the organisation image in the eyes of the public by begging for compassion.

The image repair theory is critiqued as a non-evidenced theory, as it presents itself as a descriptive theory that tests the success and failure of crisis response message (Coombs & Schmidt, 2009). The theory is also faulted for using a process that can be subject to

misrepresentation due to its presentation as a linear and successive process that moves from an attack-to-image repair progression (Burns & Burner, 2000).

2.6.4 Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

The SCCT is one of the two most widely accepted and used crisis response strategies (Kim et al., 2009), which was born out of the need of a model that uses an evidence-based strategy. This theory gives a symbolic representation of the organisation's historical performance and its relationship building approach (Coombs, 2001, 2006) by combining the rhetorical, impression management and image restoration concepts together, to help predict how stakeholders reacts to crisis (Coombs, 1998), by using the attribution theory as its framework, which is a theory that relates to how causal thoughts influence feelings and emotions. The attribution theory postulates that people tend to interpret an event by first doing a causal search and then use the information they've gathered to manage and cope with the event effectively. This event experience is then used as a yardstick for gauging their future expectations (Weiner, 1985: 2006).

In Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), Timothy Coombs, using the fundamentals of the attribution theory, posits that the choice of a crisis response strategy by an organisation should be influenced by the type of crisis situation and the threat posed by the crisis, based on how the stakeholders perceive it. The theory shifts the focus of crisis response strategy from aiming only to protect the organisation's reputation to one that includes the protection of the stakeholders and the crisis victims; with the assumption that appropriate management of the organisation's stakeholder will reduce the reputational damage that the organisation might experience when in crisis and protect them.

SCCT suggests three factors that influence the reputational threat that comes from an organisational crisis: the initial crisis responsibility, the crisis history and the organisation's prior relational reputation. The theory assumes that the crisis history and relational relationship have intensifying effects on how stakeholders apportion crisis responsibility to the organisation. This indirectly affects the initial crisis responsibility and directly threatens the organisation's reputation (Coombs, 2007).

The apportioning of crisis responsibility by the stakeholders is determined and constructed based on the type of crisis that the organisation is experiencing. This assumption comes with an expectation on the organisation to identify the crisis type as this can be used to predict their stakeholder's interpretation and reaction to the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; 2005). The

organisation is then expected to use this knowledge to determine on how best to respond to such crisis. Once this is identified, the management can then make adjustments based on the severity and their performance history (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

The SCCT theory assumes that a good understanding of the crisis situation will help in choosing the best crisis response approach to best protect the organisation's reputation because the stakeholders form their perception of a crisis based on their understanding of the crisis type, their ability to prove that the crisis occurred, the associated damages, the company's crisis history, relationship and behaviours.

This comes with a preposition that, for an organisation to know the most effective way to respond to a crisis, the crisis team is expected to first identify the crisis type. Coombs (2007) grouped the various crisis typology created by other scholars for the SCCT into three main clusters using the apportioning of responsibility as the determining element.

The **victim cluster** is the type of crisis where the organisation is perceived as a victim of circumstances and cannot really be held responsible for the occurrence; examples of crisis in this cluster are natural disaster, workplace violence, product tampering and rumour.

The second group is the **accidental cluster** which is regarded as the type of crisis that occurs unintentionally or one that is beyond the control of the organisation. This gives the organisation the opportunity to take minimal responsibility for the crisis; examples of these are technical error, accident, product harm and challenges.

The third cluster, the **preventable cluster**, is used to classify crisis that occur due to human error and organisational wrong doing. The organisation is fully held responsible for the crisis as the stakeholders perceive it as a premeditated action.

Table 2 tabulates the type of responsibility attribution that the organisation stakeholders will attribute for to a crisis types and the perceived threat that it poses to the organisation's reputation.

Table 2: SCCT crisis types, perceived threat and accompanying responsibility

Crisis Type	Crisis responsibility attribution	Reputation threat
Victim cluster	Weak	Mild
Accidental cluster	Minimal	Moderate
Preventable cluster	Strong	Severe

Adapted from Coombs (2007).

Once the crisis type has been identified, the organisation is then expected to factor in the performance history of the organisation which is a reflection of their crisis history and past behaviour and the projected effect (i.e. Financial, emotional, physical and environmental damage) that the crisis will have on the stakeholders when making decisions on which CRS to adopt (Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2001; 2002).

The organisation's crisis history is regarded as a vital factor in determining the CRS to be adopted, as the theory suggests that the existence of a similar crisis history in the organisation's past will influence the attribution process of the crisis responsibility. It is assumed that their stakeholders will interpret the occurrence of comparable crisis as an indicator of the presence of a continuing problem that the organisation has not been able to overcome.

Prior relational reputation represents the third factor that influences the type of CRS to be adopted in managing a crisis. SCCT posits the stakeholder's judgement on the organisation will not be based only on how the organisation treats them when in crisis, but will extend to include the overall treatment that they have experienced in the hand on the organisation during the pre-crisis and post-crisis period. Having a negative prior relational reputation will have a negative impact on the attribution of crisis responsibility by the stakeholders.

SCCT is critiqued on its stance that the CRS selection is dependent on the identification of the crisis type as some crisis comes with such complexity that makes it difficult to categorise the crisis into one single cluster and some crisis might not even fit into the generic crisis typology (Schwarz, 2008).

Another limitation identified with the SCCT is the challenge with measuring and quantifying the organisation's prior reputation before a crisis breakout. For research purposes, it might be difficult to know and capture where the organisation's reputation stands before they entered

into crisis. This research however makes it possible by capturing MAS pre-crisis relationship on their Facebook page.

The assumption that the responsibility attribution by stakeholders is dependent on the crisis type, history and relationship is also argued against, as there are evidences that public opinion can be influenced by the information released through the media and direct discourse with one another. The absorption of this information might interfere with the sense-making process of their stakeholders and shift it from the organisation-centred assumption of SCCT to one of circumstances attribution (Schwarz, 2008).

SCCT however argues against these criticisms and states that its model is not restricted to the effect of the crisis on the organisation alone, but goes further to suggest the behavioural intentions of the stakeholders, based on how they respond emotionally to real case crisis with emotion have been identified as impacting on an organisation's reputation (Yin & Liu, 2009). It is anticipated that an organisation's crisis communication can be more effective if it evaluates and includes its stakeholder's emotional reaction to their crisis when selecting the appropriate crisis response strategy (Coombs & Holladay, 2005).

Emotion in SCCT

The study of the type of emotion generated in response to a crisis and its effect on SCCT is another variable that is gaining momentum in crisis study. Scholars now recognise emotion as an important factor, especially when exploring real life crisis from the public's perspective. Emotion has been identified to influence the effect of SCCT (Choi & Lin, 2009).

When there is a crisis breakout, there are two victims of the crisis, the direct victims (those that feel the effect of the crisis which in most cases represent a very small percentage of their stakeholder's population) and the non-victims (those that are indirectly affected but represent a higher percentage of the stakeholder's population).

SCCT recognises this by not only focusing on the organisation or the direct victims of the crisis but also extends the study to include how these non-victims react emotionally (behavioural intension) to the crisis news. SCCT recognises that the impact that the type of emotion that the non-victim stakeholder might have towards the organisation might affect their future interaction and relationship with the organisation and could even result into negative word of mouth on the organisation's product and services if not managed well (Coombs, 2007).

SCCT claims there is a correlation between crisis responsibility and emotions expressed in crisis; crisis responsibility is positively related to anger and schadenfreude (Coombs & Holladay, 2005) and negatively related to sympathy. This led to the suggestion that the non-victim stakeholders will react emotionally with a sympathetic response to crisis news where the organisation is perceived to be a victim, as they can identify that the organisation is not to be held responsible for the crisis. The sympathetic reaction justifies why the instructing and adjusting information is enough to manage a crisis in the victim cluster (Coombs, 2007).

Crisis origin are suggested to interact with stakeholders perception of crisis responsibility as stakeholders are more lenient to the response from an organisation that is experiencing an externally aggravated crisis than they would to a crisis that they hold the organisation responsible for its occurrence (Jin et al., 2014). The crisis origin defines the crisis classification.

An organisation that is experiencing a crisis in the preventable cluster, however, will generate an emotional reaction that is filled with very strong anger and schadenfreude (the ability to take joy in seeing the organisation suffer for their actions) from their non-victim stakeholders. This is because of the assumption that their inability to prevent the crisis from occurring validates the assigning of a high level of crisis responsibility from the stakeholders, for the crisis.

Accidental crisis has less anger and schadenfreude reaction from the non-victim's stakeholders and thereby produces low emotional reaction.

The categorisation of crisis emotion into sympathy, anger and schadenfreude were contested as not being broad enough to accommodate the different emotions that could result from a crisis occurrence, as some studies suggests that more emotional reactions can emerge from the non-victim stakeholders. Choi and Lin (2009) in their attempt to fill this gap categorised crisis emotions into attribution dependent and attribution independent emotions. They found more emotions in play than the SCCT theory.

Choi and Lin recognised and categorised emotions such as anger, relief, contempt, surprise, worry, and fear that were found to be significantly related to the crisis attribution process and put these emotional reaction types to be classified as attribution dependent emotion. "Emotions" (according to Choi and Lin, 2009) like alert and confusion were evidenced to be independent emotions in their findings, as they had no significant influence on how stakeholders apportion crisis responsibility. Other emotions like disgust, shame and sympathy

remained inconclusive on the effect that they can have on crisis responsibility attribution and called for further investigation.

The integrated crisis mapping (ICM) is another systematic model that was developed by Jin, Pang and Cameron (2012) in understanding the emotional perspective of the public and their coping strategy based on the organisation engagement and the default emotion exhibited by the public to a crisis. They identified anger, fright, anxiety and sadness as the dominant negative emotions exhibited by the public to a crisis. Guilt and shame were identified as secondary emotional reaction to a crisis. Of all these negative dominant emotions, the fright emotion is found to be the primary emotion exhibited by the public when they realise that the organisation has little or no control over the crisis that occurred. In the case of a crisis caused by terrorist attack, the fright emotion transforms into sadness and anger.

Despite the difference in the grouping of the type of emotions exhibited in crisis by the public by these crisis scholars, the common denominator is that they agree on emotion being a variable that have effect on the attribution of crisis responsibility by the non-victim stakeholders.

Having documented the intensifying factors on the reputational threat (crisis type, history and prior relational reputation) and behavioural intentions (emotional reaction) that comes from a crisis, the next section discusses the crisis response approach i.e. the type of expected message that an organisation can use for their crisis communication strategy to defend, repair or minimise the unwanted impact that arises from an organisational crisis.

SCCT's Crisis response strategy (CRS)

The SCCT assumes that messages released to manage a crisis should reflect the perceived responsibility assigned for the crisis cause and methodologically identifies three types of primary crisis response strategy and a secondary CRS in addressing crisis. The primary CRS are deny, diminish and rebuild strategy while the secondary CRS is bolstering.

Deny CRS is suggested to be used to respond to crisis where there is no connection between the organisation and the crisis. In this scenario, the organisation is expected not to accept crisis responsibility as they can't be held responsible for the cause. This type of CRS comes with no reputational harm to the organisation as long as the organisation cannot be linked directly to the cause of the crisis.

The deny category expects the organisation to use their crisis response strategy to *attack the accuser* by confrontation, or by continuous assertion to the public that they are not in crisis by refuting the claim by *denial* or the use of *scapegoating* that will push the blame from the organisation to a different entity or individual.

Diminish CRS is suggested to be used when the organisation aims to reduce the gravity of the crisis or when they can portray to the public that the occurrence was beyond their control and/or that nothing could have been done to prevent the crisis from happening. This crisis response strategy aims to either reduce how the stakeholders associate the organisation to the crisis or reduce the damaging sense-making attached to the crisis.

It is suggested to be mostly effective when there are different stories to the cause of the crisis by different sources as divergent claim creates a window that enables the organisation to use the *excuse* to claim that the organisation did not intend to cause any harm to its stakeholder or *justification* to diminish the danger and the impact that comes from the crisis.

Rebuild CRS is suggested to be used when the organisation has strong reputational threat with crisis that is either in the preventable or accidental crisis clusters. The organisation uses this strategy to restore the organisation's eroded reputation by using the *compensation* in the form of gifts or money or *apology* and ask for forgiveness.

The **secondary CRS** proposed by SCCT in responding to crisis as a supplement to support the primary CRS is **bolstering** by *reminder* which tells of the organisation's previous good deeds, *ingratiation* by appreciating their stakeholders or *victimage* by reiterating that they are victims of the crisis too (Coombs, 2007).

The organisation in crisis is expected to do a matching process in order to identify which CRS is best suited for the crisis they are managing.

Table 3: SCCT CRS Coombs (2007).

Primary crisis response strategies	CRS
Deny	Attack the accuser
	Denial
	Scapegoat
Diminish	Excuse
	Justification
Rebuild	Compensation
	Apology
Secondary crisis response strategies	
Bolstering	Reminder
	Ingratiation
	Victimage

Borrowing from David Sturges recommendation on the use of instructing, adjusting and internalising information in communication through crisis, the SCCT accepts that for an organisation to have an effective crisis communication strategy, there is the need to combine the information suggestion of Sturges (1994) with the most suitable SCCT CRS.

The matching guideline for the SCCT CRS is discussed below.

SCCT crisis response strategy guidelines:

- For crisis in the victim cluster with minimal responsibility, Informing and adjusting information alone is sufficient, if there is no crisis history or if they have good prior relationship reputation. The victimage strategy is also recommended.
- For crisis in the victim cluster that has prior similar crisis history or negative relationship with their stakeholders, the diminish CRS is recommended. The diminish CRS can also be used for crisis in the accident cluster that had no similar crisis history and/or negative or neutral relationship reputation.
- Rebuild CRS is suggested to be used for crisis in the accident cluster that has similar crisis history, negative or neutral relationship reputation or for preventable crisis cluster.

- Deny CSR is basically restricted for refuting rumours and challenges faced by the organisation and shouldn't be used concurrently with any of the remaining primary CRS.

For this thesis, the SCCT CRS is adopted as the crisis response strategy that will be used in analysing MAS crisis communication; this is because it is an evidence based theory. It is also a theory that focuses on the variables and interactions that can influence the crisis response choice and strategies employed based on the crisis type.

Having explored crisis communication and its related fields, which represents the cores needed to provide the foundational understanding needed for research, this literature review then proceeds into the exploration of social media in crisis communication and how it is impacting on crisis communication

2.7 Social media

The preceding section of this literature review concentrated on crisis, crisis management and crisis communication which are part of the core needed to provide the understanding needed for this research aim. However, the ability to be able to fulfil the research aim of this thesis as it extends to the use of social media, with a focus on Facebook, raises the necessity for the need to have a review on the social media and how it is impacting on crisis communication, especially in the aviation industry. This section of this literature review provides this.

Social media is defined as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 which allows for the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (UGC) (Kaplan & Haelein, 2010). Web 2.0 is described as an internet based collection of technologies, business strategies and social trends that enables multi-sensory communication and matrix dialogues (Maness, 2007; Manugesan, 2007).

It is described as an information sharing channel that includes social networking sites, microblogging, blogs, forums and wikis with social networking sites like Facebook being used more for information sharing purposes of breaking news that gets the public's interest in a short period of time (Osatuyi, 2013).

The acceptance of social media into our daily lives has influenced the human social life and our information seeking, sharing and creating process. This is due to its ability of providing the possibility for human communication to participate and converse in an open manner that creates community, connectedness, and a platform whereby individuals can be both the

consumer and the contributor of information. It has also influenced how organisations operate by democratising the corporate communication process (Hughes, Rowe, Batey & Lee, 2011; Kietzmann, Mccathy & Slivestre, 2011; Veil, Buehner & Palencher, 2011).

In the western world, the adoption of social media is increasing with about 70% of the population taking social media content analysis seriously (Schwarz, 2012). The adoption rate in developing countries can be said to be following the same similar upward direction as there is an upsurge in the ownership of mobile phones in developing countries in recent years, even people who earn less than USD \$5 a day can now afford to own mobile phones (Nathan Eagle in Ekine, 2010). This penetration has opened up avenues for people in developing countries to access the internet more cheaply using their phones thereby bypassing the earlier expensive internet connection rate and lack of personal computers that created the prior digital divide (Howard & Mazaheri, 2009).

Social media has been effective both in developed and developing country to remove prior barriers that has prevented people with common interest and problems from locating each other and coming together and has created an easily accessible virtual community for people to come together irrespective of their locations and communities (Gonzalez-Hererro & Smith, 2008). Social media is changing the way in which people, organisations and community communicate with each other (Ngai, Tao & Moon, 2015).

The effect that social media has on business cannot be downplayed as it has unlocked communication medium even for small companies and stakeholders. Small companies who could not afford the cost of connecting with their stakeholders and media can now do so. Stakeholders could not connect to the organisation as they would want to and are even creating a community of people with a similar mind (Taylor, et al, 2001; Kent et al, 2011).

Social media has transformed the earlier situation whereby customers with similar interest found it difficult to connect with one another directly and create a community; this change has brought about a new structure that allows the creation of an enabling platform that encourages the organisation to connect with their customers and also likeminded customers connecting with each other without the organisation's involvement and control (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The internet which is the enabling platform on which social media is built on was first introduced into the organisation structure as a medium of communication with the public through the use of websites (Coombs, 2011:20), a process that presented more of a one-way

means of communication. Its use can be said to have really penetrated into our organisations (Taylor & Perry, 2005) and changed their communication over the years. The changes started when social media opened up new tailored ways of marketing and communication possibilities, that were both cost-effective and more efficient than traditional marketing (Mayfield, 2008).

The use of the internet grew into a strategic and tactical tool that has not only changed cultural models but also brought about innovations that create communities where people can exchange information that have long-lasting positive or negative effect on the company (Berthon et al., 2012). Organisations use social media as a communication channel to reach their stakeholders by either updating their status or responding to their (stakeholder) messages (Roshan et al., 2016)

Social media has also established itself as a primary news source and a strategic communication tool (Lewis, 2010) because of its ability to provide a platform that affords its users the opportunity to dialogue, interact and is used for relationship building purposes through mobile and web based technologies (Schultz, Utz & Cortiz, 2010), an opportunity that has even impacted on the tradition media channels.

These channels are evolving a new communication dynamic where there is now a surge in the thirst for real-time information processing about the organisation. It has brought about a change, whereby stakeholders do not have to wait on the organisation and media for information dissemination, but could turn to the internet to get the needed information. It is also changing the discourse process of an organisation from a dialogue that accepts a one-to-many broadcast pattern, to a more interactive many-to-many communication process that depends on content that is generated by its various users (Bertot et al., 2007; Roshan et al., 2016)

Kaplan and Haelein (2010) adopting the media theory systematically categorised the different social media channels, using the social presence and media richness model, in conjunction with the social processes model, used self-presentation and self-disclosure as elements for their classification. They categorised social media channels into six technologies as blogs, social networking sites (SNS), virtual social world, collaborative projects, content communication and virtual world games which is tabulated in table 4.

Table 4: Different categories of social media channels

Type	Description	Example	Social Process	Media Theory
Collaborative projects	Contents are created and edited simultaneously and collectively by multiple end users on a single project with the assumption that multiple content creator are more productive than it being done individually	Wikipedia, Delicious	Low	Low
Blogs (short for web blogs)	Are website-like pages with journal-like informational posts that are created and posted by authors in a reverse chronological order and gives room for their readers to interact and make comments to the posting	Wordpress.com, Bloggers.com	High	Low
Microblog	It allows users to post short updates of about 140 characters in real time for informational dissemination or social networking purposes.	Twitter, Identi	High	Medium
Content communities	Creates a platform for users to share common media content	Book crossing, YouTube, Slide share	Low	Medium
Social networking sites	Provides a platform for collaboration and interaction between the users by creating a personal profile which	Facebook, Myspace,	High	Medium

	enable them to connect, view, communicate and maintain relationships with each other			
Professional networking site	Similar to social networking site but used for career and professional networking	LinkedIn, Ozmosis, Hangout, Doc2Doc	High	Medium
Virtual games	Users create a personalised avatar to interact in a 3-D environment that is guided by strict rules	World of Warcraft, Everquest	Low	High
Virtual social world	Representative personalised avatar created by users for interaction in a 3-D environment as they would have interacted in the real world	Second life	High	High

Adapted from Grajales et al. (2014) and Kaplan & Haenlein (2010)

This categorisation defines social networking sites like Facebook as a social media channel that is high for social process (self-presentation and self-disclosure). This implies that Facebook provides a high enabling environment for users to develop relationships by divulging personal information that is consistent with a positive image building process of how others perceive them, a process that is also consistent with their real life identity (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Of the SNS, Facebook is regarded as the largest and most popular social media site (which grew from 5.5 million active users in 2005 to 1.4 billion active monthly user as of March, 2015) as it provides an opportunity for real engagement between its users, where they can create a profile, communicate both privately and publicly and send instant messages in real time as well (Facebook, 2015; Hughes et al. 2011).

Using the media research (social presence and media richness) theory categorisation, Facebook provides an average opportunity for users to socially influence each other's behaviour due to the sound, visual and physical contact that users have of each other (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This characteristic of social networking site (SNS) like Facebook is providing a communication process that enhances control change from the media and its audience as it is empowering these audiences to shift from being just a passive content viewer to being active content creator and/or contributors of views, ideologies and grievances (Ihator, 2001; Sweetser & Weaver, 2008). This shift is thereby transferring the organisation's public relation's authority into the hands of people that in some cases might not even have direct connection with the organisation before (Smith, 2010).

In the aviation industry, the use of Facebook is suggested to be seen as an integral part and one of the primary conduits of the airline's communication channel. Facebook provides organisations in the aviation industry with the opportunity to reach news media and other audiences quickly and in real-time in an emergency or accident. It should also be used in conjunction with other media/ communication channels to release information about any crisis that the organisation is facing, with their official Facebook page expected to have the same information as released on other primary communication channels (The International Air Transport Association (IATA)). The International Air Transport Association (IATA) represents a global association that provides supports, formulates industry policies and guideline for the airline industry.

This justifies one of the reasons why Facebook is adopted as the social media channel for this thesis as it is a dominant digital communication channel (Hudson, Roth, Madden, Hudson, 2015) that covers both the communication and the interaction focus of this thesis.

2.8 Crisis communication: traditional media and social media.

The social media impact is changing the crisis communication process, especially in the diffusion of bad news, or news that might indicate the beginning of a crisis for an organisation (Park, Cha, Kim, & Jeong, 2012).

Social media platform has become a powerful tool for information and news dissemination and is making the organisation to be more vulnerable to experience crisis if not well managed (Pang, Hassan & Ching, 2014) thereby leading to an increase in the call for more research on how these platforms are impacting on crisis communication management (Coombs, 2008).

The occurrence of a crisis triggers different questions that require timely tailored answers and actions from its diverse audience. Fishman (1998) described this experience as a situation that typically creates pressure for an immediate explanation to reassure the media, relevant stakeholders and the public at large. The organisation needs an efficient crisis communication strategy that answers all these various concerns of their stakeholders in order to prevent further escalation of the initial crisis into another major crisis.

In crisis management, it is recommended that one of the best practices of averting or handling a crisis is the organisation's ability to effectively communicate with the media in an open, timely and honest manner (Barton, 1990; Seeger, 2006), as the media has the power in shaping the perceived image and reputation the public attributes to the organisation based on what they report (Gray & Balmer, 1998; Kauffman, 2000).

The function that the media plays makes it a major stakeholder in most organisations and thereby reiterates the need for a continuous open communication sequence with them (Ulmer 2001). The remaining stakeholders of the organisation uses the information that they can deduce from their interactions with the organisation and the media to form opinions about the organisation (Stephens et al, 2005; Schultz et.al, 2011).

Crisis scholars suggests that being prepared for crisis by planning and having prior good media relations, even before a crisis, is essential for retaining the goodwill of the company in the eyes of the public (Horsley & Barker, 2002). This implies that, a proactive continuous interaction with the media is definitely indispensable (Pollard & Hotho, 2006) as receiving negative media attention can turn a situation to a crisis (Down, 1972; Lerbinger, 2012:15).

The recommendation of mainly focusing on maintaining a healthy relationship with the traditional media is however changing, as the communication strategy of today is changing from what it used to be in earlier decades, whereby the search for information by the stakeholders is done mainly through word-of-mouth (WOM) and the media (Coombs, 2007), to a more interactive engagement through social media which also has to be positively managed.

The occurrence of the diffusion of innovation (a process of communicating innovation through certain channels over time within a social system (Rogers, 2010:1)) which has brought about a communication innovation (the internet) that has received tremendous acceptance (Beilock &

Dimitrova, 2003) and is fast becoming a strategic tool in the organisation's communication plan and crisis communication process is changing this view. This communication innovation now influences the communication strategy both internally and externally with social media attaining a useful position in the construction and deconstruction of crisis because of the real-time, dialogic possibilities that it provides (Perry et al, 2003; Schultz et al, 2011).

The recommendation has now gone past earlier belief that one of the requirements of a good communication strategy is by having a mutually good relationship with traditional media outlet as they can mainly influence what becomes of a crisis. It is changing to one that includes the need to also have an interactive social media communication and interaction process (pre-crisis plan) in place that can be easily transitioned and updated to give real time response and information when a crisis erupts and switched back after (crisis and post crisis communication) (Coombs, 2007).

This is now an important channel in the crisis communication process as evidence supports the view that the public uses social media during crisis to seek for information, want answers to their questions and connect together for emotional and moral support (Jin et al, 2014; Stephens & Malone, 2009; Sweetner & Metzgar, 2007). The inclusion of social media in the management of crisis cannot be ignored anymore with stakeholders expecting the organisation not to just feed them with crisis information but to have conversations with them by responding to their posting (Roshan et al, 2016).

Social media has brought about a change to locus of activity, value production and power from the firm to the public (Berthon et al., 2012) in the crisis communication field by playing an important role of what becomes of a crisis both from the shareholders angle and the managements control (Schuktz et al., 2011). It has changed the earlier model of the crisis communication process which totally involves issuing of press releases, television updates and providing a dedicated telephone lines to connect with enquiring stakeholders by the management to a process that includes the use and timely updating of the organisations website and social media platforms to disseminate timely information (Stephens & Malone, 2010:411).

The impact that social media is having on crisis communication process is its ability to activate or facilitate an issue that ordinarily would have been evolved slowly or be ignored in a traditional setting into a major crisis within a twinkle of an eye if not attended to early enough (Gonzalez-Hererro & Smith, 2008). An early example of an issue that was ill managed locally and eventually escalated by social media (blog) into a major crisis is the Intel Pentium chip

flaw of 1994 when a mathematics professor in his course of duty discovered a “bug” and notified the company through email of his discovery. The company failed to disclose, acknowledge or even accept responsibility for the flaw as they believed that it will only affect a very minute number of their customers. This discovery, however, became a major crisis for the company when it received attention on social media platforms. Their lackadaisical crisis communication approach did not only affect their image and reputation but also threatened their business continuity and plunged their share price negatively (Emery, 1996). Social media is believed to have accelerated the transformation of the Intel Pentium’s flaw into a crisis that ordinarily would have been swept under the carpet or received little attention in a ‘traditional’ media environment (Gonzalez-Hererro & Smith, 2008).

In crisis communication, social media has now helped to build the missing bridge between crisis management and the use of the internet (Coombs, 2011:21) and even advanced the progression of crisis communication field. Crisis communication aims to convey information to their stakeholders as soon as possible and social media channels provide the needed platform for quick information exchange (Graham et al., 2015)

It is important to point out that the inclusion of social media in crisis communication is not a revolution but an evolution because there are still no changes to the traditional process of crisis management and communication but an adaptation of the communication process. What is changing is the collection, processing speed and the selection of information that demands tailored real-time response to the intended audience (Fearn-Banks, 2016; Coombs, 2011:19; Freberg, 2012).

Crisis communication researchers suggests that the organisation has moved from questioning themselves if it is necessary to include social media into their organisation’s crisis communication channels and moved to how to use it (Jin, et al., 2014) as social media channel is now accepted as an addition to the earlier traditional crisis communication channels.

It is also erasing the normal response grace period that the organisation usually has to prepare their response to a crisis, as stakeholders expect them to keep them informed of what is happening as soon as possible ((Roshan et al., 2016).

Social media has brought a modification to the traditional communication paradigm whereby the organisation has absolute control over what, how and to whom they communicate with and is also removing the divergence between researchers that reject the assumption of the “control

paradigm” of traditional media who view it as an illusion (by assuming that the stakeholders are selective of the messages they are exposed to and therefore have the control). This group also agrees that social media has created a platform that has been able to break through the limitations that had previously compelled organisations to be selective in who they communicate due to inadequate resources as it is providing a communication channel that is making it easier for the public to access and converge together with little restraint thereby supporting the excellence theory (Grunig, 2009).

The ability to freely discourse with each other and get the needed desired attention from the organisation, media, government and the community at large is unfettered as the organisation, media and government officials do not have the control on who has the final say on a crisis anymore (Heath, 1998). This change has created an army of stakeholder activists who cannot be ignored like before by the organisation. A good example of this independent two-way discussion avenue that was made possible by new technologies is the case of Shell’s (proposal to dump contaminated oil into the Red sea) vs. Greenpeace international and Shell’s link to the Ken Saro-Wiwa’s execution in Nigeria. The company’s use of their webpages to open up discussion and answer questions from aggrieved parties helped to lessen the impact the crisis would have had on their reputation and generated more understanding from the public (Heath, 1998).

The impact of social media in crisis communication is also providing an avenue whereby the organisations are more informed about their environment and tackle issues before it escalates into crisis. It is providing a platform for rapid information exchange to dialogue and get immediate feedback from the public (Graham, Avery & Park, 2013; Perry et al, 2003). Organisations now accept that social media can be an important tool for protecting and repairing their reputation when in crisis (Schultz, et al., 2011).

With social media becoming a primary tool in crisis communication and the organisation’s overall communication as a whole, there is the need for the organisation to monitor and tactfully respond to discussions about the organisation in the various online communities, as neglect could have devastating effect on the organisation. This can be achieved by keeping a tab on the news feeds from media houses, search engines and other unofficial sources (Wigley & Fontenob, 2010). BP’s (British petroleum) inability of accepting social media as a strategic tool for managing their crisis during the gulf oil spill did a lot of damage to their reputation. The neglect and lack of monitoring of their online presence did garner sympathizers against them

with a 'fake' Twitter handle with similar name that advocated against the company had a followership of 190,000: a followership that is 10 times bigger than the followers of the real BP hashtag (Austin et.al, 2012).

Recent research supports the need to take crisis communication via the social media seriously, as there is a positive significant relationship between the public view of organisations that uses their social media platform for discourse and a reputation attribution (Utz, 2013). This is because the stakeholders assume that the organisation is well ready in keeping them frequently updated and also engage with them directly. Another interesting support by recent research also shows that social media is bringing about a change that makes the medium of the discourse to be more important than the message for crisis management (Schultz, et al., 2011).

A growing number of emerging researches are being carried out on how people are getting involved with the use of social media platforms to inform, be informed, connect and be connected with one another during crisis period, with evidence showing that during crisis peoples informational and communication needs become diverse, which makes it impossible for one single news medium to meet all of the informational, social and emotional needs of the information seekers (Hager 2006; McAfee, 2006; Taylor & Kent, 2006; Jeager et al, 2007: Palen. et al, 2007, 2008, 2009: Jeanette et all, 2008; Solis, 2008; Sweetser, 2008; woodcock, 2009; Jin, et.al, 2014 ; Liu, 2012).

In a study on the adoption and use of the internet and social media when in crisis by Taylor and Perry (2005) found that organisations have two different forms of crisis communication tactic in communicating with their stakeholders, the traditional and innovative media tactic and can combine both i.e. mixed method approach in reaching their stakeholders.

The traditional tactic involves a one-way traditional communication approach of releasing their messages to their stakeholders by holding a press conference to address the crisis, press release, memos, and letters. This communication tactic does not require the availability of the internet although transcripts of the information can be posted on the internet in order to reach their stakeholder. The Innovative media tactic incorporates the two-way communication process that most social media platforms allows in connecting with their stakeholder as it allows dialogue between users, hyperlinks, real time monitoring and updating of information.

The effect that social media is bringing to crisis communication still needs more extensive research (Schultz, et al., 2011) and this research aims to fill this gap by focusing both on MAS's website and social media channel usage for crisis communication.

However, the development and effect that social media is having on crisis communication created a gap for the need of a theory that includes social media in crisis communication strategy and led to the development of the Social Mediated Crisis communication model which is discussed in the next section.

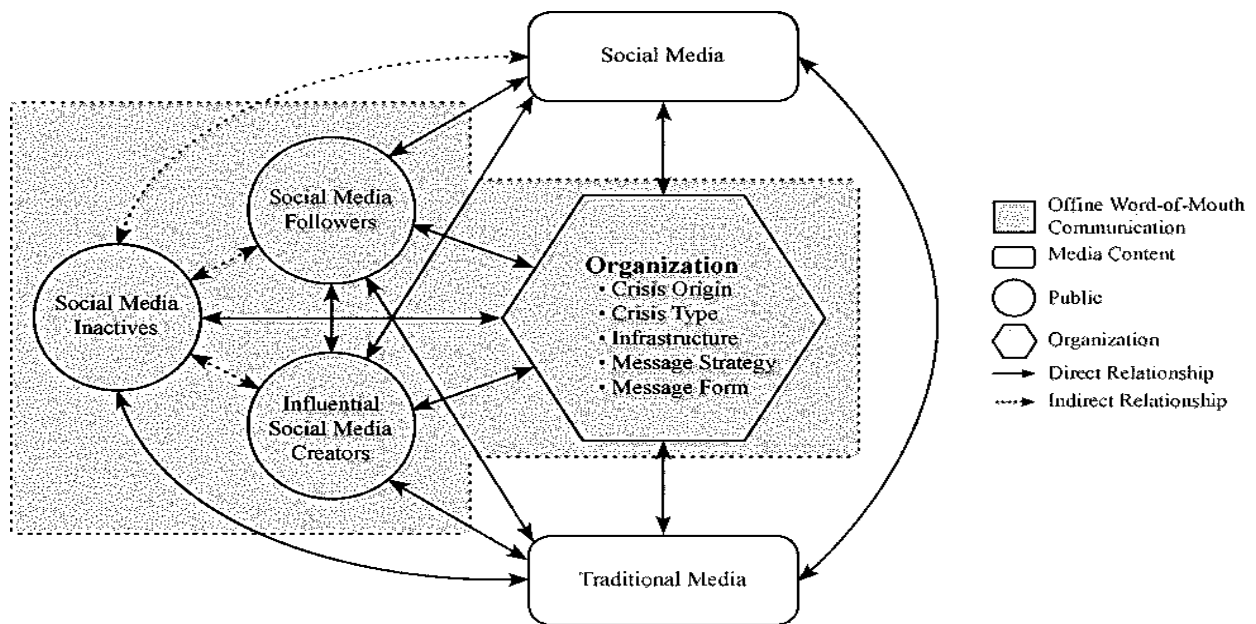
2.8.1 Social Mediated Crisis communication model (SMCC)

Though Coombs (2012) acknowledged the impact of social media on crisis response he failed to integrate it into the situational crisis communication model (SCCT). The social mediated crisis communication theory (SMCC) attempts to fill the gap by integrating social media into crisis communication with an SCCT adaptation.

The SMCC model describes the interaction of the crisis management team with three categories of the public and looks at how information was consumed and produced during a crisis. These categories are, the **social media influencers**, who are regarded as authorities that can stimulate people's thoughts and actions through the information they provide on their social media platforms. They are regarded as the crisis information creators that disperse information for their followers to consume. The second group of the public is referred to as the **influenced** i.e. the followers that seek for crisis information from the social media influencers. The last group are the **social media inactives**. These are the group of the public that do not participate directly on any communication channels but consume crisis information from the influencers or get their information indirectly through what they absorb from the stand of social media followers. The Inactives can also be traditional media that follow influencers for information tipoff.

Figure 1 gives a pictorial information flow of the SMCC model.

Figure 1: SMCC Model



Liu, Austin & Jin (2011; 2013)

One major advantage of the SMCC model is its ability to be applied to the different stages of crisis lifecycle (Hvass, 2013:191). However, the SMCC model is not a suitable theory for this thesis. This is because firstly, its analysis focuses on crises that are generated on social media and not how social media is affecting crisis communication or as a crisis communication channel.

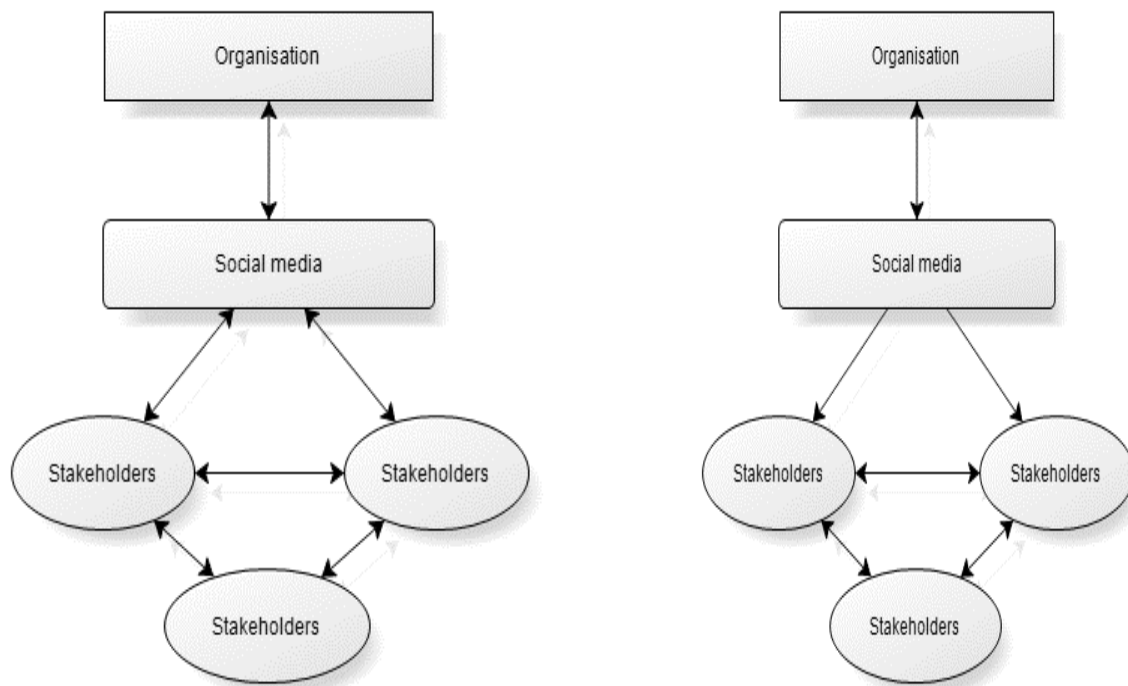
Secondly, I disagree with the theory's assumption on the public categorisation and how information is dispersed using the social media influencers and the inactive groups, because citizen journalism especially in crisis information has changed from a position where the public's thoughts and reactions are being stimulated by social media influencer. It has developed to a position where the public can now make their own conclusion based on what they understand from the messages independently without following any influencer. More importantly, the present social media platform is providing avenues that afford the consumers to be the actual originator and influencer of the crisis news without the need for any influencer. In my opinion, the social media influencer role is diminished in crisis management as opposed to its strength in other fields like marketing whereby social media influencers are used for marketing and promotional purposes to influence the public's thoughts and acceptance.

In crisis breakout, news and opinions are being disseminated either directly from the organisation to the public or by a citizen that is privy to the crisis breakout and not necessarily

needing the social media influencer as assumed by the SMCC. Crisis information can move from the organisation, the media or from the member of the public who can be thought to have no major influence or regarded as a social media influencers but were just fortunate to be the source of the crisis breaking news. A good example is the emergency landing of the US Airways flight 1549 on the Hudson River, when news was gathered through user-generated content on the crisis and there was live coverage of the crisis by people around the plane. Other examples are situations where it is difficult or impossible for “the assumed influencer” to participate due the government restrictions or the vastness of the disaster. The cases of the Arab spring and the UK riots are examples of how crisis information can bypass ‘social media influencer’ and be generated by ordinary citizens.

Figure 2 gives a depiction of how I assume crisis information travels between the organisation and their stakeholders which includes the traditional media and public.

Figure 2: communication flow before a crisis and a crisis breakout.



The organisation uses its social media channels to communicate and interact with the public in their pre-crisis stage and responds to posts made by their stakeholders, however, when there is a crisis breakout, the organisation’s crisis communication process initially shifts from an uninterrupted fully bi-direction communication process to one whereby the crisis news is released to the stakeholders and the stakeholders respond to this information by interacting

with the organisation and with themselves. The organisation, however, switches to a one-way direction of just releasing information to their stakeholders.

However, the effectiveness of a crisis communication strategy in dealing with a highly publicised crisis like MAS's requires the adoption of a set of led down actions that can be easily used or adopted in managing the crisis (Seeger, 2007). This theoretical approach details the synthesis of best practices that are expected for an effective crisis communication process and discussed in the next section.

2.9 Best practices of crisis communication for the aviation industry

This section synthesises the various best practices that are expected for an effective crisis communication, especially in managing a crisis that affects both the organisation and the public on a large scale.

The best practices for crisis communications highlighted here are to support the organisation's communication strategy in managing their crisis and drawn from the works of Vincent Covello, Robert Heath, Peter Sandman, Caroline Sapriel, Matthew Seeger, Veil and Husted and the International Air Transport Association (IATA) to bring a focus to the aviation industry.

The following are the consolidated expected best practices for an organisation to be effective in its crisis communication process:

- Partnership with the public: the need to acknowledge the public as legitimate partners of the organisation is argued to be critical to how well an organisation can manage its crisis and communicate effectively with the public.

The acceptance of this acknowledgement helps the organisation psychologically to easily share relevant information and engage in a dialogue communication with the public as at when needed because of the notion that legitimate partners of the organisation are entitled to be informed about what is happening in and to their organisation. The dialogue communication also changes the perception of the organisation in accepting the interpretations and views of the public about the crisis or if there is a crisis even when the organisation feels like they are not really experiencing any crisis.

Heath (2007) advocates the need to extend this practice beyond the image building process to a process that aims at relationship building as this helps the organisation to focus on the need to maintain dialogical communication process. The organisation should strive also to learn what the public knows about the crisis because a crisis breakout in the airline industry might first be known about and announced by a customer or an audience even without the organisation's knowledge of what had befallen their airline (Sandman, 2006).

Relationship building on social media channels by the airline organisations can be achieved by inclusion of these channels in interacting, connecting and communicating with their customers and the public about their brand, for promotional and advertising purposes, and gives a platform for providing customer service and service updates. IATA suggests that social media channels like Facebook should be used for promotional purposes in peace time and transitioned to the organisation's crisis communication channel in crisis period.

- Understand and listen to the public's concern: the ability to maintain a good partnership with the public rests in its ability to have an effective dialogic communication with the public and meet their expectations. The public expects the organisation to listen to, understand and respond to their different interpretations of the messages released by the organisation and also align the organisation's goals with their interest.

For the airline industry, it is easy to damage the reputation of the organisation and its relationship with its customers when customers and potential users have recurring concerns that are not adequately dealt with by the management of the company.

An image that is dented in the public's eye will do a lot of harm to the airline when they are in crisis as people might remember and comment about the bad experience they had encountered previously with the organisation. The memory of their bad experience makes it easy for them to attribute the causal responsibility to the crisis to the organisation.

The need to be attentive to the concerns of the public is crucial because an earlier positive relationship that is built prior to the event of a crisis is essential for effective crisis communication (Coombs, 1999).

- Honesty, candour and openness: this comes with an argument that the possibility of the organisation maintaining a healthy relationship with the public is dependent on their ability to build a relationship that has earned the trust of the public overtime. The trust process is built through the exchange of communication that is honest and open between the organisation and the public.

The organisation is expected to communicate even in situations where they feel passing some information may have a negative impact on the organisation in the interim. The non-release of vital information about a crisis from the public can have devastating effect on the organisation's reputation especially when the information gets leaked to the public. Its effect can destroy the public trust in the organisation. Airline operators are advised to acknowledge facts of their crisis instead of bulk passing as loss of credibility will lead to loss of trust and loss of attention from the public for further information.

- Remain accessible and meet the media's information need: the ability to maintain a continuous communication process with the media throughout the crisis life cycle is encouraged for an effective crisis communication process as the media is regarded as one the primary communication channel that the organisation can use to disseminate information to the public.

The media should be provided with adequate information about the crisis and also be used to refute any misinformation or rumours that are not true with operators refraining from using the "no comment" stance as this action can undermine their stakeholder's confidence in their ability to manage the crisis.

For the airline industry, Social media has changed the timing of issuing the 'first holding statement' about an airline incident from within an hour to within the first 15 minutes of the incident. This expectation requires the airline to be on top of managing the developing story online as anything short of this could leave damaging impact on their reputations (IATA).

- Compassion, concern and empathy: the crisis response messages are expected to contain information about the organisation expression of their compassion, concern and empathy for the victims of the crisis. These actions project an organisation's image as one that is legitimate and credible because of their ability to reflect on the emotions of

the victims of the crisis. This should not just be contained in the crisis response messages but should also be evident in the actions of the organisation in managing the crisis.

- Accept uncertainty and ambiguity: the organisation is advised to acknowledge the ambiguity that comes with a crisis and communicate with the public without passing out crisis response messages that is beyond their capability or making unachievable promises to the public when under pressure to respond to a crisis with messages that reassures the public of their ability.

The organisation is advised to communicate what they know about the crisis and acknowledge what they do not know yet. They should act and give reassurances that they will keep the public informed as soon as they have more information to disseminate. This portrays that they are not evading or spinning the public in their response.

- Plan for a prompt response: an effective crisis communication process is achieved by being prepared for the possibility of having a crisis outbreak and having a plan in place on how best to respond to it. The crisis plan is expected to be able to answer the public's questioning of who, what, when and where of the crisis. A framework that can be easily adapted to the crisis that the organisation should be in place.

For the airline industry, the organisation should activate its 'dark site' as soon as there is a major accident for the public to access for crisis information. This helps to reduce the pressure that the increased number of hits will have on the airline website. There is also the need to be consistent in their message posting across all their communication channels.

However, in recent times, some airlines like Airasia and Malaysia Airlines have been able to manage their crisis by using their social media channels in disseminating information to the public rather than the activating of the dark site as advised.

The acceptance social media channels, like Facebook, suggests that the public is more interested in the availability of crisis information than the type of channel that this information is being passed through and are willing to go to other valid sources for

crisis news when they can't find it from the usual/expected source (i.e. moving from the dark site to official Facebook page for information).

- Self-efficiency: when in crisis, the organisation is expected to provide information to the public on how best to protect themselves both physically and emotionally from the impacts of the crisis by disseminating possible options and precautions to the public. An organisation's communication should not be limited to providing possible options and precautions to the public but should also accept the public's ability to make choices; they may want to follow the organisations precautionary messages or handle it their way. Sandman (2006) suggests that this action projects to the public that the organisation acknowledges their ability to not just act but also to make choices.

For the airline industry, the impact of their crisis on its stakeholders comes with both physical and emotional trauma; the organisation is expected to have an established and well trained personnel that will provide immediate assistance to those affected by the crisis in the event of a crisis breakout. This includes the activation of its passenger information call centre and the movement of their care giver team, to the accident site or the most convenient place for the next-of-kin as it is done in recent times for some complex crisis. It is the responsibilities of these caregivers to respect their choice if they want to use these facilities or not and how they choose to grieve.

- Acknowledge the different cultural differences of the public: the ability of the organisation to identify the different interpretations of the public's social realities creates the need to disseminate crisis response messages that cater for the different interpretation of the crisis. This difference highlights the need for crisis response messages that caters for the diverse realities of their stakeholders
- Managing the next-of-kin communication: the acknowledgement of the need for the organisation to be prepared on how to support their employees and the next-of-kin of the crisis victims has been on the increase due to the nature of the crisis that the world is experiencing in recent times. The organisation is expected to have a plan in place that provides support, funds and travel assistance for the families of those that were victims of the crisis.

The airline industry expects the organisation to have an established staff who acts as ‘next-of-kin buddy’ when there is a crisis to provide emotional support to the victims and their families at the accident site. Also, the names of the victims are not to be released to the public until their next-of-kin has been notified to better prepare them for the crisis news.

Having discussed these best practices, another factor that has been identified as having impact on the effectiveness of a crisis communication process is the recognition of the cultural diversity of the organisation and their stakeholders, as more organisations are operating within a global environment. This is explored in the next section.

2.10 Impact of cultural orientation on Crisis Communication.

The Cultural orientation of the public is a very crucial factor, especially for airline crisis communication, that involves international and national boundaries as the different cultural orientation determines how the crisis is handled and how the organisation communicate with its stakeholders. Pinsdorf (1991) in her analysis suggests that the crisis communication by an airline, especially after a crash, must replicate the cultural values of the nationalities involved for it to be effective and sustainable.

This is supported by evidence from her analysis on the comparative study between JAL, a Japanese air crisis, and PAN AM, an American airline crisis communication strategy. The president of JAL, who represents the spokesperson for the company, responded to the public based on the cultural orientation of the Japanese people by bowing in front of board that carries the name of the victims, in respect to the victims and their families. He also accepted responsibility for the crisis and asked for forgiveness for the crash, while offering to resign his position, also a member of the management tragically committing suicide because of the crash.

This action is accepted in the Japanese society and considered proper, because they value and regard non-verbal communication to be more effective than verbal communication, while his American counterpart in response to the crisis showed grief and accepted responsibility for the crisis verbally but never visited the crash site or the victim’s family.

This need for better cultural understanding is even more reiterated with our interdependence by globalisation. This reemphasises the need for scholars to focus on studies that are appropriate and applicable to business practices in developing countries or countries with different cultural orientation, as it is apparent that what is valid in developed countries might

not be fully operational in developing economies, because of their cultural, institutional and political differences (Kiggundu et.al, 1993).

Malaysia airlines, the selected case study for this thesis, fall into the developing country category with a different cultural orientation and norms that differs from what you will find in a developed country. Irrespective of its different cultural orientation, it is expected that MAS provides a service that accommodates a global community, being a member of the one-world alliance. This alliance strives to cater for international travellers and needs to be able to switch to a crisis communication strategy that represents and acknowledges the expectations and norms of the environment in which they are, and also reflect a global crisis communication strategy that accommodates their diverse environment as well.

The organisation is recommended to portray the values and beliefs system of the environment they find themselves in, with their cultural orientation influencing how they behave (Sathe, 1983; Hofstede, 1984). The need for this understanding highlights the necessity to factor cultural diversity study more into crisis communication research (Lyu, 2012) as crisis is regarded as a global phenomenon with trans-boundary crisis occurring more often due to globalisation and advent of new technologies (Boin & Rhinard, 2008; Olssen, 2013)

For an organisation to thrive in a multi and cross cultural setting there is the need to have a good understanding of the cultural background of such a society. The possession of this knowledge will equip the crisis team with the necessary information on how best to manage their stakeholders (Yu & Wen, 2009). This need is quite evident in the two crises that befall MAS in 2014, as it was a crisis that had multiple cultural expectations and interpretations.

Marra (1998) reiterated the need for organisations to have a good understanding of the cultural background of the society in which they operate as it is regarded as one of the prerequisites for sustaining effective crisis communication process. Culture is regarded as a great influence of people's decisions, with evidence showing that relationship exists between people's choice and interest on the use of social media and their cultural background and belief system (Berthon et al., 2012). Then what is culture?

Culture is said to be the collective mental understanding that is eminent in identifying a group or society and these identifiable characters can easily be used to differentiate members of such group or society from other groups (Sathe, 1983; Hofstede, 1984).

Hofstede's (1984) pioneering cross-cultural analysis identified five dimensions of culture as collectivism vs. individualism, power distance, femininity vs. masculinity, uncertainty avoidance (weak vs. strong) and orientation (long vs. short) for cultural analysis.

The individualist vs. collectivist dimensional theory approach in understanding organisational culture suggest that a country is regarded as being individualist when it has an environment that promotes the welfare of its individual, as they are regarded as the core unit therefore allowed to cater for themselves e.g. most western countries. A culture that promotes collectivism is one that identifies its group as its core thereby expecting the individual to conform to what the society dictates and remain dependent on it for survival in return for their commitment. Most Asian countries identifies with the collectivism dimension (Hofstede, 1984, 2005:76; Oyserman et al., 2008).

Hofstede described power distance as the extent to which a society polarises a group of people from one another in a society based on power, wealth and prestige (Hofstede, 1984; Wertz & Kim, 2010). Uncertainty avoidance is defined as the level of fear that a society feels when it is threatened by an unknown or ambiguous occurrence (Hofstede, 2005:171; Wertz & Kim, 2010).

A society is regarded as either masculine or feminine based on clearly allocation of expected defined roles based on their emotional roles. A masculine society is expected to have men that are assertive, ambitious and competitive (Hofstede, 2005:120) while feminist society supports equality, modesty and responsibility from both genders (Hofstede, 2005:120).

A class oriented society, like India, where power is more designated to the elite, has been found to not acknowledge or consult the views of the public, as their culture promotes a very high power distance environment. This makes it easy for the management of the organisation, who happens to be the elite, to assume that they can make decisions on the public's behalf as they are deemed to be more knowledgeable and therefore are thought to know what is best for the public (Sriramesh, 1992; Taylor, 2000).

Although Hofstede's cultural dimensions have received some criticism based on some inconsistency, its inability to distinguish individuals and his choice of case study. He however defended his theory on its ability to distinguish culture collectively and distinguish different nations. He acknowledges that a single nation can have different groups with different cultural structures thereby negating the criticism that he equated culture to mean a whole nation. His

theory has been used to explain how people define themselves, how they perceive relationships (Oyserman et al., 2008), and to explain how messages are framed for public consumption in times of crisis (Wertz & Kim, 2010). Since this research is about the medium (Social media) used in crisis communication with a global customer, it is his theory which is assumed to be able to generate what I need to support my investigation.

Wertz & Kim (2010) in their comparative study using Coombs Situational Crisis Communication theory and Hofstede's culture dimensions as their framework in analysing the impact culture has on the crisis communication strategies employed during a food crisis in USA and Korea found that Korean companies that were involved in the food crisis used denial, excuse and justification strategies to wade through the crisis while their counterpart companies in the USA employed more of ingratiation and corrective strategies in managing their crisis.

The use of Hofstede theory in understanding culture is not new to crisis communication. Dykeman (2005) in his analysis on the influence that culture has on crisis victims and circumstances proposes that universally most factors that trigger crisis are similar irrespective of where in the world it is occurring. He, however, identified culture as a powerful factor on how crisis-victim interprets, react, respond and attribute responsibility to crisis. Some events and some occurrences that are acceptable in one culture might be perceived as despicable when viewed under a different cultural setting. Berthon et al., (2012) were also able to find evidence that a relationship exists between people's choice and interest on use of social media and their cultural background and belief system. This supports the notion that a uniform approach for crisis communication of the same company in different societies might not be effective as culture and interpretation differs.

Culture doesn't just influence the public but it also influences the organisation's communication strategy choice when in crisis (Stephens et al, 2005). This assumption is supported in Chung (2012) comparative analysis on crisis coverage of the Japanese Tsunami and Nuclear Crisis by media representatives in the USA and Japan. He found cultural differences to be a huge component of information sourcing and discourse during a crisis. His observation was based on how the Japanese government monopolised information flow; an action that will be rebuffed by the public in a western locale. This view supports the impact of culture on our communication styles, as it is understood that the Chinese culture engages a highly contextual communication style while the English speaking countries use more of the individualist approach (Oyserman et al., 2008).

Western communication perspective has been found to be less effective in other non-western communities, as nationality is said to be a reflection of culture (Soares, 2005). The western culture reflects a communication process that has the primary goal of information exchange thereby employing a low-content communication style while their counterparts, for example, Asians use a high content communication model with the core aim of building and maintaining relationships (Lyu, 2012).

When in crisis, the Chinese culture expects the organisation to maintain their self-esteem and avoid making uncertain speech (Yu & Wen, 2009). For example, when in crisis, management of South Korean companies would rather use their media relations to address a crisis than having direct discourse with the public; a practice that will be frowned upon and seen by the western public as insensitive towards the crisis victims (Kim et al, 2008).

Another interesting divergent crisis communication strategy classification is found by Huang et al (2005) which was not evident in the crisis response classification used by western nations during a cross-cultural crisis analysis. Crisis response strategies models from a western perspective suggests the organisation uses attack, denial, excuse, justification, ingratiation, correction and mortification strategies when responding to a crisis. However, a new approach; diversion strategy, which is described as a CRS used by organisations to distract interested stakeholder's attention from the main crisis has emerged. This is done by creating another issue without apologising, addressing the issue or taking responsibility for what they are being initially accused of, is another type of crisis response strategy used in Eastern Asia countries.

The effect of the culture dynamic on crisis communication doesn't need to be trans-Atlantic or far apart as is evidenced in the Coca-Cola CRS in Europe. The different cultural orientation of these European countries required them to react and handle a singular crisis using different approach. The Belgian's, French and Spanish responded to the crisis by issuing a total recall of the product while the Danish and Norwegians only monitored the development of the crisis with minimal intervention from their government (Taylor, 2000).

Taylor (2000) suggests that the reaction and difference in the crisis management approach is explained by the different cultural orientation using Hofstede's dimensions. The first three nations (Belgium, France and Spain) are regarded as high uncertainty avoidance nations, who have low tolerance for uncertainty and huge anxiety over their safety and security. Countries like Denmark, Norway and Sweden have low uncertainty avoidance cultures that can withstand risk and uncertainties.

The impact of culture on crisis is not only evident within the Asian communities but research has also found African organisations too differ from the well-established ethics of crisis management in the developed world. This is because of the impact that their diverse ethnicity and imbedded cultural orientation have on their beliefs and value system and has been transferred to their organisational makeup (Ademisokun-Turner, 1985).

Western organisations have faced difficulties when they try to export their strategies to African organisations without modification, due to the collectivist-humanist culture of Africans (Sartorius et al., 2011). For example, in Nigerian organisations, the principle for managing and reducing crisis has been found to be more dependent on socio-cultural relationships, that are guarded by connections based on ethnicity, tribal or religion, rather than simply achieving efficiency and effectiveness (Ademisokun-Turner, 1985).

This research hopes to show if the use of social media channels in organisational crisis communication conforms to this earlier findings and expectations of the inclusion of cultural orientation and diversity when managing a crisis from a global perspective.

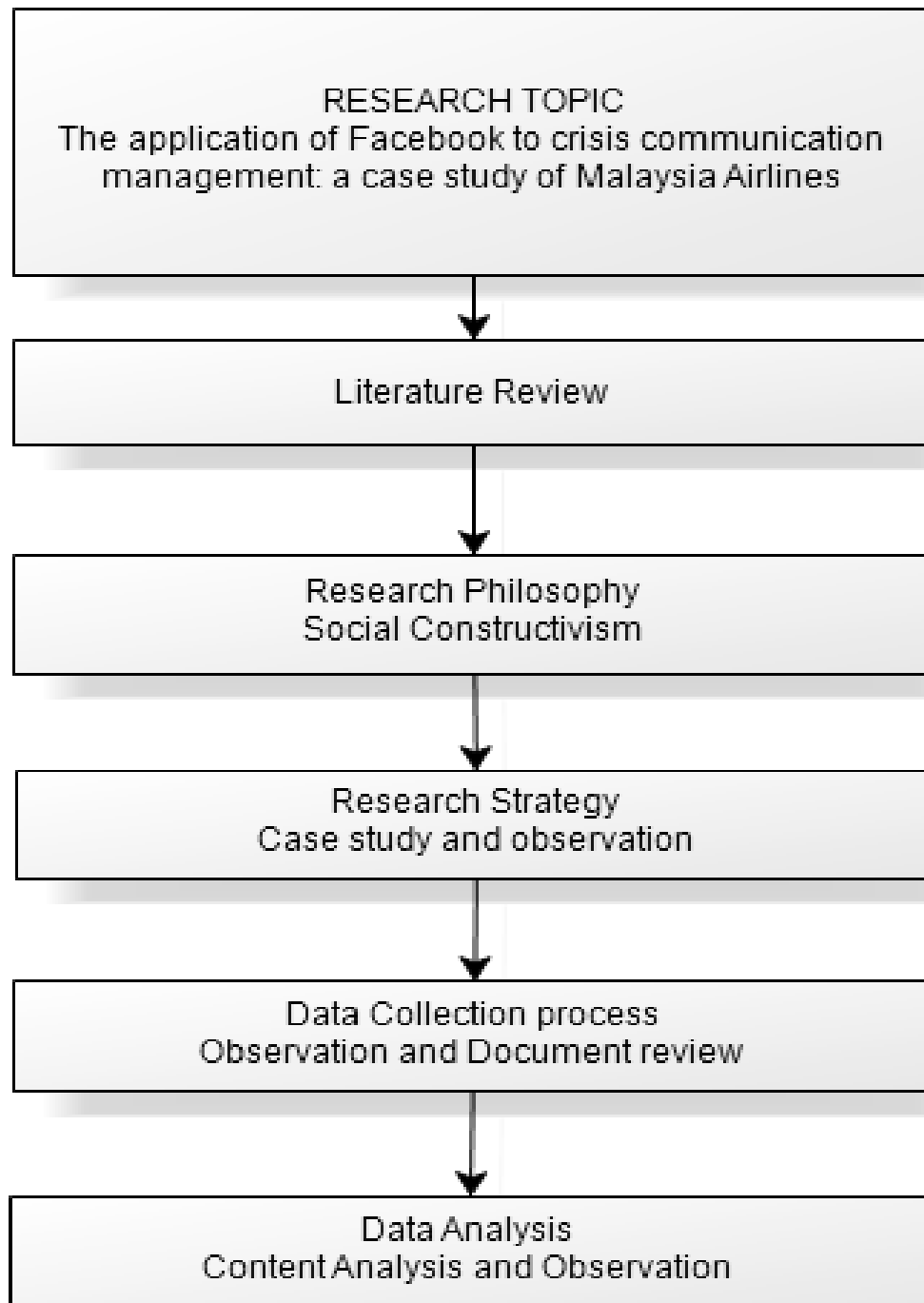


Figure 3: Chapter structure

Adapted from Saunders et al. (2008) research onion model

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter which gave a review of the literatures on earlier works on which this study rests has informed on the choice of the research methodology that is viewed to be best suited in achieving the research objectives and answering the research questions of this thesis.

This chapter describes the research methodology used for this study. The first part of the chapter indicates my philosophical position in understanding the research concept and the reasons behind the philosophical choice. I then furthered it by explaining its applicability in answering the research questions and fulfilling the research objectives of this thesis. The chapter also provides information on the sampling techniques used, the data collection process, the limitations I encountered as well as the ethical consideration that guided my research process.

Figure 3 gave a description of the sequence of the preceding chapters with chapter 3.

3.2 Recognising Social Constructivism as my preferred philosophy.

The advent of social media and its effect on communication studies has supported the application of social constructivism in communication research, as it is a paradigm that accommodates these two evolving subjects theoretically, because it is built on a tenet that promotes collaboration, engagement and a communication system that encourages feedback from its user. Social media and advance in technology now provides an additional opportunity for communication to take place between different entities that comes together for sense making, which wouldn't have ordinarily been made possible before due to constraints in time, location and resources.

Social constructivism is regarded as a confluence that joins together the sociology of science and sociology of knowledge based on foundations laid by Marx, Mannheim, and Durkheim whose works focuses on the causal roles of social factors in shaping entities belief (Kukla, 2000). It centres on the basic argument that reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyse the process in which this occurs, because a phenomena is assumed to possess special characteristics that we perceive differently as our reality and knowledge differs and is subject to social relativity (Berger & Luckman ,1966).

Using Berger & Luckman (1966) illustration of how social constructivism can be applied in a research, I found that this philosophy will support me to analyse the use of social media in

crisis communication from the construction of the interpretation of the different stakeholders that are interested in the crisis.

Nevertheless, before I came to this conclusion on the adoption of the social constructivist paradigm as the best choice for this thesis, I cautioned on the widely acceptable advice that a researcher is expected to have an understanding of the various research philosophy as this is necessary in having a quality research. The exploration of the different research philosophy helps the researcher to clarify and identify the research design that is best applicable in answering the research questions and extend their knowledge in identifying and creating a research design that might even extend beyond their experience (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002:27).

However, because of the word count limitations that come with this thesis, I decided not to write extensively into all the different research philosophy of the management and organisational research field but rather focus on my choice.

The social constructive philosophy allows me to study the organisation and its stakeholder with a flexible open mind that is not too controlled for my inquiry, a procedure that gives room for the identification of new themes and patterns that might emerge in the research process, as one is embarking on a research journey that is downward-up rather than a top-down approach.

With this approach, I will be able to identify new interpretations that might have ordinarily been oblivious to me as a researcher based on a “limited” understanding of the various social interpretations in existence in today’s complex world, if I had adopted other research philosophies. The potential new theme that emerges in my ‘down-up’ approach could have probably been knocked-off and missed if they did not conform to the predefined scientific hypothesis, observations and testing, if the top-down positivist approach were adopted (this is because the theory and hypothesis will define the data to be observed).

Another appealing element of the social constructivist for me for this research, is the acceptance that our interpretation of a social concept is as a result of the people we interact with and also the fact that people with similar history and meaning interrelate to construct a social and focused action. This is because our understandings of a social concept is fashioned based on our shared ideational factors (broadly or intersubjective beliefs) which then shapes our social realities (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001; Daymon & Holloway, 2002:5).

This type of understanding is needed in our world today as we are faced with an environment that is becoming much more diverse and integrated socially, economically and culturally, as a result of demographics, globalisation, revolutions, and migration. With our diverse traditions and religious beliefs, transfer and exchange, all mixing this is definitely impacting how we interpret and interact with our world, that means, how 'A' interprets a situation might be different from how 'B' sees it as 'B' might possess a different background, life experience and exposure that could have influenced and shaped his thinking and understanding differently even if they have some other things in common.

The social constructivist approach is a justified choice because it inculcates the ideology that the socio-contextual factors have an impact on our interpretations and that the lens through which we get to see the world is being constructed by the "whats" and "whos" that has moulded us into the "I" that we are today. With its emphasis that an individual's construction of a phenomenon in his mind is affected by his interaction, language, narratives, socio-historical and cultural processes they have encountered (Franklin, 1995) it is able to catch the cultural factors this thesis deals with.

Social constructivism emphasizes that social phenomenon and their meaning are continually being accomplished by social actors and does not conform to pre-existing rules especially in organisational studies (Bryman, 2012:33). This emphasis was further evidenced by Strauss et al., (1973:308) in their organisation and culture study which concluded that the realities on the ground is not as a result of the workers following pre-existing obligatory rules, regulations and roles as laid down by the management in an automated manner as projected by the positivist theorist, but in reality is achieved more as a negotiated order that is developed and maintained through the frequent interactions that occurs between their different stakeholders. This belief acknowledges the role of the social actors in the social construction of social realities as meanings are constructed out of our world based on our interactions, that implies our interpretation of a social phenomenon will differ based on ideas, culture, norms, time and location (Byman & Bell, 2011).

It is pertinent to make it clear that the social constructivist approach does not mean that the researcher does not have an identifiable research aim and purpose when embarking on a research journey, it is just that it does not follow a rigid hypothetical theory testing approach but adopts a flexible method that comes with an added advantage that is open to the exploration

of new themes and patterns that may encounter or emerge during the research process, with my data collection and analysis process being guided by existing literature.

Secondly, I would like to state that my adoption of the social constructivist stance does not automatically dismiss the existence of an objective reality but rather my argument recognises the impossibility of having a purely and completely objective reality (Eisenberg, 1984; Rosen, 1991) as social constructivists believe that a reality is processed in the mind according to the individual's cognitive structures, etymological meanings, and social experiences which makes it impossible for individuals to share same and exact objective reality (Mahoney, 1988a).

These are some of the reasons why the social constructivist approach appeals to me as a researcher as it provides me the avenue to study the organisation's crisis communication strategy and their stakeholder's interpretation of the information.

3.2.1 Social constructivism and its fit to crisis communication research

The field of crisis which is being investigated in this study requires an approach that can mirror the understanding and interpretation of the event and the discourse process both from the angle of the management of the organisation and the diverse stakeholder's perspectives. This is because an organisations effective management of its crisis does not lie in how it can manage its crisis outbreak internally but is currently now more dependent on what its external interest makes of the crisis and their response to it. This need supports my decision in using social constructivism. The social constructivist approach investigates the realm of meaning from the point of view of those involved in its performance and not from the view of the researcher (Rosen, 1991).

As earlier highlighted in the previous chapter, the crises that organisations are facing in this modern day are such a complex phenomenon that it necessitates the need to accept the diverse interpretation that comes with these crises from both the understanding of the organisation and its stakeholders. The occurrence of a crisis in an organisation promotes different sense-making of the plausible meanings of the crisis and the reactive actions by connecting different cues and frames in understanding what has happened, what is going on and its after effect (Matlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 1988) by the organisation and its divergent stakeholders.

These features of complexity and diversity are evident in the double tragedy of the Malaysia Airlines, the case study for this research, and necessitates the need to adopt a research paradigm

that accommodates these different interpretations from both the organisation's perspective (by exploring their crisis communication strategy and the interpretations of the crisis that they are experiencing) and their stakeholder's interpretations of the crisis as well. These interpretations are created by information gathered through the media as they are responsible for social understanding circulation (Surette, 1998) and are also responsible for the social construction of the organisation's image in the eyes of the public (Grandy & Marvin, 2011). The use of the comments on MAS's official Facebook page from their stakeholders provides a platform for capturing the stakeholder's interpretation and reaction in real-time to a real-life case.

Social constructivism is a research philosophy that differs from the positivist view which understands the organisations from an objective lens by implying that social occurrences are dependent on their social actors while crisis communication is regarded as an epistemological issue that occurs through a process of enactment with the results of this enactment being a social construction that is subject to multiple interpretations (Weick, 1988; 1995).

One of the arguments of contemporary crisis theorists is the assumption that the stakeholders of an organisation that is in crisis, will interpret the same crisis differently when provided with the similar information about the crisis, its cause and the action that is being proffered to quench the crisis. They suggest that the difference in their social realities is as a result of their various interpretations and understandings which are shaped by their different interests, expectations, environment, culture, experiences and other social factors thereby making the objective approach of the positivist philosophy unsuitable for capturing my research aim; a position that the positivist do not accept based on their need to be objective and nomothetic (Chua, 1986; Oates, 2006; Sauders et al, 2007).

Rosen (1985) explained the role of the social constructionist researcher as one who seeks to deconstruct borders between herself and the subject instead of the positivist who formulates theories and the questions or experiments to test these facts. This effort involves the absence of the use of reconstructed, rigid research instruments for theory testing.

As said in the literature review chapter, the success of an effective crisis communication strategy rests on the need for the organisation to communicate effectively with its stakeholders at all times, so as to have a mutual good relationship and when in crisis, is expected to provide more information to keep its stakeholders in the know. This assumption however is not straight forward as they do not have control on what their stakeholder's make of their crisis response messages, that is, the interpretations and meaning that they ascribe to the messages.

This makes the social actors distinct and independent of the social phenomena. A message from the organisation to its stakeholders will convey different meanings to them based on how they can interpret it. A single crisis will have different interpretations based on who you ask and their personal views thereby supporting the social constructivist stance that there is no singular objective truth to a phenomenon (Hearit & Courtright, 2003:87).

It helps to detangle the complexity that comes with the crisis phenomenon, say in the event of a crisis for example, the organisation involved in the crisis issues an information to the public through its crisis communication medium that they are not to be held responsible for the cause of the crisis, proclaiming that the crisis cause was beyond their control thereby pushing the blame to another scapegoat. It is my responsibility as the researcher, according to the social constructivist approach, not to make my conclusion based on the statement and claim of the organisation but rather I am expected to make inquiries into the epistemological and ontological status of these conceptions. This is achievable by my finding a technique that allows me know how the stakeholders of the organisation interpreted the crisis, who they are holding responsible for the crisis based on their interpretation of the crisis and the crisis information made available to them. Also how this reality is maintained over the diverse communication medium in addition to what the organisation is saying, the social constructivism provides a platform to capture such varied interpretations.

Crisis is a product of a social interpretation ascribed to the ill-occurrence by its stakeholders especially the media; an organisation can be regarded to be experiencing a crisis by the stakeholder even if the organisation is in denial and refuses to accept it initially (Coombs, 2007). In crisis time, the messages and information made available to the stakeholders is one of the determinants of what becomes of the crisis as they use this information in forming their opinion and interpretation of the crisis, as crisis is a communication creation that can be handled communicatively (Hearit & Courtright, 2003:8).

As crisis literatures (Chapter two) argues the successful management of crisis is not just about churning out messages to the stakeholders but is dependent on how the stakeholders process and interpret the crisis information. The interpretations can be more diverse and complex especially in managing crisis in the airline industry, as the organisation has to deal with both national or/and international stakeholders with different orientations, beliefs and expectations. Table 5 gives a brief overview of how these two complements each other.

Table 5: Summary of Social Constructivism and crisis communication study.

	Social Constructivism	Crisis Communication study
Human interest	Main drivers	Main drivers
Explanations	Increase general understanding	Same in crisis study as the field is still developing and evolving
Research progression	Ideas induced from rich data	Understanding of the situation goes through an inductive process that allows bottom-top approach
Concept	Incorporates stakeholder's perspectives	The stakeholder's perception to the crisis.
Units of analysis	May include the whole situation	May include the whole or part of the strategic messages from the organisation and its stakeholders
Generalisation	Theoretical abstraction	Replicability of findings across different crisis situations.
Sampling requirement	Purposeful small number of cases chosen	Small size case study has been a common feature in crisis communication research
Research methods	Case study, field study, ethnography.	Huge percentage of researchers uses same as social constructivism

Adapted social constructivism from Easterby-Smith et al., (2008: 59)

These are some of the reasons why the social constructivist approach is used for this thesis as it provides me the avenue to study the organisation's crisis communication strategy and their stakeholder's interpretation of the information.

3.3 Suitability of the qualitative approach for this study.

My research approach choice for this thesis is guided by two major motives; the philosophical stance which is dependent and affected by the research topic, objectives, context, willingness to follow previous research patterns and ability to challenge status-quo (McFarlan, 1989; Oates, 2006) and secondly, the sensitivity of the research area as crisis and crisis communication comes with a requirement for spontaneous actions and reactions that requires the attention of both the management in solving the crisis and the public wanting information about what happened and how the organisation is managing the crisis. The fluidity of this research subject has a direct impact on the type of data that is available and the data collection process is time specific.

The theses proposes to have an understanding of the crisis communication strategy employed by the organisation in managing their crisis using social media with a focus on Facebook and also to capture how their actions in managing these crises is being interpreted by their stakeholders. The accomplishment of this research purpose lies in my having a comprehensive analysis of the crisis communication strategy employed by the organisation and then extends it by positioning the observations and scrutiny from the different viewpoints of the interested party of the crisis event. This is made possible by capturing the organisation's crisis communication process and the stakeholder's emotional response based on their interpretations of the crisis and then going further to look at how they attribute responsibilities for the cause of the crisis. The necessity for this in-depth approach is achievable by adopting the qualitative research as it is known to be adequate in answering open-ended questions that helps to seek, discover, explore and describe people's experiences about a process (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006) as required in the study of crisis.

The phenomenon of crisis is complex enough and the addition of the use of social media to the subject, another area that is still developing, requires me to explore and have a good understanding of the subject area. Keeping this in mind has informed the choice as the qualitative research, which is regarded as a context understanding approach, brings the researcher close to its subjects thereby enabling a deep understanding of their words by looking at it from the point of view of the participants (Bryman, 2015) as opposed to quantitative approach that is more of a theory testing process that is dependent on numbers.

The exploration process allows me to have deep explanations of events in relation to the crisis that is being studied as qualitative approach is known to give room for flexible multilevel

questioning on the subject matter and absorb information that is available from these diverse stakeholders based on their responses and reactions (Mitchell, 2008:1). This approach provides an avenue that gives a deep understanding of the occurrence as the understanding of these various perspectives enables me to present and identify how social media channels can be employed in crisis communication.

Another reason for this choice is the knowledge that the occurrence of crisis which is known to trigger varying emotions and perspectives from those affected by it directly or indirectly makes the qualitative research approach to be a good fit as it will enable me to ‘walk in their shoes’. This is because qualitative research is known to be a process that opens up opportunities for capturing complex emotional display in an event (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and explains why it is seen as a favoured approach by earlier researcher of the crisis study to capture changes in the crisis communication process (Shrivastava, 1993) because it enables them to discuss the description of elements or phenomena by exploring their meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors and symbols (Berg, 2001:2).

Additionally, the qualitative data collection method is justified because it makes it possible to collect data accurately with little interference with the subjects that is being researched. The data collection process adopted is ideal for this research as crisis is regarded as a sensitive issue that mostly leave negative impact and implications on its shareholders thereby making data collection challenging and traumatic through other methods. This method also overcomes one of the criticisms of using qualitative approach because of the subjective nature in which the researcher finds himself by getting involved with the data.

This research does not have the intention of testing hypothesis or causal relationship between variables thereby making the adoption of a quantitative positivist philosophy stance obviously inadequate.

The aims and purpose of this thesis is achievable by the adoption of the qualitative research approach because it enables the exploration, questioning and capturing of diverse opinions that are exhibited by the stakeholders that responds to the post made by MAS and through this process might generate new abstract concept outside the established assumptions of crisis communication, as the crisis field is still a growing field that needs more contributions. Table 2 gives a tabulation of the fit of qualitative research to crisis communication research.

As stated earlier, this research is about the use of social media in their crisis communication strategy and its effect on the stakeholders which supports the decision to employ an exploratory and inductive approach, an approach that is used to build theory as opposed to testing it as it is an approach that was developed out of the need to have a better understanding of the 'human interpretation process of their world' as they believe that the application of law-like rigid methodology, as in the case of the deductive approach, is unsuitable to capture it because of its inflexibility which doesn't give room for further explanation of events (Saunders et.al, 2007).

The choice also provides a platform in achieving the aim of this research which is to have a deep understanding of the use of the social media in crisis communication by having an in-depth study of the crisis response strategy employed by the selected case study. In achieving this, the inductive approach is most appropriate to use for the study as it enables me to build the theory from the observations of the events and then use my understanding of the events to establish generalizations which backs the definition of the Inductive reasoning as a theory building process that begins with observations of specific instances and then seeks to establish generalizations about the investigated phenomenon (Hyde, 2000).

Table 6 provides an overview of the qualitative research and its applicability to crisis communication research.

Table 6: Summary of characteristics of qualitative research and crisis communication research

	Qualitative Research	Crisis communication research
Framework	Exploration of a phenomena with the aim to generate understanding from patterns	In-depth understanding of the crisis phenomenon using interviews, content analysis, observation etc. looking out for emerging patterns and themes
Central characteristic	Emphasis is on the perspective of subject being studied	Emphasis is on the perspective of subject being studied
Analytical Objective	Focuses on interpreting and understanding a social construction of meaning in a natural setting	Emphasis tends to be on the various interpretation and understanding of the crisis and crisis messages both from the organisation in crisis and its stakeholders in its natural setting
Question format	Open-ended	Open-ended using a bottom-up approach
Data processing	Attends to accurate description of process via words, texts, etc., and observations	Description of process using words, texts, pictures etc., and observations
Presentation of data	Sensitive to what peoples say and to the context in which their actions take place; understanding the participants own view	Sensitive to the subject interpretations and understanding and not the researchers view
Research design	Flexible and dynamic with the subjects shaping the research	Flexible and dynamic with the subjects and crisis shaping the research

Sampling	Often studies single cases or small groups that build arguments for the study's confirmability	Methodological trend in crisis study has been the use of case study that uses small purposeful sample size
Approaches	Action research, case study, ethnography, content analysis,	Same as qualitative research in most cases
Research focus	Interpretive in natural setting that gives room for complexity and multiple realities	Interpretive in natural setting from the subject's perspective keeping in mind the complexity that comes with crisis and its realities.
Analysis	Inductive	Inductive
Aim	Generate theory	There is need for more theory generation in this field

Qualitative research points adapted from Bryman (1989, 2015) and Sutter (2011).

3.4 Justification for using qualitative content analysis for this research.

The content analysis method is employed in answering my research question as it enables me to have a rhetorical analysis of how past communicative relationship is impacting on the present by tracking and recording the development and the management of the crisis for contemporary and retrospective analysis. The use of content analysis in crisis communication is not new and has dominated any other data collection procedure in crisis communication research over the last two decades (Ha & Boynton, 2013).

Its root as a research tool is long established having spanned across a hybrid of disciplines from industrial crisis to cultural study, mass media communication of political, social interaction, electoral and even organisational advertising and has been credited to be the postulate for shaping the study of communication and its theory of media (Fibiger, 1981; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Siune, 1981:185; Titscher et al., 2000; Weber, 1990). It is also regarded as one of the early methodology for web analysis (Herring, 2010) and the vast possibility that the use of electronic application and social media in data gathering has even made the application

of content analysis techniques more applicable and attractive to information management research in recent times (Amorosa & Eriksson, 2000)

The use of content analysis in research as earlier said is not new to social scientists as it was initially said to be used in examining the basic communication circle of messages contained in hymnals, Magazines and speeches from the sender to the receiver and later developed since the 19th century to include syntactic, syntagmatic, and pragmatic aspects of text (Harwood & Garry, 2003; White & Marsh, 2006) thereby providing an avenue for researchers to interpret the social context of the communication process with it spanning across various discipline.

Another justification for the choice of content analysis over other data generation and analysis techniques is because of the advantage it proffers; a procedure that operates directly upon the text and transcripts of human communication in a non-disruptive manner. This is because the data used has not been subjected based on the assumption that both the sender and the receiver of the message (as of when the message was released) do not have prior knowledge that their communication process will be used for further analysis later on(Weber, 1990).

Content analysis method can be either quantitative or qualitative with one of the main differences between these two methods being that as the name suggests the quantitative content analysis follow a more positivist approaches while qualitative content analysis uses an inductive, humanistic process because it helps to identify old concepts and patterns (White & Marsh, 2006).

It however was not free from controversies as the quantitative content analysis approach, which is focused mainly on frequency analysis by using scientific quantitative methods to deal with the manifest of the message, was seen to be superior to the qualitative content analysis method because of its simplicity without any statistical processing thereby affecting its reliability and validity (Elo & Kyngas, 2007).To me, as a researcher, I argue that the qualitative content analysis is as valid as its quantitative process as it follows a procedure that can be repeated over time as required of a valid and reliable analysis.

The qualitative content analysis fulfils this reliability requirement that is a criteria for any research to be accepted as a valid research technique because, as it is demonstrated in the later part of this research process, that I followed and replicated a technique and procedure that is systematic and if repeated by a different researchers at different points in time using the same data and technique then they will have similar results even when the research is carried out

under different circumstances as demanded (Holsti, 1968; Krippendorff, 2004: 18, 87-88). I was able to support this by repeating the same process that was used in the pilot study for the main study. Reliability entails the ability to be able to replicate a research process systematically by a different researcher and my research process can be replicated by others.

Another good advantage that the qualitative content analysis provides for this research is that it has been able to remove the restriction of using content analysis in just a quantitative manner, which follows a top-bottom research process with pre-defined research hypothesis and testing. Quality content analysis has now developed into a method that accommodates a bottom-up procedure that enable researchers to spread their tentacles and not be restricted to answering previously laid down research questions by early researchers, but follow a flexible yet systematic procedure which enables them, in the process of their analysis, to identify new or emerging characters, patterns and themes, when they analyse both the manifest and latent content of the message by taking into consideration the cause of the message and its effect on the receiver (Holsti, 1968; Krippendorff, 2004: 18, 87-88).

Since my philosophical stance is of the social constructivist paradigm that is flexible in understanding social phenomenon and social actors (instead of following a rigid hypothesis testing approach) in the crisis communication study which is still developing both in theory and practice, it enables me to capture any new emerging themes and concepts along the way.

The qualitative content analysis is adopted as it is ideal for this study based on my philosophical position, research topic, and its ability to provide answers to the research questions of this thesis. This method enables me to achieve the aim of the study as I am able to analyse both the manifest and the latent content of the message, an opportunity that the quantitative content analysis is seen inadequate as it only follows a quantitative, objective and systematic process that groups them based on some set rules which are then summarized and compared (Berelson, 1952:18; Krippendorff, 2004: 18).

This method provides a platform to have a more holistic perspective of the messages used in managing the crisis and the interaction between the form and content of the letter in relation to how the audience digest the information. This provides what I need to be able to accomplish the goal of this research, an approach that helps to compare and identify the gap between theories, policies and practice (Bryman, 1989:197) which explains one of the reasons why it is regarded as an appropriate and fundamental research technique in the study of media analysis,

crisis management and communication studies (Krippendorff 2004: 18; Lombard et al., 2006; Morgan, 1993; Riffe & Freitag, 1997).

However, the preferring of source of data gathering procedure through qualitative content analysis is furthered by the fact that this approach minimises the sensitivity and emotional trigger that comes when collecting data regarding a crisis, a critical component that can inflict further negative impact on the respondents. Retelling the story can make those affected by the crisis directly or indirectly have further negative impact from the crisis as the narration makes them go through feelings and memories that reminds them of the unpleasant occurrence. Since this research is based on the analyses of the use of social media in corporate crisis information management, some of these factors can affect the data that would have been collected through interviews as content analysis provides an opportunity to minimise some of the bias identified above by working with documents that were released in relation to the crisis through the various media in an independent and systematic manner.

The use of the qualitative content analysis is that it is a method that is used in areas where other research methods are generally insensitive or intrusive, some features that are evident in the complexity of crisis (Amorosa & Eriksson, 2000) as it provides an avenue to use and study the interaction and mechanism between a message and its social concept with the aim of answering the “who, what, whom, how and why” questions that is embedded in the information passed and received from both the sender and receiver’s perspective (Holsti 1969:24; Laswell, 1948:37) without actually contacting the crisis victims directly . For this thesis, I can explore the who, what, whom, how and why” questions and answers from both Malaysia Airlines and their stakeholder’s perspectives without contacting them for real time data directly through interview or questionnaire when they were experiencing the crisis and so the qualitative content analysis method is preferred also for ethical reasons.

Having explained the justification for the adoption of this methodology, it is pertinent to provide the definition that guided my definition and understanding of what content analysis is for this research.

The comprehensive definition of content analysis by Krippendorff (2004: 18-19) is adopted because it captures both the quantitative and qualitative descriptions in which he defines content analysis as a research technique that is used for making replicable and valid inferences from texts. However, the word ‘text’ in his definition should not be limited to written documents but includes work of art, images, maps, sounds, signs, symbols and numerical

records, transcripts of interviews, discourses, protocols of observations, video tapes and documents (Mayring, 2014) which supports the type of data collected and used for this research as analysis will not be restricted to written documents only but all other ‘text’ in relation to the research timeframe window.

As I earlier noted that the field of crisis communication and management is still an emerging and evolving discipline that needs more structure (Mitroff et al, 2004; Roux-Dufort, 2007), the possibility of a “Hermeneutic loop” makes this research technique to be a good fit for my research as it enables me to explore, question and capture diverse opinions that are exhibited as we all view and manage crisis differently. Secondly, it gives the flexibility to explore the information regarding the crisis that is being studied as it has been established that content analysis provides a mechanism to explore and understand the language, expression and information process (Kassagian, 1977).

3.5 Reasons for adopting the Case study approach

The case study research is adopted for this thesis as the research focus is on the application of Facebook in crisis communication management with an aim to explore and analyse how MAS managed their crises. As earlier stated in the introductory chapter that the main research question to be answered by this thesis is a question of “What” with sub-research questions asking to know the “what” and “how” of the crisis communication strategy employed my MAS in managing their crisis.

The case study is best suited for answering these types of questions (Yin, 1994; 2011) in an in-depth manner as it helps to understand a phenomenon in its natural setting by gathering information from one or a few entities through multiple data collection process without controlling or manipulating the variables, an approach that is considered appropriate for a research if the phenomenon cannot be studied outside its natural setting or if the focus is still contemporary as this provides opportunities for theory generation. (Benbasat, Goldstein & Mead, 1987).

A contemporary field such as crisis communication and social media study which are still developing and being shaped by events, technological advancement and adoption needs more contribution and knowledge. The case study approach is assumed to be a suitable approach for this thesis as it provides the opportunity to ask and search for the answers to the how, why, who and what of the research which concurs with Yin (1994:1; 2013)’s assertion that the use of case study is a good fit for subjects that are modern just like the crisis field and in case when

the researcher has little control over the events as it is when an organisation is in crisis and trying to manage it.

The use of the case study approach for this research provides the opportunity to explore a case that is either time-bound or location bound thereby giving room for me to gather data from different sources both internally and externally from the internet, using the website and social media platforms which is in line with the advantages stated by Creswell et al. (2007) They stated that case studying allows the researcher to gather data through multiple sources and report their case description, themes or cross-case themes at the end of the investigation.

Another argument for my choice of using case study approach is for sensitive, traumatic and fluid happenings like the MAS crises is that researchers prefers the case study for cases like this as it known to be advantageous in analysing complex and multi-disciplinary subjects like crisis management because it enables researchers explore the research question extensively in a flexible way without the need to provide or pre-specify the variables or patterns used when analysing the organisation's crisis communication strategies and the interpretations accorded to it by its stakeholders (Barr, 2004:167; Coombs, 2007) . It also gives the researcher room for the retention of the holistic and character of the real- life events in studying complex social phenomena case like crisis (Yin, 2003:2) - which is one of the main elements needed in analysing crisis within its context as it is said that "it is he who wear the shoe that knows best where it pinches".

Although researchers focus on the applicability of using case study in generating new ideas in a research process, its applicability is not restricted to theory building but can also be used for theory and policy testing, a means of confirming finding form other earlier studies (Bryman, 1989:174). This done in this thesis, as I will be comparing the crisis response messages of MAS against the SCCT theory (an evidence based crisis response theory), a choice that fills the gap identified by crisis researchers where they identified the need for the theories used in analysing crisis case studies to be tested so as not to be regarded as mere speculative advices (Coombs & Holladay, 2011).

One of the arguments against the use of case study in the crisis field is that some studies were done using information that was available after a crisis had occurred because it was impossible for researchers to capture the exact state of the organisation's activity and relationship with their stakeholders before they went into crisis, thereby leaving them with only data that was available due to the crisis and the reactive action of those involved in managing the crisis.

This thesis, however, is able to overcome this shortcoming of analysing a case study that focuses on the crisis and after crisis period without looking at the period before the crisis by exploring the Malaysia Airlines case study communication strategy with their stakeholders before, during and after the crisis., an opportunity that social media channels like Facebook affords as it ‘archives’ the communication and interaction of the organisation with the public all through these periods.

Using the case study approach will enable me to make a tangible contribution to the field of crisis communication and in the process develop an organisational framework that is applicable to the airline industry and one that can be extended and emulated by other industries when they find themselves in crisis having looked at the crisis communication strategies employed by the Malaysia Airlines in their crisis and making recommendations and suggestions based on the systematised process adopted in this analysis that is replicable.

3.5.1 Why use a single case study?

Yin (1994; 2003) suggests that the justifications for a single case study for researchers are when instances study is revelatory especially where investigation are inaccessible, a critical case for testing well formulated theory or an extreme or unique case.

In relation to this study, the MAS crisis is a revelatory case that is both extreme and unique at the same time which will be used to test, challenge or extend the CC theory which has some specified set of prepositions and circumstances within which the prepositions are true. This is an application that is not new to crisis study (e.g. the Cuban Missile crisis) and fills one of the identified gaps in crisis communication research where it is noted that most of the research is not tailored towards answering research questions or hypothesis despite the increase in theoretical application (Allison, 1999; An & Cheng, 2010; Yin, 1994). The use of the MAS as a single case study for the thesis afforded me the opportunity to ask research questions and test theoretical applications.

The complexity of the crisis phenomenon makes it impossible to do a thorough multiple case comparison however, with the single case approach; I can be able to identify key attributes using a lesson-learned approach systematically.

Nevertheless, the use of a single case study has been criticised due to the generalisation limitation, this limitation is overcome in this study as the collection of data from the pilot study and main study from the same organisation has provided me the grounds needed for an in-

depth study that permits repeated assessment and patterns (Dyer Jr. & Gibb, 1991; Nock, Michel & Photos, 2007).

3.6 Crisis choice process

As earlier discussed in the first chapter of this thesis on what impacted on my selection of the type of crisis case study with an inclusion criterion for the selected crisis to be a type of organisational crisis that will have a significant disruption to the organisation and its social environment; a crisis phenomenon with international news coverage and interest from several stakeholders across the world thereby creating the need for the public to seek for information regarding the crisis.

During my research journey, crisis like the adulterated meat scandal in Europe, Sony cyber-attack, General motors vehicle recall, Malaysia plane crisis, Lufthansa pilot strike and AirAsia plane crisis were examples of crisis that occurred at the earlier stage of my PhD which provided me with the opportunity to obtain both their historical and real time data needed for my analysis on any of these crisis. However, the challenge was in finding the suitable criteria for analysing different crisis using similar protocols.

Malaysia Airline's crises overcame this challenge as the organisation experienced double tragedy within a spate of one year. The occurrence of these two different complex crises to the same organisation and how they managed it will provide the needed data for analysing the dynamics of the crisis that can befall an organisation in the aviation industry, give a good basis for comparative analysis of how different crisis is managed by a single organisation and also helps to improve the reliability and validity of this research.

For the pilot study, the international bound Malaysia Airlines MH370 that travelled from Kuala Lumpur airport Malaysia on the 8th March, 2014 with 239 persons and scheduled to land at Beijing Capital international airport but went missing is used as the case study for the pilot study while the main case study is the Malaysia Airlines, M17, an international passenger plane travelling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, which was shot down in the Ukrainian airspace on the 17th of July, 2014.

3.7 Crisis time frame

This section discusses the time frame used for the data collection process.

3.7.1 Corporate website

Data was collected from the first date that the crisis was reported.

3.7.2 Facebook

The data that was analysed was collected by capturing the messages on the Facebook wall of Malaysia Airlines official Facebook page chronologically two weeks before the crisis broke out and one month immediately after the crisis broke for the main study while the pilot study was done using data captured on the first day of the crisis breakout. This data will provide information about their crisis communication strategy as it is argued that the crisis management process starts before a crisis breakout because it involves having a strategic planning, monitoring trained personnel to communicate efficiently when a crisis breaks out (Heath, 1997:301) and also have a healthy relationship and communication with its stakeholders. The two-week pre-crisis enables me to analyse their communication relationship prior to the crisis while the one-month window provides the opportunity of capturing the crisis and post crisis communication strategy.

3.8 Media Selection

The choice of the media to use as the source of data collection is obtained from both the traditional and social media outlets as combining these two medium is not new to crisis communication research, for example, Stephen et al, (2005) in their attempt to integrate the crisis communication strategy with stakeholder's theory obtained their data using both the traditional media and the internet. Social media channels have also been found to provide more data without having direct contact or interaction with the respondents as it would have been with other qualitative data collection method (Branthwaite & Petterson, 2011).

However, for the social media platforms, Facebook is used for data sourcing reason being that Facebook is one of the top social media platforms used by organisation for their strategic, corporate and organisation communication policy and public relations (Macnamara et al., 2012).

3.8.1 Corporate website

Once there was a reported organisational crisis on the online version of the newspaper website, I followed up my data collection process by checking the corporate website of Malaysia Airlines after the breaking news of the crisis to observe if there is any information about the reported crisis i.e. details about the crisis, response and actions that they are taking on their webpage. I observed if there was any news about the crisis on their home page and captured

the information and extended the observation by looking out for the link, if any, on the homepage directing visitors to other pages in relation to the news taking note to see if the link is a text, button, or redirection to the social media channels.

3.8.2 Social media Channel - Facebook

Before I proceed in discussing the MAS Facebook page and its identification process for this research, I feel it is pertinent to explain the reason behind the selection of Facebook as the preferred social media channel for this research which leads to the next section that answers the question.

Why Facebook?

Facebook was chosen as my source of data gathering for this thesis as it is a social media channel is the most investigated social networking site by scholars with a platform that is built on the ethos of people's interaction and one that constitutes a robust data gathering avenue due to its huge global usage and technological capability that it affords the researcher (Ellison et al, 2007; Zhang & Leung, 2014).

A social networking site that was created in 2004 and considered a rich site for researches on social media because of its huge usage and fusion of both online and offline connections which provides a tool to connect people with common interest like business, brand, organisations or celebrity (Ellison et al., 2007; Facebook, 2014).

For organisational study, it is regarded as the most widely adopted social media medium by organisations because of its ability to provide a platform for sharing, conversing, engagement, reputation and relationship building using texts, pictures, video, blogging to connect with diverse people (Habibi et al., 2014; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012).

It allows asynchronous communication between a post that is made and the opportunity for the audience to comment, like or share the post thereby providing a freer communication platform for its users as opposed to other social media channel like Twitter which has a word limit of 140 words per tweet, a limit that some users find restrictive as it does not allow them to fully express themselves as they would have want to due to the number of words control. It also allows users of their platform to preserve previous posts, comments, likes and shares on the organisations timeline in a sequential manner, as long as the owner of the post did not delete it.

In addition to these factors, Facebook supports a higher level of network diversity like the trend in the adoption of older communication technology (e.g. telephone) as it provides a platform for meeting users who might have lower levels of their local neighbourhood social participation but possess a relationship that is sustained, diverse and spatially distributed (Hampton, Lee & Her, 2011) thereby providing an opportunity to study those that might not be conventionally encountered as participants of for this type of analysis.

Facebook provides a platform that supports interaction and engagement for its users because of its ability to accommodate both posting (which represents the passage of information to the public) and on the other hand provides an avenue for the public to engage, interact and reply to such posting through their comments, shares and likes with the organisation and between themselves (which represents their reaction and interpretation of the information passed to them). This features provided by Facebook pages affords me with the opportunity of gathering the data that I needed for my audience-oriented analysis as I was able to collect information (through the postings) on how the public reacted to this crisis news in its 'pure' form and how they interpreted this news based on the information available to them as at that very time when the data were captured. This is an added advantage as it is known in the field of crisis that getting such data from the public later on after their crisis experience can be subjected to misremembering of events and change in reaction to the breaking of the crisis news.

Having discussed the rationale behind the Facebook choice, I will then proceed to focus on the case study official Facebook page.

MAS Facebook official page

As earlier said, the Malaysia Airlines official Facebook page is used as my source of data gathering and the process of verifying that I am using the official Facebook page of Malaysia Airlines was done by going through the Malaysia Airline's corporate website, clicked on the Facebook icon on their webpage which then took me to their official Facebook page.

MAS in their quest to provide a more personalised travel experience for their customers developed a Facebook page that caters for 18 main markets and 16 time zones whereby customers can select the most suitable content to them in terms of services, request and travel expectations. The universal Facebook page has dedicated contents for customers with bespoke interest in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Brunei, Philippines, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, India, Ireland, UK, France, Netherlands and Germany

with the last market, Global page, representing all other countries that does not fall into the remaining market (“Malaysia Airlines begins social media”, 2013). This robustness makes their page even more interesting as it might help to shed light to know if the contents are different and see how the public respond.

3.9 Recognising the units of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this research is the official statements released to the public during the initial crisis and/or immediately following the crisis by the Malaysia Airlines for their crisis communication strategy.

Messages that were analysed are corporate outgoing communication released through both the official website and social media platform, Facebook, in relation to the crisis either by press conference, statements or news releases. The use of media articles is a widely accepted data sampling technique in crisis communication as a majority of articles uses these and is also found to be statistically significant in crisis communication research (Hong Hu & Boynton, 2014).

3.10 Data collection and analysis process

This research is based on the analysis of the use of social media by organisation in crisis communication, so therefore the data for the selected case study was obtained through content analysis from the organisation’s website and their social media platform, Facebook. Observational methodology of these mediums is used to record the captured changes that are evident from the collected data.

For this thesis, observational methodology is regarded as a similar method to netnography but involves less or little participation from the researcher (Kozinets, 2002) and recognised as an effective technique of measuring and understanding communication which is the central aspect of social interaction (Weber, 1985). It is employed in this research because it offers me the ability to compare how the crisis is managed and how it fizzles out on the social media channels by the transitioning of the crisis response messages.

This data collection method also provides the needed avenue to capture how the organisation has used their social media platform before the crisis, during and also after the crisis event without much interference from the organisation and also overcoming the challengers that researchers encounter with getting information personally from an organisation that has

experienced a crisis and its stakeholders as well and in some cases, they are unavailable or distantly located which makes it to be time consuming and sometimes impossible .

This type of data collection process is regarded as a good fit for doing organisation studies as it provides the opportunity to gather rich data that spans enough to provide room for the exposition of the change that the organisation actually experienced, an opportunity that is difficult to achieve using other data collection methods because of the time restricting for data collection thereby missing out on the possibility of accessing some vital information (Bryman, 1989:197).

This thesis adopts observational and content analysis methods, a method that has been adopted by crisis researchers, as it is regarded as appropriate for the nature of a research field that is quite intricate with emotional memories as that of the crisis field. Another advantage of using this method is the capturing of the social media data directly from their pages which gives a picture of the true state of the organisation's social media communication strategy with little bias. This method is ideal as interviews and surveys in some social media research has been found to be subjected to incoherent claims of usage and knowledge of social media by organisation and respondent when asked by researcher is overstated and differs from results of findings when the question is asked in a different format in a survey (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012).

3.10.1 Steps for data collection:

- Once an impending crisis or a crisis is identified.
- A manual search is done by ensuring that it conforms to the criteria for selection, if it does, I will then proceed to data collection.
- The relevant data in relation to the crisis from organisation website will be captured using Nvivo then archived before analysing it so as to preserve and be able to reproduce the exact experience at any time (Schneider & Foot, 2004).
- The social media data will be captured using Ncapture feature of NVivo and saved
- Each relevant data will be stored in different folders and organised by saving each captured page in to Folder O, and F representing source of the data i.e. the organisation website and Facebook page respectively.
- The captured data will then be sorted in a sequential order according to the dates the news was released for further analysis.

3.10.2 Steps for data coding.

The data analysis process in answering the sub-research question follows the guidelines for an inductive content analysis.

Krippendorff (2013) and Mayring (2000; 2014) proposes a guideline for qualitative content analysis researchers to follow when conducting their research which is followed for this research.

The first step is to collect data that will be able to adequately answer the research question. This is then followed by knowing and being familiar with the research question and the theoretical background of the research field. The researcher is expected to understand and be able to make sense of the data collected, determine the unit of analysis and stages of abstraction.

Once this is achieved, I am then expected, as the researcher, to make analytical construct from the knowledge about the context, make inference from my findings with the aim of answering the research questions and validating evidences from the literatures. Figure 4 gives shows the stages of an inductive qualitative content analysis.

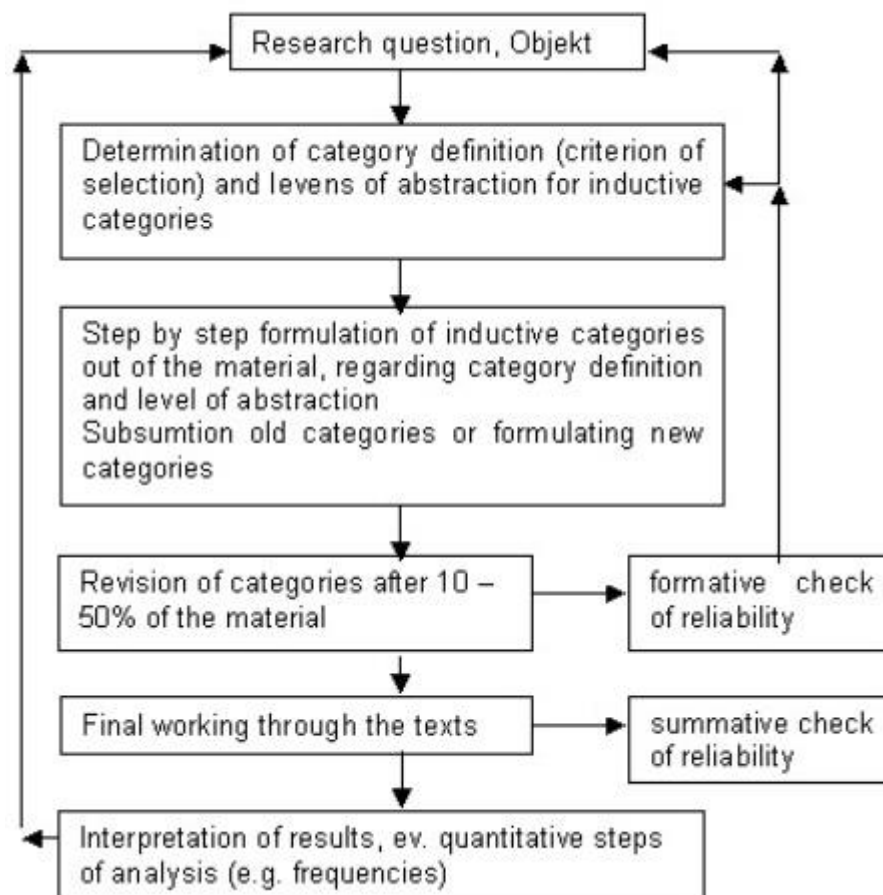


Figure 4: Step model of inductive category development (Mayring, 2014)

3.11 How the chosen research methods are used in answering the research questions.

This thesis aim is to explore the use of social media in organisation's crisis communication in the airline industry with Malaysia Airlines crisis as the cases study, with the aim of providing answers to the main research question in understanding how Malaysia Airline (MAS) used Facebook in their crisis communication strategy. In qualitative research, the research question is crucial to the successful fulfilment of the research aim as it provides guidance on the most suitable research design for the thesis, data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2015).

As stated in chapter 1, the main research question that is addressed in this thesis is to know How Malaysia Airline (MAS) used Facebook in their crisis communication strategy? This broad question is asked so as to provide a central exploration of the phenomenon or concept that is to be studied and then narrowed down to sub-questions to bring more focus to the research process (Creswell). The three sub-research questions for this thesis are:

SR1. What tactic did MAS employ in their mediated crisis response?

SR2. What practice did MAS maintain in their crisis communication on Facebook?

SR3. How did the public react to MAS's CRM?

The first sub-research question which asks to know the type of tactic that MAS employed in their mediated crisis response requires the adoption of a qualitative approach in order to answer this question adequately. This is because as I explained in chapter one (Section 1.3) of this thesis on the decisions I had to make by adopting a single case study, Malaysia Airlines, to research a socially-constructed phenomenon.

Researching a phenomenon like crisis communication comes with diverse realities and interpretations from the organisation and its different stakeholders (Matlis & Sonenshein, 2010) and therefore needs to be conducted and understood in a natural setting and not by engaging in experimental research. To achieve this, I needed to observe and take note of their crisis communication tactic on their website and Facebook page, describing and analysing my observations in a detailed but un-obstructive way.

Although the focus of the research is on the stakeholders, there is the need to know the process and tactics that the organisation adopts in communicating and connecting with them as an act of communication process between an organisation and its stakeholders includes process and tactics (McQuail & Windahl, 2015: p 13). The purpose of this is to know how the organisation were able to connect with and reach their stakeholders before, during and after a crisis.

In order to answer the first sub-research question, I employed the observational methods in discovering the processes employed by MAS in communicating the crisis to the public through their official website and Facebook page when the crisis broke out as this helps to identify if they view the social media as an extension of their traditional crisis communication channel or as a different form of crisis communication channel. The method used here was adapted using the methods employed by Taylor and Perry (2005) in their analysis of the diffusion of traditional and new media tactics in crisis communication.

I captured how soon the news was reported on MAS's official website and Facebook page to know if it was reported within the first 24 hours on these mediums and if the communication process was one or two dimensional communication process that allowed interaction between the organisation and the audience and/or between the audiences communicating with each other without the interference of the organisation. I also explored how interactive these crisis communication channels were, do they have any connecting links from one channel to the other? Was there any real-time updating of information on page? Were there any Multimedia effects employed in communicating to the public? This investigation will show the tactics that MAS employed in their mediated crisis response in managing their crisis.

The next stage is answering the second sub-research question by understanding the type of practice that MAS maintained in their crisis communication on Facebook? To provide answer to this question, I captured and explored the crisis response messages released by MAS using the content analysis method by identifying the strategies that were contained in their messages to the public. After the identification, I used the SCCT as a guideline to provide comparison.

The third sub-research question moves from focusing on what the organisation is saying to the public to the exploration of how the audience are reacting to their crisis response messages. This investigation is very useful in that the data captured will be able to provide information on whether the strategies employed by the organisation were adequate, their sense making of a crisis and crisis responsibility attribution based on information available to them. The audience

comments were captured to the first post that was made regarding the loss of contact with the plane on their official Facebook page to see how the stakeholders interpret the organisation's crisis communication strategies.

3.12 Ethical consideration

This research follows the ethical policy set out by the University of Salford with approval granted for this methodology.

I used data that were released to the public by MAS as I could infer from their posting that their Facebook page is regarded as one of their communication channels to the public. This in effect, diminishes the requirement for informed consent (Rourke et al, 2000) with ethical scholars agreeing that harvesting publicly available data does not require the type of ethical approval that comes with the regulation that binds human subject research because it doesn't involve any interaction with the users (Wilson, Gosling & Graham, 2012).

One of the common shared opinion among internet researchers is what is regarded as public information and how to obtain informed consent (Buchanan, 2004; Langer & Beckman, 2005; Schaap 2002; Sharp & Earle 2003) as Kozinets (2000) asserts that any page that is free to access without a request for password and membership is public information and since the information I used did not require membership or passwords but are information that were readily available and released to the public, I do not need to obtain informed consent for this as the organisation's postings were made public and were not privately posted to their followers.

The acquisition of my data does not require face-to-face observation/interaction but involved remote data collection of a public Facebook page, I was able to maintain a covert position in my data gathering process and observation as this enables me to harvest the data naturally and in a non-disruptive manner because of the sensitivity of my research theme.

However, when it came to the data collected from the comments from the public in response to the crisis response messages, as this provided the data needed in understanding how they made sense of the crisis and responded to it, there was the need for me to recognize and clarify what is acceptable as public data and what could be regarded as private data as there was no clear cut definitional insight into this. I came to the conclusion that what might be accepted as public data to a group and ethically right, might be seen as sensitive and unethical in another community.

For me to overcome this ethical challenge, as I was using a case study that is over publicised with information vastly and easily available, there was an increasing need for me to protect the identity of the commenters. I accepted that its either I get the informed consent of these commenters or not make public their comments for the outside community as there is evidence where these actions of paraphrasing or anonymising these comments have been found inadequate in dealing with privacy issue (Zimmer, 2010). In recognising that it is impractical for me to contact all these people that responded to the posting made by MAS on their Facebook page based on the limitation that comes with this type of research, I created two different versions of this thesis, the examiner's version and the public's version.

The "examiner's version" contains anonymised comments as proof of evidence for the results and findings of this thesis while the second version, "public version", does not include any of these comments or any personal identification data either directly as they were written, paraphrased or anonymised.

3.13 Validity and reliability with the adopted qualitative methodology

The quality and acceptability of a research hinges on the ability of the researcher to establish its validity and reliability. Validity is the degree to which what is measured or observed is the same as what is purported to be measured or observed while reliability is the consistency in the research process with the possibility of replicating the research study using a similar procedure (Robson, 2011).

Maxwell (2013:124) identified researcher's bias and reactivity as the threats that could affect the validity of a qualitative research and furthered that the ability to control these generic variables helps to increase the validity of the research and supports my decision to improve the validity of the research by controlling these identified threats.

In order to diminish the researcher's bias, I included in this thesis information about the audit trail of the research process with provision of the process employed, the data collection process and data analyses process and the justification for the various interpretations which were guided by existing theories and literatures. I also did not just collect data that seems suitable to me as a researcher but collected rich data that are varied enough to give room for a robust analysis.

For a research to be deemed valid, Robson (2011:132) argues that one of the elements guiding such research is the expectation of the researcher to focus on the opinions of the participants and be subjective which was followed for this thesis by using a social constructivist approach

that avoids the imposition of my personal beliefs and prejudices and in the process noted down the assumptions I made in this research process at the beginning of this research journey.

For the researcher's reactivity aspect, the data that was used for this research are non-reactive as there was no physical interaction with the participant or during the data collection process which could have increased the reactivity bias based on their knowledge that they are being studied or as a result of my physical interaction or direct involvement with them. I also had no direct influence on the locations of where the data collection would take place.

The credibility and trust for this thesis was also established by adopting a data triangulation strategy whereby data for this research was collected from different sources (Facebook and Website) and the processing was not done in isolation but was informed by the understanding of existing evidence based literatures in this field (Bryman, 2004; Robson, 2011).

The reliability of this thesis was maintained by performing a pilot test on the data and then replicating the process for the main study of this research by modifying the data collected as it is argued that the reliability of a research does not solely rely on how thorough, careful and honest the researcher is but is also dependent on the possibility that the research process can be repeated by other researchers who so wishes to replicate the research process (Robson, 2011:156).

3.14 Summary

To be able to effectively explore the application of Facebook in the crisis communication strategy by organisations in the airline industries, which is the research concentration of this thesis, I adopted the qualitative research methods by using content analysis and observation for my analysis with the earlier part of the chapter explains the justification for the research methodology choice, a choice which was guided by the research questions and knowledge from the literature review of the previous chapter.

The next section is called the '**interlude**' which gives a description of what I know from the first three chapter and how I applied it in achieving the aims and objectives of this thesis.

It begins by giving an explanation on how I moved from using the knowledge from the secondary research to doing the primary research.


INTERLUDE

This section provides a discussion on the transitioning of the knowledge and information of the preceding chapters and what it enables me to do in achieving the research aims and objectives by providing details of how I put into operation the details of the first three chapters. The detailing of this process is important as it provides a distinction between the secondary research and how I moved into the primary research process due to fact that both the secondary and primary data used for this thesis were collected without any contact with the management of MAS and their stakeholders.

However, before embarking on giving the details of the transitioning process from the secondary research to primary research, I will give a brief background of the cases used for this research.

Transitioning process:

The following steps were taken in collecting the primary data:

- Once Malaysia Airlines announced that the organisation is experiencing crisis by their loss of contact with their plane by notifying the public through the media.
- A purposeful search for Malaysia Airlines website was done using google search engine to identify their official website.
- I had identified their official website as www.malaysiaairlines.com.
- I was able to identify their social media channel by clicking on  icon that represents their Facebook page on their home page; this took me directly to their official pages.
- The relevant data in relation to the crisis from the organisation website and Facebook page were then captured using Ncapture feature of NVivo and saved.
- Each relevant piece of data was stored in different folders. This was organised by saving each captured page in to Folder O and F representing source of the data i.e. the organisation website and Facebook page respectively.
- This captured data was then sorted into a sequential order according to how the posting were released in relation to dates and time.
- The first posting made on their Facebook about their crisis and the comments that it generated was then analysed.
- The comments were also analysed using Nvivo

- The selected data were first coded by sorting the comments into English, non-English and uncodable.
- The next step was coding the comments in the English category.
- The data were then code after themes were identified.

The next chapter, chapter 4, presents the data analysis and the results.

Chapter 4 Data analysis and research results- Pilot study

This chapter presents the data analysis and research results from the methodology chapter, chapter three. It starts by providing a background into MAS and their crisis and then proceeds with a presentation of the results from the observation methods on both the organisation's website and their Facebook page. It then progresses to present the analysis from the content analysis of their crisis communication strategy on these two communication channels. The result from the pilot study is first presented and that of the main study is presented in chapter five.

4.1 Background of Malaysia Airlines.

Malaysia Airlines (MAS), a five-star airline and a member of the one world alliance, is the Malaysian national flag bearer. The Malaysian government holds majority shareholder of the organisation as of when the crash occurred in 2014.

MAS as a company has been experiencing growing financial losses since 2011 despite their ability of having huge customer patronage over these periods and became even worse off by the experience of a double tragedy just months apart, an experience that will naturally challenge an organisation's survival especially for an industry that has been experiencing difficulties in recent times due to global economic downturn, terrorism, natural disasters and outbreak of deadly diseases, occurrences that has led to increase in security insurance and cancellation of flights (Wong & Musa, 2011).

The organisation apart from dealing with the general challenges that their industry was experiencing was faced with extra crisis to manage in 2014 when one of their planes that departed from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for a scheduled destination in Beijing, China went missing. While managing the MH370 crisis, another plane of theirs, M17, was brought down by a missile shot just four months apart from the MH370 crisis, an occurrence that shocked the world and generated diverse reactions globally due to its unusualness and complexity.

The Malaysia airline MH370, an international passenger Boeing 777-200 airplane with 12 crew members and 227 passengers, flew from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia at 12.41 am on 8th March, 2014 and scheduled to land on the same day in Beijing, China at 6.30am.

The MH370 crisis started officially when Subang Air Traffic Control reportedly lost contact with the airplane at 2.40am, two hours after take-off. An international search and rescue team

was activated with the hope of finding and understanding what happened to the missing plane and with the disappearance of the plane and the passengers still shrouded in mystery.

The Malaysia's Department of Civil Aviation declared the plane as an accident with the 239 passengers presumed dead on the 29th of January, 2015, 10 months, after it went missing to pave way for the compensation process for the affected families. This decision is in accordance with the International Civil Aviation organisation law annexes 12 and 13 on what can be regarded as an accident and missing.

The MH370 crisis is yet to get a closure as of the writing of this thesis but on the 29th of July 2015, more than a year after the plane went missing, a flaperon which was found on the Reunion Island was later identified as part of the missing MH370 plane, a find that hopefully will bring some answers to what became of the plane.

Still being embroiled in the MH370 crisis, MAS was once again thrown into another crisis due to the tragic news of the M17 Malaysian Airlines Boeing 777-200 flight with 280 passengers and 15 crew members losing contact with the Ukrainian ATC a scheduled flight from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur on the 17th of July 2014 at about 14:15 (GMT) with news filtering in later that the plane had been crashed by a missile shot on the Ukrainian airspace despite flying 10,000 feet above the no-fly zone , an occurrence that looped MAS into another crisis when they were still in a crisis.

Timeline analysis of events on their Facebook page on the first day of crisis for MH370 crisis.

4.2 Data analysis through observational methods.

Malaysia Airlines employed the stealing thunder approach in disclosing information to the public that MH370 was missing. Lee (2016) described stealing thunder as a strategy used by organisation to self-disclose of a crisis by itself to the public before the crisis is discovered by the media through other means.

Outgoing corporate messages used by Malaysia airlines after the Flight MH370 went missing were analysed with the content analysis offering insights to see how effective the crisis response strategy employed on social media platform with a focus on their Facebook page was and also identify the dominant crisis response strategy applied by the MAS.

Although the airlines got to notify the public about their crisis before the media, they were however not swift in their crisis communication on the loss of contact with MH370 as their media statement reported that the plane had its last contact with the air traffic control center at about 1:20 MYT and unfortunately, no official statement was released to the public about the crisis until 7:20 AM when they released an official media statement to the media and the public which is 6 hours after their first knowledge that something could be wrong with the plane and just an hour short of its scheduled destination landing in Beijing, china.

Nevertheless, Malaysia airlines (MAS) activated their crisis communication strategies in order to manage the MH370 aircraft crisis.

4.2.1 MAS official website

Within the first 24 hours, the official website adopted a change to signify that a crisis is being experienced. MAS activated a dark website which is dedicated to providing information about the missing MH370. There was a hyperlink on their website directing information seekers to the “dark site”. A hyperlink to the site is also added to their updates on Twitter and Facebook pages. There was a compilation of the media statements and information releases which included information on the time the statement was released. These statements were both in English and Chinese. The company’s “Go Team” was coordinated to depart Kuala Lumpur International Airport to support families in Beijing as the plane was meant to land in china

4.2.2 Social media – Facebook page

On Facebook, its communication style switched from a fully bi-directional communication process that enables mutual communication between the airline, customer and public which is regarded as the preferred communication strategy of airlines (Grancay, 2013) to an un-monitored bi-directional communication process where staff were not responding to their audience comments. The news was reported in a two-way communication process that allowed comment, shares and likes on their page in response to their posting. There was however, no dialogue between Malaysia airlines staff and the public; the public were interacting with themselves though.

Their social media channels also have connecting hyperlinks and/or audio visual effects to the media statements that takes one directly to the posted media messages on their ‘dark site’ during the crisis and was frequently updated with real-time updating of information on their Facebook pages and websites which includes information released to the media and public.

Their cover photo changed to a picture to reflect the mood that the company is in their time of crisis on their Facebook page.

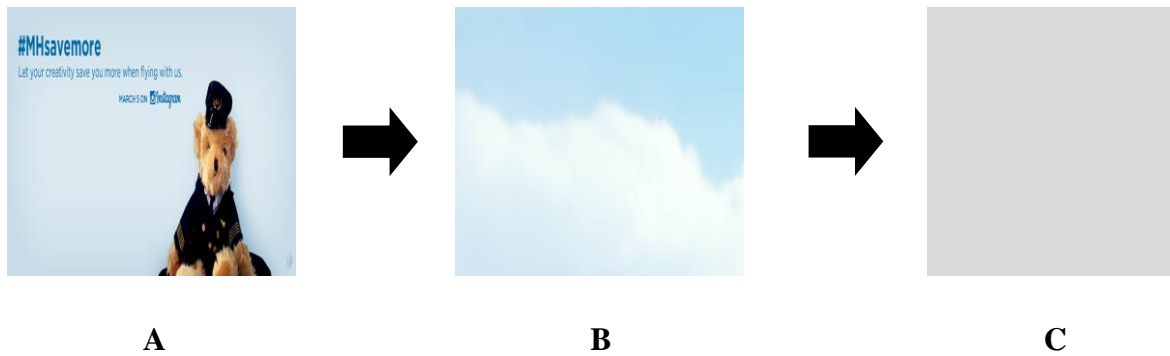


Figure 5: Changes to cover photo

The cover photo changed from **A** which was used for promotions at their pre-crisis stage to **B** when they made the first announcement on their page that they had lost contact with the plane to **C**.

Their profile picture on Facebook also took the same format by being changed from a logo with their corporate colour to a grey colour to convey the crisis message.

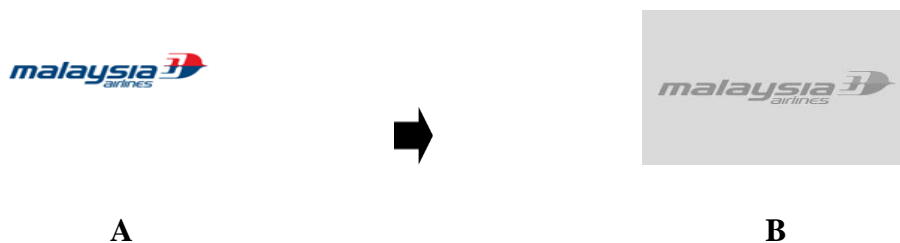


Figure 6: Profile picture changes captured from MAS's official Facebook page

4.3 Data analysis through Content analysis

As earlier explained in the methodological chapter, section 3.10, that the first step for data analysis using content analysis is to collect data that will be able to adequately answer the research question. The data used for this analysis were the messages released by MAS through their website and Facebook pages.

On the first day of the crisis (08/03/2104), six crisis response messages were posted in total. Five media statements were released on the dark site with one incident update. Similar statements were released on their Facebook pages but the Facebook page had more messages posted than the official website. Nine posting were made on the Facebook page on the day of the crisis with four media statements, two statements from the group CEO, a post giving update on the search and rescue mission and the last one requesting for prayer support from the public.

4.3.1 Analysis of written crisis response messages on the first day of the crisis from MAS Facebook page.

The CRS released by MAS on their Facebook page is tabulated below in table 7 as this process will provide insights to how MAS employed their social media channel in managing the MH370 crisis.

Table 7: Summary of released crisis response messages on the first day of the crisis on MAS Facebook page.

Date	Facebook post	Comment
08/03/2014	Media statement	Gives details about the loss of contact with plane, plane type details, and flight route, no of people on board, search and rescue, and phone no for the public to contact.
08/03/2014	Statement by group CEO	Regret on loss of contact with details on loss of contact , plane type details, destination route, no of people on board, search and rescue, contact of next of kin, focus on emergency responder, thoughts with family, promise to provide updates and phone no for the public to contact and two more phone no for the media.
08/03/2014	Statement by group CEO at press conference	Hyperlink to the dark site for updates
08/03/2014	Media statement	Hyperlink to the dark site for updates
08/03/2014	Media statement	Hyperlink to the dark site for updates
08/03/2014	Message	We understand everyone's concern on MH370 pax & crew. We're accelerating every effort with all relevant authorities to locate the aircraft.
08/03/2014	Media statement	Hyperlink to the dark site for updates
08/03/2014	Message	An international SAR mission was mobilized and efforts are being intensified with team from Singapore, Vietnam & others participating.

08/03/2014	Message	[#MASalert [We would like to humbly ask all Malaysians and people around the world to pray for flight MH370 http://bit.ly/MH370updates .
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4.3.2 Analysis of written corporate messages on the first day of the crisis for the official website.

This section also provides the CRS released by MAS for the MH370 crisis to the public as this information will also provide more understanding of how the crisis was managed through these different media.

Table 8: Summary of released crisis response messages on the first day of the crisis through MAS's official website.

Date	Official website	Comment
08/03/2014	1st media statement	Same information as was posted on the Facebook notifying the public about the loss in contact
08/03/2014	2nd media statement	Contained same information as was posted on the Facebook and also included information directing the next-of-kin to the support center with different phone numbers for the family, press/media and the public

08/03/2014	3rd media statement	Confirmation of loss of contact with plane, acknowledgement of speculations of plane landing in Nanming and efforts to verify the authenticity, details of plane and no of those on board with their nationalities, rescue and search efforts update, details of pilot's personal and work experience, promise to keep the public updated and contact details for those that need more information
08/03/2014	Incident update	Notification of loss of contact, current report on search and rescue, details of plane and flight route, no of people on board, in the process of updating next-of-kin, promise to provide regular update, phone contact details
08/03/2014	4th media statement	more update on search and rescue details, details of the missing plane, manifest withheld till families are notified, Go Team (care givers and volunteer) departing Malaysia, correction of the misinformation on the nationality details of those on board, thoughts with families of victims, acknowledgement of invalidated report in some media and urging the public to report only official statements from MAS and Malaysia government.
08/03/2014	5th media statement	Next of kin being informed, details of those on board, a link that redirects to passengers manifest, details of nationalities, thoughts with families and contact details.

Table 7 and 8 gives an overview of the crisis response message employed by MAS in managing the M370 crisis. The tabulation of these messages will provide insight to how MAS employed their official website and social media channel in managing the M370 crisis by depicting if the messages posted were the same content and if posting on this two different platforms sequential or not? The juxtaposing indicates that MAS perceives the internet and social media channels as an extension of their communication channel.

For the second step of the analysis process, having grounded myself with the needed theoretical knowledge and the data that was collected, I was confident that the collected data is adequate enough to answer the second sub-research question which is: What practice did MAS maintain in their crisis communication on Facebook?

This is then followed by knowing and being familiar with the research question and the theoretical background of the research field. The researcher is expected to understand and be able to make sense of the data collected, code emerging themes and categories. I then followed it by making inferences and interpretations from the emerged themes to answer the research questions and compare my findings with the theoretical knowledge of the research area.

Section 4.3.3 provides a tabulation of the categories that emerged from the data and SCCT's crisis communication recommendations.

4.3.3 The comparison between MAS crisis communication strategies on their Facebook page and SCCT's recommendation.

The segment presents the SCCT recommendation for managing crisis and the crisis communication strategy employed by the MAS in Table 9 so as to be able to evaluate if MAS followed the guidelines and if following the guidelines produces the expected result.

Table 9: Evaluation CRS employed by MAS and the SCCT recommendation.

NO	Statement	MAS Crisis Communication	SCCT recommendation
1	<p>1st MEDIA STATEMENT released at 7.24am/8 Mar 2014 MH370 Incident</p> <p>Sepang, 8 March 2014: Malaysia Airlines confirms that flight MH370 has lost contact with Subang Air Traffic Control at 2.40am, today (8 March 2014).</p> <p>Flight MH370, operated on the B777-200 aircraft, departed Kuala Lumpur at 12.41am on 8 March 2014. MH370 was expected to land in Beijing at 6.30am the same day. The flight was carrying a total number of 227 passengers (including 2 infants), 12 crew members. Malaysia Airlines is currently working with the authorities who have activated their Search and Rescue team to locate the aircraft. The airline will provide regular updates on the situation. Meanwhile, the public may contact +603 7884 1234 for further info.</p>	<p>MAS released Instructing information that gave a full disclosure of the crisis they are entering. This information tells the public the what, where and how of the crisis.</p>	<p>Instructing information which should contain information about the crisis. Represents the first-half based of the SCCT recommendation for crisis in the victim cluster</p>
2	<p>2nd MEDIA STATEMENT [#MASalert] Statement By Our Group Chief Executive Officer, Ahmad Jauhari Yahya on MH370 Incident. Released at 9.05am/8 Mar 2014 MY Local Time.</p>	<p>Instructing and adjusting information which included information about the crisis and extended it to contain information that will help their stakeholders</p>	<p>Instructing and adjusting information with the message containing sympathy, corrective action and counselling.</p>

<p>We deeply regret that we have lost all contacts with flight MH370 which departed Kuala Lumpur at 12.41 am earlier this morning bound for Beijing.</p> <p>The aircraft was scheduled to land at Beijing International Airport at 6.30am local Beijing time. Subang Air Traffic Control reported that it lost contact at 2.40am (local Malaysia time) today.</p> <p>Flight MH370 was operated on a Boeing B777-200 aircraft. The flight was carrying a total number of 239 passengers and crew – comprising 227 passengers (including 2 infants), 12 crew members. The passengers were of 13 different nationalities. Malaysia Airlines is currently working with the authorities who have activated their Search and Rescue team to locate the aircraft. Our team is currently calling the next-of-kin of passengers and crew. Focus of the airline is to work with the emergency responders and authorities and mobilize its full support.</p> <p>Our thoughts and prayers are with all affected passengers and crew and their family members. The airline will provide regular updates on the situation. The public may contact +603 7884 1234. For media queries, kindly contact +603 8777 5698/ +603 8787 1276.</p>	<p>adjust psychologically by including sympathy and corrective actions.</p>	<p>Represents the second-half base of the SCCT recommendation.</p>
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3	3 RD MEDIA STATAMENT [#ýMASalert] Statement By Our Group CEO, Ahmad Jauhari Yahya on MH370 Incident at the Press Conference. Released at 11.00am/8 Mar 2014 MY Local Time - http://bit.ly/MH370updates	Instructing and adjusting information which included more instructing information on the plane, information on the nationality of people on board, pilots detail and experience, search and rescue (SAR) update and sympathy.	Instructing and adjusting information with the message containing sympathy, corrective action and counselling. Represents the second-half base of the SCCT recommendation.
4	[#ýMASalert] MEDIA STATEMENT on MH370 Incident released at 2.30pm/8 Mar 2014 MY LT - http://bit.ly/MH370updates	Adjusting information on SAR update with instructing information on nationalities and manifest link	Adjusting information
5	[#ýMASalert] 4 th MEDIA STATEMENT on MH370 Incident released at 4.20pm/8 Mar 2014 MY LT - http://bit.ly/MH370updates	Adjusting and instructing information on the SAR, the crisis, manifest, deployment of care giver and correction of their mistake in PAX list	Adjusting information
6	We understand everyone's concern on MH370 pax & crew. We're accelerating every effort with all relevant authorities to locate the aircraft.	Adjusting information	Adjusting information as it helps to cope psychologically

7	[#yMASalert] 5 th MEDIA STATEMENT on MH370 Incident released at 7.20pm/8 Mar 2014 MY LT - http://bit.ly/MH370updates	Adjusting information on families being informed, SAR update, manifest of PAX, nationalities and sympathy	Adjusting information
8	An international SAR mission was mobilized and efforts are being intensified with team from Singapore, Vietnam & others participating.	Adjusting information on Corrective action	Adjusting information on Corrective action
9	[#yMASalert] We would like to humbly ask all Malaysians and people around the world to pray for flight MH370 – http://bit.ly/MH370updates	With this message, MAS portrays their ‘victimage’ and vulnerability by asking for the public’s support.	Victimage

4.4 Analysis of comments to the first posting on their Facebook.

For the data analysis of the comments, I followed the steps suggested by Mayring (2014) for carry out an inductive qualitative content analysis research as earlier discussed in Chapter 3.10.2. The data used for this analysis were the comments posted in response to the first crisis response Facebook post made by MAS to their crisis. These comments were captured and uploaded to Nvivo using Ncapture.

Having familiarised myself with the theoretical background of the research field and the research question that I intend to answer as suggested by Mayring (2014) to be the first step of the analysis process.

I then applied the criterion for the selection process. To achieve this, I familiarised myself with the collected data by first reading through all the comments and then began to create free nodes (themes) in Nvivo to separate comments that were written in English, non-English, comments that were spam or unrelated to the crisis or MAS post (Figure 7).

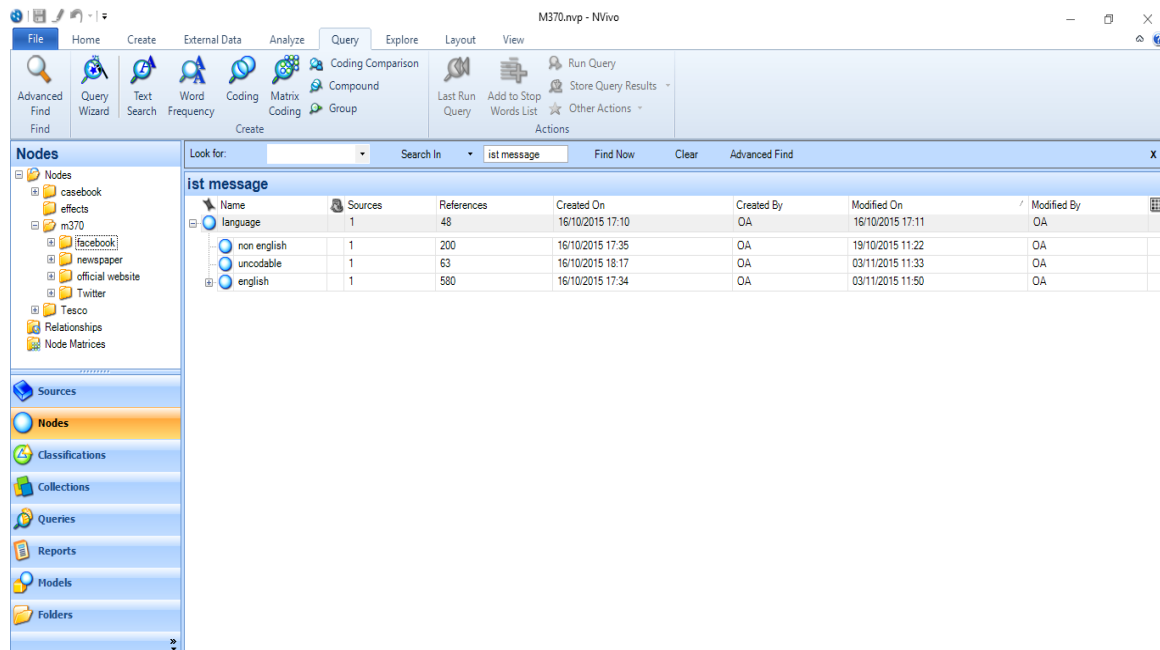


Figure 7: Free nodes (themes of comments)

The next step I took in the data analysis process was to get familiar with the clean data (selected comments) and read them individually again, line by line. I ran a word frequency query of the 100 most frequently repeated words as it is assumed that visualising the words that appear most frequently can help in identifying themes and concepts (Bergin, 2011). The analysis as shown in Figure 8 shows that god, pray and bless are the three most frequently occurring words in the collected data.

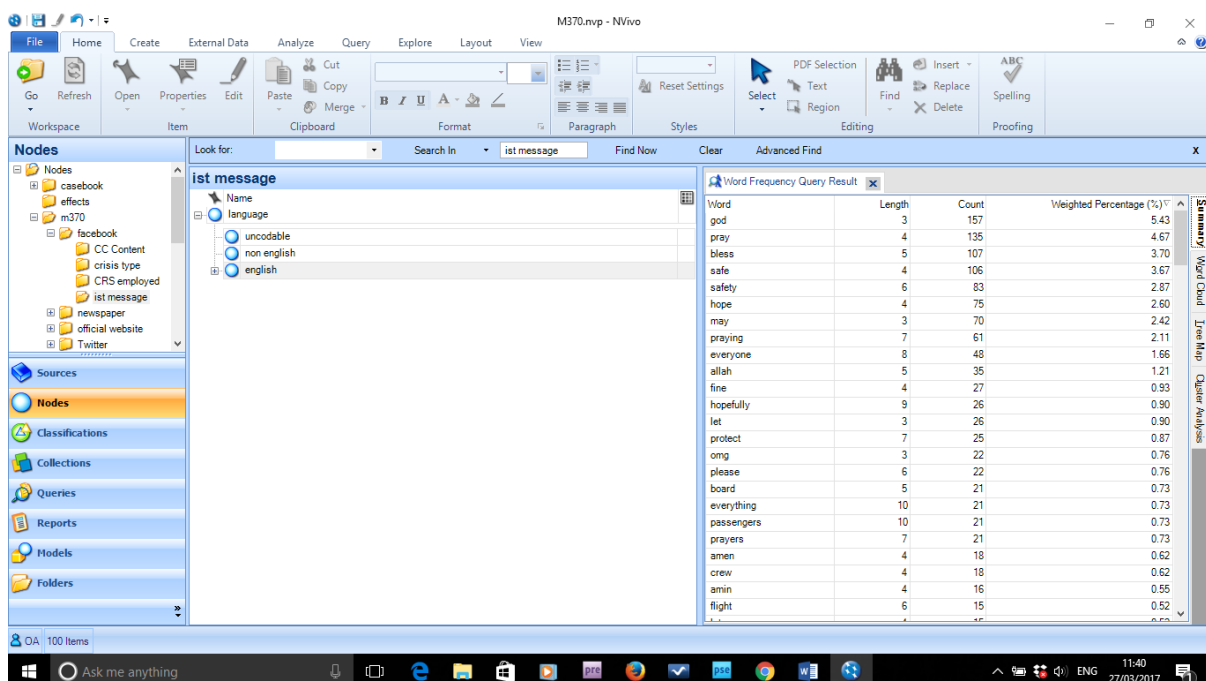


Figure 8: Word frequency query for overall data

Of the total 580 comments that met the inclusion criteria, 26 of these comments were perspective related while 48 comments were coded into the information related theme and 506 comments were coded under the emotion related theme (Figure 10). The themes that emerged from this coding are similar to those found in Qu, Wu and Wang (2009) analysis of the Sichuan Earthquake.

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
language	1	48	16/10/2015 17:10	OA	16/10/2015 17:11	OA
non english	1	200	16/10/2015 17:35	OA	19/10/2015 11:22	OA
uncodable	1	63	16/10/2015 18:17	OA	03/11/2015 11:33	OA
english	1	580	16/10/2015 17:34	OA	03/11/2015 11:50	OA
Information rela	1	48	23/10/2015 16:40	OA	03/11/2015 11:35	OA
seeking	1	28	27/10/2015 14:17	OA	27/10/2015 14:55	OA
sharing	1	20	27/10/2015 14:17	OA	03/11/2015 11:35	OA
Opinion related	1	26	23/10/2015 16:40	OA	03/11/2015 11:41	OA
others com	1	9	03/11/2015 11:06	OA	03/11/2015 11:37	OA
on the plan	1	17	03/11/2015 11:06	OA	03/11/2015 11:41	OA
emotion related	1	506	23/10/2015 16:39	OA	03/11/2015 11:41	OA
personal	1	36	27/10/2015 11:09	OA	03/11/2015 11:30	OA
support	1	470	27/10/2015 11:13	OA	03/11/2015 11:41	OA

Figure 10: Codes for comments that met the inclusion criteria

The flow diagram below illustrates the data extraction and analysis of the comments included for this analysis.

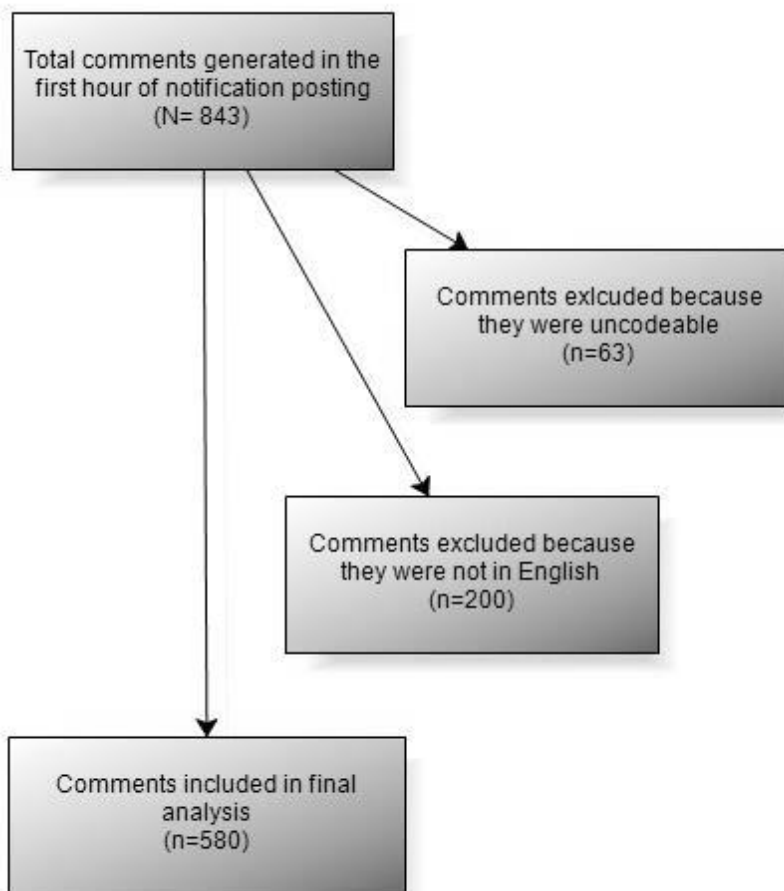


Figure 11: Flow diagram for the data extraction and analysis of the comments

4.4.1 Themes of the comments to first posting on Malaysia Airlines Facebook page

In the first stage of coding and theme identification, I identified some recurring and similar patterns and themes which were categorized into a theme based on their similarities.

These main themes and codes emerged after the coding process:

The **emotion related** theme had 87% of the comments that was generated within the first hour of posting thereby representing the highest number of posting. The comments content included more of prayers to God/ Allah, blessings for the passengers and crew members and their families, sadness, surprise, and concern for those on board.

The emotional theme included two different codes with comments containing support to the victims, family and MAS in the form of prayers to God for protection hope for safety and reassurances. The second theme was emotional comments with personal content that shows the writer’s personal expression of surprise, sadness and feelings to the news.

Figure 12 shows the word frequency query result on the emotion related theme with pray, god and safe being the three most reoccurring words in this theme.

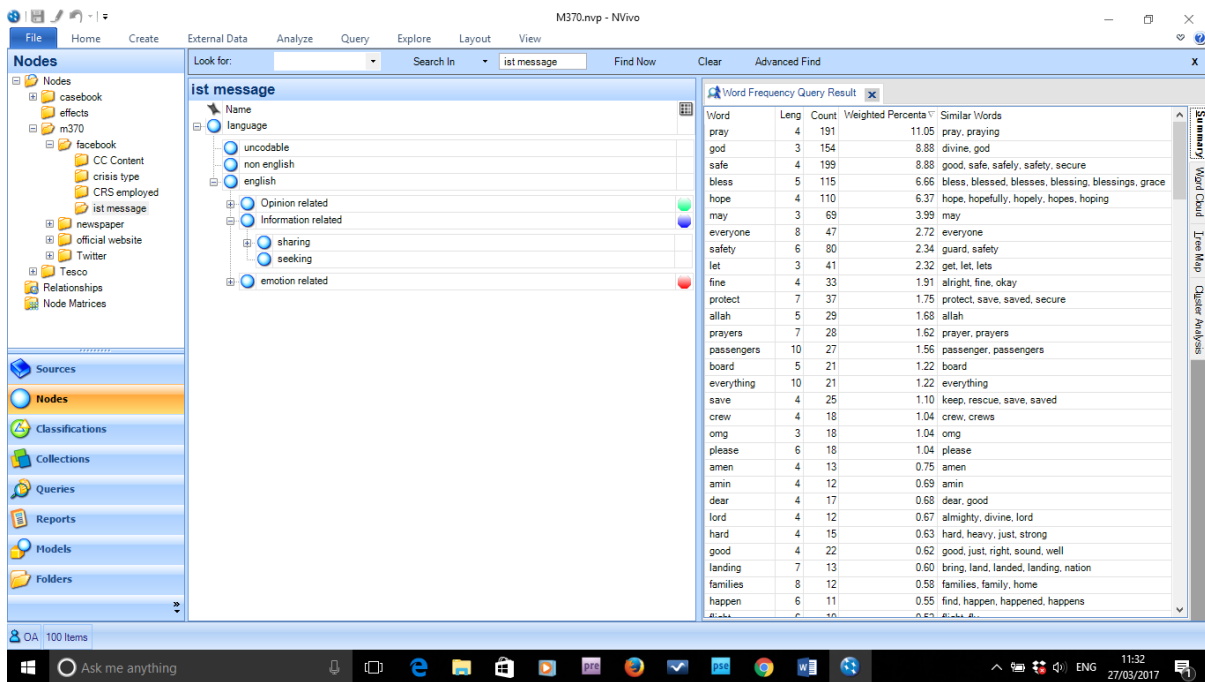


Figure 12: Word frequency query for emotion-related theme

The **Information related** theme included contents where the comments were either soliciting for information on the crisis or providing information to the public. These comments represented 8% of the comments analysed. The information spread included comments that gave correct information on the crisis situation with some commenters making references to traditional media and other social media news sources, some were rumours and untrue while other commenters came to the page to seek for more updates on the crisis by soliciting for updates on the news, requesting for information on what happened to the flight. The second category in this theme were sharing information to the public through their comments by posting the crisis news with reference to other media sources, information about the status of the missing plane and even sharing of false news to the public.

Figure 16 shows the word frequency query result on the information related theme with updates, news and happened representing the three most reoccurring words in this theme.

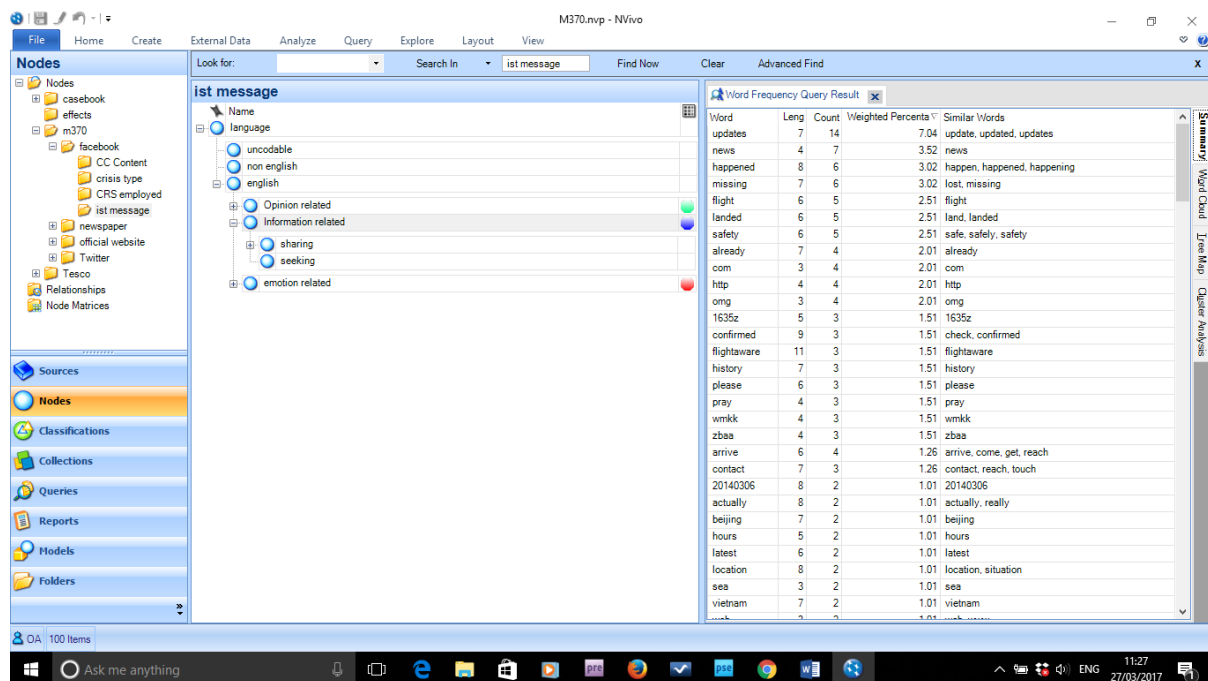


Figure 16: Word frequency query for information-related theme

4.5 Action learning from the pilot study.

Analysis of the comments generated reflected the need to read more on emotional related journal as it was the most evident in the response to the crisis news and the need to look at the pre and post crisis relationship with their stakeholders using the interactions on their official Facebook page.

The occurrence of a crisis like the MAS cases are crisis that generates lots of interest from different stakeholders and the fact that I needed to do a real-time capturing of data with so much happening quickly at the same time makes it impossible for me to capture all the relevant information concerning the crisis from different channels and sources. This led to some constraint of my inability to capture 100% of the material on the crisis on all the social media channels and pages that reported on the crisis; I had to apply the concept of saturation and use of both real-time and historical data.

The uncertainty of what could be regarded as the end of the M370 crisis as of the time of this research also defends my need to use a single case study as this will allow me to see if it is so in the M17 case or not using the same methodology and process.

CHAPTER 5 Data analysis and research results- The main study

This chapter presents the data analysis and research results from the methodology chapter and replicates the process of the pilot study. It starts with a presentation of the results from the observation methods on both the organisation's website and their Facebook page and then proceeds to present the analysis from the content analysis of their crisis communication strategy on these two communication channels as was done for the pilot study.

Timeline analysis of events on their Facebook page on the first day of crisis for MH370 crisis.

5.1. Data analysis through observational methods

Outgoing corporate messages used by Malaysia airlines after the Flight M17 went missing were analysed using the same data collection process as was done for the pilot study for the MH370 crisis.

Using observation methods, Unlike the MH370 whereby the organisation did not report the loss of contact with the plane, MAS was swift in reporting the crisis news to the public with the crisis news of M17 being posted on their Facebook page at 08:51 EDT with a message referring the public to check their Twitter handle for more updates on the crisis. This highlighted their Twitter handle as the first tool of communicating about the crisis with a tweet using their official Twitter handle at 08:36 EDT. Their website did not reflect the crisis mode until a much later time.

Malaysia Airlines employed the stealing thunder approach in disclosing information to the public about the M17 crisis as earlier stated in the pilot study, stealing thunder is a self-disclosing strategy used by organisation to inform the public of a crisis before the crisis is discovered by the media through other means (Lee, 2016). The news of the M17 airplane was reported within the first 24 hours of its occurrence on their webpage, Facebook and Twitter pages.

Nevertheless, Malaysia airlines (MAS) activated their crisis communication strategies in managing the M17 aircraft crisis by using their social media channels and official website in their response to the M17 crisis within the first 24 hours of the crisis in conjunction with the traditional media.

5.1.1 MAS official website

Their official website was assessed immediately after the crisis was announced by the traditional and social media channels about the M17 crisis, an html version was available with a message explaining that the website is experiencing overwhelming traffic on the site (figure 19).

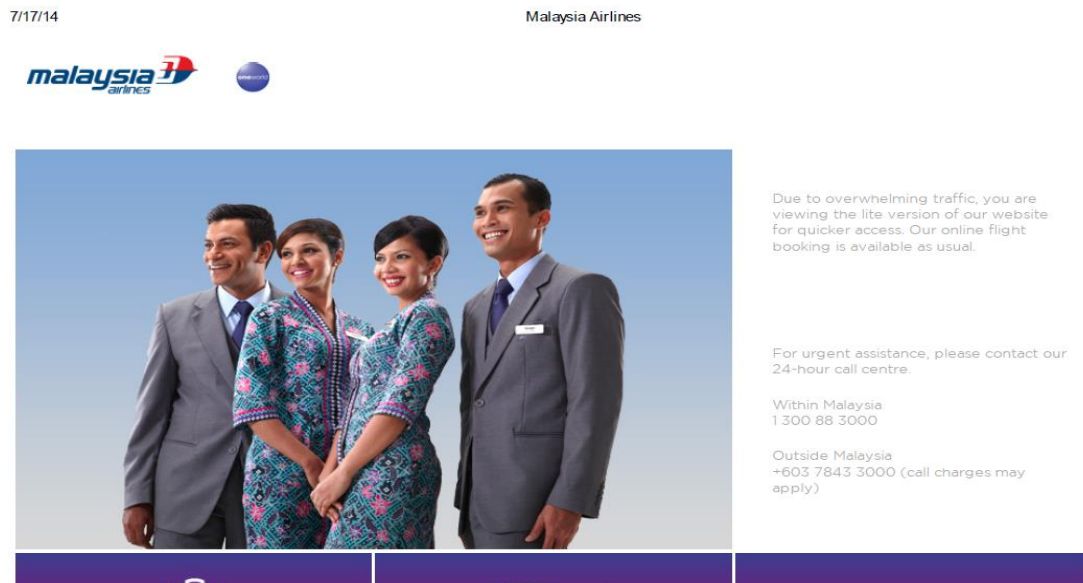


Figure 19: Screen shot of their webpage on 17/07/2014 at 4:52pm

The website was however updated with the news of the M17 crisis within the first 24 hours of the plane going down.

MAS did not activate a “dark site” as most organisations in the airline industry do when in crisis (a dark-site is a website that is dedicated to providing information about an accident or crisis; M17 hyperlink was www.malaysiaairlines.com/uk/en.html as opposed to M370 which was www.malaysiaairlines.com/my/en/site/dark-site.html). The reason for this could be that the dark-site which was used for communicating at the initial stages of the MH370 crisis has not been reactivated back to its pre-crisis readiness state as M370 still remains inconclusive when they entered into another crisis.

Observation of their official website shows that there is a condolence message about the plane crash and also a notice of “travel advisory Media statement 1:MH17 incident” (figure 20) with

a hyperlink that requests one to read more, when I clicked on the hyperlink, it took me to the media statements which were arranged in sequential order as they were released to the public.

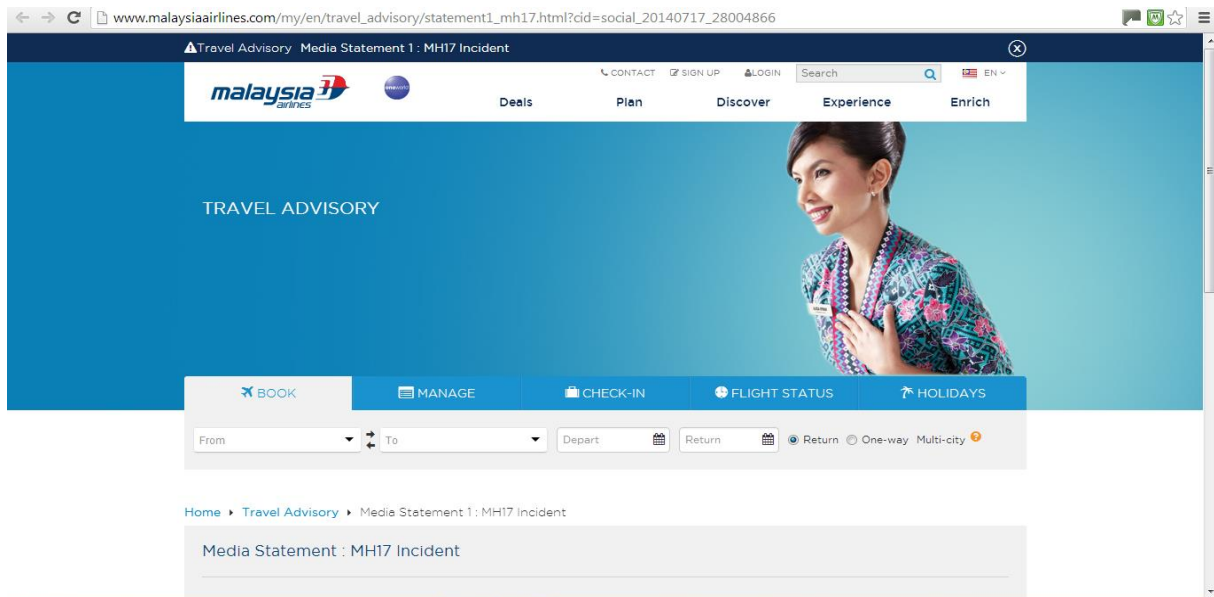


Figure 20: Screen shot of webpage taken at 6:17pm on 17/07/2014

Their website however used a one-way communication process that does not give room for any dialoguing communication process from their audience.

From the crisis management perspective, it served the purpose of giving out information about the crisis without any form of interaction with the public. The website also served as their news portal as other notifications on their social media channels had a hyperlink attached to the updates that take you to their website and as of the 18th of July, 2014, the background colour of their website was reflecting the crisis mood (figure 21).

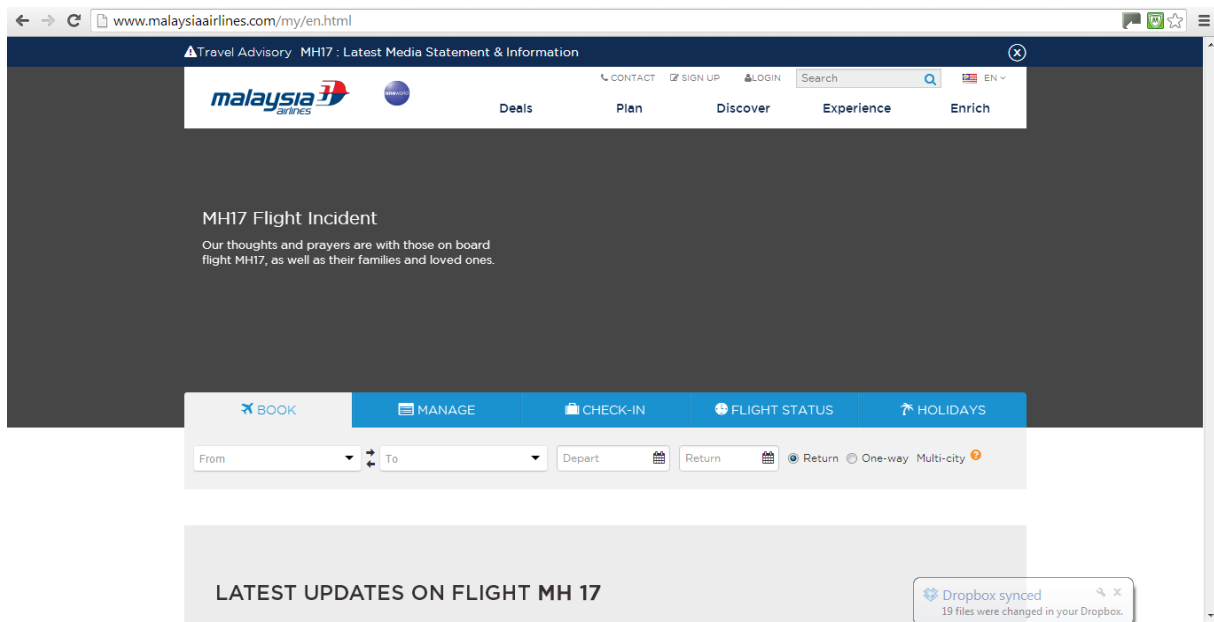


Figure 21: Screen shot of the webpage on 18/07/2014 at 4:19pm depicting their crisis situation

5.1.2 Social media – Facebook

Based on the reflection from the pilot study because of the opportunity that the Facebook platform provided, I observed the pre-crisis communication style of MAS on their Facebook page, the crisis communication style after the first 24 hours and the post-crisis communication one month after the crisis broke out.

The day of the crisis.

On their Facebook page, observations on the Facebook page shows that the crisis communication style for M17 followed the pattern of the MH370 which switched from a fully bi-directional communication procedure to an un-monitored bi-directional communication process where staff were not responding to their audience comments. The reporting of the news also follows a two-way communication process that allowed comment, shares and likes on their page from their audience in response to the postings that was made.

As it was for the pilot study, there was no discourse between MAS staff and the public but the public were interacting with themselves on their official page.

However, looking at the Netherlands and the Australian regional Facebook pages (these countries with Malaysia has the highest no of passengers in the ill-fated plane) still maintained

a fully bi-directional communication dialogue at the onset of the crisis where by Malaysia Airlines staff responded to peoples comment on the Facebook pages.

On a general view of the three Facebook Pages (Malaysia, Netherland and Australia), there were connecting hyperlinks and/or audio visual effects to the media statements that takes one directly to the posted media messages on MAS's website during the crisis and was frequently updated with real-time updating of information on their Facebook pages and websites which includes information released to the media and public.

On July 17 2014 (using Malaysia Facebook page as the main source of data) , which is the day that the plane crashed (crisis) , five posting were made by MAS on their timeline with two representing a change to their profile picture and cover photo (third and fourth posting). The changes to their cover and profile picture (figure: 22 and 23 which changes from A to B) were made after the first media statement had been released to the public by the media.

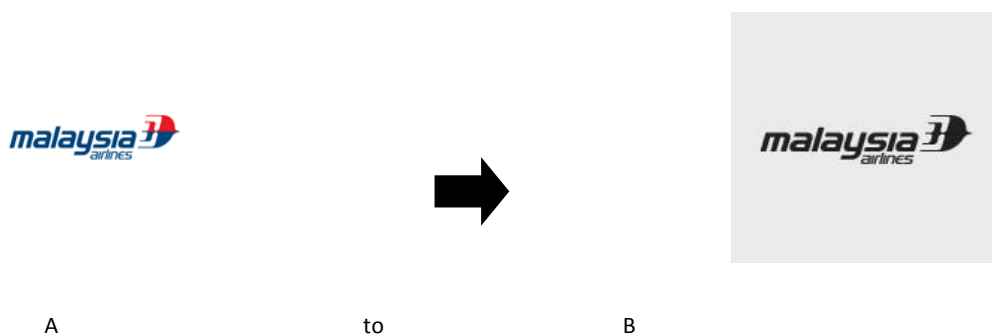


Figure 22: Changes to their profile picture to depict their crisis mood for M17 crisis

Their cover photos changed also just like the MH370 crisis to a picture to reflect the mood that the company was

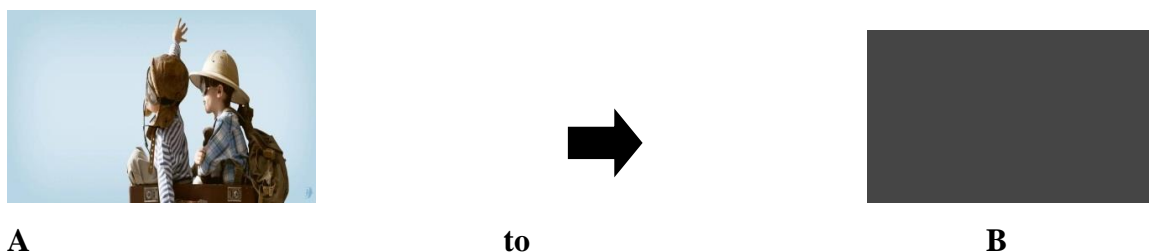


Figure 23: Cover photos change

Having identified the M17 crisis as a crisis that falls in the victim crisis cluster which comes with a weak attribution of responsibility and mild reputational threat, one need not forget also that Malaysia airlines had a history of a missing plane (M370) that is still unresolved as of when the M17 crash. This could have impacted or changed the stakeholder's interpretation of the crisis and make them attach the crisis responsibility and reputational threat that is applicable to a crisis in the accidental crisis cluster. This is explained in my literature review that an organisation with a similar crisis history is more likely to suffer more reputational damage and higher crisis responsibility attribution than one without a crisis history.

In the literature review, I also explained the importance of having a prior relationship reputation with one's stakeholders as it is noted that an organisation with a positive pre-crisis relationship will have a lesser crisis responsibility than one with a negative pre-crisis relationship. This factor raises the need to explore the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis communication style of MAS on their Facebook page which is discussed in the next section.

5.2 Overall analysing of the crisis communication strategy used by Malaysia airline at the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis moment on their Facebook page.

This section provides results from the use of observational methods on MAS Facebook page for their overall crisis communication strategy as this will provide insight into their relationship building process over time.

5.2.1 The pre-crisis Communication before the M17 crisis

Looking through MAS's official Facebook page, it is evident that MAS uses their Facebook page in communicating and connecting with their audience using a fully bi-directional communication process which is regarded a common communication strategy employed by Airlines in communicating with their customers and the public on Facebook by making a post and allowing users to ask questions which can be answered either by the airline itself or by other users (Grancier, 2013). MAS used their timeline to provide information to the public about news, contest, places to visits and people, and for customer relations service in their pre-crisis stage.

Malaysia Airlines has been one of the early social media 'engager' in the aviation industry as their aim on social media according to a press release is to have a vibrant global presence on social media, although with a localised content that is tailored to each region. This statement and their actions on their social media platforms shows that they did stay true to their words

and commitment as it can be seen by observing their Facebook and Twitter pages that they engage their stakeholders using a communication strategy that is very robust and active.

Crisis communication literature suggests that at the pre-crisis stage, the organisation should develop and maintain a positive image in the eyes of their stakeholders which can be achieved by sending out internalising messages. Using the observational method, I easily observe from the Facebook page that Malaysia Airlines has been using their social media channels in staying connected and interact with the public using a social media communication strategy that is open and continuous, one that afforded them a seamless discourse platform with their stakeholders and vice versa. This type of communication strategy enables the organisation to monitor and detect any issue signal early enough and manage it before any further escalation.

Malaysia Airlines from my observation has a good approach in place for their social media communication as they use them as a dialogue communication platform for their marketing, branding and even customer care services with their stakeholders. Their having a social media team and being accustomed to the use of social media for communicating with a huge followership made it an easy option to use when the M17 crisis erupted as their first notification referred the public to follow their Twitter handle for more information.

Malaysia Airlines easily switched from their normal pre-crisis communication style to a crisis mood as soon as they knew that a crisis has erupted seamlessly.

5.2.2 Communication during crisis

The type of information communicated to stakeholders during a crisis is regarded to one of the most important determinants on what becomes of the crisis. In the case of the M17 crisis, Malaysia Airlines used their social media platforms to disseminate information that they are in crisis as soon as the crisis broke out.

From 17 July, 2014 to 20 July, 2014, MAS posted messages strictly that gave information about the crisis, the what, where and how's of the crisis which included information that they have lost contact with the plane, where it was last seen, maintenance record of the plane, commiserations, counter rumour and prevent misinformation as the public was about to hold them responsible for using a crisis zone area for flying.

Malaysia Airlines used their Facebook page for their crisis response messages and connecting with the public as they knew that when in crisis, it is not only their normal customer that will

visit their Facebook page but people with diverse interest will be there to feed their different needs.

The #staystrong campaign started on 21 July, 2013 with, a post appreciation post for the public's support in their crisis period. The #staystrong approach was highly responded to by the public especially when they started posting it with messages that display their tenacity and resolve to pull through the crisis. The first of such post received with the phrase “*tough times do not last, tough people do*” received tremendous response with almost 13,000 likes and about 860 shares (Figure 25).

They started with #staystrong to express their present state and their future projections. Their first picture is of two female cabin crew holding hand and then a male cabin crew picture with his cap neatly held under his arm portrays their pain and resolution from their internal stakeholder and a picture of a passenger with his luggage unites the internal and external stakeholders together.

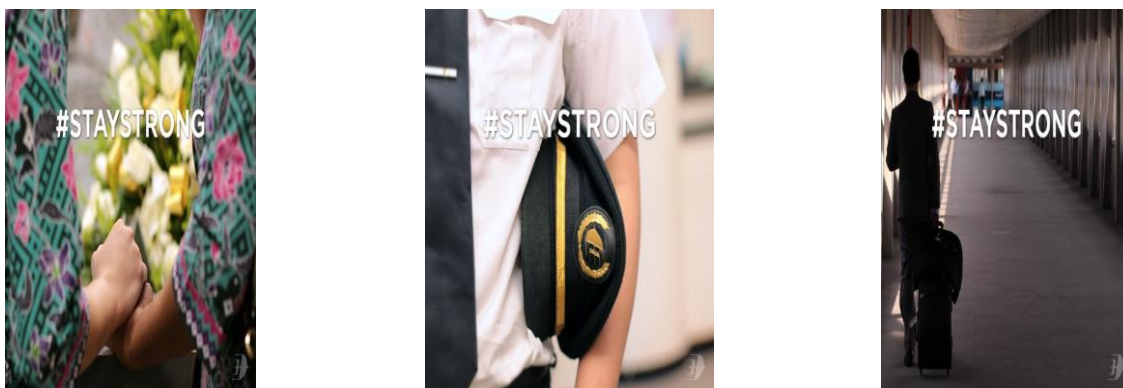


Figure 24: #Staystrong campaign

The #flyinghigh campaigns started on 31 July, 2014, a week ahead of their informing the public about a proposed full ownership takeover by Knazanah and delist MAS. The #flyinghigh can be said to be strategically started ahead of the takeover notification of their resolve to still be in business and continue to provide their services to the public as they did before the crisis.

The #staystrong and #flyinghigh postings received more response than any other form of posting by the public which could be a signal that their stakeholders could identify with their pains.

The crisis team refrained from posting any promotional or contest announcement during this period which continued till the 21st of August, 2014 which they declared as the national mourning day for those on board the M17 plane.

This period could be regarded as the crisis period for the organisation.

5.2.3 Post crisis communication

It is worthy to note that Malaysia airlines did not utilize any message that promotes their brand or reputation or marketing their product as this act would have been viewed as being insensitive to the victims of the crisis. Internalising messages were not used by Malaysia airlines at the initial periods of crisis as suggested by crisis scholars.

Internalising messages in the form of promotional contest was reintroduced on 24 August, 2014; more than a month after they experienced the loss of contact with M17.

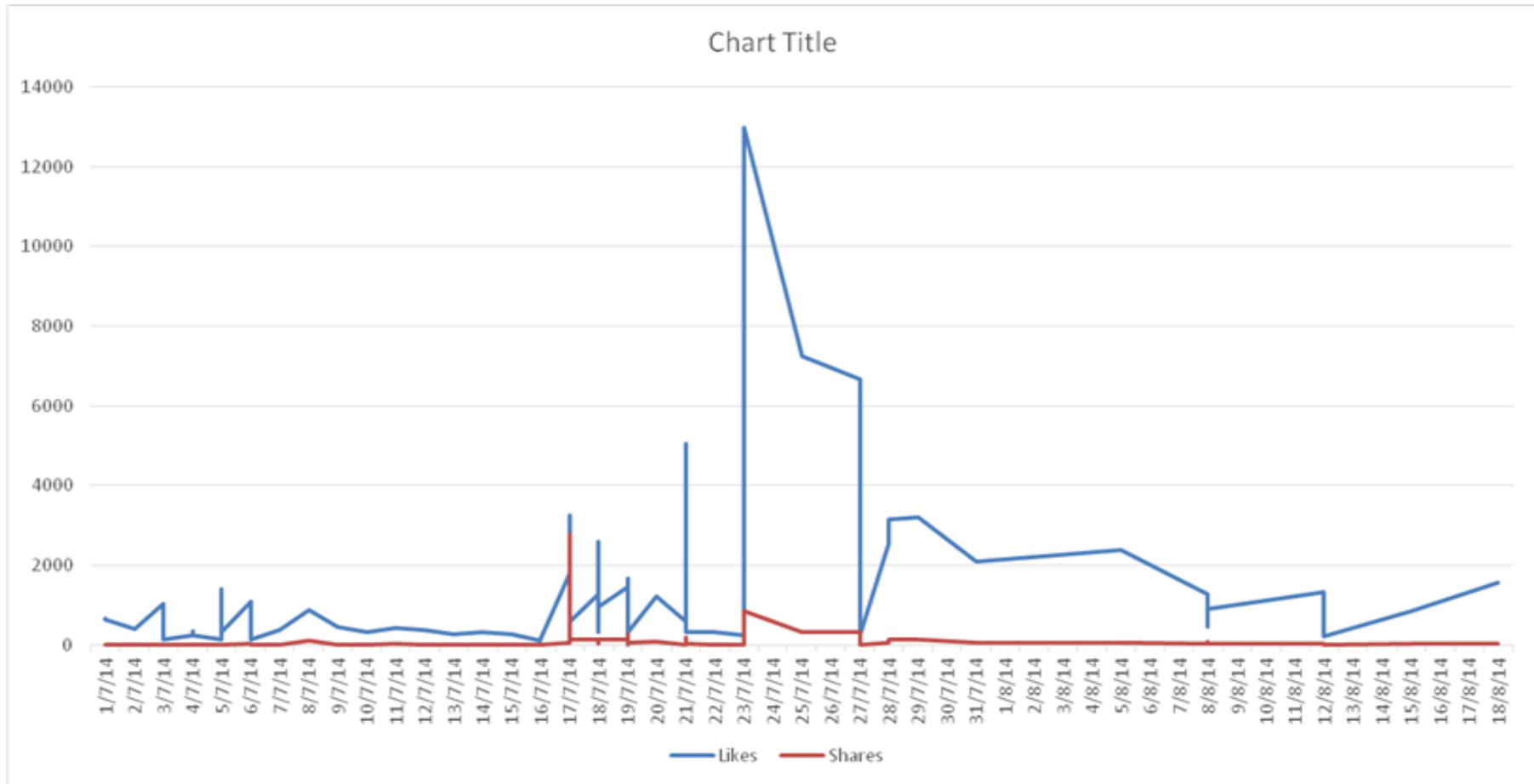


Figure 25: Chart showing the Facebook likes and shares for the pre-crisis (2 weeks before the crisis), crisis day and one month after the crisis

5.3 Content analysis of the Malaysia Facebook page.

I repeated the analysis process that I followed for the pilot study which used the content analysis guideline as explained chapter 3.

Data for the analysis was messages that were released by MAS through their organisation's website and official Facebook for the M17 crisis.

On the first day of the crisis (17/07/2104), three crisis response messages were posted in total. Similar statements were released on their Facebook pages but the Facebook page had more posting than the official website. five posting were made on the Facebook page on the day of the crisis with one of the posts representing the statement from the prime minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Najib Razak, and the third and fourth posts representing changes made to their cover and profile pictures.

In order to realise the posts made on the first day of the crisis and determine the sequence of the crisis information posts made on their Facebook page and website the timestamp of the Facebook page was compared with the timestamp of the statement released through their website which was converted to British summer time, which represents the Facebook timestamp (Appendix 1).

The identification of the timestamp of the posts helps to provide insights into how the posts were made and released to the public.

The first crisis information released by MAS was a notification which was released through their Facebook page at 4:51 pm (BST) on 17/07/2014 which was used to inform the public that they are entering a crisis with the loss of contact with M17, this post was however not made on their official website.

The 1st media statement released on their official website has a timestamp of 5:30 pm when converted to BST and their Facebook page has a timestamp of 5:39 pm. This implies that the media statement was first released through their website before it was posted on their Facebook page.

The press statement of the prime minster was timestamped 9:15 pm on their website and 10: 22 pm on their Facebook respectively. This also shows that the posting on the website was released before the Facebook posting.

The process of identifying the crisis response message employed by MAS in the pilot study was also repeated for the M17 crisis with the aim of identifying how MAS view their official website and Facebook page as a communication tool in managing their crisis.

The next section 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 gives a tabulation of the crisis response messages released on these two media channels in reaching the public. The layout of these messages will provide an insight to how MAS employed and view their official website and social media channel in managing the M17 crisis by looking at the message frequency, content etc. thereby depicting how consistent and integrated their crisis communication channels are.

5.3.1 Analysis of written corporate messages on the first day of the crisis for the Facebook page.

This section provides a summary of the CRS released by MAS for the M17 crisis to the public

The table below shows the crisis response messages released by MAS in managing the M17 crisis

Table 11: Summary of released crisis response messages on the first day of the M17 crisis on MAS's Facebook page.

Date and posting time	Facebook post	Comment
17/07/2014 @ 4:15pm	Notification	Gives details about the loss of contact with plane, flight route, and last known position and to follow their Twitter handle for more updates
17/07/2014 @ 5:39pm	Media statement	Confirms notification of the loss of contact with plane from Ukrainian ATC, plane type details, and flight route with departure and estimated arrival time, no of people on board and more details to follow.
17/07/2014 @ 9:30pm	Profile photo change	
17/07/2014 @ 9:35pm	Cover picture change	
17/07/2014 @ 10:24pm	Statement by PM of Malaysia	Hyperlink to the dark site for updates

5.3.2 Analysis of written corporate messages on the first day of the crisis for the official website.

The CRS released to the public by MAS through their official website is also explored to be able to provide understanding into how they used these different media in communicating with the public.

Table 12: Summary of released crisis response messages on the first day of the M17 crisis through MAS’s official website

Date and posting time	Official website	Comment
17/07/2014 @ 5:30 pm	1st media statement	Same information as was posted on the Facebook notifying the public about the loss in contact from Ukrainian airspace
17/07/2014 @ 9:15 pm	Statement by PM of Malaysia	This contained the full statement from the PM of Malaysia about his personal shock, the crisis details, information on the collective international collaboration for the SAR and fact finding mission of what happened, call for justice and negotiation with rebels to grant humanitarian corridor to the crash site and emotions towards the families and friend of the victims of the crash.

The second stage of the analysis process expects the researcher to be grounded in the theoretical knowledge of the researched field, I process I had gone through for the literature review chapter, and with this knowledge I was sure that the data collected is enough to provide answers to my research question of knowing the practice that MAS maintained in their Crisis communication on Facebook.

I then read through the data collected which were posting made by MAS on the first day of the M17 crisis breakout in order to familiarise, understand and make sense of the context of the message that MAS was passing to its stakeholders.

The next step of the analysis process is the coding of the data. At this stage, reading the data chronologically based on how they were released. I highlighted words that describe essential themes and made notes of them. This process is then repeated again to be sure that I didn't miss out on the understanding and interpretation that MAS was sending out through these messages. The identified words were then captured and coded into categories.

For example, the first message released by MAS for the M17 crisis was '[#MASAlert - [Malaysia Airlines has lost contact of flight MH 17operating from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur on 17 July 2014. The last known position was over Ukrainian airspace. For latest update, please follow our Twitter account @MAS'.

The context of this message are information for the what and where questions. Essential words like 'Malaysia Airlines has lost contact of flight MH17 operating from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur on 17 July 2014' in the first message released answers the 'what' crisis are you entering question while 'The last known position was over Ukrainian airspace' provided information on the 'where' question.

Once I achieved this, I then proceeded to make analytical construct from the knowledge about the context, drew inference from my findings and validating my findings by doing a comparative interpretation of my results with the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) .

The comparison of the themes and categories that emerged from the data with existing theory and literature is acceptable in qualitative content analysis research as it promotes validity and generalization (Kohlbacher, 2006).

I then linked the findings to my acquired crisis communication literature knowledge and interpreted them as instructing information. Instructing information are messages that are used

by the organisation when in crisis to update the public about what the crisis is, where and how to protect oneself i.e. information on the physical attributes of the crisis (Coombs, 2014).

Section 5.3.3 gives a tabulation of the released messages, the category and comparison with an existing crisis communication theory, SCCT.

5.3.3 Comparison between MAS crisis communication strategies on their Facebook page and SCCT's recommendation.

The purpose of this section is to provide more understanding into the crisis response strategy used by MAS in managing the M17 crisis on their social media channel and if it adheres to the guidelines provided by crisis communication theory.

Table 13: Evaluation of the SCCT recommendation and the CRS employed by MAS for their M17 crisis.

No	Statement	MAS Crisis Communication	SCCT recommendation
1	<p>[#MASalert - [Malaysia Airlines has lost contact of flight MH 17operating from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur on 17 July 2014. The last known position was over Ukrainian airspace.</p> <p>For latest update, please follow our Twitter account @MAS.</p>	<p>Instructing information that gave full disclosure that the organisation is in a crisis stage. This information tells the public that their plane M17 has gone missing. This information answers the ‘what’ and ‘where’ questions from the public</p>	<p>Instructing information which should contain information about the crisis.</p> <p>Represents the first-half based of the SCCT recommendation for crisis in the victim cluster</p>
2	<p>#MASalert - Media Statement1 -MH 17Incident Released at 12:30am/18 July 2014.</p> <p>Malaysia Airlines confirms it received notification from Ukrainian ATC that it had lost contact with flight MH17 at 1415 (GMT) at 30km from Tamak waypoint, approximately 50km from the Russia-Ukraine border. Flight MH17 operated on a Boeing 777 departed Amsterdam at 12.15pm (Amsterdam</p>	<p>More detailed Instructing information which included information about the crisis. It also included information that answer the ‘how’ question i.e. By their receiving notification from the Ukrainian ATC that they can’t contact with their plane.</p>	<p>Instructing information.</p>

	local time) and was estimated to arrive at Kuala Lumpur International Airport at 6.10 am (Malaysia local time) the next day. The flight was carrying 280 passengers and 15 crew onboard. More details to follow		
3	[#MASalert] Statement by Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Najib Razak on #MH17 Incident. http://bit.ly/MH17updates .	Instructing and adjusting information which included instructing information on the plane, information on the nationality of people on board, rescue (SAR) update and sympathy. He went further to provide information that the public need for their sense making for apportioning responsibility based on information of that they currently have.	Instructing and adjusting information with the message containing sympathy, corrective action and counselling. Represents the second-half base of the SCCT recommendation.

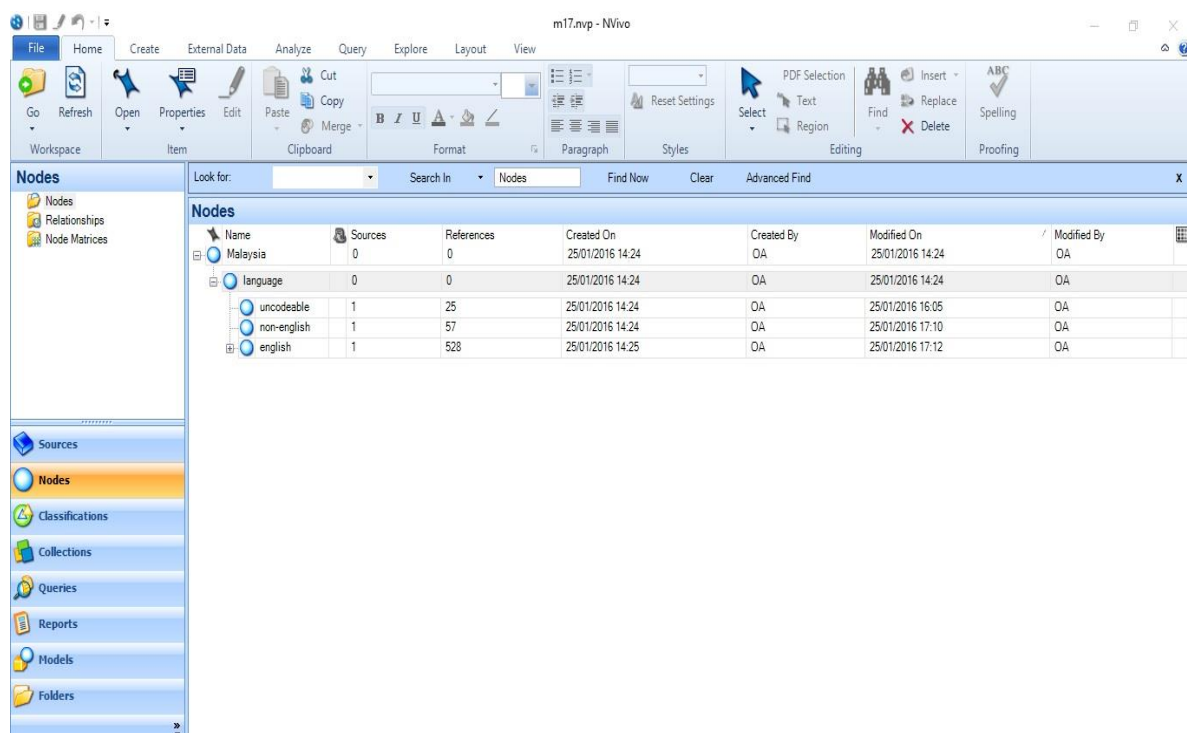
5.4 Analysis of comments to the first posting on their Malaysia Facebook.

For the main study, I replicated the analysis process I used for the pilot study by following Mayring (2014) guideline.

I used the data collected from the comments posted in response to the first post made by MAS their M17 crisis and followed the same process I used for the pilot study. This process enables me to test the replicability of the process I used for the M370 crisis.

Using my knowledge of the theoretical background and the sub-research question that I intend to answer, which is to know to know how the public reacted to MAS CRM. I applied the selection criterion for the analysis process which I did by first capturing the comments that were made in response to the first posting made by MAS when the crisis broke out.

I read through the collected data so as to familiarise myself with it and then proceeded to data cleaning by separating comments that were written in English, non-English, comments that were spam or unrelated to the crisis or MAS post into different nodes (themes) (Figure 26).



The screenshot shows the NVivo software interface with a word query for language-related themes. The 'Nodes' table is displayed, showing the following data:

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Malaysia	0	0	25/01/2016 14:24	OA	25/01/2016 14:24	OA
language	0	0	25/01/2016 14:24	OA	25/01/2016 14:24	OA
uncodeable	1	25	25/01/2016 14:24	OA	25/01/2016 16:05	OA
non-english	1	57	25/01/2016 14:24	OA	25/01/2016 17:10	OA
english	1	528	25/01/2016 14:25	OA	25/01/2016 17:12	OA

Figure 26: Word query for language-related theme

I then got myself familiar with the clean data (selected comments) as I did for the pilot study and read them line by line individually again and ran a word frequency query of the 100 most frequently repeated words, this is assumed to help in identifying themes and concepts (Bergin, 2011). Themes emerged along the process with a category label. As done with the pilot study, subsequent reading of comments were either subsumed into an already identified theme or give a new label. The process was repeated for until I got to the level of saturation where a new theme emerged i.e blame theme.

A total of 610 comments were posted in response to the first posting on their Facebook page which was used to notify the public that the organisation is in crisis with the loss of contact with the M17 plane over Ukrainian airspace. Of these comments, 528 comments were included for data extraction and analysis as they meet the inclusion criteria, 82 comments were deemed uncodeable as they either were not related to the post or non-English comments.

The flow diagram below illustrates the data extraction and analysis of the comments included for this analysis.

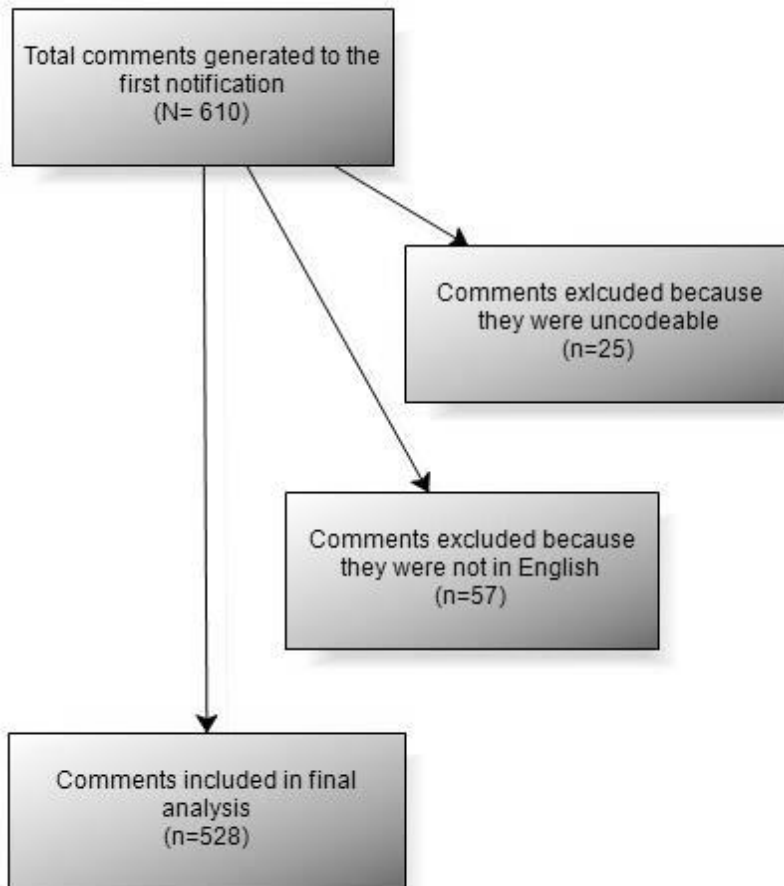


Figure 27: Flow diagram for the data extraction and analysis of the comments for M17

Of the total 528 comments that met the inclusion criteria, some comments however, fell into more than one category.

5.4.1 Themes of the comments to first posting on Malaysia Airlines Facebook page

In the first stage of coding and theme identification, I identified some recurring and similar patterns and themes that were similar to that of the comments of the M370 analysis however, a new theme emerged in this analysis as some comments were apportioning crisis responsibility as to who should be held accountable for the cause of the crisis.

The main themes and codes that emerged after the coding process were the **perspective related** theme, **Information related** theme, **emotion related** theme with the same coding measures as used for the M370 crisis.

The **emotion related** theme represents comments that included more of prayers to God/ Allah, blessings for the passengers and crew members and their families, sadness, surprise, and concern for those on board.

Figure 28 below gives a visual representation of the word frequency query using NVIVO software. Pray, Mh17 and sad represents the three most recurring words in this theme.

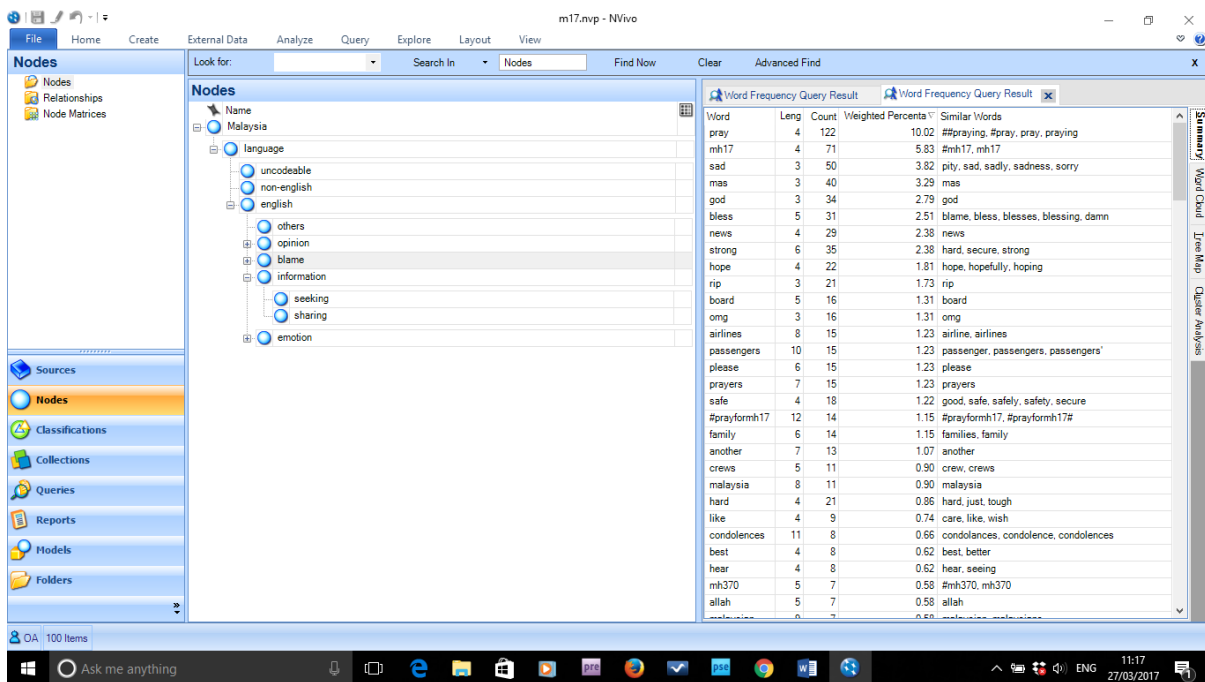


Figure 28: Word frequency query for most recurring words

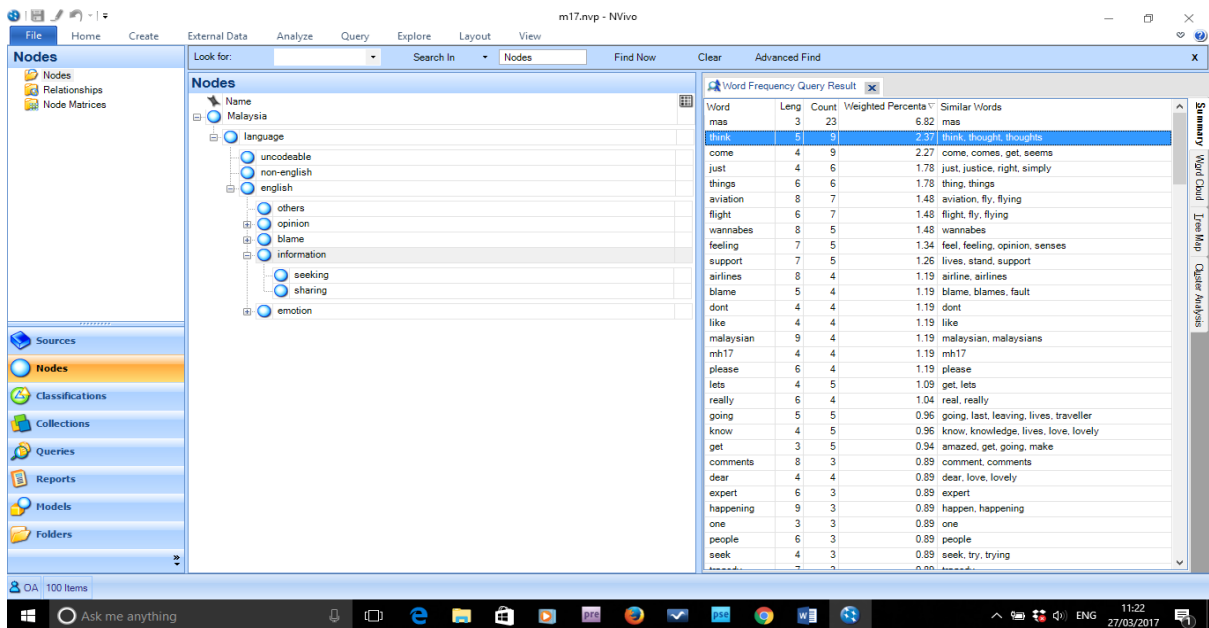


Figure 30: Word frequency query for perspective related theme

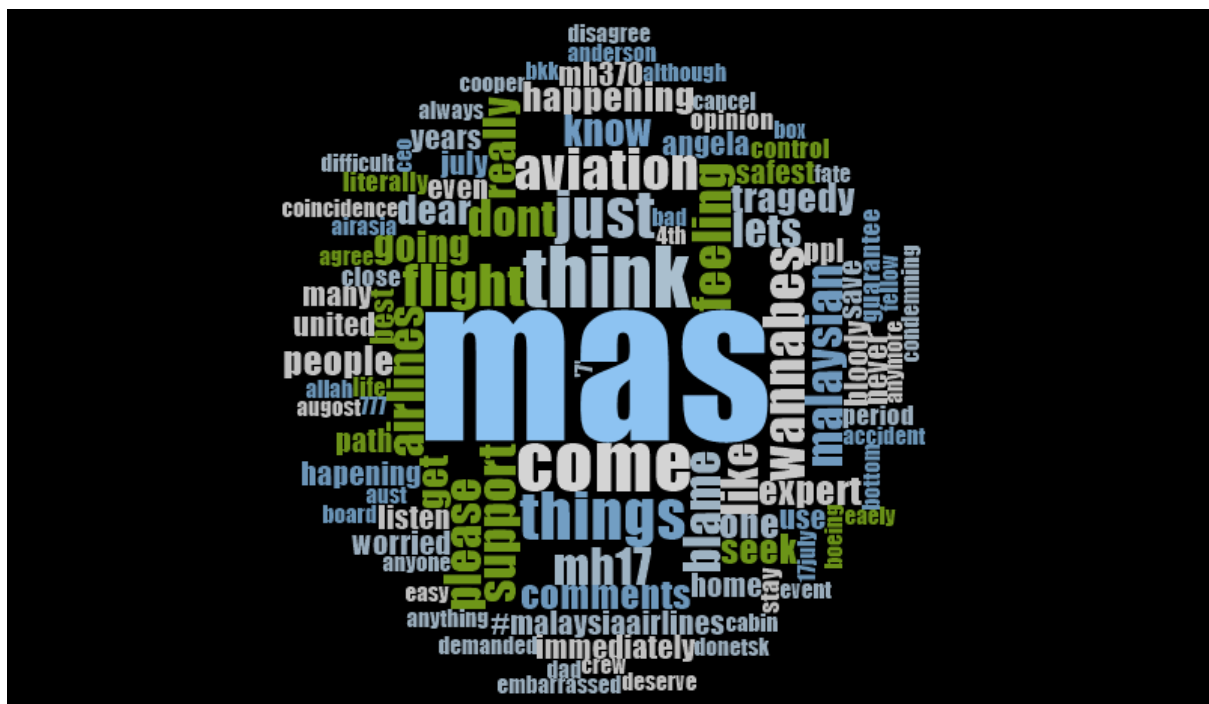


Figure 31: Word frequency cloud for perspective related theme

The **Information related** theme were contexts where the comments were educating on the cause of the crisis or providing information to the public about the crisis.

However, a new theme emerged in the data for the M17 crisis which was categorised as the Blame theme.

The **blame theme** represents comments that attributed crisis responsibility for M17 as MAS had a prior history of a missing plane that occurred some months back and the fact that the plane was travelling over a crisis zone even made it more so easier for their stakeholders to see the need to apportion blame for who was responsible for the crash. This type of sense-making has great impact on the reputation of the organisation and their business continuity.

The blame theme included comments that absolved MAS as being responsible for the crisis, some comments blamed MAS, the terrorist and some attributed it to fate as MAS was not the only airline that used the route but just unfortunate to be the one that was targeted and crashed.

Figure 34 below gives a visual representation of the word frequency query using NVIVO software.

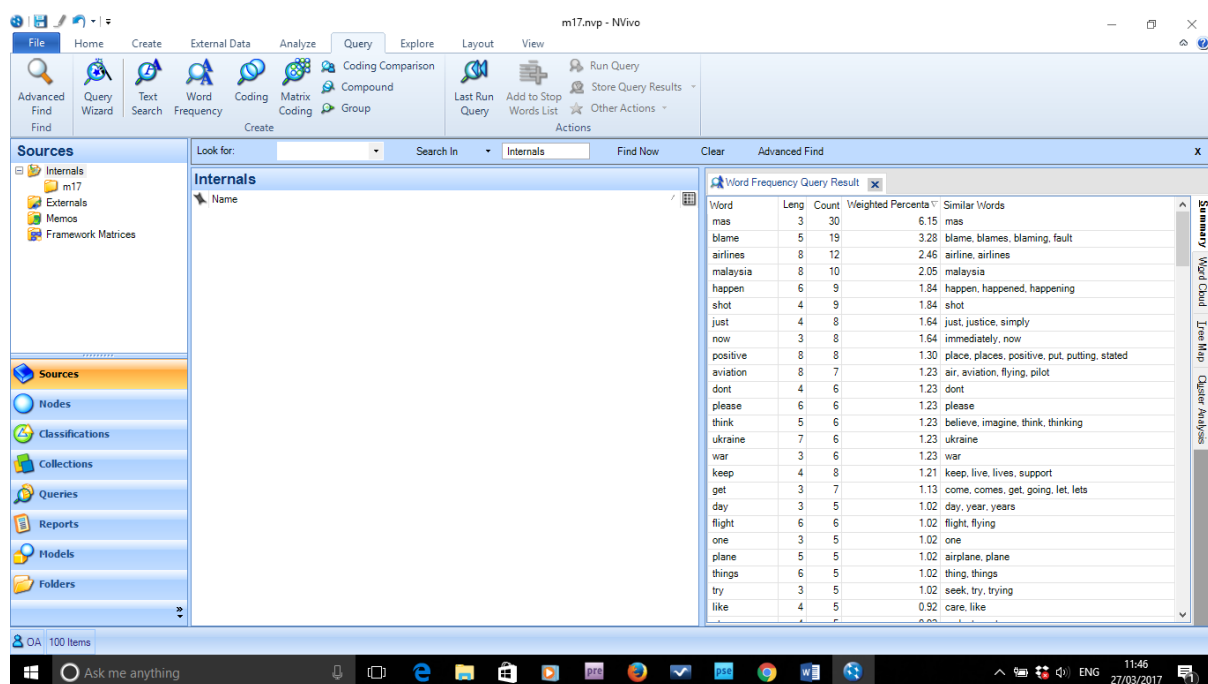


Figure 34: Word frequency query for the blame theme

Table 14: Themes from the comments to the first post of MAS

Theme	Percentage
Blame	9%
Emotion related	65%
Information related	17%
Perspective related	5%
Others	4%
Total	100%

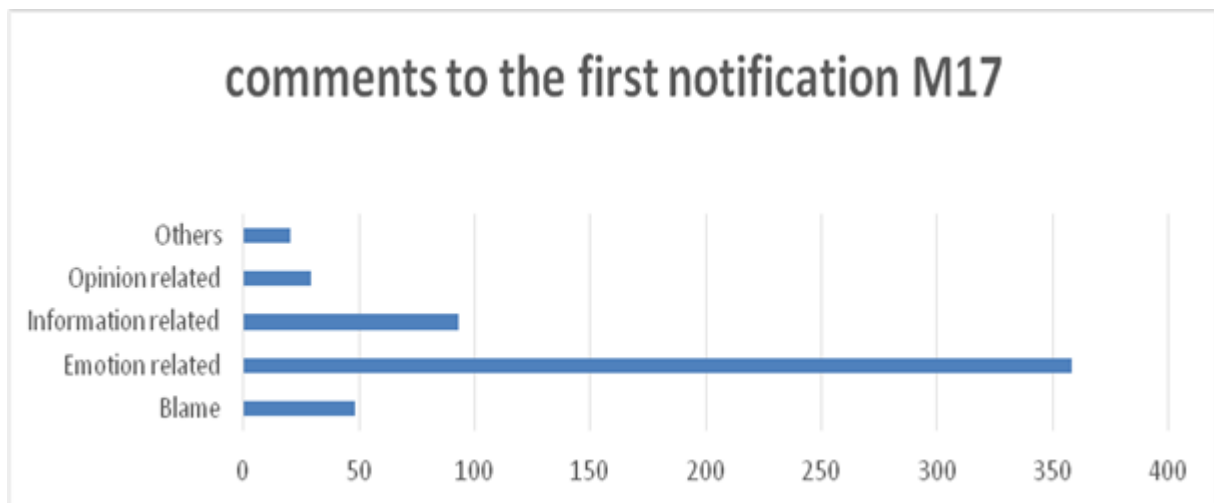


Figure 36: Graph showing the no of comments in each theme

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the data analysis and results of the main study using data collected through observation and content analysis in exploring how MAS applied their organisational website and Social media channels in their crisis communication strategy. The next chapter, chapter six discusses the findings of this chapter.

6.0 Discussions of findings in relation to the research questions and literature.

This chapter provides the discussion on the findings from the data analysis of the previous chapter for both the pilot study and the main study. The results for the pilot study are included in this thesis because it is viewed as an exceptional and special case as the findings presented does not only provide a platform to prove the reliability and validity of this study but also that future researchers will find this useful for upcoming research as this is still an unresolved case as of the writing of this thesis.

The chapter starts with the findings from the pilot study and the answering of the research questions with the process replicated for the main study as well.

6.1 Pilot study

This section discusses the results from the research finding in the previous section in answering the research questions for this thesis and also relates it to the theoretical framework from the literature review of chapter two of this thesis.

The research question that was aimed to answer for this thesis is: **How did Malaysia Airline (MAS) use Facebook in their crisis communication strategy?** Three sub-research questions were introduced to narrow down the main research question to a more focused approach.

SR1. What tactic did MAS employ in their mediated crisis response?

SR2. What practice did MAS maintain in their crisis communication on Facebook?

SR3. How did the public react to MAS's CRM?

In answering the first sub-research question which aimed to explore the type of tactic that MAS employed in their crisis response to the M370 crisis, the result shows that the news of the missing plane was reported within the first 24 hours of its occurrence on their webpage, Facebook and Twitter pages although it was reported over six hours after it lost contact with the air traffic control. The crisis was however responded to in both the traditional mainstream and social media.

The organisation's website served as the information hub of their crisis communication as it has the hyperlink that takes the audience to the dark site and their social media sites. However,

it only provided a one-way crisis communication process as it did not have any facilities to communicate or interact with the public.

The one-way communication strategy was only limited to their website as the Facebook page also switched from a bi-direction communication process on the day of the crisis to an un-monitored bi-directional communication process whereby the audience interacted with each other but there was no interaction from the organisation in the comments section

Although MAS used both their traditional and social media channels in their crisis communicating strategy, it was however noted that the connecting hyperlinks that takes the reader to the dark site from the social media channels like Facebook became unresponsive due to the inactivation of the dark site as it is only used when the organisation is experiencing crisis in order to reduce the traffic pressure on their normal website. A click on the hyperlink says *“we can't find the page you're looking for; we've done some spring cleaning to our site in order to serve your needs better. As such, the page you are looking for has probably been moved. We sincerely apologise for the inconvenience caused”*. This illustrates that social media channel like Facebook pages is not a full historical curator of crisis response messages as messages are lost when it is deleted or the connecting hyperlinks cease to exist. It is however different on their official website as the crisis information were archived for the public to access.

Malaysia Airlines incorporated (adopted) their social media platforms in responding to their crisis of the missing MH370 plane in conjunction with their websites and traditional media for their news releases with multimedia effects employed in their crisis communication. However, their Facebook page does not include the video or any hyperlink that connects the audience to the press conference video but rather contain only the transcript of the press conference by their group CEO.

The use of mixed motive approach by the airline company also supports Taylor and Perry (2005) findings that organisations are adopting a mixed motive approach to the internet usage in crisis response.

The second sub-research question aimed to answer the practice that MAS maintain in their crisis communication on Facebook. This question was answered by exploring the crisis response messages released by MAS in relation to the M370 crisis with the aim of identifying the strategies employed.

The use of the SCCT as the theoretical framework for this analysis which expects the organisation in crisis to first identify the type of crisis they are experiencing. This identification will support them in knowing the best applicable crisis response message in communicating with the public in relation to the crisis, the crisis type and the type of damage that comes with it. This will have an impact on the sense-making of the crisis by the public as this information discloses the type of crisis responsibility which also defines the reputation threat.

For the M370 crisis, the identification of the crisis type was not easily possible as it was an unusual event as MAS management could not easily ascertain the crisis was a victim, accident or preventable crisis. This difficulty however did not prevent MAS from managing their crisis as they activated the dark site as expected of any airline company experiencing crisis in the aviation industry, and concurrently posted messages to keep the public and media informed using their social media channel like Facebook.

This action portrays that they perceive their social media platforms as an extension of the traditional crisis communication channels as the same messages were disseminated to the media and public through their website, Facebook and Twitter accounts.

The content of their messages contained mainly instructing information which is used to tell the public what happened, how to further protect them from further harm and measures being taken by the organisation to prevent a reoccurrence. It also contained adjusting information which is information that helps the public to adjust psychologically, this follows and complies with the SCCT crisis response strategy guidelines.

In the event of a crisis, SCCT advises the organisation to release instructing and adjusting information as soon as the organisation is aware of the crisis provided the crisis has minimal crisis responsibility, no history of similar crisis or poses a positive or neutral pre-crisis relationship. However, the assigning of crisis responsibility by the public for the M370 crisis was a difficult one as there was little or no information for them to base their judgment on coupled with the fact that the crisis was an unusual one that befell a leading airline company that seem to have a positive pre-crisis relationship with its customer.

The provision of instructing information helped the stakeholders to know what is happening as the crisis unfolds, and gives the crisis team the perception that the organisation is in control of the crisis as the public rely on them for the crisis information and their crisis management

strategy with their action translating to factors that will promote their business continuity (Coombs, 2007).

The processing of crisis information helps the public to cope better psychologically with the occurrence of a crisis as this provides some reassurance that their safety is important to the organisation and the understanding of the crisis news removes some of the uncertainty and helplessness that its lack of or unavailability of information might inflict on the public.

Malaysia Airlines did refrain from using internalizing information for reputational management on the first day of the crisis as this would have been perceived as being insensitive by the public for them to be talking about themselves and their past reputation when people are suffering due to a crisis that identifies with their organisation.

Once the crisis type has been identified, the next step is to match the crisis response strategy according to SCCT but with the difficulty of pinning the M370 to a crisis type, Malaysia Airlines began to use the **Diminish crisis response strategy**. Through the first media statement where they acknowledge the loss of contact with the plane as this occurrence can be interpreted as something beyond the control of the organisation neither would they intentionally harm the passengers, their crew and plane.

The second media statement which was the speech by the group CEO, Ahmad Jauhari Yahya, with an opening statement that indicated the loss by saying “*We deeply regret that we have lost all contacts with flight MH370 which departed Kuala Lumpur at 12.41 am earlier this morning bound for Beijing*”. The *regret CRS* shows that Malaysia Airlines feels sad about the crisis as they recognize severity that comes with the loss of contact with an airplane, they however did not accept responsibility for the cause of the crisis as there was no reason for the organisation to do so. This response is accepted as showing compassion to the victims of the crisis and their families does not translate to accepting responsibility for the crisis by the organisation. MAS were able to show compassion without accepting responsibility for the cause of the crisis. Their use of the *concern CRS* for the victims and their families by expressing that their thoughts are with the victims and their families, the act of notification of next of kin before giving full details to the public falls under the deal crisis response strategy (Coombs, 2006)

MAS also used *ingratiation* as their CRS which is used to praise the stakeholders or remind them of the organisation’s good work according to the SCCT. MAS acknowledged their

stakeholder's concern by writing that "*we understand everyone's concern on MH370 pax & crew*". This statement acknowledges the stakeholder's concern and support and also went further by the content of their last message on the first day of the crisis when they posted that "*We would like to humbly ask all Malaysians and people around the world to pray for flight MH370*". This positioned MAS as a victim of the crisis too.

The dominant crisis communication strategies present in their statement are **diminish** (Excuse depicting that the loss was beyond their control) and **rebuild** crisis response (by offering compensation to the victim's family). MAS did not make use of the apology crisis response as there was no need for them to accept full responsibility for the loss of the plane based on the information they had and going by the fact that what happened to the plane is still unknown despite part of its debris being found.

This justifies MAS crisis response strategy by accepting that they are in crisis without accepting full responsibility for the crisis based on the facts available. By responding in a way that shows that it is an occurrence beyond their control, they lessened the attribution of crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2006; 2015).

Since the aim of the organisation is to be able to continue its business operation after the crisis, its crisis communication strategy goes beyond its ability to reduce the crisis responsibility attributed by the public but to also protect and reduce further reputation damage to its name for its business continuity. This justifies the decision MAS crisis team not to only use the diminish crisis response strategy but to combine it with the rebuild response strategy which are applicable to organisations whose crisis falls within the accident victim cluster. This helps to restore the organisation's legitimacy by showing that the organisation is a socially responsible one that meets the public expectations of care and conduct (Coombs, 2006)

One of the guidelines for effective crisis management is to have a visible spokesperson (CEO) to portray effective leadership communication (BS 11200:2014; Coombs, 2014; Ulmer, 2001). Malaysia Airlines took steps to make sure that its upper management was visible to the public in their crisis management.

The dominant figure of the organisation, the Group Chief Executive Officer, Ahmad Jauhari Yahya released a press statement on MH370 Incident on the first day and was a visible spokesperson for the organisation in their time of crisis. His statement complies with the

content recommendations of a crisis response (Coombs, 1999a) as it contained information about the crisis, their crisis management efforts and compassion to the victims of the crisis.

On the 29th of January 2015, the plane's disappearance was however declared as an accident so as to fulfil the legal requirement to usher in the compensation procedure for the families of those affected by the crisis.

The third sub-question examines the public's reaction to MAS's crisis response messages. The answering of the question using their Facebook page in capturing the public's sense-making of the post is significant because it provides an opportunity for empirically examining the traditional crisis communication theories with real crisis and reactions as Facebook provides an opportunity to access the public's responses to the traditional crisis response messages posted on their wall.

Although the emotional related comments had a higher percentage than other comment theme, with the comments having negative emotions as it involves people's lives, the commenters did not hold MAS responsible for the loss of the flight despite their lateness in reporting the loss to the public, they instead posted negative emotions that depicted sadness and offering of prayers for the successful location of the missing plane without showing anger towards the organisation for their action.

6.2 Main study M17

This section discusses the results from the research finding in the previous section and how it answered the research questions set out for this thesis. It also relates the findings to the theoretical framework from the literature review section of this thesis.

The main research question for this thesis is: **How did Malaysia Airline (MAS) use Facebook in their crisis communication strategy?** In order to answer the questions adequately, three sub-research questions were introduced to narrow down the main research question to a more focused approach.

SR1. What tactic did MAS employ in their mediated crisis response for M17 crisis?

SR2. What practice did MAS maintain in their crisis communication on Facebook for the M17 crisis?

SR3. How did the public react to MAS's CRM?

In answering the **first sub-research question** which aimed to explore the type of tactic that MAS employed in their crisis response to the M17 crisis, the research result shows that MAS was prompt in notifying the public about their crisis as they sent out notification through both the traditional and social media outlets. The announcement to the public that the Ukrainian ATC has lost contact with the plane was reported within the first 24 hours on their webpage and social media platforms. MAS applied the stealing thunder approach in disclosing information to the public about the M17 mishap

The organisation's website was also used as the information hub of their crisis communication just like the M370 crisis with hyperlink that takes the audience from their social media sites to the website for more detailed information on the crisis and the crisis response messages. As it was in the M370 crisis, their website only provided a one-way crisis communication process as it does not have any facilities to communicate or interact with the public.

The Facebook page crisis communication strategy was however different having looked at the pages for comparative purpose. Malaysia, Netherlands and Australian Facebook pages were observed as these countries experienced the highest number of casualty from the crash. It was noticed that the Australian and the Netherlands pages had fully bi-directional communication process at the onset of the crisis with staff of the organisation responding to the public comments, however the Malaysia page changed to an un-monitored bi-directional communication process whereby the audience interacted with each other but there was no interaction from the organisation with the public in the comments section.

For the M17 crisis, MAS did not activate the dark site immediately after the notification of the crash probably due to its being used earlier for the MH370 crisis which was still ongoing as of the crash. The absence of the dark site however had impact on their website due to increase in traffic as the public's interest increased in knowing more about the crisis and therefore, naturally, will visit the website of the organisation that is in crisis as they assume it to be a platform that they will provide them with authentic information about the crisis and crisis management.

For the M17 case, the public identified MAS's website as an authentic source to go for the crisis news as their website experienced an increase in visit with MAS acknowledging that the full version of the website is unavailable due to overwhelming traffic (figure 21), this finding supports one of the suggestion for best practices for crisis communication discussed in the literature review section (Chapter 2). This best practice suggests that an organisation that is

experiencing crisis in the airline industry should activate its 'dark site' as soon as there is a major accident for the public to access for crisis news to prevent pressure on the full website which might lead to service disruption for other customers who visits the site for their normal service.

MAS however overcame the absence of the dark site by making effective use of the social media channels for their crisis communication strategy by directing the public to follow their social media channel for more update on the crisis news.

Another advantage that comes with their not using the "dark site" is that the redirecting hyperlinks on their social media pages that takes the reader to the organisation's website for more detailed information is still active after the crisis because it is directly linked to the website and not the "dark site" like it is for the MH370 crisis which becomes unavailable once the organisation feels the traffic to the website has reduced or that the crisis is over and they have gotten to the post-crisis or pre-crisis stage. With this, the crisis response messages are curated and can be used for full historical purposes in documenting the organisation's messages to the public before, during and after the crisis.

Malaysia Airlines incorporated (adopted) their social media platforms in responding to their crisis of the M17 plane crash in conjunction with their websites and traditional media for their news releases with multimedia effects employed in their crisis communication which is similar to their action in the MH370 and done even more promptly which shows that they were able to learn from their previous crisis where their stakeholder's blamed them for some of their actions. These findings further support the suggestion by Jin, Lin and Austin (2014) that the adoption of social media into the organisation's crisis communication strategy is no longer a matter of choice as MAS adopted their social media channels for crisis communication.

However, their Facebook page does not include the video or any hyperlink that connects the audience to the press conference video but rather contain only the transcript of their press conference.

MAS used the mixed motive approach for their crisis communication strategy for the M17 crisis by combining both the traditional and internet by their use of their organisation website and social media outlets in responding to the crisis. This finding supports Taylor and Perry (2005) conclusion that organisations are now adopting the mixed motive approach in responding to their crisis by using both their traditional and social media channels in

communicating with their stakeholders. Figure 37 shows the information flow between the organisation and the communication channels.

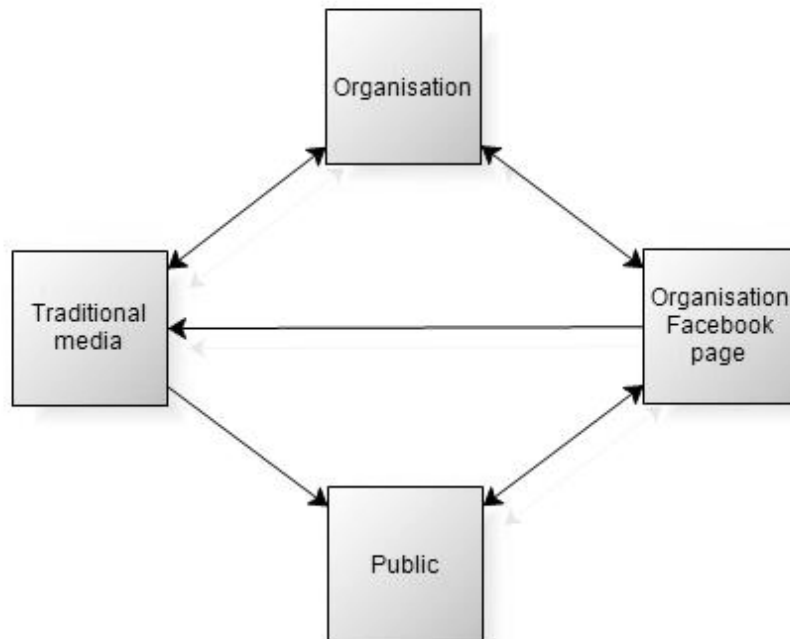


Figure 37: Flow of crisis information for the MAS crisis

On the other hand, the findings do not lend support to Taylor and Perry (2005) findings that the adoption rate of the use of the internet is not growing as expected as MAS used both the traditional, official website and social media concurrently in all their crisis communication process.

The **second sub-research question** aimed to explore the type of practice that MAS maintain in their crisis communication on their Facebook page was answered by exploring the crisis response messages released by MAS in managing the M17 crisis by identifying the crisis communication strategies employed.

The findings in this research for the main study shows that organisations are adopting the traditional crisis response messages on their internet and social media channels and are not only adopting the traditional tactics but also integrating the internet into their crisis response as suggested by Taylor and Perry (2005).

The use of social media channels like Facebook by MAS provides a bi-directional communication process thereby addressing one of the shortcomings identified with the use on

traditional crisis management tactics on the organisation's website which only allows a one-way communication process from the organisation (Taylor & Perry, 2005)

The SCCT which is used as the theoretical framework for this exploration suggests that the organisation in crisis first identify their crisis type as it is assumed that this knowledge will support them in knowing the most suitable crisis response message for communicating with the public (Coombs, 2007). This is based on the assumption that a type of crisis requires a tailored type of crisis response that will protect the organisation from further damage and help quench the crisis fire and prevent it from further escalation, as the information released to the public is used for their sense-making in identification of the crisis responsibility and the reputational threat that accompanies it.

For the M17 crisis, the identification of the crisis type by the first spokesperson (the Malaysia prime minister) where after giving instructing information about the plane, passengers and the SAR effort informed the public that the "Ukrainian authorities believe that the plane was shot down" and that the fact is yet to be verified by the Malaysian government and if found true, a call for justice will prevail.

The information included in this statement puts MAS in a position of not accepting responsibility for the crisis as the crisis was caused by an external force and based on the report by the Ukrainian government, the crisis can be classified as a terrorist act which is defined by SCCT as an intentional crisis that is caused by an external agent. This supports the assumption that crisis origin interacts with the crisis response messages released by the organisation when managing a crisis (Jin, Lin & Austin, 2014) as MAS was able to take a victim position based on the source of the crisis and evade crisis responsibility by calling for justice in their statement.

Although, MAS did not activate their "dark site" when the crisis erupted as they were still in the MH370 crisis, the organisation effectively communicated with the public by releasing timely information through the mainstream traditional media outlets and their social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. This suggests that crisis in the airline industry can be well managed even in the absence of a dark site as long as there are other primary sources that are directly linked to the organisation for crisis news.

With this, the researcher was able to assume that MAS perceive their social media platforms as an additional crisis communication channel to the traditional mainstream media outlets in

communicating with the public when in crisis as all the information released through these channels were done concurrently with similar content.

On the first day of the crisis, the content of their crisis response message in the first two releases contained mainly instructing information which is basically used to inform the public about what is happening to the organisation by releasing information that answers the “what” questions of the public. Subsequent message from the organisation included both instructing and adjusting information which helps the public to know what has happened, what is being done to prevent reoccurrence and messages that helps the public to cope psychologically with the crisis information that they have just received. Their response to the M17 crisis follows the guidelines as advised by SCCT in responding to organisational crisis.

As the M17 crisis falls under the terrorist act which is in the victim cluster of SCCT, the plane crash was a major and fatal accident which was caused by an external agent as it was shot down by a missile externally which according to Coombs comes with minimal organisational attribution of responsibility to the affected organisation by their stakeholders provided they have no history of similar crisis. However, the fact that Malaysia Airlines has a recent history of the missing M370 airline which shrouded in mystery and still unresolved as of the M17 plane crash coupled with their decision to fly over a crisis prone area. These two factors could impact the stakeholder’s perception of the crisis attribution and hold Malaysia Airlines responsible for the crisis which comes with a severe reputation threat, the Malaysian prime minister was able to provide information that that based on what they know, the plane was shot down, this information will help in reducing the reputational damage and the crisis responsibility by the public. They communicated what they know and their readiness in finding the true events that led to the M17 in conjunction with other major countries to help bring justice.

The content of the instructing and adjusting information released portrays to the public that MAS knows what is happening to their organisation, helps to feed the need for the provision of crisis information by the public and also gives the crisis team that perspective that they are in the know and have control of the M17 crisis as the public rely on them on getting the needed information instead of going to other sources for such information thereby enhancing their business continuity (Coombs, 2007).

As the crisis communication strategy in crisis management according to crisis scholars is expected to contain information on the cause of the crisis, responsibility apportioning,

controlling what is being reported, preventing further harm, and retelling the crisis story if needed as all this information are being processed by the stakeholders in interpreting the crisis.

As expected based on the SCCT framework, MAS did not use any internalizing information that promoted their organisation as this act could be termed as being insensitive by the public who expects the organisation to identify with the grief of the victims of the crisis.

After identifying the crisis type, the organisation is expected to match the type of crisis with the crisis response strategy as stipulated by SCCT which expects the crisis that falls in the victim cluster. The first and second posting released to the public were used to announce the acknowledgement that the Ukrainian ATC has lost contact with the M17. This can be interpreted as using the **Diminish** crisis response strategy which allows them to tell the public that the plane is not in contact as it is expected to and that loss in contact as of when the message was released is beyond the control of the organisation as such event hurts the organisation as well as the victim. They, also using the **deny** scapegoating CRS by announcing that the plane was shot down, shifted the cause of the crisis from them to the missile that brought it down.

Their announcement for people to follow their Twitter handle for more updates shows that they are still in need of more information as an organisation in order to make sense of the cause of the plane crash. This will then determine the type of position to take in their crisis response messages that will be released to the public, as they know the impact that a wrong message or action can have on what becomes of the crisis, their reputation and business continuity in the long run.

As an organisation that has a similar crisis history, it was easy for the public to attribute responsibility of the cause of the crash to the organisation for negligence by their flying over a crisis prone airspace. This was handled in the third posting which represents the statement made by the Malaysian Prime Minister Dato' Seri Najib Razak on the M17 crisis where he started with an emotional statement by expressing that he “was informed of the terrible and deeply shocking news that a Malaysia Airlines jet went down in eastern Ukraine” and went further to give information about the speculated cause of the crash- external agent, even though they could not verify of the authenticity of the claim by the Ukrainian authorities.

Malaysia Airlines used this detailed press release statement by Prime Minister Dato' Seri Najib Razak, evidenced in the third posting, to absolve themselves from the responsibility of the crisis and thus protect their reputation by employing the diminish strategy. He declared that the

route was authorised and declared safe by the International Civil Aviation Organisation and International Air Transportation Association and not subject to any travel restriction. This statement absolves the organisation of using a crisis prone airspace to fly as it also shows that other airlines used the route for flying as well, they were just unfortunate to be a terrorist target thereby shifting the blame from them and taking a position from accepting the crisis responsibility.

The statement by the Prime Minister Dato' Seri Najib Razak contained the **diminish strategy** (by depicting to the public that the loss of contact with the plane was beyond their control) as the **primary crisis response strategy**. They applied the **excuse strategy** by suggesting their inability to control the event that triggered the tragedy as it was externally motivated. The **scapegoating** CRS was also used to blame the group that shot the missile. MAS through this statement acknowledged that there is a crisis in their organisation but weakened the attribution of the responsibility for the cause of the crisis to the organisation.

However, as expected in the airline industry, the rebuild CRS has to be adopted by compensating the victim's family when there is a plane accident.

The **victimage strategy** was employed as their **secondary crisis response strategy** by portraying themselves also as victim of the unfortunate incident, they showed compassion and respect to the victims and their families and refrained from accepting responsibility for the cause of the crisis thereby decreasing the attribution of crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2006). These crisis responses used by Malaysia Airlines follows the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) suggestions of how to respond to a crisis that falls into the victim crisis cluster.

Having given enough information to the public for their crisis responsibility attribution, they went further to protect their reputation as their business continuity is dependent on this factor, MAS went further by releasing a statement on their decision to reroute all European flights to use alternative routes on the following day which is regarded as a rectification strategy under the mortification employed by an organisation to prevent a reoccurrence, helps to portray that as an organisation that is responsible for their customer's wellbeing and also improve the confidence of future user of their airline of their safety. This action supports the re-establishment of the organisation's legitimacy by showing that the organisation meets the public expectations of care and conduct by their portrayal of being socially responsible (Coombs, 2006)

The crisis response strategies employed by Malaysia Airlines in the first day of the crisis was able to achieve the objective of an effective crisis response strategy by shaping the attribution of the crisis, change the perception of Malaysia Airlines in the public's eyes and also reduce the negative effect generated by the crisis (Coombs, 1995).

As identified in the literature review section that one of the prerequisites of having an effective crisis management is the provision of a visible spokesperson that the public can see and identify as the face of the organisation thereby portraying that they have an effective leadership communication who is part of the team handling the crisis (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2014; Ulmer, 2001). The Malaysian Prime minister was made visible within the first 24 hours of the crisis occurrence to address the public and feed them on the crisis information that is available based on what is known and what is being done in managing the crisis and its victims (Coombs, 2014).

The **third sub-question** which examined the public's reaction to MAS's crisis response messages. This question was answered by capturing and analysing the comments in response to the first posting made by MAS's on their Facebook page.

The analysis is significant to the crisis communication study because it provides an opportunity for examining the traditional crisis communication theories with real crisis and reactions as Facebook provides an opportunity to access the public's responses to the traditional crisis response messages posted on their wall thereby using real life cases instead of student's data which is found limiting my crisis scholars.

The findings from the M17 analysis identified one more additional theme, blame theme, during the coding process to the three earlier identified themes from the MH370 coding. The blame theme represents nine percent of the total comments coded for this analysis.

Emotion related theme.

As explained in the literature review, section 2.6,4, that emotion is an important factor in crisis communication with the emotional reaction of the non-victim stakeholders to a crisis represents a major determinant of their future interaction and relationship with the organisation after the crisis experience.

The comments from the non-victim stakeholders that had emotional content was very high. The theme represents the highest number of comments for the MH370 (87% of the total

comments) and M17 (65% of the total comments) crisis than any of the other themes that merged during the coding process.

Having a visual look at the word frequency cloud (figure 13) shows words like pray, sad, god, bless, hope, condolences, RIP to be prominent words used by stakeholders in their emotional reaction to the crisis news. When a crisis results in loss of lives, the non-victim stakeholders are more likely to respond emotionally to the crisis news, stakeholders wrote about their emotional feelings regarding the crisis news without response or consolation from other commenters, they wrote their feelings on hearing the tragic news that MAS was experiencing by expressing their sympathy. These findings lend support to the evidence that the public uses social media channels for emotional support when there is a crisis (Stephens & Malone, 2009).

The occurrence of MAS crises was a tragic occurrence that resulted with high fatalities, a crisis that falls into the victim cluster of the SCCT model because it was an externally activated crisis and with this type of crisis, SCCT assumes that there is a correlation between crisis responsibility and the emotional reaction to a crisis by its stakeholders with crisis responsibility being negatively related to sympathy (Coombs, 2007). This assumption is evident in this study.

The majority of the comments in this theme expresses their sadness on the news and offers prayers and supplications for the victims, their families e.g. **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**. The emotional post was not only expressed to the victims on board and their families but also to MAS for example, **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions** with another post communicating support for MAS **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**. Some posted encouraging comments saying **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**

Some comments in this theme also depicts spiritual connotation by the offering of supplications to God for the victims and their families with some calling on others to **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**.

An interpretation of crisis that makes stakeholders express sympathy for the organisation brings little reputational threat to the organisation as long as the organisation provides instructing and adjusting information that will support the stakeholders to have knowledge about the crisis and help them cope psychologically with the crisis news as discussed on chapter two, thereby helping them to deal with their emotional reaction to the crisis news.

Even for the MH370 crisis that the crisis origin is unexplainable, the commenters did not hold MAS responsible for the loss of the flight despite their lateness in reporting the loss to the public, they instead posted negative emotions that depicted sadness and offering of prayers for the successful location of the missing plane without showing anger towards the organisation for their action.

These findings support SCCT assumption that organisations that are experiencing crisis that falls into the victim cluster evokes sympathy from their stakeholders that are not directly affected by the crisis.

Blame related theme

The blame theme represents comments that attributed crisis responsibility for the M17 crisis. The comments in this theme apportioned crisis responsibility using the crisis origin. Crisis origin as suggested in section 2.6 of the literature review chapter interacts with the stakeholder's opinion of crisis responsibility with externally aggravated crisis having mild crisis responsibility (Jin et al., 2014).

The identification of the crisis type by the stakeholders is assumed to have a direct impact on how they frame their initial sense making of the crisis with the information used in the attribution of crisis responsibility as explained in chapter two of this thesis. The M17 crisis being an externally activated crisis positions the organisation in the victim cluster is expected to come with a weak crisis responsibility that poses a mild reputational threat to the organisation as crisis literature suggests (Section 2.6).

However, for this crisis, the announcement by Malaysia Airlines that they are entering a crisis with a statement issued on the loss of contact with the MH17 plane which was last seen over the Ukrainian airplane. Malaysia Airline did not state in their announcement that the airline the aircraft has crashed nor make any reference to it being shot down. They only stated that they had *“lost contact of flight MH17 operating from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur on 17 July 2014. The last known position was over Ukrainian airspace”*.

The exclusion of the cause of the crisis left a void. To fill this missing information, the stakeholders had to scan their environment for other sources of information about the MH17 crisis so as to help them interpret why the crisis occurred as knowing the crisis origin is essential for the crisis responsibility attribution process.

The findings from this study supports the assumption by crisis communication scholars that in the event of a crisis even if an organisation did not give enough information, stakeholders will naturally go to other various sources for information to help them understand the crisis. The commenters were able to understand and respond to the ‘incomplete’ crisis response message posted by MAS based on the extra information they got from other sources about the crisis and with this could attribute the crisis responsibility.

The comments posted in the blame theme as discussed in chapter five, section 5.4, were posts that absolved MAS from being responsible for the crisis, blamed the terrorist, fate, which comes under the weak attribution category. The other category of comments were those that held MAS as being responsible for the crisis.

Weak attribution of crisis responsibility:

Most of the comments in the blame theme absolved MAS of being responsible for the cause of the plane crash

Comments with the weak blame attribution out rightly absolve the airline of any accountability. For example, a commenter posted that “**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**”. This comment, which depicts weak attribution of crisis responsibility for MAS, **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**.

Some comments suggest that the airline should not be blamed with a further request for the blame to be shifted to those that brought down the plane instead. One of the posts was questioning “**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**” with another talking about “**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**”.

This result is consistent with the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) suggestion that in the case of a crisis erupting as a result of a terrorist attack as it was for the MH17 crisis, the stakeholders sees the organisation as a victim and thereby attribute weak crisis responsibility for the cause. This study also show significant evidence that supports the external validity of the SCCT assumption on the cause-reputation relationship as more of the comments that fell into the blame theme had a weak crisis responsibility for MAS as the crisis is perceived to be in the victim cluster by the stakeholders.

A crisis in the victim cluster comes with a weak crisis responsibility that has a mild reputational threat on the organisation (Section 2.6) which suggests that the M17 crisis being an externally triggered crisis would naturally come with a mild reputational threat.

Although the M17 crisis ordinarily would have been categorised as a crisis in the victim cluster based on it being shot down, it was easy for the public to conclude that MAS should be apportioned high crisis responsibility on hearing that the plane was shot down over a warzone airspace, findings from the comments however shows that the public goes out of their way to scan their environment for more crisis news even when the organisation that is in crisis does not provide them with enough information when the crisis broke out.

The commenters were able to recognize that the crash was not MAS fault as the plane was shot down by missiles with no survivor from the accident and MAS was just unfortunate for example a reported that the plane was shot down by a missile with another commenter suggesting that For example, a commenter wrote **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**

Most of the comments that contained weak crisis responsibility content echoed similar reasoning that the occurrence of the MH17 crisis is not the fault of MAS with some commenter even accepting it as an accident caused by “fate” and therefore MAS should not be held responsible for the accident *and* **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**. This information were enough for most of the commenter for interpretation process of the crisis and who to apportion the crisis responsibility to. The findings support the assumption that the public will voluntarily converge to attribute crisis causal-relationship attribute in the event of a crisis without being told to do so (Schwarz, 2012).

One of the assumptions of SCCT as explained earlier in the literature review chapter is that the threat that comes from a crisis is dependent on the initial crisis responsibility attributed by the stakeholders, crisis history, prior relationship reputation and the need for organisations to respond by communicating effectively (Coombs, 2007; Schultz et al., 2011) as explained in section 2.6 of this thesis.

In the literature review section, crisis history is identified as a vital factor to consider when organisations are responding to a crisis. It is assumed that crisis history will influence the stakeholder’s attribution process, this assumption is supported in the comments as some comments made reference to MAS’s crisis history.

MAS has a crisis history as the MH370 was still missing and unresolved as of the time that they are experiencing the M17 crisis. An organisation with a crisis history is expected to generate a crisis responsibility that is similar to that of an accidental crisis which comes with minimal crisis responsibility (Coombs, 2007). This is because stakeholders conclude that the organisation has not taken enough steps to prevent a reoccurrence. Therefore, the occurrence of the M17 crash after the unresolved MH370 crisis could impact their stakeholder's sense making of the crisis and change the crisis responsibility for MAS from weak attribution to being minimally held responsible for the crisis reoccurrence.

It is assumed that the stakeholders will use the crisis history in their sense making process for the crisis responsibility attribution for a current crisis as people will remember the organisation's negative past history (Coombs, 2007). For the M17 crisis some comments made reference to the MH370 unresolved crisis with a commenter **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions** while some said a prayer for both MH370 and M17 victims and their families. This shows that stakeholders do not forget the previous crisis that an organisation had been through and can also link past crisis history to newer occurrence.

However, for MAS, their crises were occurrences that were tragic and involved human losses which generated understanding and compassion from the stakeholder. Majority of the comments were more of sympathy to the victims and the airline company. Malaysia Airlines were assumed to be victims in the crisis as well and didn't act wrongfully by choosing to fly the route as it was declared safe to use and other airlines were also using it.

This finding also supports the assumption that the crisis type has a major impact on the attribution of responsibility than crisis history and prior reputation as suggested by SCCT theory.

Strong attribution of crisis responsibility:

Not all comments in the blame theme came with weak crisis responsibility. Some comments attributed high crisis responsibility to MAS for the M17 crisis. The comments with strong crisis attribution to Malaysia Airlines held MAS accountable for the cause of the crash.

Posts questioning the decision of MAS to fly over a conflict zone in the first place as the plane crash could have been avoided if they had chosen not to fly over the Ukrainian conflict airspace. An example of a comment with strong attribution of crisis responsibility wrote "**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**".

Some post linked their past historical crisis to the current crisis i.e. the crisis of the M370 plane that still remains unresolved. For example, a post queries “**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**”.

Comments with high crisis responsibility has more negative content when referencing MAS while those with weak crisis responsibility empathised more with the organisation with more positive content that protects and supports the organisation’s reputation This finding supports SCCT assumption that the sense-making of a crisis based on the attribution of responsibility impacts on the effect that such crisis will have on the organisation’s reputation.

Emotions

As explained in the literature review, section 2.6.4, that emotion is an important factor in crisis communication with the emotional reaction of the non-victim stakeholders to a crisis represents a major determinant of their future interaction and relationship with the organisation after the crisis experience.

The comments from the non-victim stakeholders that had emotional content was very high. The theme represents the highest number of comments for the MH370 (87% of the total comments) and M17 (65% of the total comments) crisis than any of the other themes that merged during the coding process.

Having a visual look at the word frequency cloud (figure 12) shows words like pray, sad, god, bless, hope, condolences, RIP to be prominent words used by stakeholders in their emotional reaction to the crisis news. When a crisis results in loss of lives, the non-victim stakeholders are more likely to respond emotionally to the crisis news, stakeholders wrote about their emotional feelings regarding the crisis news without response or consolation from other commenters, they wrote their feelings on hearing the tragic news that MAS was experiencing by expressing their sympathy. This findings lend support to the evidence that the public uses social media channels for emotional support when there is a crisis (Stephens & Malone, 2009).

The occurrence of MAS crises was a tragic occurrence that resulted with high fatalities, a crisis that falls into the victim cluster of the SCCT model because it was an externally activated crisis and with this type of crisis, SCCT assumes that there is a correlation between crisis responsibility and the emotional reaction to a crisis by its stakeholders with crisis responsibility being negatively related to sympathy (Coombs, 2007). This assumption is evident in this study.

The majority of the comments in this theme expresses their sadness on the news and offers prayers and supplications for the victims, their families e.g. a commenter wishes the crew and passengers RIP M17 and thought to the families of the passenger and crew member. The emotional post was not only expressed to the victims on board and their families but also to MAS for example, a commenter wrote expressing “**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**” with another post communicating **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**. Some posted encouraging comments saying “**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**”

Some comments in this theme also depicts spiritual connotation by the offering of supplications to God for the victims and their families with some calling on others to **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**.

An interpretation of crisis that makes stakeholders express sympathy for the organisation brings little reputational threat to the organisation as long as the organisation provides instructing and adjusting information that will support the stakeholders to have knowledge about the crisis and help them cope psychologically with the crisis news as discussed on chapter two, thereby helping them to deal with their emotional reaction to the crisis news.

Even for the MH370 crisis that the crisis origin is unexplainable, the commenters did not hold MAS responsible for the loss of the flight despite their lateness in reporting the loss to the public, they instead posted negative emotions that depicted sadness and offering of prayers for the successful location of the missing plane without showing anger towards the organisation for their action.

These findings support SCCT assumption that organisations that are experiencing crisis that falls into the victim cluster evokes sympathy from their stakeholders that are not directly affected by the crisis.

Information.

One of the themes that emerged in the coding of the stakeholder’s reply to the crisis response message posted by MAS is the information category as explained in the data analysis chapters four and five with stakeholders responding by either seeking for or providing information on the crisis.

An Interest finding from this theme's context is that although MAS in their notification of the M17 crisis did not communicate about the current status of the plane to the public (an acceptable practice expected of airlines organisation in crisis to first notify the families of the victims before the public), it is evident from the comments that stakeholders due to their interest in the crisis scanned their environment for the crisis information from other sources as some news media were reporting that the plane had crashed with no survivor. This finding supports the assumption that the stakeholders scan the news report for crisis news as the traditional media and internet plays a critical role in keeping the public informed (Coombs, 2007).

Some of the comments came to the MAS Facebook page to seek for information on what is happening to the organisation, for example a comment was asking about **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions** or **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**. Some were however asking for details about the emergency room and the manifest list as a commenter asked "**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**", request for update or even which channel to go to for more live news coverage of the crisis.

The commenters who posted on MAS Facebook page were not only information seekers but included those that shared information on the crisis, telling others that the plane had been shot down, for example, '**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**' was posted to share information about the fate of M17. This comment was sharing information about what has happened to the plane based on information acquired from another news source as MAS did not give this information in their crisis response message to their stakeholders.

Some post were sharing information from traditional media on what has happened to the plane, for example a post says '**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**' while another posted a **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions** web link **comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**.

There is also support for the assumption that news from traditional media are regarded as authentic as commenters were referencing traditional media outlets like BBC, CNN, Astro news, Reuters as their source of the crisis information on knowing that the plane had crashed with no survivor. It also highlights the importance of the traditional media as commenters sharing information made reference to news from traditional news outlet confirming the fate of the plane.

This shows that social media channels are not used just for marketing, promotional and customer services purposes but is a news and information portal that people come to when in search of or to spread crisis news and lends support to the assumption that stakeholders use Facebook during a crisis to share and obtain crisis information (Austin et.al, 2012; Kietzmann, et al, 2011) rather than just receiving information as 17% of the total comments were either seeking for information on what happened to the plane and/or sharing information about the current fate of the plane and the M17 crisis.

Perspective

The commenters in this theme gave their view not just on the crisis but about what they think of MAS as an organisation for example while a commenter acknowledged that in '**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**' This indicates that when a crisis occurs, some non-victim stakeholders will converge to give their view about the crisis or the organisation.

Other comments in this category were not towards the organisation but more about personal advice asking other commenters to be more sensitive in what they write, for example, a post reads '**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**' or even about the behaviours of other non-victim stakeholders. An example of a post addressing the behaviours of others wrote '**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**'.

Some were of the opinion that the crisis had been pre-destined to happen suggesting that '**comment removed due to ethical and copyright restrictions**' (MH370, M17, Boeing 777 with the crash happening on the 17th day of the 7 month).

6.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the discussion on the findings from the data analysis of both the pilot study and the main study and how it relates to the prior literature in chapter two and organised sequentially to provide answers to the three research questions by exploring the tactic that MAS employed in their mediated crisis response, the practice that MAS maintained in their crisis communication on Facebook and how the public reacted to MAS's CRM?

The next chapter, which is the last chapter of this thesis, represents the conclusion chapter which gives an overview of how the research objectives were accomplished and the research question answered. A summary of the limitations encountered will also be presented and suggestions for future research directions.

7.1 Introduction

This chapter represents the end of the research journey for this thesis which sought to examine the application of Facebook to crisis communication management: a case study of Malaysia airlines.

The chapter begins with a summary of the research aims and objectives that I set to achieve at the beginning of my research journey as stated in chapter one and how these were achieved in the subsequent chapters. It then revisited the research questions of this thesis and how they were answered and the approaches used.

The ability to achieve the research aims and objective for this thesis and also effectively answering the set research questions was made possible by the review of the relevant literatures for this study and the selection of the most suitable research theory and methodology.

Social constructivism as discussed in chapter three was found to be the most suited for this research. The case study approach using qualitative content analysis and observation methods were used for gathering data from MAS official Facebook page and website. The use of observation methods and content analysis for this analysis provided me with the opportunity to explore my case study, gather data needed for the research in an unobtrusive manner due to the complexity of the crisis that was studied with the adopted data collection process opening up a window of getting data that would have been otherwise impossible to access using other data collection method.

This study's contribution and the limitations I encountered during this research process are also outlined and my recommendations for future research discussed.

7.2 Summary of research

Before drawing up the conclusion for this study, I feel it is imperative to reflect back on the research aim of this thesis which was to explore the application of social media in crisis communication in the Airline industry. The research questions answered in this research provided the avenue to fulfil these aim and objectives

In order to achieve this aim, I set my research objectives which was to first provide a comprehensive literature review on crisis communication and social media and then analyse

the crisis communication strategy employed MAS in managing their crisis by collecting data about the organisation's Facebook usage and diffusion for their crisis communication strategy and extending it to their pre-crisis and post-crisis period.

The first section of the research objective of this thesis was accomplished in the literature review chapter of this thesis, chapter two, by first presenting the historical development of the crisis study and then progressing to a review of relevant literature on crisis management, its theories and generic framework. The review then narrowed down to crisis communication study that this research rests on with the inclusion of social media domain.

The second part of the research objective was to explore MAS's crisis communication strategy on the social media channel. In fulfilling this objective, I used the Malaysia Airlines MH370 and M17 crisis for the pilot and main study by using data collected from their Facebook page using observational and content analysis method.

The primary research question that was to be answered by this research was how did Malaysia Airline (MAS) use Facebook in their crisis communication strategy? As this question was viewed to be too broad for this type of research, three sub-questions were developed:

The first sub-research question which asked what tactic MAS employed in their mediated crisis response was answered by exploring the diffusion of the crisis and CRS on both the traditional and social media channel through observational methods and found that MAS employed the mixed motive approach in their crisis communication strategy for the MH370 and M17 crisis.

The second question which was to explore the practice that MAS maintained in their crisis communication on Facebook was answered by observing and content analysing their Facebook page. It was discovered that they followed the SCCT guideline in the crisis communication strategy on their social media channels. MAS recognised their social media channels as part of their crisis communication channel and overall communication channel for disseminating information, interacting and collaborating with the public.

These findings show the rebuild CRS of compensating the families of the victims are used irrespective of the crisis cluster that the crisis falls into for fatal aviation crisis.

The third sub-question was more focused on stakeholders by capturing the reactions through comments to the CRM on their Facebook page and found that the public empathised with MAS

as they were able to identify that the crisis was externally caused and the organisation had no control over the crisis which made them victims of the crisis as well.

The main finding for this research, which answers the primary research question of this thesis on how MAS used Facebook in their crisis communication strategy shows that MAS accepted their social media channel as part of their primary communication channel. This is evidenced by the implementation of the same approach of crisis communication through the release of the same information to the traditional media, organisation website and social media channels, like Facebook. Their social media platforms also adhered to the expected best practices for breaking news in aviation crisis with a mandate that the families of the victims have to be notified first before the manifest list of the passengers is released to the public. MAS maintained this stance even on their social media channels.

However, their social media channels provide a more robust communication platform for engagement, interaction and feedbacks that is not evident with their official website as this only allows for a one-directional form of communication with no opportunity for their stakeholder's feedback or reaction.

In respect of their overall communication strategy, it was observed that MAS has a robust relationship with their stakeholders on their official Facebook page by having a fully bi-directional communication process that was used to communicate, collaborate and connect with its stakeholders at its pre-crisis stage and was seamlessly transitioned for use in releasing crisis response information when in crisis and in its post crisis stages.

It can be assumed that MAS was able to learn from the MH370 crisis as the M17 crisis was better handled by adhering to the suggested best practices guide for crisis communication as their communication strategy has been able to build a steady relationship with their stakeholders in peace time and transitioned to a crisis communication channel in their time of crisis which was used to provide prompt, credible and clear messages across their communication channels and also taking a positions that presents them to be accessible to the media and the public by providing alternative means for these different information seeking groups to contact them.

They refrained from giving ambiguous response and provided the public with information on what they know and what was still unknown and acknowledged their information sources in situations where they didn't have the first hand information.

The result from this research shows that MAS was not having full conversation with their stakeholders in the heat of the crisis thereby reiterating earlier findings by crisis scholars who found that organisations mainly update their status rather and do not answer their stakeholder's messages when in crisis (Roshan et al., 2016).

Organisation should train their support staff to be able to handle these channels even in the period of crisis to maintain a fully monitored bi-directional communication strategy instead just using it as a conduit for releasing crisis information alone with little or no engagement with the public who has converged on their channels for more instructing and adjusting information as stakeholder still want to have conversations with the organisation even when in crisis and not just be informed with the crisis news as explained in the literature review chapter.

The airline industry is said to be one of the industries that have enthusiastically embraced social media for engaging with the public (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2015) and is evident in the case of MAS as not only early adopters of social media but has been able to actively incorporate the use of social media in their communication strategy by going beyond using their social media platforms for customer relations, sales and marketing to extending its use for their crisis communication and management.

For their communication language, MAS had their contents written mainly in English language, an action that is found to be common for Malaysia companies as they are regarded as early adopters of social media who uses their Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts for corporate communication activities with their content written majorly in English language with some posting also in Bahasa Malayu and Chinese (Parveen et al., 2015). This makes it easy for the organisation to communicate to their global community with little limitation due to language barrier.

MAS also promotes their social media platforms for communication purposes as I was able to find logos of these social media channels on their official website that when clicked navigates the user to their official pages respectively without the need to use any search engines to identify them and reducing the possibility of the public engaging with phoney pages.

In terms of their crisis history having an impact on their reputation due to the first crisis (MH370) having a long tail and also the fact that it left digital traces of its occurrence and inconclusiveness on the internet provides the likelihood that the public can recall crisis history

in future with a click of the mouse. The Internet makes it easier for the public to link new crisis information with old crisis as it was in the case of Malaysia Airlines.

This study shows that an organisation that has a crisis history can still experience minimal reputation damage if due and timely information that can absolve them of the crisis responsibility is provided to the public. MAS, despite having a crisis history that is tragic and unresolved as of the time the second crisis occurred, was able to provide enough information to the public to aid them make sense of the crisis and conclude that MAS is as well as a victim of the crisis thereby reducing the reputational damage that could have come from the second crisis.

Also, the internet and social media sites can be said to be curator of crisis information and its history as it was evident in this study that some comments linked the M17 crisis to the M370 crisis that preceded it suggesting that social media especially Facebook can be used to commemorate crisis occurrence and its victims.

One of the major challenges preventing management from adopting their social media platform for crisis communication is the fear of misinformation and amplification of rumours on these platforms (Hager, 2012; Hiltz et al., 2014). This study has shown that social media channel, when used effectively, can be a major tool in mitigating and refuting these rumours as exemplified in MAS crisis communication as they were able to use their Facebook page for responding to their stakeholder's concern, refuting rumours and addressing misinformation about the crisis.

However, the argument that the crisis response messages should be tailored to the cultural orientation of the victims of the crisis and the need for messages to reflect their cultural values was not fully supported in this research, as the same CRM were released to the public irrespective of the cultural orientation of the organisation and the victims of the crisis. When MAS acted harshly in their treatment of the families and friend of the victim's stakeholders, there was a public outcry on their need to deal with these people in a globally acceptable manner. The use of a consistent and similar CRM in managing their crisis across their communication channels supports the assumption that global organisations can issue CRS that is globally acceptable as their stakeholder base cuts across different cultures and regions.

Although I didn't set out to prioritise which of the channels is more important for crisis communication in my research, this findings through the action of MAS management has been

able to establish the fact in crisis management, social media can take the position of the organisation website and serve as the communication hub where other communication channels can feed from thereby diminishing the need for dark site which is used to reduce pressure from the excessive traffic that the official website would have experience when in crisis.

MAS made use of their social media channels for their crisis communication changed from a position whereby the organisation website serves as a hub for other communication channels to a position whereby their social media channels were being used as main news sources due to the unavailability of the dark site indicating that a crisis in the aviation industry can be effectively managed without the need of a dark site, this is because social media channels provides a good platform for sending out instructing and adjusting information during a crisis and at the same time get feedback on how the stakeholders are reacting to the crisis news and CRM.

The overall conclusion is that social media channels, especially Facebook, are being used as a primary source of communication in crisis times for releasing crisis messages to the media and other stakeholders. It is also decreasing the need for the “dark site” when in crisis as the stakeholders will adapt to a different form of information dissemination when the traditional mode is unavailable as the public resorted to other sources like the social media channels for the crisis news when the dark site was unavailable for the M17 crisis due to its prior use for the MH370 crisis which was just few months apart.

The initial notification of the M17 crisis came with a request to the public to follow their social media channel for further information on the crisis provided the researcher the opportunity to suggest that the provision of information to the public is more important to them than the type of communication medium or the need to follow old tradition of the need to activate and release information on dark site immediately after a crisis is occurring. The organisation should focus more on making information available to the public and directing them on where to look for such information is found effective in this social media age.

7.3 Limitation

The original motivation for my PhD research as said in chapter one was to provide a comparative analysis of corporate crisis communication between organisations in developed and developing countries and hopefully in the process, try to develop a framework for crisis communication but with the limitation of time and expectations that comes with a PhD experience, I had to refocus my thesis using the feedback from my supervisor and examiners

and narrowed it down to a scope that is achievable within the time frame using one of the real life cases that occurred within this period. Nevertheless, I can confidently say that this research journey and experience has provided me with an enabling stepping stone to build upon which will be developed further in the future and take me back to my fulfilling my initial aim at the onset of the PhD journey.

The need to finish my research within the PhD timeframe and the desire to use data from crisis cases that are unfolding in real time impacted on the selection of the case study chosen for this research as and the fact that MAS experienced double tragedy within this period made it to be a good choice for my research.

Other limitations that came with this research is the restriction of the data used for my analysis to only contents that were written in English and the selection of Facebook as my representative of the social media channel as the complexity of these cases demanded time and focus, as part of my data collection process was done in real time, which made it difficult to shuttle between all the available crisis communication channels used by MAS concurrently.

Also, this study concentrates on the use of social media channels for organisational crisis communication and therefore its findings should not be generalised for other social media channels usage.

As my data source for answering the third sub-research question is a purposeful sampling which is limited to those who have internet access and Facebook users that posted in response to the crisis news which cannot be said to precisely represent an extrapolation from sample to population representation of MAS's overall stakeholder comments and reaction. However, the process presented me the opportunity to capture how crisis and crisis communication presents itself on social media and was able to explore the audience-oriented approach by getting a feel of their response through those that have 'genuine' interest in the organisation as the comments that were used in my analysis were gotten from the public that voluntarily echoed their feeling on the organisation's social media platform as opposed to trying to get these information from traditional sample/ interviewee who might have answered my research question differently if I had asked them the same question in the 'heat of the crisis'

Another limitation I acknowledge is my access for this research is that of an outsider researcher and my perspective is shaped by the information that I was able to gather externally without any official contact with the management of MAS and their stakeholders which implies that

my inferences were made from what I saw and not what MAS says they did or would have done when in crisis based on their crisis plan. I therefore recognise that the results and perspective for this thesis are based on MAS externally articulated crisis communication strategy that were made available to the public, having an internal contact with MAS management on their crisis communication plan and the changes they made, if any, to their plans in managing these unusual crises could have helped, impacted or changed my results for this thesis.

7.4 Recommendation for future research

As I earlier said that my starting point for this research journey when I submitted my proposal for my PhD study was a practice orientation approach by wanting to create a framework for crisis communication but the limitations of this research gave me the opportunity to develop a preliminary step to developing that framework that I initially wanted to achieve as this provides the platform and potential for further work done that is beyond the scope of this thesis. Further research can be done by doing a comparative analysis of the comments generated on the different MAS Facebook pages, a different social media channel like Twitter and Instagram, comparison of the comments between social media channels and traditional media channels, analysis from both the victims and the non-victims reactions, different time frame, all the CRS used by MAS in managing the crisis, and how these crisis are commemorated on social media. Future developments of software that can be used for data harvesting of real-life crisis in real time too are opportunities for future researchers.

In addition to these, there is need for further research on crisis that are internally activated within the airline industry as this study used crises cases that were mainly external activated which were beyond the control of the organisation. The crisis communication literature can be furthered on this area of crisis too.

7.5 Inconclusiveness of the MH370 crisis call for further research

The use of the MH370 as my pilot study came with its challenges and advantages based on the complexity and rareness of this type of crisis as the mystery that surrounds it makes it difficult to identify the crisis type as suggested by SCCT as this is needed to determine the type of CRM to use in managing the crisis.

There is need for further research to know if the complexity of the crisis impacted on why MAS delayed for six hours before communicating to the public about the loss in contact with the

plane and later release of inconsistent or misinformation to the public and the treatment of the victims stakeholders as this type of information can be assessed through internal contact with the management of the MAS to know if the inability to identify the crisis type and if it was an internally or externally triggered crisis affect their prior crisis plan and crisis communication strategy.

As of the writing of this thesis, there are claims of finding some parts that might belong to the unfortunate plane; this type of crisis reiterates the complexity of crisis as some are over within days while others last longer than expected. Future research could be conducted to see the emotional circle that such crisis news generates from the stakeholders.

7.6 Contribution of the study.

7.6.1 Contribution to theory

The fields on which this thesis develops (crisis communication and social media) from are both still regarded as developing academic field and with such comes with a dearth of theoretical framework and literatures as identified in the literature review chapter. This thesis extends the crisis communication study by providing a synthesis of existing literature in crisis communication study and then advancing the field by conducting a research in a modern-day setting by using real life crisis of MAS, an organisation that operates within an industry that is crisis prone, and a crisis that is externally caused and focused within the social media domain, a domain that is impacting crisis study in recent times.

In addition to the theoretical and definitional challenges that comes with developing research fields like the crisis communication and social media field that this thesis develops from, internet mediated research has also raised up new challenges to existing ethical procedures that has previously guided us on how we conduct academic researches. As my research focused on exploring how MAS applied Facebook in their crisis communication for both MH370 and M17 crisis which required some of my research to be occurring as the crisis was unfolding simultaneously, I have been able to conduct my research in an academic environment using acceptable ethical code of conduct that can be repeated for investigating real life crisis that is caused externally by factors like terrorism, a type of crisis that tends to be recurring more globally.

The use of real life crisis did provide me the opportunity to explore not only how the organisation manages their crisis but also to capture their pre-crisis, crisis and post crisis

communication which social media platforms like Facebook afford and the opportunity to gain insight to how their stakeholders react their messages which justifies the need for this research as crisis communication study needs to extend beyond looking at just the crisis period but one that captures the communicative process of the before, during and after periods of the crisis (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010:431) and also overcome one of the limitations of SCCT as the theory has been criticized to be developed on using student data instead of actual stakeholder's reaction, this study has been able to test this theory using real non-victim stakeholder's reaction of the CRM used by MAS for the MH70 and M17 crisis and bridge one of the gaps identified in the crisis communication theories.

By doing this, this thesis provides a research that is conducted using existing crisis communication theory in a more contemporary setting using real life cases that answers research questions within the academic walls thereby bridging a gap between academic and industrial practice, a gap between crisis communication research and contextual use of crisis communication with a focus on a developing country like Malaysia, a gap that has been identified in the crisis communication field (An & Cheng, 2010 ; Robson & James, 2013).

The crisis management research in relation to organisational studies still requires more research. The dearth in the crisis management research is attributed to the ambiguous nature of the subject which led early researchers in the field to analyse the subject based on a crisis induced event by looking at industrial crisis from the organisation's perspective which focuses more on crisis in Europe and North America (Shrivastava, 1993), this thesis fills a gap by using a case study that is from a developing country with a different perspective.

7.6.2 Contribution to practice.

The contribution of this study is not only limited to the academics but also provides practical implications for organisations on how to manage crisis especially complex crisis that are externally triggered as the study was able to offer insights into how MAS managed their crisis, a process that can be replicated for crisis communication management.

The results from this study has been able to provide useful finding that bridges the scholar-practitioner divide, a gap identified by crisis scholars (Sellnow & Ulmer, 2013) as real-life cases were used for building the crisis communication theory with results that informs practice.

This study establishes the prospective usage of Facebook as an efficient tool of crisis communication. Earlier studies have recommended the use of dark site in communicating with stakeholders as soon as an organisation in the airline industry is entering a crisis (Section 2.9), however, some crisis occurrence might not allow that as it was in the case of MAS. Malaysia Airlines experienced a new crisis (M17) while they were still in crisis (MH370) thereby making the dark site unavailable when the M17 crisis erupted and had to use their social media channels for crisis communication. The role that the use of social media in crisis communication can play has been evidenced in this thesis.

The findings from this thesis shows that social media channels can be used effectively as a substitute to the dark site in reaching the organisation's stakeholder when managing a crisis and supports the need to have a good social media relationship with their stakeholders during the pre-crisis stage.

Social media channels are suggested to be implemented as part of the organisation's crisis communication channel as findings from this thesis suggests. The finding shows that when in crisis, the management can use the organisation's social media channels for communicating, engaging and getting feedbacks from their stakeholders. Thereby advising organisations to have an active communication pattern in place that includes the use of their social media channels in communicating and engaging with the public in quiet times as this will make the transitioning of these channels for crisis communication purposes when needed easily. Malaysia Airlines was able to make use of their social media channels for the entire crisis communication process and became a valuable communication hub when their website became unavailable due to overwhelming traffic.

As discussed in chapter two, section 2.7, on the suggestion that Facebook is the preferred crisis communication channel for stakeholder's engagement by airline industry in peace and crisis period, the findings from this study provides support on the added benefit of using the organisation's social media channels for crisis communication as it provides a more robust communication platform for reaching their stakeholders.

The findings presented in this thesis support the theoretical suggestions of crisis communication theories on the need to match the crisis type with the crisis response messages that is released to their stakeholders (Coombs, 2014).

In addition to this, results from this analysis provide support to the recommendation of crisis scholar in terms of crisis communication best practices. Malaysia Airlines was able to manage their crisis by being prompt with their crisis response messages, partnered with the public, listened to their concerns and addressing it, remained accessible, showed compassion in their communication, visible spokesperson and an adaptable crisis management plan and policy; in the case of MAS, they are guided by IATA being an airline industry.

7.7 Final observation

This thesis has explored the application of Facebook to crisis communication using Malaysia airlines by using observation and content analysis methods on the crisis communication strategy used. The thesis researched two different research areas, crisis communication and social media, that is still developing and has made a small contribution in filling the crisis research gap, however, as earlier identified in the literature review, there is still a greater need for more research due to lack of consensus on definitional issues and development on theories and framework for the crisis field, a field that is very important to the organisation and its continuity especially in recent times when organisations are faced with more frequent and complex crisis than before.

The adoption of social media in crisis communication by organisations is another interesting field that I will advocate for more future research to be done as the findings from this study suggests that some social media channels can be used as part of the organisation's crisis communication channel and, on its own, as the main crisis communication channel when other media fails as was in the initial case of the M17 crisis; where the organisation encouraged the public to follow their social media channels for more update on the crisis news as their dark site was unavailable due to the fact that they were still embroiled in the management of the MH370 crisis . This research suggests that social media channels can be an effective crisis communication replacement channel in lieu of the traditional media for releasing crisis response messages to the public and therefore calls for more research in its use.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Process of determining the time stamp of the Facebook post.

I identified the timestamp of each Facebook post by hovering the cursor over the displayed date which is recorded in British Summer Time, which represents the researcher's local time zone.

In order to verify that the time zone captured truly represents my local time zone, I used the epoch converter to translate the timestamp html to human readable data. Using google chrome, I right-clicked on the date of the post and selected inspect which gave me the html timestamp code that is displayed as data-utime number which is converted using <http://www.epochconverter.com/>.

I also had the support that the data collected is enough to achieve the research aim and objectives and then decided to extend the analysis beyond the first message posted on their Facebook page.

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