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1. Introduction

United Airlines suffered the mother of all (…) crises (Sean Czarnecki from PR Week, 2007)

In the beginning of April 2007, the medial attention was focused on the American airline *United Airlines.* The reason why is a video which went viral on social media. In this video one can see how law enforcement officers drag a passenger violently off an *United Airlines* plane due to the flight being overbooked. Because not one of the other passengers volunteered, the passenger was forced to give up his seat and leave the plane. Having resisted, he was then forcibly removed from the plane against his will. Through being dragged out, the passenger was injured by the law enforcement. According to his lawyer he suffered concussion, a broken nose, and the loss of two front teeth during the incident. After many reports in the media about the previous crisis history of the organization, the background of the present accident, about how it comes in the first place to the incident, what even happened and why this was happen, *United Airlines* CEO was expected to clarify the circumstances. But he failed at responding appropriate to the events. After that the incident developed into an organizational crisis and in consequence the market value of *United Airlines* dropped and their share value suffered.

While the CEO was struggling with the right crisis response strategy, the media started to focus on details about the history of previous crises of *United Airlines.* The media published information about other crises of the airline organization which happened weeks to years ago. It turned out that *United Airlines* once handled the baggage of a singer carelessly and because of this, his loved guitar broke. Thus the singer made a song called 'United breaks Guitars' which had a giant reach on the internet and the damage to *United Airlines* reputation was equally big (The Huffington Post online, June 2009). A bit later in time *United Airlines* stopped two teenage girls from entering the plane until they would change their clothes into dresses, because for *United Airlines* it is inappropriate to fly on their plane with leggings. As a consequence, there was a medial riot. In the eye of the public, the airplane organization[1] uses an "intrusive" and "sexist" policy (NY Times online, March 2017).

[1] The term "organization" is used analogous to the term "company" or "corporation".

To come back to the incident on April 2007, also details about the violated passenger respectively the victim of this crisis were released by the media. The reporters investigated his life and even interviewed former colleagues of the victim about his character. Ten days after the incident the victim was identified by the media and the media published details about the history of the victim, which has been reported by hundreds of news outlets. It turned out that the victim was a medical doctor who was arrested few years ago because of drug-related offenses, fraudulent prescriptions for controlled medication and because of sexual harassment of one patient of him. Suddenly not only the previous crisis history of the organization, but also the immoral behavior in the past of the victim respectively the history of the removed passenger was in the international spotlight of the media (Courier Journal online, April 2017; PR Week online, April 2017; die Presse online, April 2017, Stern online, April 2017).

This example of a crisis-reporting in news media, which on the one hand involves the reporting about the previous crisis history of the concerned organization and on the other hand a human interest angle of reporting, serves as an occasion for the current study to further investigate the news media reader`s perception of an organizational crisis. The journalistic trend is observable: Zhang noted that the media coverage of corporations increased as early as in the 1980s and many scholars drew already attention to it (Zhang, 2016). In order to illustrate: The amount of pages covering business news multiplied from the year 1980 to 2000 in the newspapers (Henriques, 2000).

Coombs already noticed that journalists often remind the readers with information about the previous history of crises of the concerned organization when reporting about a current organizational crisis (2004). Also, the usage of human interest framing is in today´s news media an omnipresent style of reporting (Vettehen et al., 2005). Both, the involvement of information about a previous crisis history and of a human interest frame in news stories about an organizational crisis is seen as a critical journalist´s way of working regarding the perception of the corporate reputation by the public (Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Cho & Gower, 2006).

Coombs & Holladay noted amongst other scholars that much of the communication research discuss crisis response strategies and shed light only on the view of the concerned organization. Little research deals with the experiences and the perceptions of the public during a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2004, 2007). Consequently, the view of

the stakeholders, their perceptions and their opinion making process seem to be neglected by scholars.

Given that many stakeholders depend on an indirect source of information to build an opinion about organizations and that the media assume this important role very often (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990), their news stories have great significance on audience perception (Coombs & Holladay, 2011). In accordance, Zhang discovers in the field of business news that the published information in the media influences the perceptions of readers about the reported corporations (2016).

In crisis communication research the following two broad categories predominate: managing information and managing meaning. Managing information is about collecting and analyzing information about an organizational crisis, whereas managing meaning is characterized by managing the perception from the audience about the crisis and the organization (Coombs, 2009). As early as 1996 also Coombs & Holladay were convinced that the stakeholder can be influenced by communication on how they perceive a crisis and how they evaluate the associated organization. Therefore, the current study focuses on *managing meaning* and tries to contribute to a better understanding of the management process of "the perception of the crisis and/or the organization in the crisis" (Coombs, 2013, 262).

Amongst other scholars Barton summarizes the consequences of an organizational crisis. It is seen as part of the natural story of an organization and is therefore a threat to nearly every organization (Barton, 2001). The threat contributes to the reputational crisis and in consequence also to the financial damage as well as even to the organization´s survival (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). The main objective of crisis communication is to protect the organization against damage to corporate reputation and finance loss (Barton, 1993; Coombs & Holladay, 1996).

Because of this, it is crucial to investigate factors of the news stories which could shape audience perception and consequently the perceived individual reputation of the victim as well as the organizational reputation by the readers.

This study contributes to understanding how the influencing factors of stakeholder`s attitude formation about corporations during a crisis, impacts their future behavior. The stakeholder[2] approach provides guidance through the structure of the current study. The

[2] As a stakeholder „ (…) any group or individual who can affect or be affected of the achievements of the organization´s objectives" (Freeman, 2010, 46) can be understood.

following three elements are of special interest for the stakeholder approach (Shamma, 2012):

I. factors which could influence the perception of the crisis by the public,
II. the formation of beliefs and attitudes by the recipients,
III. and the future intentions of the recipients.

In *figure 1*, the stakeholder perspective (Shamma, 2012) of corporate reputation which is used in the current study as a guide to analyze the perception of the organizational crisis is pictured (Hillebrand & Money, 2006). First step is the perception of the crisis by the public which is very often applied by the media and therefore influenced by journalists. Step two results in the formation of beliefs and attitudes by the recipients which is seen as the second step of analyzation. Here the reputation is built. The third step is the investigation of the future intentions of the recipients. At this point the behavioral consequences are in the spotlight.

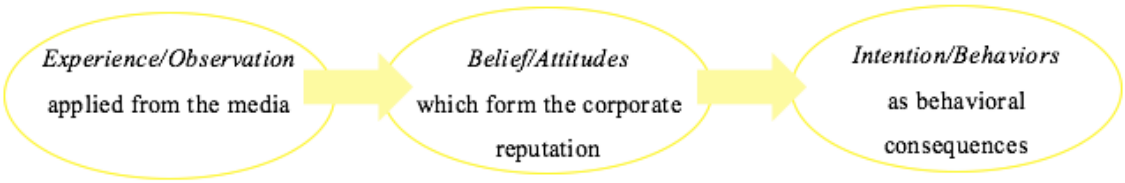

Figure 1. Stakeholder perspective of corporate reputation inspired by Hillenbrand & Money (2006).

Firstly, factors, which could influence the perception of the crisis by the public (I) and which are very often applied by the media and therefore shaped by the journalists, are investigated. On the one hand, the present experimental study explores how exposure to the increasingly used style of human interest frames in journalist`s news reporting affects recipient´s perception of the corporate reputation.

But the usage of human interest framing (with related or unrelated histories of the victim to the current crisis) for creating news stories by the journalists is just one component of investigation. Because as Coombs & Holladay noted, organizational performance history shapes the perception of the public too (1996). Therefore, the reporting about historical crises involving the organization (related or unrelated to the current crisis) is also from special interest to the current study.

Secondly the formation of beliefs and attitudes (II) by the recipients about the victims of the crisis as well as the concerned organization are measured in dependence of the human interest framing and the reporting about previous crises involving the organization, which constitute in the individual as well the corporate reputation. It is assumed by the current study that the emotion of *Schadenfreude* and the attributed responsibility of the crisis are contributing to the formation of beliefs and attitudes.

Lu & Huang are convinced that scholars and practitioners of crisis communication are now confronted with a changing digital environment which is characterized by emotions. In their opinion, this phenomenon should attract the interest of scholars to examine how emotional reactions of organizational crises effect the crisis communication (2017). Also, only few studies have investigated the role of emotions in the context of the human interest frame (Feinholdt et al. 2016) and none in the context of the reporting about previous crisis histories. Therefore, the current study is also testing the emotion of *Schadenfreude* referred to the episodic framing as well as to the involvement of a previous crisis history in a news story. Here, both, the emotion of *Schadenfreude* regarding what happened the victim as well as the *Schadenfreude* about what happened to the organization is examined. The research`s aim is to illustrate the consequences of enjoyment of the misfortune of the victim or the organization on the reputation of the victim and as well on the reputation of the company. As Weiner and also Coombs & Holladay noted, the image of an individual or organization could worsen with a strong attribution of responsibility of the crisis towards them. Therefore, also the attribution of responsibility as a consequence of the human interest frame and the involvement of a previous crisis history in a news story is investigated.

In addition, the relationship between the emotion of *Schadenfreude*, both on an individual level and on an organizational level, and the future behavior as well as the relationship of the attribution of responsibility and the future behavior are additional interesting aspects in which the current study is interested in, therefore also the third element of the stakeholder approach named future intentions of the recipients (III) is analyzed in the current study.

As tabloidization now stands in the spotlight of media research (Gencel Bek, 2004), interest in investigation about news media audiences has grown regarding the new challenges which newspaper organizations have to manage in times of the rise of digital news (Costera Meijer, 2016). As a tribute to Abramson, who said that “there is a human need and desire for quality journalism” (2010, 39), the current study sees a need to

additionally investigate the involvement of information about a previous crisis history of the concerned organization as well as the usage of a human interest frame in the reporting about an organizational crisis on the estimation of the quality of the crisis journalism by the readers.

Results can have an impact on journalists' work on reporting about organizational crisis. They can lead journalists to a work which is judged by the readers as more qualitative.

To summarize, this study presents the results of an online experiment designed to test what factors influence the perception of news media readers about an organizational crisis. More precisely the study investigates the role of the human interest frame which includes the reporting about the crisis victim used by the media for reporting about organizational crises in reputation formation. Also the effect of reporting about the previous crisis history of the organization is studied in the context of reputation formation. Moreover, it is of special interest to the current study whether there are differences in the perception of the organization or the victim when the previous (crisis) history of the organization or the victim is related or unrelated to the current crisis. Another aim of the current study is to explore the impact of attribution of responsibility and the perceived feeling of *Schadenfreude* by the readers on corporate reputation and individual reputation of the victim. Additionally, the current study sees a need to shed light on the estimation by the readers of the quality of the crisis journalism.

The first section presents the literature relevant to an organizational crisis, to reputation of an individual as well as corporate reputation, and to the relation between reputation and the media using the Agenda-Setting-Theory. Then the personalization in journalistic reporting, the Framing-Theory and the influence of involving human interest frames in reporting about organizational crises on recipients is described. Also the estimated quality of journalism by the reader is addressed. Afterwards the literature review on journalists' reporting about a previous history of unmoral behavior of the victim as well as the influence of a journalist`s reporting about a previous history of organizational crises is presented. Next, the perceived responsibility of the crisis is discussed. At the end of the first section of the study, the literature in the field of *Schadenfreude* towards an individual as well as *Schadenfreude* towards the organization is introduced and discussed in relation to crisis reporting.

The second section of the current study discusses the methodology and presents the research questions as well as the hypotheses. Results are presented following the description of the methodology.

The final section presents a discussion of the findings and implications for further investigations in the field of crisis communication. Also, a further finding regarding the attention of the readers while reading the news story about the organizational crisis, which is not assumed in advance, will be discussed and further research ideas to investigate this "incidental" findings will be presented.

2. Literature Review

The literature review starts with general definitions and declarations to the main concepts of the current study. Afterwards the leader thread follows the Stakeholder approach (Shamma, 2012). Firstly, factors which could influence the perception of the crisis by the public are discussed. Secondly, the influencing factors of formation of beliefs and attitudes by the recipients are presented and finally, future intentions of the recipients as behavioral consequences are addressed.

2.1 Main concepts

The main concepts of this study are the organizational crisis and the reputation on an individual as well on a corporate level described.

2.1.1 Organizational Crisis

Crisis is defined by Coombs & Holladay as an inappropriate behavior that can lead to *Schadenfreude* and other emotions (2007). Fisherman characterizes a crisis as the occurrence of an unpredictable event by which important values for an institution must be threatened (1999). Coombs summarizes this in a definition of a crisis as an "unpredictable event, that threatens important expectations of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization`s performance (…)" (2-3). As a negative outcome of a

crisis the corporate reputation can get worse, as well as the intended future behavior (Coombs, 2007).

2.1.2 Reputation

The concept of reputation gained in the recent years much attention both from practice and the scientific domain of communications (Barnett et al., 2016; Chun, 2005; Shamma, 2012). However, reputation in the context of PR is referred too exclusively to private business and the discussion about reputation suffers from a so called *corporate bias,* at least in professional circles (Eisenegger & Imhof, 2008). This paper contributes to this gap in the research by raising attention to a possible victim of a corporation´s crisis and how the victim´s reputation can influence the reputation of the company.

In order to easily follow the main points of the current study, it is necessary to investigate first the reputation of an individual. After the individual part, the thesis will expand on the corporate reputation. After this, the relation of corporate reputation and the media is discussed using the Agenda-Setting Theory.

2.1.2.1 Reputation/Judgements of an Individual.

Bromley compares the reputation building of corporations with the reputation formation of persons. Both are described and known with attributes that people ascribe to them (2000). A person`s reputation can be understood as a score which is updated by members of a social group on a regular basis. Watching the interaction of the person first hand or get to know about the person`s social interactions second hand, for example by hearing gossip about the person or by learning about it in the media, is influencing the score of the individual`s reputation. Hence an important aspect of reputation is that it is public knowledge.

Milinski sees reputation from an evolutionary point of view and describes it as a "current standing the person has gained from previous investments or refusal of investment of helping others" (2016, 1). The known reputation of an individual helps to evaluate the personality and trustworthiness as well as if it is better to avoid the person or to choose them as a social partner. Milinski argues furthermore that a known good reputation can be compared with money, that can be spent whenever the owner is in need

of help from one another. Any action of good character, for example helping others or donating to charity increases the reputation of an individual. However, reputation is not always positive. It could also be negative, for example if a person always refuses to help others or if that person is behaving in an unsocial way (2016).

Because reputation can also be built indirectly on the basis of the information the media provides about a person, it is important to know for the current study what type of information people most rely on when forming impressions of others. When taking a look at the scientific literature of social psychology it occurs that there are two main dimensions which are important to the formation of judgements about an individual, named *warmth* (includes such personality traits as friendliness, kindness, and trustworthiness) and *competence* (includes qualities like efficiency, competence, and capability) (Abele et al., 2008; Brambilla et al., 2011; Fiske et al., 2006). Cuddy sums it up by calling *warmth* and *competence* influencing factors which shape social judgements and lead to conditional emotions and behavior (2008). There are two reasons, why people rely on these two dimensions to evaluate others. The expression of *warmth* (high or low) tells about the likelihood of intentions (good or bad) towards oneself. With the information of *competence* (high or low), it is possible to say if the other is capable to put these intentions into practice. Judgements using the dimension of *warmth* and *competence* cause active and passive behavior, as well as emotions. People who are evaluated as warm are triggering active facilitation (for example help) and positive emotions, and those who are evaluated as lacking warm are triggering active harm (for example attack) and negative emotions. People who are evaluated as competent are triggering passive facilitation (for example obligatory association) and positive emotions, and those who are evaluated as lacking competence are triggering passive harm (for example ignoring) and negative emotions (Cuddy, 2008; Fiske et al. 2006). However, judgements about *warmth* are made quicker and have a greater consequence on overall attitudes toward others, on emotions and behavior than judgements about *competence.* To illustrate: *Warmth*-related trait words are identified quicker by social perceivers in a lexical task than *competence*-related words.

So, it can be said from a cognitive perspective, that people are more alert to warmth information than to information about one another`s competence (Fiske et al. 2006). Previous findings from Leach et al. show that the warmth dimension consists on the one hand of *sociability* and on the other hand of *morality* (2007). When people are searching for information to build a global reputation of an individual, they are rather

affected by facts about *morality* in comparison to *sociability* (Brambilla et al. 2011). Conveniently, according to Goodwin et al. people do care most about moral character-information. This dimension plays a big role in a person´s perception and evaluation (2014). The reason that information about moral character of another person is so important, is due to the fact that, "the goodness of another`s person character determines whether they are likely to be harmful or helpful to the self" (Goodwin et al., 2014, 148). An individual of good moral character is described as not harmful and even actively helpful. An individual of dubious moral character is a not helpful, and even harmful person. In conformity, Brambilla et al. showed that moral character information is relevant to the formation of an impression of others, respectively for building a reputation (2011).

2.1.2.2 Corporate Reputation.

Barnett et al. term *Corporate Reputation* as judgements made by observers about a firm, which could originate in perceptions of its identity and image. The term of *Reputation* is in need of estimation, which implies judgment or assessment. This also accords to the lexicology of the word *Reputation*, which means judgement or assessment. Therefore, Barnett et al. come to the conclusion, that the definition of *Corporate Reputation* includes estimation, judgement, evaluation and opinion (2006). Chun´s view of how to define *Reputation* is similar with Barnett et al. (2006). She believes that it is useful to see *Corporate Reputation* as the summarization of the perceptions of all relevant stakeholders of an organization. It is what associations, for example customers, media and community make with the company. According to Chun, corporate Reputation can be seen as an umbrella construct, which holds in a cumulative way the impressions of the stakeholder of a company together (2005). Coombs comes to the conclusion that *Reputations* are based on the evaluation from stakeholders regarding "the ability of the organization to meet their expectations" (Coombs, 2007, 164). So, the process of evaluating a reputation includes comparison between what stakeholders know about the organization and whether an organization meets expectations from them how it should behave (Coombs, 2007). There are many advantages of established favorable reputations, which function as a signal (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990) and a financial asset (Einwiller, 2014). For example, a good reputation can attract customers, improve financial performance, could create a competitive advantage within their field and generate good word-of-mouth

(Fombrun & Gardberg, 2000). To summarize, Einwiller indicates that the overview of the definitions of reputation in the scientific field shows that there is agreement on the definition that reputation is a perceptual phenomenon in which corporations are perceived and evaluated because of certain attributes which consequently can lead to a competitive advantage (2014).

Because a reputation originates from information stakeholders receive about the organization, it is important for an organization, that people get to know information about the company. The following sources to form a reputation are included in a list which Shamma created 2012: the employees` behavior and communication, individuals` experiences with the company, company`s self-presentations, rumors, competitors, word of mouth and lastly media interpretations of the company. Direct experience with the company in form of using products or service from the company, getting in contact with employees or visiting their shops is not always possible for stakeholders. Then they have to rely on other sources to get a perception of the company and be able to build a reputation. Consequently, many stakeholders are dependent on an indirect source to build a reputation. The needed information for the formation of a reputation could be applied for the stakeholders from the media (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). This is coherent with the increased attention from media to information about organizations in the last years, which Shamma believes is one factor for precisely looking after the reputation of the company and even actively manage it as a company (2012).

2.2 Influencing factors on the perception of the crisis by the public

As factors which could influence the perception of the crisis by the public, the media in the context of the reputation formation, the Agenda-Setting Theory with its levels, the Framing-Theory with the human interest frame and the previous history of a crisis as well as of an individual are discussed. In the end, the quality of the journalism and the distraction between hard and soft news is covered.

2.2.1 Reputation and the media

Corporate reputation is constructed from available information about the activities of the company originating amongst other things like from the companies themselves or from other sources like the media. According to Fombrun et al. 1990 the media is influencing

the informational context in which reputation is built by the recipients. Findings show that within market information, media reports and other non-economic cues are important for publics to form reputation from a mix of these signals (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Moreover, Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis report that positive news about corporations in the media improved the reputations of the companies (2006).

Deephouse developed in the year 2000 a theory of media reputation which is described as an "overall evaluation of a company presented in the media" (1097). According to Deephouse, *media reputation* is specified as a strategic resource leading to competitive advantage. Leading to the statement that a more favorable media reputation increases performance (2000).

2.2.2 Agenda-Setting Theory

Already in 1990 Fombrun & Shanley pointed out that media acts in two ways in terms of influencing the reputation of companies. On the one hand media acts "as vehicles for advertising and mirrors of reality reflecting firms´ actions". On the other hand, media can be seen as "active agents shaping information through editorials and feature articles" (240). Also McCombs & Shaw see media as an important part in shaping reality (1972). The current study assumes that the Agenda-Setting Theory which is based upon political news in the media can theoretically be transferred to corporate news in the media, because the information in the media becomes the only contact many have with not only politics, but also with companies. From the amount of information about an issue showing up in the media, for example the amount of reporting about a special company, the readers learn not only about the given information, but more: they learn how much attention they should raise upon this company (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Therefore, media coverage of companies raises the salience of them in the public agenda and makes information about these companies more attractive for those parts of the public without direct experience or strongly formed opinions (Deephouse, 2000).

As a consequence, the concept of influencing public knowledge and opinion through media called Agenda-Setting is transferable to the concept of reputation because "[…] media coverage is a reasonable indicator of the public´s knowledge and opinions about firms within a few months of the publication date" (Deephouse, 2000; 1096). Consistent with this, Carroll and McCombs argument in 2003 that the main idea of the Agenda-Setting Theory also fits with the field of business communication. Journalism

and mass communication is indispensable when engaging in reputation (Carroll & McCombs, 2003).

2.2.2.1 Agenda-Setting Levels.

At the first level Agenda-Setting deals with salience of elements. If specific elements are very salient in the media, the salience of these elements will increase in the public. The media has an influence on this process, because if journalists pay attention to a specific topic or corporation, then the public use these attention cues for their own agenda to decide on which topics or corporations they fix their attention upon. To say it in the words of Carroll & McCombs: "the news media set the public agenda" (2003, 37). Especially newspapers set many cues about the salience of topics or corporations on their agenda in a day-to-day frequency. The lead story, front page story, size of the writing and the length of the media coverage of a single topic: all this give the readers a feeling of what is important and has impact on the perceived salience on topics or corporations. For corporations the influence of Agenda-Setting can be observed in regard to corporate ranking systems like the Forbes List. Companies with high rankings on this lists can profit from them by being prominent on the media agenda and hence on the public agenda (Carroll & McCombs, 2003).

Fombrun & Shanley´s investigation into media visibility of corporations and their reputation found that intensive media reporting has a strong negative effect on reputation of the reported corporation. It does not matter if the reporting is *favorable* or *unfavorable* (for explanation of *favorable* or *unfavorable* reporting, see next paragraph) (1990).

The second level Agenda-Setting is engaged with the salience of attributes which are conveyed about topics or corporation through the media. The assumption that the media is more than a presenter of an agenda, that it is even a presenter of the attributes which are ascribed to the agenda, is the central assumption of the second level of the theory. If journalists pay attention to specific descriptions of corporations and make some attributions salient on their media agenda, the public agenda will be influenced with those attributions and they will be getting more salient also on the public agenda. Here, the effects are not only seen on the attention like on the first level of the Agenda-Setting, they are also observable on the comprehension (Carroll & McCombs, 2003). Deephouse suggests that the media not only gives information to the public, but also wraps it already in *reputational evaluation-packages* to get easier absorbed by the audience (2000). These

reputations could be *favorable* or *unfavorable* for the corporation concerned. When the corporation is criticized or associated with negative events, for example a crisis, which could have bad influence on the reputation of the corporation, it would be an *unfavorable* media reporting (Deephouse, 2000). Because people rely on the information which is salient at the time they develop an opinion about a corporation, the Agenda-Setting effects have significant impact on the public`s attitudes and opinions about corporations and consequently for their reputation. This is because the journalists are able to "influence the criteria by which (…) corporations are judged" (Carroll & McCombs, 2003, 41).
According to Carroll & McCombs, the theoretical background from Agenda-Setting constitutes a good base for empirical research in the field of mass media and corporate reputation (2003).

2.2.3 Personalization in Journalism

"The newspaper must be founded upon human nature" Charles Dana (Fahs, 2011).

Already in the year 1991, Rucinski argue that media has a tendency to personalize problems and events, especially political ones. She explains personalized bias as a tendency of the media to orientate on individual actors and human interest perspectives when reporting political news. Personalization in the news, the focus on individuals while reporting about larger social, political or economic issues (Bennett, 2001), is theoretically connected to episodic news framing and human interest frames in journalist`s reporting (Jebril et al., 2013). Therefore, the Framing-Theory and the human interest framing is first discussed in a more general light and afterwards in the context of organizational crises.

2.2.3.1 The Framing-Theory – Human interest framing.

Framing can be understood as a determination of what the most people notice, understand, remember, evaluate and choose to act upon it. Frames illuminate particular bits of information and consequently in doing so, the salience[3] of this information is increasing.

[3] Salience is described as "making piece of information more noticeable, meaningful or memorable" (Entman, 1993, 53)

With the use of frames, journalists are able to direct attention on aspects and simultaneously take away attention from other aspects (Entman, 1993). Frames have an effect of the understanding, opinions and attitudes of readers (Kostadinova & Dimitrova, 2012). There are two sorts of framing, the thematic and the episodic framing. The thematic framing is characterized by reporting issues through information of for example their cause, trends and consequences (Iyengar, 1991). Episodic framing defines itself through coverage with a story about an individual (Iyengar, 1991).

It is from special interest of the current study that episodic framing on the one hand evokes emotions through concentrating on an individual case which make the issue more personal and hence emotional (Aaroe, 2011). And on the other hand, in political studies, Jebril finds, that episodic framing shifts the attribution of responsibility of the reported problem or accident in the direction of the individual rather than the government (Jebril et al., 2013). Kostadinova & Dimitrova show with a content analysis that in print media episodic framing of economic news stories is more popular than thematic framing (2012). However, episodic framing provides the framework for human interest reporting of news.

A human interest frame is understood as the portraying of persons in news stories who have a personal involvement in the reported issue (Boukes et al., 2015). Fahs adds to this, claiming that a human interest frame is characterized by the statement that almost every issue with a human angle of view could be an interesting story (2011). Moreover, in the political field, Boukes et al. found that the writing of a news story in the style of a human interest framing affects how people perceive a topic and how they view political topics. The type of framing has an indirect influence of people`s political attributes via their perceived responsibility of a problem (2015).

Dirikx & Gelders claim that the human interest frame is frequently used in the media (2010) and also Vettehen et al. note that human interest framing is in today´s news media an omnipresent style of reporting (2005). According to An & Gower previous literature shows that there are a handful of frames which occur commonly in the news, including the human interest frame (2009). In line with this, Boukes et al. claim that journalists increasingly make use of the story of an individual in news reports about political topics (2015). This phenomenon has practical and economic reasons. First the attractiveness for a wide audience is an important reason of framing the news with a human interest story, since stories with other citizens are linked to the own experiences of the reader and have a dramatic touch. Moreover, Bird argues that “showing the

personal side of public events is probably the most effective way to make people understand the impact of those events" (1998, 37). These human interest stories are appreciated by the readers, because they are more memorable than just political or economic descriptions. They facilitate the memory-process of encoding, storage and retrieval of news information (Bas et al., 2013). The second reason for producing human interest stories is of a more economic nature. To produce editorial content with human interest stories is cheaper compared to complex investigation from the journalist as the story of the individual is also objective content produced. That could explain why journalism (especially the U.S. journalism) "seems to be giving up and making an effort to do anything but tell stories and provide spectacle" (Bird, 1998, 46).

2.2.3.2 Human interest frames and organizational crises.

Previous research shows that the implications of the stylistic dimension of journalism named human interest frame, personalization and sensationalism is for scholars in the field of political communication already of special interest (for example Boukes et al., 2015; Jebril et al., 2013; Bas & Grabe, 2013). In the scientific field of crisis communication, the journalistic framing of news stories about organizations is a relatively unexplored aspect of audience perception of a crisis. Although Coombs & Holladay recognized that "the crisis situation is a mosaic composed of many different variables" (2011, 119), the effect of framing on the audience perception of a crisis and the following perceived impression of the organization is still relatively unexplored (An & Gower, 2009).

Amongst very few other scholars, Kim & Cameron assume that different news frames to a crisis have an influence on the emotional response of the public. They examined the different emotional responses and afterwards the perceptions of the public on the organizations and found that different news frames have an effect on the cognitive processing of the article and the attitudes towards the organization (2011). In regard to crisis communication, a content analysis of newspapers shows that the human interest frame is especially used in organizational crisis news involving a crisis victim. Van der Meer et al. show that framing in news media has an important role for crisis communication and can even be used as a prevention tool for crisis escalation (2013). Moreover, when reading a news story about an organizational crisis, the human interest frame "stimulates the psychological pulse of people" and leads them to more negative

attitudes towards the crisis (An & Gower, 2009, 108). In consistency also Cho & Gower claim that this sort of framing stimulates emotion and leads to a more negative evaluation of the whole crisis. Also, the human interest frame is a significant predictor of responsibility in a crisis (Cho & Gower, 2006). Just as when journalists attribute responsibility to an individual, the probability is higher that they write about morality issues and personal stories to stimulate emotions (An & Gower, 2009).

2.2.4 Previous history

Fombrun & Shanley suggest on the basis of statistical results, that historical performance influences reputation (1990). According to Hall, reputation comes after years of demonstrated superior competence (Keh & Xie, 2009) and is therefore a very fragile immaterial product which can´t be bought. On the one hand it takes time to build reputation for an individual as well as for an organization and on the other hand it is damaged easily (1993).

2.2.4.1 Previous history of an individual (human interest frame).

To be able to reliably judge the attributes of a person (reputation) the history of its behavior is important. To know about the previous social interactions from the person in which it refuses or investigate in others is an important aspect to get an impression of the person (Milinski, 2016). It is known from individual reputation research, that information about the morality of an individual is mostly affecting the reputation building because people tend to rely on this sort of information about an individual to percept and evaluate the person`s character (Brambilla et al., 2011; Goodwin et al. 2014).

2.2.4.2 Previous crisis history of an organization.

A positive reputation tells stakeholders about the attractiveness of the company who are in consequence more willing to make business with the company. According to this, reputation is important for the demonstration of superior competence (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990) and is therefore dependent on previous performance of the organization.

Coombs & Holladay point out that if a crisis is an exception in the history of the organization, then the attributed blame and responsibility (see *2.3.1 Attribution of Responsibility*) from the public is less strong, than when there is a previous history of crises (1996; 2013). Griffin concludes, that when an organization has a previous crisis history, a present crisis is perceived as more usual for the organization than when the organization has only once been confronted with a crisis situation. The perception of responsibility gets stronger, when the crises seem to be more common for an organization (2006). Coombs & Holladay found that performance history shapes the perception of the public. The consequence of a history of many crises in the past of an organization result in a more negative perception of the organization by the public (1996). As a consequence, a history of previous organizational crises intensifies the perceived responsibility by the public and reduce the corporate reputation. Coombs sees the reason for this effect similar as Griffin (2006) in the circumstance, that previous crises suggest that the crisis is part of a pattern of crises (2004). But what is unexplored is if there are differences in the perception of a related and unrelated previous history of crises.

2.2.5 Quality of journalism

Because of new technology which affects means of communication, communication is right now undergoing structural changes. These structural changes are due to the rise of the internet (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2016; Murphy, 2015). Especially for newspaper corporations, the concerns are acute owing to the difficult adjustment of digital news next to print news. Quality journalism appears not to fit the business model of a news organization anymore. Advertising online does not bring the same profit than advertising in print news, because readers still spend more time reading the print news than the online news (Abramson, 2010).

These changes have implication for journalists. To optimize their revenues, it seems that news corporations neglect the value of quality journalism (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2016). Journalists themselves report that they have difficulties to manage new economically efficient strategies and simultaneously respect their journalistic norms and standards of their work (Ruggiero, 2004). Nowadays, there is much pressure for news websites to be for example on the top of Google news alerts or to receive attention on social media with their news stories. With stories low in quality and therefore quick in the journalistic production (Murthy speaks about “breaking gossip” and “breaking half

facts") it is very easy to reach these goals (2015, 152). For quality journalism, it is much harder work because to produce high-quality journalism is amongst other things, time intensive.

Two frameworks are conflicting here. According to Schudson, the Trustee Model and the Market Model are not compatible. Journalists who abide by the Trustee Model rely on their professional ability to decide what news they report for the public. In the Market Model journalists rely on the preferences of the readers and report what news they demand (2003). Welbers noted that analysis of the people´s interest show that they are more interested in soft news than in hard news (2015). Therefore, popular newspapers report more often soft news[4] (Market Model) and so-called quality newspapers focus more often on hard news[5] (Trustee Model). The combination of the benefits of the new technology and the economic advantages, when relying on the demands of the market, respectively the desire of the general readers, is attractive to news organizations. The blending in of the audience in the gatekeeping role of the journalists[6] is tempting and the relying of journalists on what the audience wants could lead to a trivialization of the news (Welbers et al., 2015). This means less reporting about international issues, politics and economy and more reporting about "human interest, entertainment news stories, sport, scandal and people´s private lives" (Gencel Bek, 2004, 381). This process is also described as Tabloidization, which means "a spill-over of tabloid news values from the popular to the quality press" (Esser, 1999, 293). With tabloidization, feelings are evoked by the readers and dramatic accidents which happen to ordinary people, like in a crisis, are paramount to the news telling (Gencel Bek, 2004).

2.2.5.1 Dimensions for distinguishing between soft and hard news.

Reinemann et al. designed a theoretical construct with which the degree of Tabloidization can be measured. They differentiate between hard and soft news and derive the following

[4] For example, the reporting about entertainment, sports, crime, lifestyle, celebrities and scandals (Ryfe, 2012; Costera Mejer, 2016).

[5] For example, the reporting about politics, finance, public affairs and governmental issues (Ryfe, 2012).

[6] Traditionally, the role of so-called "gatekeepers" is seen in "controlling what should be presented to audiences and what not" (Tien Vu, 2014, 1095).

three categories of classification from the literature: The topic dimension, the focus dimension and the style dimension (2011).

The topic dimension is stated as the most important dimension to distinguish between soft and hard news. It deals with the political relevance of the news story and follow up with for example, governmental decisions about societal conflicts.

The focus dimension is all about the distinction of whether the news story has personal or societal relevance. Is the news story about an individual accident and has more personal significance for this one individual or has the reporting a general importance for the society as a whole? In addition, the episodic and thematic framing can give a further cue to the distinction between soft and hard news. Also the fact, whether a human interest frame is involved in the news story is an important information for the distinction.

The stylistic dimension describes the explicit involvement of the personal opinion of the journalists in the news story and the emotional coloring of information. The question here is: does the news story evoke emotions in the readers? (2011).

The content analysis of the news story used as a stimulus in the current experimental study reveals that the organizational crisis is a just partly politically relevant news topic. The organizational crisis could, but may not necessarily be a relevant political discussion. The description of the accident which the organization has caused is not about greater societal or political issues. There are no so-called “decision making authorities”, no “policy plan” and no “political actors” involved (237). The analysis of the focus dimension of the news story with the involvement of the human interest frame suggests that the reported information is of personal relevance. In the news article, the “personal, private meanings or consequences of the incident” are described and not the consequences for society at large (237). In addition, the news story is through the usage of a human interest frame classified as episodically framed because it is oriented on an individual case.

The analysis of the style dimension shows that there is no explicit involvement of the personal opinion of the journalists in the news story, but the information is reported in a way, which is likely to evoke emotions by the readers (see *figure 2*).

	Topic dimension	
	only partly politically relevant	
Focus dimension		*Style dimension*
individual relevance &		impersonal &
episodic framing		emotional reporting

Figure 2. Dimensions for distinguishing between soft and hard news (Reinemann et al., 2011)

Apart from the human interest frame, publishing information about the previous history of an organization which is right now in a crisis can be described as "telling the whole story" (Aucoin, 2005, 204) and could categorized as investigative journalism, because it uncovers information which is not known by parts of the public. Investigative journalism is seen as rather qualitatively high than tabloid journalism is, at least by media organizations (Aucoin, 2005).

2.3 Influencing factors of formation of believes and attitudes by the recipients

This study assumes the attribution of responsibility of the crisis by the readers, and additionally the evoked Schadenfreude about both the individual as well as the organization as influencing factors of formation of beliefs and attitudes by the recipients. Therefore, these two factors are being discussed.

2.3.1 Attribution of Responsibility

According to Weiner`s Theory of Attribution, people seek for a cause of an organizational crisis. As a consequence, they tend to evaluate the responsibility of the people or organizations which are involved in the crisis to be able to assign the cause to somebody. Weiner points out, that the greater the attributions of responsibility towards an individual or an organization are, the stronger negative feelings towards them develop. Consequently, the image of an individual or organization gets worse with a strong attribution of responsibility towards them (Weiner, 1987; Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Coombs & Holladay derive from Weiner`s Theory, that organizational crisis responsibility is perceived the strongest by the public, when the organizations intentionality is high, because in this case it seems as if the organization could have

prevented the crisis. Moreover, the organizational crisis responsibility is noticed as very strong when the organization has a history of previous crises. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory from Coombs proposes that the consequence of a strong attribution of responsibility is the risk of reputational damage, which gets greater the stronger the responsibility attributions are (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; 2004a; Coombs, 2007).

2.3.2 Schadenfreude

The German word *Schadenfreude* means pleasure in the misfortunes of others. It has a very negative connotation because it implies that the suffering of others is enjoyed. If another person or organization has a negative outcome or something negative happens to another person or organization, an outside observer could get the feeling of pleasure (Feather & McKee, 2014).

Van Dijk et al. note that the feeling of *Schadenfreude* is not uncommon, especially in the context of the media which often evokes an experience of this certain emotional experience. Schadenfreude can occur about an individual or an organization (2012).

2.3.2.1 Individual level: A person with lacking warmth

What is important to the current study, is, that there is a link between dislike of a person and *Schadenfreude* (2012). Heider (1958) hypothesized the principle of balance assumption, which says that when a disliked person experiences something negative, positive feelings like *Schadenfreude* are triggered (Van Djik et al. 2006). Furthermore, he thinks that "judgements are [seen as] deserved dependent upon consistency between the evaluation of the action and the outcome it leads to" (Feather & McKee, 2014, 18). When the evaluation is perceived as consistent, the outcome is felt as deserved. In consistency, he predicts an effect of deservingness of misfortune on the occurrence of *Schadenfreude*. Feather shows with his deservingness theory that *Schadenfreude* is felt when someone, who behave unjust, gets a deserved punishment (Feather & Sherman, 2002). Feather & McKee show moreover that when a disliked person gets punished for a dishonest behavior, the perceived deservingness, as well as the *Schadenfreude* is stronger as when a liked person gets deserved punishment (2014).

According to Brambilla & Riva, people feel joy, when a person who lacks warmth, finds themselves in a negative situation. They found that morality beats sociability and competence, when evoking pleasure at someone else`s misfortune. The feeling of *Schadenfreude* is affected stronger, when the moral qualities were in a negative way manipulated than the competence or sociability qualities with which a person is described. To conclude, morality has a very special role, that "goes over and beyond other human characteristics" (Brambilla & Riva, 2016, 251). Immoral individuals are perceived as more likely to initiate a negative event and be more responsible for the negative outcome as individuals which are perceived as moral. In addition, people tend to attribute less feelings like pity or sadness and more feelings like *Schadenfreude* to individuals who are perceived as immortal (Brambilla & Riva, 2016).

2.3.2.2 Organizational level: High organizational responsibility and misdeed type of crisis

Jin et al. 2010 argue that emotions are "one of the anchors" with which publics interpret the crisis situation (2010, 429). How a crisis is perceived is a function of the environmental stimulus, but also the interpretation of the stimulus has its influence (Carver & Blaney, 1977). Emotion is understood here as a very important stimulus (Jin et al., 2010). In emotion literature, it is known that emotions can guide judgements and decision making (Loewenstein et al. 2001). Han et al. found that in a negative event, people with different emotions see things in a different way relating to their emotion. People who feel anger perceive it more negatively as people who feel sadness. The authors think that the Appraisal Theory (Lazarus, 1991) is the basis for predicting consumer decision made through emotions and that emotions define the thoughts and the future behavior of the consumers (2007). The Appraisal Theory implies that "specific emotions give rise to specific cognitive and motivational processes" (Han et al., 2007, 158) through inspecting and interpreting what these feelings mean (Jin et al. 2010).

In the context of corporate crises, *Schadenfreude* is seen as an important emotion (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). According to Coombs & Holladay *Schadenfreude* toward an organization means "taking joy from the pain of the organization" (265) and is evoked by people when a company purposefully have placed customers at risk (2005). As stated in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT; Coombs & Holladay, 2003), people are likely to search for causes and responsibility of unexpected and harmful events

(see *2.3.1 Attribution of Responsibility*) and therefore often attribute responsibility of the crisis to the organization. This attribution of the situation lead to emotions about the organization which will affect the future intentions of the stakeholders (Lu & Huang, 2017).

A consequence of this is that the emotion of *Schadenfreude* has an implication on how an organization should handle media coverage to protect their reputation. Coombs & Holladay show that crisis responsibility as well as the type of organizational crisis play a role in triggering *Schadenfreude*. When the received responsibility of the crisis is seen by the organization as high, then the felt *Schadenfreude* is also stronger. When the crisis is of the type of organizational misdeed crisis[7], then there are stronger feelings of *Schadenfreude* evoked in comparison to a victim crisis. According to Coombs & Holladay there is also a negative correlation between *Schadenfreude* and the reporting of behavioral intentions to support the organization. When *Schadenfreude* is felt strongly, then the likelihood of behavioral intentions which are supportive for the organization is low (2004).

To sum it up, Lu & Huang argue that crisis emotions have a strong influence of the cognitive processes in crisis situations due to modified crisis-information-processing by emotions (2017).

2.4 Future intentions of the recipients as behavioral consequences

The examination of the future intentions of the readers of the news story is covered already in *2.2 Influencing factors on the perception of the crisis by the public* and *2.3 Influencing factors of formation of believes and attitudes by the recipients*.

[7] An organizational misdeed crisis is "knowingly placing stakeholder at risk" and categorized as an intentional crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2004, 270)

3. Method

3.1 Research Questions and Hypothesis

The main research question of this study is how the journalistic reporting about the previous history (related vs. unrelated) of the organization which is currently concerned with a crisis, and the usage of a human interest frame which includes reporting about a previous history of the victim (related vs. unrelated), does impact the attributed responsibility of the crisis by readers. How does it influence the perceived reputation of the company as well as of the victim by the readers? Is there a difference in the intended future behavior by the readers? And is there an effect of *Schadenfreude* about both what happened to the organization as well as what happened to the involved victim of the crisis?

The main research question is, to easily follow, separated in his parts. Each part is dealing with the attributed responsibility (whether the responsibility of the crisis is rather seen by the concerned organization or the involved victim), the perceived reputation of both the concerned organization and the victim of the crisis, the intended future behavior by the readers and the *Schadenfreude* evoked by the readers towards the concerned organization as well as towards the victim of the crisis. The research questions and the matched hypothesis are derived on the basis of the consisting literature. First the hypothesized impact of the journalistic reporting about the previous crisis history of the concerned organization is discussed. Following also the hypothesized impact of the journalistic reporting about the previous history of the victim (human interest framing) of the crisis is covered.

3.1.1 Previous crisis history

Referring to previous research by Griffin (2006) and Coombs (2004; 2013), it is now predicted that information about a previous crisis history is a threat to corporate reputation. Especially information about a related crisis history to the current crisis is a more dangerous threat to corporate reputation than information about an unrelated crisis history. Because a related previous crisis history suggests to the readers that the crises are

a pattern which is unstoppable in recurrence. And, because it also suggests that the organization is not able to improve the similar occurring problems which lead to the current crisis in the first place. So, the problems and with them, the crises will occur again and again. Consequently, the responsibility of the crisis is attributed by the readers to the organization in a stronger way because the organization holds sway over their further development and their error management. When the responsibility of the crisis is attributed to the organization, the corporate reputation becomes worse and the intended future behavior becomes more negative than positive. To refer to the theory of deservingness (Feather & Sherman, 2002) in turn to the suffering corporate reputation, the perceived reputation of the victim is protected when the readers get this sort of information about the concerned organization. Because now, the responsibility of the current crisis is rather attributed to the organization due to their previous failings and the victim is released of responsibility. Especially so when there is information about a related previous crisis of the concerned organization included in the news story, the deservingness of the negative effects is stronger seen by the organization than the victim.

To repeat, when the responsibility is seen by the organization, the wrongdoer is identified as the organization and the corporate reputation suffers. This evokes *Schadenfreude* because it is felt as deserved that something bad is happening to the organization due to the perception that the organization could have avoided the crisis and the injury of the victim in the first place, having recognized their mistake (misdeed management misconduct, Coombs & Holladay 2017).

RQ1: What effect does the reporting of a previous organizational crisis history have on the attributed responsibility of the current crisis, the perceived corporate reputation as well as the reputation of the victim and in consequence also on the behavioral intentions by news media readers and the evoked *Schadenfreude* towards the organization? And, does it make a difference if the previous organizational crises history is related or unrelated to the current crisis?

H1: When there is no reporting about previous crises in the organization`s history, the responsibility is attributed rather weaker to the organization than the victim. The perceived reputation of the organization and in consequence also the behavioral intentions of the readers are more positive and the perceived reputation of the victim is worse. Alternatively, the evoked *Schadenfreude* towards the organization is felt stronger by the

readers (and towards the victim rather weaker) as when there is reporting (related or unrelated) about previous crises in the organization`s history by the news media.

H2: When information about a related crises history of the concerned organization to the current crisis is reported by the media, the responsibility of the crisis is attributed stronger to the organization than to the victim and there is a greater threat to the corporate reputation and to the positive behavioral intentions, on the contrary a smaller threat to the reputation of the victim, and the evoked *Schadenfreude* towards the organization is felt stronger by the readers (and towards the victim rather weaker), than when an unrelated crises history is reported.

3.1.2 Previous history of the crisis´ victim (human interest framing).

When journalists use a human interest frame (involving information about the previous immoral history of an individual) to report about an organizational crisis, it makes the reporting more personal and emotions are evoked by the readers through the focus on an individual case (Aaroe, 2011). As a consequence, the responsibility of the organizational crisis is attributed stronger to the individual than to the organization (Jebril et al., 2013), because on the one hand, the interest and the attention of the readers is directed to the victim and on the other hand, the readers are additionally made aware of the unmoral character of the individual.

When the journalists report about the previous history of the victim related to the current crisis (a dubious moral behavior related to the current crisis, for example a traffic accident with an injured pedestrian because of drink-driving during medical service), the victim is seen by the readers as a harmful character who is apparently doing this sort of things in a familiar way and is involved in such situations often and not only this one time in the current crisis situation. As a consequence, the responsibility of the crisis is attributed more in the victim`s direction and away from the organization. Therefore, the reputation of the victim is perceived as rather more negative than positive. Apart from that, the corporate reputation is in turn perceived better when the victim of the crisis is connected to immoral characteristic. In consequence also the intended future behavior by the readers is more positive because the organization is spoken free of responsibility by the readers.

When there is an unrelated victim`s history reported (a dubious moral behavior unrelated to the current crisis, for example the demand of sexual service in return of medical advice/help) in the news story, the reputation of the organization and the positive intended future behavior by the readers is protected in comparison to when there is no victim´s history at all reported, but not as much as when there is a related victim´s history reported. That is because the related history suggests more than the unrelated history, that the victim shows this sort of behavior more often and therefore is responsible for not changing it. So, it is assumed by the readers that the victim has caused the crisis because he is behaving in this manner often.

It is also stated in the current study that when there is information about a person`s bad character due to dubious moral behavior in the past (not helpful, even harmful to others), emotions like *Schadenfreude* about the harmful events in the organizational crisis towards the victim can be evoked through on the one hand the personal and hence emotional reporting and on the other hand noticing the dubious moral character of the victim by the readers (inspired from Cuddy, 2008; Fiske et al. 2006). As mentioned above, the related history suggests stronger than the unrelated history that the victim shows this sort of behavior more often and therefore is responsible for not changing it. As a result, the *Schadenfreude* about the harm which happened the victim in the crisis is felt stronger by the readers when they read a related history about the victim, instead of an unrelated or even no history, because of their estimation of deservingness (Feather & Sherman, 2002).

RQ2: What effects does the reporting of a previous history about the victim (human interest framing) have on the attributed responsibility of the current crisis, the perceived reputation of the organization as well as of the victim and in consequence also on the behavioral intentions by news media readers and the evoked *Schadenfreude* towards the victim? Furthermore, does it make a difference if the previous organizational crises history is related or unrelated to the current crisis?

H3: If there is information about a previous immoral history of the victim (human interest framing) in the journalistic reporting included, then the attribution of responsibility of the current crisis is rather shifted in the direction of the victim and rather away from the organization, the corporate reputation is more protected, but the victim`s reputation is suffering, the behavioral intentions by the readers are more positive and the evoked

Schadenfreude towards the victim is stronger in comparison if there is no history of the victim reported.

H4: If there is an immoral history related to the current organizational crisis of the victim (human interest framing) reported in the news story, then the attribution of the responsibility of the crisis is shifted away from the organization towards the victim, the corporate reputation is more protected, but the victim`s reputation is suffering, the behavioral intentions by the readers are more positive and the evoked *Schadenfreude* towards the victim is stronger in comparison with if there is a history of the victim unrelated to the current crisis reported.

3.1.3 Interaction of the two journalistic elements

The mix of the previous crisis history which is related to the present crisis and the immoral history of the victim which is unrelated to the current crisis, is assumed as a very damaging combination for corporate reputation. In this case, the victim is going to be discharged of all the responsibility of the crisis by the readers, because with the information about the unrelated history, it seems for the readers as he did nothing similar in his past and that one cannot deduce the current crisis to his character. The information about the previous crisis history of the organization which is related to the current crisis confirm these assumptions by the readers. It seems that the organization was involved with something very similar in the past and they took no lessons from it, therefore, allowing a similar accident to happen again. The responsibility is attributed by the readers strongly to the organization and in consequence, the corporate reputation and the intended future behavior by the readers are rather negative than positive. Otherwise, the victim´s reputation is with the information about the previous history of the organization which is related, protected, because it functions in this case as a confirmation for the readers, that the victim is not to blame.

H5: When there is a mix of information about a previous crisis history related to the present crisis of the organization and information about the immoral history of the victim (human interest framing) which is unrelated to the current crisis, then the responsibility of the crisis is attributed rather to the organization than the victim and consequently the

perceived corporate reputation as well as the intended future behavior by the readers suffers while the reputation of the victim is protected.

3.1.4 Schadenfreude

RQ3: What impact does the feeling of *Schadenfreude,* felt by recipients of a news article towards the victim as well as towards the organization, have on the corporate reputation as well as on the reputation of the victim?

H6: When there is a greater amount of *Schadenfreude* concerning the destiny of the crisis´ victim felt than towards the organization, the perceived corporate reputation is more protected and the perceived victim´s reputation suffers more, as when there is lower *Schadenfreude* concerning the destiny of the victim.

H7: When there is a greater amount of *Schadenfreude* felt towards the organization than towards the crisis´ victim, the perceived corporate reputation suffers more and the perceived victim´s reputation is more protected as when there is lower *Schadenfreude* concerning the organization.

3.1.5 Attributed Responsibility

When the responsibility is rather attributed to the victim of the crisis than to the organization (even when the organization´s intentionality is high), the corporate reputation is protected. This is because the attribution of responsibility is directed away from the organization and towards the individual owing to the fact that the attention of the readers is distracted by the personal and hence emotional reporting about the victim´s history (human interest framing). Therefore, this study hypothesises that when the responsibility of the crisis is attributed rather to the victim instead of the organization, the reputation of the organization is protected from getting damaged.

By noticing the dubious moral character of the victim by the readers, the responsibility of the crisis is attributed to the victim and emotions of Schadenfreude can be evoked (inspired from Cuddy, 2008; Fiske et al. 2006; as mentioned above, see *2.3.2 Schadenfreude*). Furthermore, the current investigation states that not only the attribution

of responsibility has an effect on the corporate reputation, but also the feeling of *Schadenfreude* towards the victim functions as a mediator. Thus, when the responsibility of the crisis is attributed rather to the victim than to the organization, the evoked *Schadenfreude* about the victim mediates this protecting effect which results as a buffer for the damage to the corporate reputation.

RQ4: What effects does the attributed direction of the responsibility (whether it is attributed stronger to the victim or to the organization) have on the corporate reputation? And, do emotions like *Schadenfreude*, concerning the destiny of the victim, function as a mediator for the relationship between attributions of responsibility and perceived reputation of the organization by the readers?

H8: Higher attributions of responsibility of the crisis to the victim lead to a better corporate reputation as when the responsibility is attributed stronger to the organization.

H9: *Schadenfreude* concerning the destiny of the victim of the organizational crisis is a mediator for the relationship between attribution of responsibility and perceived corporate reputation.

3.1.6 Estimation of the quality of journalism

The news story about the organizational crisis, which is used as a stimulus in the experiment of the current study, is according to Reinemann et al. (2011), primary through the usage of a human interest frame, classified rather as soft news than as hard news. This means that the used news story, when using a human interest frame, is theoretically categorized rather as popular press than as quality press.

But when reporting about the previous crisis history of the concerned organization, the quality of journalism should be estimated higher because of the perception of the elements of investigative journalism. When the reporting involves information about a previous crisis history of the concerned organization, the news story should be categorized by the readers rather to the quality press than to the popular press.

RQ5: Does the involvement of the two stylistic elements of reporting about an organizational crisis, namely the involvement of information about previous crisis history

of the concerned organization and the usage of a human interest frame have an effect on the estimated quality of journalism by the readers?

H10: When human interest framing is used by the journalists to report a news story about an organizational crisis, the quality of journalism is estimated by the readers as rather low than high in comparison when there is no human interest framing used.

H11: When information about a previous crisis history (irrelevant if it is related or unrelated to the current crisis) is involved in the news story about an organizational crisis, the quality of journalism is estimated by the readers as rather high than low in comparison when there is no previous crisis history involved.

3.2. Experimental design

This study uses an online experiment as a research method. A 3 x 3 between-subjects factorial experimental design was applied. To examine the effects of the crisis history of the company and the history of the victim of the crisis on reputation of the company, three types of crisis histories (related to present crisis vs. unrelated to present crisis vs. none) and three types of histories of the victim (negative related to the present crisis vs. negative unrelated to the present crisis vs. none) were employed.

The online-experiment includes a news story about a present accident crisis from a bicycle-company as stimuli, which differs in two parts of the story (crisis history of the company and history of the victim of the present crisis) over the conditions. The study participants were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions. Some participants were exposed to a news story with a related crisis of the company in the past (related history crisis) and some received a story to read with an unrelated crisis of the company in the past (unrelated history crisis). These two conditions were coupled with a human interest frame which includes a story about the crisis victim, which had a related immoral past to the present crisis of the company (related victim history) or with a story about the victim, which had an unrelated immoral past to the present crisis of the company (unrelated victim history). Each control condition contains either no part of the crisis history, no part of the victim history, or both, no part of the crisis history and no part of the victim´s history, just the introduction (for details see *figure 3*).

Condition 1	*Condition 2*	*Condition 3*
related history victim related history company	related history victim unrelated history company	unrelated history victim related history company

Condition 4	*Condition 5*	*Condition 6*
unrelated history victim unrelated history company	no history victim related history company	no history victim unrelated history company

Condition 7	*Condition 8*	*Condition 9*
no history victim no history company	unrelated history victim no history company	related history victim no history company

Figure 3. Experimental Design: 3 (history of the victim: related vs. unrelated vs. none) x 3 (history of the company: related vs. unrelated vs. none) between subjects factorial design.

3.3 Data Collection, Scales and Items

The data-collection took place between the 25.01.2018 and the 03.02.2018. The study participants were recruited at the university of Vienna. The students got bonus points for an exam when they went through the study. They could choose where and when they undergo the online-experiment. The material was in German, the native language of the participants.

First, a World Wide Web link was send to the students per email with the information that the data collection is anonymous and there is no right or wrong answer, just personal judgment. Then the students were asked to read a news story about a corporation´s crisis of a bicycle-company. After the news article, the experiment included a manipulation check with questions about attributes of the quality of the article and about the perceived morality and sociability of the victim. To detect outliners in the sample, the participants were asked to rate their attention while reading the news article. Responses were recorded on a seven-point scale ranging from “not attentive at all” to “very attentive”. As a distraction of the participants from the main research topic, the attributes of the participants regarding the quality of the news article of the study were requested. Using a 6-items semantic differential (not relevant – relevant, not interesting – interesting,

not serious – serious, reliable – unreliable, biased – balanced, tabloid-journalism – quality-journalism), participants were asked to rate on a seven-point scale how they think about the news article. The reputation of the company was measured using the five-items Brand Attitude Scale (Spears & Singh, 2004) and the five-item Consumer Trust Scale (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002) (semantic differential). *Schadenfreude* (about what happened to the victim and about what happened to the company) was assessed with a five-item scale from Dijk et al. (2012). Responses were recorded for both on a seven-point scale ranging from "I agree not at all" to "I strongly agree". The reputation of the victim was measured using four items of Moral Perception (Goodwin et al., 2014), five items of Sociability (Goodwin et al., 2014) and five items of Consumer Trust (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). To measure future behavior, the participants were asked to rate the probability of four future behavior-items in regards to borrowing bikes from the company in return for payment and word-of-mouth about the information in the article they read (based on Coombs & Holladay, 2009). Responses were recorded on a seven-point scale ranging from "not likely at all" to "very likely". The attributed responsibility of the accident was measured using a 11-point scale with higher scores meaning the responsibility is attributed towards the victim and lower scores it is attributed towards the company. Last but not least the sociodemographic data (age, gender, professional activity) was collected. The students completed the entire experiment in about 10 minutes ($M = 9.20$, $SD = 3.18$). A complete counterbalance was utilized to randomly allocate the different stimuli such as types of crisis histories and types of victim´s histories.

3.4 Quality Criteria (Reliability & Validity)

For reliability analysis *Cronbach´s alpha* was evaluated to describe the internal consistency of the scale of *Schadenfreude* according to the event that happened the company, which consists of five items. The internal consistency of the scale is satisfying, with *Cronbach´s alpha* for *Schadenfreude* concerning the company = .91.

The internal consistency of the scale of *Schadenfreude* regarding what happened to the victim, which consists of the same five items as the scale of *Schadenfreude* according to the event that happened the company, only little modified so it fits for the individual case, is also satisfying regarding the reliability ($\alpha = .94$). The reputation scale for the company, which consists of 10 items, is reliable ($\alpha = .92$), as well as the reputation

scale for the victim which consists of 14 items (α = .94). Furthermore, the future behavior scale with its four items is according to *Cronbach´s Alpha* reliable (α = .71). The scale of the evaluation of the stimulus and respectively the quality of journalism shows also a reliable *Cronbach´s alpha* (α = .81).

Because the scales in the current study which are used to measure the latent constructs are already applied in several studies before and are proved there from other scholars, this study assumes that the validity of them is also for this study satisfactory. However, academic consent indicates the legitimacy for using the scales also in this study.

3.5 Pre-Test

To check the suitability and the comparability of the different stimuli, a pre-test took place in December 2017 (08.12.2017-26.12.2017) and was participated voluntarily from students at the University of Vienna and the University of Graz in Austria (N = 42). The participants were asked to read the news article, which differs in the following two parts of the story, crisis history of the company and history of the victim of the present crisis, over the conditions. The following stimuli were scanned: the news article with a corporation-history related to the present crisis as well as unrelated to the present crisis, and a news article with an immoral victim-history related to the present crisis as well as unrelated to the present crisis. The participants were asked to estimate the seriousness and the reprehensibility of the past behavior of the company (corporation`s history) as well as of the past behavior of the victim (victim´s history) on a 7-point Likert-type scale (from "very serious" to "not serious at all"; from "very reprehensible" to "not reprehensible at all"). The students completed the pre-test in about 15 minutes.

A t-test for independent samples shows that the stimuli of the unrelated (M = 32.80, SD = 19.67) and related (M = 38.67, SD = 21.77) history of the company as well as the unrelated (M = 29.8, SD = 29.44) and related (M = 30.19, SD = 24.35) history of the victim are comparable in their perceived reprehensibility. For the histories of the company was not a significant difference between unrelated and related on reprehensibility ($t(36) = 0.87$, p = ns.), nor for the histories of the victim ($t(40) = 0.04$, p = ns.). Another t-test for independent samples shows that the stimuli with both the unrelated (M = 34.90, SD = 21.21) and related (M = 34.67, SD = 18.71) history of the company as well as the unrelated (M = 20.52, SD = 22.13) and related (M = 29.81, SD =

23.03) history of the victim is comparable in their perceived seriousness (company: $t(36) = -0.04$, p = ns.; victim: $t(40) = 1.33$, p = ns.).

3.6 Stimuli

The stimuli are designed in the style of a news story of the online offering of the local newspaper *Die Kleine Zeitung* based in Graz. This newspaper is a real, non-fictitious newspaper-organization in Styria and Carinthia, Austria.

In the present study a product-harm crisis of a fictitious company called *E-Motion* is described. The present study uses a fictitious company in order to rule out the effect of prior corporate reputation and other potential cofounding effects, for example stable attitudes towards a brand which are not influenceable by the experimental manipulation (Laufer & Jung, 2010).

The news story is about the organization called *E-Motion* which produces bicycles and rents them in return for payment from the citizens. A bicycle company was chosen because of the high level of usage of the product by college students in Austria (bmvit, 2013). For the purpose of external validity, the news story was inspired in structure and wording from professional news articles written by *Die Presse online* (http://diepresse.com/home/ausland/welt/5199141/Securities-zerren-Mann-aus-ueberbuchtem-Flieger) and *Stern online* (https://www.stern.de/reise/fernreisen/united-airlines-chef-entschuldigt-sich-fuer-rabiaten-rauswurf-aus-flieger-7407778.html) which reported about a crisis of an airline organization called *United Airlines*. The news story made for the present study is about an individual who rents a bicycle to ride to work, tries to stop, but because of broken brakes, has an accident. As a consequence, this individual gets injured and has to be admitted to the hospital in Graz. On the top of this, government agencies investigate the accident and come to the conclusion that it was an intentional act from *E-Motion* to use bad quality-brakes in their production because they are cheaper. In addition, these brakes of low quality are forbidden in Austria, because they are seen as potential danger by the authorities. According to Coombs & Holladay the described crisis of *E-Motion* is an organizational misdeed management misconduct with injuries because the bikes are intentionally produced cheap. So the quality was bad and *E-Motion* knew this in the first place, but did not warn their customers. The injury of the victim was therefore avoidable. The organizational misdeed management misconduct crisis is

defined as a crisis where “laws or regulations are violated by management” (2017, 168). The crisis with injuries is described by Coombs & Holladay as “stakeholders are placed at risk by management and injuries occur” (168). These types of crises are part of the preventable cluster which create strong attributions of crisis responsibility (Coombs & Holladay, 2007).

The start of the story as mentioned above is in all conditions identical. The following two parts which deal with details about company´s crisis history and details about victim´s history vary between the versions. Details about the company´s crisis history are either related or unrelated to the current crisis. In the related version *E-Motion* already had problems with a technical error of the bicycle tubes dated, 2015. In the unrelated version *E-Motion* was confronted with public criticism of their marketing strategy which was discriminatory towards parts of the population dated in 2015.

Details about the victim´s history are also either related or unrelated to the described present crisis of *E-Motion*. In the related version the victim, a medical doctor, drove under the influence of alcohol with his car during medical service and slightly injured a passerby. In the unrelated version the victim prescribed illegal medication to his patients in return for sexual service. To ensure extern validity, the unrelated history of behavior of the victim was inspired also from the crisis-reporting about the *United Airlines* crisis dated in April 2007. In these news stories the history of behavior of the victim of the *United Airlines* crisis was included in the reporting similar as in the stimuli of the current online experiment (See Appendix B for the stimuli used in this study).

4. Results

4.1 Statistical outliers

To clean up the data, the few people who spend much more or much less time than the average of the participants to read the stimulus (M = 97.85 sec., SD = 60.51) are detected and excluded from the data. A box-plot in IMB SPSS Statistics (version 24; IBM Corp. 2016) shows, that there are at least 7 participants which are extreme outliers and which are excluded from the data, because of the reading time (< 6 seconds or > 786 seconds). Another box-plot in SPSS indicates that four participants assess themselves as not a bit

attentive while reading the stimulus and are therefore extreme outliers (scale point 1 on the scale from 1 „not at all attentive while reading“ to 7 „very attentive while reading“). These four participants are also excluded from the data. This was to make sure that only those respondents who read the news article with at least some attention were included in the analysis. All in all, the refined data includes N = 625. Figure 4 provides an overview of the sample size and their distribution on the experimental conditions.

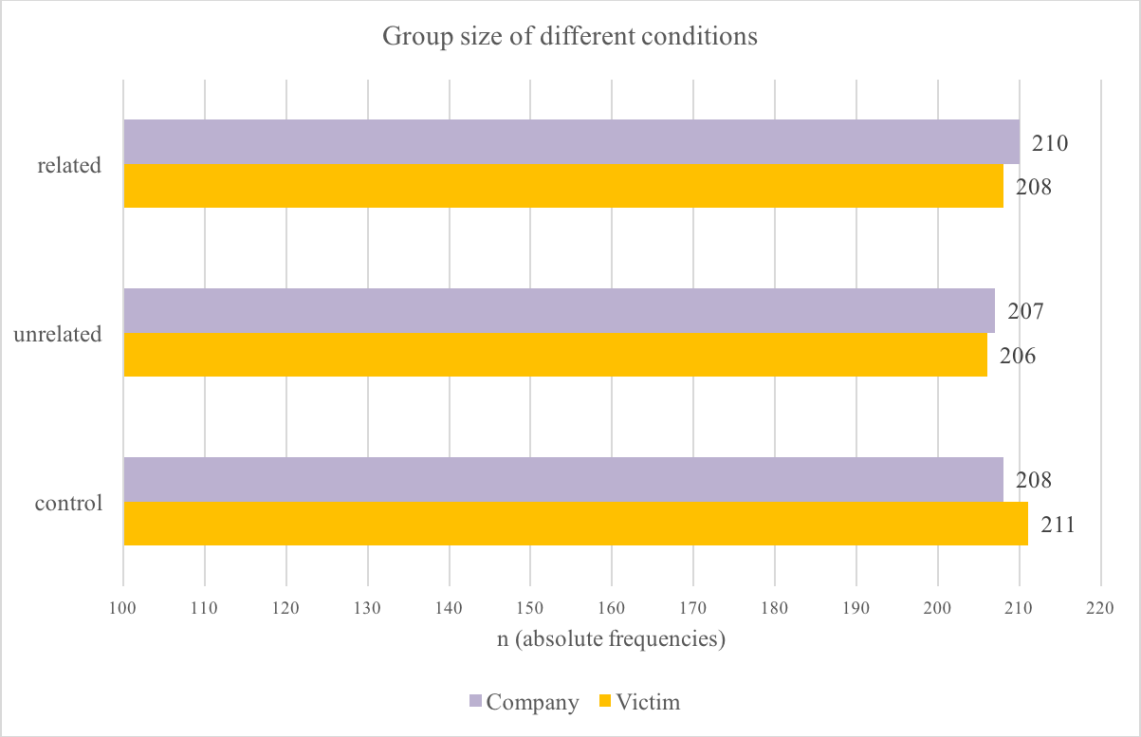

Figure 4. Group size of the different conditions: history of the victim: related vs. unrelated vs. none and history of the company: related vs. unrelated vs. none.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and sample description

This study used a sample of 625 university students from the university of Vienna. Students of the university of Vienna were selected, because of their easy reachability and because they are an interesting group for the current study. First, they are potential customers and second, they are potential employees or even future opinion leaders (Einwiller et al. 2010). There was an uneven distribution between the gender of the participants (82 % female and 18 % male). Because of this, the covariate of gender has

to be implemented in the further statistical analysis (see results). The participants were aged between 18-57 years ($M = 21.84$, $SD = 3.57$). The vast majority (95 %) of the sample was job-less at the time of the study.

The quality of the journalism (1) of the news article is evaluated from the participants as indifferent, it is not quality journalism, but also not boulevard for them ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.07$).

Over all conditions, the participants attribute the qualities of *E-Motion* (corporate reputation; 2) rather bad ($M = 2.69$, $SD = .94$). The attribution of qualities respectively the victim (victim´s reputation; 3) leads to a better reputation ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.05$) than the company got. The feeling of *Schadenfreude* is not a strong feeling which is felt by the participants, but it is a little bit higher regarding the company (4; $M = 2.01$, $SD = 1.19$) than the victim (5; $M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.34$). The intentions of future behavior (6) are rather negative than positive ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.13$). The responsibility (7) of the accident which is described in the news article is mainly attributed to the company ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 2.14$) rather than to the victim (see *figure 5*).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
M	3.93	2.69	4.51	2.01	2.00	2.98	3.66
SD	1.07	.94	1.05	1.19	1.34	1.13	2.14

Figure 5. Descriptive Statistics (N = 625) of the estimated quality of journalism (1), perceived corporate reputation (2), perceived victim´s reputation (3), Schadenfreude towards the organization (4), Schadenfreude towards the victim (5), intended future behavi

4.2.1 Normal distribution of the dependent variables

To test if the dependent variables are distributed normally within the sample, the *Kolmogorov-Smirnov-Test* in SPSS is used. The dependent variables named reputation of the company, as well as reputation of the victim differ significantly from the normal distribution ($Z = .06$, $p = .00$; $Z = .09$, $p = .00$). In addition, the dependent variables called future behavior ($Z = .08$, $p = .00$), *Schadenfreude* with what happened to the company ($Z = .20$, $p = .00$), *Schadenfreude* with what happened to the victim ($Z = .27$, $p = .00$),

attributed responsibility (Z = .16, p = .00) and quality of journalism (Z = .05, p = .00) differ also from a normal distribution.

According to Salkind (2010), the statistical requirement of a normal distribution of the data for a MANOVA, is the least important of all requirements[8]. Consistent with Salkind (2010), Bühner & Ziegler (2009) point out that the MANOVA is a statistical procedure which is stable against the violation of the requirement of a normal distribution of the dependent variables. Furthermore, they suggest, that it is not advisable to take another statistical procedure which is possibly weaker in a statistical way.

4.2.2 Homogeneity of variances

Homogeneity of variances is asserted using *Levene´s Test* which shows that equal variances could not be assumed for the following dependent variables: perceived reputation of the victim (p = .00), *Schadenfreude* regarding what happened to the victim (p = .00) and future behavior (p = .03).

The *Levene´s Test* shows further, that equal variances can be assumed for the following dependent variables: perceived reputation of the company (p = .35), *Schadenfreude* concerning the company (p = .34) attributed responsibility of the accident (p = .07) and estimated quality of the journalism (p = .71).

Bühner & Ziegler (2009) note, that the MANOVA is robust towards the violation of the requirement of the homogeneity of variances, especially when the sample size is in all conditions nearly the same (see *figure 4*) and can therefore be used as a statistical analysis method.

4.2.3 Correlations

As part of the descriptive statistics, the correlations between the dependent variables are described. The estimation of the quality of the journalism by the readers correlates negatively with the perceived victim´s reputation (r = -.22, p = .00) and with the intended future behavior by the readers (r = -.08, p = .04). When the quality of the journalism of the news story is estimated better, then the victim´s reputation is perceived worse and

[8] Normal distribution of the dependent variables, variance homogeneity, independence of the data and the interval scale of the dependent variable (Bühner & Ziegler 2009)

also the future behavior is intended more negative by the readers. The perceived corporate reputation correlates negatively with the perceived victim´s reputation (r = -.14, p = .00), positively with the *Schadenfreude* towards the victim (r = .16, p = .00), positively with the intended future behavior by the readers (r = .53, p = .00) and also positively with the attribution of the responsibility of the crisis (r = .33, p = .00). This means that when the corporate reputation is perceived as rather good, then the victim´s reputation is perceived as rather bad, the *Schadenfreude* towards the victim is felt rather strongly and the future behavior is intended by the readers as rather positive. The responsibility of the crisis is in this case rather attributed to the victim of the crisis than to the organization. The perceived reputation of the victim correlates in a positive way with the *Schadenfreude* towards the victim (r = .29, p = .00) and in a negative way with the intended future behavior (r = -.11, p = .01) by the readers as well as with the attribution of responsibility (r = -.10, p = .02). When the reputation of the victim is perceived as rather good, then the *Schadenfreude* towards the victim is rather strong, the future behavior is intended by the readers rather bad and the responsibility of the crisis is rather attributed to the concerned organization than to the victim of the crisis. The *Schadenfreude* towards the organization is correlated positively with the *Schadenfreude* towards the victim (r = .53, p = .00) and with the attribution of responsibility (r = .14, p = .00). When the readers feel the emotion of *Schadenfreude* towards the organization in a strong way, then they also feel greater *Schadenfreude* towards the victim. In this situation the responsibility of the crisis is rather attributed to the victim than to the organization. The *Schadenfreude* towards the victim is correlated positively with the attribution of responsibility by the readers (r = .16, p = .00). When the *Schadenfreude* towards the victim is felt stronger, then the responsibility is attributed by the readers rather to the victim than to the organization (see *figure 6*). Correlation analysis additionally shows that the estimation of the quality of a news story about an organizational crisis correlates in a significantly positive way with the subjective attention of the readers of this news story (r(623) = .21, p = .00). When the quality of the journalism is estimated higher by the readers, the subjective attention of the readers is also attributed higher. Furthermore, with greater attention while reading, an evaluated opinion can be built about the concerned organization.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Quality of journalism	-						
2. Corporate Reputation	.01	-					
3. Victim´s reputation	-.22**	.14**	-				
4. Schadenfreude organization	.01	.05	.02	-			
5. Schadenfreude victim	-.05	.16**	.29**	.53**	-		
6. Future behavior	-.08 *	.53**	-.11*	-.05	.07	-	
7. Attribution of Responsibility	-.05	.33**	-.10*	.14**	.16**	.32**	-

Figure 6. Correlations of the estimated quality of journalism (1), perceived corporate reputation (2), perceived victim´s reputation (3), Schadenfreude towards the organization (4), Schadenfreude towards the victim (5), intended future behavior (6) and attribution of the responsibility of the crisis. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

4.3 Interference Statistics

To iterate, the main research question of this study is how the journalistic reporting about the previous history (related vs. unrelated) of the organization which is currently concerned with a crisis and the usage of a human interest frame which includes reporting about a previous history of the victim (related vs. unrelated), impacts the attributed responsibility of the crisis by readers. How does it influence the perceived reputation of the company as well as of the victim by the readers? Is there a difference in the intended future behavior by the readers? And is there an effect of *Schadenfreude* both on what happened to the organization as well as what happened to the victim of the crisis involved?

To answer the research questions and to confirm or reject the hypotheses, a 3 x 3 MANOVA is conducted to evaluate the effects of the three types of history of the

company condition (related vs. unrelated vs. no history) and the three types of history of the victim condition (related vs. unrelated vs. no history) on corporate reputation, reputation of the victim, future behavior, responsibility for the accident, and *Schadenfreude* about what happened. Because of the inequality in gender (more women as men) in the sample size of the current study, gender was used as a covariate in the MANOVA.

All of the statistical analyses are conducted using IMB SPSS Statistics (version 24; IBM Corp. 2016).

4.3.1 Previous crisis history of the organization (related or unrelated)

RQ1: What effect has the reporting of a previous organizational crises history on the attributed responsibility of the current crisis, the perceived reputation of the organization as well as of the victim and in consequence also on the behavioral intentions by news media readers and the evoked *Schadenfreude*? And, does it make a difference if the previous organizational crises history is related or unrelated to the current crisis?

H1: When there is no reporting about previous crises in the organization`s history, the responsibility is attributed rather weaker to the organization than the victim. The perceived reputation of the organization and in consequence also the behavioral intentions of the readers are more positive and the perceived reputation of the victim is worse. Alternatively, the evoked *Schadenfreude* towards the organization is felt stronger by the readers (and towards the victim rather weaker) as when there is reporting (related or unrelated) about previous crises in the organization`s history by the news media.

H2: When information about a related crises history of the concerned organization to the current crisis is reported by the media, the responsibility of the crisis is attributed stronger to the organization than to the victim and there is a greater threat to the corporate reputation and to the positive behavioral intentions, however, a smaller threat to the reputation of the victim as well as the evoked *Schadenfreude* towards the organization is felt stronger by the readers (and towards the victim rather weaker), than when an unrelated crises history is reported.

The results of the MANOVA show a significant main effect of the crisis history of the company for the reputation of the victim ($F(2, 616) = 200.48$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 = .39$), the attributed responsibility ($F(2, 616) = 7.48$, $p = .00$), and of the *Schadenfreude* (only for the victim [$F(2, 616) = 40.13$, $p = .00$)], but not for the company [$p = .12$]) For corporate reputation ($p = .70$) or future behavior ($p = .15$), there is no significant difference between the conditions.

The co-variable named gender show no significant effects on any of the dependent variables (p = .07).

Regarding the conditions of the previous crisis history of the company: LSD Post-Hoc analysis revealed a significant ($p < .01$) difference between the reputation scores of the victim of the groups with the related history of the company and the unrelated history of the company (-.39, 95%-Cl[-.55, -.24]) as well as the control condition (1.15, 95%-Cl[.99, 1.31]). The difference between the group with the unrelated history of the company and the control group is also significant (1.54, 95%-Cl[1.38, 1.70, $p < .00$]). In addition LSD shows that there is a significant difference ($p < .01$) between the responsibility scores of the groups with the related history of the company and the unrelated history of the company (-.77, 95%-Cl[.36, 1.18]) as well as the group with the unrelated history and no history at all (-.59, 95%-Cl[-1, -.18]). Furthermore the LSD shows a significant difference (p < .01) between the scores of *Schadenfreude* which is felt about the victim of the groups with the related history and the unrelated (-.53, 95%-Cl[-.78, -.29]), as well as the related history and the control group (.58, 95%-Cl[.34, .83]) and the unrelated history and the control group (1.12, 95%-Cl[.87, 1.36]).

To summarize the results, the reputation of the victim is better when the company has an unrelated history ($M = 5.16$, $SD = .99$) than when the company has no history ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .64$) or when the company has a related history ($M = 4.76$, $SD = .79$). But when the company has a related history ($M = 4.76$, $SD = .79$), the reputation is better than when it has no history ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .64$).

The responsibility of the accident is rather attributed to the company, when there is an unrelated history ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 2.03$) about the company than a related ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 2.20$) or no history ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 2.13$) in the news story reported.

The *Schadenfreude* towards the victim is stronger when the history of the company is unrelated ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.45$) than when the history of the company is related ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 1.34$). In comparison to the control group ($M = 1.44$, $SD = .95$) the unrelated history and the related history both cause stronger feelings of *Schadenfreude*

towards the victim. *Figure 7* provides a summary of the MANOVA results for the effect of previous organizational crisis history.

Figure 7. Significant results of the 3 x 3 MANOVA: Effects of previous organizational crisis history on reputation of the company, reputation of the victim, future behavior, perceived responsibility, and *Schadenfreude* about what happened to the victim. The error bar represents the standard error. ** $p < .01$.

4.3.2 Previous history of the victim of the crisis (related or unrelated)

RQ2: What effects has the reporting of a previous history about the victim (human interest framing) on the attributed responsibility of the current crisis, the perceived reputation of the organization as well as of the victim and in consequence also on the behavioral intentions by news media readers and the evoked Schadenfreude? And does it make a difference if the previous organizational crises history is related or unrelated to the current crisis?

H3: If there is information about a previous history of the victim (human interest framing) in the journalistic reporting included, then the attribution of responsibility of the current crisis is rather shifted in the direction of the victim and rather away from the organization. Moreover, the corporate reputation is more protected but the victim`s reputation is suffering, the behavioral intentions by the readers are more positive and the evoked

Schadenfreude towards the victim is stronger (and the *Schadenfreude* towards the organization is weaker) in comparison to if there is no history of the victim reported.

H4: If there is a history related to the current organizational crisis of the victim (human interest framing) reported in the news story, then the attribution of the responsibility of the crisis is shifted away from the organization towards the victim, the corporate reputation is more protected, but the victim`s reputation is suffering. The behavioral intentions by the readers are more positive and the evoked *Schadenfreude* towards the victim is stronger (and the *Schadenfreude* towards the organization is weaker) in comparison, if there is a history of the victim unrelated to the current crisis reported.

The results of the MANOVA revealed a significant main effect of history of the victim for corporate reputation ($F(2, 616) = 7.93$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 = .03$), reputation of the victim ($F(2, 616) = 4.01$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .01$) and future behavior ($F(2, 616) = 3.13$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .01$), but not for responsibility ($p = .59$), not for *Schadenfreude* (either about the victim [$p = .67$], nor about the company [$p = .13$].

Regarding the condition of the history of the victim: LSD Post-Hoc analysis revealed a significant difference ($p < .01$) between the reputation scores of the company of the groups with the related history of the victim and the control condition (-.27, 95%-Cl[-.45, -.09]) as well as the unrelated history of the victim and the control condition (-.35, 95%[-.53, -.17]).

Furthermore LSD Post-Hoc analysis revealed a significant ($p < .05$) difference between the reputation scores of the victim of the groups with the related history of the victim and the control condition (.16, 95%-Cl[.01, .32]) as well as the unrelated history of the victim and the control condition (.21, 95%[.05, .37]). The group with the unrelated history of the victim differs significantly ($p < .01$) from the control group between the scores of future behavior (-.31, 95%-Cl[-.52, -.09]).

To summarize the results, the reputation of the company is better when there is no history ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .98$) about the victim reported as when the victim has an unrelated history ($M = 2.55$, $SD = .90$) or a related history ($M = 2.61$, $SD = .91$). There is no significant difference of the reputation of the company score if the history of the company is related or unrelated to the present accident ($p = .67$).

The reputation of the victim is at its best when the victim has a related (M = 4.60, SD = 1.02) or unrelated history (M = 4.60, SD = 1.10) and it is at its worst when the victim has no history (M = 4.40, SD = 1.01).

For future behavior, the scores are higher when the victim has no history (M = 3.14, SD = 1.14) than when the victim has an unrelated history (M = 2.84, SD = 1.05). *Figure 8* provides a summary of the MANOVA results for the effect of previous history about the victim (human interest framing).

Figure 8. Significant results of the 3 x 3 MANOVA: Effects of human interest frame on reputation of the company, reputation of the victim, future behavior, perceived responsibility, and Schadenfreude about what happened to the victim. The error bar represents the standard error ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

4.3.3 Interaction of previous crisis history and previous victim´s history

H5: When there is a mix of information about a previous crisis history related to the present crisis of the organization and information about the history of the victim (human interest framing), which is unrelated to the current crisis, then the responsibility of the crisis is attributed rather to the organization than to the victim and consequently the perceived corporate reputation as well as the intended future behavior by the readers suffers while the reputation of the victim is protected.

The MANOVA revealed no significant interaction effect between type of history of the company and type of history of the victim for attributed responsibility of the crisis, perceived reputation of the victim as well as of the organization and the intended future behavior of the readers (p = .72). Therefore, the interpretation and discussion will focus on the main effects.

4.3.4 Schadenfreude

RQ3: What impact does the feeling of *Schadenfreude* felt by recipients of a news article have towards the victim as well as towards the organization on the corporate reputation, as well as on the reputation of the victim?

H6: When there is a higher amount of *Schadenfreude* concerning what happened to the organization felt than towards the crisis´ victim, the perceived corporate reputation is suffering more and the perceived victim´s reputation is more protected as when there is a lower amount of *Schadenfreude* concerning what happened to the organization felt.

The scale of Schadenfreude about what happened to the organization of the current crisis is measured from 1 to 7. On the basis of the median (*Med* = 1.60), two groups are defined: Readers who feel much of the feeling *Schadenfreude* towards the organization (> 1.60) and readers who feel little of the feeling *Schadenfreude* towards the organization (≤ 1.60). A t-test for independent samples reveals that there is no difference between readers who feel much *Schadenfreude* about the organization and readers who feel less *Schadenfreude* towards the organization in their perceived corporate reputation (t(578.26) = -.48, p = .63).

H7: When there is higher *Schadenfreude* concerning the destiny of the crisis´ victim felt than towards the organization, the perceived corporate reputation is more protected and the perceived victim´s reputation suffers more as when there is lower *Schadenfreude* concerning the destiny of the victim, felt.

The scale of *Schadenfreude* towards what happened to the victim of the crisis is measured on a scale of 1 to 7. On the basis of the median (*Med* = 1.20), two groups are defined:

Readers who feel much of the feeling *Schadenfreude* towards the victim (> 1.20) and readers who feel little of the feeling *Schadenfreude* towards the victim (≤ 1.20). A t-test for independent samples reveals that readers who feel much *Schadenfreude* towards the victim, perceive the corporate reputation better (M = 2.90, SD = 1.07) than readers who feel less *Schadenfreude* towards the victim (M = 2.56, SD = .89) (t(578.26) = -3.90, p = .00; *see figure 9*).

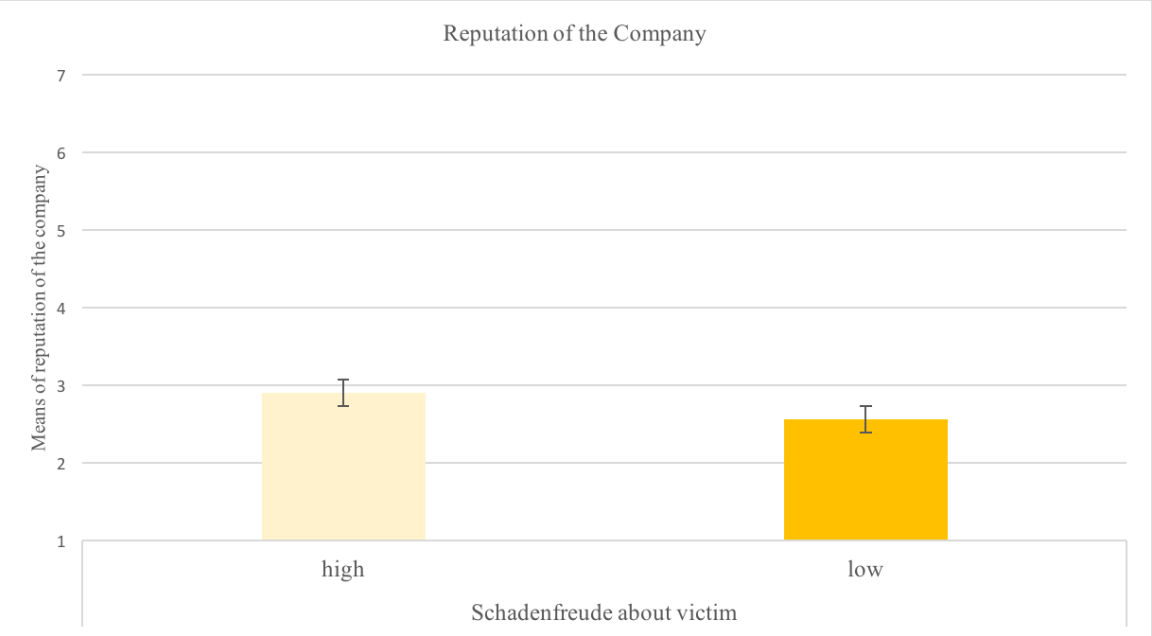

Figure 9. Statistical significant result of a t-test: Reputation of the company when *Schadenfreude* towards the victim is high vs. low. The error bar represents the standard error.

4.3.5 Attributed responsibility of the crisis

RQ4: What effect does the attributed direction of the responsibility (whether it is attributed stronger to the victim or to the organization) have on the corporate reputation? And do emotions like *Schadenfreude*, concerning the destiny of the victim, function as a mediator for the relationship between attributions of responsibility and perceived reputation of the organization by the readers?

H8: Higher attributions of responsibility of the crisis to the victim lead to a better corporate reputation as when the responsibility is attributed stronger to the organization.

The scale of perceived responsibility of the crisis is measured from 1 (responsibility is seen totally by *E-Motion*) to 11 (responsibility is seen totally by the victim). On the basis of the median (*Med* = 3), 2 groups are defined: Readers who see the responsibility by *E-Motion* (≤ 3) and readers who see the responsibility by the victim (> 3).

A t-test for independent samples shows that there is a significant difference between people who attribute the responsibility of the crisis to the organization and people who attribute the responsibility of the crisis to the victim in the perceived corporate reputation ($t(571.42) = -7.43$, $p = .00$). When the responsibility of the crisis is seen rather on the side of the victim, the reputation of the organization is better ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.01$) than when the responsibility of the crisis is seen rather on the side of the organization ($M = 2.44$, $SD = .88$; *see figure 10*)

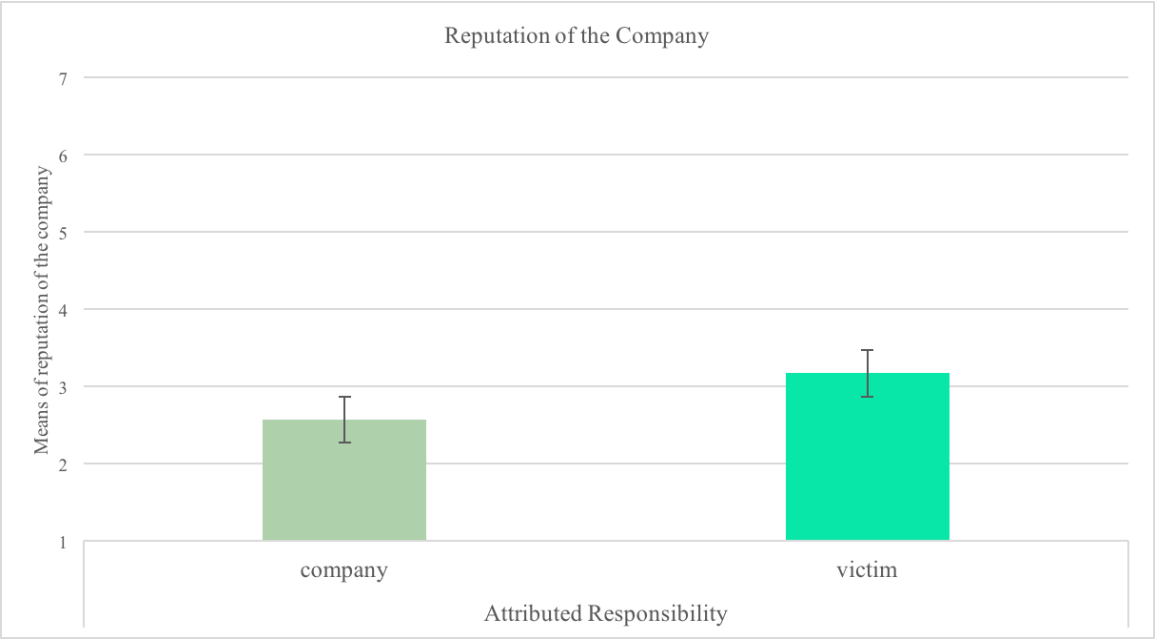

Figure 10. Statistical significant result of a t-test: Corporate reputation when the responsibility is either attributed to the company or the victim. The error bar represents the standard error.

H9: *Schadenfreude* concerning the destiny of the victim of the organizational crisis is a mediator for the relationship between attribution of responsibility and perceived corporate reputation.

For mediation analysis, PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) in IMB SPSS Statistics (version 24; IBM Corp. 2016) was used. The analysis showed that the attribution of responsibility has a direct effect on the perceived corporate reputation of the readers (c`= .13, $t(622) = 8.04$, p = 00). Furthermore, the attributed responsibility to the victim significantly increases *Schadenfreude* towards the victim (a = .10, $t(623) = 4.05$, p = .00) and *Schadenfreude* significantly ameliorates the perceived corporate reputation (b = .08, $t(622) = 2.98$, p = .00). As indicated by 95 % bias corrected bootstrapping interval (*IC*: 0.002; 0.017), entirely above zero, this indirect effect of attributed responsibility through *Schadenfreude* was significant but actually small ($\eta^2 = .008$) in comparison to the direct effect ($\eta^2 = .13$) (*see figure 11*).

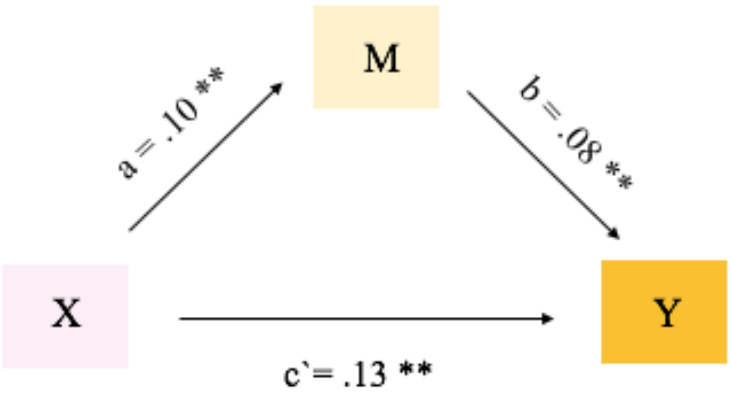

Figure 11. Significant results of the mediator analysis of *Schadenfreude* towards the victim (M) for the relationship between responsibility (X) and corporate reputation (Y). The error bar represents the standard error. ** $p < .001$.

4.3.6 Estimation of the quality of journalism

RQ5: What effects does the involvement of the two stylistic elements of reporting about an organizational crisis, namely the involvement of information about previous crisis history of the concerned organization and the usage of a human interest frame have on the estimated quality of journalism by the readers?

H10: When a human interest framing is used by the journalists to report a news story about an organizational crisis, the quality of journalism is estimated by the readers as rather low than high in comparison when there is no human interest framing used.

H11: When information about a previous crisis history (irrelevant if it is related or unrelated to the current crisis) is involved in the news story about an organizational crisis, the quality of journalism is estimated by the readers as rather high than low in comparison when there is no previous crisis history involved.

Overall the quality of journalism is established as not really good, but also not really bad by the readers ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.07$).

Further analysis is performed to be able to discuss the effects of the stylistic elements of the news story of an organizational crisis on the reader`s estimation. An univariate ANOVA showed a main effect of information about previous crisis ($F(2,616) = 11.14$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 = .04$) on the estimation of the quality of journalism by the readers. A LSD post-hoc test further showed that there is a significant difference ($p < .00$) between no information about a previous crisis history and an information about a previous crisis history which is related to the current crisis (-.29, 95%-*Cl*[-.09, -.50]) as well as a significant difference ($p < .00$) between no information about a previous crisis history and an information about a previous crisis history which is unrelated to the current crisis (-.49, 95%-*Cl*[-.28, -.69]). The quality of the journalism is estimated by the readers better when there is no information about a previous crisis history ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.07$) as when there is information about a related ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.09$) or an unrelated previous history ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.07$) reported (see *figure 12*).

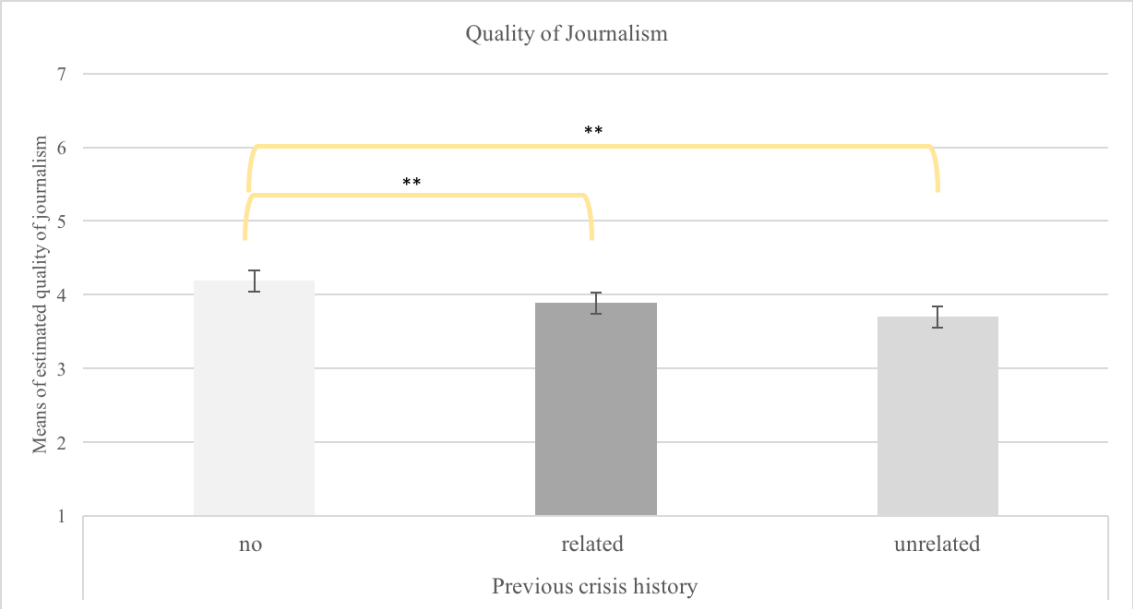

Figure 12. ANOVA effects: The estimation of the quality of the journalism between information about a previous crisis history which is related to the current crisis as well as unrelated and no information about a previous crisis history. The error bar represents the standard error. ** $p < .01$.

The second stylistic element of the news story used in this experiment is a human interest frame. An univariate ANOVA shows that there is no significant difference between the journalists usage of a human interest frame in the news story about the organizational crisis and the non-usage of a human interest frame on the estimation of the quality of journalism by the readers ($F(1,623) = 2.25$, $p = .13$). Consequently, the human interest frame has no impact on the perceived quality of journalism by the readers of a news story about an organizational crisis.

5. Discussion

While the research on crisis communication is rapidly expanding, it has given too little attention to the experiences and the perceptions of the public during a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2004; 2007). This research provides an insight in the topic by exploring influencing factors by the media on the reader`s perception of an organizational crisis and can therefore be seen as a start to minimize this research gap. The investigation aimed to shed light on the question whether and to which extent the reader´s perception of an

organization as well as of an individual is influenced by the way a news story is written by journalists about an organizational crisis and the involved victim of a crisis.

More precisely the study analyses the effect of reporting about previous crises and the role of the human interest frame used by the media increasingly often for making news stories about organizational crisis. The objective of the current study is to explore the impact of the attribution of responsibility and the perceived feeling of *Schadenfreude* by the readers on corporate reputation as well as on individual reputation of the victim.

The Agenda-Setting Theory helps to provide insights on the general impact media can have on the reader´s perceptions. It sheds light on the impact that journalists have on the public´s attitudes and opinions about organizations and their reputation. With their reporting journalists are able to make specific information about an organization more salient on the people´s agenda. And when people are later asked, how they perceive the reputation of this organization, they rely on their salient information they have in this moment, in the current case, the information about the previous history of crises or the information about the previous immoral history of the crisis´ victim.

To summarize, the new insights into the effects of the reporting by journalists about a previous crisis history of the concerned organization and the involvement of a human interest frame in a news story about a current organizational crisis on readers, the assumed hypotheses (H1-H9) are shortly repeated and discussed. The hypothesis called H1 which states that - when there is no reporting about previous crises in a news story about a current organizational crisis, then the responsibility of the crisis is attributed weaker to the organization, the perceived corporate reputation is better, the behavioral intention of the readers is better, the victim´s reputation is perceived worse and the *Schadenfreude* towards the organization is evoked stronger by the readers - is only partly confirmed. Statistical results showed no effects of reporting about previous crises of an organization on corporate reputation, on behavioral intentions by the readers, on *Schadenfreude* towards the organization and on the attributed responsibility of the crisis. But the hypothesis is confirmed in the one aspect, that the perceived reputation of the victim is suffering when there is no previous crisis history of the concerned organization involved.

The hypothesis that there is a difference between reporting about a related history of the victim and an unrelated is called in this study H2. H2 states that when information about a related crisis of the organization in comparison to the unrelated crisis is reported by the media, the responsibility is stronger attributed to the organization, the corporate

reputation and the behavioral intentions are threatened more, but the reputation of the victim is more protected and the *Schadenfreude* towards the organization is felt stronger by the readers, is not confirmed. There is no effect on the corporate reputation and on the behavioral intentions by the readers. There is indeed an effect on the perceived victim´s reputation, the attributed responsibility of the crisis and the *Schadenfreude* towards the victim, but it points in the opposite direction as the hypothesis supposes it on behalf of the reviewed literature. When there is an unrelated history of previous crises reported then the reputation of the victim of the crisis is perceived better, the responsibility of the crisis by the readers is rather attributed in the direction of the organization than the victim and the *Schadenfreude* towards the victim is evoked stronger than towards the organization.

The Framing-Theory also helps to provide insights on the impact media can have on the reader´s perceptions, but in a more specific way than the Agenda-Setting Theory. The theory explains that frames have an effect on the reader´s attitudes by portraying individuals which have a personal involvement with the reported issue. This so called human interest framing stimulates emotion through evoking empathy with the individual. In the context of organizational crises, it also predicts the attribution of responsibility.

To shed light on the human interest framing, two hypotheses (H3 and H4) were conducted. Hypothesis named H3 states that when there is information about a previous history of the victim, then the attribution of responsibility is shifted in the direction of the victim and not the organization, the corporate reputation is better but the victim´s reputation is worse, the behavioral intentions by the readers are more positive and the evoked *Schadenfreude* towards the victim is stronger (and the *Schadenfreude* towards the organization is weaker) in comparison to when there is no information about a previous history of the victim involved in the news story. Findings show that there is no impact of the human interest frame on the attribution of responsibility of the crisis by the readers and on the *Schadenfreude* towards the victim as well as towards the organization. There is an effect on the perceived corporate reputation, on the victim´s reputation and on the behavioral intentions by the readers, however, it points in the opposite direction as the hypothesis supposed it. When there is information about a previous history of the victim involved (human interest frame), then the corporate reputation is suffering, the intended future behavior by the readers is more negative but the victim´s reputation is protected in comparison to when there is no information about a previous history of the victim is involved.

Regarding hypothesis H4 which states that there is a difference between a related previous history of the victim and an unrelated previous history of the victim, the findings indicate no such an effect on attribution of responsibility, perceived corporate reputation, perceived victim´s reputation, intended behavioral intentions and *Schadenfreude* towards the victim as well as towards the organization.

Concerning the hypothesis called H5 which hypothesized an interaction effect of the reporting of information about a related previous crisis history of the concerned organization and the unrelated history of the victim, the results indicate no interaction. The assumption that the mix of reporting about both a related organizational crisis history and an unrelated victim´s history in a news story, is a deadly combination for the perception of the corporate reputation and for the intended future behavior by the readers is not confirmed. The results indicate no statistical interaction between the providing information about both the organizational crisis history and the victim´s history in a news story from journalists. The reporting-mix about both, the information about a related previous crisis history of the concerned organization and information about the unrelated history of the victim do not influence together the attribution of responsibility, the perceived corporate reputation, the perceived victim´s reputation and the intended behavioral intentions.

Hypotheses H6 and H7 regard the effects of evoked *Schadenfreude* towards the victim as well as about the organization on corporate reputation and on victim´s reputation. The hypothesis H6 which states that, when there is higher *Schadenfreude* concerning what happened to the organization felt than towards the crisis´ victim, then the perceived corporate reputation is suffering more than when there is less *Schadenfreude* concerning what happened to the organization felt, is not confirmed. Findings show no difference between readers who feel much *Schadenfreude* towards the organization and readers who feel less *Schadenfreude* towards the organization in their perceived reputation of the company. Hypothesis H7 otherwise is confirmed. H7 states a higher *Schadenfreude* concerning the destiny of the crisis´ victim felt than towards the organization leads to a better perceived corporate reputation as when there is lower *Schadenfreude* concerning the destiny of the victim, felt. Therefore, readers who feel much *Schadenfreude* towards the victim, perceive the reputation of the organization better than readers who feel less *Schadenfreude* towards the victim. Hypothesis H8 and hypothesis H9 deal with the attributed responsibility of the current crisis which is described in the news story. Hypothesis called H8 states that higher attributions of

responsibility of the crisis to the victim lead to a better corporate reputation as when the responsibility is attributed stronger to the organization. H8 is confirmed by the current study. Findings show that when the responsibility of the crisis is seen rather on the side of the victim, the reputation of the organization is better than when the responsibility of the crisis is seen rather on the side of the organization.

Last but not least comes hypothesis H9 which assumes that *Schadenfreude* concerning the destiny of the victim of the organizational crisis is a mediator for the relationship between attribution of responsibility and perceived corporate reputation. Hypothesis H9 is confirmed by the current study. Findings show that the attributed responsibility by the readers to the victim increases *Schadenfreude* towards the victim and *Schadenfreude* in turn enhance the perceived corporate reputation by the readers.

All in all, there are five new insights into the mosaic of the crisis situation and their many different variables which form the crises perception by the public. The stakeholder approach (Shamma, 2012) provided guidance through the structure of the current study. The following three elements are now discussed in a final light.

- Factors which could influence the perception of the crisis by the public:

Firstly, the involvement of information about a previous history of crises which is related to the current crisis of the organization in a news story has effects on the perception of the crisis by its readers. Namely, when journalists report about an unrelated history of previous crises, the responsibility of the crisis by the readers is rather attributed in the direction of the organization than the victim.

Furthermore, the reputation of the victim of the crisis is perceived better when there is an unrelated previous crisis history reported. And with the information of an unrelated previous crisis history involved in the news story, the *Schadenfreude* towards the victim is evoked stronger than towards the organization by the readers. As the Situational Communication Crisis Theory (SCCT; Coombs, 2013) states, the readers are searching for a cause of the crisis. The information about a previous crisis history which is unrelated to the current crisis is a useful reference point for the readers to attribute the responsibility of the crisis to the right originator.

The responsibility of the crisis is by readers which have the information that there is a history of previous crises of the concerned organization which are unrelated to the current crisis rather attributed in the direction of the organization than the victim. One

interpretation could be that in this case, the readers are aware that the organization had already made mistakes before the crisis. These mistakes occurred in a different area of the organization than the current crisis occurred. This results in the perception by the readers that the organization has not only in one area of their work a malfunction (as it would maybe be when there is information about a related previous crisis history) but instead the whole organization is perceived as failing. It seems as if the organization is good for nothing and has many problems throughout its organizational areas. When the responsibility of the crisis is attributed to the organization, then the victim is seen as free from liability.

Furthermore, a crisis history which is unrelated to the current crisis predicts nothing about the events and the development of the current crisis. The accident is more unexpected than when the organization had previous crises which are related and therefore similar to the current crisis. Only with the information about previous unrelated crises, it is impossible for customers to predict the current crisis, because they have no information about previous crises or even about previous related crises and therefore cannot take any precautions. Just with the knowing that the organization had crises before the current crisis but which were unrelated to the current crises history the victim of the crisis could not have prepared itself and had no chance to avoid the organizational crisis accident. Because of the unknowingness and unpredictability of the current crisis, the victim´s reputation is perceived as good. The victim had no chance of avoiding the accident and is seen as a real victim of this crisis without any responsibility for it.

The finding that the *Schadenfreude* towards the victim is in this case stronger than when no previous history or even when a related previous history is mentioned in the news story, is with regard to the literature review about *Schadenfreude* in organizational crises not explainable, but a very interesting finding. One possible interpretation of this finding could relate with the estimation of the quality of the journalism of the news story.

The current study shows that the quality of journalism is estimated by the readers better when there is no reporting about the previous crisis history of the organization in the news story involved as when there is a related reporting or unrelated reporting involved. Especially the estimations by the readers on the professionalism and the credibility of the news story differentiate between the news story which involves information about a related previous crisis history and the news story which involves information about an unrelated previous crisis history of the concerned organization. When the reporting involves information about an unrelated previous crisis history, then

the news story is seen as rather unserious than serious and rather unreliable than reliable by the readers. This bad estimation of the two factors of quality journalism by the readers suggests that the reported news is rather classified as tabloidization than as quality news because of the decrease of journalistic standards (at least a decrease in professionalism and credibility) which is perceived by the readers (Kurtz, 1993).

Tabloidization means the trend to more news stories which on the one hand involve a human interest frame and on the other hand are entertaining for the readers with the aim of evoking emotions in the readers (Gencel Bek, 2004). This could imply that when information about an unrelated previous crisis history of the concerned organization is involved in a news story about a crisis, first, the quality of the journalism is estimated as bad. Second, the news story is categorized automatically as tabloidization, because of the low quality of journalism, which normally evokes emotions because of human interest frames and the entertaining reporting. As a result of this early recognition of tabloid journalism by the readers, emotions towards occurring humans in the news story are automatically evoked. Referring to the Appraisal Theory, emotions provoke cognition and motivation through the interpretation of what the physical activation could mean. The questions in the experiment about emotions are only about the emotion *Schadenfreude* and therefore could suggest to the readers that the emotion they felt was *Schadenfreude*. Because of the study´s questions, the felt emotions could be classified by the readers through cognitional and motivational processes as *Schadenfreude*.

Secondly, the involvement of a human interest frame (information about a previous history of the victim) in a news story has effects on the perception of the crisis by readers of the news story about the current organizational crisis. Namely, the corporate reputation is suffering and also the intended future behavior by the readers is decreasing, whilst the victim´s reputation is protected in comparison to when there is no human interest frame involved (information about a previous history of the victim).

This suggests that there is no such thing as a protection from a human interest frame in news stories reporting about an organizational crisis for the corporate reputation and the intended future behavior of the readers as hypothesized initially. Even on the contrary, the usage of human interest frames impairs the perception of the corporate reputation and the intentions of future behavior by readers. The corporate reputation is more positive when the journalists do not use a human interest frame to report about the crisis.

Furthermore, when there is a human interest framing used, the reputation of the victim is not suffering as hypothesized. Here the results also show a contrary outcome to the

literature, namely human interest frames even improve the perceived reputation of the victim. This could be because of the stimulation of the psychological pulse of the readers through the usage of a human interest frame for reporting about an organizational crisis. This stimulation could lead to more negative attitudes towards the whole crisis (An & Gower, 2009). When the individual, which suffered from the crisis, because it was involved in an accident, is described through the human interest frame, the individual case of this personal tragedy is the main focus of attention for the readers. Cho & Gower found that the human interest frame influences the reader´s empathy. When there is a human interest frame involved in a news story about an accident, the readers feel more empathy about the accident and are able to put oneself in the victim´s position and therefore perceive the reputation of the victim better. In consequence emotion is evoked and the current crisis is perceived more negatively by the readers (2006) which could be a predictor for the suffering of the corporate reputation.

The intended future behavior by the readers is suffering too, because the readers react with avoidance behavior. They are able to feel empathy with the victim and are not keen to see themselves the next time in the place of the victim.

- The formation of beliefs and attitudes by the recipients:

The formation of the beliefs and attitudes by the public or rather by the readers of the news story of the organizational crisis is influenced by two components, namely *Schadenfreude* towards the victim and the attribution of responsibility of the crisis. Readers who feel much *Schadenfreude* towards the victim, perceive the corporate reputation better than readers who feel less *Schadenfreude* towards the victim.

Referring to the balance theory, positive feelings like *Schadenfreude* towards an individual are evoked, when a disliked person is involved in something negative. The character of the victim and the organizational crisis accident are evaluated by the readers and they ask themselves if the victim deserves to be involved in the accident. As Feather & McKee showed, *Schadenfreude* is felt when a disliked person gets punished for their behavior (2014). In this case, the victim of the crisis is disliked by the readers, because of immoral past behavior and gets a punishment in form of the personal involvement in the crisis accident. The situation is judged by the readers as fair because of the victim´s immoral character. At least in the eyes of the readers, the victim deserves to be involved in the accident. These judgements shield the corporate reputation for suffering because

the events of the organizational crisis are interpreted as fair and deserved. In the eyes of the readers, the organization did nothing wrong!

Furthermore, when the responsibility of the crisis is seen rather by the victim, the reputation of the organization is better than when the responsibility of the crisis is seen rather by the concerned organization. According to Weiner (1987) there is a relationship between the attribution of responsibility and the raising of negative emotions. The greater these attributions of responsibility of the crisis by the readers towards an organization are, the stronger negative feelings towards the organization arise. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT; Coombs & Holladay, 2003) hence suggest that with a strong attribution of responsibility of the crisis towards the concerned organization, the corporate reputation suffers as a consequence. One can interpret, that people who attribute the responsibility of the crisis high towards the organization do this because of the information in the news story about the initial character of the crisis. The news story reveals that the organization has known that something bad could happen to customers when using their products already, before the accident happened and did nothing about it. Because the organization did not prevent the victim from suffering, the attribution of responsibility is especially high towards the organization. Consequently, the corporate reputation suffers. Though when the attribution of the responsibility by the readers is rather seen by the victim for whatever reasons, then also the reputational damage shifts away from the organization and in the direction of the victim.

Furthermore, the current investigation is able to show that *Schadenfreude* towards the victim even functions as a mediator for the positive impact of the attribution of responsibility by the readers to the victim on the perceived corporate reputation by the readers. It can be shown that there is a mediated relationship between the attributed responsibility of the crisis, the *Schadenfreude* towards what happened the victim and the perceived corporate reputation. This study documented already how the attributed responsibility affects the perceived corporate reputation of the readers. What is new, is that the attributed responsibility to the victim increases *Schadenfreude* towards the victim and *Schadenfreude* enhances the perceived corporate reputation. Though, it has to be noted, that the mediating effect is rather small.

- The future intentions of the recipients:

The study discovered that when the corporate reputation is perceived as rather good, also the future behavior is intended as rather positive by the readers. In addition, it can be assumed, that when the reputation of the victim is perceived as good, the future behavior is intended by the readers as bad.

This finding leads to the conclusion that the perception of the reputation of the organization and also the perception of the victim is deciding how the future behavior is intended. It seems as the decision of the future intentions of the readers is all about taking a personal position and acting from this position. When taking the side of the organization, the intention of acting in a positive way towards this organization in the future is reasonable. However, when backing the victim´s position the intent of acting in a positive way towards the organization in the future would be perceived as unreasonable. In this case, the organization gets avoided by the readers and the intended future behavior is consequently rather negative than positive.

Moreover, in regard to the estimation of the quality of the journalism: Surprisingly only the involvement of information about the previous crisis history of the organization functions as an indicator for the readers to estimate the quality of the crisis story´s journalism. If there is a human interest frame in the news story involved or not is no cue for the readers to estimate the quality of the journalism (theoretically) right. When there is no previous crisis history in the reporting involved, the relevance, the professionalism, the credibility and the balance of the coverage of the news story is estimated as higher-quality by the readers as when there is an information about a previous crisis history (which is related or unrelated to the current crisis) reported.

These findings are unexpected in regard to the previous literature on soft and hard news. Publishing information about the previous history of an organization which is currently in a crisis can be described as “telling the whole story” (Aucoin, 2005, 204) and could be categorized as investigative journalism because it uncovers information which is not known by parts of the public. Investigative journalism is seen higher in quality compared to tabloid journalism (Aucoin, 2005). These findings can be interpreted that on the one hand the readers are not able, like the scholars, to identify the current news story about the organizational crisis belonging to tabloid journalism, although a human interest frame is involved. On the other hand, one can interpret that it is irrelevant for the readers if there is a human interest frame involved or not for their estimation of quality journalism.

Further research should consider these findings in the context of the reporting about organizational crises since the estimation of the quality of a news story about an organizational crisis correlates in a significant positive way with the subjective attention of the readers on this news story. When the quality of the journalism is estimated higher by the readers the subjective attention of the readers is also attributed higher. Furthermore, with greater attention while reading, a more evaluated opinion can be built about the concerned organization.

However, the message for journalists is clear: when reporting about an organizational crisis in the news media, the involvement of information about the previous crisis history is an indicator for the readers to downgrade the quality of journalism. While the usage of a human interest frame to give the story about the organizational crisis a human angle has no effect on the estimation of the quality of the journalism.

5.1. Further directions

This study used experimental stimuli which imitate a hypothetical situation. This hypothetical situation is only inspired from a real crisis but is no genuine organizational crisis. Different experimental stimuli can be investigated in a future research to replicate the findings of the current study and to confirm them.

In addition, methodological triangulation could be also the aim of further investigation. The combination of first qualitative and later quantitative research could be an additional achievement in understanding how corporate reputation is formed by the readers of a news story and what consequences this formation has for the corporations future.

Other emotions (positive and negative) should be studied in the context of news reporting about organizational crises to see if there are more emotions which mediate the relationship between the attribution of responsibility and the corporate reputation. The knowledge of further involved emotions could provide new possibilities for PR managers to deal with journalists and shape the media reports.

5.1.1 Attention of the readers

The current study brought another interesting aspect in focus, namely the subjective attention of the readers while reading the news article about the organizational crisis. Following stylistic elements of a news story of an organizational crisis which have an effect on the reader`s attention are discussed.

The subjective attention which the readers of a news story about an organizational crisis turn towards the reading of the news story is an interesting aspect which needs additional research. One is not able to learn without paying attention and also cannot reason without maintaining attention and cannot analyze or build a justified opinion without shifting the attention towards the relevant issue. For most cognitive processes attention is required (Kindlon, 1998).

As reading also needs attention, attention constitutes a very important aspect for the current study because it is all about the effects of reading a news story about an organizational crisis. In the present study the readers were asked after reading the news story how much attention they had whilst reading of the story. The subjective attention is measured on the scale from 1 “not at all attentive while reading” to 7 “very attentive while reading” and is originally used for the detection of statistical outliers.

An univariate ANOVA indicates that there is a main effect of information about previous crisis history ($F(2,616) = 3.36$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .01$). LSD post-hoc test (-.29, 95%-Cl[-.52, -.07]) reveals a significant difference ($p = .01$) between the reporting about information about a related previous crisis history ($M = 5.70$, $SD = 1.13$) and the absence of reporting about information about a previous crisis history ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.17$) on the subjective attention while reading. The subjective attention while reading the news story about an organizational crisis is higher when the news story involves information about a previous crisis history of the concerned organization (see *figure 13* for visualization of the effect).

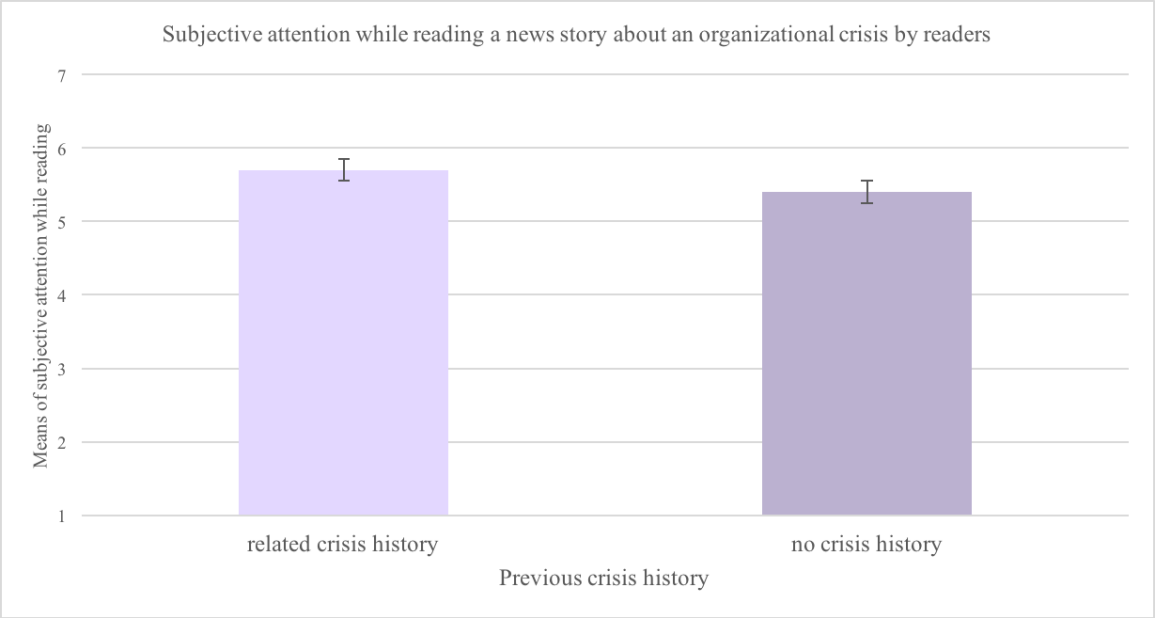

Figure 13. Significant statistical result of a t-test: Subjective attention of the readers while reading a news story of an organizational crisis when there is either information about a related previous crises history of the concerned organization reported or when there is no previous crises history of the concerned organization reported. The error bar represents the standard error.

On the basis of the median (*Med* = 6), two groups are defined: readers who say that they were attentive while the reading of the news story and read it carefully (> 6) and readers who say that they were not so attentive while the reading of the news story and read it not very carefully (≤ 6). A t-test for independent samples reveals that these two groups of readers differ in the perceived corporate reputation ($T(623) = 2.45$, $p = .02$), in the felt *Schadenfreude* towards the concerned organization ($T(252.56) = 4.41$, $p = .00$), in the attribution of responsibility of the current crisis ($T(623) = 3.45$, $p = .00$) and also in the assessment by the readers of the quality of the news story about the organizational crisis ($T(623) = -2.78$, $p = .00$).

The corporate reputation is perceived by the recipients who did not read the news story very carefully and said about themselves that they were not very attentive while reading better ($M = 2.74$, $SD = .93$) than by the readers who read the news story very carefully and said about themselves that they were very attentive while reading ($M = 2.52$, $SD = .96$). The *Schadenfreude* towards the organization is felt stronger by the recipients who did not read the news story very carefully and said about themselves that they were not very attentive while reading ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 1.22$) than by the readers who read the news story very carefully and said about themselves that they were very attentive while

reading (*M* = 1.65, *SD* = .97). The responsibility of the crisis is rather attributed to the organization than the victim, when the news story is not read attentively (*M* = 3.81, *SD* = 2.10) than when the news story is read carefully with subjective strong attention to the news story (*M* = 3.09, *SD* = 2.22). The quality of the journalism is perceived as better by readers who do not spend much subjective attention while reading the news story about the organizational crisis (*M* = 3.86, *SD* = 1.05) than readers who do spend much subjective attention while reading (*M* = 4.17, *SD* = 1.14).

Further research might explore deeper, firstly the reasons why the reader`s attention is attracted from the information about a related previous crisis history in a news story about an organizational crisis. Secondly, the consequences of this attention attraction on many relevant factors in a crisis managing situation could deliver useful results for PR and crisis manager, how to cooperate with journalists and the media in general during a crisis situation. For further investigations into the relationship of attention and news stories about organizational crises, a combination of different methods of measurement is required. There are various possibilities to measure attention suggested from psychology research. However, most of the methods are limited to the personal ability of an individual to pay attention (Kindlon, 1998). To investigate attention concerning the news article, it is suggested by the current study that both the subjective assessment of the reader´s attention and an objective measurement in the form of knowledge questions about the news story, should be combined. Only then, one can make conclusions about the role of attention while reading a news story about an organizational crisis on the corporate reputation.

5.2. Relevance of the findings of the current study

This new knowledge about medial factors which could influence the perception of the crisis by the public can be seen as opportunities for actors (public relation managers, organizational crises communicators) to understand a little bit more about what the public thinks about in the context of the organizational crisis.

An organizational crisis can happen to any organization at any time and can lead to a catastrophe, when the situation escalates (Vassilikopoulou et al., 2009). Organizational crises often go together with a financial loss for the organization. Millions of dollars in sales or market share can be lost through a crisis. Therefore, organizations

have to be prepared for such a situation as well as possible (Vassilikopoulou et al., 2009), to protect the organization properly.

The findings of the current study provide know-how for a better preparation on how to handle this possible threatening situation. With these findings, actors can estimate how the public thinks about the organizational crisis and the concerned organization because the current findings explain what impact (given) information about the organizational crisis on the public has. Furthermore, it is found that the media is able to push the attribution of responsibility for the crisis by the readers in one direction and consequently shape the perception of the corporate reputation and the intention of their future behavior with the use of stylistic elements (the supply of information about a previous crisis history and the human interest frame). The findings show that the investigation of the news media takes an important role in understanding the public´s opinion in an organizational crisis situation by insights into the reputation formation of news story readers. They also demonstrate that the emotion *Schadenfreude* plays an important role in this formation and could actually be, when evoked correct (towards the victim), a buffer for damage to the corporate reputation.

With this knowledge, crisis managers can optimize the reputational protection by referring to the public´s attribution of responsibility of the crisis and the evoked *Schadenfreude* by the public. They have now the chance to minimize the reputational damage by managing the news media and therefore also guiding the perception of the readers respectively of the public.

All in all, the current study gives advice for journalists who are reporting about a crisis as well as for public relations practitioners. The journalists who reported about the *United Airlines* crisis should have taken into count that the published information about other crises of the airline organization which happened a time ago, is perceived by the readers as rather low-quality than high-quality regarding journalistic quality. The information that *United Airlines* once handled the baggage of a singer carelessly and that *United Airlines* stopped two teenage girls from entering the plane until they would change their clothes into dresses probably creates a picture of a journalism that has little relevance, little professionalism, poor credibility and an unsatisfactory balance of the coverage of the news. Otherwise, the reporting about the details about the violated passenger respectively the victim of the *United Airlines* crisis which were also released by the media probably, were not used by the readers to judge the quality of the journalism. For future media reports about organizational crises it is better for the reputation of the

news medium to release news stories without information about previous crises of the concerned organization.

For public relations practitioners, the current study shows that paying attention to the media reports and attaching value to good media relations by staying in tight contact with journalists who are reporting about the crisis of the organization is essential for protecting the corporate reputation in a crisis situation. The findings suggest five practical implementations:

I. The usage of human interest frames in crisis-news stories impairs the perception of the corporate reputation and the intentions of future behavior by readers. Therefore, it of importance for public relation managers to prevent journalists from reporting a news story with a human interest frame about the victim because then the individual case of a personal tragedy would be the main attention-focus of the readers and they are likely to empathize with the victim.

II. The attribution of the responsibility of the crisis towards the victim and *Schadenfreude* towards the victim of the crisis function as a buffer for corporate reputation loss. To guide journalists to tell a story where after reading the responsibility of the crisis is attributed by the readers to the victim and the feeling of *Schadenfreude* towards what happened to the victim is evoked by the readers, is a way of protecting the corporate reputation as a public relation manager. The art of journalism is to not use a typical human interest frame with information about the previous history of the victim but to provide information about the victim in a more discreet way.

III. Information about a previous crisis history of the organization which is unrelated to the current crisis evokes *Schadenfreude* towards the victim of the crisis. This is a purposeful effect because the feeling of *Schadenfreude* towards the victim is involved in the buffer process of corporate reputation loss. But reporting about a previous crisis history of the organization which is unrelated to the current crisis also leads to an attribution of responsibility of the crisis towards the organization, which constitutes a threat to corporate reputation. But it is known that otherwise the reporting about a previous crisis history of the organization which is related to the current crisis results in an attribution of the responsibility of the crisis

towards the victim. Consequently, the combination of reporting about an unrelated and related previous crisis history, if existing, could be the golden middle road to protect the corporate reputation.

5.2.1 Ethical aspects

Martin & Wright stated 2016 that the question of "Will it work?" is more often asked by PR practitioners than "Is it right?" (Martin & Wright, 2016, 25). Only the first question is discussed in the current study, but the second question is of equally or even greater importance.

It is well-known that public relations practitioners are confronted eventually with challenging ethical issues at some point of their work. Because of this it is important for the current study to also discuss very shortly the ethical considerations for applying the practical implementations that this study suggests. Ethic deals with moral questions, with correct moral behavior and with the "right" and the "wrong" (Martin & Wright, 2016). To find a middle road between pursuing aims of the client and the journalists ethical responsibility to society, is often challenging for public relations practitioners. PR practitioners are confronted with a dilemma "to do the right thing" for the client as well as for the society. For PR practitioners one of the big challenges for the future is the mastering of the digital evolution (Zerfass at al., 2011). To be able to master this, the current study provides practical implementations derived from scientific research for public relations practitioners.

However, these practical implementations in no way involve ethical considerations. It is important for public relations practitioners to use ethical considerations as a basis for their thinking and behavior, to be self-critical, to pay attention to the social viewpoint and to enter into discourse with society. When PR is only used as communication for the client and as communication to maximize the profit of the organization, then PR will not be seen as trustworthy and also will not be accepted by society (Faber-Wiener, 2013). Therefore, it is of particular importance that the suggested practical implementations should not be implemented without thinking about ethical restrictions, especially because there is a victim of an organizational crisis involved. To respect the ethical standards of PR, one should practice at least honesty, loyalty and fairness (Martin & Wright, 2016).

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APPENDIX A

Abstract I

The journalistic trend of both, including information about a previous crisis history and using a human interest frame in a news story about an organizational crisis is increasingly observable in the media. Effects of this journalistic trend on the perception of the corporate reputation by the readers are predicted (Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Cho & Gower, 2006). The current study investigates the effects of journalists including information of a previous crisis history of the organization (related and unrelated to the current crisis) and a human interest frame with information about the previous history of the victim of the crisis (related and unrelated to the current crisis) in a news story about a present organizational crisis on the reader´s perceptions of the corporate reputation. To examine the effects, this study used a 3 (related crisis history versus unrelated crisis history versus no crisis history of the organization) x 3 (related history versus unrelated history versus no history of the crisis´ victim) between-subjects experimental design (N = 625 university students). Results show that the usage of a human interest frame in crisis-news stories (do not matter if a related or unrelated previous history of the victim is revealed) impairs the perceived corporate reputation and the intentions of future behavior with respect to the concerned organization by the readers. Moreover, the attribution of responsibility of the crisis towards the victim and the emotion of *Schadenfreude* towards the victim function as a buffer for corporate reputation damage. Therefore, the study concludes that the combination of reporting about an unrelated and a related previous crisis history, if existing, is the golden middle-road to protect the corporate reputation. Only then, both the *Schadenfreude* towards the victim can be evoked as well as the responsibility of the crisis can be attributed to the victim which leads to a protected corporate reputation.

Keywords: Crisis communication; organizational crisis; Media; Corporate reputation; Human interest frame; Related and unrelated previous crisis history; Schadenfreude; Attribution of responsibility.

Abstract II

Der journalistische Trend, Information über frühere Unternehmenskrisen und ein Human-Interest Frame in die Berichterstattung über eine aktuelle Unternehmenskrise einzubinden, wird immer öfter in den Medien beobachtet. Effekte dieses journalistischen Trends auf die Unternehmensreputation des betroffenen Unternehmens werden vermutet (Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Cho & Gower, 2006). Die vorliegende Studie untersucht einerseits die Effekte der journalistischen Berichterstattung über eine Unternehmenskrise, die Information über die vorherige Krisengeschichte eines Unternehmens (ähnlich oder unähnlich zu der aktuellen Unternehmenskrise) enthält. Andererseits werden auch die Effekte der journalistischen Berichterstattung über eine Unternehmenskrise, die ein Human-Interest Frame, das Information über die Geschichte des Krisenopfers enthält (ähnlich oder unähnlich zu der aktuellen Unternehmenskrise) auf die wahrgenommene Reputation des betroffenen Unternehmens von den RezipientInnen untersucht. Um die Effekte zu prüfen wurde ein 3 (ähnliche Krisengeschichte versus unähnliche Krisengeschichte versus keine Krisengeschichte des Unternehmens) x 3 (ähnliche Geschichte versus unähnliche Geschichte versus keine Geschichte des Krisenopfers) Between-Subjects Experimentaldesign durchgeführt (N = 625 StudentInnen). Ergebnisse zeigen, dass der Gebrauch von einem Human-Interest Frame (unabhängig davon, ob die Information über das Krisenopfer eine ähnliche oder unähnliche Geschichte zu der vorgefallenen aktuellen Krise enthält) die wahrgenommene Unternehmensreputation, sowie das beabsichtigte zukünftige Verhalten der RezipientInnen bezüglich des betroffenen Unternehmen verschlechtert. Des Weiteren fungiert die Verantwortungszuschreibung der Krise zu dem Krisenopfer und das Gefühl der Schadenfreude der RezipientInnen gegenüber dem Krisenopfer als Puffer für den Schaden an der Unternehmensreputation durch eine Unternehmenskrise. Die Studie kommt folglich zu dem Schluss, dass die Kombination von Information über eine ähnliche vorherige Krisengeschichte und Information über eine unähnliche vorherige Krisengeschichte zu der vorgefallenen aktuellen Krise, wenn vorhanden, der goldene Mittelweg einer medialen Krisenberichterstattung zum Schutz der Unternehmensreputation, ist. Nur dann kann das Gefühl der Schadenfreude gegenüber dem Opfer bei den RezipientInnen hervorgerufen werden und gleichzeitig die

Verantwortungszuschreibung für die Krise dem Krisenopfer zugeschrieben werden, was zu einem Schutz für die Unternehmensreputation führt.

Stichwörter: Krisenkommunikation; Unternehmenskrise; Medien; Unternehmensreputation; Human Interest Frame; ähnliche und unähnliche vorausgehende Krisengeschichte; Schadenfreude; Verantwortungszuschreibung.

APPENDIX B

A) IV1: related

IV2: unrelated

E-Motion-Unfall

Radfahrer rast mit geliehenem E-Bike in Hauswand

Ein Kunde des österreichischen Fahrradverleihs „E-Motion" knallte am Dienstag wegen defekter Bremsen in eine Hauswand. Der Chef des Grazer Fahrradverleihs entschuldigt sich.

Der Unfallsort © Christoph Petersen

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Es ist nicht das erste Mal, dass die Firma negative Schlagzeilen macht. Bereits 2015 sah sich das Unternehmen mit Vorwürfen zu technischen Mängel an den Leih-Rädern konfrontiert. Damals war E-Motion wegen mangelhafter Qualität der Gummis der Fahrradreifen im Kreuzfeuer.
Auch das Unfallopfer Robin P. steht nicht zum ersten Mal im Interesse der Öffentlichkeit. 2016 wurde der Arzt wegen eines Verstoßes gegen das österreichische Arzneimittelgesetz verurteilt. Er verlor dabei seine Lizenz als Mediziner. Besonders pikant: Robin P. stellte Patienten illegale Rezepte für verschreibungspflichtige Medikamente aus - im Gegenzug für sexuelle Dienste. Er hat diese Straftat in seiner Funktion als Arzt begangen. Nun will er vor Gericht ziehen und E-Motion auf Schmerzensgeld klagen.

(APA/ Die Kleine Zeitung)

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B) IV1: related

IV2: related

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C) IV1: unrelated

IV2: unrelated

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D) IV1: unrelated

IV2: related

E-Motion-Unfall

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E) IV1: control

IV2: related

E-Motion-Unfall

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F) IV1: control group

IV2: unrelated

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E-Motion-Unfall

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G) IV1: unrelated

IV2: control

E-Motion-Unfall

Radfahrer rast mit geliehenem E-Bike in Hauswand

Ein Kunde des österreichischen Fahrradverleihs „E-Motion" knallte am Dienstag wegen defekter Bremsen in eine Hauswand. Der Chef des Grazer Fahrradverleihs entschuldigt sich.

Der Unfallsort © Christoph Petersen

Am Dienstag kam es zu einem schweren Radunfall. Der Arzt Robin P. hatte sich am Vormittag ein Rad der Firma E-Motion ausgeliehen, in einer Kurve versagten die Bremsen und der 58-Jährige raste mit voller Wucht gegen eine Hauswand. Er wurde mit einer Gehirnerschütterung und multiplen Knochenbrüchen ins LKH Graz eingeliefert.

Die defekten Bremsen an dem verliehenen E-Bike seien der Grund für den schweren Unfall, heißt es in einer Untersuchung des zuständigen Verkehrsamtes. So hielt die Leihrad-Firma E-Motion die technischen Mindestanforderungen der österreichischen Fahrradverordnung nicht ein. Bei der Produktion von Bremsbelägen der Fahrräder wurde laut dem Bericht eine billige und unsichere Variante verwendet, die in Österreich verboten ist. Laut Insider-Informationen wurde aufgrund von internen Sparmaßnahmen bei der Produktion bei den Bremsbelägen eingespart. „Das ist ein Vorfall, der uns betroffen macht," sagt Markus Bauer von E-Motion in einem Pressestatement zum Unfall und entschuldigt sich bei dem verletzten Arzt.
Es ist nicht das erste Mal, dass die Firma negative Schlagzeilen macht. Bereits 2015 sah sich das Unternehmen mit Vorwürfen zu fragwürdigen Marketing-Arbeitsweisen konfrontiert. Damals war E-Motion wegen diskriminierender TV-Werbung gegen Teile der Bevölkerung im Kreuzfeuer.

(APA/ Die Kleine Zeitung)

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H) IV1: related

IV2: control

E-Motion-Unfall

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Es ist nicht das erste Mal, dass die Firma negative Schlagzeilen macht. Bereits 2015 sah sich das Unternehmen mit Vorwürfen zu technischen Mängel an den Leih-Rädern konfrontiert. Damals war E-Motion wegen mangelhafter Qualität der Gummis der Fahrradreifen im Kreuzfeuer.

(APA/ Die Kleine Zeitung)

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I) IV1: control

IV2: control

E-Motion-Unfall

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