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Corporate Brand Recovery in the After Wake of a Crisis

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Abstract

Title: Corporate Brand Recovery in the After Wake of a Crisis

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Aim: The overall aim of this study is to define post-crisis recovery as well as gain a deeper understanding of the strategies that corporate brands use in order to recover from a crisis.

Theoretical Perspective: The research takes a strategic brand management perspective in order to define recovery as well as how corporate brands recover from a crisis. The previous literature that is utilized has mainly drawn from the fields of crisis management and communications, where the recovery phase and its subsequent strategies have not been clearly defined from a long term perspective.

Methodology: The research approach of this study has been taken from grounded theory. The method has included using both document studies in combination with semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews build upon the document studies with insights from key professionals and executives.

Empirical data: The study has garnered both primary and secondary data. The data was collected from semi-structured interviews as well as document studies. The interviews provided in-depth insights into how corporate brands recover from a crisis and the document studies were used as case examples in order to further uncover recovery strategies used by corporate brands.

Originality: The crisis recovery stage has not been explored in great detail from a strategic brand management point of view and thus, the study explores what the recovery stage is according to corporate brands and how brands recover from a crisis.

Contributions: The study's main contribution is the Brand Crisis Recovery Framework, which incorporates four themes derived from the empirical findings: strategic recovery vision, genuine solution-oriented action, change and consistent communication. These four themes helped to uncover how a corporate brand recovers from a crisis. The framework further aids corporate brands in identifying which brand archetype they fall into in order to identify which recovery strategies to use in the after wake of a crisis.

Keywords: brand crisis recovery, post-crisis recovery, corporate brand, crisis management, crisis communications, corporate brand management

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1 Introduction

1.1 Relevance of the Topic

It is not a matter of ‘if’ a crisis will occur, it is ‘when’ it will occur. Even the most prepared companies will often find themselves dealing with a crisis of any magnitude. Some of the most recent crises to date are Swedbank's money laundering scandal in the Baltic region, Boeing's 737 Max malfunctions and Johnson & Johnson's talcum powder lawsuit (Farmbrough, 2019; Josephs & Newburger, 2019; Girion, 2018). It can be argued that with the extreme ease of transferring information quickly and efficiently, due to Web 2.0, society has grown accustomed to hearing about these crises in real-time. While these crises do not necessarily come as a surprise, consumers consequently struggle with trusting multinational corporations and therefore, it is even more important for brands today to be transparent and build up long-lasting relationships with key stakeholders (DeMers, 2018). However, as a result of a crisis, this broken brand trust causes consumers to change their behavioral and purchase intentions, as they no longer support the brand, which therefore causes them to stop acquiring its products or services (Coombs, 2007a). We believe that it is imperative that corporate brands handle these crises through honest and genuine actions that communicate to the public that they are in control of the situation in order to rebuild the lost trust amongst its stakeholders. Nevertheless, we understand that crisis management is easier said than done and the post-crisis reputational loss that a brand experiences requires proactive recovery strategies in order to mitigate the current crisis and to prevent future crises from reoccurring.

Furthermore, when looking at the crisis incident, crisis management research mainly focuses on crisis communication and immediate response strategies (Coombs 2007a, Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Roper & Fill, 2012; Coombs, 2015), while the long term perspective on post-crisis recovery has received little attention. For example, VW's Dieselgate crisis is a well-known case that was, at first, controversial but ultimately contributed to an even stronger position on the market, as it was able to alter the situation to be an opportunity rather than a hindrance for the brand (Hakim, 2016). Although the crisis still affects the brand to some extent, the sales have remained stable and increased shortly after the outbreak of the crisis in the U.S., as well as internationally (Boudette, 2017). While it cannot be stated that VW has fully recovered from Dieselgate, the brand's post-crisis efforts have aided in its recovery efforts. Other examples of cases where brands have participated in the recovery process include the Findus Horse Meat scandal, the Germanwings French Alps crash, as well as the LRF Mjölök vs. Oatly lawsuit. Based on Boin (2019), these cases can all be commonly characterized as transboundary crises, by exceeding geographical, political, cultural, public-private and legal boundaries, which complicate a manager's ability to classify, contain and manage a crisis. They all also exemplify

cases that resulted in different outcomes based on the the magnitude of the crisis, among other factors.

With these examples in mind, we therefore find it imperative to uncover these recovery strategies in order to identify the steps which need to be taken to continue regular business operations once the worst is over and draw conclusions as to what needs to be done next in order to restore a weakened reputation. There is an extensive research existing in the strategic communication field on the topic, however, current research has not explored crisis recovery from a brand management perspective in great detail. Thus, there are various literature streams which have touched upon crisis communication and its subsequent immediate crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2007b; Coombs & Holladay, 2010) and their effect on corporate brand reputation during and after the crisis (Greyser, 2009; Greyser & Urde, 2016; Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Coombs, 2006; Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2007b; Roper & Fill, 2012; Fombrun & van Riel, 2003). While Mitroff and Pearson (1993) outline the crisis recovery stage as a part of crisis management, which is made up of short term and long term strategies to recover a brand's reputation, the authors do not define what these recovery strategies are that brands should pursue.

However, in order to truly understand the usefulness of this concept, it is necessary to move beyond the communication and short term oriented focus of the post-crisis stages and instead, map out the managerial aspects of brand recovery strategies for the long term. Crisis management research has been extensively focused on providing negative examples of handling crises with possible learning lessons for practitioners, however, there is a need to highlight the positive achievements in this field (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). Further, the field of crisis communication is dominated by the use of case studies, where we find out little about how stakeholders react to crises (Coombs, 2007a), and subsequently about the proper recovery strategies used to manage crises. Additionally, case studies lack the first-hand insight of those involved in a crisis and are rather based on mediated accounts of a crisis (Coombs, 2007b). Therefore, according to Coombs (2007a), crisis management needs evidence-based management in crisis communication guidance.

1.2 Purpose/Aim, Research Questions and Contribution

As mentioned in the previous section, due to the differing and limited viewpoints on recovery, the crisis recovery stage itself is both not clearly defined and there is no general understanding of when brand's begin to recover. Similarly, there is little on how brands can recover from a crisis. Therefore, the overall aim is to define post-crisis recovery as well as gain a deeper understanding of the strategies that corporate brands use in order to recover from a crisis. With this aim, the purpose of our study is to further explore the post-crisis recovery phenomenon through a

theoretical and managerial lens. In order to fulfill this purpose, this research paper attempts to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is crisis recovery according to corporate brands?

RQ2: How can corporate brands recover from a crisis?

From a theoretical standpoint, the following research further intends to define post crisis recovery from a brand management perspective and instead, move beyond the communication and short term oriented conceptualization of the post-crisis recovery. The conceptual development of the post-crisis recovery is additionally intended to provide theory that is both applicable and useful to practitioners in the field of brand crisis management. From a managerial point of view, this research intends to develop a framework that can help brand managers to better grasp what post-crisis recovery is and which post-crisis recovery strategies are used by corporate brands.

1.3 Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 2 aims to provide a background of key areas related to our research topic: brand crisis management, corporate brand reputation in a crisis, crisis communication strategies and post-crisis brand recovery. The review of the previous literature has been further written with consideration to the purpose of our study. The literature review also serves as a tool to compare and contrast our findings with the existing theory in the analysis as well as position our findings in the researched field.

Chapter 3 describes the way our research topic has been approached from a methodological standpoint. In this section, we further argue why and how we made our methodological choices, which we supplement using diagrams within the section and tables located in the Appendix. The chapter ends by reflecting upon and evaluating the quality of our research approach and design.

Chapter 4 presents background information on the four case examples that were used throughout our research, which were formed through our document analysis.

Chapter 5 shows our analysis of the empirical findings using both the results of the case examples and semi-structured interviews, where we initially identify and describe our focused codes/themes.

Chapter 6 answers our first research question by providing our definition of crisis recovery as well as our positioning in regards to the literature. Additionally, we present Brand Crisis

Recovery Framework, which builds on the definition as well as answers our second research question. The framework's purpose is to provide corporate brands with a tool to use in order to determine their recovery in the after wake of a crisis.

Chapter 7 provides an overview of what was discussed in our thesis and summarizes our key findings. Moreover, the managerial and theoretical implications, along with our limitations and future research, are emphasized.

2 Literature Review

In this section, we aim to establish an overarching view of particular literature streams that will help to uncover our research questions. Due to the fact that there is little research on post-crisis recovery strategies, the literature review will first explore brand crisis management, which will focus mainly on stakeholder theory and the role that stakeholders take in a crisis. Further, we will discuss corporate brand reputation in a crisis, as it is the branding element of focus in post-crisis recovery, which will be subdivided into reputational capital and reputational threat. Moreover, we will focus broadly on crisis communication before narrowing it down to post-crisis communication strategies as well as post-crisis response strategies, as they are the most closely related literature streams to recovery strategies. Finally, we will conclude with the post-crisis recovery stage, which will aid in setting the scene for the gap in the literature we have identified on the topic.

2.1 Brand Crisis Management

In order to define brand crisis management, it is important to understand what makes a particular event or situation a crisis. A crisis can be described as a sudden and unexpected event that threatens the reputation and viability of an organization (Coombs, 2007a; Mitroff & Pearson, 1993; Roper & Fill, 2012). Managers, therefore, state that crises are made up of five different dimensions: “high magnitude, require immediate attention, [have] an element of surprise, [have] the need for taking action, and are outside of the organization’s [complete] control” (Mitroff & Pearson, 1993, p. 49). However, we believe that our traditional understanding of crises has increasingly become much more complicated due to globalization, which has improved the lives of many, but has also created a more complex world. Therefore, the traditional notion of sensemaking in crisis management and the ability of the decision maker to interpret the signals causes the overall understanding of the existing events to be questioned (Boin, ’t Hart, Stern & Sundelius, 2005; Weick, 1995).

Moreover, there are multiple types of crises which exist in the literature, however, we focus on the phenomenon of transboundary crises, first introduced by Boin in 2010. He argues that transboundary crises come in different forms and share certain characteristics that make them challenging to manage. These types of crises also exceed geographical, political, cultural, public-private and legal boundaries (Boin, 2019) and therefore impose increasing threats to a corporate brand’s reputation. In other words, the crisis situation challenges the borders between the national and international arena as well as corporate and political spheres (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). These transboundary crises pose wide and deep challenges to the existing crisis response

strategies of corporate brands and rapidly become an issue of legitimacy (adapted from Boin, 2019). Thus, the crises of late modernity confront traditional crisis management due to the large amount of information that is present today, in contrast with the past, which creates confusion and does not necessarily contribute to the solution (Weick, 1995).

2.1.1 Phases of a Brand Crisis

Furthermore, crisis management should be a proactive and strategic regimen that corporations follow and which encapsulates all of the interlinked processes an organization goes through, from crisis prevention to crisis recovery (Jaques, 2007). Thus, there are different stages or phases that crises have and they are important to identify in order to pinpoint what actions are necessary at each stage. In addition, we believe that it is vital to consider each previous stage in the brand crisis process as they are interrelated and affect the subsequent post-crisis stages. According to Mitroff and Pearson (1993), if each phase is handled correctly, then the organization has a better chance at overcoming the crisis swiftly and efficiently. The authors go on to state that the five phases of an organizational crisis are: signal detection, prevention/preparation, containment/damage limitation, recovery, and learning. Please see Figure 1 for an overview of the five phases of crisis management.

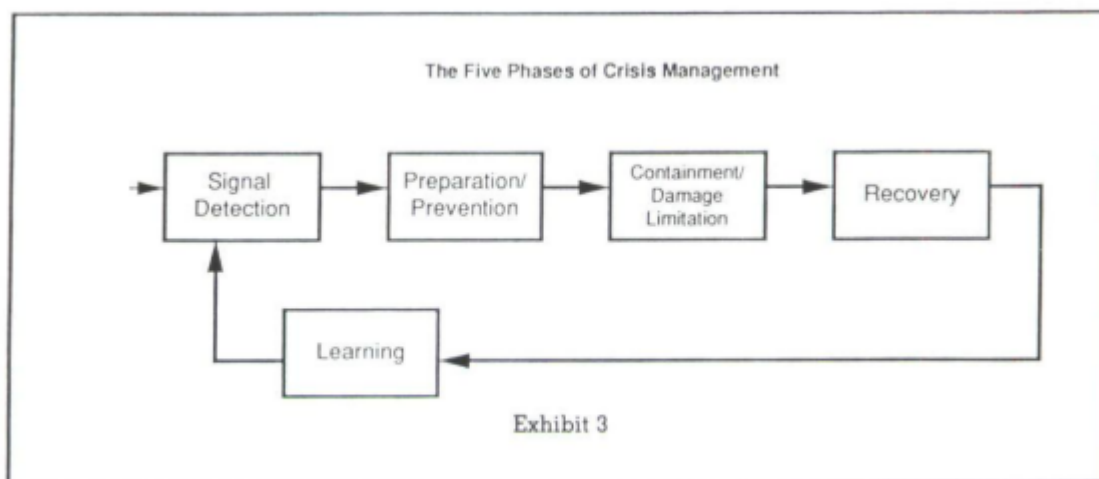


Figure 1. The Five Phases of Crisis Management (Mitroff & Pearson, 1993)

In their research, Augustine (1996) and Mitroff and Pearson (1993) argue that most organizations do not pick up on signals that may be important for preventing a crisis since they are always consistently given information, which may just be translated into irrelevant noise. The authors continue to state that the most effective organizations constantly search for errors or issues that may be occurring in order to spot them quickly before they grow into much larger or unmanageable problems. Therefore, corporations should keep track of anything that would

potentially harm the business and consider the consequences so as to calculate the cost of preventing the crisis (Augustine, 1996). The preparation phase includes putting systems in place, such as creating teams that are dedicated to crisis management as well as providing crisis training and different crisis exercises (Mitroff & Pearson, 1993). According to Augustine (1996), managers should take these necessary steps in order to minimize risk by educating employees on how they should act in a crisis situation; although, this is not always the case. Augustine (1996) further states that another important aspect of preparation is to form essential relationships with individuals that would be able to help the organization if a crisis occurs. However, sometimes it is impossible to spot the crisis before it occurs and even the most well prepared organizations still fail at handling the crisis well (Mitroff & Pearson, 1993).

As a result, the damage containment phase is crucial in order to limit the spread of the contamination of the crisis to other parts of the organization (Mitroff & Pearson, 1993). In addition to this, it is far better to overshare information with the public to look credible as soon as the outbreak of the crisis occurs rather than stay silent due to legal reasons (Augustine, 1996). The author argues that in order to contain the crisis, it is usually best to call upon the CEO to swiftly comment on the situation, especially if there is a massive threat to the brand's reputation. The recovery phase, as described by Mitroff and Pearson (1993), is the stage of a crisis that is the focus of this paper and is composed of short term and long term strategies that organizations can use in order to recover their reputations. During recovery, the organization can begin to repair itself by viewing the aftermath of the crisis as an opportunity to make a negative situation work in the company's favor (Augustine, 1996). Finally, the learning phase is where organizations should reflect upon how they handled the crisis and critically examine the behavior and subsequent actions that they took so as to better prepare for future crises (Mitroff & Pearson, 1993). While these arguments have valid points, more up to date research in this area is needed in order to have clearer insights into recovery, which is an aim of this thesis.

2.1.2 Stakeholders in a Brand Crisis

According to stakeholder theory, all stakeholders have intrinsic value and their interests should be accounted for as they are affected by the organization's actions (Alpaslan, Green & Mitroff, 2009). Managers should consider stakeholders based on their perceived risk of harm or injury that is a direct result of an organization's actions and decisions, especially in a crisis (Alpaslan, Green & Mitroff, 2009), since such changes can have an effect on how the stakeholders interact with the corporate brand (Coombs 2007a). Thus, managers who follow the stakeholder theory model strive to be cooperative and create trusting relationships with stakeholders, while also becoming more aware of how various stakeholders may be harmed or respond to a crisis situation (Alpaslan, Green & Mitroff, 2009; Coombs 2007a; Roper & Fill, 2012). As Alpaslan, Green and Mitroff (2009) argue, if only a narrow set of stakeholders are considered in the crisis

preparation and response stages, then the correct information may not reach the right stakeholders, which in turn will disturb both crisis prevention and recovery. To be more specific, in their research, they further argue that when managers create these established and long term relationships before a crisis hits, it will aid in making crisis prevention and recovery quicker. In addition, these stages will be more efficient because stakeholders won't be as likely to withhold vital information or use manipulative tactics through hindering the corporation's access to resources before and after the crisis ends (Alpaslan, Green & Mitroff, 2009; Augustine, 1996; Roper & Fill, 2012). Therefore, it is essential to build the relationships with stakeholders prior to crisis, so as to have the network once the crisis occurs.

2.1.3 Role of Stakeholders in a Crisis

According to Nut and Blackoff (1992), stakeholders can be categorized based on their importance in a crisis and that either support or oppose the organization in handling the issue at hand: problematic, antagonistic, low-priority and supporter. In their research, the authors state that problematic stakeholders are those that oppose the organization but do not hold much authority, so they do not pose a threat. They further state that antagonistic stakeholders oppose the situation and also do have power to influence the outcome. On the other hand, Nut and Blackoff (1992) believe that while low-priority stakeholders support the organization, they do not have any influence on the outcome, whereas supporter stakeholders have the power and influence to spur change. A more detailed account of the stakeholders is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Archetypal Characteristics of Stakeholders
(Adapted From Mitroff & Pearson, 1993; Roper & Fill, 2012)

Rescuers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide solutions to major issues • Help to save corporation from crisis
Heroes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocal in supporting the corporation • Speak out on behalf of the brand
Victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suffer financially from the crisis • Lose market share • Reputation is also damaged
Protectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rally support for the brand • Help to reframe the crisis to others (media, etc.)
Allies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act in accordance with brand

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the same views and opinions (employees)
Enemies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perpetuate crisis in hopes of destroying the brand's reputation
Villains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caused or stimulated the crisis to occur (CEO)

2.2 Corporate Brand Reputation in a Crisis

According to Coombs and Holladay (2006), in order to take appropriate action, it is necessary to analyze the anatomy of the reasons for reputational crisis. Reputation can be defined as “an evaluation stakeholders make about an organization” (p. 123). Their research argues that a brand’s reputation is an intangible, unique and extremely valuable asset that cannot be reproduced. Reputations are created through the interaction between stakeholders and the organization, and therefore, positive interactions lead to favorable reputations and negative interactions lead to unfavorable reputations (Coombs & Holladay, 2006). These interactions take place through direct interactions, news, media, advertising, word-of-mouth and blogs (Coombs, 2007b). The author continues that in order to effectively manage a firm’s reputation, media coverage is the most important aspect to consider, while social media and blogs can also be crucial for some crises. Therefore, reputational issues might come in many forms, from a wide variety of causes and from many publics (Greyser, 2009). In his research, Greyser (2009) states, that some crises are sudden or are results of problems that have accumulated over time. The author further argues that the protests can come from advocacy groups with a cause, disaffected consumers, governmental entities or the general public. Thus, stakeholders can be harmed by a crisis physically, emotionally and/or financially (Coombs, 2007a).

Since a wide array of stakeholders such as community members, employees, customers, suppliers and stakeholders are directly or indirectly affected by a crisis (Coombs, 2007a), corporate brand reputation can be defined in plural terms, depending on the stakeholder group (Greyser & Urde, 2016). It is further important to note that an organization's brand structure is composed of a brand portfolio, and therefore, corporate brand reputation can significantly differ from the reputation of the specific product or service brand (Greyser & Urde, 2016). The authors further argue that in times of crisis, however, one can affect the other and reputational damage can spread from one part of the organization to another. As Greyser (2009) argues, perceptions of the brand depend on various stakeholders and affect the competitive strength and willingness-to-support the brand. In other words, it is vital that corporate brands handle the crisis and post-

crisis stages well, so as to avoid reputational damage, which could affect the brand's position on the market.

Furthermore, we believe that corporate brands need to be genuine in their attempts to resolve the crisis. We agree with Greyser (2009), who argues that a brand needs to be perceived by its stakeholders as authentic through credible behavior. Stakeholders that perceive a corporation to be authentic aid in reputation management as well as give the brand substance (Greyser, 2009). In fact, more often than not, the public's perception of a situation is what turns it into a crisis (Augustine, 1996). The author argues that during a crisis, therefore, it is of utmost importance to consider the customer first and understand their view to ensure continuous trust through open communication. According to Greyser (2009), there are four different ways for a brand to be perceived as authentic: 1) talking authentic (communications), 2) being authentic (brand's track record), 3) staying authentic (brand's core values), and 4) defending authenticity during a crisis (employing its "reputational reservoir" or generated trust over time). He also states that the authentic substance that makes up a brand is what will help the brand to overcome a crisis and its reputation to remain intact. In other words, we agree with the author and believe that stakeholders will recognize the brand's credible behavior, which will then increase the likelihood of stakeholders forgiving the corporate brand, and help the brand to recover.

2.2.1 Reputational Capital

When a crisis occurs, it is most likely that the brand's reputation will be damaged (Coombs, 2007b; Roper & Fill, 2012). However, although a crisis has the ability to threaten a brand's reputational assets, organizations that have a strong reputation before a crisis will more likely be able to overcome a crisis than organizations that already have an unfavorable reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Greyser, 2009; Roper & Fill, 2012). This is due to the idea of organization's accruing reputational capital, known as a "stock of perceptual and social assets - the quality of the relationship it has established with stakeholders and the regard in which the company and the brand is held" (Fombrun & van Riel, 2003, p. 32). The concept has been attributed to being like a bank account where it takes time to build up this capital and crises act as withdrawals that cause organization's to lose capital (Coombs, 2007b). Thus, an organization that has more reputational capital, or a greater reputational reservoir, before a crisis has more to spend during a crisis, than an organization that is worse off or neutral in comparison, and will have a stronger post-crisis position (Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Greyser, 2009; Roper & Fill, 2012). However, while we understand that having a strong reputation before the crisis is a great asset to have, we believe that brands can come out stronger from the crisis through utilizing recovery as a strategic plan of action.

2.2.2 Reputational Threat

It also is relevant to state how an organization’s reputation can be affected based on the organization’s responsibility for the crisis’ occurrence. According to Coombs (2007), there are three types of clusters that the organization can fall into: victim, accident and preventable clusters, which are described in Table 2.

Table 2. Three Types of Crisis Clusters (Coombs, 2007a)

Victim	Accident	Preventable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders do not believe that the brand has much responsibility for the crisis i.e. natural disasters, rumors • Minimal reputational threat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions taken by the brand are not significant i.e. technical errors, product recalls • Reputational threat is moderate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization assumes full responsibility i.e. bypassing regulations, acting inappropriately • Reputational threat is enormous

We believe that it is important to consider several factors when assessing the crisis situation and its effect on a brand's reputation when planning for the future steps. According to Coombs (2006), there are four elements to determine the severity of an organization’s reputational threat: 1) the crisis type, 2) severity of damage, 3) crisis history and 4) relationship history. First, the organization can assess the crisis type or how the situation is being framed, which is determined by placing it into one of the three clusters that were just mentioned, and then through analyzing the severity of the crisis along with crisis and performance history (Coombs, 2006; Coombs, 2007a). If the crisis is deemed to be quite severe or the brand has a negative crisis and/or performance history, the author argues that it should be treated as if it were in a worse cluster, so for example if it is in the victim cluster, it would become an accident and so on. Thus, the reputational damage is greater if stakeholders attribute greater responsibility to the organization for the crisis (Coombs, 2007b). Although it is important to consider these factors, one should look beyond the current crisis situation and look into the brand’s identity.

To provide an alternative view, Greyser (2009) states it is necessary to understand “what” is the source of reputational trouble and “who” is being affected and is involved (Greyser, 2009). According to the author, there are four areas that determine if an issue will threaten a brand’s reputation: 1) Brand elements or if the brand was positioned favorably before the crisis i.e. market share and essence of the brand, 2) Crisis situation or if many consumers are severely affected, 3) Company initiatives or issues with organizational communications and 4) Results or ability to effectively recover and restore the brand’s meaning. Further, we believe that once the

source of reputational trouble is identified, it is easier to assess the seriousness of the crisis situation. In doing so, we further argue that one needs to understand the company's brand identity including its core values. According to Greyser (2009), crises can be life threatening to the organization if it affects the so called "essence of the brand". In other words, brand essence is what other authors refer to as the brand core, or kernel (Kapferer, 2012; Urde, 2013). It is the distinctive attribute which is closely linked to the brand meaning and success (Greyser, 2009). In his research, the author argues that the brand's market position and meaning are seriously challenged if the essence/core is affected. On the other hand, if the core is not affected, the problem can be tackled, however the situation is still troublesome (Greyser, 2009). Therefore, we agree with the author that if the crisis has an impact on the brand's essence, it needs to be evaluated in order to determine the recovery plan.

2.3 Crisis Communication Strategies

When an incident occurs that threatens a brand's reputation, it is imperative to consider various crisis communication strategies so as to minimize its impact. During a crisis, both critics and the media will be the closest scrutinizers of the organization's response in terms of content and timeliness (Greyser, 2009). The media can be dangerous for a corporation if the information is not provided by an appointed spokesperson that is able to shape perceptions and frame the crisis (Augustine, 1996; Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Roper & Fill, 2012). Any information that is known should be dispersed as quickly as possible in the initial stages of the crisis and it should be accurate, consistent and transparent (Augustine, 1996; Coombs & Holladay, 2010). It is of utmost importance to make sure that messages are coordinated and remain in the same voice throughout the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). In their research, the authors describe the first twenty four hours as critical, since the messages given during this time period will be what creates the corporation's ultimate public image.

However, considering the globalized world we live in today, crises are often more complex due to their transboundary nature. Hence, it is imperative to note that the cause of the crisis may not be apparent (Boin, 2019) for weeks or months and that company spokespersons should not speculate on what the cause may be (Augustine, 1996; Coombs & Holladay, 2010). Therefore, corporations should communicate that the cause of the crisis is currently under investigation in order to remain honest and in control of the situation (Augustine, 1996; Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Roper & Fill, 2012). In order to understand the various corporate crisis communication strategies, please see Table 3. Despite the communication being an important tool during and after the crisis, we feel the need to provide the insight by Greyser (2009) that communications alone will not save the corporation from a crisis. Thus, we agree with author on this point and

understand that there are other tools, besides communication, that brands need to deploy already at the crisis breakout, which further facilitate the recovery.

Table 3. Four Corporate Crisis Communication Strategies (Cornelissen, 2008)

Silence strategy	Accommodation strategy	Reasoning strategy	Advocacy strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues are not serious • Does not require immediate attention • Allows the corporation to buy time and buffer the situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue is pressing and intense • Swift corporate communications are needed • Employees will be notified of significant changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engages in dialogue with key stakeholders for feedback • Will help to mitigate damage to brand's reputation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alters the public's opinion and perceptions • Uses message framing as a tool to establish brand's moral ground to implement change

2.3.1 Post-Crisis Communication Strategies

Coombs and Holladay (2010) define post-crisis communications as the time period after a crisis that has been deemed to be resolved. The authors believe that these communications are especially important as they can help the company in minimizing the threat to its reputation by letting the public know that the organization is in control of the situation. Since every organization faces the threat of a crisis, it needs to be prepared for what to do and say in its post-crisis communications (Coombs, 2007c). Coombs and Holladay (2010) argue that while it is difficult to pinpoint when a crisis is over, these post-crisis communication strategies essentially build upon previous crisis response communication combined with what has been learned from the crisis. Due to this, the authors continue to state that corporations need to effectively manage stakeholders in its post-crisis communications. While we agree with the authors that stakeholders need to continue to be managed in the post-crisis stage, we believe that post-crisis communication strategies are not apart of the recovery stage and take place beforehand. Rather, we see post-crisis communication strategies as immediate crisis response strategies.

Furthermore, Coombs and Holladay (2010) exclaim that all key stakeholders, such as employees, suppliers and customers should be kept up to date on when business operations will return to normal. In addition to this, according to Coombs and Holladay (2010), corporations may also need to participate in investigations and be willing to disseminate information about the cause of the crisis in various report formats. Thus, they insist that a brand needs to deliver on its promises

to its stakeholders by providing information about the cause of the crisis. As summarized by Coombs (2007c), “post-crisis communication needs to 1) identify a list of potential crisis situations, 2) articulate a list of potential crisis response strategies and 3) develop a system for selecting a crisis response strategy that will maximize reputational protection in a given crisis - match the crisis response to the crisis situation” (p. 277). Clearly, very little research has been done in this area with the long term in mind and more needs to be done from a brand management perspective in order to pinpoint which recovery strategies are best suited to the situation.

2.3.2 Post-Crisis Response Strategies

Crisis response strategies are the words and actions that managers utilize when they are responding to a crisis (Coombs, 2015). These strategies that the author describes help to contribute to a stronger communication plan and are only a part of the overall crisis communication approach. According to the author, there are two main post-crisis communication strategies: managing information and managing meaning. Managing information involves dispersing pertinent crisis-related information to the relevant parties (Coombs, 2015), whereas managing meaning is framing the situation through shaping the perceptions of stakeholders as well as how the organization has been involved in the crisis (Coombs, 2015; Roper & Fill, 2012). According to Coombs (2015), it is important to note that managing meaning is the most commonly employed strategy in crisis communications. Thus, there are three types of crisis response strategies: instructing information, adjusting information and reputation repair (Coombs, 2015). These response strategies are complemented by image restoration approaches which are similar and are offered by Roper and Fill (2012). However, we believe that these strategies are employed right after the crisis occurs to mitigate damage to the brand’s image, and thus, are not part of recovery from a long term perspective. Please see Table 4 for an overview of the crisis response strategies.

Table 4. Three Types of Crisis Response Strategies (Adapted from Coombs, 2015; Roper & Fill, 2012)

Instructing information	Adjusting information	Image/Reputation repair
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aids stakeholders in protecting themselves physically during a crisis • Objective is public safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aids stakeholders psychologically after a crisis occurs through apologizing, offering additional information, and providing a plan of corrective action to avoid repeat occurrence • Objective is to mitigate anxiety and anger 	<p>1. Denial strategies: the brand denies that it had any involvement in the crisis or asserts blame on another entity</p> <p>2. Reducing offensiveness strategies: the corporation admits involvement, but argues that it had little control over it</p> <p>3. Bolstering strategy: the brand adds a positive spin to the crisis by redirecting the conversation to its good deeds</p> <p>4. Redress strategies: the corporation prioritizes the victim’s needs using compensation and/or rewards or apologizes and asks for forgiveness</p>

2.4 Post-Crisis Recovery Phase

As we have seen, crisis management is made up of certain steps in order to resume regular business functions, reduce the negative impact on stakeholders, as well as learn from the organizations’ trials and tribulations (Wang, Hutchins & Garavan, 2009). In the post-crisis phase, business is returning to normal and the crisis is no longer the main focus of management’s attention (Coombs, 2007a) (see Table 5), however, this statement is arguable. To provide an alternative view, Jaques (2007) argues, that instead of organizations focusing on resuming business as usual right after the crisis ends, organizations need to take the time to reflect on what they can do in the future to prevent more crises from occurring. Alternatively, Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2009) state that the post-crisis stage is when an organization should take the time to renew itself in order to assume a stronger position, that is both different and better, than before the crisis. Therefore, we agree with the research of these authors that has been done to date, and

we furthermore believe that brands need to take several steps in order to recover and come out of the crisis stronger.

As stated by Jaques (2007), the most widely adopted models use recovery synonymously with post-crisis and the reputational issues that arise after the crisis are often even more serious than the crisis itself. In his research, he further argues, that there is a need for including crisis management into strategic management field. From the communication standpoint, the post-crisis stage is thus focused on the actions taken after a crisis has been resolved and seeks to provide follow-up information with key stakeholders, allowing investigations to occur, as well as learning from the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). Although this research highlights that stakeholders' negative perceptions should be managed and reputational repair will take place, it is still lacking in defining post-crisis recovery as a long term effort that should remain at the top of a brand's agenda in order to assume even stronger position after the crisis.

In his research, Coombs (2007b) states that if the brand's reputation was severely damaged, then reputational repair will carry over into recovery phase. Therefore, organizations should focus on the crisis recovery stage in order to make up for reputational losses and begin to repair their image to the public (Campiranon & Scott, 2014). In order to recover efficiently and swiftly, brands should create short term and long term recovery strategies (Campiranon & Scott, 2014). According to Wang, Hutchins & Garavan (2009), these recovery efforts should include creating a business continuity plan as well as aiding the human resources department in order to help stakeholders, such as employees, to recover from the crisis, but this is not always the case.

Mitroff and Pearson (1993) state that recovery strategies should answer these types of questions: "1) what are the minimal procedures and operations that we need to recover and conduct normal business?" and "2) what are the key activities and tasks that we must perform to serve our most important customers?". Although post-crisis involves additional communication to stakeholders and evaluating the company's responses, the post-crisis stage itself is still only conceptual and little research has been done on the topic (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). In order to fill this gap, this research endeavours to shed light on defining brand crisis recovery and how brands recover from a crisis.

Table 5. Summary of Post-Crisis Phase Best Practices (Coombs, 2007a)

Post-Crisis Phase Best Practices
1. Deliver all information promised to stakeholders as soon as that information is known
2. Keep stakeholders updated on the progression of recovery efforts including any corrective measures being taken and the progress of investigations
3. Analyze the crisis management effort for lessons and integrate those lessons into the organization's crisis management system

2.5 Chapter Summary

Throughout the review, we have identified a gap in the literature on brand crisis management and have found that there is a limited amount of information on post-crisis recovery as well as how to recover from a crisis. In regards to post-crisis communication, Coombs (2015) as well as Roper and Fill (2012) have identified that there are certain crisis response strategies that do take place post-crisis, however, we agree with Jacques (2007) that these strategies are apart of crisis incident management and do not take place in the post-crisis stages (recovery and learning). Further, these strategies are short term and communication oriented, whereas as suggested by Mitroff and Pearson (1993), there should be long term strategies that are apart of recovery efforts and thus, the aim of this paper is to explore post-crisis recovery from a long term perspective. In addition to this, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the strategies that corporate brands use in order to recover from a crisis. While we believe that communication is a vital component of brand crisis recovery, we do not merely focus on communication as the only tool that can help brands recover from a crisis and rather, seek to identify other strategic recovery approaches that can mitigate the damage to a brand's reputation from a long term perspective. A summary of the literature review is presented below in Figure 2.

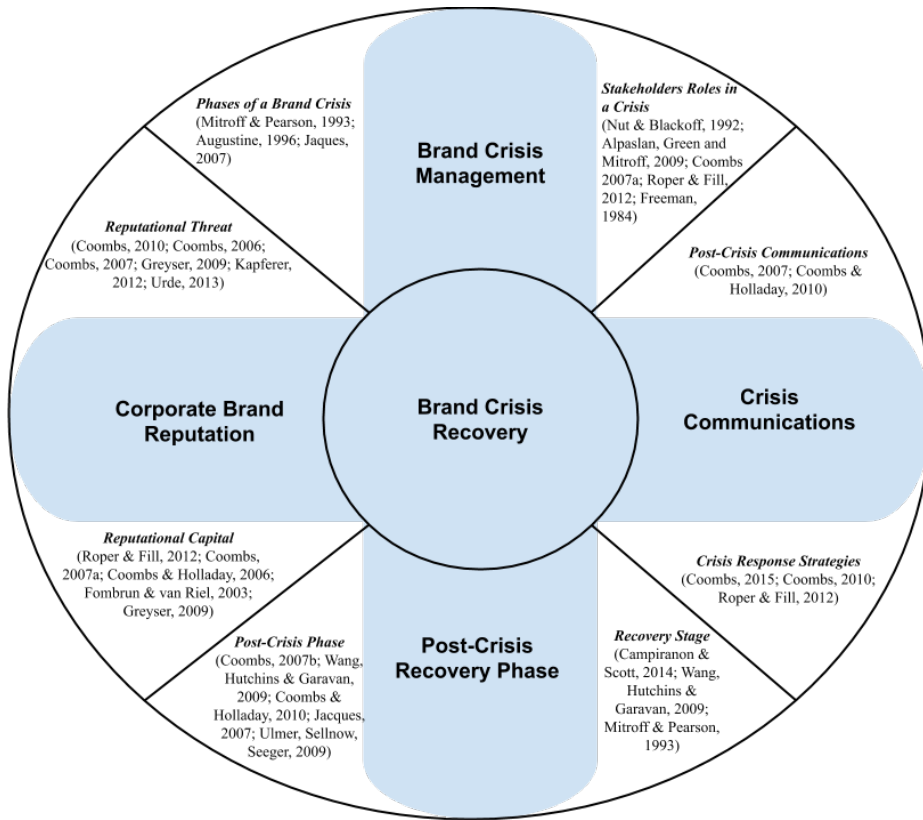


Figure 2. Summary of Literature Review

3 Methodology

This chapter aims to help the reader understand the motives and the process of this research. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to present a transparent overview of our investigation process, which was carried out in order to answer our research questions and present the findings of this study. We first start with describing the research approach, followed by the research design, which outlines the type of data that was collected, the method type and the sampling strategy. Last but not least, the method of analysis is described. To conclude this chapter, we reflect on the method choices we made.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Since we are studying the phenomenon of post-crisis recovery from a strategic brand management perspective, we recognize that other researchers might use different perspectives to analyse the same phenomenon while accomplishing different outcomes, which would be equally valid. Therefore, the knowledge we are trying to generate is a mere result of the interpretation of the empirical material we managed to collect during our research. Thus, we are not trying to provide the only definition and conceptualization of post-crisis recovery that is used by corporate brands. Moreover, given our interpretive research philosophy, we do not aim at quantifying the consequences of these post-crisis recovery. Rather, we put an emphasis on understanding how corporate brand's approach the recovery process and how they subsequently are able to overcome the crisis. To clarify, our view of social reality is the one of constantly changing property of individuals' creation (Bryman, 2008; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015) and we believe that there are many truths as well as the facts depend on the viewpoint of the observer (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

The research outcome is to a great extent based on the interpretation of the conducted interviews and document studies (Bryman, 2008) and therefore, we are providing the interpretation of other individuals' interpretation of the phenomenon. In order to be able to provide a deeper understanding of post-crisis recovery strategies, we chose to conduct qualitative interviews with corporate managers and executives, so as to delve into their individual experiences and stories. Similarly, through conducting document studies, which have not been produced at our request and are simply 'out there', allowed for our interpretation of the knowledge. Therefore, the reality of our social research is constructed and given meaning by social interaction through interviews (Bryman, 2008; Charmaz, 2006; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015) as well as through reflexivity upon secondary data (Alvesson, Hardy & Harley, 2008; Bryman, 2008; Charmaz, 2006; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

3.2 Research Approach

Since the field of corporate brand crisis management mainly covers containment/damage control and short term, communication oriented response strategies, we decided to pursue empirical data collection in order to build the theory in the area of post-crisis brand recovery. Our research is therefore qualitative, focusing on words rather than the analysis of numeric data, in accordance with Bryman (2008) and Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015). We opted to use an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, which Bryman (2008) considers to be synonymous to grounded theory. According to the authors of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967), the main task of the researcher is to develop theory through the comparative method, which is the result of considering the same event or process in different settings or situations (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Thus, we are striving to uncover how brands, who have been involved in a crisis, recover in various crisis situations. Since Glaser and Strauss (1967) come from different research traditions, in our research, we have chosen to complement it with the extended version of grounded theory by Kathy Charmaz (2006). Since Charmaz comes from the constructionist tradition and highlights the primacy of the stories and experiences of the research subjects (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015), we collected these insights through expert interviews.

Grounded theory is defined as “theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). Grounded theory therefore develops theory out of data through the iterative approach, which allows for weaving back and forth among data collection, analysis and existing theory (Bryman, 2008; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), there are two main criteria when evaluating the quality of generated theory: (1) the theory needs to be analytic enough to enable some generalization and (2) the individual’s ability to relate the theory to their own experiences (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Both of these criterias need to be met at the same time (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Furthermore, grounded theory needs to fit the significant area, be comprehensible and useable by actors and be sufficiently complex to allow for variation (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Furthermore, in our study, we agree with Bryman (2008) that grounded theory is an approach to the generation of theory out of qualitative data, rather than method itself. The author further distinguishes between tools and outcomes of grounded theory. The main tools of the grounded theory approach are theoretical sampling, coding, theoretical saturation and the previously mentioned constant comparison (Bryman, 2008), which will be further described in this chapter.

3.3 Research Design

In this study, a cross-sectional research design was chosen, where the empirical data is used to collect a variety of experiences in order to uncover patterns of associations using more than one case (Bryman, 2008). Thus, through combining both primary data, in the form of qualitative interviews, and secondary data, in the form of case examples by collecting documents about multiple crises, we were able to explore recovery and the strategies used by corporate brands. Our research design is therefore in line with our grounded theory approach, since Charmaz (2008) argues that grounded theory methods can therefore complement other approaches to qualitative data analysis, rather than opposing them. Due to this, our main focus was to use both interviews and document studies in order to examine what actions are taken and which processes are followed by corporate brands during their recovery.

There is data existing in the public domain in the form of various official documents, deriving from private and public sources as well as mass media outputs, (Bryman, 2008; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015) however, since crises are a delicate topic, it was difficult to access several of these documents. Nevertheless, the documents aided in supplying information that was useful for our research. However, in order to supplement this secondary data, in the form of multiple case study examples from corporations that have been involved in transboundary crises, we have also conducted semi-structured interviews. In order to gain a more in-depth understanding around the post-crisis recovery phase, we sought out key professionals, in different fields and industries, that have experience in crisis management. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), the narratives or stories that are derived from semi-structured interviews are a way to gain insight into individual experiences in organizational life that would not be possible to see or understand through the collection of solely secondary data. Therefore, these case examples served as a situational context that helped to guide our interviews as well as provided additional background information on recovery strategies. Due to the fact that there has not been much research conducted on post-crisis brand recovery, it is of the utmost importance to supplement these case examples through the collection of first-hand knowledge on the subject. Please see Figure 3 for an overview of our cross sectional research design below.

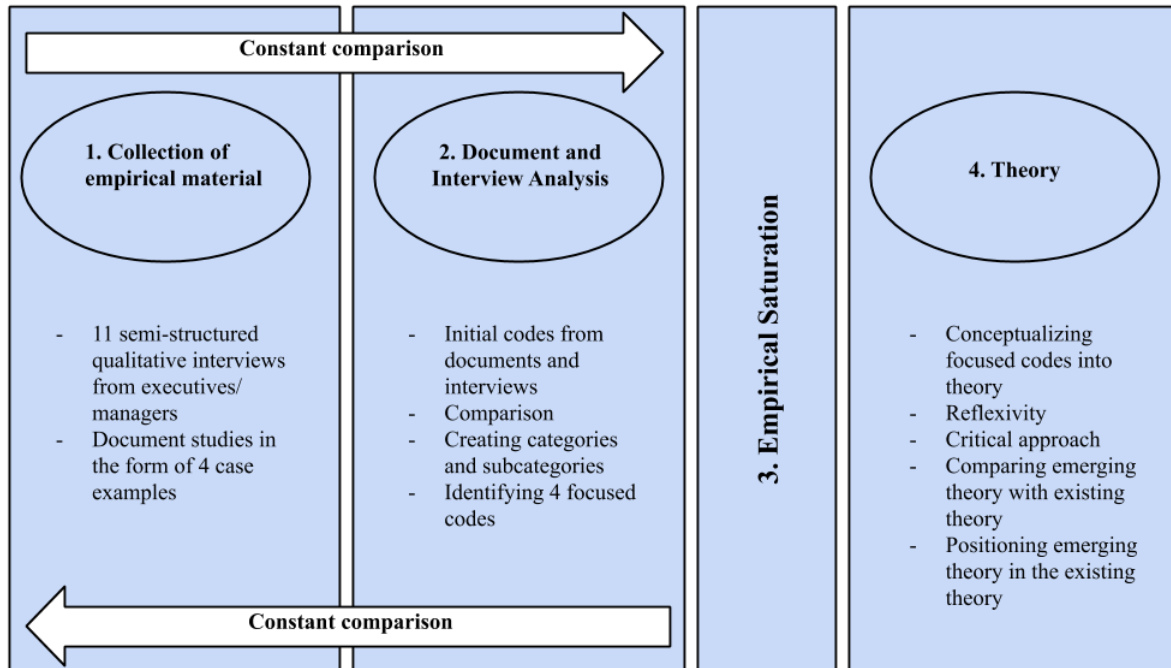


Figure 3. Cross Sectional Research Design

3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Since the aim of our study is to define post-crisis recovery as well as gain a deeper understanding of how corporate brands recover from a crisis, semi-structured qualitative interviews were found to be a suitable choice of method. These interviews were more personal in nature as they allowed for a natural conversation to flow and were also helpful in articulating non-verbal cues (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The authors further state that focus groups are helpful to gain insights into how multiple individuals understand a certain phenomenon and interact with one another on a specific issue or experience. While we recognize that focus groups could have been a viable possibility for our research, we believe it would have been difficult to gather executives in the same place at the same time, as well as their experiences in crisis management would differ immensely since every crisis is unique, and thus it would be challenging to guide the conversation.

Furthermore, the interviews were conducted both in person and remotely. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), an interview that is held remotely means that it was conducted either over the phone or through video calls. Due to the fact that these professionals have busy schedules and also for geographical reasons, it was much more convenient to conduct seven interviews over Skype or a conference call. However, we sought to conduct as many interviews as possible in person so as to keep our ability to make nonverbal observations when

respondents were answering our questions (Easterby Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Most of our respondents held executive or managerial positions at the time that our study was conducted and have had some sort of experience with crisis management. As our respondents were educated professionals, according to Von Platen and Young (2014), our interviews could be deemed as expert interviews. These types of interviews are characterized by pursuing interviews with people who are very difficult to contact and typically have very busy work schedules (Von Platen and Young, 2014). Thus, it was imperative that we had the option to conduct remote interviews when face-to-face interviews were not an option.

Furthermore, the interviews followed a funnel structure, where we first provided our interviewees with general background information and used intended questions to understand which recovery strategies are used by brands in the after wake of a crisis. In order to do this, we created an interview guide, as suggested by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), structuring the interview into three sections: opening questions, questions around key topics and closing questions. The list of questions for this research are presented in the Interview Guide (See Appendix A). In addition, each of our interviewees were provided with background information on our study prior to the interviews, which allowed them to prepare and reflect on the topic beforehand.

Additionally, as we assumed the role of the interviewer, it was possible to generate imperative insights from our respondents through our ability to develop upon their thoughts through back and forth discourse. As Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) state, the interviews allowed for a high degree of interaction between us and our respondents, which allowed us to alter the questions that we were going to ask depending upon their responses. Thus, as suggested by Sullivan (1954), we acted as vital instruments that helped to facilitate authentic communication which could not be replicated in another situation because of the uniqueness of the interaction. Due to this, we sought to utilize the laddering up and laddering down techniques in order to understand the underlying values of the participants and to provide deeper accounts of their experiences. Therefore, qualitative interviews allowed us to generate new ideas about the topic and for new topics to emerge from an open-ended discussion.

It is also important to note that, especially with expert interviews, a person that is being interviewed can assume the role of a spokesperson for the company that they work for (Von Platen and Young, 2014). Therefore, since we interviewed a couple professionals that work in roles that were involved in a crisis as exemplified in our case examples, there could be a bias towards how the company handled the crisis. However, we were able to supply unbiased viewpoints from other professionals who were asked questions about our case examples, as well as other crises, that we are using in our research. In this way, we were able to avoid this potential issue by interviewing these professionals about their personal expertise and experience with crises in order to determine what strategies can be used in the recovery stage of a crisis.

Lastly, in order to conduct research in the most ethical way, interviewers should provide a description of the study, overview of the methods used, how the participants will be chosen, as well as a reflection on potential issues or risks (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In order to take ethical precautions into consideration, we made sure to describe the research topic, the types of questions that we would be asking our respondents, as well as asked if we could use their identities throughout the analysis of our research. We were honest and transparent throughout the entirety of the interview process in order to make our respondents feel comfortable and to answer truthfully and without hesitation. As suggested by Bryman (2008), we also asked all the participants for their permission to record the conversations, and confirmed this through obtaining written consent forms (See Appendix B), so as to minimize further bias and provide quality assurance. Therefore, in order to live up to the ethical guidelines for conducting qualitative interviews, we gained our respondents' verbal consent to record our conversations in addition to their written consent to participate in our research.

3.3.2 Interview Selection

The sampling strategies that were used to conduct the semi-structured interviews were a combination of convenience, purposive and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling selects candidates based on how easy it is to access them, whereas purposive has a more clear idea of what candidates would fit the purpose of the study best and chooses them based off of certain eligibility criteria (Bryman, 2008; Easterby Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). On the other hand, snowball sampling begins with an individual who meets certain criteria to be used within a study who then identifies others who would be appropriate to interview as well (Bryman, 2008; Easterby Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). To begin the study, convenience and purposive sampling were used in order to identify candidates with a requirement of having crisis management experience to a certain extent, and who were within the researchers' networks initially, that could potentially aid in contributing to the study.

However, we also consulted our research with other academic professionals in this field, who further introduced us to crisis management professionals and therefore, snowball sampling was used towards the end of our research. While snowball sampling was more difficult to conduct, we used LinkedIn as the main avenue to message professionals and managers who either shared the same connections or another attribute in common. Through the use of these strategies, eleven interviews were conducted, each at about 30-60 minutes long, before a saturation level was reached once the variation in responses being collected were no longer novel. Therefore, a sufficient amount of data has been collected from these eleven respondents, whose background information is presented below in Table 6.

Table 6. Descriptions of the Respondents

<p>Marcus Thomasfolk <i>Head of Communication</i> <i>Volkswagen Sweden</i></p>	<p>Marcus has over 25 years of PR and communication experience, working with agencies as well as Securitas and Audi Sverige, where he faced many smaller and bigger scale crises. Currently, Marcus holds the Head of Communications position at Volkswagen Sweden, during which he was responsible for communications during the Dieselgate crisis to the Swedish public.</p>
<p>Jean-Luc Ferraton <i>Chief Human Resources</i> <i>Officer</i> <i>Intrum</i></p>	<p>Jean-Luc Ferraton has over 20 years of HR experience, currently working for the market leader in credit management services. Since Jean-Luc works in the service industry, he focuses on delivering the company's strategy through people. He is an experienced change management leader, who worked on the re-branding of Intrum into Intrum Justitia as well as the merge of Intrum and Lindroff.</p>
<p>Lubos Lopatka <i>Chief Executive Officer</i> <i>Welding Research Institute</i></p>	<p>Lubos has over 25 years of professional experience working for Scandinavian companies among others. Lubos also held the position of Vice President of Paper and Pulp Industry Association as well as President of Association for Industrial Ecology, both for 7 years. Lubos holds several awards such as Influential Economic Professional (2002), Economic Leader (2012) and Executive of the Year 2012, all granted to him in Slovakia.</p>
<p>Toomas Tartu <i>Business Director</i> <i>PS Occasion</i></p>	<p>Toomas has over 25 years of marketing and advertising experience on a strategic as well as tactical level. Toomas specializes in the sponsorships and event industry. Toomas has been working in global advertising agencies as Grey and McCann and also worked with many prominent clients. He further possesses business, communication, marketing, branding and PR experience working with B2B and B2C companies.</p>
<p>Melker Nilsson <i>Senior Executive and Adviser</i> <i>in the Dental Industry</i></p>	<p>Melker has around 30 years of experience in the dental (implant) industry, both working in the United States as well as in Europe. During his international career, he experienced smaller as well as bigger crises, which also implicated Food and Drug Administration (FDA) involvement. Currently, Melker works as a Senior Executive and Adviser to American as well as European dental companies.</p>
<p>Fredrik Erlandsson <i>Senior Vice President</i> <i>Communications and Investor</i> <i>Relations</i> <i>Thule Group</i></p>	<p>Fredrik has over 20 years of professional experience in corporate communications in Scandinavian and international environments. Fredrik has held roles that have included working with corporate brand's PR, investor relations and reputation and crisis communication. He further closely worked with businesses in industries such as alcoholic beverages, sports and outdoor, passenger shipping, tourism destinations, fashion and 'pure political' public policy making.</p>
<p>Linda Nordgren <i>Communications Manager</i> <i>OATLY AB</i></p>	<p>Linda has around 15 years of public and business experience working in internal communication, change management and relationship-based social media context. While working for Malmo Stad, Linda was responsible for strategic planning and development of the city's crisis communication action plan. Linda is currently working for Oatly as a Communications Manager.</p>
<p>Martina Smedberg <i>PhD Candidate, Lund</i> <i>University, Department of</i> <i>Strategic Communication</i></p>	<p>Martina has over 20 years of diplomatic experience in Swedish foreign service, mostly in multilateral relations within the European Union and United Nations. Apart from her public service experience, she joined IKEA Group in 2014 as Head of Press for Corporate Communications. Right now, Martina's research focuses on Public and Corporate Diplomacy, which is complementary to her previous work experience.</p>
<p>Maria Lehmann <i>Senior Consultant in Furniture</i> <i>Industry</i></p>	<p>Maria has over 25 years of experience working in leading positions for furniture companies. She has been mostly working for smaller businesses and has dealt with internal crises. As she noted, small business crises and their severity, as well as how they are handled, determines the existence of these companies more than much larger ones.</p>
<p>Johanna Snickars <i>Head of Communications,</i> <i>Eriasson</i></p>	<p>Johanna is an award-winning senior communications and public relations professional and leader with over 12 years of experience working for Swedish as well as international companies. Prior to her experience with Eriasson, she worked for Microsoft, Nordnet Bank, Weber Shandwick and Hewlett Packard. Johanna has been featured in magazines,</p>

	newspapers and podcasts, and is a frequent speaker at communications, tech and leadership conferences.
Carsten Browall <i>Chairman of the Board, Vitrolife AB</i>	Carsten has around 35 years of experience and works in the life science field. He has had various leading positions in this industry, ranging from CEO to multiple Chairman of the Board positions. Since Carsten has held these leading positions, he has witnessed and been involved in a wide range of internal and external crises.

3.3.3 Document Studies and Selection

As previously mentioned, since there are different types of existing documents which can be analyzed, we decided to follow four criteria based on Scott (1999), which helps to assess the quality of documents and choose the most relevant outputs: *authenticity*, *credibility*, *representativeness* and *meaning* (Bryman, 2008). At the same time, prior to accessing the documents, we also sought to identify two criteria which would help us to identify the documents out of which we could illustrate case examples: 1) the brand has been involved in a crisis to some extent and 2) the brand has attempted to undergo the recovery process after the crisis has occurred. Therefore, we paid attention to the official documents deriving from public and private sources such as organizations, companies, internet websites, mass and social media outputs.

Since crises can be regarded as a sensitive topic, and they influence multiple stakeholders and different emotions emerge during the crisis (Coombs, 2007a), one needs to be critical when evaluating the source of information (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). According to Bryman (2008), while official public documents on crisis are authentic, have meaning, and are clear and comprehensible, they might reveal certain biases. Therefore, the representativeness of recovery was complemented by social and mass media outputs, since an extensive amount of newspapers and magazine articles exist on these crisis examples. At the same time, however, we took a critical approach and pursued closer analysis, since their authenticity and credibility might be questionable. Lastly, the corporate documents that we selected were authentic and meaningful, although the credibility and representativeness required deeper analysis as companies mostly try to present their own views to the public. In other words, the corporate reports were not taken for granted as objective accounts and were examined in the context of other sources of data.

Based on the factors stated above, the case examples were identified to illustrate the purpose of this study. Furthermore, we chose well-known crises, which occurred 4-6 years ago, transcended the borders of a single country, had an impact on the industry of operation, and affected multiple stakeholders. Moreover, in contrast with short term crisis response strategies, which are extensively covered in the literature, we were specifically looking at the long term post-crisis recovery stage. These crises examples thus illustrate variations in brand crisis recovery due to

their unique situational context. Since there was a sufficient amount of documents covering these crises, we were able to garner a holistic view of them, and thus, saturation was reached. Moreover, since the documents used were publicly available, no consent was needed in order to gain access. In regards to Oatly and Findus' corporate documents, they were provided to us upon request by the corporate representatives. Table 7 below describes the chosen case examples.

Table 7. Overview of the Case Examples

Crisis Example	Year	Industry	Stage
Findus Horse Meat Scandal	2013	Food/Meat	Recovered
LRF Mjök vs. Oatly Lawsuit	2014	Food/Dairy Alternative	Recovered
Germanwings French Alps Crash	2015	Transportation/Airline	Recovered
Volkswagen's 'Dieselgate' Crisis	2015	Transportation/Automobile	In recovery process

3.4 Method of Analysis

In accordance with our grounded theory approach, according to Charmaz (2006), there are two main phases in coding: initial and focused coding. Initial coding is more detailed, where a code is given to each line of text in the initial stages of interpretation. Charmaz (2006) further argues that researchers should remain open minded and should seek to generate as many ideas as possible around the data when making sense of it. Next, focused coding takes place where the researchers identify the most common codes and those that are not the most important are then dropped (Charmaz, 2006; Bryman, 2008). In this way, the data that is the most revealing and pertinent to the research is coded and is then re-evaluated with these selected codes.

Since we followed the grounded theory method of Charmaz (2006), we started to analyze as soon as possible after conducting the first few interviews and collected the first documents. The author further describes that the advantage of the grounded theory is analyzing on the go, which helps the researchers to see the gaps and holes in the data collection. Therefore, we followed this approach so as to localize the data that was needed and missing in order to gather it. As a result, we determined which documents were needed in order to support our interviews as well as which interviews were needed to complement the documents. Thus, this process helped us to create rich descriptions on our topic. The following diagram (Figure 4) further showcases the process of analysis of the documents as well as interviews, the two coding types used as well as the creation of categories and subcategories in order to conceptualize the emerging theory.

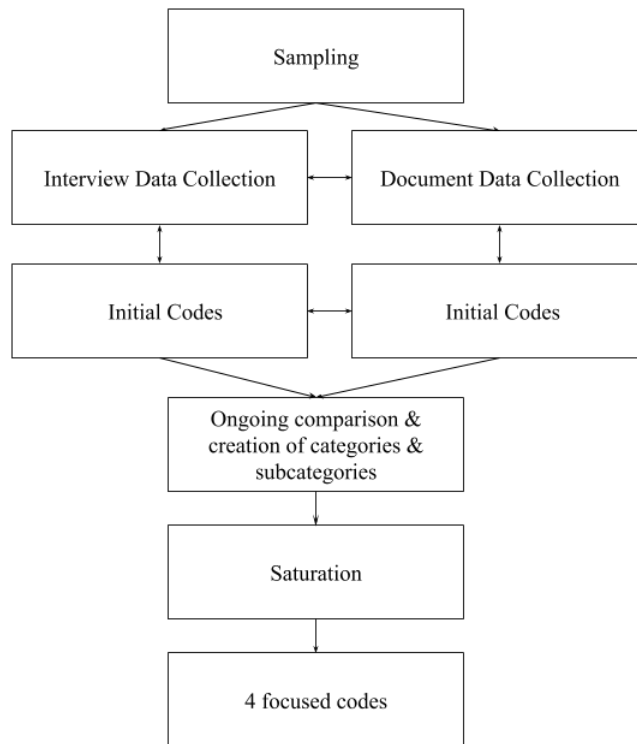


Figure 4. Method of Analysis Summary

3.4.1 Analysis of Documents

As Bryman (2008) argues, it is imperative that the documents are understood in their true light, as they are being written for distinctive purposes and do not reflect reality. Since a variety of documents on corporate brand crises and their recovery were used in our research, we were able to acquire governmental, corporate brand's, media's as well as wider public viewpoints (Table 8). Thus, in order to account for these differences, grounded theory was used as our analytical approach. As crises are highly sensitive events, which we believe depend on the perceptions of different stakeholders, we took a critical approach when evaluating and analyzing the data. Therefore, as Bryman (2008) and Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) state, the documents only form a part of our data and their analysis is compared with the analysis of the interviews so as to create unbiased findings.

Table 8. Different Types of Documents Analyzed per Case Example

Type of Documents	Volkswagen 'Dieselgate' Scandal	LRF Mjöljk vs. Oatly Lawsuit	Findus Horsemeat Scandal	Germanwings Crash in French Alps
Governmental and Int. Org.'s Documents	1	0	1	2
Academic Papers	0	0	2	1
Corporate Documents	2	2	4	2
Mass Media Outputs	7	5	6	11
Internet Websites	2	2	3	2
Total	12	9	16	18

After selecting the right documents based on the criteria in the previous subchapter, we initiated the process of open/initial coding. During the initial analysis of our ongoing data gathering, we used word-by-word coding, which helped to understand the images and meanings, as well as the structure, flow and the content of the text. As Charmaz (2008) describes, our initial codes were assigned to the data rather than making our data fit the codes. Furthermore, as initial codes were identified, we compared them with the initial codes from the interview analysis. Later on, we selected our categories of the most significant and frequent data, from which we formed our four focused codes. Table 9 below shows the process of coding the documents.

Table 9. Example of Coding Process for Documents

Case	Type of Document	Expression	Initial Code	Category	Focused Code
Volkswagen 'Dieselgate' Scandal	Corporate Document	The aim of the Modular Electric Drive Toolkit (MEB) is to translate electric mobility into mass mobility at affordable prices.	Electric mobility and affordability	New direction into electric vehicles	Strategic Recovery Vision
LRF Mjöljk vs. Oatly Lawsuit	Internet Website	Most companies would immediately back down, but because we felt we had just spoke the truth we published the entire 172 page lawsuit on our website and let the public decide.	Spoke the truth, let the public decide based on the published information	Communicate on regular basis	Consistent Communication
Findus Horse Meat Scandal	Academic Paper	In March 2013, a large trust campaign was launched [...] One of the main activities was an invitation to current or potential customers to visit the production facility, and meet the head director and other coworkers.	Meeting the people to let them experience the production	Action to prove transparent practices	Solution-oriented Action

Germanwings Crash in French Alps	Internet Website	After the Germanwings suicide crash in the French Alps March 2015, Lufthansa transferred all Germanwings flights to the Eurowings brand and closed the Germanwings brand in January 2016.	Transfer of Germanwings flights to Eurowings brand	Merging initiative	Change
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3.4.2 Analysis of Interviews

Similarly to the document analysis, we started with initial coding. As Charmaz (2006) explains, in this stage of the coding, the speed and spontaneity is of importance. As the author explains, it helped our new ideas to emerge and created a fresh outlook on the data. In this initial stage, we used line-by-line coding, although not all of the sentences from our interview transcriptions were useful. However, it helped us to understand and produce a holistic view of our data. Throughout this process, the gaps and the need for additional data was identified, as well as the emerging data was constantly compared with the initial stages of the data analysis.

During the process of line-by-line coding, we became aware of the respondents actions, feelings, statements as well as the crisis and company settings. This type of coding approach helped new ideas to constantly emerge and aided in avoiding bias. Furthermore, based on Alvesson & Skoldberg (2009), we challenged our initial coding by both questioning its objectivity and subjectivity. Thus, as the authors further argue, when determining the codes, it was a difficult but imperative process, as we had to understand different interpretations of the data in order to be reflexive and open to other possible viewpoints. Following a reflexive approach required us to consciously interpret our data through investigating it from various perspectives and using alternative vocabulary to understand it in a different way (Alvesson, 2003). As a result, the initial codes from the document analysis were merged with the initial codes from the interview analysis. These were later compared and divided into both categories and subcategories. The categories and subcategories further helped us to conceptualize the phenomenon of post-crisis recovery. Subsequently, we have selected four focused themes: strategic recovery vision, solution oriented action, change and consistent communication, which are displayed in Table 10 below.

Table 10. Example of Coding Process for Interviews

Name of Respondent	Expression	Initial Code	Category	Focused Code/Theme
Marcus Thomasfolk	<i>The important date was when we placed an ad in the big newspapers in Sweden and on the Internet (forgive us ad)... We know that we broke your trust and we realize that this is totally unacceptable</i>	Apologizing in the newspapers in order to rebuild trust	Communicate on a regular basis	Consistent communication
Jean-Luc Ferraton	<i>You have a natural internal resistance through the people... they are the main vehicle towards the external stakeholders... The resistance can be an issue, but they also can be an opportunity... The success of the company lies on their ability to create the change...</i>	Employees are a key factor when trying to rebuild image in the service industry	Success lies in employees ability to create the change	Change
Toomas Tartu	<i>Somewhere it's that you need to have a clear plan/strategy and be very very open-minded in how you present this...If you are not clear, then you don't have a good direction of where you should go</i>	Need for explicit direction for the employees to understand what to do	A plan/vision to get out of the crisis	Brand Recovery Vision
Melker Nilsson	<i>The best answer is still that I can't give many examples of crisis that have been successful...That's the key here as part of the recovery plan, regaining trust from whoever you need to regain trust from ... Some sort of change needs to occur to solve the issue...To be honest, it's largely symbolic, but to change the CEO</i>	Regaining trust comes through changing the things that have caused the problem	Solving the issue through change	Change
Carsten Browall	<i>Most important thing is that you take a crisis very seriously and you put the right resources into trying to solve the crisis...Communicate very openly about the crisis you have...And you communicate [with employees] using the values that you have in the company...If you try to hide things or you try to find the easy way out that doesn't correspond, then I think you will have big problems, you have to be very open</i>	Communicate on a regular basis in a transparent way, without searching for shortcuts in order to genuinely solve the problem	Communicate frequently/ Looking for right solution	Consistent Communication/Solution-oriented action
Linda Nordgren	<i>People typically want to put goals on their crisis but it can be difficult to measure whether we reached that goal and difficult to measure what our starting point is.. More about where we want to be and to make that realistic. You can't be successful out of every crisis incident but to set the bar so that everyone knows what to work towards</i>	Where do we want to be? What do we need to do in order to achieve this?	A realistic direction how to solve the problem and know what to work towards	Strategic recovery vision

Martina Smedberg	<i>Afterwards - have to be severe in your attempt to actually do something about the crisis. You can say we made a mistake, I'm sorry. But if people don't feel like something is happening after the crisis, you lose your credibility. Need to be very clear and tangible in the further actions. Yes, we made a mistake, but we actually have something we need to improve. That's the most important thing for the long term with stakeholders and customers</i>	Do not apologize only but also do something about the root cause of the crisis, the stakeholders expect it	Genuine improvement to be credible	Solution-oriented action/Change
Maria Lehmann	<i>You can say that you have 100% crisis recovery if, after a crisis, you feel that you are back on track again and also have gained something. Gained an experience, have a stronger team, stronger culture in the company if it's well handled [...] I think a crisis that is well taken care of can even add values to a company because they work closer together and have a common goal</i>	Have a direction to work towards, also for employees, once the improvement happens, the brand becomes stronger	Vision to work towards and change what was wrong/the problem	Strategic recovery vision/Change
Fredrik Erlandsson	<i>But now when the media crisis is over, it still needs to be on the top of the agenda. Need to have action plans.. Needs to be there and has to be followed up... Cannot move that down to a low level because the lower the level it gets, the less people will be interested and the less people will take it seriously</i>	The problem needs to stay on a high level so people know this still needs to be worked on and acted upon	Commitment to the vision supported by action	Strategic recovery vision/Solution-oriented action
Luboš Lopatka	<i>Change in the acts of senior management but also change of company, but it has to work in middle line, front line... It is important to communicate to subordinates in order to establish their trust in senior management, and if it is being done, they start helping to make changes, and these people have to understand these changes, and why they are necessary, otherwise the lack of understanding will not create dedication to work on these changes</i>	Revise the strategic intent of the company, communicate it, act on it and deliver the improvements	Upper management communicates to employees to enforce the change	Strategic Recovery Vision/Consistent Communication/Change
Johanna Snickars	<i>Not about the crisis communication, but show that you take action... Fast with establishing new top management ... so they really understood the magnitude of this issue, addressed it and took action</i>	Communication is not all but show the issue is in the solution process	Acting on the root cause and changing what is necessary	Solution-oriented action/Change

3.6 Method Reflection

The aim of this section is to reflect upon the choice of method as well as the research process and the motivations behind it. Due to the limited amount of research in the area of post-crisis brand recovery, we decided to pursue an inductive approach inspired by grounded theory based on Glaser and Strauss (1967) and its extended version by Charmaz (2006). As Easterby-Smith,

Jackson and Thorpe (2015) argue, the original Straussian view of grounded theory assumes that preconceptions are inevitable and therefore, in order to make the readers of this study aware of the previous work conducted in this field, we decided to first start with crisis management theory in the literature review and then outline the methodology section.

Since document studies would not have been enough to fulfill the purpose of our research and to truly contribute to the field of brand crisis recovery, we have supplemented our case examples with interviews and vice versa. Due to the fact that documents are passive and they have not been created specifically for the purposes of social research, they can be seen as a limitation on the validity of data (Bryman, 2008). In order to avoid this limitation, we conducted interactive interviews and spoke with executives and managers in order to understand their experiences and motives. Furthermore, since brands are created based on individuals' actions and words, they can be categorized as social constructions (Greyser & Urde, 2016). As a result, corporate brand crises are also perceptual and depend on the viewpoint of the affected stakeholder (Coombs, 2007a). Thus, since most of the crisis management field is made up of case studies and little to none is known about stakeholders reactions to crises (Coombs, 2007a), it is imperative to supplement these cases with first-hand knowledge about crises.

In the initial stage of our research, we aimed at conducting interviews with professionals involved in the crises that are illustrated in our case examples. Unfortunately, some of the companies were not able to provide us with their testimonies due to the lack of personnel or simply due to the sensitive nature of the topic. However, despite our efforts, we were able to acquire a couple interviews with key executives that work with these brands (Volkswagen and Oatly). It is important to note that although we conducted interviews with representatives from Volkswagen and Oatly, we only gained a Swedish perspective on the 'Dieselgate' crisis, and Linda Nordgren from Oatly was not working with the brand at the time of the LRF Mjölks vs. Oatly lawsuit. Therefore, we did not pursue a case method since we could not secure interviews with individuals from the brands who worked with these four crises. Thus, we were able to supplement the four case examples with our respondents, who were able to provide us with unbiased viewpoints as well as share their crisis experiences with us. As a result, each of our respondents were involved in a crisis to a certain extent in order to meet our minimum sampling criteria.

Due to our ontological and epistemological views, we have chosen to evaluate our qualitative research based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four trustworthiness criterias: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, as mentioned in Bryman (2008). We are further aligned with the authors in their critical view of the absolute truths and their role in revealing them. In terms of the first criteria, credibility, the research has been carried out according to the canons of good practice as well as triangulation was used in order to develop confidence in our findings. We triangulated our results utilizing more than one source of method, through

interviews and document studies, which further helped to cross check and uncover our findings of this phenomenon (Bryman, 2008; Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015). Due to the nature of qualitative research, the findings are usually contextually unique and significant for the aspect of the social world being studied (Bryman, 2008). Thus, we tried to provide rich descriptions of crisis recovery and the experiences of the individuals involved in the crises to ensure the second criterion, transferability. Hence, the research process included the descriptions of the respondents (Table 6) and case examples, as well as the coding methods (Tables 9 & 10, Appendix C), to ensure transferability to other fields.

The third criteria, dependability, requires an 'auditing approach', during which researchers provide comprehensive records of all stages of the investigation process (Bryman, 2008). To be able to reach dependability, we made the research process as transparent as possible. The descriptions of our data collection and method of analysis have been provided to manifest that the findings were uncovered in a transparent manner. We believe that through using multiple levels of coding within the grounded theory approach, it further enhanced the transparency and objectivity of our findings. As suggested by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015), through this code identification process, we were thus able to identify multiple experiences and perspectives from our chosen sample of participants. As mentioned previously, our coding process is further shared throughout our methodology as well as in Appendix C. Lastly, the respondents' quotes are used to strengthen our analysis and additionally convey transparency.

The last criteria is confirmability, which assures that while analyzing the data, the researchers have acted in good faith and that the research was conducted and the findings were created in an unbiased way (Bryman, 2008). Although complete objectivity is impossible in qualitative research, personal values or theoretical inclinations should not influence the outcome of the study (Bryman, 2008; Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015). Alvesson's (2003) reflexive approach while analyzing the data, triangulation, as well as constant discussion between the research partners was used in order to produce unbiased results. Furthermore, a critical approach was used in order to avoid taken for granted assumptions (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Thorpe, 2015). Lastly, when necessary, we contacted our respondents in order to clarify and confirm the statements from the recordings and transcripts for the use of the study so as to ensure objectivity.

4 Presentation of the Case Examples

The focus of this chapter is to present the case examples from our document research. The four crisis case examples, the Volkswagen ‘Dieselgate’ Crisis, the LRF Mjölks vs. Oatly Lawsuit, the Findus Horse Meat Scandal and the Germanwings Crash in the French Alps are presented together with the crises’ outlined recovery. The empirical findings of these case examples will be analyzed together with the interviews in chapter five with the aim to contribute to emerging theory on corporate brand crisis recovery. Therefore, this chapter merely serves as a presentation of the cases, which we later analyze in order to answer our first and second research questions. The following presents the chosen case examples that exemplify the variations identified in crisis recovery. The case examples have been cultivated through an in-depth document analysis using mainly communication materials from the mass-media and other news outlets, the brand’s own websites and their subsequent crisis communication, government, academic papers and internet websites.

4.1 Volkswagen’s ‘Dieselgate’ Crisis

The Volkswagen Group is comprised of twelve brands from seven European countries in total, however, the crisis that is the focus of this study is related to just one of its brands, Volkswagen passenger cars (Volkswagen AG, 2019). Founded in 1937, the Volkswagen brand is one of the world’s most successful volume carmakers and in 2018, a record 6.2 million vehicles were sold worldwide (Volkswagen AG, 2019). However, in September of 2015 just three years prior, VW witnessed one of its biggest crises in history, now known as Dieselgate. In an article posted by the New York Times in February of 2016, about five months after the initial outbreak of the crisis, VW’s Communications Chief stated in an interview:



There was something like a tsunami [...] thousands of calls and emails all coming in at the same time. A crisis like this, the company was not prepared for [...] We don’t know the right way out (Hakim, 2016).

Following this outbreak, the VW brand admitted that it had been cheating on tailpipe-emissions tests in the US (Hotten, 2015). In order to do so, the brand stated that it produced software, known as “defeat devices” to detect and alter laboratory tests for pollutants that would pose a

severe health risk (Hakim, 2016; Hotten, 2015). The executive board at VW stated that it had not been notified of the cheating until late August in 2015 and thus reported it to the US authorities in September (Cremer, 2017). However, Matthias Müller, the new chief executive at the time, aided in sending mixed messages to the public as he told NPR in the U.S. that the brand, had in fact, not lied (Hakim, 2016). This led to the need for Mr. Müller to revise his statement after facing backlash. In addition to this, ex-CEO Martin Winterkorn first stated, in regards to the crisis that:

It's incomprehensible why I wasn't informed early and clearly... I would have prevented any type of deception or misleading of authorities (Matussek & Rauwald, 2017).

In turn, upon his resignation, he blamed the crisis on the “mistakes of a few people” and stated that “I am not aware of any wrongdoing on my part” (Hakim, 2016).

Moreover, upon further analysis of how the crisis arose, it can be determined that the “no-failure” culture that the VW brand was cultivating is what led to its imminent outbreak (Glazer, 2016). Former executives who worked with ex-CEO Winterkorn said that his management style was authoritarian and created a climate of fear within the company (Glazer, 2016). It is even more apparent that his claim that he was unaware of the cheating technology did not align with his detail oriented and perfectionist personality characteristics, as he was known for chastising VW employees for design flaws (Matussek & Rauwald, 2017).

To aid in the recovery process, VW launched a “goodwill” campaign in 2015 that gave affected diesel car owners a \$500 prepaid Visa card, \$500 in dealership credit, and three additional years of roadside assistance (Bartlett, Naranjo & Plungis, 2017). To complement this, the U.S. government required that 85% of the 475,000 affected vehicles be fixed or removed by June 30th, 2019 (Bartlett, Naranjo & Plungis, 2017; European Commission, 2017). Finally, the authors state that to help combat the environmental degradation of the dirty diesel cars, VW donated \$2.7 billion to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions where extreme smog exists in the US.

In Germany, key politicians stated that “the emissions scandal damaged the global reputation of of the German car industry” and that consumers should not be the ones who should suffer because of it (Shalal, 2018). In the US, Reputation Management Consultants stated that although VW had “destroyed brand trust”, the VW brand had stolen market share which increased by 5.2% in 2017 (McGee, 2018). Further, VW's Chief of Integrity and Legal Affairs, Hiltrud Werner, said that VW was internally being proactive in working to transform its culture and to address compliance issues (Shalal, 2018). Along the same lines, Matthias Müller stated that while the crisis was an obstacle to overcome, there are new plans ahead for the company:

The crisis, of course, was a huge problem and it was also rather costly... But it actually worked as a kind of accelerator to address issues that, before, were unable to be addressed.

As a result, in September 2018, the VW brand altered its position on the market by introducing its new electric vehicle platform (Volkswagen AB, 2019). The campaign, known as the Modular Electric Drive Toolkit (MEB) has the aim to translate electric mobility into mass mobility at an affordable price (Volkswagen AB, 2019). While this is only an indication of VW's move towards recovery, the case provides an interesting and unusual viewpoint of how to handle a crisis that is transboundary, making it extremely complex to handle. Although Dieselgate is still an ongoing crisis, it has been able to rebuild its reputation in other markets. For example, the VW Golf was the best-selling car in Sweden for the first time in over half a century in 2016, beating out long-time Swedish favorite, Volvo (Hincks, 2017). Thus, in the analysis of this case, we are focusing on the crisis in the context of the Swedish market and how the globalized effect of the crisis impacted recovery within Sweden.

4.2 LRF Mjölks vs. Oatly Lawsuit

Founded in the 1990s and rooted in research from Lund University, Oatly is a Swedish company that uses a special enzyme patented technology, which through natural processes, transforms fiber rich oats into nutritional liquid food (Oatly Inc, 2017). The oat based products are positioned by the brand as healthy for humans which in turn, upgrades their lives, while also protecting the planet and its general well-being without taxing the Earth's natural resources (Oatly Inc, 2017). As a brand, Oatly has been able to occupy a niche in the food industry that is completely disrupting what has traditionally been done (Chesters, 2016).



Toni Petersson, the Chief Executive Officer of Oatly, has a unique approach to the brand's business concept:

We truly let values dictate our strategies; our business – not the other way around, and that's what makes us different from other companies (Chesters, 2016).

Due to Oatly's differentiated position and unorthodox approach to marketing its products, the brand was sued by a Swedish dairy conglomerate, LRF Mjölks in 2014 (Phair, 2015). The dairy

conglomerate created the lawsuit due to Oatly's marketing tactics, where the brand used slogans such as "It's like milk, but made for humans", "Wow no cow!" and "No milk. No soy. No badness", which the dairy conglomerate claimed discredited the milk industry (Phair, 2015; Chesters, 2016; Wisterberg, 2015). LRF Mjöljk, although a much bigger company than Oatly, further claimed that this form of marketing was "giving milk a bad name" and created negative buzz for the dairy industry as a whole (Phair, 2015; Kvist, 2015).

According to the Creative Director of Oatly, John Schoolcraft, the brand handled the crisis in a nonconformist way:

Most companies would immediately back down, but because we felt we had just spoke the truth, we published the entire 172 page lawsuit on our website and let the public decide (The Challenger Project, 2016).

In addition to this, according to Oatly's corporate documents (2015), the brand consistently updated its social media accounts to keep the public notified of what was occurring in regards to the lawsuit. Based on these documents, we believe that Oatly was unconventional in the way that it portrayed the case, such as through using illustrations that are similar to courtroom sketches (Oatly, 2015).

It is interesting that although Oatly lost the lawsuit, the company ended up gaining a good amount of publicity and its sales grew (Phair, 2015). Petersson even noticed that the case made more individuals aware and supportive of the brand, with an increase in sales of 37% in Europe and Asia and 45% in Sweden (Phair, 2015; Lewis, 2018). Schoolcraft concurred with Petersson by stating that the public realized that "the lawsuit was just a bully tactic" used by a bigger association (The Challenger Project, 2016). This can be contributed to the fact that Oatly was highly communicative during the lawsuit and as part of the brand's recovery, it continued these communications even after the lawsuit ended.

Schoolcraft stated that Oatly also placed a full page ad on the same day of the final proceedings in order to explain why the company had been sued and why this lawsuit was making headlines (The Challenger Project, 2016; Billing, 2019). The public was interested in the lawsuit since the non-dairy industry has seen a boom in recent years due to an increase in awareness of nutrition, environmental impact as well as societal implications (Phair, 2015). This awareness has also grown in regards to the impact of the food industry on the planet.

According to Petersson, the aim for Oatly is to see the bigger picture:

There are really strong forces in our society, affecting our daily lives... What is our role in society? Just to disrupt it. Big food, dairy industry and all that, it's really sad to see what's going on right now (Chesters, 2016).

Moreover, Oatly uses transparency and openness to challenge the mainstream industry. Petersson believes that:

As an industry, it's not always about the good things that you do, but also the bad things you do, and we rarely talk about where we want to improve - to be an honest and open company, we need to talk about both (Chesters, 2016).

Although Oatly lost the case and had gone into crisis mode because of the lawsuit, the company ended up coming out stronger at the end of it all because of its strong recovery through consistent communication. Therefore, the lawsuit demonstrates that dairy alternatives, like Oatly, are creating a new market and challenging industry norms, whereas mainstream and traditional dairy conglomerates, like LRF Mjölke, are nervous for the future (Phair, 2015). In addition, this legal case exemplifies what consequences may be coming, on a global scale, for the dairy industry as a whole.

4.3 Findus Horsemeat Scandal



Findus is originally a Swedish company, dating all the way back to 1945, when the first deep frozen fruit and vegetables were sold in 60 stores in Stockholm (Findus, 2019). In the 60's, Findus was acquired by Nestlé and launched in France and later in Italy, through a joint venture with Unilever (Nomad Foods, 2018). Today, Findus (Scandinavia, France and Italy) is part of Nomad Foods Europe, a largest European frozen food company, together with Birds Eye (UK) and iglo (Continental Europe) (Findus, 2019; Nomad Foods, 2018). The branded products manufactured by Nomad Foods are sold and distributed in 13 European countries, including its biggest markets: the UK, Italy, Germany, Sweden and France (Nomad Foods, 2018). Nomad foods became incorporated in 2014 and is listed on New York Stock Exchange and the corporate brand's goal is organic growth also through strategic merger and acquisitions to develop global portfolio of best in class food brands (Findus 2019; Nomad Foods, 2018).

The horsemeat scandal originally started when The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) conducted a random test of a range of cheap frozen beef burgers and ready made meals from

supermarkets in November 2012 (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Lawrence, 2013; Levs & Nyberg, 2013). The products which claimed to contain beef were tested positive for pork and horsemeat to different extents (Lawrence, 2013; Levs & Nyberg, 2013; Hickman, 2013). The findings started a wave of food safety testing, first spreading to the United Kingdom with implications for Continental Europe (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Lawrence, 2013). The tests revealed that frozen beef lasagne and spaghetti bolognese made for multiple retailers such as Tesco, Aldi and Findus by a French manufacturer Comigel contained up to 100% of horse meat DNA (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Lawrence, 2013; Hickman, 2013; Lane, 2013; Levs & Nyberg, 2013; Neville, 2013). Comigel was further producing affordable beef meals for supermarkets and branded companies in 16 European countries including Germany, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland as well as Ireland and the UK (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Lawrence, 2013).

Comigel's concern about the origin of the meat forced Findus Sweden to recall its frozen lasagne products from the supermarkets (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Levs & Nyberg, 2013). In their communication, Comigel further acknowledged that the horse meat issue might go back in time to August 2012 (Hickman, 2013; Levs & Nyberg, 2013). As a result, Findus Nordic, which oversees Findus in Scandinavia, decided to begin the legal action against Comigel and its sub-suppliers (Levs & Nyberg, 2013). The CEO of Findus Nordic, in an interview for CNN said:

We are only at the beginning of our legal process. Comigel will end up in a lot of legal processes going forward, I imagine,"[...] "Comigel is the villain." [...] "What has happened with Comigel is a crime, a scandal. (Levs & Nyberg, 2013)

The source of the Comigel's horse meat was different than the one from Ireland/Britain (Lawrence, 2013). The thread leads through a production factory in Luxembourg (Levs & Nyberg, 2013) to a supplier Spaghero, which further bought the meat from Dutch company Draap (spelled backwards from 'paard' meaning horse in Dutch), which sourced the horse meat from South America and Mexico (Lawrence, 2013). Draap had already been involved in several fraudulent activities including false horse meat labelling as Dutch and German 'beef' (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Lawrence, 2013). In this case however, the origins of the meat exported from France were sourced by Draap in Romania. While the Romanian authorities noted that the meat was exported under the correct horse meat label, the French authorities said it was Spaghero who stamped the meat as 'beef'. However, Spaghero declined these accusations (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Lawrence, 2013). It is important to note that the horse meat alone would not be in issue, it is more the bute, which is used for treating horse inflammation, which can impose severe health risks on humans (Lawrence, 2013; Levs & Nyberg, 2013; Hickman, 2013).

However, Findus Nordic never begun the legal action as mentioned, due to the complexity of the problem, as well as the Swedish Food National Agency never reported Findus Nordic to the police as promised to the media since they were responsible (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). Since

the frozen beef lasagne was not produced in the Swedish facility in Bjuv (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015), the company blamed Comigel and subsequently, the termination of the supply contracts was communicated (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Levs & Nyberg, 2013). Once Findus' tests confirmed that the products did not contain the drug, the CEO commented:

We are a victim of fraud [...] It is not acceptable that a supplier cheats and exposes Findus customers to this. I am very proud of the fact that it was Findus quality tests that revealed this fraud, which now involves over 60 food producers in 16 countries. (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015, p. 141)

Subsequently, the crisis communication campaign “Welcome to Bjuv” was launched to prove transparency of Findus Sweden to the public (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). The consumers were provided with a two and a half hour exhibit of the production facility and over 2,000 consumers viewed the exhibits, which gained local, national and international media coverage (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). However, food corporations in the UK (Hickman, 2013; Lane, 2013) and France were subject to criticism and were charged for wrongdoing, also due to their slow, not transparent and reactive communication (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015).

The globalization in recent decades brought cheaper meals and long supply chains and traceability became a problem. The origins of the meat cannot be easily traced, since there are clearly companies taking advantage of and engaging in fraudulent activities as warnings were raised by animal welfare organisations previously (Lawrence, 2013). While the Polish and Romanian authorities claimed that their exports were labelled as horse, they also pointed out that their horse slaughtering industries are minor compared to the scale of adulteration which is currently taking place (Lawrence, 2013). Therefore, Findus Sweden was in a transboundary crisis affecting multiple food and retail industry actors within Europe, which escalated quickly through the blame war without any clear victim (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Lawrence, 2013). Furthermore, the European Union's legislature required revisions after the scandal. As a result, Tonio Borg, the Health Commissioner, proposed new regulations for safer food and simpler agri-food supply chain in May 2013 (European Commission, 2018; Falkheimer & Heide, 2015).

4.4 Germanwings crash in French Alps

The Lufthansa Group is a German aviation corporate entity, operating with over 550 subsidiaries and affiliated companies (Lufthansa AG, n.d.). The brand's portfolio is made up of network airlines, point-to-point airlines and



airline service companies (Lufthansa AG, n.d.). As of January 2017, its network airlines are comprised of Lufthansa German Airlines, Swiss and Austrian Airlines. The point-to-point traffic segments are made up of Eurowings, Germanwings and Brussels airline brands (Lufthansa Group, 2016).

On March 24th, 2015, a flight from Barcelona El Prat to Dusseldorf, operated by Germanwings, a low cost carrier owned by Lufthansa, crashed in the French Alps (Tran & Yuhas, 2015). During the crash of Flight 9525, 144 passengers and 6 crew members died (BEA, 2016; Lufthansa Group, 2015). The passengers on the board were from all around the world, mostly from Germany and Spain but also from as far as United States, Australia and South America (Asher, Brennan, Kleiderman, McClatchey, McDermott & Poole, 2015; BEA, 2016). The investigations by the French and German aircraft accident and safety authorities together with Spanish, British, American and EU organisations were involved and complemented by medical and psychiatric experts (BEA, 2016). After a careful investigation process, the French and German prosecutors agreed that the crash was caused by the co-pilot Andreas Lubitz, who was suffering from psychosomatic disorder (BEA, 2016). The captain had been locked out of the cockpit during his break by co-pilot Lubitz, who eventually deliberately caused the crash (Clark, 2015; BEA, 2016; BBC, 28 April 2017).

Andreas Lubitz had been co-piloting for Germanwings since June 2014 and held a medical certificate from 2008, which was continuously renewed every year (BEA, 2016). The co-pilot's record also contained waiver due to the severe depression, lasting between 2008 and 2009 (BEA, 2016). At that time, Lubitz was not secretive of his health conditions (Reuters, 2015a). In December 2014, the pilot suffered severe anxiety again and was diagnosed with psychosomatic disorder (Clark, 2015; BEA, 2016). He was prescribed drugs, but the health care providers and himself included, never informed any aviation authority about his mental state (BEA, 2016). Lubitz believed he was losing vision, which caused severe insomnia and was recommended psychiatric hospital treatment (Clark, 2015; BEA, 2016). Within the five years prior to the crash, Lubitz visited forty one doctors, while during the month before, he visited at least seven (Clark, 2015). While several sick leave certificates were issued for Lubitz, none of them stated the

diagnosis (BEA, 2016). Moreover, the German law did not allow the employer to have access to the employees' medical statements (Clark, 2015; Reuters, 2015).

In terms of the immediate crisis response, Lufthansa's CEO, Carsten Spohr, issued public apology and visited the site of the crash the next day (Reuters, 2015). During the press conference on March 26, 2015, Spohr explained the cause of the crash and further stated:

I have to say it leaves us speechless here at Germanwings and Lufthansa, I can only repeat what I said over the last few days, we are deeply shocked, and were not able to imagine this situation could get any worse. (Richards, 2015)

Following the crash, CEO spoke to several family members, acknowledged the full responsibility and sent out signed condolence letters (Bryan & Lauer, 2015). Nonetheless, the airline has been criticized for seemingly ignoring co-pilot's medical state (Bryant, 2015; Reuters, 2015). Further post-accident action involved cancellation of several flights by Germanwings on March 24th and 25th in order to pay the tribute to the lost colleagues (Huggler, 2015). Although Lufthansa issued a statement that there was no need to change the cockpit procedures, they later introduced the new rule of two crew members being present in the cockpit at all times (Bryant, 2015; BBC, 28 April 2017). At the same time, Germanwings' mother brand Lufthansa immediately offered to pay up to 50,000 euros separately from the legally-binding charges to the families of the victims (Bryant, 2015). However, this statement became controversial later on (Bryan & Lauer, 2015) and based on the Lufthansa Group Annual Report (2015), the corporate brand ended up paying 7 million euros as a short term assistance to the family members of the passengers as of 2015 year end. Furthermore, according to the report, the memorials were built at the brand's headquarters in Cologne as well as affected locations.

Although several experts claimed that the incidents could affect Germanwings flight booking situation (Bryant, 2015), Lufthansa Group Annual Report for 2015 refused this statement. From a long term perspective, the CEO of Lufthansa, Carsten Spohr, introduced the accidental psychological tests of the pilots and loosened the medical secrecy of these tests (BBC, 28 April 2017). Although Lufthansa acquired Germanwings in 2009 (Krishnamurthy, 2016), the corporate brand decided to merge it with Eurowings, six years later (Bryant, 2015; Fehrm, 2016). Eurowings operated as a regional and subsidiary airline of Germanwings until 2014 when it began taking over some Germanwings flights (Fehrm, 2016) and several long-haul flights were introduced towards the end of 2015 (Lufthansa Group, 2015). The process was first initiated in October 2015 (McWhirter, 2015) and ended up being solidified in January 2016 (Fehrm, 2016). As Annual Report Lufthansa Group (2015, p. 46) states:

Germanwings, Eurowings and other flight operations will be marketed together under the umbrella of the new Eurowings in future.

Furthermore, next year's Annual Report of Lufthansa Group (2016) refers to both airlines as Eurowings, however, their fleet is being split into two respectively. Furthermore, as a result of this event, several European airlines followed Lufthansa Group safety precautions and introduced a two person policy in cockpit at all times, such as Easyjet, Monarch, Thomas Cook, while Ryanair and Flybe already had the procedures in place (Low, 2016). To conclude, the European Union released regulations regarding the medical and mental fitness for air crew, as proposed by European Union Aviation Safety Agency following the accident (European Union Aviation Safety Agency, 2018).

5 Analysis of Empirical Findings

In this section, we explore the phenomenon of post-crisis recovery from a strategic brand management perspective in order to understand how corporate brands can recover from a crisis. Thus, in order to define brand crisis recovery and uncover how corporate brands can recover from a crisis, our empirical findings are used in our analysis. The empirical findings are furthermore based upon interviews with corporate brand professionals as well as documents in the form of four case examples. We explore post-crisis recovery as a series of activities and seek to understand the strategies used by corporations when recovering from a crisis, thus restoring the brand's identity, image and reputation. Upon analyzing the empirical findings, we were able to derive four focused codes/themes to describe how brands recover from a crisis: strategic recovery vision, solution-oriented action, change and consistent communication.

5.1 Strategic Recovery Vision

In order for a corporate brand to recover from a crisis, a clear, guiding vision is necessary to be implemented, ideally as early as possible from the outbreak of the crisis. As aforementioned, the strategic recovery vision is separate from the brand's overarching vision as described by Greyser and Urde (2019) and is more specific to the crisis situation, which takes a long term recovery perspective. Therefore, we believe that this strategic intent guides the corporate brand in its communication as well as recovery management. As illustrated by Linda Nordgren, it is often difficult to measure goals that individuals want to set in a crisis situation. However, she further explains that one of the most important elements of Oatly's crisis agenda is what approach the brand should take, what the aim is and where the brand wants to be when the crisis is over. By setting this vision ideally at the outbreak of the crisis, Oatly's subsequent actions and communication strategy were consistent and clear, thus aiding in the brand's overall recovery.

Likewise, Melker Nilsson stated that very early on in the crisis, the brand needs to have an internal discussion of how the recovery plan is going to look like. This is important so as to align all individuals who are involved in handling the crisis in order to understand how the brand will recover in the long term. Further, Maria Lehmann also concurs with Linda and Melker that it is imperative to have a set aim for the employees to work towards a common goal in order to overcome the crisis, otherwise an internal confusion might complicate an already troublesome situation. Although every brand handles a crisis differently, we further believe that it is essential for them to implement a strategic vision that aims for long term recovery and mitigates the after wake of the crisis.

To develop upon the previous paragraph, Melker Nilsson gives a more concrete example of how a corporate brand can express that it is proactively working on solving the root cause of the crisis by altering its direction with a new strategic vision:

If the new direction is actually part of how you plan to solve the problem, then that is ideal [...] If your new campaign or products are partly a way to solve the problem or the crisis.

Melker therefore explains that launching a new distinctive campaign and products, which are created to solve the crisis, can to some extent help with recovery. Similarly, Marcus Thomasfolk emphasized Volkswagen's new strategic orientation into the electric vehicle category through the brand's aim to produce a wide range of new electric vehicles, which are especially suitable for the Swedish market, since the charging infrastructure is already in place.

Furthermore, Maria Lehmann, Senior Consultant in the Furniture Industry, explains that once the corporate brand is in a crisis, upper management and the employees need to be both aligned on what they are working towards and where they are heading. Comparatively, Toomas Tartu explains:

Somewhere, it's that you need to have a clear plan/strategy and be very open-minded in how you present this [...] If you are not clear, then you don't have a good direction of where you should go.

Maria's and Toomas' statements additionally illustrate the need for setting a strategic plan for the future direction of the corporation. In other words, several respondents mentioned that in order to recover, the corporate brand needs to look beyond the current crisis situation and determine where the brand should be in the long term once the crisis has been resolved. Their insights can be complemented by Marcus Thomasfolk, who talks about the new post-crisis Volkswagen aim to democratize the market with electric vehicles so that everyone will be able to afford them:

We have a strategy for making the cars affordable, we see that battery costs are going down and we know how to build the cars to make them affordable [...] It is hard to communicate this to the public since we can't just go out and say 'we are now a totally different company' but the biggest evidence is that they can feel it and see it.

To illustrate the previous paragraphs on the strategic recovery vision, we use the case example of the Volkswagen 'Dieselgate' scandal. Although, in this particular case, the new vision was not implemented directly at the outbreak of the crisis, which thus has impeded the recovery process of the VW brand. Since the 'Dieselgate' scandal was complex and involved national and international stakeholders, as well as regulations, it is an ideal example of a transboundary crisis and thus, the brand's recovery is still taking place. However, we can see, in this case, that the strategic recovery vision was implemented later on during the recovery stage. For example,

VW's CEO, Herbert Diess, opens the Annual Report for 2018 with a letter to shareholders by saying:

Our emphasis is on the electric car, because from today's perspective, it is the best and most efficient choice for reducing CO2 in transport (Volkswagen Group, 2018, p. 8).

He further states that VW's goal is to become a leading provider of e-mobility on a global scale, as well as this is only possible through continuous improvement (Volkswagen Group, 2018). Additionally, the Report of the Supervisory Board further describes that:

Other agenda items included the current state of affairs with respect to the diesel issue and the agenda for the 58th Annual General Meeting of Volkswagen AG, particularly the Supervisory Board's proposed resolutions (Volkswagen Group, 2018, p.13).

It can therefore be seen that, despite the fact that the crisis happened in 2015, the recovery is still ongoing and the strategic vision is apart of the brand's high level agenda. As a result, according to Marcus Thomasfolk, this case example showcases the brand's recovery vision, which had an effect on the entire automotive industry once the issue was resolved.

Although the focus of this section is on strategic recovery vision, it is important to add that several respondents noted that corporate brands with a strong brand culture are more likely to recover from crises than fragmented ones. This is vital to mention because we believe if the brand has a strong culture from the start, the employees will be more willing to help implement the strategic recovery vision and thus, aid in a faster recovery process. To illustrate this statement, Carsten Browall stated that the company culture is essential in order to overcome the crisis in a good way, which was also supported by Maria Lehmann. To exemplify further, Martina Smedberg expressed the belief that IKEA's overall mission and vision, together with its core values, represents a guiding element in the brand's crisis communication and resolution. Similarly, Jean-Luc Ferraton notes that it is less likely that the corporate brand will recover its reputation without its own employees being committed to the mission and vision. From a theoretical standpoint, Augustine (1996) states that corporations that know what they stand for before a crisis occurs end up managing the crises the best. This is comparable to what Greyser (2009) believes, stating that if the brand's essence is affected during a crisis, the more difficult it will be to eventually overcome it. Therefore, it can be seen that brands with a strong core and identity before the crisis are more likely to recover from it.

As explained previously, without a guiding vision as part of a comprehensible crisis plan, the brand's recovery will be difficult to achieve. The strategic recovery vision is essential to have ideally from the outbreak of the crisis so that it aids in creating an action-oriented solution and permeates the brand's communication. In addition to this, it is important that brands also have a

strong identity and culture before the outbreak of the crisis in order to aid in the recovery process. In other words, if the corporate brand's values are deeply entrenched in its culture, the employees will be more willing to work towards the strategic recovery vision in order to overcome the crisis and avoid similar events from occurring again.

5.2 Solution-oriented Action

Although strategic recovery vision is an important component in setting the direction for a brand's recovery, it needs to be supplemented by solution-oriented action. In contrast with crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2015; Roper & Fill, 2012), which focus mainly on repairing the external image and reputation, this solution-oriented action needs to be communicated in a genuine way to show the brand's key stakeholders that the corporation truly wants to make a difference inside out. We believe that, especially in a crisis situation, it is important for brands to show that they care about how its stakeholders are affected and provide a proactive solution in order to recover in the long term. This idea is encapsulated by Melker Nilsson, who explained:

First, the brand needs to have solved the problem or can present convincing evidence that they are well under way to solve the problem.

To elaborate on Melker's statement, Maria Lehmann, Martina Smedberg, Johanna Snickars and Toomas Tartu strengthened his argument by emphasizing that issuing an apology is not enough and the brand must prove that it is taking clear and tangible actions in order to appear credible to external stakeholders. It is, however, important to note that this action should be deemed authentic, in the way that the brand wants to prevent the issue from happening again, and that it allows the brand to recover with a long term perspective. This is further in line with Greyser's (2009) notion of not only talking, but also being and staying authentic in the brand's actions during the crisis.

To develop upon the solution-oriented action further, the crisis needs to be acted upon since day one, as Toomas Tartu argues:

From [the] first day, you have almost every day something, crisis or challenge [...] You always need to think if it's not going on plan A, how do you have a plan B or C [...] If you have a bigger crisis, you must go backwards and make your analysis and think of what kind of solutions you should take and also how you should act.

We believe that in order to make a wise decision, it is imperative for brands to first analyze what caused the crisis (Coombs 2007a; Greyser, 2009) and to figure out what is true and what is not true, thus determining what the facts of the crisis are and subsequently acting upon them. Thus,

recovery is not possible without coming up with a solution that solves the issue at hand. Further, Fredrik Erlandsson states that it is necessary to decide who will deal with the crisis and what roles each individual should take in order to create clear KPIs that can be communicated so as to measure how the crisis is being handled. In this way, he believes that a crisis is very dictatorial in that only a few people should be involved in making key decisions that will help to overcome the crisis, while constantly analyzing what has been done and what can be done better.

Fredrik's input is comparable to that of Lubos Lopatka, who says that it is imperative to persuade stakeholders that this is only a temporary situation, the corporate brand is in control of what happened and knows how to solve it so as to keep public trust:

It takes longer to build up the trust but you can lose it easily in the crisis. To keep public trust, you make sure to assure them that you know how to find a solution, although we have these issues.

To illustrate this, we use the case example of the Germanwings crash in the French Alps. Since the investigation has shown that the incident was caused by the co-pilot, who was going through a mental breakdown and was left alone in the cockpit, Lufthansa decided to alter the policy regarding medical secrecy and also introduced a new policy stating that two individuals need to be present at all times in the cockpit (BBC, 28 April 2017; Low, 2016). In order to act upon the issue, Carsten Spohr, the Lufthansa group's CEO, introduced random checks to find out the presence of mental illness drugs in the blood as well as negotiated with the German government regarding loosening the doctor-patient confidentiality in the aviation industry (Sheahan, 2015). Later on, the two person policy in the cockpit at all times was introduced not only by Lufthansa, but also a handful of other airlines in Europe (Low, 2016), in order to act on the issue and prevent it from happening again. The alteration and introduction of these policies therefore prove that through solution-oriented action, the Germanwings brand, in combination with the Lufthansa Group, had an overarching impact on the aviation industry and resolved the root cause of the crisis.

In contrast to the previous paragraph, there are corporate brands which take an action to restore their image and reputation, however, their action was directed at external stakeholders to quickly solve the issue and appeared inauthentic. To exemplify this, Findus launched a brand recovery campaign after the horse meat scandal, where customers were invited to visit the factory and experience one of the brand's core values: transparency (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). Although the Findus example can be seen as a crisis response strategy rather than recovery, as the brand's aim was to repair its image first and foremost, the action provided a solution to appeal to the key affected stakeholders. Nevertheless, we believe that Findus' recovery was unique, as the company did not take full responsibility for what happened, and consequently, the internal processes were not altered, with the exception of the termination of the contract with the brand's

supplier which delivered the horse meat (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015; Levs & Nyberg, 2013). Thus, Findus' solution-oriented action was not genuine, however, the brand managed to recover due to its proactive communication and short term oriented image repair strategy.

As we have seen in this case example, although providing the public with a solution to the crisis is vital, stakeholders need to see that the solution is being acted upon and that the brand is sincerely trying to improve or correct the misconduct. In contrast to how Findus handled the crisis, this solution-oriented action needs to appear genuine rather than merely fixing the brand's image with a short term perspective. As Jean-Luc Ferraton explains, the corporate brand needs to demonstrate the right intent through its performance and behavior and adds that as it is compulsory to be transparent, the brand should also portray that it has good intentions when resolving the issue. Maria Lehmann additionally notes that if the stakeholders do not see that the company is trying to settle the issue, then the brand can lose credibility. Carsten Browall, Melker Nilsson, Fredrik Erlandsson and Linda Nordgren also all mentioned that the crisis should be handled both with humility and gravity. To further strengthen this argument, Martina Smedberg adds that:

Don't blame anybody, don't try to explain something that you haven't confirmed, act humbly [...] You have to be severe in your attempt to actually do something about the crisis [...] Yes, we made a mistake, but we actually have something we need to improve. That's the most important thing for the long term with stakeholders and customers.

Martina contradicts how Findus handled the horse meat scandal by stating that the brand should take the blame and not point the finger at someone else. In addition, she states that the brand needs to admit the mistake and then, most importantly, make an improvement within the company in order to recover from a long term perspective. Similarly, Fredrik Erlandsson describes:

But now when the media crisis is over, it still needs to be on the top of the agenda. Need to have action plans [...] Needs to be there and has to be followed up [...] Cannot move that down to a low level because the lower the level it gets, the less people will be interested and the less people will take it seriously.

To summarize, as Fredrik Erlandsson stated, even when the media crisis is over, the issue needs to stay on the top of the agenda together with concrete action plans so that employees do not become disinterested and unwilling to work on improving the issue. As a result, in order to truly recover, the brand should both be proactive in admitting the mistake in a humble manner, while also being genuine and solution-oriented by making a tangible improvement within the corporation.

5.3 Change

Since we have now covered the initial elements that aid in recovery, which includes creating a strategic recovery vision and stimulating genuine solution-oriented action, we find that change is a decisive factor in post-crisis recovery management, which serves as proof to the stakeholders that the brand is moving forward. We believe that change is highly necessary for a brand to enact in order to fully recover from a crisis. The changes that are made are highly dependent on the magnitude of the crisis as well as by how the crisis was handled from the start. Several respondents exclaimed that change is a necessary component to communicate that the brand is seeking a new strategic direction as well as provides a solution to the current crisis. For example, Jean-Luc Ferraton stated that change management is a key component of a company's success, and while change can at first provoke a natural resistance within the brand's employees, the success of the company lies on their ability to create the change. This was also confirmed by Lubos Lopatka, who previously stated that changes in the management or elsewhere within the company need to be communicated to the employees explicitly to help them understand why they are necessary, but also to help make the changes work:

Change in the acts of senior management but also change of the company, but it has to work in middle line, front line [...] It is important to communicate to subordinates in order to establish their trust in senior management, and if it is being done, they start helping to make changes, and these people have to understand these changes, and why they are necessary, otherwise the lack of understanding will not create dedication to work on these changes.

To illustrate, the VW Dieselgate crisis required the entire upper management, including the CEO, as well as the culture to change into becoming more open and transparent. Marcus Thomasfolk summarizes the changes that occurred as a result of the crisis:

At the HQ level, there was a big change when the former CEO stepped down, which was only a couple days after the crisis started [...] We had a culture that was maybe not so open and transparent. It was very much top-down and maybe that culture worked at that time, but in new times, we need to have a different view of our culture.

In addition to this, Marcus Thomasfolk further describes the new vision that was created, in order to address these internal changes which were then subsequently communicated externally:

But also, something was going on on the HQ level and most of the management team was replaced and there was also a decision to change strategy and to go into electrical cars [...] This wasn't new for us, but the decision now was to increase the level of investment into electricity and to become the leading brand with electric cars [...] And the crisis made the process much faster than it would have been without the crisis [...] Good to be in Sweden and these issues are important: electricity is now our main focus, which was perceived in a good way.

As a result, as exemplified in the Volkswagen case, the brand has been able to begin recovery due to providing a genuine and long term oriented solution to the crisis through communicating a new strategic direction of investing in electric vehicles and changing the brand's culture and upper management. Although according to Marcus the brand already had the electric vehicle initiative in mind, the crisis heightened the need to implement the new vision quicker so as to combat the current industry issue of the brand's polluting diesel vehicles. Thus, the new strategic vision has acted as a solution to the brand's crisis and aided in changing the brand's reputation in the minds of its stakeholders. To sum up VW's new desired positioning, as stated by the brand itself, it wants to continue to improve and achieve sustainable growth through creating value for its stakeholders (Volkswagen, 2018):

We are resolutely pursuing the transformation of the Volkswagen Group. By maintaining our course, we will continue to shape individual mobility in the future (Volkswagen, 2019, p.4).

To provide an alternative view, we will use the Germanwings French Alps Crash case example. Germanwings is another brand which implemented change in order to recover from a crisis in the form of a rebranding initiative, or in other words, merged with its sister brand, Eurowings (Fehrm, 2016). Even though the brand claims that it already had planned to change its name to Eurowings, as the Lufthansa Group was expanding its destinations beyond Germany (McWhirter, 2015), in a similar manner to VW, the crisis hastened the change. In addition to this brand architecture change, the case exemplifies, according to Melker Nilsson, that a crisis of extreme magnitude like this has to be consulted immediately and therefore, as human lives were at risk, other changes were needed such as altering the psychological evaluation and loosening of medical secrecy in exceptional cases. Melker further argues that in order to protect the mother brand, Lufthansa, the name change was important to implement so as to save the entire group.

As the previous quotes and case examples showcase, a certain degree of change is necessary to fully recover from a crisis. To support our findings, Cornelissen (2008) discusses one of the four crisis communication strategies, the accommodation strategy, which indicates that employees are notified about significant changes happening within the company, together with advertising and repositioning the company in regards to the issue. Jaques (2007) further develops this idea by explaining that although a crisis management plan is often not evaluated immediately after the crisis occurs, the post-crisis phase is a great opportunity for genuine corporate learning and modification of the systems in place. To emphasize this further, another common notion among our respondents was that if the corporate brand manages to recover, it can come out of a crisis much stronger than before. This was in particular mentioned by Carsten Browall, who shared his recent experience with a cyber attack. The attack caused the operational system to go down for almost two weeks, however, the employee's commitment to resolve the crisis helped the

corporate brand to return to normal operations and resulted in the implementation of a better security system. Therefore, Carsten commented on the aftermath of the cyber crisis:

It's always so when you have a crisis, if you are able to overcome that crisis in a decent or good way, you come out on the other side stronger than before.

To build upon this, Maria Lehmann, who has over 20 years of working experience with mostly small and medium businesses, explained how crises can especially threaten the existence of these type of companies. In addition to what Carsten said, Maria explains that brands can actually improve themselves after the crisis is resolved. It is not only that they learn how to prevent the same issue from occurring again in the future, but they actually become stronger internally through heightened commitment among the employees:

You can say that you have 100% crisis recovery if, after a crisis, you feel that you are back on track again and also have gained something. Gained an experience, have a stronger team, stronger culture in the company if it's well handled [...] I think a crisis that is well taken care of can even add values to a company because they work closer together and have a common goal.

Thus, the communication of the recovery vision and solution-oriented action to employees then leads to a strategic change within the corporation. The change often does not only implement new, improved policies within the corporation but also contributes to a stronger and more productive brand culture. In this respect, we agree with Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2009) that the post-crisis stage offers the opportunity for the brand to renew itself in order to gain a different and better position than before. Therefore, we believe that the recovery stage is when the brand has the opportunity to enact change in order to solve the root cause of the crisis and ensure it does not happen again in the future. In return, once the change is implemented successfully, we believe that the brand ends up profiting from the crisis in the long term.

5.4 Consistent Communication

The previous sections that were dedicated to strategic recovery vision, genuine solution-oriented action and change are strengthened by the brand's consistent communication. Although communication is not the only key element of the brand's recovery, it is how the brand communicates both internally and externally with its stakeholders, and thus, is the vehicle that ultimately aids in the brand's recovery. Therefore, we believe that consistent communication serves as a bridging element between the initial stages of the crisis and the recovery stage. To illustrate, Linda Nordgren states that ideally, a good recovery is completely dependent on how you manage the actual crisis and brands cannot recover unless they pursue good crisis management practices.

Moreover, while we agree with Linda and all of our respondents who expressed that transparent and honest communication would be one of the most important aspects of the initial crisis response, it is understandable that these communication decisions are often taken when employees are under pressure and can also consequently negatively affect the brand in the long term. Therefore, we see that the recovery stage provides brands with the opportunity to communicate the change in progress and to resolve any communication mistakes that were made at the beginning of the crisis. This can be particularly seen in the VW case example, where the brand is currently enacting a strategic change by seeking to become a leader in e-mobility in Sweden and has sought to move beyond its initial troublesome communication at the beginning of the crisis. Alternatively, we believe that the recovery stage is a second chance for the brand to improve and resolve what has been previously done wrong in the long term.

Thus, in contrary with Coombs (2007a) we argue that brands should communicate consistently throughout all of the stages, including in recovery. To exemplify this, such as when the brand operates in an industry where the regulatory affairs are conflicting with the beliefs of diverse stakeholders, the brand might find itself in constant crisis. Linda Nordgren talks about the procedures in place regarding the organic oat beverage production, which are not aligned with what the vegan community believes in:

There is a difference, we do vegan products but we are not a vegan company. It won't be sustainable for the world if everyone turns [sic] vegan, so our mission is to get people to eat more plant based because today, we eat too much animal products, and most of our consumers are vegan, but our values differ from them. Since we are a value based company, and value driven in our communication, people tend to put their own values onto us as well.

As a result, this often causes small crises to occur even within the corporation, since as Linda explained, the European regulation stipulates the use of animal fertilizers to be the organic way. Therefore, Oatly often needs to stand up for its brand values and does not compromise on regulatory compliance.

We also find this is to be of particular importance when looking at the LRF Mjölks vs. Oatly case example. Despite the fact that Oatly lost the lawsuit (Phair, 2015; Lewis, 2018), no significant changes, other than the restriction on what the brand could say about milk in its communication, were made. In addition to this, the crisis attracted significant media attention and increased the brand's sales (Phair, 2015; Lewis, 2018; Chesters, 2016; Wisterberg, 2015), which eventually helped Oatly to recover through consistently communicating the brand's *raison d'être*: to provide oat products with maximum nutritional value and minimal environmental impact (Oatly Inc, 2017). Due to their unique position on the market, which has disrupted the dairy industry, the brand itself is already enacting change within its industry and thus, did not make any major

changes in response to this crisis. As illustrated by Linda Nordgren, she states that Oatly continuously communicated the brand's values after the lawsuit occurred as part of its recovery without discussing the brand's opponent, LRF Mjölkk. She explains that when the brand spoke out once it lost the lawsuit with LRF Mjölkk, it did not talk to the media about the milk conglomerate, but rather focused on what it had to say to the public about what the brand wants to achieve through Oatly's mission and vision:

Pushing our core values, like yeah, we lost, we weren't allowed to say certain things [it's like milk, just made for humans]. But we talked about why we said them, we need to turn into plant based and it's all about sustainability. Not talking about them [LRF Mjölkk], but about our core values and what we want to accomplish.

In other words, this example showcases that if a brand takes full responsibility for the crisis, then it can use the situation as an opportunity to show what the brand stands for as well as what it hopes to accomplish in the future. Therefore, Oatly took a strategic stand to defend the brand's mission and vision without blaming the milk conglomerate for causing the crisis and as a result, Oatly's disruptive position on the market challenged the milk industry and helped the brand to fully recover.

However, another significant aspect to consider in crisis communications is to avoid blaming another entity. Martina Smedberg, a former Head Spokesperson of IKEA summarizes the brand's best practice crisis communication in the following statement:

IKEA is quick at admitting a mistake and the brand doesn't have a CEO [who handles the communication in a crisis]. IKEA uses a spokesperson at the lower level who says that we don't know the consequences yet.

In contrast however, while Findus was transparent in its external crisis communications, it did not take any responsibility for the horse meat scandal and pointed the finger at the brand's supplier when discussing the situation with the public. For example, Findus' CEO made this comment in regards to who was at fault for the crisis' outbreak:

We are a victim of fraud [...] It is not acceptable that a supplier cheats and exposes Findus customers to this. I am very proud of the fact that it was Findus' quality tests that revealed this fraud, which now involves over 60 food producers in 16 countries (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015, p.141).

To complement this statement, Fredrik Erlandsson also voices the concern over taking full responsibility for the crisis, stating that there should be a balance between saying too much and too little. He believes that the brand should never lie and should not say that it does not know whose fault it is, but it should handle the situation in a balanced, humble and correct way.

On the other hand, we also find it imperative to mention that communications can also determine whether a crisis actually occurs or not. As stated by Johanna Snickars, it is possible to prevent a crisis from happening if the crisis is identified early on and the subsequent communications are swift and effective:

So many of the communications I've been involved with, the crisis never happened [...] We were able to stop it [...] So the best crisis communications are those that no one ever sees.

Although the focus of this paper is on the recovery stage, it is still apparent that the best handled crises are those that stakeholders and the media never find out about in the first place, which is also a shared sentiment with another one of our respondents, Melker Nilsson. However, the most important aspect of communications in the recovery stage is for the brand to continue being transparent and open, while at the same time, effectively managing stakeholders perceptions using the brand's values, mission and vision.

6 Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to conceptualize the empirical material analyzed, as well as to present the results of our research. In doing so, this chapter is split into two subchapters, based on our two research questions. The first subchapter conceptualizes Brand Crisis Recovery based on the results from a strategic brand management perspective and connects the concept to previous literature. The second subchapter presents the research outcomes in connection to the first research question, and thus, answers the second research question. In doing so, it showcases the different recovery strategies and activities that corporate brands follow in order to recover.

6.1 What is crisis recovery according to corporate brands?

In order to understand what post-crisis recovery is, it is imperative to see how it has been used in the previous literature. As aforementioned, the post-crisis recovery stage has been conceptualized by researchers in different ways. According to Mitroff and Pearson (1993), the crisis recovery stage should be made up of short term and long term strategies in order to recover the brand's reputation. From our research, we have found that to fully recover and mitigate the after wake of the scandal in the post-crisis stages, this phenomenon needs to be explored from a long term perspective. Furthermore, existing crisis management literature focuses on immediate crisis response strategies, which are mainly rooted in the field of strategic crisis communication (Roper & Fill, 2012; Coombs, 2007a; Coombs, 2007c; Coombs & Holladay, 2010). Since the communication field focuses on short term response strategies to appease stakeholders, we categorize it as short term recovery, which mainly targets external stakeholders. It additionally seems that the long term implications of recovery are not developed in order to solve the root cause of the internal problem with the ultimate goal to improve the brand. Therefore, we intend to extend the meaning of brand crisis recovery beyond the communication field and instant crisis response strategies.

Moreover, other scholars, such as Augustine (1996), Campiranon and Scott (2009), and Jaques (2007) describe crisis recovery as an opportunity for companies to turnaround their business losses in the aftermath of the crisis. Similarly, Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2009) believe that companies should view recovery as a renewal period in order to resume a stronger position. In addition to this, Jaques (2007), Mitroff and Pearson (1993) and Wang, Hutchins and Garavan (2009) argue that organizations need to consider what has been learned in order to help prevent future crises and stress the need to include crisis management in broader strategic management processes. While we agree with the previous research that has been conducted, we further recognize the need to take strategic action during the recovery stage in order to mitigate the

current crisis and regain trust in the long term. As a result, we introduce the concept of brand crisis recovery, looking at it from a strategic brand management perspective.

We define brand crisis recovery as a long term strategic commitment in order to regain brand trust and the brand’s harmed/weakened position on the market through having a strong vision, followed by genuine and solution-oriented action and its subsequent communication, with the ultimate goal to change. To further clarify the notion of a vision, we believe that this strategic intent guides a brand in its crisis communication and needs to be established ideally as soon as possible once the crisis occurs. The strategic recovery vision is different than the overarching brand vision as it stipulates what the corporate brand hopes to achieve and how it wants to recover once the media crisis has ended. For this reason, the crisis recovery stage is dependent on the initial stages of crisis management. In other words, the absence of a vision, in order to enact action and change from a long term perspective, might weaken the brand's ability to recover from a crisis. Based on the results of our study and from what was initially presented in Chapter 2, we are able to position our interpretation of brand crisis recovery in terms of current literature on Recovery, which is shown in Figure 5 below.

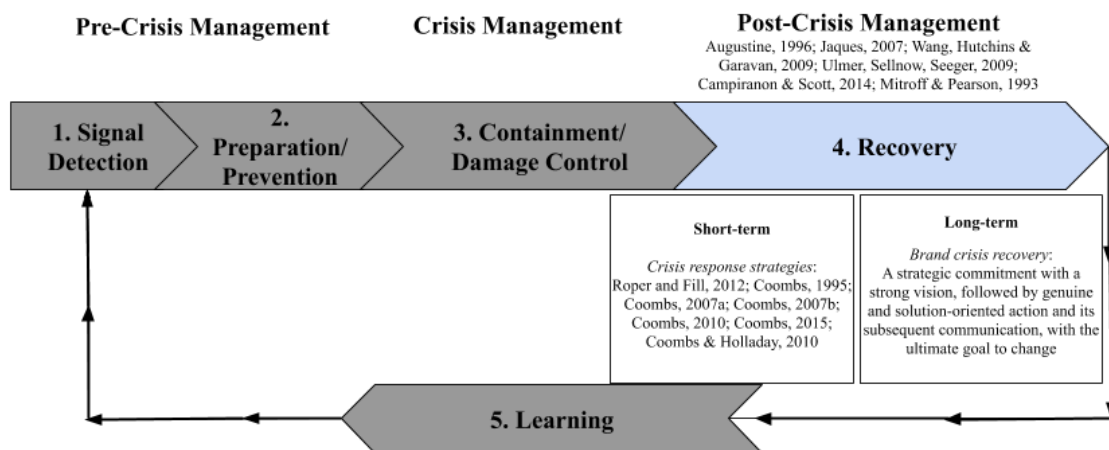


Figure 5. Brand Crisis Recovery (Based on Mitroff & Pearson, 1993)

To conclude this section, we have both provided a definition of crisis recovery as well as have positioned ourselves in regards to current literature, thus answering our first research question. In the next section, we will further develop this conceptualization of recovery and describe the different activities and strategies that corporate brands implement, with the aim to recover from a crisis.

6.2 How do corporate brands recover from a crisis?

To develop our definition of Brand Crisis Recovery, we have created a framework called the Brand Crisis Recovery Framework (BCRF) in order to illustrate our findings from the analysis (Figure 6). Based on our focused codes/themes, as described in the analysis, we were able to identify different strategic management tactics, which corporate brands can use in order to recover from a crisis. In the framework, we identify four archetypes: *Justifiers*, *Seekers*, *Challengers*, and *Deniers*. The purpose of the framework is to outline different crisis recovery strategies, which are subsequently categorized into four brand crisis recovery archetypes. The BCRF, therefore, answers our second research question about how brands can recover from a crisis. Further, we have assigned different variables to each archetype, external versus internal recovery with each having extreme versus moderate implications, which will be discussed below.

The Framework Dimensions

First, the framework helps brands to strategically identify the archetype that most closely relates to their own crisis situation. Following our analysis, the two axes are divided into internal and external recovery. As we saw from our case examples, some brands chose to enact recovery internally, which then would be communicated externally, and vice versa. The brands who used internal strategies decided that they needed to alter an internal process and the elements of the identity of the brand in order to recover, whereas the brands that used external strategies are mainly concerned with recovering their image or reputation. Moreover, the moderate and extreme variables explain if the brand used moderate or extreme strategies, given the intensity of the improvements which are needed in order to repair what has been tarnished. A moderate strategy can be explained as a correction to the misconduct or issue at hand, whereas an extreme strategy would consist of a complete change to the overall corporate brand management approach.

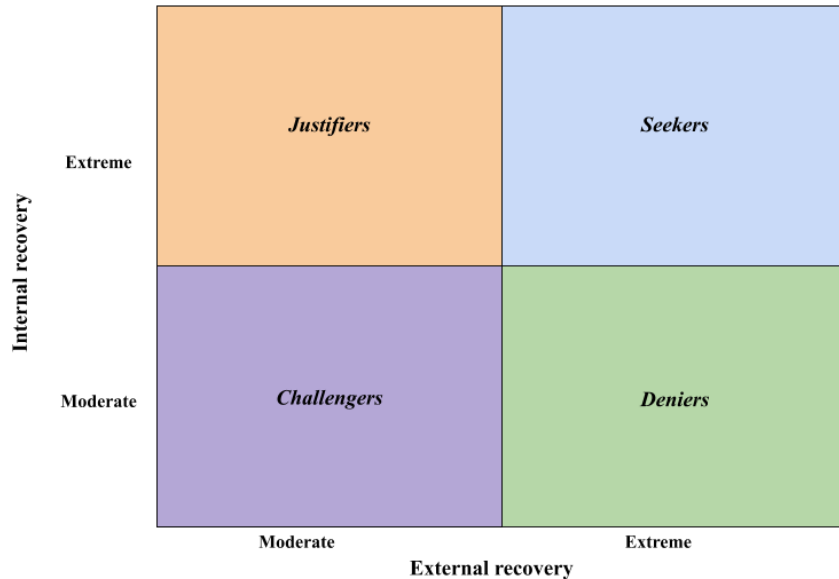


Figure 6. The Brand Crisis Recovery Framework (BCRF)

The Justifiers: Extreme Internal and Moderate External Recovery

Justifiers believe that it is necessary to enact extreme internal and moderate external recovery due to the severity of the crisis, often affecting human lives, in order for the brand to survive as well as to save their reputation from being tarnished. Thus, the brands that fall into the *Justifiers* archetype often change their name, get acquired or merge with another company. The purpose is to provide a *Justifier* with a fresh start and to aid in a faster recovery process, as stakeholders tend to forget and forgive the crisis quicker due to the new corporate brand name. Although starting with a blank sheet can be challenging, in this case, it rather moves the brand forward due to the gravity of the crisis. As a result, *Justifiers* usually pursue extreme internal recovery in the form of changes to the brand architecture, which can be done through being merged or acquired by an independent brand or simply by being absorbed by a sister or mother brand.

In the case of Germanwings, the brand was merged with Eurowings, another brand from its Lufthansa mother brand portfolio, because of the increased magnitude of the crisis with the loss of human lives. Although Lufthansa claimed that it had already planned on Germanwings being absorbed by its sister brand, the crisis subsequently sped up the process and was a key factor in the brand's recovery. The brand not only changed its name but also caused change to be implemented externally, such as the security procedures being altered for the cockpit through the implementation of the two person rule, along with screenings for mental health issues within the Lufthansa Group and loosening the German medical secrecy laws for exceptional cases.

The Seekers: Extreme Internal and External Recovery

Due to severe broken trust with stakeholders and/or damage to the brand's reputation, which is usually caused by unethical behaviour which had legal consequences, the brands that fall into the *Seekers* archetype either need to reposition and alter their internal strategy and culture or realign their core values in order to recover from a crisis. The brand may also need to make alterations in its management culture. Thus, *Seekers* use both extreme internal and external recovery strategies so as to solve the issue and to recover the brand's reputation or image. To illustrate, a brand needs to, for example, re-evaluate its existing competences and value proposition and implement a new direction, which eventually aids in repositioning the brand on the market. As a result, the brand seeks to implement a strategic recovery vision supported by genuine solution-oriented action in order to fully repair its internal brand management and external image and reputation in the long term.

In the case of VW, the brand has used its e-mobility vision as a guiding strategic intent in order to help the brand recover. However, VW has still not fully recovered due to the complexity and transboundary nature of the Dieseltgate scandal. Due to the fact that one of the brand's core values is sustainability, VW subsequently needed to re-align this value as the brand went against it by cheating on the diesel emissions tests in the United States, resulting in the necessary internal change of its competences and culture to become more transparent and open. The launch of the new electric vehicles also serves as a solution to the problem, which has aided in its recovery by communicating this new vision to the public and genuinely acting on it.

The Challengers: Moderate Internal and External Recovery

The brands that fall into the *Challenger* archetype are inherently a disruptor in an already established industry. This type of brand is unique in the way that it is strongly brand oriented and value driven and therefore, disrupts the normal industry operations. Thus, the brand's core values, mission and vision drive change on the traditional market. However, in times of crisis, they are categorized as a *Challenger* because they have already made significant changes within their industry and thus, challenge the need to improve or change as a result of the crisis in order to recover. Therefore, the internal and external recovery strategies are moderate for the *Challenger* archetype since they use their existing unique core values and mission/vision in their crisis communication as they already do in their usual communication.

In the case of Oatly, the brand's tagline "just like milk, but made for humans" was confronted by its competitor, LRF Mjöl, as the brand is currently disrupting the dairy industry and offering an alternative to dairy with oat based products. Thus, the milk conglomerate claimed that Oatly was "giving milk a bad name". Although Oatly lost the lawsuit and it stopped using the slogan in Sweden, the brand attracted significant attention from consumers due to its bold practices and

mission. Oatly can be considered a disruptor in their market, however, in a crisis situation, the brand does not change and challenges the norm due to its strong brand orientation. Since the Oatly case is highly unique, as the brand is a disruptor, the recovery strategies that the brand uses both internally and externally are considered moderate because Oatly is already creating a new direction in the brand's industry setting.

The Deniers: Moderate Internal and Extreme External Recovery

Deniers are the corporate brands that did not cause the crisis deliberately, however, it can be argued that they should have had internal processes in place beforehand to avoid it. Therefore, the brands that fall into the *Deniers* archetype do not take responsibility for the crisis and thus, place the blame on another entity for the cause of the crisis. Although *Deniers* disagree that they should be fully responsible for the crisis, these brands do care about taking action in order to recover their status and image in the industry. Although they make small corrections within, these brands rather use external brand recovery campaigns by offering a new positive outlook to solve the issue. Due to this, *Deniers* only use moderate internal recovery strategies but enact extreme recovery externally through mainly repairing their image in the short term and eventually long term.

In the case of Findus Nordic, the brand places the blame on the supplier that distributed the horse meat and terminates the contract. Although it does not take the responsibility for the crisis, in order to save the brand's image, Findus Nordic decided to utilize transparent and consistent communication with key stakeholders, in combination with a trust recovery campaign. Because the crisis was transboundary, making it complex and difficult to follow, Swedish consumers did not know who to blame or how to perceive Findus Nordic since the supplier was from another country. Thus, the consumers accepted the scapegoat strategy, although the brand's overall approach to the issue can be questioned. This is another unique case where the brand was able to recover using a strategy which is usually frowned upon according to best practice crisis management.

6.3 Chapter Summary

To summarize the key findings based on our analysis, we provided a definition of brand crisis recovery, which we further enrich through the four archetypes of how brands can recover from a crisis. Furthermore, we agree with Jacques (2007) that crisis management needs to move beyond the linear and communication oriented crisis models, with the need to provide the operational context and changes which need to be implemented within the corporate brand. We also agree that crisis management is not only about lobbying, media relations and waiting until the worst is

over (Jacques, 2007), but rather proactively tackling the issue through operationalizing effective strategic brand management in order to solve the root cause of the issue.

7 Conclusion

To reiterate, the aim of this study was to define brand crisis recovery as well as to gain a deeper understanding of how corporate brands recover from a crisis. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to explore the post-crisis recovery phenomenon through a theoretical and managerial lens. While pursuing the study, we looked at the phenomenon from a corporate brand management perspective. As a result, in the following sections, we look back at our research questions and revise our assumptions, which were presented in the introduction and made prior to completing the analytical process. To conclude this section, we outline the theoretical contributions, managerial implications as well as the limitations of our research and provide suggestions for future research in the field of brand crisis management.

7.1 Research Aims and Objectives

RQ1 - Defining Crisis Recovery from a Corporate Brand Perspective

The thesis at hand presents the concept of *Brand Crisis Recovery* to answer the first research question. In doing so, we extended the notion of the phenomenon beyond the initial field of crisis management and communications in order to provide a more holistic and strategic brand management perspective. *Thus, we define brand crisis recovery as a long term strategic commitment in order to regain brand trust and the brand's harmed/weakened position on the market through having a strong vision, followed by genuine and solution-oriented action and its subsequent communication, with the ultimate goal to change.* Although we recognize that communication is important, it is not the only tool that helps brands to repair their image and reputation in the long term. Our results additionally contribute to crisis brand management through identifying the strategic internal and external managerial rationales behind the decisions that brands take when trying to overcome a crisis. Therefore, we have concluded that *Brand Crisis Recovery* is made up of a multitude of factors that can help a brand to eventually regain their market position and favorability in the eyes of its stakeholders.

RQ2 - How Brands Recover from a Crisis

In this study, we further extend the definition of brand crisis recovery through the Brand Crisis Recovery Framework (BCRF), which allows corporate brands to operationalize their recovery in order to recoup from the crisis. The recovery can be internal and/or external with moderate and extreme changes to the existing brand management respectively. Based on this, we have identified four brand archetypes, with their subsequent recovery strategies: *Deniers, Justifiers,*

Challengers and *Seekers*. In other words, with these brand archetypes, we have described the different ways that brands can recover in the after wake of a crisis, which answers our second research question. In this way, the BCRF serves as a corporate brand recovery tool which enables brand managers to use different strategies based on the type of crisis they find themselves involved in.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

Based on our definition of Brand Crisis Recovery, and its conceptualization within the Brand Crisis Recovery Framework, we believe we provide significant theoretical contributions, which are described below.

1. The first theoretical contribution is our definition of Brand Crisis Recovery. In regards to previous literature on post-crisis recovery, our definition focuses on the long term perspective as a strategic commitment to eventually overcome the crisis with the ultimate goal to change. In this way we extend the understanding of the crisis recovery management beyond its conceptualization within strategic communication field.
2. Our second theoretical contribution is how brands can recover from a crisis through our four focused codes/themes as emphasized by our respondents: strategic recovery vision, genuine solution-oriented action, change and consistent communication. These themes showcase the ideal steps that brands can take in order to overcome a crisis.
3. Our third theoretical contribution is the Brand Crisis Recovery Framework (BCRF). The framework helps to conceptualize the different crisis situations that brands can fall into and thus categorizes brands into four archetypes: *Seekers*, *Challengers*, *Deniers* and *Justifiers*. As a result, these categories aid brands in their recovery process by identifying key strategies that they can use in the after wake of a crisis.
4. Our fourth and final theoretical contribution is that our conceptualization of Brand Crisis Recovery extends beyond the field of crisis communications, which mainly focuses on immediate response strategies, which do not address the root cause of the issue. Our findings rather take an operational and long term outlook on post-crisis management. Therefore, our definition and framework utilizes a strategic branding perspective, which has not been used extensively before in the field of crisis management.

7.3 Managerial Implications

The results of this study on Brand Crisis Recovery creates the following implications for brand managers and practitioners:

1. The first managerial implication is that, as recovery has not been explored extensively from a strategic brand management perspective, we believe our definition of recovery provides managers with strategic steps to consider and/or to take when trying to restore and improve the brand after the crisis incident occurs.
2. The second managerial implication is that the Brand Crisis Recovery Framework (BCRF) allows corporate brands to categorize their crisis situation into different archetypes according to the crisis that they are involved in. This allows brand managers to efficiently and simply identify the strategies that are most closely related to their own crisis situation.
3. The third managerial implication is that, based on our results, we show managers that recovery is imperative and the various crisis response strategies are not enough to solve the problem from a long term point of view. Therefore, a more operational, interdisciplinary and strategic outlook is necessary in order to sustain the brand into the future.
4. The fourth managerial implication is that the results implicate that brand managers can take control of a crisis situation and, thus, become empowered. If managers understand that when recovery is viewed as a strategic tool, it can help brands to come out of a crisis even stronger than they were before.

7.4 Research Limitations

In regards to the limitations of this study, a majority of the respondents that were interviewed are either from Swedish descent or work/have worked for a Swedish company, so our findings are very much based on individuals' perceptions and attitudes that are common in a Swedish or westernized context. In addition to this, most of the crisis examples that were used were crises that either took place within Sweden or were discussed using a Swedish perspective. Further, during our document research, we found that it was difficult to either access or find reputable sources on crises, as they are highly sensitive topics. Moreover, it was challenging to access individuals who had been involved in a crisis to some extent since some executives were not

willing to discuss them. Lastly, this research is based on our interpretation of the documents in combination with our respondent's answers, which could have produced different results if other researchers were working with the same empirical material.

7.5 Future Research

Based on the limitations of our research, we believe that there are several ways that future research can develop upon the topic further. Since this research has been mainly conducted in a Swedish context, it would be interesting to see another study which would be dedicated to exploring executives' and managers' experiences with recovery in a cross cultural context. Moreover, one of our frequent initial codes was the culture of the market, or the cultural differences in handling crises, which we did not decide to develop further as part of this research. For example, the Findus Horse Meat scandal and the VW 'Dieselgate' crisis were both handled in different ways in other cultural contexts compared to how they were handled in Sweden, thus leading to different recovery processes in each country. Similarly, several managers provided their testimonies regarding their cross cultural crisis experience. Therefore, it would be interesting to look at brand crisis recovery across different countries, which would yield intriguing results and produce more best practice crisis management takeaways from each cultural context.

Another area that future research could cover would be to create a comparative study of brand crisis recovery in corporations who have successfully recovered and those who have not been yet able to fully recover and why. An example of this comparative study would be to use case studies of crises that occurred in a similar time period, and possibly in a similar context, and then compare the measures taken during their recovery processes. In addition to this, the magnitude and length of the crisis, according to stakeholders' perceptions and memories, could also be explored as factors of comparison amongst the brands, indicating how long the crisis stays in the memory of the stakeholders and how long it takes for a brand to recover.

Lastly, although we took a qualitative approach to this study, we believe that quantitative research into the phenomenon of post-crisis recovery would also be useful to broaden this concept as well as would allow for generalizable results. For example, this research could be in the form of surveys and/or structured interviews targeting a large sample of executives and brand managers across different fields. Alternatively, it would also be interesting to gather stakeholders' perspectives in order to provide another perspective on brand recovery and whether the stakeholders are receptive to the changes being made.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Opening questions

- What is your role/position (within your company)?
- What experience do you have with crisis management?

Questions around key topics

- What is the most important when it comes to handling a crisis?
- What do you believe “crisis recovery” means?
- What strategies can brands use in order to recover from a crisis?
- How should these strategies be used/implemented by brands i.e. in communication (internal and external)?
- In summary, what are the key elements to consider for a successful recovery from a crisis?

Examples of laddering up and laddering down questions for further explanation:

- Could you provide an example of an experience that you had that relates to ...?
- How would you define ...?
- Why do you believe ... is important?
- Could you provide more information about ... ?
- Can you clarify what you said about ... ?

Closing questions

- Would you be willing to connect us to another professional (executive/manager) so as to gain another perspective on crisis recovery in order to make our research better?
- Do you have any other comments that would be helpful for our research?

Appendix B

Consent Form



LUND UNIVERSITY
School of Economics and Management

Thesis Title: Corporate Brand Recovery in the After Wake of a Crisis
By: Catharina Nilsson and Dajana Pjatakova

Interview Consent Form.

I have been given information about *Corporate Brand Recovery in the After Wake of a Crisis* and discussed the research project with *Catharina Nilsson and Dajana Pjatakova* who are conducting this research as a part of the Master's in *International Marketing and Brand Management* program supervised by *Andrea Lucarelli*.

I understand that, if I consent to participate in this project I will be asked to give the researcher a duration of approximately *30-60 minutes* of my time to participate in the process.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time.

By signing below, I am indicating my consent to participate in the research as it has been described to me. I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for thesis and journal publications, and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

Name:

Email:

Telephone:


Signed:

Appendix C


Interview Example of Initial Coding, Fredrik Erlandsson

mat.
OK, I see. Cat do you have any questions? No. Did you ask about recovery specifically? And [uuhm] do you have any examples how brands can best recover from a crisis? Like what are the tactics? Not only communication wise like you said... but do you have anything else on your mind that can help the brand to recover.... in general from the crisis?


What I would like to...well I think...you have to take it seriously and then when the.... there are as you said different phases of the crisis and that's very easy to forget about the crisis and move on, if I mean...In the Swedbank case it's a huge crisis for them and I'm sure they will be reminded by media and customers and legislators etc. about this for a long time, yes...Danske bank is another example. **But you need to somewhere close the immediate crisis and decide that the crisis goes into another phase.** An in that other phase, you need to also be very directive... you need to be very firm in how you...as I said in handling a crisis is not a democratic process it is something that is done with a firm hand and a very clearly appointed team who is responsible for it. That needs to...that doesn't change when it goes into the next phase...it needs to be implemented in the larger part of the organization maybe. If you can imagine, to make it visible, for example, if we take Swedbank, since that is so fresh... of course that has been on top of the board's agenda during the crisis of course. **Maybe they had no other topics on the agenda I would expect that though... But now when the media crisis is over, it still needs to be on the top of the agenda, but in another way...you need to discuss other things and you need to be tagged to action plans or whatever... so it needs to be there, on the top of the agenda and followed up by the highest senior... you cannot move that down in an organisation to very low level because the lower the level it gets, the less people will be interested and the less people will take it seriously.** But it the the CEO, or Vice CEO, he wants a report, every second week or he wants to know from the product management "What has happened now?" "Have you updated this manual?" "Have you done this?"...so..."What did the parents say?"...Then it's on top of the agenda. So it is not to say, now the crisis is over, let someone else to take over now... no no... that cannot be done

 Dajana Pjatak... 6:40 PM Today Resolve ⋮


Importance of recovery management after the immediate crisis

 Dajana Pjatak... 6:47 PM Today Resolve ⋮

Decide when to go to recovery phase

 Dajana Pjatak... 9:51 PM Today Resolve ⋮

The root cause needs to be resolved after the media crisis blows out

 Dajana Pjatak... 9:47 PM Today Resolve ⋮

The problem needs to stay on a high level so people know this still needs to be worked on and acted upon

Interview Example of Initial Coding, Martina Smedberg


Yes, I would say those are the people. And If there is a threat or it involves human life, then of course we have the security people as well.

What are the key recovery strategies that you believe should be used during and after a crisis?


Well, during the crisis, as I said, respond swiftly, be humble, inform as much as you can, but don't say anything more. Never try to find the blame/ a scapegoat. Uhm, afterwards, uhm I think you have to be, how do you say, severe in your attempt to actually do something about the crisis...I mean, you can have a crisis and you can say yeah, we made a mistake, I am so sorry, but if people don't see like something is actually happening after the crisis, for the next time you have a crisis, you lose your credibility... So I think you have to be very clear and tangible in your further actions to say yes we made a mistake, but we actually have something we need to improve. And I think that's the most important thing for the long term relationship with stakeholders and clients and customers.

Can you give us some examples you can think of?

The easiest example is the recall, if it's discovered that there is a problem with a product, then that product is taken off the market immediately. Uhm and that's a pretty clear sign at least. I mean for a company like IKEA that's an obvious one I think. Uuhm other crisis uuhm for example if it's been

 Dajana Pjatak... 10:01 PM Today Resolve ⋮

Do not apologize only but also do something about the root cause of the crisis, the stakeholders expect it

 Dajana Pjatak... 10:02 PM Today Resolve ⋮

Be genuine in your next steps and show that you are in fact going to fix it


Interview Example of Initial Coding, Marcus Thomasfolk

...And also, from a media point of view, I think it was really important to, from us here, with the figures, but also that we could communicate some kind of plan that we are going to take care of these cars, there will be a development of a new software uhhh and we will bring in these cars to our workshops and change the software and we will come back as soon as possible with more information and details about how this will work. A lot of new angles coming up all the time about this issue. Wolfsburg, the picture was a bit clearer and they also formed a group, they invited us to a telephone conference and uh it was not only we in Sweden but in other markets as well, and it was kind of a forgive us ad, where we said we know we broke your trust and we really ask for forgiveness for this and this is something that is for us totally unacceptable and uh the evening before these ads went out, uh, the editor in chief of Dagensnyheter, which is one of the leading daily newspapers here, he made a tweet about that this ad was going to be published the day after, so and that itself created a lot of discussions in a positive way. And after this, we felt that now we can start the next phase, it's not about asking for forgiveness all the time anymore, now we can start the next phase and can be more constructive, what can we do now, and how can we communicate regarding what we are going to do with the cars and how to inform the car owners. So...


So you think the first stage was more... how long do you think was the first stage for you, 2-3 months, like you said, with a lot of pressure or was it longer?

When it was high pressure, 2-3 months, uh the stage where we pretty much started every conversation with asking for forgiveness was, like, 3 weeks, something like that.


So you think that the first thing to do is to illuminate the speculations? Yes. In the public and private/in

 **Dajana Pjatak...**
10:12 PM Today Resolve

Having a plan how to address this issue and solve it

 **Dajana Pjatak...**
10:11 PM Today Resolve

Apologizing in the newspapers in order to rebuild trust

 **Dajana Pjatak...**
10:09 PM Today Resolve

The next phase is recovery, is trying to fix the car issue.

Document Studies Example of Initial Coding, Germanwings Crash in French Alps


CRJ900s for 25 Airbus A319s and A320s. The regional aircraft and routes were transferred to Lufthansa Regional.

After the Germanwings suicide crash in the French Alps March 2015, Lufthansa transferred all Germanwings flights to the Eurowings brand and closed the Germanwings brand in January 2016.


Eurowings of 2016

Eurowings of 2016 was the merger of Eurowings and Germanwings. The company wet-leased routes, aircraft and crews from an ailing Air Berlin from mid-2016, the more modern Air Berlin A320s replacing the older A320 from Germanwings.

Its European network had 80 destinations which were operated with 60 aircraft from hubs at Düsseldorf, Cologne, Berlin, Hamburg and Vienna.

 **Catharina Nils...**
9:02 PM Today Resolve


Transfer of Germanwings flights to Eurowings after crash

 **Dajana Pjatak...**
9:05 PM Today Resolve


Germanwings disappears and Eurowings takes over with clean sheet

Document Studies Example of Initial Coding, Findus Horsemeat Scandal

In March 2013, a large trust campaign was launched with film and print advertising in press, TV, radio, and through social media (Facebook). One of the main activities was an invitation to current or potential customers to visit the production facility, and meet the head director and other coworkers. The crisis communication campaign was titled "Welcome to Bjuv." Bjuv, located in southern Sweden, is the village where production and the headquarters are located. The main idea behind the campaign was to invite external publics to an "open kitchen" and assure them that the company has nothing to hide. Swedish consumers were invited to a two and a half hour exhibit in the production facility. They saw a film about the production process, did a study visit in the manufacturing plant, listened to several presentations by coworkers and were provided with lunch.

 **Dajana Pjatak...**
8:34 PM Today Resolve

Meeting the people to let them experience the production

 **Dajana Pjatak...**
8:35 PM Today Resolve

Attempts to prove transparent food production practices


Document Studies Example of Initial Coding, LRF Mjök vs. Oatly Lawsuit

Apparently, that wasn't legal. They claimed we had discredited milk so they filed a lawsuit against us.


Most companies would immediately back down, but because we felt we had just spoke the truth we published the entire 172 page lawsuit on our website and let the public decide. We had no idea what the public opinion would be, but it quickly became a David versus Goliath situation where thousands of people began to support us because they could see it was a bully tactic. We then took a full page out in the morning papers that explained that we had been sued and why and suddenly the milk vs oat war is making headline news. We went from niche to mainstream in part because of that lawsuit so in one sense we were quite fortunate.

What does it mean to be a challenger today?

Everyone wants to be a challenger brand, but I'm not sure if everyone really knows how much of a pain it is. It would be far easier if I just went to work, did my job, and then went home. Do we

 **Catharina Nils...**
9:07 PM Today Resolve

Oatly spoke the truth and let the public decide based on the published information

 **Catharina Nils...**
9:16 PM Today Resolve

Oatly gets publicity due to big vs. small situation