

Faking Hitler

**The STERN scandal and its impact on
the reputation of the entire European
press industry**

TEACHING NOTES

The authors prepared this case solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. Although based on real events and despite occasional references to actual companies, this case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

Teaching Plan

This teaching plan serves as a guide for the presentation of the STERN scandal which occupied an entire industry in the 1980s, when the topics of 'fake news' and 'lying press' were still in their infancy. Thus, this case exemplifies real-life management decisions in the field of corporate brand management that scandal-causing magazine STERN as well as other European media organizations had to make. The presented teaching notes are intended to assist the presenter in the preparation, structure and organization of the 'Faking Hitler' case in order to facilitate an engaging discussion among the students while achieving the learning objectives listed below. It is worth to note that the case should be particularly adapted to the COVID-19 situation. Since, the audience cannot solve the case in class, Zoom, Microsoft Teams or another similar software should be used for the purpose of presenting the case and organizing the discussion. Hereby, the audience will be composed of students from the "Corporate Brand Management and Reputation" course. The document comprises a case synopsis, an argumentation on the evergreen nature of the case, learning objectives including relevant theories, discussion questions, teaching methods, an epilogue as well as or own reflection on the given case.

Case Synopsis

On April 25, 1983, STERN, a renowned German magazine, held a press conference attended by more than 200 journalists and 27 television crews from all around the world. On that day, STERN announced that it had obtained private diaries of Adolf Hitler through a confidential source and intended to publish them. The Hamburg-based magazine had already signed several contracts with various European magazines and newspapers to sell them exclusive serialization rights for the publication of those diaries. Despite rising doubts, on April 28, 1983, excerpts from the diaries were published as a series by the German magazine. "Hitler's diaries discovered" was the headline of this first STERN issue. In parallel, the other European magazines and newspapers, which had acquired the exclusive rights to publish the diaries in their home countries, followed STERN in their decision. On May 6, 1983, the diaries were officially declared to be forgeries after thorough scientific investigations by the German Federal Criminal Police Office. STERN and the other media organizations involved in the scandal faced severe criticism and were at risk of losing their credibility and good reputation. This raises the following questions:

How should STERN manage its reputational crisis internally and externally? What are the short- and long-term consequences for STERN?

Would your way of managing the reputational crisis change if you were one of the European media organizations which bought the exclusive rights to publish the diaries? How different would it be to STERN's approach?

Rationale for being an evergreen case

The case of the forged Hitler diaries is of central importance in the history of media, as it concerns the duties of journalistic due diligence and the journalistic forms of depicting critical topics. Publishing false stories attacks the most important element regarding the reputation of media houses, namely the credibility and trust in the accuracy of their publications. The fact that STERN published the forged Hitler diaries affected the core of the brand. The crisis thereby emerged internally which represents an even more severe crisis than if it would have been caused externally. The individual case thereby not only had a negative impact on the company's own brand reputation, but also on the credibility of other European news organizations which fell for the scam as well.

The Hitler diaries case is a prime example in relation to lying press and how it has influenced the entire European press industry. At the same time, the published fake news touch on a highly sensitive topic through the context of the Nazi era. The timelessness of the topic can be demonstrated by the current scandal caused by the New York Times and their award-winning podcast "Caliphate" which also addressed a highly sensitive topic. It turned out that the American media house fell for an impostor who claimed to be a supporter of the IS. As a result, the New York Times admitted that the reports did not meet the journalistic standards (BBC, 2020).

In the case of the Hitler diaries, two perspectives are involved; on the one hand the internal crisis of STERN, and on the other hand the European magazines, which were also affected by the crisis through an external origin. Therefore, we believe that the "Faking Hitler" case can be seen as an evergreen case which provides a thought-provoking basis for discussion in relation to crises in the media environment concerning the credibility of news and the spread of misinformation.

Learning objectives

The subsequent section outlines the learning objectives that are to be acquired through the presentation, discussion, and evaluation of the case of the Hitler diaries. By executing the case, the case audience should obtain diverse learning objectives in the areas of crisis management and crisis communication, corporate brand identity and reputation management, and how to manage stakeholders in a crisis. **Table 4** provides an overview of the key learning outcomes aimed at understanding the case of the Hitler diaries, as well as analysing and finding solutions to the case questions. The handling of this case not only provides valuable lessons regarding corporate brand reputation management for STERN, but also provides general implications that are applicable to current times and the media industry in general.

Crisis management

A central concern in reputation management is the fear of a major crisis (Roper & Fill, 2012). In order to understand and evaluate the seriousness of the STERN scandal and

its impact on the press organizations involved, a theoretical background knowledge of crisis management is necessary.

Managing a crisis

According to Roper and Fill (2012), crisis management is an important concept to consider in managing brand reputation. Therefore, it is necessary to use crisis management theories to understand the seriousness of the crisis and how the actors involved can minimize the negative consequences.

When a crisis strikes an organization, its reputation can be heavily damaged (Roper & Fill, 2012). In those critical moments of a brand crisis, it becomes crucial for the management to protect its brand reputation by taking the right course of actions (Greyser, 2009). Regarding the scandal of the Hitler diaries, most of the actors involved experienced a negative impact on their reputation due to the event.

To successfully handle such kind of crisis, Augustine (1996) proposes six steps to follow:

- Avoiding the crisis
- Preparing to manage the crisis
- Recognizing the crisis
- Containing the crisis
- Resolving the crisis
- Profiting from the crisis

As the first and second step of the process had not been executed by STERN and the other European magazines which bought the exclusive rights to publish the forged diaries, we decided to only focus on the following crisis management steps: recognizing, containing, resolving and profiting.

Recognizing the crisis

Quite often, senior managers refuse to accept that their organization is facing a reputational crisis, even when there is strong evidence to support the existence of a threatening event. According to Augustine (1996), executives must be capable to recognize a potentially dangerous brand crisis for their organization. To do so, the author suggests using independent investigators and insiders to give a better understanding of the crisis context. Additionally, Greyser (2009) proposes to understand the seriousness of the crisis through the evaluation of the brand elements, the crisis situation, the organization initiatives and the results after the initiatives. Furthermore, the author stresses the importance of assessing whether the crisis comes from an internal or external source and if it has an impact on the brand essence or not.

Containing the crisis

Once the crisis is recognized and evaluated, the threat needs to be contained. In other words, this step is about stopping the haemorrhage. According to Augustine (1996), the organization needs to refer to its core principles and what it stands for.

Furthermore, the company should be as transparent as possible while telling the truth (Greyser, 2009), and simultaneously all of the stakeholders should be addressed (Augustine 1996). Finally, a single person should be elected as the organization's spokesperson to be in charge of all the public comments.

Resolving the crisis

After the containment of the crisis comes the resolution. In this step, being able to react quickly is essential. The stricken organization needs to show its willingness to change and improve the situation while backing up its intention with actions. As Greyser (2009) argues, organizations should directly try to address the problem, even if it implies to change corporate behaviour.

Profiting from the crisis

Lastly, the final step in crisis management, as defined by Augustine (1996), is to benefit from the crisis. If an organization has successfully executed the previous steps without worsening the crisis, it will be able to recoup some losses. However, such outcomes are not always guaranteed as explained by the author – luck has its role to play.

STERN crisis management

In the case of STERN, the management fully recognized the existence and the danger of the crisis. Two days after the incident, the German magazine set up an independent editorial commission to investigate the incidents thoroughly and without bias. This commission aimed to understand what happened to prevent such incidents from happening again. With an internally rooted crisis and the brand essence in danger, the scandal was rapidly seen as extremely serious by STERN's management which publicly apologized a couple of days after the incident. In parallel, the German magazine responded publicly to the scandal as transparently as possible, with credibility and authenticity, for instance through various published issues such as Henri Nannen's editorial and the report about Kujau. STERN even took the scandal as an opportunity to reopen the case 35 years later, with an on-demand podcast series. By taking a humanistic and self-critical approach in the ten-episode podcast, STERN managed to recoup from its losses by building brand awareness and attracting a younger audience. Despite the overall successful management of the crisis, STERN still failed the first two steps of the crisis management defined by Augustine (1996). The magazine did not manage to recognize that their "headline mentality" could be the cause of the crisis and therefore responsible for damaging the reputation of its business (Roper & Fill, 2012).

Paris Match and The Sunday Times crisis management

Similarly, to STERN, Paris Match and The Sunday Times rapidly recognized the severity of the scandal and chose to stop the publication of the diaries until light was shed on the story. Even if - for Paris Match and The Sunday Times - the crisis came from an external source, their credibility was still endangered. Both apologized publicly to calm the situation, however the critics kept coming from different

stakeholders. To contain the crisis, Paris Match used a quite defensive approach by totally disagreeing with the critics, calling them unfair and too harsh. Additionally, the French magazine decided to conduct its own investigation on the scandal to provide more clarity to its audience. In parallel, The Sunday Times also conducted its own investigation with the help of a third-party British forensic firm. It appears that Paris Match was more transparent and informative than The Sunday Times regarding its investigation process and its findings. Overall, both were heavily impacted by the scandal and were attacked by harsh criticisms.

Managing stakeholders

As explained by Roper and Fill (2012), reputational crisis can impact many different types of stakeholders. A crisis rarely affects only one company as it usually has repercussions on affiliated organizations too. Thus, every organization directly under threat of a crisis should see itself as part of a network of vulnerable stakeholders. Since each stakeholder has different perceptions and images of the stricken organization, it is important to have a better understanding of this network and how it can influence the crisis (Roper & Fill, 2012). In the case of STERN, the magazine should have examined how its position impacted the network by using the following typology defined by Pearson & Mitroff (1993): “Roles assumed by stakeholders during a crisis”.

Table 1: Roles assumed by stakeholders during a crisis (own table based on Pearson & Mitroff, 1993, cited in Rober & Fill, 2012)

Rescuer	A stakeholder that tends to provide a solution to the crisis.
Hero	A stakeholder that speaks and acts on behalf of the stricken company and receives fame.
Victim	A stakeholder that suffers from losses due to the crisis.
Protector	A stakeholder that supports and defend the stricken company during the crisis. The stakeholder works with the media to present the other side of the argument.
Ally	A stakeholder that gives support to the stricken company. It usually shares a similar opinion and point of view with the company directly threatened by the crisis.
Enemy	A stakeholder that has hostile and aggressive behaviour toward the stricken company.
Villain	A stakeholder that is perceived to have caused the crisis.

Defend and restore the reputation

Once the stakeholder network has been explored, the stricken organization can adopt different strategies to defend itself against the threatening crisis. According to Roper and Fill (2012), four strategies have been identified: Silence strategy, Accommodation strategy, Reasoning strategy and Advocacy strategy. STERN and the

other European news organizations involved in the scandal should follow one of those four strategies stated in **Table 2**, according to the situation they are in.

Table 2: Defending crisis strategies (own table based on Rober & Fill, 2012)

<p>Silence strategy</p> <p>This strategy can be used when issues arising from the crisis represent little threat to the stricken organization and attract little public attention. In this case, the aim is to buy time, contain the development of the issues and remain silent. Here, the organization needs to distance itself from the issue.</p>
<p>Accommodation strategy</p> <p>This strategy can be used when issues become overwhelming. The organization has to comply with changes in the environment and accommodate the issues through internal adaption. Corporate communication plays an important role in this strategy. It needs to be extensively used to communicate externally and internally about how the organization is adapting to the change in the environment.</p>
<p>Reasoning strategy</p> <p>This strategy can be used when the impact of the issues on the organization is not clear. In this situation, discussions with the key stakeholders are necessary to have a better understanding of the issues but also to develop a relationship with them.</p>
<p>Advocacy strategy</p> <p>This strategy can be used when issues are threatening the organization and preventing it from achieving its goals and objectives. Here, the accommodation strategy would not work. It is recommended to change public opinion and the perception of the stakeholders on the arising issues. Corporate communication also plays an important role in this strategy as it needs to make the stakeholders perceive the issues differently, from perspective of the stricken organization.</p>

In addition to the previously mentioned defensive strategies defined by Roper and Fill (2012), organizations threatened by a crisis can also use approaches to restore their reputation. According to Benoit (1997), five general approaches, listed in **Table 3**, can be taken by organizations to rebuild their image after a crisis. Those approaches are the following: denial, evasion, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification.

Table 3: Defending crisis strategies (own table based on Rober & Fill, 2012)

Damage retrieval	Explanation
Simple denial	The organization denies being the cause of the crisis and blames another organization or a person instead.
Evasion of responsibility	The organization tries to justify its actions through the four following excuses: a previous provocation, an accident, good intentions or a lack of time and information.

Reducing offensiveness	The organization demonstrates that its actions have a minor impact.
Corrective action	The organization fixes the consequences of its actions and tries to avoid a repeat occurrence of the incident.
Mortification	The organization apologies for its actions and shows its regrets for causing the crisis.

As explained previously, STERN took a corrective action and mortification approach to restore its image during the crisis while defending itself with an accommodation strategy.

Managing corporate communication

As Greyser (2009) points out, effective communication is key to overcome a reputational crisis. In the past decades, corporate communication has become a central concept in building and supporting brands' reputation and identity. However, such communication can be perceived negatively by the media and the public, if not correctly managed during a crisis (Greyser, 2009). Roper and Fill (2012) define corporate communication as follows: *"Corporate communication is concerned with presenting an organization, in ways that management determines so that stakeholders recognize, understand, like and interact with it in ways that are important to them"* (p.214). The authors stress the importance of using corporate communication to defend and rebuild the reputation of an organization during a crisis. In parallel, Greyser (2009) highlights the importance of authenticity in corporate communication to not provoke negative perceptions and reactions from the stakeholders. The author also explains that corporate communication cannot work on its own and needs to be supported by evidence-based behaviour and actions from the stricken organization to show that it is willing to resolve the crisis. As such, four contexts of authentic communication and behaviour have been defined by Greyser (2009):

- "Talking authentic", which concerns communications
- "Being authentic", which is based the organization's behaviour
- "Staying authentic", which relates to an organization's stewardship of its core values
- "Defending authenticity in times of trouble", which draws on an organization's ability to use its "reputational reservoir" and the trust it has generated over time

By applying those four contexts a distressed organization can build trust and simultaneously minimize the threat of the crisis (Greyser, 2009). In the case of STERN, the corporate communication and behaviour can be considered as authentic and working hand in hand. With apologies, a commission set up and transparent communication on the investigation process and the findings, the German magazine managed to talk and act authentically from the audience perspective which minimized the external but also internal critics. Moreover, since the fault was put on Gerd Heidemann and Konrad Kujau, the reputation could be quite easily defended.

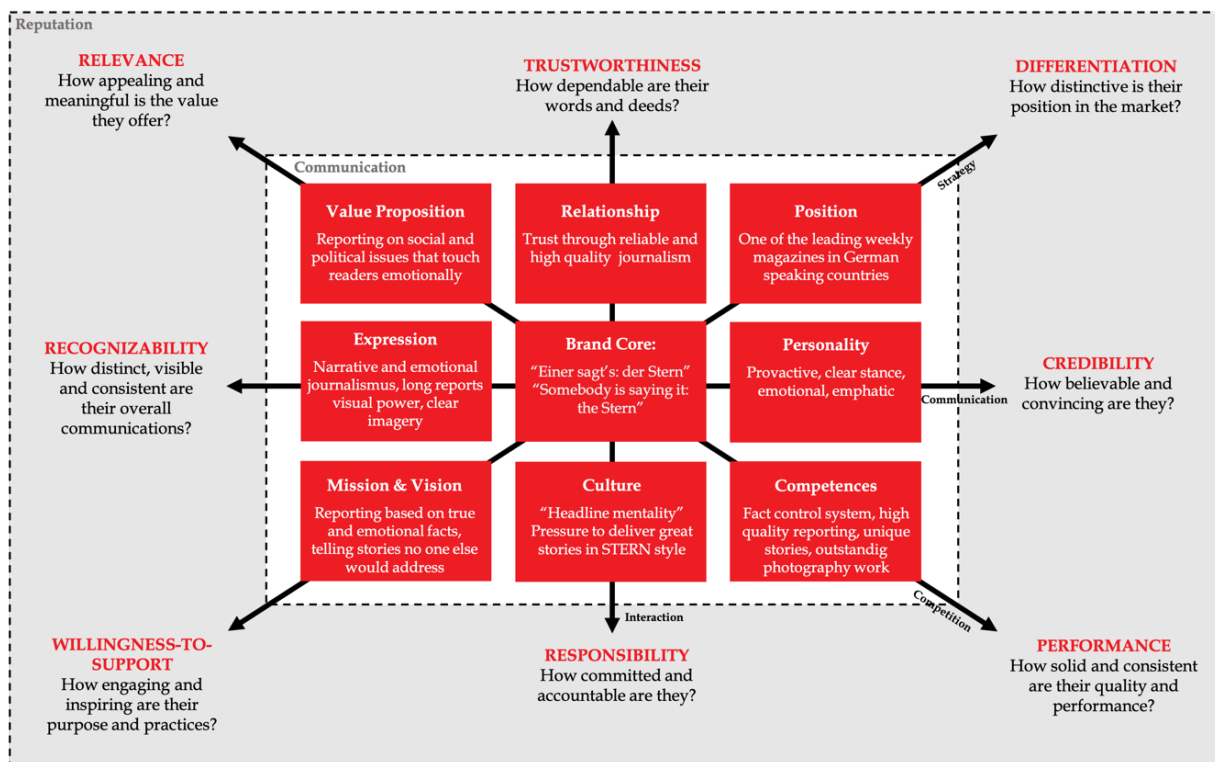
Corporate brand identity and -reputation

To fully assess the consequences of the faked Hitler diaries on STERN, it is crucial to analyse the relationship between the corporate brand identity and the reputation of STERN. According to Roper and Fill (2012), an organization's identity and reputation are strongly intertwined since the company's image perceived by stakeholders is shaped by a variety of formal and informal identity cues that the company conveys. Thus, it is vital to define an organization's internal identity which is then further transferred to the external environment through communication. The organization has to ask itself if the perception of its stakeholders is consistent with its identity. In case of a misalignment, a negative impact on reputation is the consequence. This forces the company to align internal and external perceptions (Roper & Fill, 2012). Hence, the identity of STERN must first be evaluated to examine how the scandal of the Hitler diaries affected the magazine's reputation, and to determine any given misalignments.

Corporate brand identity and reputation matrix (CBIRM)

The CBIRM by Urde and Greyser (2016) is a framework often utilised for this purpose, as it is applicable regardless of industry and time. In **Figure 1** the CBIRM applied to STERN's brand identity¹ from 1983 is illustrated.

Figure 1: CBIRM matrix applied to STERN's brand identity from 1983 (own illustration based on Urde & Greyser, 2016)



¹ The CBIRM is used for the analysis of the STERN magazine's corporate identity because back in 1983, the corporate brand encompassed only the magazine itself, opposed to today where the organization STERN comprises more than the magazine (e.g. STERN.de, STERN TV, etc.).

The matrix comprises nine elements that define and align the corporate brand identity. The central element represents the organization's brand core – its promise. The brand core shapes all of the surrounding eight matrix elements and each element in turn reflects the brand core, resulting in everything being interrelated and influenced by each other (Urde & Greyser, 2016). As mentioned earlier, the brand promise of STERN is “Einer sagt's: der Stern” (Somebody is saying it: the Stern), which for Germans implies that the magazine tells the truth, no matter what, and that it covers topics nobody else would.

The internal elements build the foundation of an organization's brand identity and are represented in the bottom line of the matrix. The *competence* element describes what the organization does better than its competition (Urde & Greyser, 2016), which in the case of STERN refers to its fact control system, its unique, high-quality reporting and its outstanding photography work. Corporate *culture* reflects the prevailing attitudes and behaviour at the workplace (Urde & Greyser, 2016). In the case of STERN, the working culture could be described as “headline mentality” which included the pressure to deliver stories at a high level, also referred to as narrative journalism. The firm's *mission and vision* refer to what engages its people beyond the purpose of making money, as well as its inspiration and direction (Urde & Greyser, 2016). Here, STERN strived for peerless reporting based on true and emotional facts.

Moreover, the middle row consists of three hybrid elements since they bridge internal and external aspects. One element is the *brand core*, which is the essence of the brand identity that underlines what the brand stands for and what enduring values underpin its promise. The element *personality* demonstrates the mix of human characteristics or qualities that form the corporate character of the organization (Urde & Greyser, 2016). Devoted to say something, nobody else would say, STERN's personality can be described as provocative, emotional, emphatic and with a clear stance. The last hybrid element *expression* defines in which unique or special way the organization communicates, enabling recognition at a distance (Urde & Greyser, 2016). In this context STERN's expression could be defined as narrative journalism with visual power and clear imagery.

The top line accounts for three external elements, whereby the *position* element reflects the firm's intended position in the market and in the minds and hearts of key customers and non-customer stakeholders (Urde & Greyser, 2016). Here, STERN was designated as one of the leading magazines in German speaking countries. The *relationship* element demonstrates the nature of the organization's relationship with key customers and non-customer stakeholders (Urde & Greyser, 2016), which in STERN's case could be explained by the fact that trust is built through reliable and high-quality journalism. Last but not least, the *value proposition* refers to the organization's key offerings and how they want them to appeal to stakeholders (Urde & Greyser, 2016). In this respect, STERN's value proposition was to cover social and political topics in its reporting which touched readers emotionally.

In addition, each matrix element, with the exception of the core, is associated with a reputational question that is mapped around the matrix, which help managers to analyse “*how its multiple stakeholders perceive the brand, and to what extent these external perceptions match the internally driven identity*” (Urde & Greyser, 2016, p.103). Moreover, the nine elements are linked by diagonal, vertical and horizontal arrows, which depict

the link between brand identity (company's perspective) and reputation (stakeholder's perception). The diagonal paths illustrate the company's strategy and performance against the competition, the vertical arrow underlines the organization's interactions internally and externally and the horizontal path highlights the firm's communication. It is important to note, that all axes pass through the brand core, which is at the centre of the matrix (Urde & Greyser, 2016).

As mentioned before, Greyser (2009) categorises a crisis as serious when the essence or core of the brand is affected. When considering the CBIRM, it is obvious that STERN's brand core got deeply harmed by the scandal of the forged Hitler diaries. Even though the magazine published something "nobody else would", they did not tell the truth - which was contradicting to STERN'S brand promise. Consequently, all other eight elements of the matrix were affected. As the matrix core influences and reflects them, stakeholders' perceptions of STERN's brand reputation had been changed. For example, stakeholders needed to evaluate whether they were still willing-to-support STERN, as its practices were anything but inspiring and appealing. In this context, the strategy arrow links the mission and vision element with the market position, which was also harmed by the scandal. After the diaries were exposed as forgeries, the stakeholder's perception of STERN radically changed. Readers expressed their disappointment by commenting on the scandal in form of reader letters. Thus, the magazine experienced a decrease in its reputation.

Corporate culture

One identity element that was heavily affected by the Hitler diaries scandal was STERN'S corporate culture. For this reason, we would like to discuss this element in further detail.

As previously mentioned, the element culture occupies an important position within the CBIRM matrix as it is included in the interaction axis which relates to the reputation element responsibility. In the crisis under discussion, both the identity (culture) and the reputation (responsibility) aspects of STERN were at risk as the crisis was rooted internally and consequently affected the brand core. Therefore, STERN had to ensure that its corporate culture remained intact during these difficult times, because satisfied employees together with a strong culture are essential to further improve an organization's reputation (Roper & Fill, 2012).

Critics put forward that STERN's "headline mentality" triggered a particular organizational culture. Thus, journalists were pressured to deliver sensational stories, which presumably led to a shift away from the truth. As a result, supposed sensations were frequently accepted without their truthfulness being critically assessed. In addition, the competence of STERN's fact-checking department was also questioned. Therefore, STERN's employees might have questioned the magazine's culture and the work pressure associated with it. To summarize, STERN's brand promise, its narrative storytelling and its fact-checking system were criticised. Lastly, to overcome this internally emerged crisis, it is crucial to nurture the organizations' culture through internal communication (Greyser, 2009).

The psychological contract, which is part of the employer's promise, "*represents the mutual beliefs, perceptions and informal obligations between the employer and employees*" (Roper & Fill, 2012, p.68), and depends on the trust between both parties. In the given case, the promise is closely connected to the prestige of being employed at a renowned magazine that reports only on the basis of truthful facts. The scandal about the Hitler diaries affected this promise, as the magazine failed to tell the truth, which might have damaged the trust within STERN. Therefore, it was essential for STERN's management to take actions to regain trust, both externally and internally (Greyser, 2009).

Overview of learning objectives

Table 4 provides an overview of the learning objectives that are to be obtained through working on and solving the case.

Table 4: Key learning objectives (own table)

Key Learning Objectives		
Remembering	... how an internally emerged reputational crisis can be managed by companies and how this crisis can also affect involved market players and the whole respective industry	Here: STERN and its collaborating magazines such as Paris Match and Sunday Times which also bought the rights to publish the Hitler diaries resulting in publishing "fake news"
Understanding	... how a brand's identity and its communication and reputation are interconnected and affected by a crisis	Here: STERN's brand core "Einer sagt's: der Stern" (Somebody is saying it: the Stern) was threatened and thus the credibility and reputation of the magazine as well as the involved European media organizations were at risk
Applying	... key corporate brand management and crisis concepts and frameworks to evaluate and manage a crisis situation	Here: the CBIRM applied to STERN and the impact on the involved European magazines, supporting the conceptualization of response strategies through crisis management and crisis communication theories
Evaluating	... how a crisis which emerges (through one person) internally can affect the reputation of an entire company as well as have a spill-over-effect on involved partners and the whole industry	Here: the reaction and actions of STERN as well as the involved European magazines and the reputational impact of their response strategy

Creating	... strategies on management level and establishing an action plan for the reputational crisis management	Here: the actions of STERN editors-in-chief for their magazine as well as international collaborative media organizations involved in the scandal
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Discussion questions

To ensure an engaging and exciting discussion it is beneficial for the presenter to prepare main- and assisting questions to further motivate the discussion if needed. In doing so, the presenter can choose between the supporting questions and determine the sequence to best fit the class environment. If the discussion questions do not stimulate the conversation and participation in class, the presenter can follow the general topics of managing stakeholders, crisis management and communication, corporate brand identity and reputation management.

Main questions

1. How should STERN manage its reputational crisis internally and externally? What are the short- and long-term consequences for STERN?
2. Would your way of managing the reputational crisis change if you were one of the European media organizations which bought the exclusive rights to publish the diaries? How different would it be to STERN's approach?

Assisting questions to main question 1

- What different strategies and positioning options can STERN use in relation to its communication?
 - What are the consequences of these different strategies and ways of positioning? Who and what would be most affected?
 - Who was responsible for this scandal? Was it Heidemann or STERN itself?
- What should be communicated externally right after the incident? How should STERN communicate externally and who should communicate?
- What should be communicated internally right after the incident? How should STERN communicate internally and who should communicate?
- How should STERN communicate and act with the European media organizations which bought the exclusive publishing rights?
- What different initiatives can STERN take to rebuild its reputation?
- How does this incident affect STERN's reputation and how would you assess the impact?

Assisting questions to main question 2

- What different strategies and positioning options can the European media organizations (which bought the exclusive rights to publish the forged diaries) use in relation to their communication?
 - What are the consequences of these different strategies and ways of positioning? Who and what would be most affected?
- What should be communicated externally right after the incident? How should they communicate externally and who should communicate?
- What should be communicated internally right after the incident? How should they communicate internally and who should communicate?
- What are the different initiatives the can European media organizations which bought the exclusive rights take to rebuild their reputation?
- How does this incident affect the reputation of the European media organizations involved and how would you assess the impact?

Further assisting question

- Do you think other European magazines that were not involved in the incident are affected by the STERN scandal, considering that they operate on the same market?
- Does the crisis offer a good opportunity for an uninvolved competitor to make a statement against STERN, considering the trustworthiness of the entire press environment was questioned at that time?
- How can the competitors contribute to rebuild the industry's reputation and fight against terms such as 'fake news' and 'lying press'?
- What could have STERN or the European media organizations done to prevent such crisis from happening?

Teaching plan and -suggestions

The following sections provide suggestions on techniques to conduct an interactive case discussion and should assist the presenters in planning and executing the case presentation in order to enhance the teaching process, especially in the given digitally setting.

Pre-presentation and introduction phase

In case of multiple presenters, it should be clearly defined in advance who will take which role and who is responsible for which tasks. Two of the presenters could lead the case discussion and the third person takes care of the technicalities of the

presentation and time management. Here technicalities would not only include taking care of the fluidity of the Power Point presentation, but especially the smooth running of the virtual meeting and the screen sharing.

In order to give the case solvers enough background information to approach the case, background information on STERN should be given first, as well as a brief context of the historical circumstances around 1980. Subsequently, the emergence of the crisis and the development up to May 6, 1983 should be presented. Additionally, background information on Gerd Heidemann and Konrad Kujau should be provided along with information on the European media organizations involved with the examples of Paris Match and Sunday Times. This information can be found in the Written Case as well as in the PowerPoint presentation. To further provide the participants with more details on STERN's brand identity, communication and reputation, the CBIRM matrix should also be provided to solve the case. In order to give the case solvers enough time to familiarize themselves with the case, the Written Case should be available for the audience 24 hours prior to the case discussion.

During the case presentation, the presenter should have detailed speaker notes under the PowerPoint slides to add relevant additional information. A digital whiteboard is also recommended for taking notes on questions or other comments that arise during the case presentation. Before proceeding after the case presentation, the audience should be asked if any questions or ambiguities exist concerning the case.

Discussion phase

After the audience has been provided with the background information of the case, the discussion phase should be initiated by asking the participants to put themselves into the role of STERN and the other involved European magazines. The presenter should thereby maintain a neutral role and not comment on arguments in an influencing way. For answering the case questions, the audience will be divided into smaller group and send into breakout rooms to stimulate interaction among the students. Each of the breakout rooms will be provided with Board Plan templates by sending the templates into the group chats where every participant can download it from.

The case audience should now discuss in the breakout sessions what possible options STERN had, and what the consequences of each would be. The virtually displayed Board Plans can now be used (**Table 5, 6 and 7**). Those blank tables represent the challenges, possible alternatives and actions taken by STERN, Paris Match and The Sunday Times. The content of the tables will be based on the given case questions, which need to be answered by the audience.

Due to the digital case setting, the presenter is responsible for calling students back into the main discussion room. Then the presenter should choose groups to present their findings. Thereby the presenter is in charge of filling in the responses of the presenting case solvers into the respective fields of the tables, shared via screen. In case not all participants contribute equally to the discussion, the presenter can also directly address the less active or inactive participants to create a balanced and interactive environment which is especially crucial in the digital case setting. If the

participants deviate too much from the actual solution while answering the questions, the presenter can proceed to the second question after about half of the time or add assisting questions to further stimulate the discussion.

Concluding phase

In case that the discussion does not come to an end by itself, the presenter should give an indication of the remaining time. If necessary, the presenter can bring the discussion to an end and let the audience vote for which of the presented strategies the majority favours. Afterwards, the management decision of STERN and the European media organizations should be presented, and the audience should be asked for their opinions on their actions. Finally, the presenter should thank the audience for their active participation in the case discussion and solving.

Board Plan

To keep the class discussion organised, we recommend that the case moderator uses a predefined structure which is based on the Discussion Questions. By following this recommendation, the presenter can keep a clear vision of the goals that need to be accomplished by the participating audience. Therefore, a board plan should be prepared prior to the case presentation which will act as a supportive tool to achieve the predetermined case objectives. However, there are different approaches regarding the use of board plans in the context of method teaching, as stated by Harvard Business School (2015). Board usage can vary widely, from minimalistic use (e.g. just noting down the main discussion points) to rather extensive practices such as summarizing the discussion, linking contributions by circling, underlining or drawing of arrows in between elements. These methods assist in ensuring a structured flow of class discussions. When executed well, a well-crafted board can lead to a clear understanding of the case presented among the participating students.

For the case presented a moderate problem-solving approach is adopted, as it is familiar to us through our participation in the Corporate Brand Management and Reputation course. Through the identification of key challenges, alternatives and actions, the presenter will together with the audience identify, what actions STERN and also Paris Match and The Sunday Times should consider to best manage the reputational crisis. **Table 5, 6** and **7** below, illustrate potential outcomes of board plans for all parties involved after class discussion.

Table 5 Board Plan Question 1 - STERN (own table)

Challenges	Alternatives	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to cope with having published fake news - How to treat the highly sensitive topic - Damaged reputation 	<p><u>Organization:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keep or replace management or editors-in-chief - Initiate internal clarification and investigation 	<p><u>Short-term:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Editor-in-chief Felix Schmidt initiated an internal press conference for department heads and editors (internal) - Felix Schmidt and Peter Koch resigned, and Rolf Gillhausen and

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Huge international media coverage - Uncertainty of who should communicate internally and externally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set up new control mechanism to verify the authenticity of future documents <p>Communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication through Henri Nannen, Editor-in-chiefs Peter Koch, Felix Schmidt or Rolf Gillhausen - Blame Gerd Heidemann or take responsibility on STERN - Reimburse affected European media organizations who bought publishing rights - Fire Heidemann or keep him - Stay silent or talk publicly about the scandal <p>Brand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reconsider brand promise - Change core values - Change brand elements 	<p>Henri Nannen became the new editors-in-chief (internal)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Established an independent editorial commission to investigate the incident without bias (internal) - Henri Nannen filed criminal complaint against Heidemann (internal) - Henri Nannen wrote an editorial apologizing to the readers (external) - STERN published an issue focusing on the events unfolded within the magazine and on Konrad Kujau (external) - STERN published letters from the readers and international responses laughing at STERNs flop (external) <p>Long-term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changed brand promise (external) - 35 years after the incident, STERN reopened the case and launched a podcast regarding the fake Hitler diaries (external) - Set up new control mechanisms (internal)
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Table 6 Board Plan Question 2 – Paris Match (own table)

Challenges	Alternatives	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to cope with having published fake news - How to treat the highly sensitive topic - Damaged reputation - Future handling of buying publishing rights 	<p>Organization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initiate clarification and investigation about the scandal - Set up new control mechanism to verify the authenticity of future documents when buying rights to publish them from other magazines <p>Communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make STERN responsible for the crisis or take own responsibility - Stay silent about the scandal - Justify its action due to a lack of information from STERN - Try to change public opinion <p>Brand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reconsider brand promise - Change core values - Change brand elements 	<p>Short-term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stopped publishing further diaries excerpts - Announced investigation - Defensive behaviour - Announced new aim “to be the echo of the incidents taking place in Germany” - Goal to save credibility, thus own investigation of the incident <p>Long-term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aim to be transparent to its readers - Clear distinction from the rumours of wanting to portray Hitler in a positive way

Table 7 Board Plan Question 2 - Sunday Times (own table)

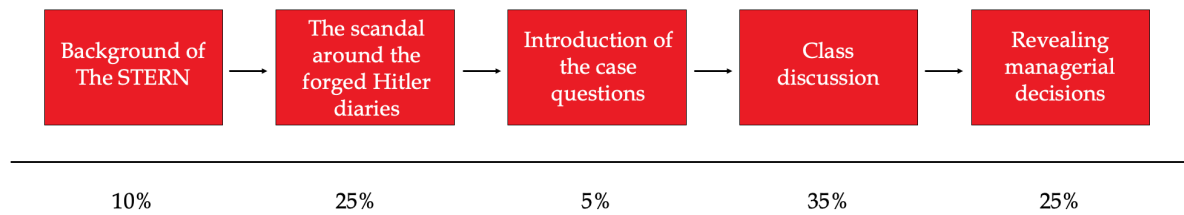
Challenges	Alternatives	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to cope with having published fake news - How to treat the highly sensitive topic - Damaged reputation - Future handling of buying publishing rights 	<p>Organization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initiate clarification and investigation about the scandal - Set up new control mechanism to verify the authenticity of future documents when buying rights to publish them from other magazines <p>Communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make STERN responsible for the crisis or take own responsibility - Stay silent about the scandal - Justify its action due to a lack of information from STERN - Try to change public opinion <p>Brand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reconsider brand promise - Change core values - Change brand elements 	<p>Short-term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CEO of The Sunday Times, Rupert Murdoch, dismissed their concerns and required to keep the press rolling - On Stopped publishing further diaries excerpts - Provided information about the cause of the forgery and acknowledged the forgery - Announced investigations and pursued own forensic tests of the diaries - Apologized to readers and acknowledged its own fault <p>Long-term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In 2012, CEO Rupert Murdoch declared to take "full responsibility"

The board plan divides the discussion phase in the following three sections: Challenges, Alternatives and Actions. The initial section covers all the challenges faced by STERN or the two exemplary European magazines involved, to create a starting point for the rest of the debate. The second part consists of all alternatives, in other words the audiences' ideas of how to handle the crisis. Lastly, the section Action is divided into short-term and long-term actions which actually happened. After uncovering what the magazines did, we return to the board and discuss what they could have done to prevent such a crisis from happening.

Time plan

In order to be able to plan the time schedule prior to the case execution, this section provides a guideline on how to allocate the available time to each section, depending on how much time is targeted for the overall case execution (see **Figure 2**). The first step of the learning objectives is "applying" and "understanding" the case background and the crisis situation in which STERN and the involved European media organizations found themselves on May 6, 1983. For this part 35% of the total processing time should be planned by using the CBIMR matrix as a basis for discussion. The following 5% of the time should be planned for the presentation of the two case questions and arising questions to clarify the understanding of the case setting. For the discussion of the case and the possible solutions, 35% of the time should be scheduled, covering the learning outcomes "applying", "evaluating" and "creating", which are the most challenging parts of the case solution process. The remaining 25% should be reserved for the presentation of the actual management decision.

Figure 2 Time Plan (own table)



Epilogue

The case of “Faking Hitler” is a prime example for stimulating a class discussion on the topic of crisis management as it illuminates a scandal from two perspectives. The first perspective focuses on STERN’s internal management of the reputational crisis; the second perspective discusses the external handling of the crisis with reference to the European media organizations involved. Thus, the case scores with two learning aspects. It motivates independent thinking, as the audience has to find a solution to an internally rooted scandal that affects the brand core of a magazine. Simultaneously, they have to solve the case for other market players for whom the scandal has occurred externally. The initial step within the case is to discuss the crisis management within STERN, considering the contemporary sensitive context. For this reason, the spill over effect not only for the European papers involved, but also for the entire press industry, can be considered in the discussion session. During class discussion, possible paths can be considered that the scandal-causing magazine STERN, but also the other papers, can take to overcome the crisis. This is a truly unique case as a crisis is studied in a wider context. Especially in corporate brand reputation management a holistic way of thinking is frequently required, as organizations are often confronted with crisis not necessarily caused internally. Crisis can also be caused by competitors or partners, which still requires attention. The “Faking Hitler” case provides learning outcomes which are valuable for various courses, such as corporate brand management, strategic (brand) management or human resources management.

Reflection

As a group we experienced it as a great opportunity and learning challenge to work on the case of the Hitler diaries as part of the Master course Corporate Brand Management and Reputation. During the course we valued learning about how to manage brands and their reputation through many live cases and the applied case-based teaching method in class. While we worked on our own case, it was a great opportunity to practise case writing and to put ourselves in the opposite position, the presenting person. We explored the topics of corporate crisis management and reputation from several perspectives, combining a real-life business case with the concepts and techniques learned in the course.

Finding a topic was the first challenge, as the case had to be both fully closed as well as contain enough aspects to be relevant for the case analysis by providing learning outcomes in relation to the topics of corporate brand management and reputation. The case of the Hitler diaries fully met these requirements, as the issues of crisis management within STERN were relevant both internally and externally. In addition, the case also added another perspective, as other magazines in the European media industry were also affected. As the scandal originated internally at STERN, it represents one of the most severe crises, which is a particularly interesting aspect with respect to solving the case.

Since the case of the Hitler diaries is a historical case that occurred more than 35 years ago, it was important to ensure that the readers of the case are brought up to the same level of knowledge about the circumstances at that time. In addition, the case deals with a highly sensitive topic due to the historical connection to the Nazi regime, which has to be handled with great sensibility. As our team consists of students from France, Austria and Germany, we found this to be another interesting aspect of dealing with the time of the Hitler Regimes through the historical reference of the three countries. As the magazine Paris Match took a very interesting strategy towards the publication of the Hitler diaries, it was very helpful to have a French native speaker in the team to translate the sources, which mostly existed only in French. In parallel, having two German-speaking team members was very beneficial as well, as most of STERN's sources were only available in German. These different language barriers in terms of research highlighted our team's greatest asset - the cultural background of the individual team members.

Since not only the topics of corporate brand management and reputation are relevant to the case, but also the topics of the lying press and fake news play a role, the case of the Hitler diaries offers an evergreen example with timeless relevance. The emerging spill-over effect on the entire industry is particularly relevant in today's age of globalization and internationalization and offers many insights that can be transferred to today.

Especially writing the Teaching Notes was a challenge, as for the first time we approached a case from a different angle. However, this change of perspective provided us with a great learning opportunity and broadened our perspective. We designed the case based on the learning outcomes "remembering", "understanding", "applying", "evaluating", and "creating", as it was not only about presenting the case in a detailed and understandable way, especially with respect to the historical background, but also with regard to the learning objectives that the case solvers should acquire from working on the case.

Writing the Faking Hitler case not only trained our case writing skills, but also our presentation skills in a case environment. Due to the Covid-19 situation, we also had to consider adapting the case presentation and solution to the digital case setting. This gave us a holistic view of the topics of crisis and reputation in the environment of corporate brand management, as well as a good preparation for the real-life business world that will await us soon.

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