

Crisis Response Strategy and Crisis Types Suitability: A Preliminary Study on MH370

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Abstract. In time of crisis, the organisation's tactic in responding to the crisis according to its type/s may significantly affect the organisation's effort to survive its reputational damages. The study of crisis response strategy (CRS) requires further exploration within the Malaysian context, more so with the greater and apparent use of social media as a platform for the organisation in crisis to reach out to its stakeholders. This preliminary paper studies the MH370 crisis in light of Coombs [1] Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). It aims to discuss the suitability of the CRS applied by Malaysia Airlines System (MAS) with the crisis type/s that was/were experienced by the organisation. Hence, the need for this paper to investigate the crisis type/s of MH370 and examines the CRS applied by MAS by content analysing media statements that were disseminated directly to the organisation's stakeholders on Facebook during the first day of the crisis. Results ultimately show an interesting analysis to the crisis type of MH370, and the suitability of the CRS applied by MAS for that matter.

1 Introduction

Crises implicate an organisation's reputation in ways that can lead to both economic and reputational challenges to the organisation. A sudden, unexpected crisis can damage or to great extent, lose the organisation's reputation if not managed carefully by the organisation in crisis. Regardless of the size, reputation or industry, there is always a possibility for every organisation to face any type of crisis situations.

This paper positions Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) [1] as the foundation of this study, particularly in regards to linking the crisis type and the application of crisis response strategies (CRS). At a glance, SCCT suggests that an organisation's reputation is a valued resource that is threatened by crises [2]. Moreover, SCCT functions to predict the reputational threat presented by a crisis and to prescribe CRS designed to protect reputational assets [1]. One can predict reputational threat with two steps [1]: (1) by assessing the initial crisis responsibility attached to a crisis (that is the crisis type) and then (2) assessing the other two intensifying factors of reputational threat – crisis history and prior relationship reputation. These crisis types, increased by factors of crisis history and

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