

Organizational Crisis Response

A Critical Analysis of Uber's Crisis Response Strategies during a Four Year Tribulation

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Governance and Global Affairs of Leiden University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Science
(MSc) Crisis and Security Management



Shaniqua F. Delamore

The Hague

19th November, 2020

Student Number: s2450658

Supervisor: Dr. Wouter Jong

Second Reader: Dr. Sanneke Kuipers

Word Count: 20, 649

© 2020

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I thank God for granting me the wisdom, health and strength to move this mountain. I would have not been able to accomplish such a feat without faith, God's guidance and the courage that he has equipped me with to move forth and fulfil the divine purpose which he has ordained for my life.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, Carmen Webb and Frank Delamore, who have prayed without ceasing and provided unwavering support throughout my entire academic journey.

I place on record sincere gratitude to my sisters, Kalifa and Makini, who went through this journey before me, setting the bar at admirable heights. Your love and support has been a stronghold throughout not only this process but also the journey of life.

With humility and love, I thank my fiancée, Michelle, who stood by my side through the impossible days. The brightest day this year was the day that you said "Yes"!

Lastly, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Wouter Jong for his guidance throughout this journey. Your expertise and passion for the field of Crisis Communication was reflected in your counsel. Thank you.

Shaniqua F. Delamore

The Hague, November 19th, 2020

**If we prepare for crisis in times of crisis,
we haven't prepared at all.**

-Shaniqua F. Delamore -

Abstract

Since its establishment in 2009, Uber quickly expanded into one of the most valuable start-ups worldwide. However, shortly after its establishment the company began facing a wave of legal challenges which threatened its corporate longevity. The latter part of 2013 sparked the advent of a series of consecutive crises for which Uber was not prepared. During the subsequent four years, Uber battled these unfortunate events which, ultimately, led to the resignation of its CEO Travis Kalanick in 2017. This study explores the ways in which Uber approached the crisis response of eight major crises which the company experienced between the critical years leading up to the resignation of its CEO. The results of this study indicate a lack of leadership, planning and preparation from the top-down. A mixture of these factors propelled Uber into a downward spiral of poor crisis management and an incapacity to acknowledge the latent failures within their critical organizational processes. As learning is an essential part of effective crisis management, this study also proposes various lessons, based on the findings derived from the Uber case. Ultimately, the lessons have been proposed as practical examples of key points which organizations may need to factor-in, in order to better ensure effective response when contending with a series of consecutive crises.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	8
1.1. Uber in Crisis	9
1.2. Academic and Societal Relevance	10
1.2.1. Academic Relevance.....	10
1.2.2. Societal Relevance.....	11
2. Literature Review	12
2.1. Defining Crises.....	12
2.2. Organizational Crisis Communication	13
2.3. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)	14
2.3.1. SCCT Crisis Response Strategies.....	16
2.3.2. SCCT Recommended Response Strategies.....	18
2.4. “Scansis” & Stealing Thunder	20
2.5. Expectations & Hypotheses	21
3. Methodology	22
3.1. Research Design	22
3.1.2. Case Selections	23
3.2. Data Collection.....	24
3.3. Data Analysis	26
3.4. Limitations	27
3.4.1. Validity and Reliability.....	29
4. Timeline: A Map of Uber’s Crisis Landscape	30
5. Findings	48
5.1. Uber’s Response to C1-C8 based on the SCCT criteria	48
5.2. Uber’s Overall Strategy	59

6. Critical Discussion and Lessons Learned	61
7. Conclusion	66
7.1. Recommendations for Further Research	67
8. Bibliography	69

1. Introduction

Crises may arise when organizations least expect them. A crucial element of effective crisis management lies within the capacity of organizations to strategically coordinate, steer and master crisis communication. Crisis communication may be broadly defined as *“the collection, processing and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation”* (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 20). It is through such strategic response that organizations work towards mitigating panic, bridging gaps of uncertainty, boosting public trust and preserving or restoring the strong reputational ties conducive to survival (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 20).

A pivotal aspect of ensuring effective crisis communication is preparation. When a crisis occurs, the need to communicate becomes immediate (Lynn, 2018). Disruptions in day to day operations often raise questions, amongst various stakeholders, regarding the very integrity of the organization(s) involved (Lynn, 2018). Clients, regulators, employees as well as the public, may begin worrying about the impact that the crisis may have and the action being taken to minimize damage and prevent such an occurrence in the future (Lynn, 2018). Essentially, organizations must be prepared to respond swiftly and accurately to a large pool of audiences, while simultaneously providing information which addresses the unique interests of all stakeholders (Lynn, 2018).

Although crises are unpredictable by nature, establishing an overall strategy can make the difference between whether organizations float or sink, during the crisis response phase. This notion is further defended by existing literature which discusses the importance of consistency as well as organizations speaking with one voice during crisis response, in order to avert the risks of managers being perceived as incompetent (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 29, para 1). Planning and establishing strategic response will assist organizations to better control the crisis narrative, which may otherwise become distorted if negatively influenced by speculation, misinformation or rumours (Coleman, 2020, p. 2). Therefore, preparation is vital in order to increase the capacity of organizations to maintain the dominant narrative; essentially aiding a better grip on the perceptions surrounding crisis situations (Coleman, 2020, p. 3).

Despite the advantages of strategic planning and preparation, crises remain unpredictable and shocking in nature. Although all organizations are susceptible to experiencing a crisis at any given moment, some tend to be more unfortunate than others. Where some organizations may

not endure a crisis situation for years on end, others seem to consistently contend with these undesirable events. This presents continuous opportunities to uproot the stability of organizations and potentially diminish trust amongst vital stakeholders.

1.1. Uber in Crisis

Uber is a prime example of a company that has been plagued with crises and PR incidents since its establishment in 2009. As a relatively new corporation, things initially began well for this Tech giant. In an unprecedented fashion, Uber's business model aims at connecting clients in need of transportation, with various drivers online. In its prime, Uber quickly expanded and became one of the most valuable start up companies world-wide (Blystone, 2019). However, this period of triumph was relatively short lived as the company began facing a trail of challenges, beginning as early as 2013 (Wired, 2017).

As time progressed, Uber was accused of having a cut-throat business culture and a toxic work environment (Wired, 2017), particularly one which condones gender bias and sexual harassment (Nguyen, 2019). Additionally, the company faced several other public embarrassments between 2013 and 2017. Ultimately, this led to the resignation of its CEO, Travis Kalanick, in June 2017 (Wired, 2017).

Despite Uber's attempts to mitigate the damage from these undesired events, the company struggled to emerge from the impact of years consecutive crises. Uber has since spent a half a billion dollars in attempts to restore its reputation. A feat that critics estimate will take some time, as the company needs to first work on rebuilding trust amongst consumers (Nguyen, 2019).

In times of crises, internal and external stakeholders begin to connect the dots regarding organizations and their capacity to fulfil their corporate responsibilities. The Uber case has been selected as it presents a unique opportunity to study a series of consecutive crises which reflect unprecedented situational factors that other corporations did not contend with at the time. Uber's response to the various crises may provide crucial insight into the way that the company approached crisis response, as well as whether there are signs that they employed an overall communication strategy during the response phases. As discussed in existing literature, an overall strategy is important as it propels consistency and increases the capacity of organizations to speak with one voice; further displaying competence and ensuring a foundation conducive to

bridging gaps of uncertainty amongst key stakeholders (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 29, para 1).

The purpose of this research is to identify how Uber responded to eight (8) major crises which arose between 2013 and 2017, whether there are signs that they employed an overall communication strategy to tackle the various challenges that they faced, as well as the lessons that can be learned from their approach to crisis response. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) will be employed as the main theoretical framework to aid the analysis processes (*sub-chapter 2.3*).

In order to accomplish the set objectives, the following research questions have been established:

CRQ: to what extent can an overall strategy be identified in Uber’s approach to the 8 major crises which occurred between 2013 – 2017, and what lessons can be learned based on Uber’s response to the series of crises which they faced?

Sub-questions

RQ2: How did Uber respond to the 8 major crises and how do their crisis response strategies compare to the SCCT recommendations?

RQ3: Are reoccurring elements and/or an overall strategy identifiable in Uber’s response?

RQ4: What lessons can be learned from Uber’s crisis response and how can these factors potentially assist other companies who might also experience a series of crises, over a short period of time?

1.2. Academic and Societal Relevance

1.2.1. Academic Relevance

Scholarly attention has been substantially dedicated towards establishing effective (situational-based) crisis response strategies, in order to assist organizations to better mitigate the impact of crises. However, where existing studies have broadly outlined and recommended strategies to respond crisis situations, there still remains a lack of empirical research geared towards understanding the way in which companies strategically approach a series of consecutive crises,

whether they consider the recommendations provided in theory and the lessons which can be learned based on their successes and failures during the critical crisis response phase.

Therefore, this research seeks to fill this gap in existing literature by delving deeper into the strategic approach used by a high profile corporation when dealing with crises and how effective and consistent their responses were, especially when compared to the recommendations present within the current body of existing knowledge. Additionally, this research in turn may shed some light on the importance of an effective overarching crisis response strategy, as well as potential lessons that can be learned to better assist organizations to successfully emerge from crisis situations.

1.2.2. Societal Relevance

Despite Uber's troubled past, the company has managed to remain one of the leading transportation services world-wide. Some critics attribute this to the fact that Uber was the first of its kind and there is still not yet sufficient competition in the industry to significantly change this dynamic (Nguyen, 2019). However, other companies in more developed industries may not have the advantage of less competition to spare them from repeated crisis management mishaps.

Therefore, in practice, this research may make considerable contributions towards improving the way in which companies approach crisis situations. The results may assist to shed some light on the challenges which organizations sometime face during crises and the strategic methods that can be employed to overcome such challenges. Additionally, the lessons identified may assist other companies in establishing an understanding of responsibility when assessing different crisis situations, as well as aid the development of a strategic approach for preserving/restoring reputation and rebuilding consumer trust, subsequent to major crises.

The remaining two chapters will explore the body of knowledge in relation to strategic crisis communication, outline the main theoretical framework which will be used during the analysis processes (*see sub-chapter 2.3*) and elaborate on the methodological paths which will facilitate the pending research. Subsequently, chapter four will map out Uber's crisis landscape and present a chronological timeline of the eight major crises which they faced, as well as the backlash which ensued as a result. The research findings will then be presented in chapter 5 and assessed based on the merits of the SCCT. Lastly, chapter six will feature a critical discussion

and propose lessons learned based on the research findings. This chapter will be followed by the conclusion which will proceed to answer the central research question; after which recommendations for future research will be proposed, based on the limitations of this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Defining Crises

Over the years, several scholars have attempted to define the term crisis. However, despite the various strides towards conceptual clarity, there remains a lack of consensus in the field. In the interest of the pending research analysis, it is imperative to establish a common understanding of what a crisis is and the impact which these undesired events may have on organizations. To facilitate this common understanding, the definition of Coombs (2007) will be employed.

Coombs (2007) defines a crisis as: *“the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes”* (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 19). Essentially, this definition seeks to differentiate crises from other incidents which organizations sometimes contend with. Additionally, in contrast to previous definitions which focused on crises as “events” which bare potential to negatively impact organizations; this definition introduces the element of perception. The perceptual nature of crises implies that the way in which stakeholders perceive undesired events, directly impact whether these events escalate into organizational crises (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 19). This definition also uses the general term “negative outcomes” to include any negative effects on not only the organization but also all stakeholders involved. In essence, this implies a broader spectrum of potential impact which can be derived from crises, including: physical, financial and psychological elements (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 19).

In order to avert the potential negative outcomes of crises, effective crisis management is needed. Although crises are unpredictable in nature, this should not be understood to mean that crises are unexpected. Effective crisis management requires crisis managers to establish realistic expectations that crises can occur at any given moment, despite not knowing what, when or how these undesired events will take place (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 20). Therefore, crisis management seeks to shield organizations and stakeholders from potential negative outcomes,

through effective planning, preparation, response and evaluation (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 20).

2.2. Organizational Crisis Communication

The contemporary crisis landscape brings with it much uncertainty and potential for exacerbated impact, due to the dynamics of both traditional and social media. Essentially, the recent decades have created a shift in the crisis communication and media landscapes, as the rapid and vast diffusion of social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) has triggered new dynamics, which influences the way in which information is disseminated and received by the public (Austin & Jin, 2018, p. 33). Where traditional media was previously relied upon to inform and update the public during crisis situations, social media has up-heaved such practices; allowing for increased interaction and involvement by societal actors. Therefore, the crisis communication and media arenas no longer feature the one sided and controlled framing of information by organizations and traditional media outlets. In contrast, various actors now utilize social media to publish vast strains of information during crises. This in turn creates an environment conducive to varying perceptions, expectations and ideologies regarding the situational factors and organizational responsibilities associated with crises (Austin & Jin, 2018, pp. 33-34).

Considering this shift in the dissemination of information, it is increasingly important that organizations retain the ability to effectively respond to crisis situations. Crisis communication plays a crucial role in bridging gaps of uncertainty, managing public opinion and minimizing overall damage (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 25, para. 3). The ability of organizations to ensure an effective crisis communication strategy is contingent upon sufficient planning and preparation and such strategy must be well integrated within the broader scope of an organizational public relations plan (Lesenciuc & Nagy, 2008, p. 112).

By nature, crises disrupt the day-to-day activities within organizations. Therefore, proper communication and information management is imperative. These disruptions in the “status quo” tend to violate the expectations of stakeholders, which may lead to increased questions from various streams of actors including: clients, media and the general public. As a central theme to crises is that of the legitimacy and accountability of organizations, one can argue that crises alert various stakeholders to fractures in organizational ability to effectively meet appropriate

standards (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 4). Therefore, upon the advent of a crisis, effective crisis communication plays a crucial role in allowing organizations to swiftly match an array of inquiries, with plausible answers, conducive to continuity and survival.

Essentially, effective crisis communication increases organizational capacity to:

- Guide the framing of the crisis narrative
- Inform and influence public opinion regarding the crisis
- Mitigate panic and bridge gaps of uncertainty amongst all stakeholders involved
- Preserve/restore organizational reputation
- Boost trust and loyalty

A critical element of crisis communication lies within the nature and framing of the crisis response message. Several scholars (*e.g. Timothy Coombs and William Benoit*) have dedicated substantial research efforts towards aiding the ability of organizations to establish the right message when responding to crises. Where Coombs (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is focused on the types of crises, situational factors and assigning organizational responsibility, in relation to framing crisis response messages; the work of Benoit (1995) Image Restoration Theory (IRT) focuses on restoring organizational image and reputation subsequent to damage (Coombs & Holladay, 2011). Although both theories are staples in the field of Crisis Communication, the SCCT has been selected as the main theoretical framework to further guide the analysis processes. The SCCT has been chosen, above the merits of the IRT, as it offers unique factors which are relevant to this research, including: the importance of crisis history and the impact that it can have on organizational responsibility, stakeholder perceptions and the effectiveness of crisis response strategies. In the interest of set objective and the pending research analysis process, the SCCT will be further elaborated upon below.

2.3. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Timothy Coombs (2007) presents a strategic guidance for identifying and approaching various phases of crises, including: pre-crisis and post-crisis scenarios (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 102). Essentially, the theory focuses on aligning organizational responsibility with the appropriate crisis response strategies, linked to specific situational factors of different crisis types/categories. According to Coombs, effective

crisis response first requires a proper assessment of crisis situations, as well as the reputational threat posed by each unique undesired event (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 102). In order to aid such assessment, the theory proposes three (3) different clusters of crises. These include:

- **Victim Cluster:** The victim cluster is comprised of several crisis sub-types, within which the organizations involved are considered to be victims of the crisis situation. These crisis sub-types (e.g. rumours, natural disasters, malevolence or workplace violence) present situational factors linked to low organizational responsibility. However, despite the organizations being victims of these events, Coombs warns that crises in this cluster still bear the potential to negatively impact organizations, unless they are combated with effective crisis response (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, p. 168).
- **Accidental Cluster:** The accidental cluster refers to crises which were unintentionally created by the organizations involved (e.g. technical errors or product harm as a result of technical errors). These crisis sub-types present situational factors linked to moderate organizational responsibility. Additionally, the reputational threat also elevates to a moderate level, requiring swift and effective crisis response from organizations in order to minimize damage (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, p. 168).
- **Preventable Cluster:** The preventable cluster refers to crisis situations that were purposefully initiated by organizations or whereby insufficient measures were taken to prevent the undesirable event (e.g. organizational misdeeds, product harm or human error). The crisis sub-types within this cluster are linked to high organizational responsibility. Individuals impacted by such crises can harbour deep negative perceptions regarding the crisis situation and the negligence on the part of the organizations involved. Therefore, such crisis sub-types are the most severe and substantially increases the potential to negatively impact organizations, without strategic crisis response (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, p. 168).

<i>Crisis Cluster types</i>	<i>Level of Organizational Responsibility</i>	<i>Crisis Sub-Types</i>
Victim Cluster	Low Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Natural Disasters ▪ Rumours/disinformation ▪ Workplace violence ▪ Malevolence/attacks toward the organization involved
Accidental Cluster	Moderate Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Various Unforeseen Challenges (e.g. server issues at a Tech company or technical errors leading to accidents or product harm etc.)
Preventable Cluster	High Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Human error resulting in accidents or product harm ▪ Organizational Misdeeds

Table 1: The SCCT Crisis Type- Organizational Responsibility Matrix

2.3.1. SCCT Crisis Response Strategies

Having identified various clusters of crises and the sub-types associated with them, the SCCT proposes various response strategies to address crises, based on their unique situational factors (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, pp. 102-103). These response strategies include:

- **Denial:** The denial strategy seeks to remove organizational responsibility in relation to the crisis. This strategy is built on the premise that if the organization in questions is excluded from the causal factors of the crises, the likelihood of reputational damage would be considerably low (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, pp. 170-171). This crisis response strategy is associated with three (3) sub-types. These include: **1. Attack the Accuser:** whereby organizations confront the parties which are making false claims, **2. Denial:** whereby organizations reassure that there is no crisis situation and continue to disassociate from the situation at hand and **3. Scapegoat:** whereby organizations shift blame and identify other parties as causal factors associated with the crisis situation (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, pp. 170-171) .
- **Diminishment:** The diminishment strategy is used when organizations seek to influence perceptions associated with the crisis, by “down playing” the situational factors. In essence, the organization(s) involved attempt to convince stakeholders that the situation is “not as dire as it seems” and that mitigating the risk/causal factors were not in the immediate control of the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, pp. 170-171). This

crisis response strategy is associated with two sub-types. These include: **1. Excuses:** whereby organizations attempt to minimize any associated responsibility with the crisis by claiming that the situational factors were unintentional and out of their immediate control and **2. Justification:** whereby organizations attempt to minimize perceptions surrounding the potential impact of the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, pp. 170-171).

- **Rebuilding:** The rebuilding strategy seeks to repair reputational damage by organizations offering materialistic or symbolic assistance to victims of the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, pp. 170-171). At the core of the rebuilding phase, organizations communicate positive messages and focus on actions in the interest of rebuilding stakeholder-trust, in attempts to shift attention away from the undesired event. This strategy is associated with two sub-types. These include: **1. Compensation:** whereby organizations offer compensation to the victims of the crises. This compensation may be both in monetary or non-monetary forms and **2. Apology:** whereby organizations fully accept responsibility for the crisis and request forgiveness by all those who were impacted (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, pp. 170-171).
- **Bolstering:** The bolstering strategy is often considered supplementary to the others. In essence, organizations that share a good relationship with stakeholders beforehand, can utilize those strong network ties to minimize negative perceptions associated with the crisis and mitigate reputational damage (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, pp. 170-171). This strategy is associated with three (3) sub-types. These include: **1. Reminder:** whereby organizations shift the focus from the negative to the positive and use opportunities to remind stakeholders of all the positive things that have been achieved, **2. Ingratiation:** whereby organizations show their appreciation to stakeholders for their contributions, in attempts to continuously strengthen the working relationship and **3. Victimization:** whereby organizations re-iterate that they, too, are victims of the crisis; in attempts to gain sympathy from the various stakeholders involved (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, pp. 170-171).

<i>Response Strategy Type</i>	<i>Response Strategy Sub-Types</i>
Denial Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attack Accusers ▪ Deny the crisis situation or attempt to scapegoat (blame it on another)
Diminishment Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make excuses for the crisis situation ▪ Try to justify organizational behaviour
Rebuilding Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accept responsibility ▪ Offer an apology ▪ Corrective action ▪ Victim compensation
Bolstering Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Remind stakeholders of past good deeds ▪ Lean on the strength of good working relationships with stakeholders ▪ Claim the victim status (in cases where the organization bears low responsibility e.g. rumours)

Table 2: SCCT Response Strategies

2.3.2. SCCT Recommended Response Strategies

Having established the various crisis types and sub-types, along with the response strategies associated with unique situational factors, Coombs has equipped the theory model with a recommendation scheme, as a proposal to aid best practices within the field of Crisis Communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 104). The SCCT was established based on the premise that the better organizations understand the situational factors of unique crises, the more prepared they will be to execute effective crisis response and minimize reputational damage (Coombs & Holladay, 2007, p. 166).

Crisis History

In addition to the situational factors of unique crises, the crisis history of organizations can also affect the way in which stakeholders perceive crises and by extension, the way in which organizations should effectively respond to crises (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 167). Essentially, if organizations have a previous history of crises, this could negatively affect how individuals view future crises as well as potentially associate the organization with a higher level of responsibility for these undesired events. Therefore, the more experience/history that

organizations have with crisis events, the more the urgency increases for strategic crisis response (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 167). Considering that Uber experienced consecutive crises over the years, the crisis history of the company will be a relevant factor when assessing the way in which the company responded to the crises and the lessons which can be derived from the response strategies which were employed.

The SCCT proposed recommendations have been outlined in table 3, below. The recommendation scheme has been categorized based on the crisis type, sub-type and organisational history in connection to crises.

<i>Situation Type</i>	<i>Situation Sub-Type</i>	<i>Organizational History</i>	<i>Recommended Strategy</i>
Accidental Cluster	<u>Challenges</u>	➤ No previous crisis history or unfavourable reputation	➤ Diminishment strategies
		➤ Previous crisis history or unfavourable reputation	➤ Rebuilding strategies
		➤ Challenge is unwarranted	➤ Denial strategies
		➤ Challenge is perceived to be warranted by key stakeholders	➤ Rebuilding strategies
Victim Cluster	<u>Rumours/disinformation</u>	➤ No previous crisis history or unfavourable reputation	➤ Diminishment strategies
		—————→	➤ Denial Strategies
Preventable Cluster			➤ Rebuilding Strategies

Table 3: SCCT Recommended Crisis Response Strategies

These proposed recommendations will be later employed during the analysis process, as a reference point to compare the situational factors of each of the eight (8) crises that Uber experienced and the lessons that can be learned based on their crisis response, when compared to what is recommended by the SCCT.

2.4. “Scansis” & Stealing Thunder

In addition to the merits of the SCCT and the crisis types and sub-types identified by the theory, Coombs has also provided additional situational factors which are associated with negative stakeholder perceptions and crises (Coombs, 2018). There are two major situations which Coombs have associated with negative perceptions and severe reputational damage in the absence of mitigating/preventative action. These include: Stealing Thunder and Scansis.

- **Stealing Thunder:** Coombs advises that one of the most offensive and damaging acts that organizations can engage in is attempting to conceal responsibility (wrong-doing) associated with crises. Stealing thunder refers to the importance of organizations being the first entity to admit that a problem exists (Coombs, 2018). Essentially, this allows the organization to “steal the thunder” and jump start effective crisis response, otherwise potentially running the risk of loss of reliability and stakeholder-trust; a situation also referred to as being “struck by lightning” (Coombs, 2018). A prime example of stealing thunder is the voluntary recall of over 1000 cars by General Motors, in 1991. The Saturn division of the corporation was made aware of defects in the front seats of their cars, due to several client complaints. After a total of 19 clients complained, the company made the decision to voluntarily recall their cars, a month after they were placed on the market (The New York Times, 1991, para. 1-6). The company contacted all their customers to inform them about whether their car was defected or not. This facilitated a smooth recall process, which further boosted the company’s reputation as they later “wittingly” incorporated it in a marketing campaign (Harvard Business Review, 1996, para. 7). As a result of their proactive decisions, General Motors most likely averted a crisis situation and simultaneously sent a clear message to their stakeholders that their safety and well-being is of top priority.
- **Scansis:** Coombs also discusses the detrimental impact of what he calls Scansis. A Scansis refers to a crisis that further escalates into scandal; hence the term “scansis” (*scandal* + *crisis*). Essentially, this refers to situational factors where organizations blatantly lie or falsify information for personal gain (Coombs, 2018). Such situations are often associated with moral outrage and negative perceptions about the organization(s) involved. A relatively modern example of a scansis is the data leak which occurred with

Facebook and Cambridge Analytica, in 2018. The situational factors were quite unique, as Facebook illegally collected sensitive data of 87 million Facebook users via their Global Science Research app (IG, 2018, para. 7). Facebook then proceeded to sell the app to Cambridge Analytica, who used the data to influence the 2016 US elections as well as the votes for Brexit (IG, 2018, para. 7). The initial crisis in this case was the illegal collection of sensitive data of Facebook users. However, at the time that this information was made public, the situation had already transitioned to a scandal due to the leak regarding Cambridge Analytica's actions; a "scansis" then ensued. Stakeholders were appalled by the actions of the two companies and many questions were raised regarding morality and integrity. The negative perceptions surrounding the scansis matched the gravity of the situation, so much so that Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg was summoned by the US congress to stand interrogation for Facebook's gross neglect of privacy laws (IG, 2018, para. 7).

The aforementioned situational factors imply that the type of crisis does matter (Coombs, 2018). The way in which organizations respond to such situations is a crucial factor in determining effective recovery. Although Coombs argues that an apology is a plausible strategic starting point in such cases, he also advises that it may prove most effective in conjunction with corrective action (Coombs, 2018).

These two crisis sub-types will also be referred to during the analysis process, in order to identify whether similar situational factors are applicable to any of the crises which Uber faced, as well as to assess how the company responded in comparison to theoretical recommendations.

2.5. Expectations & Hypotheses

Existing literature has been instrumental in providing a structure for categorizing crises and proposing crisis response strategies, based on relevant situational factors. Uber presents a unique case with a series of consecutive crises, within its extensive crisis history.

Although organizational crisis history is often linked to negative perceptions, crisis history also provides opportunities to learn. This study is expected to provide an opportunity to gain insight into whether Uber displayed signs that they learned from previous crises and whether that knowledge influenced the way in which they approached subsequent crisis situations.

In terms of an overall strategy, if Uber developed a comprehensive approach to the crisis response phase, one would expect that it would be reflected in a clear pattern based on the SCCT crisis response strategies which they employed, when responding to crises in respective clusters. However, a large variation in response strategies to crises in the same cluster or an overuse of a single response strategy for crises in varying clusters may indicate a lack of an overall strategy and imply that Uber may have dealt with each crisis situation as they surfaced.

The preconceived hypothesis **H1**: is that Uber did not employ an overall strategy when approaching the crisis situations but instead, individually responded to each crisis as they arose. This potential outcome is presumptuously stated due to the sheer extent of Uber's crisis history and the duration of time that the company has been contending with undesired events.

As the research progresses, it will be useful to discern how the company actually responded to the crises, whether the responses align with theoretical propositions, how Uber's extensive crisis history may have influenced stakeholder perceptions and ultimately, the lessons that can be derived from years of corporate tribulation.

3. Methodology

The following chapter outlines the approach which was employed to facilitate the research process. This includes the research design, the cases that were investigated and the relevant methods that were employed during the data collection and analysis processes. Scientific sources have been employed where necessary, in order to justify the methodological paths which have been chosen.

3.1. Research Design

Qualitative research methods have been employed to conduct the following research. McMillan and Schumacher (1993) refer to qualitative research as “a primarily inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships amongst established categories” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 479). Qualitative methods have been chosen as they allow for the exploration of depth, richness and the complexity inherent in the selected cases (UMSL, 2019). Therefore, this method supported an in-depth investigation and description of each of the eight (8) crises experienced by Uber, as well as the opportunity to gain insights into how Uber approached crisis response in relation to strategies proposed in theory.

Generally, there are four main types of qualitative research methods. These include: phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory and case study research (Astalin, 2013, p. 119). For the purpose of this research, a case study method has been adopted. This method has been chosen as it allows for detailed investigations into Uber's organizational crisis history, as well as the analysis of the context and processes involved in the phenomenon under study (Meyer, 2001, p. 329). Essentially, case study research differs from that of other qualitative methods because it facilitates the use of theory or conceptual categories which will further guide the research and analysis processes (Meyer, 2001, p. 331).

Single Embedded Case Study

In order to facilitate the realization of set objectives, this research features a single case study design. Yin (2003) distinguishes two types of single case study designs, including: 1. the holistic single case study which involves the analysis of a single unit and 2. The single embedded case study which involves various units of analysis within the context of the single case (Yin, 2003, p. 19, para. 3). The single embedded case study design was selected for the purpose of this study, as it allows for all units of analyses (crisis cases) to be encompassed within the research. Single case study research is often critiqued due to concerns regarding researcher biases and the generalizability of results. Comparative or multiple case studies may better assist to propel external validity as well as better guard against biases (Meyer, 2001, p. 333). However, despite the projected limitations linked to single case studies, the Uber case presents situational factors that may produce useful lessons for the field of crisis communication. In contrast to other corporations who may have experienced crises with substantial room for recovery, the series of consecutive crises which Uber contended with present a unique phenomenon; one which the company has managed to survive. A single case study design allowed for an in depth analysis of the way in which Uber's communication department approached each respective crisis case and shed some light on potential implications as well as lessons that can be derived from years of consecutive crises. The following sub-chapter outlines and motivates the cases which have been selected. The respective limitations of this research will be addressed in sub-chapter 3.4.

3.1.2. Case Selections

Case selection is a fundamental task in case study research. Whilst selecting specific cases, one also sets the agenda and boundaries for studying the chosen cases (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p.

249). Huberman and Miles (1994) define cases within case study research as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 25). Essentially, the cases reflect the units of analyses, the entities being analyzed and their bounded components (Smith A., 2014, p. 58).

Eight major crisis cases, experienced by Uber between 2013 and 2017, have been selected for the pending analysis. These crisis cases have been chosen as they represent a series of consecutive crises which Uber faced, leading up to the resignation of its CEO in 2017. The crises have been assigned identifications **C1 - C8** for further reference, within the subsequent chapters. They include the following:

- **C1:** Uber Driver Involved in Fatal Collision (2013)
- **C2:** Uber Accused of Tracking Passengers with “God view” App (2014)
- **C3:** Uber Banned in India due to Rape Allegations Associated with Driver (2014)
- **C4:** Uber Driver Accused of Killing 6 People in Shooting Spree (2016)
- **C5:** The Delete Uber Campaign (2017)
- **C6:** Uber Accused of Fostering a Misogynistic Corporate Culture (2017)
- **C7:** Uber Executive Resigns due to Previous Sexual Harassment Claims (2017)
- **C8:** Uber CEO Caught on Tape Yelling at Uber Driver (2017)

These cases will be further elaborated upon in chapter 4, where Uber’s crisis landscape will be explored.

3.2. Data Collection

Data collection is integral to the research process, as it is at this point that the necessary information is attained to aid the critical analysis process. Traditionally, the case study data collection process features multiple streams of data collection methods including: observations, interviews, documents, record analyses and work samples (Gillham, 2000). However, more contemporary perspectives on case study research seek to take into consideration the advantages of the digital landscape. Yin (2009) differentiates case study research from other types of qualitative methods (i.e. ethnography) and further argues that case study research does not solely rely on traditional data collection methods, such as: interviews and observations (Yin, 2009).

Therefore, depending on the topic of the research, all data necessary to conduct case study research can be obtained via the use of the internet (Yin, 2009).

The latter approach to case study data collection best aids the design of this study, as the pending research seeks to identify, compare and learn from Uber's crisis response strategies through an analysis of available information via digital media platforms. Therefore, **secondary** (desk) **research** was primarily carried out, in order to realize set research objectives.

During the data collection process, large quantities of data were collected from both traditional and social media platforms, in order to obtain sufficient data for analysis.

Traditional Media: News Articles

Assessing online news articles assisted to establish background information about the selected crisis cases. This played a crucial role in mapping out the situational factors of each crisis, as well as establishing an understanding of how Uber responded. The primary traditional media source used during the data collection process was the New York Times. This media source was selected, as it is a well-renowned media outlet with extensive online archives. In order access the available information, a monthly subscription was arranged which allowed for in-depth research across the entire New York Times archive. Several **key** words were used in order to acquire the necessary information, these included: Uber, crises at Uber as well as various key words related to each individual crisis case (i.e. Uber + collision, six year old, God view app, CEO, sexual harassment, #Delete Uber etc.).

In addition to the New York Times, other reliable traditional media outlets were employed. These included sources, such as: The Guardian, NBC as well as other local traditional media outlets, relevant to the location where the respective crises occurred. Collecting information from these various sources allowed for a **triangulation** of data, through the verification of information collected across the various media outlets. Essentially, once the information collected from one source was verified by news articles from two or more other sources, it was then considered reliable input for the purpose of this research.

Social Media Platforms

In addition to traditional media, social media platforms were utilized in order to establish an understanding of public opinion in relation to each of the crises. Twitter and Facebook were

primarily used during the data collection process, as these platforms represented focal points for the majority of public discussions about Uber’s crisis history.

An assessment of these social media platforms also proved vital for the collection of statements which Uber released via these channels, as well as how those responses influenced the public’s opinion and perceptions surrounding the crises. In specific cases where public opinion was mixed, this research strived to capture the varied perceptions within the mapping of Uber’s crisis landscape (chapter 4). However, in cases where there was a large consensus in terms of public opinion surrounding a respective crisis, fewer examples were needed in order to convey stakeholder perceptions.

The data collection process lasted for a period of three weeks, after which it was determined that sufficient data was collected to begin the analysis process. The following sub-chapter will further elaborate on data analysis.

3.3. Data Analysis and Framework

Yin (2009) considers data analysis as a process consisting of “examining, categorizing or otherwise recombining evidence, in order to draw empirically based conclusions” (Yin, 2009, p. 126). Therefore, case study research should follow a general analytical strategy which prioritizes and motivates the elements which are being analyzed (Yin, 2009).

A systematic framework was employed in order to facilitate the content analysis process. Firstly, the crisis timeline of each case was mapped out. Subsequently, the crises were categorized using a framework which outlined the crisis type and the situational factors present within each case, based on the guidance of the SCCT. The following table was employed to categorize the data, in order to establish an understanding of the way Uber responded to each of the eight crises respectively, as well as how their selected response compared to SCCT recommendations.

<i>Crisis</i>	<i>SCCT Cluster</i>	<i>Uber’s Responsibility</i>	<i>Uber’s Response</i>	<i>SCCT Recommendation</i>
Example 1	Accidental	Moderate	Denial & Bolstering	Denial

Once the situational factors were established, the way in which Uber approached each crisis was analyzed and compared in order to identify if there were any patterns present in the ways in which the company responded. The table below provides an example of how the patterns have been identified, based on Uber’s approach to the crises.

Crisis	Cluster	Uber’s Response			
		Diminishment	Bolstering	Rebuilding	Denial
Example 1	Accidental		X		X
Example 2	Victim			X	
Example 3	Preventable		X		

Subsequently the identified patterns were assessed in order to determine if they presented signs that Uber’s Communications department employed an overall strategy when approaching crisis response during selected timeframe. Lastly, the findings were employed as guidance for determining the lessons that can be derived from the way in which Uber approached the period of consecutive crises. The analysis of the findings, as well as the lessons derived thereof, have been further elaborated upon in *chapters 5 and 6*.

3.4. Limitations

There are several general limitations within the scope of this study. One of the main limitations lies within the research design. Single case study research often raises concerns in terms of external validity (generalizability). Sub-chapter 3.4.1 further addresses the validity and reliability

of this study. However, in terms of why a single case study was selected is strongly linked to the unique situational factors presented by the Uber case and the opportunities to learn from Uber's short comings. Had a comparative or multiple case study design been adopted, the units of analyses would have been limited across the various cases. Therefore, it would have only allowed for an assessment of a limited amount of crisis cases per corporation. A single embedded case study allowed for an in depth look into the Uber case, the analysis of which produced a series of lessons that could potentially aid organizations who may be currently facing consecutive crises or may face such challenging periods in the future.

Additional limitations include:

- **Case Selections:** the units of analyses are limited to eight major crises which Uber experienced between 2013 and 2017. However, Uber experienced more than 8 crises within this time frame. Although there were other crises which the company contended with during those years, C1-C8 were selected as they represented crises which resulted in dire consequences for Uber, including legal and financial implications as well as a substantial loss of stakeholder trust.
- **Sources:** During the data collection process, a triangulation of data was employed in order to verify the information that was collected, via the online news outlets. However, in order to establish an understanding of public opinion and the perceptions surrounding the crises, two social media platforms were used (i.e. Facebook and Twitter). These two platforms were selected as they represent the socials sites where the majority of the discussions about the crisis cases were taking place. Additional social media platforms were excluded because there were little to no discussion taking place about the crises. Therefore, it is not likely that the use of additional social platforms would have aided or changed the public perceptions which were found via Facebook and Twitter.
- **Interpretation of results:** Lastly, the results of this research were interpreted to the best of the researcher's ability, in order to propose the lessons learned. Therefore, the interpretations may be biased to a certain extent which has the potential to decrease reliability. The following sub-chapter will further address the validity and reliability of this research.

3.4.1. Validity and Reliability

Yin (2009) discusses four essential factors for assessing the quality of research, these include: construct validity, internal validity, external validity (generalizability) and reliability (Yin, 2009, p. 40).

Firstly, construct validity refers to the extent to which the key theoretical concepts have been defined and accurately operationalized (Yin, 2009, p. 40). This research strives to increase construct validity by providing clear definitions of the theoretical (SCCT) concepts, after which it employed the criteria to assess Uber's response to the eight units of analysis. Additionally, the conceptual framework was further operationalized in order to identify patterns within the results which directly contributed to establishing an understanding of Uber's overall approach to crisis response during the four years of consecutive crises, as well as the key lessons that could be derived from said response. Essentially this research strived to answer the central research question through structured and transparent indicators which can arguably aid the reader to follow the research process from start to finish.

Subsequently, internal validity refers to the extent to which a cause and effect relationship can be identified; whereby specific conditions are linked to the causation of specific situations (Yin, 2009, p. 42). This research does not particularly strive to identify a cause and effect relationship. However, this research strives to more so strengthen internal validity by identifying a correlation between the units of assessments and Uber's approach to crisis response. Although causal structures for the consecutive crises were not the aim of this research, the results aid internal validity because they indicate a strong correlation between the undesired events and Uber's incapacity to address latent failures within their organizational processes.

Thirdly, external validity refers to the extent to which the research results can be generalized (Yin, 2009, p. 42). Generalizability is usually a concern for case study research. A single case study design often increases limitations of generalizability, more so than multiple case studies where the results reflect an assessment of units across various cases. Although this research features a single case study design, it is embedded with several units of assessments (crisis cases) within its scope. This study seeks to increase generalizability of the results, through a systematic assessment of Uber's response to the consecutive crises they faced, strongly linked to the criteria provided by existing literature (SCCT). Ultimately, this single case study design has allowed for

an in depth analysis of Uber's approach to the crisis response phases. As a result, it has produced lessons that can potentially aid other organizations in their strides towards effective crisis response, by facilitating a better understanding of the mistakes which Uber made and the steps which are necessary to avoid such errors in the future.

Lastly, reliability refers to the extent to which the research methods can be repeated; yielding the same results (Yin, 2009, p. 40). In order to increase reliability, the systematic steps in terms of data collection and analyses have been clearly outlined. Additionally, the data was collected through a triangulation of public (online sources) which potentially advances the prospects of replicating the findings of this study. As the data analysis processes are closely linked to theoretical criteria, the systematic assessment does yield high potential to produce the same results. However, the results of the research, particularly in terms of the lessons learned, does include some researcher bias. The proposed lessons are based on the researcher's interpretation of the findings, subsequent to the analysis process. Therefore, should the research be replicated, the lessons learned can vary depending on the way in which respective researchers interpret the findings.

The following chapter will outline Uber's crisis landscape, in order to aid an understanding of the challenges which Uber faced during the four years of consecutive crises.

4. Timeline: A Map of Uber's Crisis Landscape

Prior to assessing Uber's response, it is essential to first outline the crisis landscape surrounding the major crises Uber faced between 2013 and 2017. Therefore, this chapter will present a chronological and factual outline of each crisis, including the repercussions involved. Uber's response to each of the crises will also be captured below, along with the relevant responses from various stakeholders. The subsequent chapter (*chapter 5*) will present the analysis of each respective crisis case, based on the merits of the SCCT criteria.

2013

- **Headline C1: Uber Driver Involved in Fatal Collision**

Description: On December 31st, 2013 an Uber driver collided with a family on a crosswalk in San Francisco, Ca. The impact of the collision resulted in the death of a 6 year old girl; her mother and 3-year old brother also sustained severe injuries as a result

of the impact (Alba, 2017, para. 4). The driver remained at the scene of the incident and cooperated with investigators. However, he was later arrested facing potential charges for vehicular manslaughter (Constine, 2014, para. 4).

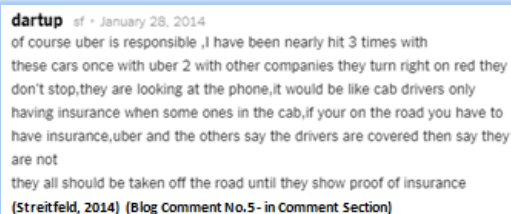
Backlash & Uber's Response:

Subsequent to the incident, the family proceeded to sue Uber for wrongful death and negligence (Rushe, 2014, para. 4). However, Uber claimed that *the driver was not on duty at the time of the incident. Although he had the Uber app open at the time, he had no clients in the car nor was he en-route to provide travel services to any booked clients.* Therefore, the company claimed that the driver was not eligible to be covered by company insurance (Alba, 2015, para. 2).

Following the arrest of the driver, Uber officials **stated:** *“Our hearts go out to the family and victims of the accident that occurred in downtown San Francisco last night. We work with transportation providers across the Bay Area, but we can confirm that this tragedy did not involve a vehicle or provider doing a trip on the Uber system”* (Constine, 2014, para. 6). Uber also used this opportunity to further disassociate its brand from the incident, **stating:** *“Our policy is to immediately deactivate any Uber partner involved in a serious law enforcement matter. For that reason, we urge the police to release information about the driver in question as soon as possible. If the driver is a partner of Uber, his or her Uber account will immediately be deactivated”* (Constine, 2014, para. 7).

The initial response from Uber raised several eyebrows regarding liability, especially stipulations involving third parties (Alba, 2017, para. 5). The public also expressed mixed perceptions regarding whether the company or the driver was responsible for the incident. Some of the public comments included:

“



dartup sf · January 28, 2014
of course uber is responsible ,I have been nearly hit 3 times with these cars once with uber 2 with other companies they turn right on red they don't stop,they are looking at the phone,it would be like cab drivers only having insurance when some ones in the cab,if your on the road you have to have insurance,uber and the others say the drivers are covered then say they are not they all should be taken off the road until they show proof of insurance
(Streitfeld, 2014) (Blog Comment No.5- in Comment Section)

“

Tess Harding The New York Globe · January 27, 2014
Personally, I would never use Uber. The legal confusion surrounding any potential injury to me far outweighs the convenience. Also, I don't want a complete stranger ferrying me around. I want someone who the cops have at least background checked.
(Streitfeld, 2014) (Blog Comment No.6 - in Comment Section)

“

Constance Underfoot Seymour, CT · January 27, 2014
The plaintiff's argument in this case has several big problems. First, to say a fareless driver is working simply because the car is being tracked for future convenience is to say the driver is never "off the job." That would mean that if the driver stops at a grocery store, for himself, trips, falls and hurts himself, he could collect on Workers' Comp since he was "on the job," which is nonsense.

Plus, myriad labor laws would require things like minimum hourly payments if they were "on the job" all the time.

Lastly, to argue that technology that doesn't exist, should exist to account for drivers that won't pull over and break the law isn't going to fly. That's way less than 50% of the liability.

Very regrettable about the child's death, but they're going after UBER since they're the ones with the deep pockets. The driver is responsible, first and foremost.
(Streitfeld, 2014) (Blog Comment No.11 - in Comment Section)

“

Chris Kox San Francisco · January 27, 2014
You must also hold the legislature also accountable for their mad rush to support so called ride sharing. Anyone with a brain and eyes could see amateurs zipping in and out of traffic, eyes glued to their phones, pretending to be cabs, and knew that one big accident was imminent. The concept was so new that my insurance company did not quite grasp what I meant when I asked, but they did assue me that private policies did not cover this, and thus I was not paying the risk for other drivers using personal vehicles in this way. We shall discover that now, with this case.
(Streitfeld, 2014) (Blog Comment No.14- in Comment Section)

Uber was not observed responding to public opinion on this matter. However, the incident sparked reform in the state of California, which changed its legislation regarding Transportation Networking Companies and the requirements for insurance and liability coverage (Alba, 2015, para. 3). As a result, Uber and companies with similar business

models are now required to offer third-party liability insurance to third parties in cases of property damage, injury and death (Alba, 2015, para. 3).

Ultimately, the family settled the lawsuit with Uber but the terms of the settlement were not disclosed. Subsequent to the settlement, Uber adjusted its insurance policy to also extend coverage to drivers who have the Uber app open and are actively awaiting bookings with clients (Fox 2 News, 2018, para. 18). Uber also released an **official message** stating: *"The Lius suffered a terrible tragedy -- and our hearts go out to them."While we cannot ease their pain, we do hope that this settlement helps the family move forward"* (Bay City News, 2015, para. 3).

Despite the reformed legislation and the subsequent settlement, the Uber driver was charged with misdemeanour vehicular manslaughter (Fox 2 News, 2018, para. 1). The victim's mother expressed that she was happy with the conviction. She later went on record stating: *"He did the crime. I'm glad the jury held him responsible and that justice will be done. I miss my daughter every day and nothing will bring her back"* (Fox 2 News, 2018, para. 19).

2014

▪ **Headline C2: Uber Accused of Tracking Passengers with “ God View” App**

Description: In the latter part of 2014, the New York Attorney General (*E.S.*) expressed his concerns in a formal letter regarding Uber's "God View" app and potential data breaches. These concerns were raised following a complaint from a BuzzFeed report which accused Uber of tracking one of its reporters using the God View app (Carson, 2016, para. 3). There were also several complaints prior to the BuzzFeed report, accusing Uber of misusing the God View app to track the real-time locations of various users including: celebrities, politicians and in some cases ex-partners of Uber employees (Morgan, 2017, para. 3). Despite the company's claims of updated security, an Uber employee blew the whistle on the company and confirmed that Uber personnel were still privy to real-time locations of passengers and other sensitive information via the app (Chapman, 2016, para. 3). The disgruntled employee admitted to releasing this information due to Uber's alleged discrimination against his age. He was fired subsequent to this incident (Chapman, 2016, para. 5).

Backlash & Uber's Response:

The accusations against Uber sparked growing concerns amongst various stakeholders. Subsequent to the internal leak, Uber officials defended the company by **stating**: “*there are hundreds of security and privacy experts working around the clock, to protect our data*” (Chapman, 2016, para. 4). However, despite these efforts suspicion and outrage continued to brew.

Eventually, an investigation was launched which resulted in the conclusion that the God View app was in breach of privacy and data laws. As a result, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) charged Uber with failure to monitor employee's use of the God View App as well as failure to securely store customer and driver information, as it became apparent that the data breach also exposed sensitive demographic information of over 100,000 drivers (Morgan, 2017, para. 6).

Ultimately, Uber was fined \$20, 000 dollars in a settlement for this case (Carson, 2016, para. 2). The company will also be subjected to two decades of audits, in order to ensure proper privacy practices (Morgan, 2017, para. 1).

A glimpse of public opinion below reflects a significant consensus on how the public felt about Uber's privacy malpractices. However, Uber remained relatively silent on social media.



Subsequent to the settlement, Uber released an official statement and **said**: *"We are deeply committed to protecting the privacy and personal data of riders and drivers. We are pleased to have reached an agreement with the New York Attorney General that resolves these questions and makes clear our commitment to best practices that put our community first"* (Carson, 2016, para. 7).

- **Headline C3: Uber Banned in Delhi due to Rape Allegations Associated with Driver**
Description: A Delhi Uber driver was arrested in December, 2014 in connection to rape accusations while providing travel services to a female passenger (Menon, 2014, para. 1). The young woman (late 20's) accused the driver of taking her to a secluded location and sexually assaulting her. In her statement she disclosed that she was working late and booked an Uber from work to her home, just outside of Delhi. Although she nodded off during the ride, she was awakened when the driver started veering off course from the scheduled route. He then proceeded to park the vehicle, make his way to the back seat and assault her (Barry & Raj, 2014, para. 18). The driver was arrested and taken into custody for questioning. Ultimately, he admitted his guilt and also admitted to sexually assaulting another female passenger in 2011; a charge for which he was initially acquitted earlier that year (Barry & Raj, 2014, para. 21).

Backlash & Uber's Response:

The incident sparked outrage in the community, inciting pre-existing fears that remained underlying from similar events in the past. India remains one of the most dangerous places for women to use public transportation, with an average of 40 cases of violence against women reported to Delhi authorities on a daily basis (Menon, 2014, para. 9). Initially, Uber seemed a 'saving grace' for some and grew in popularity due to its safety-driven marketing strategy. One woman who frequently booked rides with Uber expressed that she, too, had become equally relaxed due to her trust in the service. Upon hearing about the incident she related to the victim's plight, **stating**: *"It is likely that she was sufficiently relaxed to nod off precisely because she believed she was safe in an Uber"* (Barry & Raj, 2014, para. 17).

The incident raised several eyebrows regarding Uber's background-check and licensing procedures. Delhi officials expressed dire concerns in relation to Uber hiring a driver that was previously arrested in connection with sexual assault charges (Barry & Raj, 2014, para. 22). The Transportation Department in the Delhi region proceeded to ban Uber and all other transportation networking companies from operating in the area (Barry & Raj, 2014, para. 3).

Investigations into the incident confirmed that Uber failed to carry out a background check on the driver, prior to hiring him. A local **Uber official** confirmed that it was not a requirement of the Indian government to screen drivers prior to employment; he went on record **stating**: *"Uber does not conduct background checks of drivers in India. It accepts partner drivers if they have valid insurance documents, a driver's license and a commercial permit to drive a taxi"* (Barry & Raj, 2014, para. 23).

Further investigations revealed that Uber lapsed in other areas of security, which if otherwise handled could have potentially prevented the incident from occurring (Barry & Raj, 2014, para 27). In the midst of the community's outcry, **Uber's CEO** released a **statement** saying: *"What happened over the weekend in New Delhi is horrific. Our entire team's hearts go out to the victim of this despicable crime. We will do everything, I repeat, everything to help bring this perpetrator to justice and support the victim and her family in her recovery"* (Barry & Raj, 2014, para. 13). He also went on to say that Uber will work along with the Indian government to ensure clear background-check policies, which are not currently present in their transportation licensing program. Lastly, Kalanick **stated** that Uber will commit to using technological advantages *"to help make New Delhi a safer city for women"* (Barry & Raj, 2014, para. 12).

Despite Uber's strides towards initiating joint corrective action, the lost of trust within the community may be the next mountain to climb; as one local woman responded to the incident **stating**: *"Uber was the one thing that gave me the confidence to feel independent in Delhi, which you don't feel here. I used the service regularly for the last six months. "Now I'm back to square one"* (Barry & Raj, 2014, para. 16).

2016

▪ **Headline C4: Uber Driver Accused of Killing 6 People in Shooting Spree**

Description: On February 6th, 2016 an Uber driver drove through the streets of Kalamazoo, Michigan on a shooting spree; killing 6 people and injuring two others as a result (Inside Edition, 2019, para. 2). After nearly seven hours of terror, the Kalamazoo police detained the suspect downtown in the city (Conlon & Valencia, 2016, para. 13). Among those killed were a 17 year old high school student and his dad, who at the time were at a car dealership together. Another victim was only 14 years old and was in the passenger seat of a vehicle when the gun man opened fire. She was initially thought to have passed away; however, she miraculously survived her injuries (Conlon & Valencia, 2016, para. 11). Upon arrest, the suspect pleaded not guilty. However, he later pleaded guilty to all charges and when asked if he understood his plea, he chillingly disclosed that he had been “waiting for this for a while”. He was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole (Smith M., 2019, para. 1-8).

Backlash & Uber’s Response:

The incident shocked the community and incited fear amongst local citizens. It also raised more eyebrows regarding Uber’s background check and licensing procedures. One of the most concerning aspects of the incident is the supporting evidence that the driver picked up and dropped off passengers between committing his crimes (Conlon & Valencia, 2016, para. 1). In a statement to reporters one passenger recalled a strange encounter with the driver earlier that day, he stated: *"We got about a mile from my house and he got a telephone call. After that call, he started driving erratically, running stop signs. We were kind of driving through medians, driving through the lawn speeding along and then finally, once he came to a stop, I jumped out of the car and ran away"* (Conlon & Valencia, 2016, para. 3). In a separate interview, another passenger recalled that she and her partner were at a bar and booked that particular Uber at 11:30 pm; an hour after the last shooting took place (Guarino, Wan, & Ryan, 2016, para. 43). However, they cancelled because she realized that he would have arrived earlier than desired. She told reporters that she wanted to finish her drink so they ended up booking a different driver;

in much relief she stated: *“It was by the grace of God we cancelled”* (Guarino, Wan, & Ryan, 2016, para. 46).

Upon arrest of the driver, Uber’s Chief Security Officer released a **statement** saying: *“We are horrified and heartbroken at the senseless violence in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Our hearts and prayers are with the families of the victims of this devastating crime and those recovering from injuries. We have reached out to the police to help with their investigation in any way that we can”* (Bacon, 2016, para. 22).

The public also weighed in heavily on this case. In a response to various sources of news coverage on the incident, many people tweeted expressing their outrage. Some of these included:



Uber was not observed responding to public opinion on the matter. However, the company confirmed in an interview with CNN that the Uber driver passed a background check prior to his employment (Conlon & Valencia, 2016, para. 6). Uber officials continued to defend their back ground check procedures, amidst the public outcry. In an interview the company’s Chief Security Officer **stated**: *“No background check process would have made a difference in this case because this person didn’t have a criminal history”* (Smith M., 2019, para. 14).

▪ **Headline C5: The #DeleteUber Campaign**

Description: On January 27th, 2017 US President Donald Trump signed an executive order which banned immigrants, within seven predominantly Muslim countries, from entering into the United States (BBC, 2017, para. 1). According to Trump, the 90 day travel ban was ordered in a vetting effort to protect the United States from extreme Islamic terrorists. The order also included the religious testing of refugees from other Muslim countries, in an effort to prioritize Christians entering the US before refugees of Muslim faith (Shear & Cooper, 2017, para. 2). The travel ban sparked nation-wide outrage as well as raised questions regarding whether the decision was an attack against religious freedoms (BBC, 2017, para. 26). Citizens and organizations all over the country rose up to stand strong with those affected by the ban (BBC, 2017, para. 2). The New York Taxi Association, in particular, began striking at the John F. Kennedy (JFK) Airport where they usually pick up and drop off passengers on a daily basis. The strike was scheduled to take place on January 28th between 6:00 pm and 7:00pm, as a stance against the decision made by the President (Isaac, 2017, para. 5). The NY Taxi association also tweeted a message during this period stating: *“No Pick Ups @ JFK Airport 6:00pm to 7:00pm today. Drivers stand in solidarity with thousands protesting inhumane & unconstitutional #MuslimBan”* (NYTW, 2017).

In the midst of the movement, Uber released an announcement on Twitter. The message was posted around 7:30 pm; half an hour after the strike was scheduled to end (Isaac, 2017, para. 6). The Tweet **stated:** *“Surge pricing has been turned off at JFK Airport. This may result in longer wait times. Please be patient”* (Cresci, 2017, para. 5). Social media did not take too kindly to the announcement, as many interpreted it as Uber attempting to profit off of the strike. As a result, the hash tag **#DeleteUber** began circulating (Cresci, 2017, para. 6).

Backlash & Uber’s Response:

During the campaign, people began convincing others to delete the Uber app and close their Uber service accounts (Cresci, 2017, para. 6). Customers took to Twitter and

Facebook to vent about their frustrations with Uber. The following Tweet reflects a significant consensus on how the public felt about Uber's actions:

“



(Jeremiah, 2017)

Following the wave of adverse effects, Uber stated that its intention was not to interfere with the strike. The goal was only to notify passengers that there will be no surge in prices during that time, when transportation was scarce and in high demand (Isaac, 2017, para. 8). Uber released a **statement** saying: *“We wanted people to know they could use Uber to get to and from JFK at normal prices”* (Cresci, 2017, para. 14).

Uber's CEO also shared an email that he distributed to all Uber personnel, in attempts to convince the public that he, too, is strongly against the travel ban. In the email he informed Uber personnel about the steps that the company was prepared to take, in order to ensure the financial security of all those affected. In the Facebook post he also **stated**: *“At Uber we've always believed in standing up for what's right. Today we need your help supporting drivers who may be impacted by the President's unjust immigration ban”* (Kalanick, 2017). He also encouraged all affected personnel to contact the company, and in his final statements he said: *“Uber is a community. We're here to support each other”* (Kalanick, 2017).

Despite Uber's attempts to clarify its intentions, the company continued to receive hundreds of messages from users requesting to delete their Uber service accounts. This raised a subsequent issue, as before the crisis began, all requests to close accounts were manually processed; a procedure which was not meant to handle a large influx of requests. Due to this, users started accusing Uber of not allowing them to delete their service accounts (Isaac, 2017, para. 11). In order counteract these accusations Uber quickly established an automated process to accommodate user requests (Isaac, 2017, para. 12). The company also released an official statement **saying**: *"Anyone who requested that their account be deleted will have their account deleted, and reports to the contrary are false. Over the weekend we implemented a new automated process to handle an increased volume of requests and implemented a password check, a security best practice to avoid abuse and fraud"* (Isaac, 2017, para. 18).

Ultimately, Uber confirmed that a large sum of users deleted the app as well as their Uber service accounts, due to the impact of movement (Leskin, 2019, para. 2). The company went on record **stating**: *"As a result of the #DeleteUber campaign, hundreds of thousands of consumers stopped using the Uber platform within days of the campaign"* (Leskin, 2019, para. 5). The company also stated that the viral movement adversely affected their reputation and fuelled distrust amongst consumers (Leskin, 2019, para. 2). Ironically, at the end of the first quarter of 2017, Uber's main competitor in the US (Lyft) reported a boost in business in January of that year; a time when the #DeleteUber Campaign was at its peak (Leskin, 2019, para. 10). One user who was fully engaged in the movement **stated** in an interview: *"Let this be a warning: if you are a corporation who thinks you will ride out Trump, and quietly make money at his side, you will be made to pay a price"* (Cresci, 2017, para. 11).

▪ **Headline C6: Uber Accused of Fostering a Misogynistic Corporate Culture**

Description: In late February, 2017 a former Uber employee accused the company of sexual harassment and fostering a misogynistic work culture (Alba, 2017, para. 19). Susan Fowler, a former engineer at Uber, broke her silence when she released a blog post reflecting on her time at Uber. In the post she claimed that she was sexually harassed by her direct supervisor; a complaint that she said was diminished and ignored by Uber's

Human Resources department (Isaac, 2017, para. 2). In her blog she **stated**: “*On my first official day rotating on the team, my new manager sent me a string of messages over company chat. He was in an open relationship, he said, and his girlfriend was having an easy time finding new partners but he wasn't. He was trying to stay out of trouble at work, he said, but he couldn't help getting in trouble, because he was looking for women to have sex with*” (Fowler, 2017, para. 3). She expressed that it was clear by his actions that he was trying to convince her to have sex with him, after which she immediately reported him to HR (Fowler, 2017, para. 3).

The HR department informed Susan, as well as upper management, that although his actions clearly constituted sexual harassment, it was his first offense. Therefore, they were only prepared to give him a stern warning (Levin, 2017, para. 8). HR also informed her that she could either transfer to another department or stay and risk a poor evaluation; a decision that she would not have been able to object to, if she chose to stay (Levin, 2017, para. 9). Shortly after, it became apparent that the situation was not an isolated event (Levin, 2017, para. 10). Two months after Susan’s complaint, the same manager was reported to HR by other women in the company; however, they were also told that it was his first offense. This manager later left the company, to which Susan **stated**: “*I don't know what he did that finally convinced them to fire him*” (Fowler, 2017, para. 8).

Ultimately, Susan quit her job at Uber after fighting for a transfer that never materialized. In her blog she reminisced about there being 25% women employed at Uber when she started in 2015; a figure that dwindled to roughly 6% by the time she left a year later (Fowler, 2017, para. 17). She also disclosed parts of a conversation she had with an Uber director where she inquired about his thoughts regarding women leaving the company; he responded: “*the women of Uber just needed to step up and be better engineers*” (Fowler, 2017, para. 17).

Backlash & Uber’s Response:

People were disturbed by the information disclosed about Uber in Susan’s Blog. These accusations also came shortly after Uber’s CEO, Travis Kalanick, was criticized for sexist remarks that he previously made in an interview about women on demand, where he **stated**: “*we call that Boob-er*” (Levin, 2017, para. 26).

Within hours of the blog post, **Uber's CEO** stated that it was the first time that he heard of these allegations (Isaac, 2017, para. 7). He also released two statements on Twitter, **saying:** *"What's described here is abhorrent & against everything we believe in. Anyone who behaves this way or thinks this is OK will be fired"* (Kalanick, 2017). A minute later he tweeted: *"I've instructed our CHRO Liane to conduct an urgent investigation. There can be absolutely no place for this kind of behaviour at Uber"* (Kalanick, 2017).

The public proceeded to retaliate, in response to the CEO's statements. A glimpse of public opinion below reflects a large consensus of perceptions surrounding the issue.



(TwinCitiesChick, 2017)



(defaultslug, 2017)

Subsequently, Uber hired a third-party law firm to assist with the internal investigation. The company also opened an anonymous hotline for personnel to report sexual harassment, discrimination, unprofessionalism and bullying (Solon, 2017, para.4-9).The law firm investigated 215 reports made via the hotline. The results indicated that in a staggering 100 cases, no action was taken to address the claims made by personnel (Solon, 2017, para. 10). Based on the results and recommendations made by the law firm, Uber's HR department immediately terminated over 20 employees (Solon, 2017, para. 10).

Following the terminations **Uber's Chief Human Resources Officer** said that the trail of sexual harassment complaints were never an issue at Uber (Solon, 2017, para. 16). In an interview she stated: *"Fowler's blog shocked me"*. She also went on to say: *"what did surprise me was when I did the listening sessions; this didn't come up as an issue. It wasn't one of our big themes. Other things came up that are in that area, that our values are masculine and a little aggressive, but the harassment issue, I just didn't find that at all"* (Solon, 2017, para. 17).

Subsequently, Uber also hired the former US Attorney General to carry out a separate investigation into the broader company culture, leadership and values (Solon, 2017, para. 19).

A woman that applied for a position at Uber in 2015 spoke on the situation in an interview and said: *"I have never in my career heard of groups of people being terminated for sexual harassment like this"* (Solon, 2017, para. 11). The woman who now works for a different company mentioned that she was initially "put off" by Uber's culture, during her 2015 interview at the company. In her final statements on how Uber handled the matter she said: *"It points to a much bigger problem. How do you end up with that many people reporting sexual harassment and having to bring in an outside firm to handle it? What the hell has your HR department been doing?"*(Solon, 2017, para. 12).

▪ **Headline C7: Uber Executive Resigns due to Previous Sexual Harassment Claims**

Description: One week following Susan Fowler's blog post, information was leaked that an Uber executive failed to disclose sexual harassment accusations which occurred during his previous employment at Google (Isaac & Wakabayashi, 2017, para. 1). The Engineer, who worked at Google for 15 years, was only employed at Uber for five weeks when Susan Fowler blew the whistle on the company (The Guardian, 2017, para. 2).

In the midst of the Chaos, Uber CEO Travis Kalanick was informed about the claims through persons familiar with the incident, who wished to remain anonymous due to privacy issues (Isaac & Wakabayashi, 2017, para. 3). Through these accounts, it became apparent that the Uber executive was not forthcoming about his reasons for leaving Google. The source also revealed that Google deemed the sexual harassment claims as

credible and was prepared to fire him for the offense. However, he resigned instead (Isaac & Wakabayashi, 2017,para. 10). Google allowed him to leave quietly because the victim refused to publicly speak out about the matter (Dickey & Conger, 2017,para.5).

Backlash & Uber's Response:

Subsequent to receiving this information **Uber's CEO** took swift action and requested that the executive immediately resigns (Isaac & Wakabayashi, 2017,para. 2). After resigning, the former engineer **stated**: *"Harassment is unacceptable in any setting. I certainly want everyone to know that I do not condone and have not committed such behaviour. In my 20-year career, I've never been accused of anything like this before, and the decision to leave Google was my own"* (Isaac & Wakabayashi, 2017,para. 11).

Google declined to release a statement confirming or opposing the nature of the former engineer's resignation (Isaac & Wakabayashi, 2017,para. 12).

Uber also chose silence; only confirming that the employee no longer works for the company (The Guardian, 2017, para. 9).

▪ **Headline C8: Uber CEO Caught on Tape Yelling at Uber Driver**

Description: On February 28th, 2017 a video was leaked of Uber's CEO Travis Kalanick yelling at an Uber driver (Newcomer, 2017,para. 2). The video surfaced within days of Susan Fowler's blog and the resignation of a company executive in relation to undisclosed sexual harassment allegations.

The incident occurred in early February, when Travis Kalanick and two women utilized the services of an Uber-Black driver. Upon arrival at the scheduled destination, the driver took the opportunity to discuss some grievances with his CEO (Newcomer, 2017,para. 2). Uber Black drivers tend to experience increased challenges, as they are required to purchase high-end vehicle brands in order to provide a luxury service; they may also find themselves in competition with the cheaper rides that Uber offers, such as: UberX (Wong, 2017,para.15). In this case, the driver's main concerns involved his inability to make the required vehicle payments, due to Uber lowering Uber-Black fares. During the conversation, the driver expressed how Uber's constant lowering of fares has affected him. At a certain point the conversation got heated and the driver stated: *"But people are*

not trusting you anymore. I lost \$97,000 because of you. I'm bankrupt because of you. Yes, yes, yes. You keep changing every day. You keep changing every day" (Newcomer, 2017,para. 26). He continued to re-iterate that the company consistently drops the fares for Uber Black, to which Kalanick responded: *Bullshit!* (Newcomer, 2017,para. 31).The driver rebutted stating that the fares for Uber Black were initially \$20 in comparison to the current fare of \$2.75 per mile (Newcomer, 2017,para. 34). As the back and forth continued, Kalanick became increasingly annoyed and stated: *"You know what? Some people don't like to take responsibility for their own shit. They blame everything in their life on somebody else. Good luck"* (Newcomer, 2017,para. 37). As he stepped out, the Uber driver responded saying: *"Good luck to you, but I know [you're not] going to go far"* (Newcomer, 2017,para. 38). Kalanick slammed the car door.

Backlash & Uber's Response:

Within hours of the leaked tape, **Uber's CEO** Travis Kalanick issued a formal apology through an email addressing the driver, Uber personnel and the larger ride-hailing community. He **stated**: *"To say that I am ashamed is an extreme understatement. My job as your leader is to lead, and that starts with behaving in a way that makes us all proud. That is not what I did, and it cannot be explained away"* (Isaac, 2017, para. 6).

Shortly after, during an interview, the Uber driver expressed that he addressed Kalanick not only on behalf of his own plight, but also for other drivers experiencing the same challenges. He stated: *"We've talked to so many drivers who have been left in insurmountable debt after purchasing or leasing vehicles based on promised income from Uber then unable to make the payments as Uber has slashed fares, increased its commission, and flooded the streets with too many vehicles."* (Wong, 2017,para. 17).

Public opinion on the matter was slightly mixed. Where some sided with Uber's CEO, others criticized his delivery of the message and used the opportunity to highlight Uber's crisis history. A glimpse of public opinion, below, reflects some perceptions surrounding the crisis.



Uber refrained from commenting on public opinion. However, in addition to his apology, Travis Kalanick used the opportunity to address his leadership style and admitted that he needed help. He stated: *“It’s clear this video is a reflection of me and the criticism we’ve received is a stark reminder that I must fundamentally change as a leader and grow up. This is the first time I’ve been willing to admit that I need leadership help and I intend to get it* (Isaac, 2017,para. 12).

Subsequent to these crises, Uber continued contending with undesired events. Ultimately, the years leading up to and including 2017 proved to be challenging for the company. In June, 2017 Uber launched a 180 day campaign in attempts to repair damage and restore its reputation. At the same time, Uber’s investors decided that it was time for change. Five of Uber’s largest investors pressured CEO Travis Kalanick to resign. After much deliberation, he obliged (Alba, 2017,para. 30). Upon resigning he stated: *“I love Uber more than anything in the world and at this difficult moment in my personal life I have accepted the investors request to step aside so that Uber can*

go back to building rather than be distracted with another fight” (Isaac, 2017,para. 5). Uber’s board also released a final statement saying that Travis Kalanick *“always put Uber first”* and that his stepping down will allow room for the company to embrace a new chapter (Isaac, 2017,para. 6). Although Travis Kalanick stepped down from his position as CEO, he still remained on Uber’s Board of Directors; retaining the majority of the company’s voting shares (Isaac, 2017,para. 15).

5. Findings

Having navigated through Uber’s crises landscape, this chapter will present the findings and critical assessment of Uber’s response to the eight crises. First, Uber’s response strategies will be categorized and assessed based on the SCCT criteria. Subsequently, the chapter will discuss whether reoccurring elements or an overall strategy has been identified within Uber’s response to the various crises which they experienced during the relevant timeframe.

5.1. Uber’s Response to C1-C8 based on the SCCT criteria

In the previous chapter, we discussed the 8 major crises and captured Uber’s response to each of them, respectively. Based on the criteria of the SCCT, Uber’s responses have been categorized and assessed in the tables below.

<i>Crisis</i>	<i>SCCT Cluster</i>	<i>Uber’s Responsibility</i>	<i>Uber’s Response</i>	<i>SCCT Recommendation</i>
C1: Uber Driver Involved in Fatal Collision	Accidental	Moderate	Diminishment	Rebuilding

Assessment: C1 has been categorized as accidental because there was no malice involved and the situation did not present elements that Uber could have possibly prevented. It was an accidental and unfortunate event. However, based on the SCCT framework Uber still bore moderate responsibility, as the situational factors presented a challenge perceived to be warranted by stakeholders. This was increasingly clear based on the crisis case, as the family of the victims sought compensation from Uber and deemed the company responsible because the driver involved in the collision was an Uber affiliate. In their response, Uber immediately

attempted to diminish (“downplay”) the company’s responsibility, by disassociating their brand from the incident and directing all attention to the driver. Signs of diminishment were clear in parts of Uber’s initial statements:

We work with transportation providers across the Bay Area, but we can confirm that this tragedy did not involve a vehicle or provider doing a trip on the Uber system” (Constine, 2014, para. 6).

The company attempted to further disassociate their responsibility from the incident when they released the following statement:

“Our policy is to immediately deactivate any Uber partner involved in a serious law enforcement matter. For that reason, we urge the police to release information about the driver in question as soon as possible. If the driver is a partner of Uber, his or her Uber account will immediately be deactivated” (Constine, 2014, para. 7).

This statement is almost completely contradictory to the one which preceded it. Therefore, it is understandable that Uber’s response raised some eyebrows regarding when a transportation provider is actually considered “on the clock”, at which time he/she would be covered by company insurance. The mixed public opinion also reflected increased levels of confusion amongst stakeholders, as some believed Uber to be partially responsible whereas others critiqued the very structure of their business model and the legislators that approved it.

The SCCT recommends that Uber should have employed rebuilding strategies when responding to this crisis situation. Despite Uber’s attempts to diminish responsibility, the company was held partially responsible from a legal perspective. As a result, Uber only agreed to clarify its insurance policies regarding when drivers are eligible to be covered by company insurance, subsequent to the legal settlement. In this case, one might argue that Uber was legally forced into a position where rebuilding was the only choice that they had left; ultimately, accepting partial responsibility, compensating victims and taking corrective action in order to prevent similar

confusion in the future. Had Uber initially employed a rebuilding strategy, as recommended in existing literature, the incident may not have snowballed into a court case; possibly averting increased criticism to the brand and sparing the victims additional pain.

<i>Crisis</i>	<i>SCCT Cluster</i>	<i>Uber's Responsibility</i>	<i>Uber's Response</i>	<i>SCCT Recommendation</i>
C2: Uber Accused of Tracking Passengers with “ God View” App	Preventable	High	Diminishment	Rebuilding

Assessment: In contrast to C1, it can be argued that **C2** presented situational factors which were well within Uber’s capacity to prevent. As the crisis falls within the preventable cluster, the SCCT advises that Uber bore high responsibility to accept its role in the crisis and take appropriate action to correct organizational misdeeds.

However, contrary to theoretical recommendations and in a similar fashion to their response to C1, Uber attempted to diminish the crisis situation and defend their data protection practices. Signs of diminishment were clear throughout the entire crisis response phase. Initially they stated:

“There are hundreds of security and privacy experts working around the clock, to protect our data” (Chapman, 2016, para. 4).

In this statement Uber refrained from acknowledging the accusations made against them. However, despite their attempts to divert attention to more positive actions, stakeholders were not convinced. The uneasiness grew and can be seen reflected in public opinion about the matter, where clients expressed increased concerns about the breach of privacy. The SCCT recommends rebuilding strategies for crises that are in the preventable cluster and linked to organizational misdeeds. However, even after Uber was legally fined for their negligence in the case of the God

View app, the company continued to diminish and divert away from their responsibility by stating:

"We are deeply committed to protecting the privacy and personal data of riders and drivers. We are pleased to have reached an agreement with the New York Attorney General that resolves these questions and makes clear our commitment to best practices that put our community first" (Carson, 2016, para. 7).

A more direct approach towards accepting responsibility and taking immediate corrective action (*rebuilding strategies*) may have been more plausibly received; however, Uber's attempts to "sweep the problem under the rug" only contributed to increased doubt and speculation amongst stakeholders.

<i>Crisis</i>	<i>SCCT Cluster</i>	<i>Uber's Responsibility</i>	<i>Uber's Response</i>	<i>SCCT Recommendation</i>
C3: Uber Banned in Delhi due to Rape Allegations Associated with Driver	Preventable	High	Diminishment & Bolstering	Rebuilding

Assessment: C3 presented situational factors that were preventable, had Uber employed the same hiring/screening practices across the board. Although Uber did not violate any national laws within the Delhi area, a routine pre-screening process could have highlighted the driver's criminal history, prior to him being hired.

During the response phase, Uber acknowledged the horrible nature of the situation. However, the company also attempted to disassociate its brand from any responsibility related to the undesired event. In their initial statements, Uber attempted to justify their background check practices which came under high scrutiny, as a result of the incident. Their main argument being that pre-screening is not legally required in Delhi. Signs of diminishment were apparent when a representative stated:

“Uber does not conduct background checks of drivers in India. It accepts partner drivers if they have valid insurance documents, a driver’s license and a commercial permit to drive a taxi” (Barry & Raj, 2014, para. 23).

This statement directly reflects Uber’s contentment with achieving the minimum legal requirements, in regards to their hiring processes in India. Additionally, one can argue that if the company equally valued the safety of their clients, mandatory screening would be a prerequisite to employment in all situations, as opposed to only specific countries where it is legally required. The outrage, linked to the lack of passenger safety, was also seen reflected in local public opinion.

In addition to diminishing strategies, Uber denounced the crimes and employed bolstering strategies to re-iterate their commitment to the collaboration with Indian authorities, in order to ensure a safer future for the community. Bolstering was apparent in the statement made by CEO Travis Kalanick:

Uber will commit to using technological advantages “to help make New Delhi a safer city for women” (Barry & Raj, 2014, para. 12).

Although this statement reflects intention to jointly create a safer future, it also presents an example of diversion from SCCT recommendations towards rebuilding. Uber in no way took responsibility for their part in the crisis and victim compensation seemed to be completely excluded from the equation. Ultimately, Uber did not break any laws in Delhi. However, this crisis case does raise questions of morality; especially from the perspectives of clients who are at the mercy of the drivers hired by the company.

<i>Crisis</i>	<i>SCCT Cluster</i>	<i>Uber’s Responsibility</i>	<i>Uber’s Response</i>	<i>SCCT Recommendation</i>
C4: Uber Driver Accused of Killing 6 People in Shooting Spree	Victim	Low	Diminishment	Diminishment

Assessment: In contrast to C3, C4 presented situational factors aligned with the Victim Cluster. Therefore, Uber bore low responsibility in relation to the crisis, as the undesired event could not have been predicted nor prevented by the company. This crisis case was uniquely different to C3 which preceded it, as Uber carried out a background check on the driver before he was employed. The screening process did not yield any information that prevented the company from hiring the driver at the time.

In alignment with SCCT recommendations, Uber employed Diminishing strategies during the response phase. Initially, Uber released statements denouncing the crimes which took place and expressing their commitment to assisting investigations in any way possible. Diminishment was particularly apparent in their closing statements where the company defended their screening practices which were once again in question, considering the situational factors of the crisis in Delhi (C3) just months before. Uber stated:

“No background check process would have made a difference in this case because this person didn’t have a criminal history” (Smith M., 2019, para. 14).

Despite the factual nature of this statement, it was not sufficient in terms of swaying public perceptions surrounding the crisis. At this point, Uber had already accrued an arguably substantial crisis history, accompanied with speculations about their background-check procedures and questions of morality in the eyes of key stakeholders. Therefore, one can argue that Uber employed the only plausible strategy in response to this particular crisis; however, this case presents a prime example of how the company’s crisis history in conjunction with their attempts to inappropriately diminish responsibility during prior crises, negatively impacted trust amongst key stakeholders.

<i>Crisis</i>	<i>SCCT Cluster</i>	<i>Uber’s Responsibility</i>	<i>Uber’s Response</i>	<i>SCCT Recommendation</i>
C5: The #DeleteUber Campaign	Accidental	Moderate	Diminishment Bolstering & Denial	Rebuilding

Assessment: C5 presented unique situational factors, as it was a crisis which was directly caused by Uber's actions. Although Uber chose questionable timing to release the statement regarding disabled surge pricing at JFK, company executives surely did not intend to spark the advent of the viral backlash that ensued as a result. Based on these situational factors, the crisis situation has been categorized as accidental, for which Uber bore moderate responsibility.

During the response phase Uber employed a variety of strategies. In their initial statements, Uber used diminishing strategies in attempts to clarify that their intentions were not to interfere with the strike. Uber officials stated:

"We wanted people to know they could use Uber to get to and from JFK at normal prices" (Cresci, 2017, para. 14).

Despite Uber's attempts to clarify their intentions, the viral #Delete Uber Campaign continued spreading; negatively influencing stakeholder trust and perceptions in the process. It can be argued that the ineffectiveness of this first strategy caused a shift in Uber's approach to the crisis. As the campaign continued growing, Uber shifted to Bolstering strategies in attempts to calm the storm. Bolstering was apparent in Uber's strides to remind stakeholders that the company stands strong with all those affected by the travel ban. Bolstering was particularly apparent in the following statements:

"At Uber we've always believed in standing up for what's right. Today we need your help supporting drivers who may be impacted by the President's unjust immigration ban. Uber is a community. We're here to support each other" (Kalanick, 2017).

Uber's attempts to remind stakeholders of their community values were no more effective than their initial attempts to diminish the crisis situation. The #Delete Uber campaign began at a time where Uber's crisis history was at its peak. Therefore, stakeholders seemed increasingly weary of the company's misdeeds, including their previous attempts to displace responsibility.

In an unexpected turn of events, Uber faced thousands of requests to delete user accounts. Their inability to effectively process these requests led to additional complaints from stakeholders, accusing them of not allowing users to delete their accounts. These accusations which began spreading through the campaign, had potential to shift this crisis into a “scansis” situation. However, Uber’s swift action to correct the problem in their system most likely saved the company from a worse situation. As Uber corrected the issue, they employed denial strategies in response to the accusations that the company was hindering users from deleting their accounts. Denial strategies were most apparent when Uber stated:

“Anyone who requested that their account be deleted will have their account deleted, and reports to the contrary are false. Over the weekend we implemented a new automated process to handle an increased volume of requests and implemented a password check, a security best practice to avoid abuse and fraud” (Isaac, 2017, para. 18).

Although the SCCT recommends rebuilding strategies for crises within the accidental cluster, it can be argued that Uber’s denial at this point in the crisis may have been warranted, as user perceptions of the issue were deemed incorrect. However, the company’s initial attempts to diminish the crisis situation and their inability to take responsibility for at least their bad timing, may have only served to further decrease trust amongst various stakeholders. In this case, the SCCT recommendations towards rebuilding may have been a more plausible route for Uber, instead of yet again attempting to make excuses for their actions.

<i>Crisis</i>	<i>SCCT Cluster</i>	<i>Uber’s Responsibility</i>	<i>Uber’s Response</i>	<i>SCCT Recommendation</i>
C6: Uber Accused of Fostering a Misogynistic Corporate Culture	Preventable	High	Rebuilding, Diminishment & Corrective Action	Rebuilding & Corrective Action

Assessment: C6 presented situational factors which were within Uber’s capacity to prevent. Therefore, the company bore high responsibility for the undesired events which took place.

Essentially, the blog post exposed the lack of urgency, within Uber's corporate culture, to address situations which demeaned women and limited their professional growth opportunities.

During the response phase, Uber initially employed rebuilding strategies and completely denounced misogyny within their organization as well as those who condone it. Rebuilding strategies were apparent in CEO Travis Kalanick's initial response:

"What's described here is abhorrent & against everything we believe in. Anyone who behaves this way or thinks this is OK will be fired. I've instructed our CHRO Liane to conduct an urgent investigation. There can be absolutely no place for this kind of behaviour at Uber" (Kalanick, 2017).

As investigations proceeded, Uber's Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) released a statement claiming that it was the first time that claims of misogyny and sexual harassment have ever been made known to her. One can argue that although the Uber initially claimed to condemn such behaviour, the statement of the CHRO reflects partial attempts to diminish the crisis situation. Diminishing strategies were particularly present in the following statement made by Uber's CHRO:

"Fowler's blog shocked me". She also went on to say: "what did surprise me was when I did the listening sessions; this didn't come up as an issue. It wasn't one of our big themes. Other things came up that are in that area, that our values are masculine and a little aggressive, but the harassment issue, I just didn't find that at all" (Solon, 2017, para. 17).

This statement arguably reflects attempts to disassociate Uber's HR department from the incidents which came to light, as it would only serve as fuel to Susan's accusations if HR indeed admitted to ignoring her plight, as well as that of her former colleagues. As with many of the crises before, this form of diminishing may have very well had the opposite effect on stakeholders, who already began losing trust in the company as a whole.

Lastly, Uber’s CEO attempted to implement some extent of corrective action by opening an anonymous line and hiring an external party to carry out an independent investigation. This decision, though important, may have been set in place just a little too late, especially considering the amount of cases which surfaced as a result.

Although Uber’s response somewhat aligned with SCCT recommendations, company executives remained adamant about employing diminishing strategies to some extent; a pattern which Uber seemed to have formed throughout the years of consecutive crises, even though it was proven ineffective and inappropriately used in many previous crisis cases.

<i>Crisis</i>	<i>SCCT Cluster</i>	<i>Uber’s Responsibility</i>	<i>Uber’s Response</i>	<i>SCCT Recommendation</i>
C7: Uber Executive Resigns due to Previous Sexual Harassment Claims	Preventative	High	Rebuilding/ Corrective Action	Rebuilding

Assessment: C7 presented situational factors which were arguably within Uber’s capacity to control. This has been determined based on Uber’s pre-screening practices which were under scrutiny during several other crisis situations. C7 only further highlights the notion that there was in fact room for improvement within Uber’s background check practices, which company officials fiercely defended during their response to previous crisis situations. Therefore, there is a high responsibility linked to Uber and the undesired event in this case.

In contrast to C1-C6, Uber’s response to this crisis was a prime example of what Coombs (2009) refers to as *“stealing thunder”*. C7 took place at a peculiar point, as the company was not yet finished responding to the crisis which preceded it. At the peak of their attempts to respond to Susan Fowler’s viral blog post (C6), accusations surfaced regarding this Uber executive’s inappropriate past at Google. It can be argued that when Uber’s CEO Travis Kalanick’s made the decision to immediately fire the executive, he in fact “stole the thunder:” by informing stakeholders about the situation and the immediate corrective action that was taken.

Although Uber refrained from releasing in depth statements about the matter, officials confirmed that the executive was no longer employed at the company. In an unprecedented fashion, Uber remained relatively silent during the response phase of this crisis case. However, their corrective action, aligned with SCCT recommendations, can be arguably considered to have spoken louder than words.

Contrary to the previous crises, the situational factors presented by C7 did not stir up much public opinion. However, this could have been due to the timing of the crisis case and Uber’s swift action to rectify the problem at hand. As Uber was already in the midst of battling accusations against company culture and the harassment of female personnel, Uber officials may have chosen the right time to take action (steal the thunder). If the crisis emerged at a more peaceful time for Uber, additional doubts may have surfaced regarding Uber’s pre-screening and hiring practices. Uber seemingly evaded such questions in this case, as this crisis was to some extent linked to their response to C6 and; therefore, framed in such a way that may have shifted stakeholder perceptions away from Uber’s subpar hiring practices, towards the company proactively purging the “bad apples” who were contributing to a flawed corporate culture.

<i>Crisis</i>	<i>SCCT Cluster</i>	<i>Uber’s Responsibility</i>	<i>Uber’s Response</i>	<i>SCCT Recommendation</i>
C8: Uber CEO Caught on Tape Yelling at Uber Driver	Preventative	High	Rebuilding	Rebuilding

Assessment: C8 presented unique situational factors which were completely within Uber’s capacity to control. Therefore, the company and more specifically the company CEO Travis Kalanick bore high responsibility for the undesired event.

During the response phase, Uber’s CEO Travis Kalanick employed rebuilding strategies and took complete responsibility for his behaviour; acknowledging the flaws in his leadership style and admitting that he needs help in that area. Rebuilding strategies were apparent where he stated:

“To say that I am ashamed is an extreme understatement. My job as your leader is to lead, and that starts with behaving in a way that makes us all proud. That is not what I did, and it cannot be explained away. It’s clear this video is a reflection of me and the criticism we’ve received is a stark reminder that I must fundamentally change as a leader and grow up. This is the first time I’ve been willing to admit that I need leadership help and I intend to get it (Isaac, 2017, para. 12).

Similarly to C7, Uber’s response aligned with SCCT recommendations during the response phase. However, the company was in a position where there may have been no other choice. In contrast to previous crises which were also categorized within the preventable cluster, Uber did not attempt to diminish the crisis nor did the CEO make excuses for his actions. Although stakeholder perceptions were somewhat mixed regarding Uber’s response, the effects of Uber’s use of diminishing strategies remained apparent amongst public opinion, as stakeholders demanded that the company begin taking responsibility for previous misdeeds. Such demands arguably shed some light on the detrimental impact that Uber’s diminishing strategies had on the trust and loyalty amongst key stakeholders. Travis Kalanick’s acknowledgement of Uber’s managerial shortcomings may have taken place a little too late, as he was forced to resign swiftly thereafter.

5.2. Uber’s Overall Strategy

Having assessed Uber’s response to each of the crises, it can now be determined whether or not the company employed an overall strategy when approaching crisis response between 2013 and 2017. Sub-chapter 2.5 presented a hypothesis regarding Uber’s potential use of an overall strategy to steer their response to the series of crises that they were presented with. Taking H1 into consideration, this sub-chapter will elaborate on the extent to which those predictions can be considered plausible or not.

H1: Uber did not employ an overall strategy when approaching the crisis situations but instead, individually responded to each crisis as they arose.

Uber’s response to the eight crises yielded a pattern which has indicated signs of a potential overall strategy. However, in alignment with to the prediction of **H1**, no definite conclusion can be plausibly drawn as to whether or not an over arching strategic approach was employed. Table 4 below presents an overview of the crisis response strategies which were used by Uber, amongst which diminishment was most frequently used, followed by rebuilding which was employed subsequent to accruing a substantial crisis history, and bolstering and denial which were the least used strategies.

Crisis	Cluster	Uber’s Response			
		Diminishment	Bolstering	Rebuilding	Denial
C1	Accidental	X			
C2	Preventable	X			
C3	Preventable	X	X		
C4	Victim	X			
C5	Preventable	X			X
C6	Preventable	X		X	
C7	Preventable			X	
C8	Preventable			X	

Table 4: A pattern of Uber’s crisis response strategies

The majority of the crisis cases which were investigated have been categorized as preventable, with the exception of **C1** and **C4**. Essentially, the findings indicate that Uber employed the diminishment strategy for 6 of the 8 crises, with no prejudice towards the cluster within which the crises have been categorized. The findings reflect a pattern whereby Uber attempted to persistently shift responsibility away from their brand, towards the direct causes of the undesirable events which took place. This shift of responsibility and persistent justification of their corporate procedures can be arguably seen as Uber’s attempts to protect their corporate brand by all means necessary. Although there is no certainty regarding Uber’s overall strategic

approach, the pattern of diminishment through justification and excuses provides strong indications that the company repeatedly ignored the signs of latent failures, within their organizational processes, which may have correlated with the causes of a large majority of the crisis situations. Instead, Uber continued to defend their practices, while attempting to convince stakeholders that the direct causes of the crises were completely disconnected from their brand and all that they stood for. In the few cases (**C6-C8**) where Uber was not able to completely disassociate their brand from the crisis cases, the company began leaning towards rebuilding strategies and corrective action. Ultimately, it took four years of consecutive crises for CEO Travis Kalanick to admit that there was indeed a problem in Uber's strategic approach, which reflected deficiencies within his capacity to effectively manage the company. These struggles to steer Uber from the top-down, may have directly influenced the company's ability to effectively strategize and respond to the series of crises which they faced at the time.

6. Critical Discussion and Lessons Learned

The crises which Uber faced between 2013 and 2017 presented challenging and unprecedented situational factors for the relatively new start-up. Essentially, each crisis situation brought with it unique elements which Uber largely struggled to effectively address.

At the beginning of the four year tribulation, Uber was at the peak of its growth. Although such a daunting period of consecutive crises could not have been predicted, one can argue that the series of crises were also seemingly unexpected by the company. In other words, Uber had not expected, planned nor prepared for the magnitude of negative outcomes which resulted from the undesirable events. Therefore, a lack of preparation, strategy and guidance from the top-down potentially placed Uber in a position where company officials scrambled to protect the Uber brand and had no time to consider the internal factors that may have contributed to each crisis situation.

Based on the merits of the SSCT criteria, the majority of the crises which Uber faced were preventable. Therefore, with the exception of crisis cases (**C1: *Fatal Collision***) and (**C4: *killing of six people***), Uber bore high responsibility for the crisis situations. However, Uber failed to acknowledge their level of responsibility and instead commenced on a downward spiral of diminishing strategies, in attempts to justify and persistently defend their internal procedures.

From as early as **C1**, Uber employed diminishment in attempts to influence the perceptions of stakeholders who were pointing fingers at the company. As the series of crises persisted, Uber continued trying to shift the attention of stakeholders to the direct causes of the crises, as opposed to the underlying causes which reflected latent failures within their organizational processes. As a result, Uber was caught up in several court cases and legal fees. In addition, as the series of crises continued and their crisis history grew, stakeholders became increasingly weary of Uber's lack of ability to take responsibility where necessary. Initially, one might consider that the pattern of diminishment found within Uber's response could be reflective of an overall strategy. In other words, could it have been Uber's strategy to simply diminish and displace responsibility for the situational factors of the crises that they faced? Although this is a possibility, it does not provide an explanation as to why Uber continued using diminishment, once it became clear that it was not effective towards the mitigation of negative outcomes. Therefore, it can be more plausibly argued that Uber's decision to continue with diminishment strategies was not only unwise, but also reflective of lack of preparation, comprehensive strategy and their inability to learn and adjust in a timely manner; possibly due to the sheer speed with which each crisis followed the next.

Essentially, it took three and a half of the four years for Uber to accept that the ways in which they were responding to the crises were ineffective. **C6** presented a shift in Uber's approach towards crisis response. Although company officials still attempted some form of diminishment, they also employed rebuilding strategies in attempts to address the underlying factors which led to a break down in their corporate culture. Uber's response to **C7** and **C8** also reflected this shift towards rebuilding through acknowledgement of their responsibility and willingness to take corrective action to prevent a reoccurrence of the undesirable events. However, one might argue that the shift occurred too late within Uber's crisis response processes, as Uber seemed to have only begun focusing on rebuilding strategies in response to crisis cases where they had absolutely no other choice. In other words, had the circumstances been different and the company could have gotten away with further diminishing responsibility, they may not have shifted towards rebuilding. The shift in Uber's approach took place at a time where the company struggled to positively influence stakeholder perceptions and the extent of damage resulting from an extensive crisis history, paired with poor crisis management, was becoming increasingly apparent. Therefore, it can be argued that Uber simply had no choice but to cling on to inevitable

change. Further adding to this point was the revelations that **C8** afforded. It was only after Uber's CEO Travis Kalanick got caught on tape that he finally admitted that he needed assistance to better manage and steer Uber into the future. Essentially, his confession came at a time where Uber had gone through nearly half a decade of crises, for which they were ill prepared and misguided. Kalanick admitting the faults within his leadership style can arguably be seen as the moment where he acknowledged the faults that led Uber to the position that they were in at the time, and although he did not state it, it can be interpreted to include the way in which Uber struggled to effectively respond to the series of crises that they endured during that challenging four-year period.

Lessons

Existing literature speaks of the importance of consistency as well as organizations speaking with one voice during crisis response, in order to avert the risks of managers being perceived as incompetent (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 29, para 1). However, the Uber case is a prime example of how a lack of a clear strategy can lead companies further into crisis, despite their attempts to remain consistent. Despite Uber's attempts to consistently diminish the crisis situations, their methods proved inappropriate and created a cycle of failure that was difficult to break; ultimately, leading to the resignation of Uber's CEO in the best interest of ensuring a viable corporate future.

Learning is a key aspect of effective crisis management. It is through the collection and analysis of crisis information that effective crisis learning can begin to take place (Coombs & Holladay, 2011, p. 46, para. 2). The situational factors presented within the Uber case offer a unique opportunity to learn from the mistakes that the company made, while attempting to respond to the consecutive crises that they were faced with. The following lessons have been identified and interpreted based on the collective research findings:

- 1. Crisis Management by Design:** Systematic flaws in Uber's business model became apparent as early as C1 where there was no clarity regarding when transportation providers were "on the clock" and eligible to be covered by company insurance. Additionally, the structure of Uber's business model paired with lack of proper guidance from the top may have made it increasingly difficult for the company to discern how their role was correlated to the causes of the undesirable events. Essentially, this sort of disassociated and

decentralized corporate structure may have set Uber up for failure long before the crises ensued. A key learning point from this case is the importance of understanding how organizational structure may impact company liability if and when something does go wrong. In Uber's case, it almost seems as though management did not consider the downside of rapid growth in parallel to a decentralized structure. Had they taken the time to consider what could go wrong and properly set in place stipulations to clarify issues such as incidents and liability, they would have been in a better position to effectively respond to the catastrophe which ensued.

- 2. Be Prepared:** The Uber case presented a prime example of how lack of planning and preparation can result in an inability to effectively manage crisis situations. Uber's lack of preparation was especially apparent based on the consistency with which they made the same mistakes during the crisis response phases. Additionally, this lack of preparation made it increasingly difficult to adjust their approach, even though their response strategies were proving to be ineffective. It is essential that organizations ensure proper planning and preparation in the pre-crisis phases. Although crises are unpredictable in nature, organizations should expect that these undesirable events can arise at any given moment. A pre-conceived and clear overall strategy can also assist and guide organizations through the trying and uncertain periods presented by crises, as it will provide clear goals and better ensure the capacity to control the crisis narrative and the initial stakeholder perceptions surrounding it.
- 3. Ensure appropriate crisis response:** In addition to lack of preparation, Uber did not employ the appropriate crisis response strategy, in the majority of cases. This led to further challenges including increased doubt amongst stakeholders, regarding Uber's capacity to simply do the right thing. It is imperative that organizations establish an understanding of the situational factors of each crisis situation and ensure an appropriate crisis response strategy; otherwise, they run the risk of potentially making the crisis situation worse and further decreasing trust and brand loyalty amongst key stakeholders.
- 4. Consider Organizational Crisis History:** Closely linked to selecting an appropriate response strategy is the importance of organizational crisis history. Uber responded to a majority of the crises as though it was their first time. Even when stakeholders were clearly not buying their message anymore, they continued to employ diminishing strategies and

failed to take adequate responsibility for the latent failures within their organizational processes. Organizations should keenly acknowledge their crisis history and monitor how their message is being received by stakeholders, otherwise they risk increasing negative perceptions regarding the crisis situation which may, ultimately, result in further reputational damage.

5. **Don't Hesitate to Adjust:** Another key challenge that Uber faced was their inability to adjust when things were going wrong. Essentially, it took Uber officials responding to six out of the eight crises before they fully transitioned from diminishing strategies to rebuilding strategies. Unfortunately, substantial damage was already done at the point where they chose to adjust their approach to crisis response. Crises, indeed, present increased challenges for organizations and it is possible to make mistakes when attempting to swiftly and accurately manage these undesired events. However, it is essential that organizations correct mistakes and adjust ineffective strategies in a timely manner, in order to effectively mitigate negative outcomes.
6. **Ask for Help Early On:** Perhaps one of the most important aspects of not only crisis management but management in general, proved the most difficult feat for Uber. CEO Travis Kalanick simply waited too long to admit that he needed help managing the fast growing tech giant. As a result, the entire world looked on while Uber struggled to combat years of consecutive crises. As a result, he was forced to publicly admit his faults and his incapacity to effectively lead. If there is one critical lesson that the Uber case affords, it is the importance of getting the necessary help early on, in order to avoid a complete breakdown of stakeholder trust in the process. Kalanick's forced resignation is a prime example of what can happen when organizations ignore the signs of ineffective leadership, resulting in a collective inhibition to combat challenges which certainly lie ahead.

7. Conclusion

The consecutive crises which Uber contended with between 2013 and 2017 presented challenging situational factors, which the company largely struggled to address. Essentially, this research sought to answer the question: *“to what extent can an overall strategy be identified in Uber’s approach to the 8 major crises which occurred between 2013 – 2017, and what lessons can be learned based on Uber’s response to the series of crises which they faced?”*

In alignment with the hypothesis presented in sub-chapter 2.5., the findings of this research indicated that no comprehensive strategy could be plausibly identified within the way Uber approached crisis response during the relevant time period. In contrast, Uber’s response to the eight crises reflected a lack of planning, preparation and guidance from the top-down. This became increasingly clear by the way in which Uber employed diminishing strategies for a large majority of the crisis cases, with no regard for the situational factors which were applicable at the time (*i.e. crisis cluster, organizational responsibility & their extensive crisis history*). In contrast, signs of an overall strategy would have indicated Uber’s consideration for the aforementioned factors, as guidance for appropriate crisis response. Essentially, the majority of the crises were categorized as preventable, implying that a high level of responsibility was linked to Uber and the undesirable events. However, instead of acknowledging responsibility, Uber proceeded to justify their actions and defend their internal procedures. As Uber’s crisis history grew, stakeholders became weary of Uber’s incapacity to take responsibility for the latent failures within their organizational processes. Despite the ineffectiveness of their crisis response efforts, Uber did not adjust their approach until the very end of the four year period, when they had absolutely no other choice.

As a result of the years contending with crises, Uber was in a position where change became a prerequisite of survival. It was only at this point that the company CEO, Travis Kalanick, admitted to needing assistance leading the company forward. Ultimately, the damage was done and he was forced to resign as a result of years of ineffective leadership and crisis management.

Lastly, as discussed in the latter part of chapter 6, several lessons have been derived based on the findings of the Uber case. Although some lessons are new, others provide empirical evidence which further strengthens the recommendations present within existing literature. The lessons include:

1. Crisis Management by Design
2. Be Prepared
3. Ensure Appropriate Crisis Response Strategies
4. Consider Organizational Crisis History
5. Don't Hesitate to Adjust
6. Ask for Help Early On

Essentially, the lessons derived from the Uber case represent critical errors that the company made during the years of the consecutive crises, covered within the scope of this study. As learning is a key part of effective crisis management, it is imperative that organizations (large and small) maximize on the learning opportunities that the Uber case affords. Fortunately for Uber, their inability to learn and adjust in a timely manner did not result in corporate closure. However, in an ever changing world where repetitive mistakes are perceived more as choices, survival hangs in the balance for organizations that fail to fulfil their corporate responsibilities by simply refusing to “do the right thing”.

7.1. Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further research are proposed based on aspects that could not be covered within the scope of this study.

This research has been limited to eight crises which Uber faced between 2013 and 2017. However, following this period, new management took the lead in order to better ensure Uber's corporate longevity. At the end of 2017 when a new CEO was introduced, Uber was at a breaking point as a result of years of poor leadership and ineffective crisis management. Based on these factors, points for future research include:

- Investigations into whether new management created a shift in Uber's capacity to effectively respond to crises. It would be useful to identify the crises which Uber faced subsequent to 2017 and compare the company's approach in order to determine whether they have learned from their previous challenges and whether these lessons have resulted in better preparation and an effective strategic approach towards crisis management as a whole.

- Another path or extension of this research could further delve into how such an extensive crisis history currently affects Uber as well as the efforts that the company is making to repair its reputation and restore trust amongst key stakeholders.
- Lastly, despite years of contending with crises, Uber's doors remained open. It may be useful for future research to investigate how Uber survived this long despite its past, in comparison to another corporation that was not fortunate enough to survive challenges similar to those which Uber faced.

8. Bibliography

Alba, D. (2015). *California Forces Uber and Rivals to Bolster Insurance*. Retrieved 2020, from Wired: <https://www.wired.com/2015/07/california-forces-uber-rivals-bolster-insurance/>

Astalin, P. K. (2013). Qualitative Research Designs: A Conceptual Framework. *International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research* , 2 (1), 118-124.

Austin, L. L., & Jin, Y. (2018). *Social Media and Crisis Communication*. Routledge.

Bacon, J. (2016). *Uber Driver Arraigned on 6 Murder Counts: What We Know*. Retrieved 2020, from USA Today: <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2016/02/22/uber-driver-accused-killing-6-what-we-know/80725680/>

Barry, E., & Raj, S. (2014). *Uber Banned in India's Capital after Rape Accusation*. Retrieved 2020, from New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/09/world/asia/new-delhi-bans-uber-after-driver-is-accused-of-rape.html>

Bay City News. (2015). *Family of 6-year Old Girl Killed by Uber Driver Settles Lawsuit*. Retrieved 2020, from ABC 7 News: <https://abc7news.com/san-francisco-uber-driver-syed-muzaffar-muzzafar/852108/>

BBC. (2017). *Trump's Executive Order: Who Does Travel ban Affect?* Retrieved 2020, from BBC News: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38781302>

Blystone, D. (2019). *The Story of Uber*. Retrieved 2020, from Investopedia: <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/personal-finance/111015/story-uber.asp>

Bullit, F. (2017, March 1). *Frank Bullit 39*. Retrieved 2020, from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/FrankBullitt39/status/836724870973177856>

Carson, B. (2016). *Uber Settles Investigation into God 'View' Tool*. Retrieved 2020, from Business Insider: <https://www.businessinsider.com/uber-settles-investigation-into-god-view-tool-2016-1?international=true&r=US&IR=T>

Chapman, B. (2016). *Uber Employees Use App to 'Spy on Ex-Lovers, Politicians and Celebrities'*. Retrieved 2020, from Independent: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/uber-god-view-spied-customers-ex-lovers-politicians-and-celebrities-a7472686.html>

Christian. (2017, February 2017). *Engineer Vazquez*. Retrieved 2020, from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/EngineerVazquez/status/836712009852833794>

Coleman, A. (2020). *Crisis Communication Strategies: How to Prepare in Advance, Respond Effectively and Recover in Full*. London, United Kingdom: Kogan Page Limited.

Conlon, K., & Valencia, N. (2016). *Kalamazoo Uber Picked Up Fares Between Killing, Source Says*. Retrieved 2020, from CNN: <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/02/21/us/michigan-kalamazoo-county-shooting-spree/index.html>

Constine, J. (2014). *Uber's Denial of Responsibility in Girl's Death Raises Accountability Questions*. Retrieved 2020, from Tech Crunch: <https://techcrunch.com/2014/01/02/should-car-services-provide-insurance-whenever-their-driver-app-is-open/>

Coombs, T. W. (2018). *How to Identify and Survive a Brand Crisis*. Retrieved 2020, from WordPress: On Going Crisis Communication: <https://coombscrisiscommunication.wordpress.com/tag/scansis/>

Coombs, T. W., & Holladay, S. J. (2011). *The Handbook of Crisis Communication* (Vol. 22). John Wiley & Sons.

Coombs, T. W., & Holladay, S. J. (2007). The negative communication dynamic: Exploring the impact of stakeholder effect on behavioral intentions. *Journal of Communication Management*, 11 (4), 300-312.

Coombs, W., & Holladay, S. J. (2011). *The Handbook of Crisis Communication* (Vol. 22). John Wiley & Sons.

Cresci, E. (2017). *#DeleteUber: How Social Media Turned on Uber*. Retrieved 2020, from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jan/30/deleteuber-how-social-media-turned-on-uber>

default slug. (2017, February 20). *Saffronromiet*. Retrieved 2020, from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/saffronromiet/status/833547652205735936>

dhm. (2016, February 27). *Uber Driver Kills 6 in Michigan*. Retrieved 2020, from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/dhm/status/703393269791727617?cxt=HKwWgoCx9fec-sITAAAA>

Dickey, M. R., & Conger, K. (2017). *Uber's SVP Amit Singhal leaves company because he didn't disclose a sexual harassment allegation at Google*. Retrieved 2020, from Tech Crunch: <https://techcrunch.com/2017/02/27/ubers-svp-amit-singhal-leaves-company-because-he-didnt-disclose-a-sexual-harassment-allegation/>

Fowler, S. (2017, February 19). *Reflecting on One Very, Very Strange Year at Uber*. Retrieved 2020, from Susan Fowler : <https://www.susanjfwlwer.com/blog/2017/2/19/reflecting-on-one-very-strange-year-at-uber>

Fox 2 News. (2018). *Mother of a 6-year old Killed by Uber Driver 'Glad' about Guilty Verdict*. Retrieved 2020, from KTVU Fox 2 News: <https://www.ktvu.com/news/mother-of-6-year-old-killed-by-uber-driver-glad-over-guilty-verdict>

Gillham, B. (2000). *Case Study Research Methods* (illustrated, reprint ed.). Bloomsbury Academic.

Guarino, M., Wan, W., & Ryan, M. (2016). *Uber Driver Suspected in Shootings in Mich. that Killed six*. Retrieved 2020, from The Washington Post: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/uber-driver-suspected-in-shootings-in-mich-that-kill-six/2016/02/21/69c3543e-d8da-11e5-891a-4ed04f4213e8_story.html

Harvard Business Review. (1996). *A Strategic Approach to Managing Product Recalls*. Retrieved 2020, from Harvard Business Review: <https://hbr.org/1996/09/a-strategic-approach-to-managing-product-recalls>

Huberman, A. M., & Miles, M. B. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Sage Publications.

IG. (2018). *Top 10 biggest corporate scandals and how they affected share prices*. Retrieved 2020, from IG: <https://www.ig.com/en/news-and-trade-ideas/top-10-biggest-corporate-scandals-and-how-they-affected-share-pr-181101#apple>

Inside Edition. (2019). *Uber Driver Who Killed 6 Between Dropping Off and Picking Up Passengers Pleasd Guilty in Spree*. Retrieved 2020, from Inside Edition: <https://www.insideedition.com/uber-driver-who-killed-6-between-dropping-and-picking-passengers-pleads-guilty-spree-49802>

Isaac, M. (2017). *Travis Kalanick, Uber Chief, Apologizes after Fight With Driver*. Retrieved 2020, from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/01/technology/uber-chief-apologizes-after-video-shows-him-arguing-with-driver.html>

Isaac, M. (2017). *Uber Founder Travis Kalanick Resigns as CEO*. Retrieved 2020, from The New York Times: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/21/technology/uber-ceo-travis-kalanick.html?rref=collection%2Fbyline%2Fmike-isaac&action=click&contentCollection=undefined®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection

Isaac, M. (2017). *Uber Investigating Sexual Harassment Claims by Ex-Employee*. Retrieved 2020, from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/19/business/uber-sexual-harassment-investigation.html>

Isaac, M. (2017). *What You Need to Know About #DeleteUber*. Retrieved 2020, from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/31/business/delete-uber.html>

Isaac, M., & Wakabayashi, D. (2017). *Amit Singhal, Uber Executive Linked to Old Harassment Claim, Resigns*. Retrieved 2020, from The New York Times: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/feb/27/uber-executive-resigns-sexual-harassment-google>

Jeremiah. (2017, January 29). *#DeleteUber*. Retrieved 2020, from Twitter:
https://twitter.com/MiahSaint/status/825548419771031552?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E825548419771031552%7Ctwgr%5Eshare_3&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theguardian.com%2Ftechnology%2F2017%2Fjan%2F30%2Fdeleteuber-how-social-media-turned-

Kalanick, T. (2017, January 29). *Travis Kalanick*. Retrieved 2020, from Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/traviskal>

Kalanick, T. (2017, February 20). *Travis Kalanick*. Retrieved 2020, from Twitter:
https://twitter.com/travisk/status/833480964315557888?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E833480964315557888%7Ctwgr%5Eshare_3&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theguardian.com%2Ftechnology%2F2017%2Ffeb%2F20%2Fuber-urgent-investigation-sexual-hara

Lesenciuc, A., & Nagy, D. (2008). *Role of Communication in Crisis Management*. Retrieved 2019, from Conference on Defence Resources management:
http://www.codrm.eu/conferences/2008/10_Lesenciuc_Adrian.pdf

Leskin, P. (2019). *Uber says the #DeleteUber Movement Led to 'Hundreds of Thousands' of People Quitting the App*. Retrieved 2020, from Business Insider:
<https://www.businessinsider.com/uber-deleteuber-protest-hundreds-of-thousands-quit-app-2019-4?international=true&r=US&IR=T>

Levin, S. (2017, February 20). *Uber Launches Urgent Investigation into Sexual Harassment Claims*. Retrieved 2020, from The Guardian:
<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/feb/20/uber-urgent-investigation-sexual-harassment-claims-susan-fowler>

Lynn, A. (2018). *Why do you need a crisis communications plan?* Retrieved 2020, from Fallston Group: <https://www.fallstongroup.com/blog/crisis-communications-plan/>

McCoy, M. (2016, February 22). *Blog Post: Uber Driver Killed 6 people in Michigan*. Retrieved 2020, from Twitter:

https://twitter.com/Mack_McCoy/status/701817877939097600?cxt=HKwWgMCg-Yfprb0TAAAA

McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (1993). *Research in Education. A Conceptual Introduction* (3rd Edition ed.). HarperCollins College Publishers.

Menon, M. (2014). *Uber Banned from operating in Indian Capital after Rape Accusation*. Retrieved 2020, from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-rape-uber/uber-banned-from-operating-in-indian-capital-after-rape-accusation-idUSKBN0JM0CE20141208>

Meyer, C. B. (2001). A case in case study methodology. *Field methods* , 13 (4), 329-352.

Michelle. (2016, February 21). *Uber Driver Killed 6 people in Michigan*. Retrieved 2020, from Twitter:

https://twitter.com/Sloan0313/status/701461237687832577?cxt=HKwWgsC2ge_Ri7wTAAAA

Morgan, R. (2017). *Uber settles Federal Probe over 'God View' Spy Software*. Retrieved 2020, from NY Post: <https://nypost.com/2017/08/15/uber-settles-federal-probe-over-god-view-spy-software/>

Newcomer, E. (2017, February). *In Video, Uber CEO Argues with Driver over Falling Fares*. Retrieved 2020, from Bloomberg: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-28/in-video-uber-ceo-argues-with-driver-over-falling-fares>

Nguyen, T. (2019). *Uber Wants to Redeem Itself. Does the Public Even Care?* Retrieved 2020, from Vox: <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2019/9/5/20849632/uber-public-relations-crisis-qanda>

N'jadaka. (2017, March 1). *TechOso*. Retrieved 2020, from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/TechOso79/status/836718072962695169>

NYTW. (2017, January 28). *NY Taxi Workers*. Retrieved 2020, from Twitter: https://twitter.com/NYTW/status/825463758709518337?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E825463758709518337%7Ctwgr%5Eshare_3&ref_url=https%3A

%2F%2Fwww.theguardian.com%2Ftechnology%2F2017%2Fjan%2F30%2Fdeleteuber-how-social-media-turned-on-u

Oudegaard, D. (2014, November 19). *Uber God View App*. Retrieved 2020, from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/dodegaard/status/535045050078859264>

Rushe, D. (2014). *Uber Sued by Family of Six Year Old Killed in in San Francisco Crash*. Retrieved from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/27/uber-sued-family-six-year-old-killed-crash-san-francisco>

Seawright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options. *Political Research Quarterly* , 61 (2), 294-308.

Shear, M. D., & Cooper, H. (2017). *Trump Bars Refugees of 7 Muslim Countries*. Retrieved 2020, from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/us/politics/trump-syrian-refugees.html>

Smith, A. (2014). *University of Stirling*. Retrieved 2019, from A qualitative multiple case study investigating information exchange at lung cancer consultations: <https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/bitstream/1893/21690/1/Allison%20Smith%20DN%20Thesis.pdf>

Smith, D., & Eliot, D. (2007). Exploring the Barriers to Learning from Crisis: Organizational Learning and Crisis. *Management Learning* , 38 (5), 519-538.

Smith, M. (2019). *Former Uber Driver Pleads Guilty to Killing 6 in Michigan Shooting Rampage*. Retrieved 2020, from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/07/us/uber-driver-murder-trial.html#:~:text=A%20Michigan%20Uber%20driver%20accused,the%20Kalamazoo%20area%20on%20Feb.>

Solon, O. (2017). *Uber Fires More Than 20 Employees After Sexual Harassment Investigation*. Retrieved 2020, from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jun/06/uber-fires-employees-sexual-harassment-investigation>

Streitfeld, D. (2014). *Uber and a Child's Death*. Retrieved 2020, from Bits Blog NY Times: <https://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/01/27/uber-and-a-childs-death/>

The Guardian. (2017). *Uber Associate Resigns after Failure to Disclose Previous Sexual Harassment Claim*. Retrieved 2020, from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/feb/27/uber-executive-resigns-sexual-harassment-google>

The New York Times. (1991). *Saturn Cars Being Recalled for Seat Defect*. Retrieved 2020, from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/02/14/business/saturn-cars-being-recalled-for-seat-defect.html#:~:text=The%20infant%20Saturn%20division%20of,in%20the%20two%20front%20seats.&text=Bruce%20MacDonald%2C%20Saturn's%20vice%20president,recall%20would%20affect%201%2>

TwinCitiesChick. (2017, February 20). *I'm not #onhere for your entertainment*. Retrieved 2020, from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/TwinCitiesChick/status/833546502526136320>

UMSL. (2019). *Qualitative Research Designs: Comparison of Qualitative and Quantitative Research*. Retrieved 2019, from UMSL: University of Missouri-St.Louis: <http://www.umsl.edu/~lindquists/qualdsgn.html>

Wired. (2017). *A Short History of the Many Many Ways Uber Screwed Up*. Retrieved 2020, from Wired: <https://www.wired.com/story/timeline-uber-crises/>

Wong, J. C. (2017, March). *Uber CEO Travis Kalanick Caught on Tape Arguing with Driver about Fares*. Retrieved 2020, from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/feb/28/uber-ceo-travis-kalanick-driver-argument-video-fare-prices>

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Illustrated ed., Vol. 5). Sage Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Vol. 5). Sage .