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Clean Diesel and Dirty Scandal

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Abstract

In 2015 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency revealed that German car manufacturer Volkswagen had illegally installed software to produce fake NOx-emissions results. VW was faced with a historic scandal and was forced to restore the brands' image, whilst the media heavily scrutinised the transgression. However, unlike other corporate scandals caused by intentional wrongdoing, the crisis, coined dieselpgate, did not centre around Volkswagen alone. Instead, the attention shifted from one company to the entire German automotive industry, which in the ensuing three years became implicated in an illegal emissions tampering scandal. This study aims to analyse which crisis communication strategy was adopted by Volkswagen in response to the dieselpgate scandal and how the German news media framed VW's role. Furthermore, since the scandal shifted from a single company to an industry-wide crisis, this contribution also aims to establish whether the German news media reframed the crisis as an industry-wide phenomenon in 2018. Building on Situational Crisis Communication Theory and media framing, this contribution performed a content analysis on 169 press releases and news articles derived from Volkswagen, and three popular German newspapers. It was concluded that Volkswagen applied a combination of ingratiation, scapegoat and regret strategies which were subsequently critically framed by the German media in 2015 through the economic, morality and attribution of responsibility frame. The results also show that the dieselpgate was reframed in 2018 as an industry-wide scandal where the conflict, morality and attribution of responsibility frame were most dominant.

Key Words: Crisis Communication; Intra-Industry Crisis; Dieselpgate; Media Frames.

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List of Abbreviations

AG	Aktiengesellschaft (corporation)
BMVI	Bundesministerium für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur (Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure)
CSU	Christliche-Soziale Union (Christian Social Union)
DIHK	Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag (German Chamber of Industry and Trade)
DUH	Deutsche Umwelthilfe (German Environmental Relief)
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FDA	Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party)
ICCT	International Council of Clean Transportation
KBA	Kraftfahrtbundesamt (Federal Motor Vehicle and Transport Authority)
NOx	Nitrogen Oxide
SCCT	Situational Crisis Communication Theory
TDI	Turbocharged Direct Injection
TÜV	Technischer Überwachungsverein (Technical Inspection Agency)
U.S.	United States
UBA	Umwelt Bundesamt (Environment Agency)
VW	Volkswagen

1 Introduction

In the summer of 2007, German car manufacturer, Volkswagen (VW), introduced a new diesel motor (EA 189) in Europe and the United States (U.S.). In an attempt to convince diesel-sceptic Americans to purchase VW diesel cars, the motors were marketed as “Clean Diesel” engines (Breitinger, 2018). Eight years later, in September 2015, the “Clean Diesel” marketing success quickly turned into a dirty scandal when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) discovered that VW had rigged the vehicles’ computers to display false emission results. The so-called ‘clean’ diesel motor was producing an illegal level of nitrogen oxide (NOx) (Cieschinger, Kröger, & Niesen, 2016). The scandal quickly crossed the Atlantic to Europe, where in Germany 2.8 million VW diesel cars were affected by the manipulation. The scandal was coined ‘dieselgate’ and Volkswagen announced a loss of 1.7 billion euros in the first quarter of 2016 (Volkswagen AG, 2016). However, the popular German car manufacturer was not the only one in the industry to have proverbially gotten its hands dirty. Reports surfaced in 2018 which showed that BMW had tampered with its software in a similar way, despite the car manufacturer positioning itself as an innocent party in the ongoing diesel scandal. The Munich-based carmaker admitted to “irregularities” in its emissions software and was swiftly implicated in the dieselgate crisis (Traufetter, 2018). In May of the same year, German Mercedes producer, Daimler, who had also played the role of the innocent, soon followed its industry colleagues and was implicated by the *Bundesministerium für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur* (BMVI) (German Federal Ministry of Transport) (Simpson, 2018) What started as a single organisation’s crisis in 2015, rapidly evolved into one of the largest intra-industry crises in modern history. Three of the largest and most profitable car manufacturers in the world grappled with the financial and reputational consequences (Breitinger, 2018; Der Spiegel, 2019; Kunde, 2020).

Such organisational wrongdoing has been a frequent topic of research since the early stages of management and organisational literature. Public and academic interest regarding such unethical company behaviour has continued to increase in recent years (Diestre & Rajagopalan, 2014; Gabbioneta, Greenwood, Mazzola, & Minoja, 2013; Paruchuri & Misangyi, 2015). A newer perspective has emerged on corporate wrongdoing and suggests it be conceived as socially constructed (Greve, Palmer, & Pozner, 2010; Palmer, 2012). This perspective states that “wrongdoing is the result of a two-way interaction between organisations and socio-control agents” (Clemente & Gabbioneta, 2017, p. 287). Such socio-control agents have the role of defining ethical, legal, and socially acceptable behaviours. These

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agents include the state and related organisations, which have direct sanctioning power over companies who step over these lines. However, other non-state socio-control agents exist that can affect the reputation and image of the responsible organisations, thereby inflicting indirect economic or social costs. The media represents arguably the most powerful example of the latter agents (An & Gower, 2009, p. 107; Clemente & Gabbioneta, 2017, p. 288).

The role of the media is vital during and after a crisis caused by unethical wrongdoing for two reasons. Firstly, the media acts as the main publicist of the transgression as it can choose to make the misbehaviour known to the general population. Secondly, the media can control the narrative and thereby the public's perception of the wrongdoing by applying frames (Clemente & Gabbioneta, 2017, p. 287). Media frames are a powerful tool that can help shape public opinion and define problems (An & Gower, 2009, p. 107). Consistent with the constructivist approach, an action or behaviour becomes a violation if it is perceived as such. Media framing plays a key role in the social construction thereof, even if other control-agents, like the state, do not react to it (Greve, Palmer, & Pozner, 2010, pp. 56-57). The influence of media framing on perception is particularly evident in cases of corporate crises caused by unethical company behaviour (Jensen, 2006, p. 102). Corporate crises are often highly mediated events that lead to negative publicity which in turn can cause significant damage to the company's reputation and brand image (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2000, p. 232).

However, since the dieselgate did not solely concern one company but developed into an intra-industry crisis and was caused by intentional unethical corporate behaviour rather than an unforeseeable accident, it constitutes an under-researched domain. Although Zou, Zeng & Zhang (2015) coined 'intra-industry effects', they do not provide insight into how the phenomenon works with regards to a scandal such as the dieselgate. Namely, the impact of intentional intra-industry crises on crisis management and the media framing. Given that Volkswagen, which is often seen as one of the flagships of the German economy, was the first to receive media scrutiny before the scandal evolved into an intra-industry crisis, the following research questions arise:

RQ1: What crisis communication strategy was adopted by Volkswagen as an initial response to the dieselgate scandal and did Volkswagen refer to others in the industry in their attempt to diminish blame?

RQ2: How did the German news media frame Volkswagen's role in the dieselgate?

RQ3: To what extent did the German news media reframe dieselgate as an industry-wide crisis in 2018, and did they distinguish among competitors?

To respond to the research questions, this contribution first discusses previous research in the field of crisis communication and media framing. Second, it lays out the methodology used to gather and analyse the data of press releases and newspaper articles. Third, it provides insight into Volkswagen as a brand and the industry-wide dieselgate crisis. This is followed by the results of the content analysis and a discussion of the findings. Finally, this contribution details what can be learned from the case with regards to the implication for crisis communication theory.

1.1 Academic and Social Relevance

Dieselgate has had a harrowing effect both economically and socially on German car manufacturers and their stakeholders, and is still on-going with the affected companies projecting further losses in 2020 (Dohmen & Hawranek, 2017; Jung & Preuss, 2020). Given the grave economic impact of such crises on companies and their stakeholders, corporate crisis management and the formulation of crisis communication strategies constitute growing lucrative industries and have gradually been included in the portfolios of large consulting firms such as PwC and McKinsey (McKinsey & Company, 2020; PwC Netherlands, 2019). Furthermore, with the increased importance of corporate compliance, social responsibility and accountability, the study of communications of crises caused by intentional unethical company behaviour fit in with the current debate of corporate crisis management. Since the dieselgate scandal did not only concern one company but impacted the entire German car industry, there is evidence of a knock-on effect for the German economy, with costs estimated at 1.5 billion euros. Furthermore, the car manufacturers' global reputation has been tarnished by the scandal (Preuss, 2020). Therefore, it is socially relevant to study this corporate scandal to gain insight into best practices from the corporations and the media's framing of the crisis.

Its academic relevance can be drawn from the fact that, although crisis communication and corporate crisis management have received scholarly attention in recent years, the influence of intra-industry scandals on crisis communication strategies and media framing is under-researched. Most common crisis communication theories, such as Benoit's (1997) Image Repair Theory, and Coombs' (1995) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), neglect to include intra-industry contagion insights into their theoretical frameworks. Crisis communication strategies primarily focus on one single organisation and discuss the importance of that single company's previous behaviour and reaction to the crisis. Rather than addressing the necessary measures of a crisis that encompasses an entire industry. Furthermore, most contributions have focused on either unintentional external incident (such

as faux-pas) or unintentional internal happenings (such as accidents) (Coombs, 2004a). It appears no-one has addressed an internal intentional transgression, where multiple parties within the accused organisations were aware of their wrongdoing.

Moreover, since the general public relies on the media for information during a crisis, media framing plays a pivotal role in shaping the stakeholder perception of a scandal. Despite this vital media role in the social construction of an organisational crisis, few studies in crisis management and crisis communication have addressed the role of media framing in influencing public perception of an intra-industry crisis. Therefore, although existing literature discusses the importance of timely crisis communication, and lays out various response strategies, few contributions have discussed the portrayal of an intra-industry crisis in the media and the effect on the initial wrongdoer.

Combining results from previous research, this paper builds on Coombs' (1995) SCCT but includes insights from constructivist news frame analysis as suggested by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) (Coombs, 1995; Coombs, 2004a; Coombs, 2007; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). By including the intra-industry aspect in these theoretical frameworks, this thesis will provide a logical and future-oriented continuation of previous research on crisis communication and media framing. In analysing this on-going crisis and the under-researched phenomenon of the intra-industry effect in crisis management and media framing, this paper holds both academic and social relevance and intends to close the gap in the literature on intentional intra-industry scandals and provide learnings for companies and their stakeholders.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Corporate Crisis Communication

A corporate crisis can be defined as “an event that is an unpredictable, major threat that can harm the organisation, industry, or stakeholders if handled improperly” (Coombs, 1999, p. 2). In the field of Crisis and Security Management, corporate crisis communication constitutes a sub-discipline of crisis management. Scholarly debate on the topics of crisis communication and image restoration has steadily increased since the mid-1990s (Benoit, 1997; Bradford & Garrett, 1995; Dawar & Pillutla, 2000; Millar & Heath, 2004). Researchers such as Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (2000) have laid their focus on pre-crisis communication and have concluded that ignorance of potential crisis triggers leads to the biggest loss of legitimacy. Heath and Miller (2004), Benoit (1997), and Coombs and Holladay (2010) have analysed different crisis response strategies and their impact on image restoration. Whilst scholars such

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as Dean (2004), and Dawar and Pillutla (2000) have specifically studied how consumers respond to crises and the lasting effects of crises on a brand image.

Although corporate reputation is usually considered an intangible asset, changes in reputation have far-reaching financial implications (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 19). According to research conducted by Davies et al. (2003), a company's image can influence the generation of consumers, the attraction of investors, the perception of employability, media coverage and even the commentary of financial analysts. Therefore, as the definition states, a poorly handled crisis can harm the corporation's stock value, sales, market share and purchasing power (Davies et al., 2003, p. 288). In particular, crises caused by unethical company behaviour results in significantly negative backlash from stakeholders (Bradford & Garrett, 1995, p. 880).

A common characteristic of crises is a high level of unpredictability, and according to Veil and Odjeda (2010) disseminating information promptly is key to hampering rumours being widely distributed. If a company does not respond to the crisis on time, misinformation and gossip will dominate the crisis discourse and ultimately exacerbate the situation. Following Veil and Odjeda's assessment (2010), Stephens and Malone (2009) state that it is vital for the organisation to swiftly determine which communication strategy best suits the situation and its stakeholders. According to Coombs (1999), the communication strategy employed by a company during and after a crisis determines the long-term effects of the critical situation. To control the narrative and hamper further escalation of the crisis, many scholarly contributions emphasise the importance of communication as a vital crisis management tool (Benoit, 2018; Glantz & Benoit, 2017). In particular, limiting negative media coverage and managing the public's perception (Ritchie, Dorell, Miller, & Miller, 2004, p. 199).

Nijkraake et al. (2014) argue that corporate "crisis communication managers may try to frame the crisis in such a way that reputational damage to the organisation should be minimised" (Nijkraake, Gosselt, & Gutteling, 2014, p. 81). This framing refers to the act of highlighting or emphasising specific pieces of information in communication about a topic to elevate them in importance. The manner in which such a message is framed guides and shapes how people perceive and define issues, the causes thereof, the attribution of responsibility, and the solutions to the issue at hand (Cooper, 2002, p. 55). Therefore, Coombs (1999) argues that the creation of frames for understanding and providing explanatory definitions are crucial for effective crisis communication since they indicate how stakeholders should interpret the crisis at hand (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, p. 174). The organisation in crisis can frame the situation through news or press releases, video messages and social media postings. Within such external

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organisational communications, the company can emphasise specific circumstances and can offer their interpretation of the scandal or event (Gilpin, 2008). The aim being for these frames to be carried into various media channels and thereby reach a much larger audience.

Multiple scholars have addressed these crisis communication frames/strategies and their impact on corporate images (Benoit, 1997; Dean, 2004; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Fearn-Banks, 2017). Benoit (1997) identified five main frames companies can employ to rebuild their image when faced with a crisis. Within his theory of image restoration, these strategies include evading responsibility, denial, corrective action, reducing offensiveness and mortification (Benoit, 1997, p. 178). Along a similar line, Coombs and his colleagues developed the so-called Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) in 1995. SCCT assumes that an organisation's reputation, meaning how it is perceived by the public and its stakeholders, is a valuable resource that comes under threat during a crisis. The emphasis is laid on the audience, and the theory aims to analyse how people perceive crises, the organisations' response to them and the stakeholder reactions to the organisations in crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 68).

Crisis responsibility lies at the core of the SCCT. According to Coombs and Holladay (2010), the attribution of crisis responsibility has a significant impact on how stakeholders perceive an organisation's reputation during and after the crisis and influences the stakeholders' behavioural and affective responses to said organisation thereafter. To help identify crisis responsibility factors, SSCT suggests a two-step process. Firstly, one must determine which frame is being used by the stakeholders to categorise the process. The theory lays out three crisis types, namely *accident* that describes a minimal crisis responsibility or threat, *victim* with refers to a low crisis responsibility or threat, and *intentional* that outlines a strong crisis responsibility or threat (Coombs, 2007, p. 167). Once one has determined the crisis frame, Coombs (1995) suggests that one is to establish whether intensifying factors exist that would increase the organisation's perceived crisis responsibility.

Within SCCT, Coombs (1995) has identified two factors, namely the crisis history and the organisation's prior reputation, that intensify crisis threats. Crisis history refers to prior crises the organisation may have faced, as previous issues and scandals may result in a pattern of "bad behaviour", to which the audience would attribute a greater crisis responsibility. Prior reputation refers to how well or poorly stakeholders have been treated by the organisation in the past, thus the state of the relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders (Coombs, 2006, p. 255). According to the SCCT, a negative prior reputation increases the perceived crisis responsibility in comparison to organisations whose stakeholders hold them in

high regard or is previously unknown. However, SCCT does not only regard reputation as a crisis communication outcome, but it also includes behavioural intentions (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 68). According to Coombs and Holladay (2010) attributions of responsibility can lead to specific effects or emotional reactions, such as anger, sympathy, schadenfreude (taking joy in the failings of others). The strongest link, however, was found between crisis responsibility and anger, which unsurprisingly increases with crisis responsibility attributions. Behavioural intentions refer to the stakeholders' behaviour after the crisis, such as negative word-of-mouth and purchase intentions (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 69). Negative word-of-mouth is particularly damaging, with the vast development of technology, the internet, and the general digitalisation of daily life. Companies are no longer only accountable for their mistakes and crises offline, but also online in the cybersphere. The introduction of social media channels, such as Twitter and Facebook, have created platforms for stakeholders to voice their opinions and perceptions of company failings and their reactions to crises (Glantz & Benoit, 2017, pp. 171-172). If the unethical behaviour of companies is perceived to be significant, corporate crises can potentially swiftly become viral topics, with stakeholder messages being shared millionfold (Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011, pp. 24-25).

Coombs (2015) has mapped the variables of crisis responsibility, crisis history, prior reputation, organisational reputation, crisis response strategies, affect, organisational reputation and behavioural intentions into a model to visually represent SCCT. The model in *Figure 1* depicts how the variables SCCT identifies interact and ultimately how the crisis influences behavioural intentions of the organisation's stakeholders.

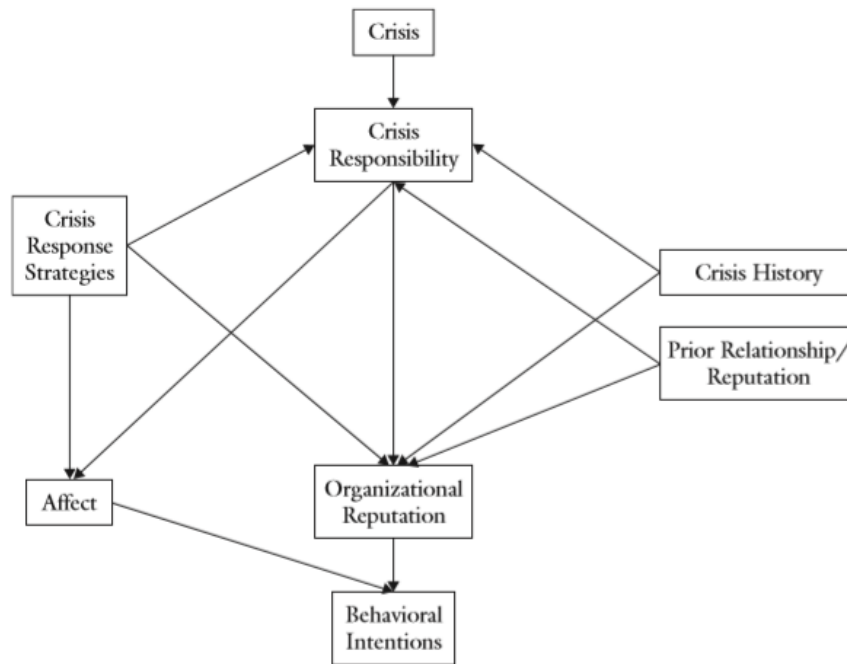


Figure 1 - Coombs' (2010) Situational Crisis Communication Theory Model

Crisis managers use the threat level diagnosis to determine an appropriate crisis communication response. SCCT divides such crisis response strategies into the three categories of deny, diminish, and rebuild, and one supplementing strategy, entitled reinforcing (Coombs, 2004a, p. 270). The strategy of denial attempts to prove that the organisation in question is not responsible for the crisis, either by shifting the blame to another party or by dismissing the claims or accusations of responsibility. The diminishing strategy seeks to reduce the perceived severity of the crisis and minimise the organisation's crisis responsibility. The rebuild strategy seeks to improve the organisation's reputation through the means of compensation and apologies. Alongside the above-mentioned strategies, reinforcing strategies are applied additionally to try to change the perception of the organisation by bolstering past achievements, and/or ingratiation by praising others (Coombs, 2004b, pp. 270-272).

In conclusion, previous studies have highlighted the importance of crisis communication as a tool to restore the brand image and to influence stakeholder crisis perception by providing a credible crisis frame. Building on these aspects, various crisis communication theories, such as SCCT, layout potential image restoration approaches with a focus on a single company in crisis.

2.2 Media Coverage of Crises

Stakeholders receive most of their information on a corporate crisis via the news media instead of the "horse's mouth", the corporation itself. This frequently allows the media to take the

position of the final arbiter of the applied crisis frames. Whilst the affected organisation aims to repair the damaged reputation, the main goal of mass media is to inform and entertain the public (Coombs, 2007, pp. 165-166; McCoombs, 1977, p. 92). Although the media do not create crises, they can exert significant influence over the public's perception, for example, by moving the crisis to centre stage or leaving it out of public view by not reporting on the situation's development (Nelkin, 1988, p. 348). By deliberately covering specific issues and events, the media additionally can set the public discussion agenda (Barnes, Hanson, Novilla, Meacham, & McIntyre, 2006, p. 608). Therefore, Carroll & McCombs (2003) argue that journalists' decisions can have a significant impact on their audience's perception of the world. Based on the different aims and interests of an organisation in crisis and journalists, it is plausible to assume that corporate communication and media coverage differ in the way they communicate about the crisis.

The content of media publications is characterised by news frames. Much like crisis communication frames, news frames can affect people's perception of issues (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997, p. 498). Nijkraake et al. (2014) state that "by prompting the activation of certain constructs at the expense of others, news frames can directly influence what enters the minds of audience members" (Nijkraake, Gosselt, & Gutteling, 2014, p. 81). In 1992, scholars Neuman, Just and Cringler identified four main news frames, namely conflict, morality, economic conflict, and human impact (Neumann, Just, & Cringler, 1992, pp. 68-70). Upon conducting a detailed content analysis of the framing of European politics in press and television news, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) extended these four frames to include the responsibility frame, which is used to hold a party (e.g. the CEO of a company or a government body) responsible for the cause of the crisis and adapted the human-impact frame into the human-interest frame, which in their study refers to a personal, emotional portrayal of the events. The application of these two frames can, however, result in the stimulation of a negative perception and attitude of the public towards the crisis and the organisation accused of the wrongdoing (An & Gower, 2009, p. 110). A publication with a conflict frame emphasizes the conflict between organisations, groups or individuals and is said to be commonly used in news media (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, pp. 95-96; Neumann, Just, & Cringler, 1992, pp. 67-68). The conflict frame is expected to correlate with a higher attribution of blame to the company in question. Whilst the economic-consequences frame discusses an issue in the light of financial consequences it may have on individuals, organisations, or regions. Naturally, if a crisis involves the financial sector or is considered a burden to the economy, the economic-consequences frame is more dominant in the news. The morality frame is present when news

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stories are placed in the context of norms and values and is usually applied indirectly through inference or quotations (Neumann, Just, & Cringler, 1992, p. 68).

Multiple scholars have argued that the presence of these news frames triggers specific responses and thoughts amongst the public (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Cho & Gower, 2006; de Vreese, 2004; Iyengar, 1987; Valkenburg, Semetko, & de Vreese, 1999). Research conducted by Cho and Gower (2006) concludes that a human-interest frame provokes an emotional response by exaggerating the evaluation of a crisis. Meanwhile, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) suggest that a story in which winners and losers of a particular situation are presented under the conflict frame will activate a cynical response from the public. Building on this view, de Vreese (2004) adds that news publications emphasise the conflict frame by including opposing points of view in their reporting. De Vreese (2004) also concurs with Valkenburg et al.'s (1999) statement that a story with an economic consequence frame will trigger responses concerning financial implications, costs, and benefits of relevant actors. Finally, Iyengar's (1987) research on news stories frames in term of responsibility provide the public with an evaluation of who is responsible for the crisis.

Given the important role of the media during a crisis, framing analysis of crisis media coverage has generated more academic attention in recent years (An & Gower, 2009; Kuttschreuter, Gutteling, & de Hond, 2011; Valentini & Romenti, 2011). In Brunken's 2006 research on Hurricane Katrina, the human-interest frame is most used, followed closely by the conflict and responsibility frame. However, in the weeks following the natural disaster, the human-interest frame was replaced by the economic-consequences frame, the responsibility frame, and the morality frame, as the interest of the reporters shifted to highlighting new issues arising from the crisis aftermath. In their analysis of the Alitalia's accidents pre-privatisation of 2008, scholars Valentini and Romenti (2011) found that the economic consequences frame was most commonly applied. Whilst, in Kuttschreuter et al.'s (2011) frame analysis of the explosion of the fireworks facility that resulted in the death of twenty-three people yielded that the responsibility frame was the most dominant whilst the morality frame was completely excluded. An and Gower (2009) conducted an extensive media analysis of twenty-five corporate crises and concluded that when the crisis was perceived as preventable the responsibility, conflict and morality frame were most used. Whilst when the crises were accidents the stories were predominantly framed with a human-interest or economic consequences frame.

In conclusion, these studies reveal that media coverage of crises is more likely to be framed in terms of conflict or responsibility, closely followed by human-interest and economic

consequences, than the morality frame. Furthermore, the media's preferential frame is highly dependent on the level of responsibility attributed to the organisation in question. In other words, different news frames can be triggered by differences in the type of crisis or based on the focus of the author/newspaper.

2.3 Competing Frames

Nijkraake et al. (2014) argue that "by presenting their interpretation of an issue, organisations frame their communications while news media participate in the process by accepting and modifying the frames presented to them (Nijkraake, Gosselt, & Gutteling, 2014, p. 82). However, to keep a story relevant and 'fresh', the media often reframes an event by highlighting different aspects (McCoombs, 2004, p. 21). This may also occur because the journalists did not have sufficient information on the crisis during their initial reporting and may, therefore, rely more heavily on the details provided by the company in question (Nijkraake, Gosselt, & Gutteling, 2014, p. 82). However, in their ensuing search for facts, journalists may opt to quote experts or government officials, as the organisation's press releases and statements may be met with scepticism (Miller & Riechert, 2000). Consequently, the public may be exposed to multiple frames within one publication, which can result in the audience being subject to competing arguments (Edy & Meirick, 2007, p. 134; Hansen, 2007, p. 388). Coombs (2007) has defined this process as "competing frames". When the audience is confronted with competing accounts, they will construct an individual narrative that seems the most logical to them (Edy & Meirick, 2007, p. 135). In response to this phenomenon, Coombs (2007) argues that crisis managers may use this to their advantage by either reinforcing an existing frame or establishing a new one. Meanwhile, news media may, in turn, reject the corporation's construction and proceed with a different frame. Earlier studies, such as Iyengar's publication in 1987, have discussed the impact of single framing on audience opinion and counter-framing, the act of offering an alternative frame. On this subject, Druckman (2004) conducted an experimental study and found that when one presents different frames to an audience (i.e. starting with the original issue and subsequently reframing the problem with an opposing news frame), the effects of framing appear neither particularly robust nor pervasive.

In conclusion, journalists may reframe a crisis to keep the interest of their readers or as new information comes to light. The media may also choose to reject the corporation's crisis communication frame and offer a counter-frame to the public. It is up to the stakeholders to then decide which frames appear most credible.

2.4 Intra-Industry Contagion

Coombs clearly states that “SCCT is still developing as a theory” and therefore does not account for all organisational crises (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 41). Although Coombs has reflected on the SCCT model in recent years, it still neglects to include the complexities of an intra-industry crisis where multiple organisations are grappling with the fallout of the same scandal simultaneously (Coombs, 2016). According to Zou, Zeng and Zhang (2015), the intra-industry contagion effect “refers to how information released on one firm affect other firms in the same industry” (Zou, Zeng, & Zhang, 2015). The researchers, Lang and Stulz (1992), who studied this phenomenon, detail two types of intra-industry effects, namely the competitive effect and the contagion effect. The competitive effect is a wealth effect, meaning that people increase their spending as the value of assets rise, attributed to wealth redistribution among companies in the same industry (Lang & Stulz, 1992, pp. 45-46). Meaning when an event or crisis is attributed to one company alone, the competitors benefit from the wrongdoer’s bad reputation as consumers switch to the competitors instead. Whilst the contagion effect is a wealth effect that cannot be attributed to such a wealth redistribution. In the contagion effect competitors in the same industry experience a similar crisis and thereby a similar market effect as the initial company. (Lang & Stulz, 1992, pp. 46-47). When an announcement of wrongdoing or an accident uncovers something common in the industry, it results in a contagion effect, shifting the competitions’ stock price in the same direction as the initial company (Zou, Zeng, & Zhang, 2015, p. 429). Many corporate events have been said to have intra-industry effects, such as earning restatements, corporate liquidations, stock repurchases, bankruptcy announcements, and dividend reduction announcements (Akhigbe & Madura, 2006; Erwin & Miller, 2004; Impson, 2005; Lang & Stulz, 1992; Patten, 1992; Xu, Najadan, & Ziegenfuss, 2006). However, there appear to only be an extremely limited amount of studies focused on an intra-industry crisis caused by intentional wrongdoing.

This contribution wishes to close the gap in the literature on intra-industry crises by analysing a current large-scale industry-wide crisis. Specifically looking at the impact of the intra-industry scandal on the initial wrongdoer’s crisis management strategy and the media framing of the situation. To do so, Volkswagen’s initial crisis communication response is analysed through the lens of SCCT, and the 2015 news media reports when the crisis centred solely around Volkswagen are evaluated. Followed by an analysis of German news articles from 2018 when the crisis truly became seen as an intra-industry scandal. By reviewing both timeframes, it is possible to analyse how an intra-industry scandal develops and how news frames might change over the course of the crisis.

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It is expected that Volkswagen will use a combination of SCCT concern and compassion strategies to frame the crisis and salvage its reputation. These two strategies are commonly used as they allow the affected organisation to rebuild its reputation without admitting guilt. By offering a form of compensation and showing that one feels bad for the stakeholder base, the company can aim to restore its initial positive branding. Furthermore, it will not diminish the blame by referring to other companies in the initial stage of the crisis. Instead, VW will try to minimise the damage with corrective action and avoid involving other entities. In response to research question two, the media, reporting on dieselpgate in 2015, is first expected to primarily apply a combination of the conflict and economic frames, as the crisis had a major impact both financially on Volkswagen and the German economy. However, since the shift to the intra-industry did not occur until 2018, this thesis expects that the media will solely frame Volkswagen as the responsible party and disregard any other manufacturers. In the analysis of 2018, it is expected that news media will reframe the scandal and shift its focus from Volkswagen to the entire industry as more information comes to light about the manipulation of other car manufacturers. The dominant frame used by the media to portray the industry-wide scandal will be the attribution of responsibility frame, as the media will assign blame to the automotive industry as a whole for conspiring to trick consumers into buying diesel motors.

3 Method

Through the method of content analysis, firstly the crisis communication strategy of Volkswagen is analysed based on their corporate communications. Secondly, the German media coverage of three of the most well-read mainstream newspapers, Der Spiegel, Zeit Online and Süddeutsche Zeitung, is coded with a focus on the crisis response and the applied news frames during the initial outbreak of the scandal in 2015. Thirdly, using the same frames, articles from these newspapers are analysed in spring of 2018, when the scandal shifted from centring around Volkswagen to an industry-wide crisis.

3.1 Data Collection

For the analysis of Volkswagen's crisis communication strategy, documents in the form of press releases (n=17), typed video message content (n=1), and the annual company report (n=1) were used dating from September 22nd 2015 to December 31st 2015. They were chosen from the online Volkswagen Newsroom database based on the above-mentioned time frame and keywords: *Diesel* (diesel), *Abgas* (emissions), *Aufklärung* (clarification), *Strategie* (strategy),

Risiko (risk), and *Reputation* (reputation). For both of the news frame analyses in late 2015 and spring 2018, three of the most read main-stream national German newspapers were chosen, namely *Der Spiegel*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *Die Zeit*. *Der Spiegel*, first published in 1947, has a readership of over 4.6 million readers and is primarily associated with its political reporting and is Germany's most quoted newspaper (*Der Spiegel*, 2020). *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, first published in 1945, has a readership of 1.28 million readers and is a centre-left publication. *Die Zeit*, was first published in 1946, has a readership of over 2 million and is said to have a liberal to left-wing liberal political stance (*Die Zeit*, 2020). However, when reporting on controversial topics, such as the dieselgate it publishes multiple viewpoints and is known to quote a wide variety of sources to provide an unbiased insight into the stories. For the first news frame analysis, articles and essays of these three publications were chosen dating from the timeframe of September 22nd 2015 to December 31st 2015, as crises are usually most noteworthy within the first few weeks of their occurrence (An & Gower, 2009, p. 108). All three of the newspapers have created a landing page with their diesel scandal related publications. The articles were only selected from the pool of 'dieselgate' publications if they include the words *Volkswagen* or *VW*. In total, a sample of 107 articles of *Der Spiegel* (n=25), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (n=23), and *Zeit Online* (n=59), matched the data collection criteria of the publication date and the word references out of the individual 'dieselgate' data pools. This sample size is of sufficient quantity for qualitative research design, given that the scope is exploratory in nature (Creswell, 1998). For the second analyses, 43 articles from *Der Spiegel* (n=15), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (n=20), *Zeit Online* (n=8), in the timeframe from May 1st, 2018, to June 30th, 2018, were chosen. This period constitutes the interval in which the industry shifted from a single crisis to a full-on intra-industry crisis in the media, with accusations of wrongdoing directed at multiple companies, such as Daimler and BMW. The period received a lot of intra-industry related media attention and commentary from German politicians and relevant institutions. It, therefore, provides insights into the extent to which the news media framed the scandal as an intra-industry crisis and if it thereby distinguished between competitors.

3.2 Data Analysis

This thesis employs the method of qualitative content analysis and builds upon the theories of Coombs (2007) and Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) to create an appropriate codebook to aid in the analysis. The method of content analysis is used as it allows researchers to find out about the intended message, and the purpose and effects of the communicated text (Erlingsson &

Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 95). Furthermore, one can make inferences about Volkswagen, the news media and the intended audience. This method allows the researcher to find correlations and patterns and further understand the intentions of individuals, groups, or organisations. The method can also be used to determine the emotional state of individuals and organisations (Kumar, 2011, p. 283). It is exceedingly difficult to gain access to high-level executives at organisations, such as VW, or contact journalists responsible for reporting on such issues. However, content analysis allows an unobtrusive data collection without the interaction or direct involvement of the studied parties. Furthermore, given that content analysis follows a more systematic and structured approach, it can be recreated more easily by other researchers, thereby increasing reliability (Columbia University, 2019). Therefore, it is the best-suited research method to respond to the research questions of this thesis, especially with regards to analysing different frames that may have been applied by Volkswagen and the news media. However, besides these clear advantages, the process of analysing and coding the texts is highly time-consuming, which leads to this thesis choosing a narrower timeframe to make the sample both large enough to yield substantial results but confined enough for the scope of this research.

More specifically this research will take the form of conceptual content analysis, within which categories are derived based on Coombs' (1995) SCCT theory for the Volkswagen press release document analysis, and the frames have been categorised based on Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) research (Coombs, 1995; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). The analysis involves counting and quantifying the presence of the selected categories. The level of analysis are phrases that correspond with the allocated indicators. The codes are considered based on the existence of the concept (Columbia University, 2019). Meaning if Volkswagen, for example, chose to apologise in one single statement, the apology is still marked up as belonging to the apology category and will be considered in the analysis of the crisis communication strategy. Furthermore, the indicators of the codes have been chosen based on the implication rather than only specific words belonging to a category. This means that, for example, the apology category is coded not only when Volkswagen explicitly used the word in a phrase such as 'we apologise', but also when an apology is implied, such as "we hope you can forgive us".

To measure the extent to which certain crisis communication strategies were used in Volkswagen's press releases from September 21st to the end of 2015, indicators were derived from Coombs' (1995) SCCT theory. Based on the definition provided by the SCCT, indicators are chosen and applied. The unit of meaning that will be focused on is the occurrence of specific words and phrases that correspond with the indicators. The codebook and operationalisation for the crisis communication strategies can be found below in Table 1. Similarly, to measure

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which news frames were applied in 2015 and 2018 in the articles selected from the Süddeutsche Zeitung, Zeit Online and Der Spiegel, codes were derived from the news media frames identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). Each of the news frames was considered as a code and based on the definitions thereof, indicators were chosen. The codebook displaying the relevant operationalised codes and indicators can be found below in Table 2.

Once the coding of both the Volkswagen press releases and the chosen news media samples is complete, the collected data will be examined to find patterns. With the help of frequency analysis, conclusions can be drawn from trends and correlations. The results will be detailed in the results section and a discussion of the findings will elaborate on the interpretation of the findings.

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Table 1
Volkswagen Crisis Communication Codebook

Category	Definition	Indicators
Denial	Management claims there is no crisis.	-If there is denial of the involvement of VW in the crisis. -If VW denies knowledge of the manipulated software. -If VW pretends that the crisis is averted. -If VW contends that the crisis never occurred. -If an individual VW employee denies involvement or wrongdoing. -If VW denies knowledge of wrongdoing.
Scapegoat	Management blames some outside entity for the crisis.	-If there is reference to a third party being guilty of the manipulation other than VW. -If VW fires an employee. -If VW accuses a single entity of the wrongdoing. -If VW searches for a guilty party within the organisation.
Attack the Accuser	Management confronts the group or person claiming that something is wrong.	-If VW attacks its stakeholders (news media, government, supply chain, consumers). -If VW confronts other car manufacturers.
Excuse	Management attempts to minimise crisis responsibility by claiming lack of control over the event or lack of intent to do harm.	-If VW diminishes its actions. -If VW provides an explanation to justify the wrongdoing. -If VW claims the crisis was outside of its control.
Ingratiation	Management praises other stakeholders and/or reminds people of past good works by the organisation.	-If VW makes references to previous achievements. -If VW thanks stakeholders for their part in solving the situation. -If VW praises the actions of employees. -If VW praises the rectification steps taken. -If VW praises government institutions.
Concern	Management expresses concern for victims.	-If VW expresses sympathy for victim. -If VW expresses concern about the effects of the crisis on its stakeholders. -If VW acknowledges problems of victims caused by crisis.
Compassion	Management offers money or other gifts to victims.	-If VW offers gift cards for damage causes. -If VW offers financial compensation to victims for damage caused. If VW offers free services for damage caused. -If VW promises to fix the issue free of charge.
Regret	Management indicates they feel badly about the crisis.	-If VW expresses regret for their actions. -If VW expresses feelings of guilt for actions. -If VW expresses that it wishes to repent for its actions.
Apology	Management accepts full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.	-If VW apologises. -If VW admits and accepts responsibility for the crisis. -If VW asks for its stakeholders' forgiveness for committing the transgression.

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Table 2
Media Frame Codebook

Code	Definition	Indicators
Human-interest Frame	This frame provides an emotional angle or human face to the presentation of the issue, event, or problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -If the article provides a human face on the issue. -If the article employs adjective that generate feelings of sympathy, outrage, sadness, or compassion. -If the article emphasises how entities are affected by the issue. -If the article outlines the personal lives of entities involved.
Conflict Frame	The conflict frame is applied to reflect disagreement amongst relevant individuals, groups, or organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -If the article portrays disagreement between the individual entities. -If the article details one party reproaching another. -If the article contrasts two different sides on the issues. -If the article refers to winners and losers.
Morality Frame	This frame places the problem, event, or issue in the context of morals, religious doctrines, and social prescriptions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -If the article contains a moral message. -If the article refers to God, morality, and other religious doctrines. -If the article describes specific social norms or prescriptions about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.
Economic Frame	This frame displays an event, problem, through the lens of the impact it will have economically on individuals, groups, or institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -If the article mentions financial gains or losses caused by the issue or predicts such in the future. -If the article mentions the costs or expenses involved in the issue. -If the article refers to economic consequences caused by or resulting from the issue.
Attribution of Responsibility Frame	This frame refers to the act of ascribing responsibility for a cause or solution to an individual, group or organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -If article suggests that VW or another entity can alleviate the issue. -If article suggests that VW is to some degree responsible for the issue. -If the article suggests that Daimler is to some degree responsible for the issue. -If the article suggests that BMW is to some degree responsible for the issue. -If the responsibility is denied by a party. -If the story suggests that another entity can be assign responsibility. -If the story suggests the issue requires urgent action.

3.3 Limitations

Crisis communication research is sometimes critiqued on the basis that it neglects to include the constraints placed on managers by their legal and financial departments during crises (Coombs, 2015, p. 147). This contribution considers that the motivations that drive specific crisis communication responses may be the result of legal liability concerns and financial incentives. In an attempt to avoid issues with the internal validity, this research strongly builds upon previous academic contributions on crisis communication strategies (Benoit, 2018; Bradford & Garrett, 1995; Coombs, 2015; Coombs & Holladay, 2010). In particular, the internal validity is increased by using a codebook, based on tested variables and their appropriate indicators provided by Coombs' (1995) and Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) extensive publications has been established, and consistently followed during the process (Coombs, 1999; Coombs, 2015; Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Therefore, although communication and the interpretation of discourse are arguably subjective, this contribution's interpretation of the data builds on the solid foundation of the indicators provided by Coombs' (1995) theory. Through this lens and the detailed attributes of the indicators, one should come to the same conclusion when repeating the research with the same methodology. Furthermore, through content analysis, and the help of peer-reviewed secondary and media sources, the data generated from the primary source analysis should yield the same results when repeated. These factors will aim to strengthen the reliability of the findings. With regards to external validity, issues may arise when one tries to generalise the findings to the wider debate of intra-industry crises and their influence on crisis communication strategies, as communication is very dependent on the social and cultural context. Although the news media analysis is based on German reporting, this contribution strongly believes that the findings reflect the Western perception of the crisis. Since both Coombs' (1995) and Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) theories are aimed at the Western World, the sources were selected that received the most attention during the dieselpgate scandal to ensure that the findings are as generalisable as possible for the Western world. By looking into a large data sample of two specific timeframes this contribution aims to ensure that the data collected stems from varied samples and reflects a larger demographic.

4 A drive-through of the VW Crisis Timeline

Although the news of the rigged vehicle computers did not come to light until late 2015, the beginning of the faked results dates to the late 2000s. In 2007, a different kind of car race began- the race for clean diesel. Since diesel engines were cheaper to produce and diesel oil

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prices were also comparatively low, the car industry saw a chance to remarket diesel as a cheaper and cleaner alternative. Although widely driven across Europe, the U.S., which was known for some of the world's strictest air pollution laws, was sceptical of driving diesel cars (Gardiner, 2019). The car industry had to find a method to rebrand diesel and provide a 'cleaner' version of the disliked engine. In an attempt to purify diesel's bad reputation, Volkswagen was one of the first to introduce so-called turbocharged direct injection (TDI) technology. This technology promised to neutralise some of the nitrogen oxide emissions, thereby providing the premise for the new 'Clean Diesel' marketing ploy (Grescoe, 2016). Daimler and BMW, eager to join the clean diesel marketing scheme, came up with witty advertising slogans such as "Emissions Impossible" and "Diesel has ch-ch-changed" (playing on the 1971 David Bowie song) (Grescoe, 2016). However, the so-called 'clean' diesel now appears to have been a dirty trick. The ingenious TDI technologies that were supposed to hamper NO_x emissions only fulfilled their promise when tested under laboratory conditions. Later it was revealed that this special software was developed to trick the cars NO_x display (Gardiner, 2019).

In fact, in 2007, Bosch, another world-famous German company, was caught up in the illicit affair, as its components supplier branch provided Volkswagen with the necessary software. Despite the usage of the software in cars on the open market being illegal, Volkswagen decides to proceed with installing it in its diesel vehicles (Der Tagesspiegel, 2015). The introduction of Bosch's software in the diesel cars coincided with Martin Winterkorn becoming the CEO of the Wolfsburg corporation. According to the media, a technician, named Heinz-Jakob Neußer, alerted the head of VW's engine development department about possible illegal practices in the measurement of the exhaust fumes in 2011. However, his claims were ignored (NDR, 2018).

Three years later, in 2014, the University of Virginia is tasked by the U.S. research institute International Council of Clean Transportation (ICCT) to test the VW diesel cars on the road. Compared to the indoor testing, the on-road results showed that the VW motors emit up to 40 times more than the allowed amount of noxious nitrogen. Volkswagen brushes off the claims made by the University as deviations between various technical issues and unforeseen conditions of use. Several of the Volkswagen models are recalled for so-called software updates, which are said to have rectified the problem (Breitinger, 2018; Der Spiegel, 2017).

However, in May of 2015 the Californian environmental agency, Carb, conducts additional tests with similarly high nitrogen levels. Carb informs both Volkswagen and EPA of the results (Blinda, 2015). Several technical meetings are rumoured to have taken place

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between the relevant U.S. agencies and Volkswagen. On September 3rd, 2015, Volkswagen admits to Carb and EPA that it has installed manipulation software in its diesel cars. On September 18th, 2015, EPA makes Volkswagen's admission public during an international car exposition. Approximately 480.000 cars are said to have been affected by VW's faked software in the U.S. and the corporation is tasked with the recall of the vehicles (Handelsblatt, 2015).

On September 20th, 2015, Volkswagen CEO Winterkorn apologises to VW customers for the breach of trust in a video message and announces an external investigation into the occurrence. In the video, Winterkorn states: "I formally apologise to our customers, the authorities and the entire public for the misconduct" (Volkswagen, 2015f). A day later, the stock market reflects the international outrage as the VW-share price falls by nineteen percent. This amounts to around fifteen billion euros in lost capital. Furthermore, the German state orders "exact and extensive" tests of all VW diesel models (Der Tagesspiegel, 2015). On September 22nd, Volkswagen reveals that worldwide around eleven million cars contain the manipulated software and vows to invest 6.5 billion euros in improvements. The VW share price falls by another twenty percent in response to this message (Der Tagesspiegel, 2015). A mere five days after EPA's public reveal of VW's transgression, Winterkorn, resigns but states that he is not responsible for any wrongdoing. The public prosecutor's office in Braunschweig receives the first criminal complaints against VW (Handelsblatt, 2015). On September 25th, Porsche CEO, Matthias Müller, becomes Winterkorn's successor as head of the company. The same day, the federal minister of transport, Alexander Dobrindt (Christlich-Soziale Union-CSU Party), announces in front of the *Bundestag* that around 2.8 million cars are affected in Germany. Following the multitude of criminal complaints, the public prosecutor's office in Braunschweig starts a formal investigation against VW's transgression (Der Spiegel, 2017).

On October 4th, Volkswagen makes a grand statement in a one-page newspaper advertising spread that was printed in multiple prominent Sunday newspapers. The headline of the spread reads: "Normally this would have been our advertisement for the 25th anniversary of the reunification". Below the unusual headline, VW stresses that it had planned to thank its customers, employees, and trading partners for their continuous support. However, instead of giving thanks, VW provides a promise that reads "We will do everything in our power to regain your trust" (Der Spiegel, 2017). Two days later, newly appointed CEO Müller announces January 2016 as an optional recall date for the affected vehicles. He further states that all the VW cars should be in order again by the end of 2016. On October 8th, U.S. Volkswagen CEO, Michael Horn, admits to having known about the strategic manipulation since 2014. In Germany, the scandal continues to escalate, as the *Deutsche Umwelthilfe* (DUH-German

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Environmental Relief) threatens the *Kraftfahrtbundesamt* (KBA-Germany's Federal Motor Vehicle and Transport Authority) with a lawsuit contingent on the KBA's decision to merely force Volkswagen to an optional service measure to rectify the issue, rather than ordering VW to recall all of its diesel motors. Braunschweig's public prosecution office searches multiple VW locations in connection with the pending criminal investigation (Der Tagesspiegel, 2015). On October 15th, the DUH's demands are met by the KBA, who decline Volkswagen's optional recall suggestion, and instead enforce a total recall of all the affected diesel vehicles in Germany. Despite, the KBA's measures, the diesel cars have not been banned from use in the country (NDR, 2018). News media reports that around 8.5 million vehicles are affected by the manipulated software in Europe. Ex-VW CEO, Winterkorn is forced to resign his Porsche SE Holding chairman position, which is a subsidiary of the Volkswagen AG. Former Volkswagen CFO, Hans Peter Pötsch, will be taking on this role as of November (Bauchmüller, Ott, & Fromm, 2015).

On October 22nd, Volkswagen's intention to salvage the situation by offering a software update was disappointed by a harsh and damaging reality. Volkswagen is forced to admit that around three million diesel cars in Germany have to receive a new engine to comply with health and safety measures. However, the new engines will take up to a year to create and test, before being released on the market (NDR, 2018). Five days later, Volkswagen continues to make headlines, as the Braunschweig public prosecution office announces formal investigations into specific VW employees, stating that the more they investigated, the more accused turned up. The evidence collected during a raid of the Wolfsburg corporate headquarters allows the investigative team to seize valuable documents and electronic devices. However, Germany was not the only country to file an official complaint, the Spanish constitutional court also started an investigation against the corporation based on the diesel affair's disregard of environmental laws and the illegal obtainment of subsidies for environmentally friendly products (Der Spiegel, 2017).

On November 3rd, the reputational crisis worsens, as Volkswagen further admits to not only having manipulated the emissions test for nitrogen but also having faked the CO₂ emissions results. In response to this announcement, VW CEO Müller vows that there will be an in-depth reconnaissance of the happenings (Handelsblatt, 2015). Meanwhile, VW, Porsche and Audi stop all sales of the controversial three-litre diesel cars in the U.S. Across the Atlantic, the VW executive committee of the supervisory board announces it will hold another meeting to discuss the recent developments. Volkswagen CEO Müller promises "ruthless" investigations into the happenings. A day later, the KBA confirms Volkswagen's statements

on additional trickery of the 1.6-litre engines than the initial nitrogen emission manipulation (NDR, 2018). On November 12th, as predicted, ex-Volkswagen CEO, Winterkorn, is forced to step down as the chairman of the Audi board. That day, Brazil, the first country to house a VW factory abroad, is the next country to follow suit and imposes a fine on the corporation (Der Spiegel, 2017). The South American country's environmental agency charges Volkswagen a total of twelve million euros and forces the German corporation to recall and rectify 17.000 Amarok pick-up trucks. On November 20th, despite initial denial, Volkswagen is forced to admit that the famous three-litre TDI engines also include the unsanctioned emissions software, namely since 2009 (Der Spiegel, 2017).

In December, the German KBA and *Technischer Überwachungsverein* (TÜV-Technical Inspection Agency) publicly blame each other for having disregarded the manipulation instead of investigating the manipulation. Meanwhile, Volkswagen presents its plans for conversion. These stipulate that a software update suffices for the 1.2 and 2-litre engine models, whilst the 1.6-litre engines require more extensive attention, to which the KBA gives VW the green light (NDR, 2018). On December 9th, Volkswagen confidently declares the NOx issues as taken care of and announces in a statement that the suspicion of illegal tampering of current vehicles was not confirmed. However, the KBA and the German transport ministry are hesitant to accept VW's self-assessment and make it clear that they are waiting for results of the investigations conducted by independent testing agencies. The dieselgate scandal which started in late September of 2015, ends the year with a proverbial bang, as reports show that scientific inquiries conducted by the European Commission on diesel vehicles had already flagged suspiciously high nitrogen emission levels in Volkswagen cars. However, the recommendations made by the responsible scientists to inspect and improve these questionable results were followed by neither the German government nor the VW corporation (Der Spiegel, 2017).

In the period highlighted by this chronological account of events, Volkswagen was one of the main topics of interest in both national and international news media. However, their portrayal of events does not necessarily correspond with VW's efforts to rectify the crisis.

5 Results

The results of the coding analysis are discussed separately according to the different research questions. Each section contains a frequency table with the relevant coding results, which from left to right, is divided into the code name, the code frequency, the relative code count percentage, the case count, and the percentage of cases within which the code was present. The

cases refer to the documents used, namely press releases in the first, and newspaper articles in the second and third analyses. Although the case count and percentage of cases are used to determine which frame was most dominant in the three analyses, the code frequency and relative code percentage give insight into how many times a particular code was used. Therefore, if the case percentage of one frame is equal to another, but the code count is higher in the latter, then the latter is more dominant based on the average percentage of the codes used per case. The results of the three content analyses are detailed below.

5.1 Volkswagen Crisis Communication Analysis

The content analysis of the Volkswagen crisis communication strategy during the initial stage of the dieselgate scandal predominantly indicates a combination of the ingratiation, scapegoat, and regret strategies. Besides these three main crisis communication frames, the frequency table, as seen below in Table 3, reveals that denial, concern and compassion strategy traits are also found within the crisis communications of the organisation. Although the apology and excuse strategies were found in less than five cases, it is significant that Volkswagen did opt to apologise to its stakeholders and provide an attempt at excusing their actions by justifying the need for the false software. In the following subsections, the findings for each category are discussed in more detail.

Table 3
Volkswagen Crisis Communication Results

Code	Code Frequency	% Codes	Cases*	% Cases
Ingratiation	41	28%	17	90%
Scapegoat	33	22%	11	58%
Regret	16	11%	10	53%
Denial	9	6%	7	37%
Concern	12	8%	7	37%
Compassion	17	12%	6	32%
Apology	12	8%	4	21%
Excuse	8	5%	3	16%
Attack the Accuser	0	0%	0	0%

*Cases refer to press releases (n=19)

5.1.1 Ingratiation

The findings of the Volkswagen crisis communication content analysis predominantly show that the ingratiation strategy was most used within the initial stage of the crisis. Ninety percent of the cases analysed within the period from the 21st of September to the end of 2015 indicate the

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usage of praise for employees and actions taken, thanks stakeholders including the government, and references to previous achievements. In particular, the Volkswagen press releases thank their employees for their continuous support and good work before and during this scandal and make statements such as: “We would like to thank the board, the works council, the management and all employees of Volkswagen AG and the employees of its affiliated companies and express our particular appreciation for their work in 2015. In these difficult times for Volkswagen, they have all shown great courage and loyalty in supporting the company” (Volkswagen AG, 2015i). Besides thanking the various internal stakeholders, the company also tactically refers to its previous achievements. In a statement within the yearly report, the new CEO, Müller, states: “It is evident that the diesel issue is overshadowing a lot of other matters in these weeks. It is important to me that you know Volkswagen is much more than this crisis. Our Group has qualities that were not lost overnight and on which we can build for the future: strong brands and great vehicles, a high level of technological expertise and innovative strength, our global presence, millions of customers worldwide who remain loyal to us, and a competent workforce that gives its all for precisely these customers” (Volkswagen AG, 2015i). Although less frequent than the reference to previous achievements and praise for internal stakeholders, Volkswagen also praises the rectification action taken by the company to salvage the issue. This is primarily with a reference to “the relentless and complete clarification” of how the diesel manipulation could occur, which Volkswagen vows to stop at “nothing and nobody” to clear up. Although the company acknowledges that it “is a painful process, but there is no alternative”. The organisation emphasises that all that matters to them is the truth (Volkswagen, 2015e).

5.1.2 *Scapegoat*

The second most common crisis strategy employed by Volkswagen is scapegoating. Within the dieselgate related press statements of 2015, there were 33 counts of indicators relating to the scapegoat strategy which amounted to 58 percent of all cases. This took the form of statements that emphasised that the management and board were not involved nor knew of the wrongdoing until it was reported by the EPA. Despite denying the direct involvement of the management and board, the CEO, Martin Winterkorn is said to have chosen to resign and leave the company. A statement made by the supervisory board on his departure states: “With great respect, the members of the presiding committee have taken note of the offer made by the chairman of the executive board, Professor Dr Martin Winterkorn, to resign from his office and to request that his contract be terminated” (Volkswagen, 2015d). Within multiple press releases

Volkswagen, as an organisation removes itself from the wrongdoing by stating that “Volkswagen does not tolerate any violations of the law” and that “the company will face a rigorous review, hold those responsible to account and take the necessary corrective actions” (Volkswagen, 2015l; Volkswagen, 2015c). As the internal investigations at Volkswagen continue, the organisation releases a statement saying that the dieselgate was caused by “individual misconduct and personal failures of individual employees” and announces the termination of several employees. VW’s scapegoat tactic also appears in the 2015 annual report where the actions of the few individuals are explained as follows: “To resolve this conflict of objectives satisfactorily within the constraints of the time and cost targets for the EA189, a group of people, which is still being determined in detail, decided to modify the engine control software at levels below the VW executive board in the area of engine development. With this interference in the software, exhaust gas values were generated at the testing facility which differed significantly from the values generated under real driving conditions” (Volkswagen, 2015a). The conflict of objectives refers to the government regulations imposed on NOx-emissions and the cost of producing a motor that complies with these measures.

5.1.3 *Regret*

Alongside the main crisis communication strategies of ingratiation and scapegoating, regret also plays a significant role in Volkswagen’s framing of the dieselgate events. The indicators for regret were measured in 53 percent of the cases. The wish to repent for their actions is most dominant in this category followed by regret for their actions. Direct mention of regret in the form of a guilty conscience was not found. Two days after the announcement of the intentional falsification of the emissions results, then CEO, Winterkorn releases a press statement expressing his regret: “I am dismayed by what has happened in the past few days” (Volkswagen, 2015f). Indication of the wish to repent was primarily found in Volkswagen’s aim to rectify the issues and ensure that such wrongdoing would not reoccur, as seen in the following statement: “Even in these turbulent days, the Volkswagen Group is fully capable of taking action in every respect. It is up to us, how and when we master the current challenges. To pass this test, we need a major joint effort. And we are all ready for it” (Volkswagen, 2015m). The company’s new CEO, Matthias Müller, further expresses his regret for the dieselgate and promises to repent by saying that “Volkswagen will not rest until we have satisfactorily resolved this issue once and for all and in a manner that is in the interests of our customers” (Volkswagen, 2015m). Dr Herbert Diess, the newly appointed chairman of the board, expresses his plan of action by stating: “We are working extremely hard on a technical

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solution which we will present to our retailers, our customers and the public as soon as possible. The aim is to inform our customers as soon as possible to ensure that their vehicles fully comply with the regulations. I can assure you that Volkswagen will do everything humanly possible to regain the trust of our customers, the dealers and the public” (Volkswagen, 2015b).

5.1.4 *Denial*

Ingratiation, scapegoating, and regret were found to be the most frequently applied frames; however, denial, concern and apology also play a part in VW’s press releases to contain the scandal and repair the brand. The strategy of denial was found in 37 percent of the cases. This took the form of denial of knowledge of the manipulation, rather than denial of the existence of the crisis, since VW admitted from the moment of EPA’s public denunciation that the wrongdoing had occurred. Winterkorn states that as the chairman of the executive board, he assumes responsibility for the irregularities that have become known about the diesel engines. However, he denies personal wrongdoing, by adding: “I do this in the interest of the company, although I am not guilty of any misconduct” (Volkswagen, 2015f). Professor Winterkorn’s statement is later corroborated by a statement made by the chairmen of the supervisory board that reads: “The members of the supervisory board note that Professor Dr Winterkorn did not know about the manipulation of exhaust gas values” (Volkswagen, 2015d). However, this strategy of denial is not solely confined to the ex-CEO, the annual report further refers to the fact that “besides the aforementioned group of persons, at the time the former and present members of the Board of Management of Volkswagen AG at did not know the use of illegal engine management software” (Volkswagen, 2015a).

5.1.5 *Concern*

The application of the concern strategy was found within 37 percent of the cases. One day after the EPA’s accusations of misconduct, ex-CEO Winterkorn expresses his concern for the impact of the diesel scandal and breach of trust to the stakeholders with the message: “This is another reason why we ask for trust on our further way: We will clarify this matter. We are working intensively on the necessary technical solutions. And we will do everything we can to prevent damage to our customers and employees. I give you my word that we will proceed with the greatest possible openness and transparency in all this” (Volkswagen, 2015h). In line with Winterkorn, newly appointed CEO Müller expresses his concerns for affected customers and promises that they are “the top priority” (Volkswagen, 2015g). The statement released in late October further lays out: “Our customers are the heart of everything our 600,000 employees

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around the world do,' he said. He added that Volkswagen was working intensively on effective technical solutions. Implementation will begin in January 2016 in coordination with the Federal Motor Transport Authority” (Volkswagen, 2015g). The organisation stresses that it wishes to avoid any disadvantages for customers, such as possible mobility restrictions, by implementing technical improvements to the affected vehicles.

5.1.6 *Compassion*

32 percent of the cases indicate the use of compassion, which primarily includes Volkswagen’s offer of free services to remove the manipulated software and replace it for the newly developed compliant version. For those vehicles that required additional costly repairs, Volkswagen vows to rectify the issues free of charge. They also promise to extend the service guarantee for affected vehicles that were no longer covered by their regular warranty. To inform their stakeholders of this extension the company states: “Volkswagen AG expressly waives the right to raise a plea of limitation until 31.12.2017 concerning any claims in connection with the software installed in vehicles with engine type EA 189. The waiver of the statute of limitations for such claims shall also apply to the extent that such claims are already statute-barred” (Volkswagen, 2015k). Furthermore, for those having to relinquish their vehicles for a lengthy rectification process, substitute vehicles are promised to be provided free of charge (Volkswagen, 2015k).

5.1.7 *Apology*

In total, the content analysis of the initial diesel related press releases showed that VW offers a clear apology in 21 percent of the cases. Winterkorn offers an apology in his video message: “I am infinitely sorry that we have disappointed this trust. I formally apologise to our customers, the authorities, and the entire public for the misconduct. We will do everything we can to make amends for the damage caused. And we will do everything possible to win back trust step by step” (Volkswagen, 2015h). Winterkorn’s apology is followed by a supervisory board statement referring to the amorality of the crisis and equally offering an apology to the stakeholders for the transgression. The statement reads: “The test manipulations represent a moral and political disaster for Volkswagen. The unlawful behaviour of developers and technicians in engine development has shocked Volkswagen as much as the public. We can only apologise and ask customers, the public, authorities and investors to give us the chance to make amends” (Volkswagen, 2015c). Volkswagen continues to apologise for the unforgivable

and in a message written by Müller states: “We are sincerely sorry that we have betrayed this trust. We will do everything in our power to regain it completely” (Volkswagen AG, 2015i).

5.1.8 Excuse

In 16 percent of the cases, Volkswagen justifies the unethical behaviour as: “The starting point was the strategic decision to launch a large-scale diesel offensive in the U.S. in 2005, but initially no satisfactory way was found to meet the stricter nitrogen oxide standards for the EA 189 engine type in the U.S. with permissible means and within the specified time and cost parameters. This led to the installation of software that regulated nitrogen oxide emissions depending on whether the vehicle was on the road or a test cycle” (Volkswagen, 2015m). However, Volkswagen admits in the statement that even when a system was developed that complied with the government’s guidelines, this was not installed, stating that “when an effective technical procedure for NOx reduction became available, it was not used as much as it could have been. Instead, the software in question ensured that the reducing agent “AdBlue” was injected in varying doses - with the effect that the NOx values were particularly low on the test bench but significantly higher on the road” (Volkswagen, 2015m). In a statement provided by the newly appointed chairman of the board Hans Dieter Pötsch, he adds that “the investigation of the internal audit provides us with valuable insights in the effort to create a framework in which violations of rules and regulations, as we have seen here in a subdivision of the Group, are not encouraged, but prevented - or at least detected at an early stage” (Volkswagen, 2015m).

5.1.9 Attack the Accuser

Within the content analysis of all dieselgate related VW press releases, there was not a single indication of the organisation or employees attacking the accuser or attacking other car manufacturers with the industry.

5.2 Volkswagen News Media Framing Analysis

For the 2015 Volkswagen news media analysis, Der Spiegel, Zeit Online and Süddeutsche Zeitung were coded within one sample pool. The results, therefore, reflect the accumulative coding of all three news outlets. The attribution of responsibility frame was most frequently applied in the timeframe from late September to the end of December 2015 in newspaper articles reporting on the dieselgate scandal. Closely followed by the economic and morality frame. The results of each frame are presented in Table 4 and elaborated on individually below.

Table 4
2015 Media Frame Results

Code	Code Frequency	% Codes	Cases*	% Cases
Attribution of Responsibility Frame	137	23%	65	60%
Economic Frame	164	28%	61	56%
Morality Frame	87	15%	45	41%
Conflict Frame	59	10%	32	29%
Human-Interest Frame	145	24%	32	29%

*Cases refer to articles (n=109)

5.2.1 *Attribution of Responsibility Frame*

The attribution of responsibility frame was most frequently applied in Der Spiegel, Zeit Online, and Süddeutsche Zeitung, within which three common themes were found. Firstly, the framing of Volkswagen as the responsible party and questioning of the company's crisis communication strategy of Winterkorn's denial of knowledge. Zeit Online challenges this strategy by asking: "Is it possible that the top management is unaware when a company is in trouble and makes mistakes?" (Al-Ani, 2015). Adding that organisations use the principle of distribution of work to spread responsibility across many shoulders (Al-Ani, 2015). Süddeutsche Zeitung also questions the credulity of VW's crisis strategy by stating: "It is not just some clever technicians on the lower floors who decide on their own which approach to take to solve a problem. This is a matter for the board to decide. Especially if the CEO is a technology freak" (Fahrenheit, 2015).

However, it is not only Volkswagen to whom the responsible frame is applied by the news media. The KBA, responsible government officials, sub-contractors, and even consumers are also held to account. An example thereof can be found in Der Spiegel which states that "the scandal about VW's exhaust gas manipulations did not come as a complete surprise. For years, there have been studies and reports of ever-widening discrepancies between factory figures and reality in consumption and exhaust emissions. Every new car customer can testify to this gap at the first refuelling stop. It just seems that no one has been interested in it so far" (Hengstenberg, 2015). Der Spiegel further quotes a civil servant of the *Umweltbundesamt* (UBA- environment agency) stating: "Krautzberger said that UBA had been pointing out for years that the measured emission values showed no improvement in the environmental balance of car traffic. The Ministry of Transport, however, had regularly failed to take such indications seriously" (Der Spiegel, 2015c).

Next to politicians, other car manufacturers receive attention in the dieselgate scandal but vehemently refute similar transgressions. Der Spiegel writes that at least indirectly the entire car industry is affected by VW's scandal since the trust in car manufacturers shaken by the news of the transgression (Diekmann & Kwasniewski, 2015). Daimler, responding to allegations, is quoted saying: "Daimler CEO Dieter Zetsche told the Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung that his company was adhering to the legal requirements. 'We have not tampered with our vehicles in any way.' When asked if all manufacturers were cheaters, he said: 'Clear answer: No!'" (Zeit Online, 2015a). BMW, following suit, denied any involvement stating: "As a matter of principle, there is no manipulation at the BMW Group, and it goes without saying that we comply with the legal requirements in every country and fulfil all local test specifications," the company announced. "This means: In the exhaust gas treatment of our vehicles, no distinction is made between roll and road operation" (Zeit Online, 2015b).

5.2.2 *Human-Interest Frame*

In all three cases, the human-interest frame was applied in connection with the newly appointed VW CEO, Müller, and chairman of the board, Pötsch, to describe the emotional impact of Germany's economic flagship coming under scrutiny. Die Süddeutsche Zeitung also takes on a cynical stance when reviewing VW's arguments of accidentally having left the manipulated software in the newer vehicles by stating: "A forgotten software, left in the engine like an umbrella in a tram" (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2015). Through the lens of the human-interest frame, the affected party of stakeholders within the Germany economy is also represented. Zeit Online refers to the Germany automobile industry as a whole saying: "Pride is a dangerous emotion. When that which one is proud of breaks, a feeling of shame quickly develops. In Germany, there is a tendency to identify with the big brands of the car industry, just as in the past with the D-Mark. That's why a feeling of national failure is easily developed when a company like VW gets caught cheating" (Heuser, 2015). Süddeutsche Zeitung analyses the effect on the German population stating: "According to the relevant science, people are generally slow to change their consumer habits; and even if buying a car is not an everyday occurrence, many people, especially in Germany, have always been familiar with the VW brand. In addition, consumers traditionally have a bad memory. To put it bluntly, one could say that sometimes they have forgotten about affairs and misdeeds of companies before they have even managed to get up the courage to change their buying behaviour because of them" (Slavik, 2015).

5.2.3 *Morality Frame*

The morality frame, applied predominantly by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Der Spiegel*, was used to denounce the ‘fraudulent’, ‘deceptive’, ‘sneaky’ ‘trickery’ of Volkswagen. Alongside such denunciations, *Der Spiegel* also referred to the fact that VW presumably believed that their trickery would remain hidden. The newspaper stated that “in the VW newsletter ‘Viavision’ it was still claimed in May that the introduction of realistic tests was ‘explicitly’ supported. The conditions must, however, be clearly defined ‘so that the measurement results cannot be falsified by abusive driving behaviour’” (Böcking, 2015). Thereby shifting any potential negative results on so-called “abusive driving behaviour”, rather than intentional software tampering, states the newspaper. However, the morality frame was not only applied by using words connected with immoral behaviour, but it was also used to question VW’s supposed “transparent and open” crisis communication strategy. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* coined the company’s crisis communication the salami-tactic, saying that “by far the biggest mistake of all is the so-called salami tactic: the slice-by-slice admission of mistakes, often combined with flowery euphemisms and a little hot air. The company behaves implausibly by disclosing the truth only in slices. This strategy is fatal, because it not only prolongs the crisis, it also damages the credibility of a company in addition to the loss of trust already caused by the original mistake” (Slavik, 2015). *Zeit Online* concurs with this analysis stating that the scandal “demonstrates a long-standing leadership failure in the VW board of directors; and with continued damaging crisis management, the existence of the VW car company could soon be at stake. Beyond the necessary clean-up in Wolfsburg, how can confidence in VW and the car industry in Germany be restored?” (Welfens, 2015).

5.2.4 *Economic Frame*

The economic frame is the second most commonly applied by the newspapers and is predominantly found in three forms. Firstly, by stressing the financial impact of the crisis on Volkswagen with statements such as “penalties, recall actions and compensation will cost the Wolfsburg-based Group billions” or “VW expects damage amounting to two billion euros” (*Der Spiegel*, 2015a; *Zeit Online*, 2015c). Secondly, the newspapers highlight Volkswagen’s crisis management frame of taking on all costs and alleviating costs for customers as much as possible. As seen with statements such as “VW has promised that customers will not incur any costs as a result of the conversions” (*Der Spiegel*, 2015d). Thirdly, another dominant economic frame was presented in the form of the impact of the VW scandal on the automotive industry and the German economy. *Zeit Online* described the various viewpoints on this topic as ranging

from “just about every kind of scenario is still on offer, from ‘A few engineers at VW have gone nuts’ to ‘The German economic model is in jeopardy’” (Heuser, 2015). It further stated in an analysis entitled “We are not VW” that “the parallels between Volkswagen and the people are quickly drawn. When the luxury and pleasure trips of board members became known at the Group a good ten years ago, this was a sign of the weak, self-absorbed German economy. Similarly, the resurgence of VW, to become the world's number one, reflected the German recovery in recent years - from the sick man of Europe to the China of the West, from one extreme to the other. And now? Is it automatically going downhill again with the exporting country D?” (Heuser, 2015). “The end of the German economy has not yet come, even if some reactions to the exhaust gas manipulations at VW suggest that it has. Nevertheless, it will not be easy to save the image, says Rolf Ganter, an analyst at the major bank UBS” on the topic in a statement provided to Der Spiegel (Diekmann & Kwasniewski, 2015).

5.2.5 *Conflict Frame*

The conflict frame is least applied in all three newspapers. However, when applied a clear theme can be seen throughout, namely, primarily to highlight disagreements between individuals or the denunciations of politicians or stakeholders of VW's illegal behaviour. Applying the conflict frame, Zeit Online quoted Bärbel Höhn, chairwoman of the Bundestag's environmental committee, who said: “Apparently VW has used illegal techniques in determining fuel consumption to correct it downwards. The whole truth must now be put on the table. Höhn added that powerful government agencies were also needed at long last, who were allowed and able to verify the manufacturers' data. So far this has not been the case” (Zeit Online, 2015j). The newspapers also highlight the conflict frame with regards to the entire industry in reporting such as “Meanwhile, there is a fear in politics and business that German products could fall into disrepute because of the emissions scandal. Environment Minister Barbara Hendricks (SPD) told the Handelsblatt that if a global corporation such as VW so blatantly disregarded environmental regulations, this would cast a shadow over the promises of German companies. Altmaier emphasized in the newspaper ‘Tagesspiegel am Sonntag’ that VW is jointly responsible for the image of the local economy. It was in “Germany's interest that the events at Volkswagen be clarified and the necessary consequences drawn” (Zeit Online, 2015a). However, it is not only the denunciation of Volkswagen that is framed under conflict, but also disagreements between political and governmental institutions. Der Spiegel reports on the issue saying “One of the big questions since the fraud became known: Volkswagen: TÜV and the Ministry of Transport are at war with each other. Why, for example,

did the Ministry of Transport not carry out stricter checks - or why did the TÜV not recognize false information? The Federal Ministry of Transport and TÜV Nord now have an answer: the blame for the failure lies with the other party” (Der Spiegel, 2015b).

5.3 Intra-Industry News Media Analysis

For the intra-industry news media analysis, Der Spiegel, Zeit Online and Süddeutsche Zeitung articles from May 2018 to June 2018 reporting on the dieselgate scandal were also coded within one sample pool. The results, therefore, reflect the accumulative coding of all three news outlets. The attribution of responsibility frame was most frequently applied, followed by the conflict and morality frame. The results of each frame are presented in Table 5 and elaborated on individually below.

Table 5
2018 Media Frame Results

Code	Code Frequency	% Codes	Cases*	% Cases
Attribution of Responsibility Frame	177	45%	40	91%
Conflict Frame	69	17%	27	61%
Morality Frame	47	12%	25	57%
Economic Frame	60	15%	21	48%
Human-Interest Frame	43	11%	19	43%

*Cases refer to articles (n=43)

5.3.1 Attribution of Responsibility Frame

The attribution of responsibility frame is most frequently applied, within 91 percent of the articles, and refers to both VW and the industry as a whole. Some articles continue to refer to Volkswagen as the initial culprit, such as in Der Spiegel, stating: “Illegal deactivation devices had triggered the diesel scandal at Volkswagen in September. After VW, Daimler is also being dragged deeper and deeper into the diesel scandal” (Der Spiegel, 2018). However, reporting also refers to other car manufacturers saying: “No other car company has so confidently and consistently denied its manipulations since the diesel scandal of 2015 became known as Daimler” (Zeit Online, 2018a). Whilst Süddeutsche Zeitung frames BMW similarly, stating: “BMW boss Harald Krüger and chairman of the supervisory board Norbert Reithofer have admitted a breakdown in the exhaust gas purification of a diesel engine, but denied any intention. ‘We made a mistake a few years ago’, Krüger said on Thursday at the BMW annual general meeting in Munich. BMW had always claimed in the exhaust gas scandal, which was

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set in motion by VW in the fall, that they had not installed fraud software in vehicles” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2018f). Quoting a member of the German federal council, Süddeutsche Zeitung wrote: “My faith in the auto industry is not destroyed. In no way”, said Kretschmann. But the scandal has damaged the industry's credibility amongst consumers. German car manufacturers today do produce clean diesel - the only question is whether you believe them” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2018b). Whilst Der Spiegel commented on the intra-industry scandal saying: “It would also have been a moment of awakening for the entire industry: away from a criminal past and instead into a sustainable future with clean, soon even climate-friendly means of transport” (Traufetter, 2018).

5.3.2 *Human-Interest Frame*

The human-interest frame is least applied compared to the other four media frames. However, when applied this frame is used to conjure feelings of anger towards the industry for believing it could “get away with it”, especially by marketing their cars as ingenious eco-friendly pieces of German machinery. Zeit Online highlighted this aspect by stating: “Daimler had launched AdBlue on the market with the slogan ‘Emission Impossible’” (Zeit Online, 2018a). Süddeutsche Zeitung quoted angered former foreign minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party), who emphasised the importance of the automotive industry for Baden-Württemberg and the rest of Germany and stated: “I do not understand how very well paid top managers could do this catastrophic nonsense whilst thinking like little boys, that it would not get out” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2018b). The newspaper also points out this intra-industry failing by using the frame in connection with BMW, stating: “Nor is it likely that BMW's late admission of having made a ‘mistake’ in exhaust emission control will boost customer confidence in the sincerity of the car industry and its diesel models” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2018f).

5.3.3 *Morality Frame*

The morality frame was applied in 57 percent of the news articles and constitutes the third most frequent frame applied to the later stages of the intra-industry crisis. Süddeutsche Zeitung frames the immorality by quoting former vice-chancellor, Fischer, by stating: “We were not believed to be capable of this. He kept hearing 'we didn't think so, the Germans don't do that'. One could only shake one's head over the degree of irresponsibility and naivety of those responsible. He still drives a German car in his private life. Out of conviction” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2018b). Der Spiegel applied the moral frame by highlighting the impact of the industries deceitful behaviour on the health of the population. The article stated: “The Daimler

boss could have put an end to the dishonesty of selling manipulated cars to loyal customers of the manufacturer over many years. Vehicles whose exhaust gas purification was designed to be cheaper and brought the company higher profits - at the expense of the health of hundreds of thousands of people who have to breathe in excessive concentrations of nitrogen oxide in the cities” (Der Spiegel, 2019). Zeit Online responded to the industry’s aim to resolve their wrongdoing with the comment: “To make dieselpgate forgotten, the German car manufacturers are doing quite a lot. Volkswagen dismissed its CEO. BMW distanced itself from its competitors. Daimler talked about the imminent revolution in mobility. Advertising campaigns are courting customers with high discounts. And anyone who wants to read up on how a company is changing can do so in Shift. That's the name of the hip magazine they call the 'child of the crisis' at Volkswagen” (Simpson, 2018).

5.3.4 Economic Frame

The economic frame, used in 48 percent of the articles, was applied primarily to highlight the impact of the industry’s losses and the knock-on effect on the German economy. With Daimler and BMW being the newly accused, the newspapers Der Spiegel, Süddeutsche Zeitung and Zeit Online also highlighted their losses much as they did with Volkswagen in 2015. Süddeutsche Zeitung commented on the diesel scandal from an economic standpoint saying: “There has been an enormous loss of image and trust for the economy. Manufacturers must do everything to regain confidence” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2018a). The newspaper also reported that “the federal government has not yet imposed fines on car manufacturers for exhaust gas trickery. This could have a massive financial impact on Germany's key industry with hundreds of thousands of jobs” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2018e). Highlighting that the German car industry not only impacts the economy with the export of its cars but also accounts for a significant percentage of jobs within the country (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2018e). Zeit Online also reported on the possible grave economic impact of the intra-industry crisis for the German economy, stating: “The association of German chambers of industry and commerce warned of the consequences for the German economy. The diesel affair and driving bans are unsettling large parts of the German economy,’ said *Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag* (DIHK-German Chamber of Industry and Trade) President Eric Schweitzer in an interview with the *Rheinische Post*” (Zeit Online, 2018b).

5.3.5 Conflict Frame

Within the 2018 intra-industry media framing analysis, conflict was measured in 61 percent of the cases, making it the second most applied frame within the three newspapers. The conflict frame was primarily used to highlight disagreements both. German chancellor Merkel provided a statement that was portrayed in the *Der Spiegel*, saying: “It was not in the government's interest 'to weaken the automobile industry by political measures in such a way that it no longer has the strength to put anything into the actual visions of the future', she said in the Bundestag. Perhaps the chancellor should have consulted her officials at the federal motor transport authority before she defended the manufacturers so effectively in public” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2018c). In an article published by *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, “Green faction leader Anton Hofreiter said that there must now be an end to sensational events and sloppy recall actions. While the *Freie Demokratische Partei* (FDP-Free Democratic Party) demanded more transparency from Federal Transport Minister Andreas Scheuer” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2018d). The newspaper further frame the conflict within the government by reporting that “the transport expert of the *Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland* (BUND- Friends of the Earth Germany), Jens Hilgenberg, said that Chancellor Angela Merkel and Transport Minister Scheurer must stop letting the car industry lead them further through the circus by the nose ring. If the federal government took environmental and health protection seriously, it would have to react more credibly, he added” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2018c).

6 Discussion

The discussion is comprised of three sections. First, Volkswagen crisis communication strategy is discussed in light of the SCCT and similar contributions. Second, the findings of the media framing analysis of 2015 are interpreted. Thirdly, the 2018 media framing analysis is discussed in contrast to reporting from 2015.

6.1 Manoeuvring out of a Scandal

Corporate crisis communication aims to provide an explanation to stakeholders for the cause of the crisis and try to rectify the situation and restore the brand image. In particular, the latter is vital for a company to successfully survive negative backlash after a crisis and regain stakeholder's trust (Davies et al., 288). Veil and Odjeda (2010) emphasise the importance of providing information to the public during and after a crisis promptly, as to avoid rumours spreading in the media. The focus for crisis managers should thereby be directed at framing the crisis in a manner that aims to guide and shape how the affected stakeholders and the public

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perceive the crisis. As described by Coombs (2010) within his SCCT, an appropriate framing within, inter alia, company press releases, can take multiple forms depending on the crisis type and company background. If a company is faced with a crisis caused by intentional unethical wrongdoing, the effect on the organisation's stock value and sales is said to be particularly significant (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 40).

When news of Volkswagen's faked emissions results came to light, their market value dropped overnight, and the German news media went into a frenzy trying to disclose as much information as possible on the newest scandal. The company, therefore, had to react swiftly to the allegations of wrongdoing and provide their framing of the occurrences. Coombs (2010) emphasises within the SCCT that prior reputation and crisis history are two important factors. Given that the manipulated software constituted intentional illegal wrongdoing, which had been hidden from the public, could cause significant health damages and had been intensively marketed by VW as 'clean diesel', Volkswagen had to decide carefully how to communicate its way out of the brand crisis. With regards to its prior reputation, the car manufacturer was held in high regard both nationally and internationally and was considered one of Germany's economic success stories. Therefore, although Coombs' (2010) theory suggests that a positive prior reputation decreases the perceived crisis responsibility, in the case of VW's the intentional wrongdoing, their breach of trust may have appeared even worse coming from one of Germany's revered flagships.

To communicate with their stakeholders and clarify matters surrounding the dieselgate scandal, Volkswagen opted for press releases posted online to their Volkswagen newsroom landing page as their main communication tool. During the timeframe of the initial EPA denunciation on September 21st, 2015, and the end of that year, Volkswagen released 19 press statements relating to this topic in various lengths and structures. Before the analysis, this contribution expected the results to show that Volkswagen would use a combination of concern and compassion as its primary crisis communication strategy. Instead, building on their positive prior reputation as one of Germany's most successful DAX 30 companies and their high international brand ranking and recognition, Volkswagen's main crisis communication strategy was ingratiation. Meaning the company emphasises positive previous achievements, praised their employees for their hard work and thanked their consumers for their trust and help in rectifying the situation. The company, thereby, primarily referred to past actions and to frame Volkswagen as being "much more than this crisis", since the company "has qualities that were not lost overnight" (Volkswagen AG, 2015i). Volkswagen did not wish to have the dieselgate

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become synonymous with the brand and therefore continued its crisis communication strategy with scapegoating.

The scapegoat strategy's primary aim is to shift the blame to another party either onto individuals within the organisation or third parties. The resignation of Winterkorn was not the traditional scapegoat 'removing the guilty party', rather it reflected that such happenings should not have occurred on his watch and he, therefore, took the proverbial 'fall' for it. However, these scapegoat tactics did not stop at the resignation of Winterkorn. Instead, combining the scapegoat strategy with denial, the company's executives vehemently denied any knowledge of the manipulated software. The executive board even stated that the EPA's denunciation of the software was the first time they had heard of the wrongdoing. Instead of admitting guilt, the company redirecting the blame to a small group of individuals within the organisation. It was framed as if the guilty individuals, who were portrayed as a very small group of sub-level employees had installed the illegal software for 8 years due to the pressure of providing a timely and cost-effective diesel motor, whilst having to comply with the government-imposed guidelines for NOx emissions. Indirectly this states that rather than investing both time and money, individuals at Volkswagen were said to have opted for an illegal manipulation software that provided the necessary results through immoral means. The combination of these tactics is questionable on multiple levels. Firstly, it implies that Winterkorn, despite being responsible for the organisation and having worked in the automotive industry for almost 40 years, was unaware of the malpractice. This would mean that individuals managed to hide the manipulated software from the executive level of the company for eight years without a single entity finding out about it. Secondly, this does not seem plausible, since the company continued to work on the appropriate software that complied with the stringent NOx norms but decided not to include the more expensive software to cut costs. Thirdly, if Winterkorn really had been an innocent bystander, why did he feel the need to resign? Had the VW not been convincing enough in framing the denial and scapegoat crisis communication strategy? On the one hand, it was perhaps easier for the company and Winterkorn to save face and leave on amicable terms since his retirement was planned for the following year. Arguably, Winterkorn leaving provided the VW with a new frame of bringing in a new individual who had not been brought into connection with the scandal. On the other hand, Winterkorn's 'guilt-free' departure had perhaps been caused by the media's disbelief of Winterkorn's ignorance towards what was happening.

Besides trying to restore the image of the brand by providing what Volkswagen deemed credible explanation for the manipulation and bringing those responsible to justice,

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Volkswagen additionally attempted the compassion strategy to rebuild their stakeholder's trust. Compassion in the form of compensation was used in Volkswagen's crisis management strategy to avoid further exasperating their loyal customer base. However, the compensation measures contained within the compassion strategy proved to be very costly for Volkswagen, possibly even costlier than implementing the compliant software in the first place.

Instead of implementing the compliant software, Volkswagen found themselves forced to apologise for the occurrences. In line with the scapegoat and denial strategies, this occurred without the admittance of guilt. Once the diesel scandal came to light in late September of 2015, Volkswagen was swift to apologise for the occurrence, however without admitting fault. In multiple press statements Volkswagen offered emotive apologies, often combined with elements of the concern strategy, by expressing their sympathies for those affected, vowing to rectify the matter. It is noteworthy, however, that although multiple statements contain an apology, a press statement released by the supervisory board states that "the manipulations are inexcusable and have shocked Volkswagen deeply" (Volkswagen, 2015c). Thereby offering an apology, whilst simultaneously stating that their actions could not be rectified with an apology. This correlates with many deeming the manipulation as being inexcusable.

Despite applying almost all of Coombs' (1995) suggested crisis communication frames, Volkswagen, as expected, did not once attack the accusers, or defer attention to another party within the industry. The company's choice not to refer to Bosch as the actual guilty party for supplying the software that enables the faked emissions results or involves its industry competition, although it supposedly had been aware of BMW and Daimler's diesel manipulation, is noteworthy. One could argue that referring to other potentially guilty parties within the industry was not in VW's interest for three reasons. Firstly, VW may have decided to not direct the attention to Bosch or another competitor in the industry to ensure that the company alone could control the narrative. Had VW blamed Bosch for their involvement or accused other car manufacturers of equally having manipulated their software, multiple companies would have provided crisis frames to explain the occurrence of the dieselgate. Thereby potentially creating counter-frames that contradict VW's chosen narrative. Although the companies could have arguably banded together, the likelihood of competitors showing solidarity in the face of intentional wrongdoing as a crisis strategy seems unlikely. Secondly, Volkswagen as a company and its executive board had taken on the role of the innocent and unaware and shifted the guilt onto a small group of individuals. It, therefore, would have been contradictory to reference other guilty parties if Volkswagen had supposedly not even been aware of misconduct within its organisation. Since their press releases emphasised the

company's objective of finding the guilty individuals within the company, it would be questionable if the company had already acquired evidence of misconduct outside of VW. Thirdly, if Volkswagen had caused the shift from single entity crisis to intra-industry crisis, the matter would have arguably received extensive media attention. Imaginably, the organisation's objective was to keep the scale of the crisis as small as possible and resolve it as cleanly and swiftly as manageable. Volkswagen arguably chose to contain out of fear of being mentioned continuously as the first guilty party. Thereby having its name associated with the dieselgate longer than necessary. This correlated with VW's expectation that the crisis would be resolved in 2016 by recalling the manipulated cars. Given the extensive media upheaval and the continuous media attention the crisis has received since it shifted from Volkswagen to the entire industry, Volkswagen was potentially correct in deciding to not redirect the blame and tried to solve the image crisis by offering compensation and weeding out the alleged guilty party. Therefore, the intra-industry aspect should be considered when responding to a crisis and should be reflected in theories such as SCCT.

Overall, VW chose a combination of Coombs' (1995) crisis communication strategies to communicate its way out of the crisis and restore its brand image and stakeholder trust. Although offering to rectify matters free of charge appeared to be well received by the media. Volkswagen's scapegoat and denial strategy of portraying the executive levels as utterly unaware and victims of individual wrongdoing was scrutinised by the socio-control agent. Since crisis communication is also directed at influencing the media's framing of the event, one could argue if the media chooses different frames that the strategy chosen by the company was not as successful as intended. This especially holds true when one considers that a larger part of the population, and therefore the relevant stakeholders, will receive the most information on the crisis from the media rather than Volkswagen itself. For that reason, it is important to review the media's framing of the diesel scandal to analyse how well Volkswagen's strategy was received.

6.2 Popping the Hood on Media Framing

In response to the revelation of Volkswagen's unethical engine tampering, the three popular newspapers Der Spiegel, Süddeutsche Zeitung, and Zeit Online applied various media frames. These were used to highlight aspects of the scandal and Volkswagen's crisis response that they deemed important and/or entertaining. The objective of newspapers is to inform and generate revenue by doing so. Therefore, newspapers have to portray certain events as newsworthy and current and must frame issues in a manner that informs the reader whilst provoking and keeping

the reader's attention (McCoombs, 1977, p. 92). All three of the analysed newspapers are subscription-based and therefore need to attract readers by supplying new and attention-grabbing information. This might lead to a topic being framed and reframed as new information from other parties comes out (Coombs, 2007, p. 166). Nijkrake et al. (2014) point out that it is common for newspapers to initially quote the company in crisis, as they often are the first to comment on the events. However, as the crisis develops different sources for information such as experts and government officials are asked to comment on the occurrence. Furthermore, since it is in the interest of the company to salvage the reputation, company press releases and their contents are not always taken at face value, and journalists may decide to find more credible sources (McCoombs, 2004, p. 21). This thesis expected the results to show the commonly used combination of conflict and economic frames to highlight the corporate crisis. However, through the application of Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) news frames, the results showed that the combination of the attribution of responsibility, economic and morality frame was the most dominant.

The attribution of responsibility frame was applied by the newspapers to highlight three distinct themes. Firstly, the media questioned Volkswagen's framing of the executive level being unaware of the manipulations. Multiple newspaper articles highlighted Winterkorn's technical background and the improbability that executives at the company had remained in the dark for eight years. Thereby highlighting the fact that former-CEO, Winterkorn, was academically well-equipped to understand such software. The news outlets further scrutinised VW's portrayal when the supposedly innocent CEO stepped down from all of his positions but remained on Volkswagen's payroll for a surprisingly long time after his departure. By questioning the probability of Volkswagen's crisis communication strategy and highlighting Winterkorn's technical know-how of emission software, the media provided a so-called counter-frame. This counter-frame suggested that VW's strategy should not be taken at face value and that VW was not being as transparent and open as their press statements had promised. Through counter-framing, the media, acting as the final arbiter of the provided corporate crisis frame can exert influence on the public's perception of the occurrence by offering an alternative viewpoint. Secondly, the frame was not only applied in connection with VW's questionable crisis communication strategies but also with regards to government officials and experts playing the blame game. The media used the frame to emphasise that government officials and organisations, such as the KBA and TÜV, had a responsibility to protect German citizens from the toxic NO_x fumes. Zeit Online and Der Spiegel questioned how Volkswagen's malpractice had gone unnoticed to authorities tasked with ensuring that

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such manipulation could not occur. Thirdly, although the news media did not apply the responsibility frame to the entire industry, it did refer to the issue as indirectly affecting other car manufacturers and quoted BMW and Daimler who vehemently denied using any manipulated software in their diesel cars. Since the media often first accepts the frames provided by the organisations until further information comes to light, later on, BMW and Daimler's statements were not brought into question.

The morality frame is said to be used to place news coverage in the context of norms and values and is often applied indirectly through quotations (Neumann, Just, & Cringler, 1992, p. 68). Although previous research concluded that the morality frame is less frequently applied than the conflict or economic frames, the framing results show that the diesel scandal presented a much more frequent use of the morality frame. Since the scandal resulted from intentional unethical wrongdoing, unsurprisingly, the morality of Volkswagen's actions would be brought into question. In the case of Zeit Online, Süddeutsche Zeitung and Der Spiegel, the morality frame was applied both directly by the journalists who denounce VW's behaviour by using words such as 'trickery' and 'sneaky', and indirectly through quoting various disappointed government officials. The frame was also applied concerning VW's questionable use of the "salami-tactic" in their dieselgate related press releases. Süddeutsche Zeitung stated that the company was behaving "implausibly by disclosing the truth only in slices" (Slavik, 2015). The journalist continues by saying that this tactic further damages the company's already damaged credibility. Zeit Online questions how the organisation's damaging crisis management will help restore stakeholder trust that has been so severely affected by VW's intentional illegal behaviour. The media's critical assessment of VW's crisis communication strategy is another example of its role as the final arbiter of crisis framing.

Unsurprisingly, the crisis of one of Germany's economic flagships is framed as a primarily economic issue and the media draws their readers attention towards the effect of the financial damages caused by the scandal both on the organisation and the German economy as a whole. The economic frame is used to emphasise the financial burden of the crisis on Volkswagen by showing the market value losses and tallying the costs of the recalls and rectification measures. To the advantage of VW, the crisis communication strategy of compassion in the form of compensation is frequently mentioned. The general public is thereby made aware that Volkswagen is willing to carry the cost of the reparations, whilst simultaneously highlighting how the compensation will negatively affect the company's financial standing. The economic frame also refers to how VW's losses will impact the German economy as a whole, stating that a significant amount of Volkswagen's jobs and export

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revenues play an important role in Germany's economy. Losses could thereby cause a knock-on effect for the economy as a whole.

Although the human-interest and conflict frame are less frequently applied, their application does paint a picture of the media's perception of the crisis. The human-interest frame refers to the emotional side of the scandal, emphasising how the disappointment in VW's intentional wrongdoing has severely affected the German citizen's economic pride. However, a few articles refer to the fact that consumers are quick to forget corporate misdeeds and are unlikely to change their consumption behaviour in the long run based on the scandal.

In general, the news frame analysis shows that the media was swift to reframe the crisis as Volkswagen's intentional wrongdoing and aimed to discredit the company's scapegoat and denial frame by questioning how the CEO and upper levels could have remained unaware of the purposeful manipulation. The media further emphasises the effect of the transgression on the German economy and belief system. Although other car manufacturers are brought into question on the side-lines, the focus throughout the initial stages remains on VW and the handling of the crisis.

6.3 Shifting Gears to Intra-Industry

In 2018 a clear shift and media reframing of the dieselgate becomes noticeable, as other car manufacturers are accused of the same unethical intentional wrongdoing. Fellow German industry front runners, BMW and Daimler, who have continuously denied any wrongdoing, are forced to recall several of their diesel models. The German media, who had been reporting on the VW diesel scandal, found themselves presented with new corporate crisis framing and increased governmental involvement. The media framing was adapted according to the new information resulting in a media frameshift with a focus on VW to a focus on the entire industry. This differed from the initial frame focus of 2015 in a variety of ways.

Firstly, unlike in 2015, the attribution of responsibility did not solely concern Volkswagen and individual government bodies but also included other car manufacturers and the entire German automotive industry as stated in the expectations. Reports from *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Der Spiegel* continued to report on VW's on-going legal proceedings and dieselgate related financial losses and referred to VW as the initial guilty party. Despite such references to VW, BMW and Daimler were now equally under scrutiny with multiple reports surfacing on similar illegal NOx tactics. Unlike VW, however, both Daimler and BMW continued to deny the accusations of any illegal activity, much like the companies had done in 2015 when the diesel scandal first occurred. Even when both car manufacturers are forced to

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conduct recalls of affected models, they continue to refute any intentional malpractice. Unlike in 2015, however, the news media reframes this strategy of responsibility denial as unconvincing and emphasises the number of government-sanctioned vehicle recalls. Much like in the case of VW's portrayal of the executive level innocents, the news media reframes BMW and Daimlers claims of innocents as being far-fetched. Another contrast to the 2015 media framing can be found in the more frequent use of the frame to describe the intra-industry responsibility of the scandal. In 2018, all three newspapers increased reporting on the industry contagion of the crisis, by quoting individuals or providing analyses on the issue. Furthermore, the media is using the attribution of responsibility frame to increasingly highlight the failings of the government to reprimand the behaviour of the industry.

Secondly, this also carried into the conflict frame, where individual parts of the government were quoted to frame the disagreement and rapprochement between political parties and organisations, such as the Green Party and the FDP. In comparison to 2015, the conflict frame was measured multiple times in spring of 2018 reporting and portrayed the industry crisis as causing disagreement about who is at fault and whether the government could have done more to prevent this industry-wide crisis. Multiple newspapers refer to the fact that chancellor Merkel and transport minister Scheurer reacted too leniently towards the automotive industry as ties between the politicians and the industry are too amicable. Multiple politicians from the Green Party and environmental institutions are quoted disagreeing with Merkel's tactics, accusing her of acting as a spokesperson for the industry rather than holding them to account for their hazardous malpractice. This conflict also reflects the close ties between the industry and the German economy, and indeed the whole image of German brands trustworthiness and standing for reliability.

Thirdly, in correlation with the conflict frame highlighting the proximity between the leading political party and the car industry executives, the prosperity of the automotive industry is framed as being of significant economic importance. The 2018 news content analysis also highlights a shift in how the economic frame is applied. There is a significant increase of quotes referring to the significant impact of the dieselgate scandal's intra-industry contagion effect. Meaning that the scandal, first occurring in VW, carried over to other manufacturers like BMW and Daimler who were also subjected to special testing because of the manipulations coming to light in the former. The contagion effect describes how the revealing of one company's failing causes suspicion towards other companies in the industry and ultimately leads to the competitor's stock price shifting in the same direction as the original wrongdoer. The media portrays this intra-industry contagion effect by comparing the companies DAX market values

in table form and quoting multiple sources who emphasise the negative impact of the industry-wide crisis on the German economy.

Fourthly, unlike in 2015 when newly appointed executives and the emotional side of Volkswagen's deceit was highlighted, the human-interest frame is less frequently applied to the scandal turned intra-industry crisis in 2018. However, the morality frame continues to play a major role in the media's framing of the crisis, in particular by highlighting the contagion effect of the crisis on consumer trust in the industry. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* emphasises the breach in the moral high ground by adding a quote that reads "German don't do that", implying it falls outside of the norms and values of German society. The moral frame is also used to portray those involved as naïve little boys who believed they could get away with the manipulation. Furthermore, the industry's collective crisis communication strategy of shifting the blame to a small group of individuals in the lower tiers of the companies and portraying the executive level as innocent and unaware is reframed as having disregarded the health of the general population to produce cheaper cars and maximise revenue. *Zeit Online* summarises the bad crisis management performance and the poor attempt of the car manufacturers to restore their brand reputation by stating: "To make dieselgate forgotten, the German car manufacturers are doing quite a lot. Volkswagen dismissed its CEO. BMW distanced itself from its competitors. Daimler talked about the imminent revolution in mobility" (Simpson, 2018).

The 2018 frame media analysis shows a distinct shift in focus from Volkswagen to the entire industry and highlights multiple intra-industry aspects of the crisis from economic consequences to a significant moral ineptitude of the industry. It further highlights the inadequate monitoring and regulating of the German government and stresses the negative effect of the manipulation on the health of the general population. Overall, it is clear that the media reframes the crisis as an intra-industry failing with significant consequences for the German way of life and their normative social structure.

7 Conclusion

This research aimed to analyse which crisis communication strategy was adopted by Volkswagen in response to the dieselgate scandal and how the German news media framed VW's role. Furthermore, since the scandal shifted from a single entity to an industry-wide crisis, this contribution also sought to establish whether the German news media reframed the crisis as an industry-wide phenomenon in 2018. Based on qualitative content analysis of VW's press releases and German news articles from 2015 and 2018, this thesis draws the following conclusions.

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Firstly, with regards to what crisis communication strategy was adopted by Volkswagen as an initial response to the dieselgate scandal and whether Volkswagen referred to others in the industry in their attempt to diminish the blame, the results highlight a combination of ingratiation, scapegoating and regret. Volkswagen's crisis communication strategy was aimed to shift the blame from the executive level to a small group of individuals in the company. Although Volkswagen knew other car manufacturers, the Group chose not to redirect blame at individuals outside of the corporation. Instead, it emphasized past actions and stressed that the company was more than the scandal. It arguably chose not to involve other car manufacturers in hopes of rectifying the issue as quickly as possible with minor media involvement. Thereby containing the crisis within the company instead of involving other entities outside of their control. Since Daimler and BMW's strategy had been a strict denial of any manipulation and had not been accused of any wrongdoing by the government or media until 2018, it is questionable whether including other entities would have benefitted VW. By being the single company involved, Volkswagen was able to control its narrative and could focus on the media's attention, rather than having multiple different accounts and frames of their competitors.

Secondly, in response to the research question of how the German media framed Volkswagen, the media frame analysis of 2015 shows that the German newspapers chose to frame Volkswagen role as the main culprit and did not scrutinise other industry competitors. The analysis also showed that the media questioned VW's strategy and reframed the scandal by attributing responsibility to the entire corporation. In particular, by stressing the improbability of the executive level having been unaware of the intentional wrongdoing. Unlike in previous studies, the media frequently applied the morality frame both directly and indirectly and accused VW of continuing to act dishonestly during their crisis management. Since Volkswagen was seen as one of Germany's economic flagships and a symbol of post-World War II resurgence, the economic frame played a significant role. The frame highlighted VW's willingness to pay for rectification measures, whilst simultaneously criticising the company for causing significant damage to the German economy and international reputation.

Thirdly, in response to what extent the German news media reframed dieselgate as an industry-wide crisis in 2018 and whether they distinguished amongst competitors, it is clear that there was a shift from portraying VW as the responsible party to focusing on the entire industry and pointing out other car manufacturers' involvement. The intra-industry contagion effect was discussed through the economic frame and the responsibility frame and attributed the intentional unethical transgression to both the automotive industry and the government. Multiple articles, referencing the government's failure to act and the industry's deliberate

violation, were portrayed through the morality frame, similar to 2015. However, unlike in 2015, the frames applied emphasised that the transgression should be assigned to the entire industry and called upon politicians to take a firmer stance towards such hazardous unethical behaviour.

One similarity can be seen throughout both news frame analyses, namely that the media strongly criticises VW and the rest of the industry's crisis management approach. Multiple articles scrutinise VW, BMW, and Daimler's denial and scapegoat tactics and use the attribution of responsibility and morality frame to discredit the corporate crisis framing. Thereby providing a counter-frame to their audiences that highlight the industry-wide failing. By studying not only the initial wrongdoer's crisis communication strategy, but also analysing the media's framing in response to the crisis and the portrayal of the industry shift, this thesis was able to understand how the crisis communication strategies were perceived by an important stakeholder, namely the media.

Based on the answers from research question one to three, it becomes clear that crisis communication theories, such as SCCT, need to account for the industry's reputation as well as the organisation's reputation. While crisis communication theory and in particular Coombs' (1995) SCCT ignore the industry effect, this thesis advocates for an extension of the theory to account for the interaction between a company and the industry. Thereby reflecting on how industry influences the credibility of the individual company's crisis response. Within this context, it is important to note that if the individual company uses one crisis frame to portray the wrongdoing, whilst others in the industry use another, the public perception may be negatively affected. Similar to the counter-frames provided by the news media, companies within the same industry facing the same crisis may intentionally or unintentionally counter-frame each other. As a result, the public may be strongly inclined to only believe the brand that is most favourable to them or turn to other socio-control agents, such as the media for a more truthful account. Furthermore, although one has to consider potential legal and financial ramifications, based on the media's assessment of the car manufacturers' crisis communication strategies and the media's subsequent reframing, it can be concluded that the only way to handle a dirty scandal is to come clean.

7.1 Further Research

This thesis advances the debate crisis communication strategies by including the intra-industry aspects and insight from the media's framing of industry-wide crises. However, each crisis presents some idiosyncrasies that hamper the external validity of this contribution's findings, whilst simultaneously opening up the possibility for future research. This thesis considers one

industry-wide scandal and reviews the crisis communication strategy of the initial wrongdoer and the framing of the media during the initial and intra-industry stages of the crisis. Therefore, it is likely that this contribution accurately captured the importance of including the intra-industry aspect into crisis management and communication strategies. However, the chosen timeframe and crisis cannot shed light on all the aspects one must assess when analysing an industry-wide scandal and the media framing thereof. Since the scandal is still on-going, Bosch's involvement in the crisis and media framing that occurred in 2019/2020 could not be included in detail into the analysis. Future research should analyse which communication strategy is the most potent when reacting to an industry-wide crisis and whether the initial wrongdoer should shift the blame to other entities. Furthermore, future research should also address whether the news media reframes other crises once they have shifted from the single entity to an entire industry to gain further insight into how the media responds to corporate crisis framing within intra-industry scandals. This thesis hopes to prompt scholars to venture further into industry-wide crises and their impact on crisis management. In addition, this contribution hopes that the academic debate on crisis media framing will continue to explore intentional crises caused by unethical corporate behaviour.

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Appendix A: Coding Sheet Samples

Table 1A

Volkswagen Crisis Communication Coding Sheet

Text	Code
Ich tue dies im Interesse des Unternehmens, obwohl ich mir keines Fehlverhaltens bewusst bin.	Denial
Es tut uns aufrichtig leid, dass wir dieses Vertrauen enttäuscht haben. Wir werden alles daransetzen, das Vertrauen vollständig zurückzugewinnen. Der Aufsichtsrat hat bereits umfangreiche Maßnahmen eingeleitet, um die Thematik umfassend aufzuarbeiten.	Apology
Die Verantwortlichen für die Vorgänge müssen laut Müller mit harten Folgen rechnen.	Scapegoat
Die Volkswagen AG arbeitet das Thema Deselemissionen derzeit auf, und zwar weltweit. Der Konzern strebt dabei nach einer ganzheitlichen Lösung, wenn es um die Einhaltung der jeweils gültigen Normen geht.	Ingratiation
<i>Note.</i> This is a sample for the content analysis of Volkswagen's press releases. It provides an illustration of how the coding was conducted.	

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Table 2A
2015 Media Frame Coding Sheet

Text	Code
<p>BMW wies die Vorwürfe der Zeitschrift zurück. Die Ergebnisse "eines nicht näher beschriebenen Straßentests sind uns bisher nicht bekannt und daher für uns derzeit weder nachvollziehbar noch erklärbar", hieß es. "Bei der BMW Group wird nicht manipuliert und wir halten uns selbstverständlich in jedem Land an die gesetzlichen Vorgaben", teilte BMW mit. Das Unternehmen will den ICCT um Aufklärung bitten.</p>	<p>Conflict Frame</p>
<p>Denn jetzt geht es nicht mehr nur um eine trickreich versteckte Mogelsoftware in der Motorsteuerung, sondern offenbar auch um manipulierte Testabläufe bei den Verbrauchs- und Abgasmessungen.</p>	<p>Morality Frame</p>
<p>Für das Rekordjahr 2014 konnte Niedersachsen im Frühjahr gut 283 Millionen Euro Dividende verbuchen. Aufgrund der drohenden Milliarden-Strafzahlungen und Prozesskosten zeichnet sich ab, dass die Dividendenauszahlung in diesem Jahr sehr klein ausfällt oder sogar ganz ausfällt.</p>	<p>Economic Frame</p>
<p>Die Parallelen zwischen Volkswagen und dem Volk sind schnell gezogen. Als bei dem Konzern vor gut zehn Jahren die Luxus- und Lustreisen von Betriebsräten ruchbar wurden, war das ein Zeichen für die schwache, mit sich selbst beschäftigte deutsche Wirtschaft. Ebenso spiegelte der Wiederaufstieg VWs, mit dem Ziel, die Nummer eins auf der Welt zu werden, in den vergangenen Jahren die deutsche Genesung wider – vom kranken Mann Europas zum China des Westens, von einem Extrem ins andere. Und jetzt? Geht es automatisch auch wieder abwärts mit dem Exportland D?</p>	<p>Human Interest Frame</p>

Note. This is a sample of the content analysis of the 2015 German newspaper articles. It provides an illustration of how the coding was conducted.

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Table 3A
2018 Media Frame Coding Sheet

Text	Code
Daimler ist zum Rückruf bereit, bestreitet aber, dass es sich um eine rechtlich nicht zulässige Funktion handelt. "Es war ein gutes Gespräch, wir sehen uns in Tagen wieder", sagte Zetsche beim Verlassen des Ministeriums.	Attribution of Responsibility Frame
Wie teuer wird die Dieselfaffäre für Daimler? Verkehrsminister Scheuer könnte dem Konzern nach SPIEGEL-Informationen wegen eines unzulässigen Abgasreinigungssystems 5000 Euro Strafe pro Wagen berechnen.	Economic Frame
Auch das späte Eingeständnis von BMW, bei der Abgasreinigung einen "Fehler" gemacht zu haben, dürfte das Vertrauen der Kunden in die Aufrichtigkeit der Autoindustrie und deren Dieselmotore nicht stärken.	Human-Interest Frame
Der Daimler-Boss hätte Schluss machen können mit der Unehrllichkeit, mit der über viele Jahre treuen Kunden des Herstellers manipulierte Autos verkauft wurden. Fahrzeuge, deren Abgasreinigung so konstruiert war, dass sie billiger war und dem Konzern höhere Gewinne bescherte - und zwar auf Kosten der Gesundheit Hunderttausender, die zu hohe Stickoxid-Konzentrationen in den Städten einatmen müssen. Es wäre auch ein Moment des Aufbruchs für die gesamte Branche gewesen: weg von einer kriminellen Vergangenheit, stattdessen in eine nachhaltige Zukunft mit sauberen, bald sogar klimafreundlichen Fortbewegungsmitteln.	Morality Frame
<i>Note.</i> This is a sample of the content analysis of the 2018 German newspaper articles. It provides an illustration of how coding was conducted.	

Appendix B: Volkswagen Crisis Communication Documents

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