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Crisis Communication in the age of the 2018 Facebook-Cambridge Analytica Data Crisis

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List of Abbreviations

CA	Cambridge Analytica
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CMP	Crisis Management Plan
CRS	Crisis Response Strategy
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
SCCT	Situational Crisis Communication Theory
SCL	Strategic Communication Laboratories
TOS	Terms of Service

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Abstract

In today's digital age, social media networks are one of the fastest growing industries worldwide with billions of online users. Advances in information and communication technology have brought an increase of data flow every day, forcing organisations to ensure individual's data protection. However, these technologies are vulnerable to cyber-attacks as data breaches incidents, security incidents, privacy breaches and other malicious threats. Despite these vulnerabilities, there is still lack of existing academic literature on how social media organizations respond to data incidents. The purpose of this thesis is to examine and analyse how social media corporations respond to the case of a data leak, during which an unauthorized transmission of personal data from one company to another has taken place. This thesis, more specifically, will use as a case study the 2018 Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data crisis, in order to examine and analyse the strategies implemented by Facebook to respond to the data crisis, based on the types of crisis response strategies of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Timothy W. Coombs.

Key words: data crisis, data leak, data protection, social media corporations, Facebook, Cambridge Analytica, crisis communication, crisis response strategies, Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Chapter I: Introduction

1.1. Definition of the problem

The prevalence of social media networks has provided both individual users and organizations with accelerated access to services and personal information. Today, 2.65 billion social media users worldwide, are benefiting from the emergence of all kinds of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp[1]. Facebook, for instance, has provided its users with several benefits, ranging from being able to create a personal profile, upload posts and photographs, make a list of friends, communicate, join or create groups, commenting, advertising new businesses[2]. In order for users to experience these benefits, they need to share with the social media platform, some of their personal information, such as full name, e-mail address, phone number. However, by providing these benefits, social media corporations and third-party companies have, undoubtedly, gained access to a large number of users' personal data.

In most cases, social media users are unaware or have little knowledge how their personal data is being collected, stored and used by social media corporations. When registering to a social network, users should acknowledge the importance of accepting the *"I agree to the terms and conditions or terms of service"* checkbox[3]. Especially, when people are signing up in a social media website, they are required to indicate that they agree to the terms and conditions of this website, which are pointed out through a link. One can assume that, when agreeing to this registration, the user has first read the terms of service (TOS) of the platform. In this way, costumers of the social media platform can be fully aware of the rules of using the specific website, the rights and obligations of the social corporation and other third-parties of collaboration.

More specifically, in the terms of service of Facebook, one can find all the necessary information regarding what kind of services the platforms provides, the rights and obligations

[1] Clement J., *Number of global social network users 2010-2021*, August 14, 2019, available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/, accessed on: 30-10-2019
[2] Leighton A., *Facebook, Media and Democracy: Big Tech, Small State?*, London: Routledge, 2019, pg. 27
[3] Terms and conditions is an agreement between a website and a user, setting out the rights and responsibilities of anyone using this site. Definition extracted from Website Policies, *What are Terms and Conditions and Why it is Important to Have it*, available at: https://www.websitepolicies.com/blog/what-are-terms-and-conditions#what-are-the-terms-and-conditions, accessed on: 30-10-2019

of the user, several personal account details, the company's liability, the advertisement policy, as well as the privacy and data policy[4]. Especially, the Data Policy describes and explains how Facebook collects and uses personal data[5]. By reading the Data Policy, a Facebook user acknowledges how personal information is being collected and used for other services, as advertisement purposes, or shared with third-party applications. The Data Policy also points out Facebook's legal obligations regarding the protection of personal data, including the company's responsibility to investigate any suspicious activity or breach of its terms of service.

Although social media corporations enhance data protection in their terms of service, today, personal information is constantly at risk of exposure due to cyber threats such as malicious attacks, phishing, security breaches, privacy breaches and other technical failures[6]. With the great access to personal data in social media, privacy concerns have gained great importance[7]. Users' personal information have become more and more subject to security, data and privacy breaches[8]. Specifically, as a data breach is defined "an incident that involves the unauthorized or illegal viewing, access or retrieval of data by an individual, application or service"[9]. However, not all data incidents are intrusions into sensitive systems by unauthorized users, but in some cases, data can be simply exposed accidentally or not, by an internal or external source, resulting in a data leak. Therefore, as a data leak, it is called "the unauthorized transmission of data from within an organization to an external recipient"[10].

Data incidents have become a major cyber threat for organizations today[11]. For example, in recent years, many data incidents took place including the cases of LinkedIn (2012, 165 million), Yahoo (2014, 3 billion), and Facebook (2018, 87 million)[12]. A data incident, either a data breach or leak, poses many challenges to businesses and corporations, damages the

[4]Facebook, *Terms of Service*, available at: https://www.facebook.com/legal/terms, accessed on: 30-10-2019
[5]Facebook, *Terms of Service-Data Policy*, available at: https://www.facebook.com/about/privacy/update, accessed on: 30-10-2019
[6] Gharibi W., & Shaabi M., *Cyber Threats in Social Networking Websites*, Jahan University, 2012, pg. 4-5
[7] Babajide O., An Instrument for Measuring Social Media Users' Information Privacy Concerns, in Bennet A., *Social Media:Global Perspectives, Application, and Benefits and Dangers*, Media and Communications, Technologies, Policies and Challenges, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2014, pg. 2
[8] Van Schaik P., Jansen J., Onibokun J., Camp J., & Kusev P., *Security and privacy in online social networking: Risk perceptions and precautionary behaviour*, Computers in Human Behavior, Vol. 78, 2018, pp. 283-297
[9] Techopedia, *Data Breach*, available at: https://www.techopedia.com/definition/13601/data-breach, accessed on: 30-10-2019
[10] Forcepoint, *What is Data Leakage? Data Leakage Define, Explained, and Explored*, available at: https://www.forcepoint.com/cyber-edu/data-leakage, accessed on: 30-10-2019
[11] M2 Presswire, *Cyber attacks and data breaches remain top of the agenda for business continuity concerns*, M2 Presswire, 2017
[12] Tunggal T.A., *The 29 Biggest Data Breaches*, UpGuard, December 9, 2019, available at: https://www.upguard.com/blog/biggest-data-breaches, accessed on: 30-10-2019

company's reputation and results in financial issues, decline of value and trust, loss of customers[13]. As stated by Coombs, "a crisis is the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders…and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes"[14]. Therefore, a data incident is considered as an organizational crisis since it has the potential to disrupt or affect the entire organization[15].

Although a crisis can be unpredictable for an organization, it can indeed be expected, and this is the reason why, organizations need to work on their crisis management domain[16]. According to Coombs, "crisis management represents a set of factors designed to combat crises and to lessen the actual damage inflicted"[17]. Crisis management comprises of four factors: prevention, preparation, response and revision. Once a crisis looms, the organization and especially the crisis management team, have to respond to the crisis by taking actions to address the incident. In the case of a data crisis, where personal data are in stake and can be misused for a variety of purposes, it is crucial that corporations respond quickly and effectively to the ongoing crisis.

During the crisis, the organization is responsible for communicating the ongoing situation both internally, to the rest of the company, and externally, to the various stakeholders and the public. To do so, the crisis response team collects and processes all relevant information, and focuses on sharing with the stakeholders and the victims of the crisis exactly what had happened, by also informing them of all the steps that the organization is going to take to solve the crisis. As stated by Coombs *"communication shapes public perceptions of a crisis and the organization involved in the crisis"*[18]. Therefore, the organization aims, by choosing a strategy to respond to the crisis, on protecting the organizational image and reputation from all negative aspects related to the crisis.

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[13] Layzell N., *12 Potential Consequences of Data Breaches*, Dataconomy, March 29, 2018, available at: https://dataconomy.com/2018/03/12-scenarios-of-data-breaches/, accessed on: 05-10-2019

[14] Coombs W.T., *Ongoing crisis communication: planning, managing and responding*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007, pg. 19

[15] Ibid., pg. 20

[16] Ibid., pg. 19

[17] Ibid., pg. 21

[18] Coombs W.T., *Choosing the Rights Words: the Development of Guidelines for the Selection of the "appropriate" crisis-response strategies*, SAGE Publications, Management Communication Quartely, Vol.8, no.4, May 1995, pp. 447-476, pg. 447

1.2. Aim of the research

This thesis aims on examining how social media platforms respond to a data crisis, and specifically to a data leak. To gain insight knowledge on this topic, the thesis will use a single case study analysis, the 2018 case of Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data crisis. The reasons for the selection of this case study will be listed in the end of the introduction, while more detailed reference will be made in Chapter III. The main goal of the study is to analyse the employed crisis response strategies on behalf of Facebook, through the theoretical lens of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Timothy W. Coombs.

For the purposes of this thesis and in order to examine the strategies implemented by Facebook, the responses of the company's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Mark Zuckerberg, will be also described and analysed, since as the leader of the company, he was expected to respond to the data crisis. Since in 2018, social media were accounted for over 56% of the 4.5 billion data records compromised, this study aims to contribute to the existing research within the crisis response strategy field, by providing new evidence in the case of a data leak crisis[19]. The study will reveal the type of strategies that can be used by a social media corporation responding to a data crisis. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, the following research question will be addressed:

RQ: How do social media corporations respond to crises, as data leaks, based on the Crisis Response Strategies of the SCCT theory by Timothy W. Coombs?

1.3. Case Study: Facebook-Cambridge Analytica 2018 Data Crisis

On March 17th 2018, the headlines of *The Guardian*[20] and *The New York Times*[21] newspapers, published articles reporting that Cambridge Analytica (CA), a British political data consulting firm and subsidiary company of the Strategic Communication Laboratories (SCL), acquired

[19] Gilbert P., *Social media becomes biggest data breach threat,* ItWeb, October 10, 2018, available at: https://www.itweb.co.za/content/G98YdqLxZZNqX2PD, accessed on: 05-10-2019

[20] Cadwallard C., & Graham-Harrison Emma, *Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach*, The Guardian, March 17, 2018, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election, accessed on: 05-10-2019

[21] Rosenberg M., Confessore N., & Cadwalladr C., *How Trump Consultants Exploited the Facebook Data of Millions*, The New York Times, March 17, 2018, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-trump-campaign.html?module=inline, accessed on: 05-10-2019

and misused personal data of up to 87 million Facebook users[22]. According to the reports, the data were used to develop analytical tools during the 2016 United States Presidential election and the UK Brexit campaigns. More specifically, the data were used during President Donald Trump's election campaign in order to identify the personalities of American voters and influence their voting behaviour[23]. The story of this data misuse incident, broke out as a scandal, since it was revealed by mass media accusing the involved organizations[24].

However, the data were not scraped by Cambridge Analytica but, via a third-party app, called *"thisisyourdigitallife".* It all started on February 2013, when a Cambridge academic named Aleksandr Kogan and his company Global Science Research (GSR) created this application with a personality quiz, through which Facebook users were asked to answer questions to create their psychological profile[25]. However, as the participants gave out their responses, their online personal data, as well as their Facebook 'friends' data were harvested by Kogan's application. As a result, Kogan passed these data to Cambridge Analytica, which later worked on Donald Trump's election campaign.

According to Facebook's report in 2018, the data gathered from the application were provided to Cambridge Analytica violating the company's privacy policy for passing information to a third party[26]. As the story of the data scandal was attracting worldwide attention, Facebook first responded to the crisis through a statement in the company's official blogpost, but it was only five days later on the 22nd of March, that the Chief Executive Officer, Mark Zuckerberg, issued a statement on his Facebook personal page[27]. In that statement he pointed out the company's responsibility to protect users' data and the fact that they had been working on solving the situation and making sure that this will not occur again. After that, on April 10th 2018, the CEO was called to testify before the United States Congress over the data

[22] Kang C., & Frenkel S., *Facebook says Cambridge Analytica Harvested Data of Up to 87 Million Users*, The New York Times, April 4, 2018, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/technology/mark-zuckerberg-testify-congress.html, accessed on: 04-10-2019

[23] Granville K., *Facebook and Cambridge Analytica: What You Need to Know as Fallout Widens,* The New York Times, March 19, 2018, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/19/technology/facebook-cambridge-analytica-explained.html, accessed on: 04-10-2019

[24] For the purposes of this thesis, when referring to the term 'data scandal', this will have the same meaning as 'data crisis' and vice versa.

[25] Isaak J., & Hanna J.M., *User Data Privacy: Facebook, Cambridge Analytica, and Privacy Protection,* The IEEE Computer Society, 2018, pp. 56-59, p. 57

[26] Facebook Newsroom, *Suspending Cambridge Analytica and SCL Group From Facebook,* March 16, 2018, available at: https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/03/suspending-cambridge-analytica/, accessed on: 04-10-2019

[27] Zuckerberg M., Facebook post, March 21, 2018, available at: https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104712037900071, accessed on: 05-10-2019

leak, since U.S. politicians were looking for answers on behalf of the CEO concerning the reasons why the data leak occurred and the steps the corporation would take in the future[28].

Although the reasons why the 2018 case of Facebook-Cambridge Analytica Data Scandal was chosen for the purposes of this thesis will be elaborated more in Chapter III, the case was initially chosen because of its importance for today's digitalized society. More specifically, according to a 2019 July report of Statista platform, Facebook has become the largest social media network in the world; for the second quarter of 2019 there were over 2.4 billion monthly active Facebook users worldwide[29]. This means that the company has a large responsibility towards its 2.4 billion users, especially regarding the protection of their personal data. For this reason, the case will provide evidence of how such a giant technology corporation responds to a data crisis, where personal information is at stake.

The purpose of this paper is to examine and analyze the crisis response strategies used and applied by Facebook in order to respond and communicate externally the data crisis. To do so, and in order to answer the abovementioned research question, the research will focus on examining and analysing, through the data analysis technique of content analysis, press releases from the Facebook's official blogpost, press releases made by Facebook in the media, CEO Mark Zuckerberg's posts in his personal Facebook page, CEO's single interviews and testimonies referring directly to the crisis response strategies used by Facebook.

1.4. Academic and Societal Relevance

In the academic literature, several studies have been made on crisis communication as an important component of crisis management (Coombs, 2010). More specifically, academic research has focused on the crisis communication aspect during crises such as natural

[28] The Economist, *Why is Mark Zuckerberg testifying in Congress*, available at: https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2018/04/09/why-is-mark-zuckerberg-testifying-in-congress, accessed on: 30-10-2019
[29] Clement J., *Number of monthly active facebook users worldwide as of 2nd quarter 2019*, November 19, 2019, available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/, accessed on: 04-10-2019

disasters[30], aviation incidents[31], organizational crisis[32], and terrorist incidents[33]. However, little research has been conducted upon the communication strategies, corporations, and especially social media networking companies, adopt and use in the case of data crises. Since studies have focused on a more traditional perspective of crisis, this study will show the importance that should also be given in this new type of crisis, data crisis. Regarding data crises, most of the available research focuses on examining the response given to data breaches and not to data leaks[34] [35]. Therefore, studying an organizational response to a data leak, will contribute to the existing research on crisis communication strategies by social media corporations. In addition, this study will provide additional research on responding to data leaks by classifying the implemented strategies within the SCCT framework. This thesis can stand as the initial point to cover the academic knowledge gap regarding organizational crisis response strategies in the cases of data leaks.

The topic of this thesis is also related to the academic field of crisis and security management. More specifically, as past history has shown, no organization is immune to crises, and therefore, there is always a need for more crisis response strategy knowledge within the crisis management domain. Organizational crisis response strategies and crisis communication are two phenomena intertwined to the field of crisis management. Understanding how organizations respond to crises, and especially to data crises, will shed light on the effectiveness of crisis management preparedness. Also, the topic of data leak and privacy breach is closely related to cyber security; with cyber-crime rising rapidly, corporations must be prepared to cope with and respond to any incident by minimizing the damage with an effective crisis management plan.

In addition to the academic relevance, the need for further research on crisis response strategies, as in the case of data leaks, can be found upon the societal importance of holding social media networks responsible for their actions. More specifically, by gaining knowledge

[30] Kaufman R., *Crisis As an Opportunity: Organizational and Community Responses to Disasters,* Lanham: UPA, 2011
[31] Greer C., & Moreland K., *United Airlines' and American Airlines' online crisis communication following the September 11 terrorist attacks*, Public Relations Review, Vol. 29(4), 2003, pp. 427-44
[32] Pearson C., Roux-Dufort C., & Clair J., *International handbook of organizational crisis management*, Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2007
[33] Durmaz H., *Understanding and responding to terrorism,* NATO Science for Peace and Security Series, Vol. 19, Washington DC: IOS Press, 2007
[34] Casey E., *Responding to a data breach: A little knowledge is a dangerous thing*, Digital Investigation, 8(1), 2011, pp. 1-2
[35] Bentley J., Oostman K., & Shah S., *We're sorry but it's not our fault: Organizational apologies in ambiguous crisis situations,* Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management, Vol. 26(1), 2018, pp. 138-149

on how these corporations respond to data crises, users will be able to comprehend how companies store, use and share their personal data online. This knowledge can be of great significance since it concerns incidents, which result in personal data being prone to any kind of misuse by other actors outside the registered social network. Additionally, the analysis of the chosen crisis response strategies on behalf of the organization, will help users identify the company's reliability on its privacy policies, and the measures taken to make sure that these kinds of incidents will not occur again in the future. Also, other social media networking organizations will benefit from the findings of the research by identifying any potential mistakes from the chosen crisis response strategies and trying to learn from past cases.

1.5. Outline of the thesis

The introductory section provided an outline of the aim behind the development of this thesis, the research question, an introduction to the case study, as well as the academic and societal relevance.

In the following chapter, Chapter II 'Theoretical Framework', the concept of crisis will be presented together with a literature review on existing research on the field of crisis management and crisis response strategies. In the same chapter, the selected theoretical framework applied on the case study, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory of Timothy W. Coombs, will be described. In this way, the chapter offers an overview of the theoretical concepts that are necessary for the analysis of this thesis.

In Chapter III 'Methodology and Research Design', the selected research design of the study will be discussed, including the case study and justification of the choice, as well as the data collection and analysis method used. Chapter IV 'Analysis of Facebook's response to the 2018 Cambridge Analytica data crisis', contains the description and the analysis part of the strategies implemented by Facebook to respond to the data crisis. The analysis will be conducted through the theoretical lens of the chosen framework discussed in Chapter II.

Finally, in Chapter V 'Conclusions', the findings of the study will be presented and an answer will be given to the research question. The findings will be accompanied by the generalizability of the findings and limitations of this thesis, with recommendations for future research.

Chapter II: Theoretical Framework

In this part of the thesis, I will analyze the theoretical lens that will be used for the study of the research question, through which I will examine how Facebook responded to the 2018 Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data crisis. First of all, the concept of crisis will be presented, along with a literature review on the different school of thoughts on the topic of crisis communication and crisis response strategies. The literature review provides a wealthy overview of the theories on crisis, crisis communication and crisis response strategies.

Additionally, the identification of the definitions of the most important terms will be conducted. According to Locke et al, it is important to *"define the terms that individuals outside the field of study may not understand and that go beyond common language"*[36]. Defining the main academic terms used throughout this thesis, will help the reader thoroughly understand how the topic of this thesis is being approached. As Firestone has pointed out: *"the words of everyday language are rich in multiple meanings… this is the reason common terms are given "technical meanings" for scientific purposes"*[37]. This section of the relevant literature on crisis response strategies, will end by introducing the main theory chosen for the subsequent analysis of how social media corporations respond to data crisis, and specifically, how Facebook responded to the 2018 Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data crisis.

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. The Concept of Crisis

First of all, it is important to clarify the meaning of crisis since there are several definitions of crisis across multiple disciplines and there is no one, commonly shared and accepted term. The word crisis comes from the Greek word 'krisis' (in greek κρίσις) which initially means 'decision' or 'turning point or an unstable situation'. For Hermann "crises are devices of

[36] Locke L.F., Spirduso W.W., & Silverman S.J., *Proposals that work: A guide for planning dissertations and grand proposals*, Thousand Oaks, 2007
[37] Firestone W.A., *Meaning in method: the rhetoric quantitative and qualitative research*, Educational Researcher, 16(7), 1987, pp. 16-21

change"[38]; which means that crises, when occurring, bring to the surface both organizational and societal change that can lead to diverse consequences for an organization.

Hermann also identifies three different features of an organizational crisis; organizational crisis (1) is a threat to values of the organization, (2) has a restricted response time, and (3) is an unexpected event[39]. Pearson and Clair defined organizational crisis as "a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly"[40]. For Allen and Caillouet crisis is a threat to an organization and can potentially do reputational damage[41]. Reputational damage is translated as financial losses and other threats to the organization's existence. Coombs and Holladay also pointed out the threat and challenges that a crisis poses to the organization's legitimacy, with stakeholders questioning if the organization is meeting normative expectations, meaning whether the organization is working on shaping stakeholders' opinion after the crisis[42].

Ulmer et al, provided the definition of organizational crisis as "a specific, unexpected, and nonroutine event that creates a high level of uncertainty and threat to the organizational goals"[43]. Their research pointed out that crises are seen as an opportunity for the involved actors to learn and make positive outcomes. Bundy et al, also argue that an organizational crisis has profound implications for its relationship with stakeholders[44]. A crisis can cause reputational and financial damage to the organization, loss of credibility, and alter the company's relationship with its stakeholders. According to Coombs, "crisis is an event that is an unpredictable, major threat that can have a negative effect on the organization, industry, or stakeholders if handled improperly"[45]. Specifically, Coombs adopts the definition of crisis as

[38] Hermann C.F., *Some consequences of crisis which limit the viability of organizations,* Administrative Science Quarterly, Vol. 8(1), 1963, pp. 61-82, p. 63
[39] Ibid., p. 64
[40] Pearson M.C., & Clair A.J., *Reframing Crisis Management,* Academy of Management Review, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1998, pp. 59-76, pg. 60
[41] Allen W.M., & Caillouet H.R., *Legitimation endeavors: Impression Management Strategies used by an Organization in Crisis,* Communication Monographs, Vol. 61, 1994
[42] Coombs W.T., & Holladay J.S., *Communication and Attributions in a Crisis: An Experimental Study in Crisis Communication,* Journal of Public Relations Research, No. 8(4), 1996, pp. 279-295, pg. 281
[43] Ulmer R.R., Sellnow L.T., & Seeger W.M., *Effective crisis communication: moving from crisis to opportunity,* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007, pg. 7
[44] Bundy J. et al., *Crises and Crisis Management: Integration, Interpretation and Research Development,* Journal of Management, Vol. 43, No. 6, 2017, pp. 1661-1692, pg. 1662
[45] Coombs W.T., *Ongoing crisis communication: planning, managing and responding,* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007, pg. 2-3

"the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes"[46].

In addition to these definitions, there is also a wide range of variety for the classification of the types of crises. More specifically, Coombs is categorizing crises based on two dimensions: internal-external and intentional-unintentional[47]. The internal-external dimension refers to a crisis based on whether it was something that occurred within the organization or outside of it. Thus, the second dimension relates the incident to whether this was done on purpose or not. In addition, Fink divided crises between the ones that the organization has no control on and the ones that it has control[48].

Marcus and Goodman, based on the causes of a crisis and the effects that can have on victims, distinguished three different types: accidents, scandals and product safety and health incidents[49]. Especially a corporate scandal, is defined as a disgraceful occurrence for which the organization cannot deny responsibility, as it is usually a result of organizational mistake. A scandal can have consequences as public dishonor, financial fine, internal organizational and management changes. According to their theory, in the case of a corporate scandal, "companies seek to get things behind them, and the quickest way to do so may be to offer an apology backed up by organizational and management change"[50].

From the aforementioned different conceptualizations of crisis, it can be stated that there are similarities since most of the definitions describe a crisis as a sudden and unexpected event, that brings several changes to the organization. Also, several definitions argue upon the fact that crises alter the relationships between the organization and the stakeholders and victims of the crisis. However, several differences can be found within the definitions, regarding the different types of crises categorization.

For the purposes of this thesis, and in order to be able to give a clear answer to the aforementioned research question, crisis will be defined as following:

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[46] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *The handbook of crisis communication*, Chichester [etc.], Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pg. 19

[47] Coombs W.T., *Choosing the Rights Words: the Development of Guidelines for the Selection of the "appropriate" crisis-response strategies*, SAGE Publications, Management Communication Quartely, vol.8, no.4, May 1995, pp. 447-476, pg. 454

[48] Fink S., Crisis Management: planning for the inevitable, as quoted in Marcus A.A., & Goodman S.R., *Victims and Shareholders: The Dilemmas of Presenting Corporate Policy during a Crisis,* The Academy of Management Journal, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1991, pp. 281-305, pg. 284

[49] Marcus A.A., & Goodman S.R., *Victims and Shareholders: The Dilemmas of Presenting Corporate Policy during a Crisis*, The Academy of Management Journal, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1991, pp. 281-305, pg. 284

[50] Ibid., pg. 287

A crisis is perceived as an organizational internal and unintentional data crisis, that threatens the organization's performance, violates the stakeholders' and costumers' expectations, and results in negative impact on the organization's image and legitimacy.

This definition was chosen from the different elements included in the various definitions for crisis, in terms of connecting these elements to the characteristics of the chosen case study for this thesis. The definition will be used throughout this thesis as the main working definition for the crisis under investigation.

2.1.2. The Concept of Crisis Management

As a crisis can alter and disrupt any organizational progress, businesses develop a set of recommendations in order to prepare and be ready to respond to any crisis. Today, a wealthy research exists on the field of crisis management, having its roots in emergency and disaster management[51]. Steven Fink examined crisis management and viewed it in four stages: (i) prodromal, a crisis gives warning signs, (ii) acute, occurring of a crisis, (iii) chronic, when the organization recovers from the crisis and (iv) resolution, the organization operates again as normal[52].

For Mitroff, crisis management can be divided into five phases: (i) signal detection, identifying warning signs of a potential crisis, (ii) probing and prevention, when risks of a crisis are known and the organization is working to reduce their harm, (iii) damage containment, when a crisis hits and actions are taken, (iv) recovery, trying to return to normal operations, and (v) learning, organization is learning from the crisis[53].

In addition, according to Coombs, crisis management is defined as *"a set of factors designed to combat crises and to lessen the actual damages inflicted"*[54]. For Coombs, crisis management is a process that includes four phases: (1) prevention, (2) preparation, (3) response,

[51] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *The handbook of crisis communication*, Chichester [etc.], Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pg. 21
[52] Fink S., Crisis Management: planning for the inevitable, as quoted in Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *The handbook of crisis communication*, Chichester [etc.], Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pg. 22
[53] Mitroff I., & Pearson C.M., From crisis prone to crisis prepared: A framework for crisis management, as quoted in Coombs W.T., *Ongoing crisis communication: planning, managing and responding*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007, pg. 24
[54] Coombs W.T., *Ongoing crisis communication: planning, managing and responding,* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007, pg. 5

and (4) revision[55]. Prevention phase, embodies all the measures taken from an organization to prevent crises from occurring. Preparation phase, is the phase during which the organization develops its crisis management plan (CMP) in the case of an outbreak of a crisis. In the response phase, when a crisis has already hit the organization, the CMP is being activated and the organization tries to limit the treat of the crisis and reduce the negative impact on the organization. The last phase, revision concerns the evaluation of the organization's response to the crisis.

According to Coombs's definition, crisis management is also a process that is divided into three different phases: pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis phase[56]. The pre-crisis management phase involves the organizational preparation to handle a crisis. During this phase, the organization is working on preventing the threats of any known risks, and preparing for a crisis with producing the crisis management plan, and training the crisis management team. During the second phase, the crisis response phase, an event produces the beginning of the crisis, the organization recognizes the crisis and responds by implementing the necessary crises-response strategies. In the post-crisis phase, the crisis is resolved, the organization is learning from the crisis and works on prevent any recurrence in the future. For the purposes of this thesis, in order to examine Facebook's response to the data crisis, the focus is being given only to the second phase of crisis management, the response phase.

2.2. Theoretical Concepts

2.2.1. Crisis Communication and Crisis Response Strategies

As mentioned before, this thesis focuses on analyzing the strategies implemented by Facebook to respond to the 2018 Cambridge Analytica data crisis. The following section will explain the theoretical perspective and concepts used in this study to answer the research question. More specifically, the study will focus on the crisis response strategies framework established by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory of Timothy W. Coombs, which will be analysed further below.

[55] Ibid., pg. 21-22
[56] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *The handbook of crisis communication*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pg. 20

As stated by Coombs, crisis communication is a critical component throughout the process of crisis management, since every crisis creates the need for knowledge and information[57]. He defines crisis communication as "the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation"[58]. As crisis management is divided into three phases, so is crisis communication: pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis. Pre-crisis phase is devoted on locating and preventing any potential crisis risk. During the pre-crisis phase, the organization is providing stakeholders with information about any exposed risks in order to mitigate the threats and protect the organizational image. Additionally, crisis response phase, includes what the organization is doing and saying after the outbreak of a crisis. Lastly, post-crisis communication happens when the crisis is over and focuses on managing and communicating the effects of the crisis.

For Coombs, crisis communication is focusing on the crisis response; what and how an organization is communicating during a crisis. When a crisis hits, the organization is responsible for responding to the crisis, internally, by collecting all necessary information, and externally, by communicating to the stakeholders and the public what happened. For Coombs, "crisis response includes the first public statements the spokesperson makes about the crisis"[59]. In any crisis, the stakeholders and the public are expecting the organization to provide them will all the necessary information about the incident. The way the organization is responding to the crisis and handling its consequences is important for shaping the public's perceptions for the organization in crisis.

For crisis response strategies, there is a wealthy research from different scholars. In 1995, William L. Benoit introduced the image repair theory within the crisis communication research, according to which, organizations seek to protect their public image or reputation during a crisis[60]. The image repair theory offers five categories of crisis response strategies: denial (denying the existence of a crisis), evading responsibility (reducing the accused's organization responsibility), reducing offensiveness (reduce the perceived offensiveness of the act), corrective action (reducing offensiveness of the act attributed to the accused), and mortification (asking for forgiveness to restore image)[61]. The theory of image restoration is

[57] Ibid., pg. 20
[58] Ibid.
[59] Coombs W.T., *Ongoing crisis communication: planning, managing and responding,* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007, pg. 158
[60] Benoit L.W., *Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication,* Public Relations Review, 23(2), 1997, pp. 177-186
[61] Ibid., pg. 179

focusing on the message and the words that the organization is choosing to use in its crisis communication strategy in order to respond to the crisis.

In 1995, Timothy W. Coombs also conducted research on crisis response strategies. Coombs stated that crisis response strategies are composed of messages to repair organizational images[62]. He categorized crisis response strategies in five different clusters as: nonexistence strategies (strategies that seek to eliminate the crisis), distance strategies (strategies that try to create public acceptance of the crisis through the use of excuse and justification), ingratiation strategies (strategies that try to gain public approval for the organization), mortification strategies (strategies aiming to win forgiveness of the crisis and create acceptance), and suffering strategies (strategies aiming to win sympathy from the public)[63].

2.2.2. Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Coombs finalized his theory about crisis response strategies with the development of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)[64]. According to the SCCT theory, "crises are negative events, stakeholders will make attributions about crisis responsibility, and those attributions will affect how stakeholders interact with the organization in crisis"[65]. The SCCT theory addresses crises from a three-phase approach as: pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis phases. During the crisis response phase, the SCCT theory provides crisis managers with a theoretical base for choosing the appropriate crisis response strategy during a crisis in order to maximize reputational protection. For the SCCT theory, "an organization's reputation is a valued resource that is threatened by crises"[66].

Therefore, an organization undergoing a crisis will first identify the crisis situation, and then choose the appropriate crisis response strategy to protect its reputation. According to the SCCT theory, the recognition of the crisis enables an initial assessment of the amount of crisis

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[62] Coombs W.T., *Choosing the Rights Words: the Development of Guidelines for the Selection of the "appropriate" crisis-response strategies*, SAGE Publications, Management Communication Quartely, Vol.8, No.4, May 1995, pp. 447-476, pg. 449

[63] Ibid., pg. 450-453

[64] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory,* Corporate Reputation Review, Vol.10, 2007, pp. 163-186

[65] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *The handbook of crisis communication*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pg. 38

[66] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *Protecting Organization Reputations During a Crisis: The Development and Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory,* Corporate Reputation Review, vol.10, 2007, pp. 163-186, pg. 167

responsibility that the public will attribute to the organization[67]. Crisis responsibility refers to the degree that the organization will recognize its responsibility for the crisis. When the organization assess the level of crisis responsibility, then the crisis management team will choose the applicable crisis response strategy.

Based on the level of crisis responsibility, SCCT theory acknowledges four crisis response strategies (CRS): three primary strategies as deny, diminish, rebuild and one supplementary strategy, the reinforce strategy[68]. Each of these strategies includes different indicators which further explain the specific type of strategy. The first strategy, deny, refers to the crisis situations in which the organization is trying to evade responsibility, either by denying the existence of the crisis or by claiming that someone else is responsible for the crisis. The indicators are denying that any crisis situation exists, evading crisis responsibility and attacking the accuser.

The second strategy, diminish, consists of strategies through which the organization aims on minimizing its crisis responsibility by providing excuses and other justifications for the crisis. In this way, the organization focuses on reducing the perceived seriousness of the occurred event. The indicators of diminish strategy include excuses and justifications for the ongoing situation.

Additionally, the third strategy, rebuild, refers to accepting responsibility by apologizing and working on overcoming the crisis. The organization seeks to improve public's impressions by providing apologies and/or compensation to the victims of the crisis. The organization is also taking corrective measures to overcome the crisis. The indicators for this crisis response strategy are sorted into apology, offering compensation, and taking corrective measures.

Lastly, the reinforce strategy, is the strategy through which the organization tries to add positive information by praising its past good works in order to minimize the risks of organizational reputational damage. The organization is aiming on increasing positive associations regarding its works in the minds of stakeholders and the public. The indicators for the reinforce strategy are made up of reminders to make positive connection between the victims and the organization in crisis.

[67] Ibid., pg. 169
[68] Ibid., pg. 40

Table 1: SCCT Crisis Response Strategies

Response Strategy Type	*Response Strategy Indicators*
Denial Strategy	Evade crisis responsibility Deny crisis/crisis situation exists Attack the accuser
Diminish Strategy	Reduce crisis responsibility Provide excuses and justifications for the situation
Rebuild Strategy	Accept responsibility Offer apology/compensation Take corrective measures
Reinforce Strategy	Remind stakeholders of past good work of the organization

In the SSCT theory, the four types of crisis response strategies (deny, diminish, rebuild, reinforce) are conceptualized on a 'defensive' to a more 'accommodative' continuum. According to the SCCT theory, "crisis managers utilize the level of threat presented by the crisis to determine the appropriate crisis response"[69]. If a crisis poses greater threat to the reputational image of an organization, then the organization will choose a more accommodative strategy to respond to the crisis, as the rebuild strategy, through which, the organization accepts responsibility and may provide compensation to the victims of the crisis. For Coombs, "full apology is the most accommodative restoration strategy because it involves taking responsibility for the crisis and asking for forgiveness"[70]. After the apology, corrective action takes place when the accused organization promises to correct all issues that might have caused the crisis.

[69] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *The handbook of crisis communication*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pg. 40
[70] Coombs, W. T. (1999). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pg. 122

Chapter III: Methodology and Research Design

The literature review on crisis management and crisis communication as well as the analysis of the theoretical framework of crisis response strategies by the SCCT theory, that is going to be the basis of this thesis, provide a clear and strong foundation in order to examine and analyze Facebook's crisis response strategy during the 2018 Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data crisis. In this chapter, the chosen research design will be explained and all methodological choices will be justified. The single case-study selection will be analysed together with the data collection and data analysis procedures.

3.1. Research Design

In this part of the thesis, I will explain the chosen research design. In order to answer the research question, **"*How do social media corporations respond to crises, as data leaks, based on the Crisis Response Strategies of the SCCT theory by Timothy W. Coombs?"***, this thesis will be based on empirical explanatory research. According to Verhoeven, "empirical research means that the research is conducted using systems to access what takes place in a certain reality"[71]. This means that the source of knowledge in the empirical research, is existing evidence that the researcher will gather in order to come up with findings for the phenomenon under investigation. More specifically, the available empirical evidence for this thesis, is all the collected evidence that represent the crisis response strategy established by Facebook in order to respond to the data crisis.

In addition, the term explanatory research "implies that the research in question is intended to explain, rather than simply to describe, the phenomenon studied"[72]. According to this definition, explanatory research allows the researcher to investigate the phenomenon, increase the understanding on a specific research topic, and provides results and findings in a detailed manner. The aim of this thesis is to explore how social media corporations respond to the new phenomenon of data crisis. Therefore, by exploring the crisis response strategy used

[71] Verhoeven N., *Doing Research: The Hows and Whys of Applied Research*, Boom Lemma uitgevers, Amsterdam, 2015, pg. 34
[72] Maxwell A.J., & Mittapalli K., Explanatory Research, in Given M.,L., *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*, London: SAGE, 2008, pg. 324

by Facebook in the case of the Cambridge Analytica data crisis, it will be possible to investigate the way these corporations handle and respond to data crises.

Moreover, qualitative research method will be conducted in order to collect all necessary evidence for the analysis of this research. Verhoeven defines qualitative research as a method that is not based on numerical information, but it is method that takes researchers into the field of analysis[73]. Qualitative research has been chosen for the study of this paper, through which qualitative data will be collected from the observation and examination of different types of documents. Additionally, the research will follow a deductive approach; for Creswell and Plano, deductive research means that the researcher is working from the top down, from a theory to the collection of the data, in order to test the theory[74]. This thesis will, therefore, start from the top, having the SCCT theory as the research framework of the paper, in order to collect evidence and then test the theory through the analysis of the collected evidence.

3.2. Case Study

For the purposes of this study, the research design will be based on a single case-study analysis, the 2018 case of Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data crisis. According to Creswell, case study as part of a qualitative research method, can provide an in-depth analysis of a specific case[75]. Through the collection, observation and analysis of the qualitative data, I will examine how Facebook responded to the data crisis. Specifically, the examination of this case will provide evidence for the research in order to extract conclusions on how social media corporations respond to data crises.

According to Gerring, "a case study is an intensive study of a single case or a small number of cases which draws on observational data and promises to shed light on a larger population of cases"[76]. Through the analysis of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data crisis, this thesis will provide the reader with evidence on how social media corporations respond to

[73] Verhoeven N., *Doing Research: The Hows and Whys of Applied Research,* Boom Lemma uitgevers, Amsterdam, 2015, pg. 135
[74] Creswell W.J., & Plano C., Desiging and conducting mixed methods research, as quoted in Soiferman L.K., *Compare and Contrast Inductive and Deductive Researc Approaches,* University of Manitoba, 2010, pg. 3
[75] Creswell W.J., & Creswell J.D., *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches,* 5th edition, CA: Sage, 2018, pg. 14
[76] Gerring J., *Case Study Research: principles and practices,* Cambridge University Press, 2017, pg. 28

data crises. In order to explain a broader phenomenon of 'crisis response strategies in data crisis', conducting a case study is the most appropriate design for the purposes of this study.

Yin uses a combined technical definition of case studies as: "case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident….and relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion"[77]. For Yin, case study is also appropriate when being asked about a contemporary event over which the investigator has little or no control[78]. The research method of a case study is based on multiple sources of evidence through which the collection of data is being conducted. For the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica case, the sources consist of Facebook's press releases in its official blogpost, press releases made by Facebook in the media, posts made by the CEO Mark Zuckerberg in his personal profile on Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg's single interviews by the media, and Mark Zuckerberg's Testimonies in front of the United States Congress.

In addition to this, there are several reasons behind the choice of conducting a single case study as the most suitable option for the purposes of this research. According to Yin, a single-case study is appropriate for a research under five components: it is critical, unusual, common, revelatory, or longitudinal case[79]. The first component, critical, means that the chosen case can contribute to theory testing, by confirming the theory and recommending future researches in the field. The case study of this thesis will contribute to gain further knowledge by applying the SCCT theory on a different type of organizational crisis than the existing research knowledge, as data crisis.

The second component, unusual, refers to cases that represent something unusual, meaning that the case can bring new knowledge and information to a specific field. Indeed, the case of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data crisis, can be characterized as an uncommon case since it was a data leak, meaning that an unauthorized export of personal data took place. Therefore, this case represents an issue not so common among the dangers concerning personal data, as for example in the case of a data breach, and therefore, it should be researched as an unusual case. Additionally, the third component, as a common case, refers to cases that can be characterized as a situation that can be of a real-life context and brings interest. The chosen case

[77] Ibid., pg. 18
[78] Ibid., pg. 13
[79] Yin K.R., *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods,* 6th Edition, SAGE Publications, 2018

for this thesis, represents a modern issue that has been characterized as a threat to organizations and businesses, the misuse of personal data. Therefore, conducting a single-case will bring evidence and will contribute to understanding how social media corporations respond to data crises.

The fourth component, a revelatory case, refers to a case which provides an opportunity to observe a topic of a little research. Although and as stated in the introduction, the topic of organizational crisis response strategies, has been investigated before, the issue of how social media corporations respond to data crises has undergone little investigation. The research brings importance on examining the way social networks choose to respond to such a sensitive issue, as the leak of millions of personal data, that the corporation is handling and, therefore, responsible to protect. Lastly, the fifth component, is the longitudinal case, which refers to studying two different points of a single-case at the same time. However, this component is not applicable to the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data crisis, since the research focuses on one point; the applied crisis response strategies by Facebook.

3.3. Case Selection

As stated by Gerring, the selection of cases is often influenced by the perceived importance of a case[80]. It can be said that there are several reasons behind the selection of the 2018 Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data crisis, as the study material for the purposes of this thesis.

Firstly, as already stated before, Facebook has become the largest social media network in the world; for the second quarter of 2019 there were over 2.4 billion monthly active Facebook users worldwide[81]. With such a large number of users, it is expected that the company is constantly working on the protection of users' personal data. For this reason, the Cambridge Analytica data crisis has raised data privacy concerns about the ability of third parties to collect data information without getting permission from the organization[82]. Although research has been done on this specific case, mainly regarding data privacy concerns[83], micro-targeting[84],

[80] Gerring J., *Case Study Research: principles and practices*, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pg. 42
[81] Clement J., *Number of monthly active facebook users worldwide as of 2nd quarter 2019*, November 19, 2019, available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/, accessed on: 04-10-2019
[82] Tuttle, H., *Facebook Scandal Raises Data Privacy Concerns*, Risk Management, Vol. 65(5), pp. 6-9.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Heewood J., *Pseudo-public political speech: Democratic implications of the Cambridge Analytica Scandal*, Information Polity, Vol. 23(4), pp. 429-434

big data issues[85], there has been little research on the crisis response strategies used by Facebook to deal with the data scandal.

Therefore, by examining this case, I will first describe and then analyze how social media corporations respond to data crises. The importance of this case, also derives from the following reasons. First of all, the response of the CEO Zuckerberg should be examined since he broke his silence only five days after the scandal's reveal, on March 21st 2018[86]. According to Coombs, when a crisis, hits, the organization must respond quickly as technology accelerates the spread of information and media report crises quickly[87]. Therefore, during this crisis, stakeholders, victims and media were expecting the CEO to stand out and respond, and because of his delay, he received media criticism, a factor that affected negatively the crisis[88]. Because of the CEO's silence, Facebook's shares slid 6.77% two days after the outbreak of the crisis, while social media users began using the #WheresZuck hashtag on Twitter and initiated the #DeleteFacebook campaign[89].

Additionally, the case attracted attention upon privacy issues regarding the ways social media corporations handle customers personal data. Specifically, it is assumed that in today's digitalized world, social media corporations gather as much data as possible, and then make use of these information for several reasons, as advertising purposes[90]. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the measures taken from corporations to cope with incidents concerning personal data. Lastly, the analysis of this specific case will contribute on providing a useful background and adding to the knowledge of other social media corporations that handle and gather users' personal data, on how to cope with a same crisis and thus, how to respond and communicate the crisis.

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[85] Fuller M., *Big data and the Facebook scandal: Issues and responses*, Theology, Vol. 122(1), 2019, pp. 14-21

[86] Wong C.J., *Mark Zuckerberg apologizes for Facebook's 'mistakes' over Cambridge Analytica,* The Guardian, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/mar/21/mark-zuckerberg-response-facebook-cambridge-analytica, accessed on: 30-10-2019

[87] Coombs W.T., *Ongoing crisis communication: planning, managing and responding,* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007, pg. 158

[88] Wong C.J., *Where's Zuck? Facebook CEO silent as data harvesting scandal unfolds,* The Guardian, March 19, 2018, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/19/where-is-mark-zuckerberg-facebook-ceo-cambridge-analytica-scandal, accessed on: 20-12-2019

[89] Wong C.J., *Where's Zuck? Facebook CEO silent as data harvesting scandal unfolds,* The Guardian, March 19, 2018, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/19/where-is-mark-zuckerberg-facebook-ceo-cambridge-analytica-scandal, accessed on: 20-12-2019

[90] Chen A., *Cambridge Analytica and our lives inside the surveillance machine,* The New Yorker, available at: https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/cambridge-analytica-and-our-lives-inside-the-surveillance-machine, accessed on: 30-10-2019

3.4. Data Collection

To examine the organization's crisis response strategy for the data crisis, data will be collected and analyzed from different sources, covering the period between the outbreak of the crisis from the media on the 17th of March[91] until one month later, on the 25th of April. This time frame has been chosen for the purposes of this study as the time period during which, Facebook was responding to the crisis. During this one-month timeframe, the crisis response strategy on behalf of Facebook will be described and analyzed, in order to be able to extract conclusions to give an answer to the research question of **"*How do social media corporations respond to crises, as data leaks, based on the Crisis Response Strategies of the SCCT theory by Timothy W. Coombs?*".** As stated in the introduction, the CEO's responses will be also investigated during the same time period.

Specifically, this thesis is not investigating evidence earlier than this timeframe, concerning the pre-crisis period, since it only focuses on the response period of the crisis. Therefore, as a starting date of the crisis and the date of the beginning of the crisis response, is considered the 17th of March, the date when the media revealed the data misuse by Cambridge Analytica. In addition, the 25th of April has been chosen as the last day of the crisis response phase, since it was the date when the CEO Mark Zuckerberg posted a last announcement on his personal profile page, which included a statement responding upon the responsibility of Facebook to work on solving the crisis. During this one-month period the crisis was not resolved and was continuing on evolving as media, stakeholders, and governmental agencies were demanding from the company to give an answer for what exactly had happened and how this happened[92].

According to the SCCT theory, the crisis response phase covers all period during which the organization communicates what exactly had happened and all efforts taken to resolve the incident, while post-crisis phase begins when the crisis is resolved and learning from the crisis period has begun[93]. From the 25th of April and on, all the other evidence from the sources are

[91] Cadwallard C., & Graham-Harrison Emma, *Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach*, The Guardian, March 17, 2018, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election, accessed on: 05-10-2019

[92] Stewart E., *Facebook's Cambridge Analytica crisis keeps growing*, Vox, March 20, 2018, available at: https://www.vox.com/technology/2018/3/20/17144318/facebook-cambridge-analytica-data-breach-stock, accessed on 20-12-2019

[93] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *The handbook of crisis communication*, Chichester [etc.], Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pg. 45

considered as part of the post-crisis phase, since they include statements that refer to post-crisis updates on all the corrective measures that the organization promised to take during the crisis-response phase.

It is important to mention, however, the fact that one day before the media outbreak of the crisis, on the 16th of March, the company issued a press release in their official blogpost, which will be also investigated later in the analysis[94]. This is due to the fact, that with this announcement, Facebook suspended SCL and Cambridge Analytica from the platform, and aimed on putting forward to the public, that the company is working on protecting users' data regardless of that incident. Therefore, the analysis of this document is important for the purposes of this thesis.

In the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica case, the universe of the sources through which data might be collected includes the company's announcements in its official blogpost, press releases made by the company in the media, Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg and other shareholders posts in their personal page on Facebook, Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg interviews, Facebook's CEO testimonies in front of the U.S. Congress, Facebook's other shareholders interviews during the aforementioned chosen timeline. However, this universe of sources is narrowed down for the purposes of this paper, and the actual used sources are:

(i) Facebook's press releases in its official blogpost,
(ii) Facebook's press releases in media outlets,
(iii) Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg posts in his personal Facebook page
(iv) Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg interviews and,
(v) Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg testimonies.

The reasons why only these sources are going to be used for this paper is due to the fact that, in order to answer the research question, it is necessary to investigate how Facebook responded as an entity, to the data crisis; however, also the CEO's Mark Zuckerberg's responses are going to be described and analysed for the purposes of this thesis; since he is the leader of the Facebook, he is expected to respond and therefore, his statements are important on extracting conclusions for the crisis response strategies used by the corporation to respond to the data crisis.

[94] Facebook Newsroom, *Suspending Cambridge Analytica and SCL Group From Facebook*, March 16, 2018, available at: https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/03/suspending-cambridge-analytica/, accessed on: 04-10-2019

Additionally, from the aforementioned sources, Facebook's announcements in its official blogpost were chosen using the following key-words: "Facebook-Cambridge Analytica", "data scandal", "privacy breach", "data privacy", "privacy regulations", "users' data", "third party applications", "responsibility", "crisis management", "crisis communication", "crisis response strategy". For the collection, these key-words were found either in the title of the source, or inside the text itself. In addition, with the use of these key-words in online searching, one Facebook press release published in several media outlets was found[95].

Also, the content of the collected press releases from Facebook's official blogpost, revealed the interviews that the CEO Mark Zuckerberg had in March 2018. After watching the interviews and completing their transcripts, the necessary data were collected with the use of the aforementioned key-words. In addition, through watching the collected interviews, I also came across with the two hearings that Mark Zuckerberg had to give in front of the U.S. Congress. The hearings were then transcribed, and the data were collected again by using the key-words.

Therefore, the sources collected for the purposes of this thesis, include 20 documents and are the following: 9 press releases from the official webpage of Facebook, 1 official announcement from Facebook in the media, 4 posts of Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg on his personal profile on Facebook, 4 single interviews of the CEO (interview with CNN, the New York Times, the American Wired magazine and the technology news website Recode), 2 testimonies of the CEO (testimony in front of the US Senate Committee and the House Energy and Commerce Committee).

3.5. Data Analysis

According to LeCompte and Schensul, data analysis "is the process a researcher uses to reduce data to a story and its interpretation"[96]. For Creswell, "the process of data analysis involves

[95] McKenzie S., *Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg says sorry in full-page newspaper ads*, The CNN, March 25, 2018, available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/25/europe/facebook-zuckerberg-cambridge-analytica-sorry-ads-newspapers-intl/index.html, accessed on: 05-10-2019

[96] LeCompte M.D., & Schensul J.J., Analyzing and interpreting ethnographic data, as quoted in Kawulich B.B., *Data Analysis Techniques in Qualitative Research*, University of West Georgia, 2004, pp. 96-113, pg. 97

making sense out of text and image data[97]". The analysis of the data helps the researcher move deeper into understanding the data and making interpretations for the purposes of the research. All gathered data from the aforementioned sources will be first organized and prepared for the analysis, then will be coded in order to be assigned into categories, so that the interpretation of the data can be conducted. The categories will be further explained in the codebook displayed further below in Table 2 'Codebook for Data Analysis'.

Although there are several qualitative data analysis techniques, such as grounded theory analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, this thesis will use the technique of content analysis[98]. All gathered data will be thoroughly examined and analyzed through the qualitative content analysis. As defined by Krippendorff, *"content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid references from texts to the contexts of their use"*[99]. Content analysis is, therefore, used for the categorization and classification of the collected text data, for the purposes of interpreting meaning from these data. The text data can have various formats as documents, videos, audio. For this thesis, only documents and videos will be used. In content analysis, the chosen unit of analysis of the texts, which in this thesis is paragraphs, will be coded and classified into the categories of the generated codebook.

Moreover, content analysis offers several advantages for the purposes of this thesis, compared to the other qualitative data analysis techniques. More specifically, content analysis is useful in analyzing communicative messages[100]. This technique can be used to identify characteristics of a message and help make patterns and themes. Since in the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica case, all data refer to announcements and messages that the corporation used to respond to the crisis, content analysis is beneficial. Also, content analysis examines texts and their contents, in order to make patterns by applying the coded data to categories and testing the theory used for the study. As in the case of this thesis, only text documents will be used, together with the transcripts of the audios of the gathered interviews and testimonies, content analysis is a helpful process of examining and analyzing the content of the gathered texts.

[97] Creswell W.J., & Creswell J.D., *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches,* 3th edition, CA: Sage, 2009
[98] LeCompte M.D., & Schensul J.J., Analyzing and interpreting ethnographic data, as quoted in Kawulich B.B., *Data Analysis Techniques in Qualitative Research,* University of West Georgia, 2004, pp. 96-113, pg. 97
[99] Krippendorff K., *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology,* SAGE Publications, 2004, pg. 18
[100] Maier A.M., Content Analysis: Advantages and Disadvantages, in Allen M., *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods,* SAGE Publications, 2018, pg. 2

In addition to these benefits, content analysis is also a method that is used to study the information within a text by determining the existence of specific themes and concepts via the use of indicators. On the contrary, discourse analysis, which is another technique for qualitative data analysis, is defined as the study of the ways in which language, as words and emotions, is used in texts[101]. Since the purposes of this study is to identify concepts, and not the meaning of the language inside the gathered sources of Facebook's responses to the data crisis, content analysis is the necessary qualitative technique to analyze the collected data.

In order to examine and analyze the collected data, the data will first be coded and classified into the different categories of the codebook. As stated by Holsti, coding is the process whereby raw data are systematically transformed and aggregated into units which permit precise description of relevant content characteristics[102]. Therefore, the coding process includes the creation of a codebook with different categories which will be generated by rules coming from the SCCT theory on the field of crisis response strategies. Then, the gathered data will be assigned to the categories based on their content.

Therefore, the chosen categories represent the different types of crisis response strategies and are indicated according to Coombs's SCCT theoretical framework of crisis response strategies. More specifically, the categories used for the analysis are the following: deny, diminish, rebuild and reinforce. The category names indicate each of the types of crisis response strategy that a corporation can use to respond to the crisis. In the codebook, the categories are stated alongside with the rules for each category in order to be able to categorize the analysed data. The codebook with the categories is as following:

Table 2: Codebook for Data Analysis

Code	Category	Definition	Indicators
1	**Deny**	Strategies that aim on proving that the organization has no responsibility for the crisis.	• Try to show that there is no responsibility for the crisis by refusing that any serious situation exists.

[101] Phillips N., & Hardy C., *Discourse Analysis*, SAGE Publications, 2011, pg. 4
[102] Holsti O., *Content Analysis for the social sciences and humanities*, Reading Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub, 1969, pg. 94

2	**Diminish**	Strategies that give emphasis on minimizing the organization's responsibility for the crisis.	• Provide excuses and justifications for the crisis in order to lower the level of responsibility.
3	**Rebuild**	Strategies that aim to show acceptance of responsibility for the crisis and provide apologies to the victims.	• Include statements that offer an apology for the crisis and acceptance of responsibility. Suggestions and corrective actions might be proposed to be taken in the future.
4	**Reinforce**	Strategies that aim on reminding stakeholders and public of past good work of the organization.	• Include statements about the past good work of the organization and claim victim status.

Chapter IV: Analysis of Facebook's Response to the 2018 Cambridge Analytica Data Crisis

4.1. Facebook's Initial Response to the data crisis

As the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal broke out, it led to media outrage resulting in numerous questions from lawmakers and data regulators around the world, about what exactly had happened and how personal data should be protected. However, one day before the data scandal broke out in the newspapers, on March 16th 2018, Facebook published a written statement in their Facebook Newsroom blogpost stating that the social media company "is suspending Strategic Communication Laboratories (SCL), including their political data analytics firm, Cambridge Analytica, from Facebook" due to unauthorized access and use of Facebook's user data[103].

In order to explain this decision, the organization continued on revealing that this story goes back in 2015, when they had found out about the violation of Facebook users' personal data through Aleksander Kogan's app "thisisyourdigitallife". Facebook stated that the participants of this personality application, "gave their consent for Kogan to access their information" in a legitimate way, pointing out in this manner that Facebook was not responsible for this data abuse, but the users gave their consent to have their data taken when they chose to download the application[104]. In this manner, Facebook used diminishment strategy by providing justifications for claiming that control of the data from the third-party application resided with the users, and not with Facebook itself.

In addition, the social media platform also made use of the denial response strategy, by trying to reject its responsibility and by placing it to Kogan and Cambridge Analytica who violated Facebook's platform policies. More specifically, through this strategy and according to SCCT theory, Facebook tried to minimize its responsibility for the data misuse by claiming inability to control what triggered in the first place the data incident[105]; this was justified by pointing out that first, users were responsible for giving their consent to Kogan's application,

[103] Grewal Paul, *Suspending Cambridge Analytica and SCL Group From Facebook*, Facebook Newsroom, available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/03/suspending-cambridge-analytica/, accessed on: 25-11-2019
[104] Ibid.
[105] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *The handbook of crisis communication*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pg. 166

and secondly, SCL and Cambridge Analytica were responsible by breaking Facebook's policies and mishandling the acquired data. Facebook, then, removed the application, and demanded from both Aleksander Kogan and Cambridge Analytica written certifications that they did not have any Facebook users' personal data.

Although Aleksander Kogan and Cambridge Analytica gave the requested certifications, few days before the scandal broke out in the media, Facebook received information that the data was not deleted[106]. Therefore, in an attempt for Facebook to get ahead of the media news, the company announced on the same post that they will move on investigating whether the application and other third parties still have users' data. However, this time, Facebook is using rebuilding crisis response strategies by claiming that: "We are committed to vigorously enforce our policies to protect people's information. We will take whatever steps are required to see that this happens. We will take legal action if necessary, to hold them responsible and accountable for any unlawful behaviours"[107]. By these means, the organization employed to rebuild, in advance, its image before the crisis broke out, by claiming that they will do whatever is possible to solve the situation.

In addition to employing rebuilding strategies, reinforcing approach is being used as a supplementary response strategy from Facebook. More specifically, Facebook tried to add positive information by pointing out that, in 2014, the company had updated its policy ensuring that users can decide what kind of information they choose to share with other third-party applications[108]. In this way, Facebook aimed at determining that the organization always had data protection and privacy as its ultimate business goal, and therefore, they had no control over the data that was acquired and misused by an application developer.

On March 17th 2018, one day after Facebook's first announcement in its blogpost referring to what had happened with SCL and Cambridge Analytica, the story was publicly

[106] Grewal Paul, *Suspending Cambridge Analytica and SCL Group From Facebook*, Facebook Newsroom, March 16, 2018, available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/03/suspending-cambridge-analytica/, accessed on: 25-11-2019

[107] Ibid.

[108] Egan Erik., *Updating out Terms and Policies: Helping You Understand How Facebook Works and How to Control Your Information*, Facebook Newsroom, November 13, 2014, available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2014/11/updating-our-terms-and-policies-helping-you-understand-how-facebook-works-and-how-to-control-your-information/, accessed on: 25-11-2019

revealed in the media[109] [110]. On the occasion of the reveal of the data misuse, Facebook updated its previous announcement in the blogpost. In response to accusations that the misuse constituted a data breach, the announcement stated that "the claim that this is a data breach is completely false. Aleksander Kogan requested and gained access to information from users who chose to sign up to his app, and everyone involved gave their consent"[111]. In this way, by denying that the incident was a data breach, Facebook aims to avoid liability for the crisis and this argument is categorized in the deny crisis response strategies.

Two days later, on March 19th, Facebook announced that the company hired the digital forensics firm, Stroz Friedberg, to perform a comprehensive audit on the political firm that acquired the data, Cambridge Analytica, and the other involved parties[112]. This is a sign of rebuilding response strategy and Facebook is using rectification approaches to show that the organization is taking action to find out whether the accusations were true, what had happened and how it happened. However, in the same announcement, Facebook once again, stated that the attackers had already given the company the requested certifications that the data had been destroyed.

After five days, on March 21st 2018, CEO Mark Zuckerberg broke his silence with a Facebook post oh his personal page and addressed the issue, responding to the Cambridge Analytica data scandal[113]. Facebook's CEO stated: "We have a responsibility to protect your data, and if we can't then we don't deserve to serve you"[114]. The CEO pointed out, in this way, Facebook's responsibility to protect users' personal data, and this argument, can be categorized in the rebuild crisis response strategy, since responsibility for the incident is being accepted. In addition, the CEO admitted that Facebook has made mistakes that the company was aiming on fixing.

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[109] Cadwallard C., & Graham-Harrison Emma, *Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach,* The Guardian, March 17, 2018, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election, accessed on: 05-10-2019

[110] Rosenberg M., Confessore N., & Cadwalladr C., *How Trump Consultants Exploited the Facebook Data of Millions,* The New York Times, March 17, 2018, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-trump-campaign.html?module=inline, accessed on: 05-10-2019

[111] Grewal Paul, *Suspending Cambridge Analytica and SCL Group From Facebook,* Facebook Newsroom, March 16, 2018, available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/03/suspending-cambridge-analytica/, accessed on: 25-11-2019

[112] Facebook Newsroom, *Pursuing Forensic Audits to Investigate Cambridge Analytica Claims,* March 19, 2018, available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/03/forensic-audits-cambridge-analytica/, accessed on 25-11-2019

[113] Zuckerberg M., Facebook Post, March 21, 2018, available at: https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104712037900071, accessed on: 25-11-2019

[114] Ibid.

In an effort to continue using rebuilding strategies to respond to the data crisis, the CEO pledged to take a series of steps in order to prevent such an incident from occurring again[115]. More specifically, he announced that Facebook would investigate all apps that had access to a large amount of data, by conducting a full audit to these apps. He then added that applications that misuse Facebook users' personal data would be banned from the platform. In addition, the company would introduce new measures as restricting the access that developers have to data, while launching a privacy tool at Facebook's NewsFeed; this tool would let users revoke applications' access to personal data.

On March 21st 2018, through an announcement in Facebook's blogpost, the company repeated the actions they had taken in 2014 to strengthen the platform's privacy policy and enhance data protection[116]. The organization also stated that "even with these changes, we've seen abuse of our platform and the misuse of people's data"[117]. With this argument, Facebook implied that, although the company had taken measures to protect users' data, third-parties still managed to illegally acquire and misuse these data. This claim can be categorized in the diminish crisis response cluster since the company tried to reduce its responsibility for the data misuse with the justification that even with platform changes, there was still data abuse.

However, in the same announcement, Facebook also used rebuilding response strategy, stating that: "we are making changes to prevent abuse. We are going to set a higher standard for how developers build on Facebook"[118]. Facebook proposed the following corrective measures: (i) review Facebook's platform by investigating all applications with access to personal data, (ii) inform all affected users by the data crisis, (iii) ban any unused app, (iv) restrict Facebook login data, (v) encourage people to manage the applications they use, and (vi) reward users who detect vulnerabilities and report those to the organization[119]. As stated in the SCCT theory, corrective actions, are proposed actions on behalf of the affected organization in order for the latter to engage in overcoming the crisis[120].

It can be stated that, already five days after the media outbreak of the Cambridge Analytica data crisis, Facebook's responds to the crisis, by announcing all corrective actions that the organization would take in order to overcome the data leak. Another indicator of the

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[115] Ibid.
[116] Facebook Newsroom, *Cracking Down on Platform Abuse*, March 21, 2018, available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/03/cracking-down-on-platform-abuse/, accessed on: 25-11-2019
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *The handbook of crisis communication*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pg. 32

company's willingness of taking corrective action is showed in another announcement in Facebook's blogpost, through which the organization stated that it was possible for users to be informed whether their personal data was shared with Cambridge Analytica. Specifically, the announcement stated: "you can now visit our Help Center to check if your information may have been shared with Cambridge Analytica by the app thisisyourdigitallife"[121].

After the first public response of Mark Zuckerberg to the data leak, the CEO gave four different media interviews in order to follow up explaining how the data leak took place. More specifically, the interviews were the following: one television interview with CNN Senior Tech Correspondent Laurie Segall, an interview in Wired with editor-in-chief Nicholas Thompson, a third interview with New York Times reporters, Sheera Frenkel and Kevin Roose, and a last interview with Recode co-founder, Kara Swisher.

During his interview with Nicholas Thompson from Wired magazine, the CEO gave information about how the data scandal evolved, while also addressing how Facebook could be regulated by law[122]. The first question that Mark Zuckerberg was called to answer, was the reasons why Facebook, in 2014, did not go deeper in investigating whether Cambridge Analytica had actually misused Facebook data. Instead of conducting an investigation, Facebook had only requested written certifications from CA confirming that all acquired data was deleted. Responding to this question, the CEO stated "what you are pointing out here is one of the biggest mistakes that we made", hinting for the first time that, if Facebook had taken stronger measures in 2014, the data leak might had been preventable[123].

Moreover, responding to a question about the measures that Facebook would take to overcome the situation, Mark Zuckerberg stated that the company wanted to make sure that there are no other companies mishandling data; this would be held possible by investigating every application cooperating with Facebook. Additionally, the CEO mentioned multiple times the company's responsibility to detect any malicious activity, regarding Facebooks users' personal data, from application developers and other third-parties. These arguments can be characterized as part of the rebuilding crisis response strategy in the SCCT theory, since the

[121] Facebook Newsroom, *Update on Cambridge Analytica*, March 21, 2018, available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/03/hard-questions-cambridge-analytica/, accessed on: 25-11-2019
[122] Thompson N., *Mark Zuckerberg Talks to WIRED About Facebook's Privacy Problem,* March 21, 2018, available at: https://www.wired.com/story/mark-zuckerberg-talks-to-wired-about-facebooks-privacy-problem/, accessed on: 25-11-2019
[123] Ibid.

CEO announced additional corrective measures that the company would take because of the data crisis.

Although the CEO is using a rebuild crisis response strategy in his response by introducing corrective actions that the company would take, no apology was given for the data leak. On the contrary of apologizing, one can tell that the CEO's responses are rotating between rebuilding and diminishing response strategy. Especially, as a proof of using the diminish response strategy, the CEO was constantly referring to the incident as part of several mistakes that Facebook made in the past, and were not able to be avoided. Additionally, the CEO was also justifying the unavoidable mistakes by claiming that the world is changing quickly and it is impossible for Facebook to keep up with all these changes. This is another argument corresponding to the diminish response cluster in SCCT theory, since the CEO tried to lower Facebook's responsibility for the data crisis, by justifying the company's inability to follow the world's changes.

On the same day, Mark Zuckerberg held a second interview with Kara Swisher, co-founder of Recode news website, during which he discussed the Cambridge Analytica data scandal and other privacy issues[124]. The CEO again pointed out Facebook's responsibility on determining that malicious data incidents do not occur again. In addition, when Kara Swisher, asked the CEO why Facebook did not suspect data incidents before occurring, Mark Zuckerberg responded by stating that he got this situation wrong, by being too idealistic about data portability[125]. He then continued on pointing out that although Facebook values data portability, the company might had misinterpreted the importance of users' data privacy, and therefore, they should had taken more actions to protect personal data.

Additionally, Zuckerberg stated that Facebook made a mistake, when in 2014, the company did not investigate all applications to verify that they do not misuse users' data. He also pointed out that Facebook "will never going to make that mistake again"[126]. In this way,

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[124] Swisher K. & Wagner K., *Here's the transcript of Recode's interview with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg about the Cambridge Analytica controversy and more*, March 22, 2018, available at: https://www.vox.com/2018/3/22/17150814/transcript-interview-facebook-mark-zuckerberg-cambridge-analytica-controversy, accessed on: 26-11-2019

[125] Data portability is the ability of people to share data about themselves held by an organization with third parties. Definition extracted from If, *GDPR, Data Portability and Data About Multiple People-What is Data Portability*, available at: https://dataportability.projectsbyif.com/what-is-data-portability/, accessed on: 10-12-2019

[126] Swisher K. & Wagner K., *Here's the transcript of Recode's interview with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg about the Cambridge Analytica controversy and more*, March 22, 2018, available at: https://www.vox.com/2018/3/22/17150814/transcript-interview-facebook-mark-zuckerberg-cambridge-analytica-controversy, accessed on: 26-11-2019

and using the rebuilding response strategy from the SCCT theory, the CEO promised that Facebook would move forward avoiding the same mistakes and working on all the corrective measures that the company had to take to recover from the data incident. Additionally, Mark Zuckerberg, for the first time after the outbreak of the data scandal, personally expressed his regret by stating that "I think we let the community down, and I feel really bad and I am sorry about that"[127]. Although this response is categorized in the rebuild crisis response strategy cluster, it cannot be acknowledged as an apology, since the CEO's statement points out his regrets for not taking additional steps earlier to enhance users' data protection. As stated by Coombs, "a partial apology is typically just an expression of concern and regret"[128].

For the third interview on the same day, Mark Zuckerberg talked to New York Times reporters, Sheera Frenkel and Kevin Roose[129]. As a first question of the interview, the CEO had to give an answer for the reasons why he remained silent for five days after the outbreak of the data scandal[130]. He, therefore, stated that, before giving out an accurate public statement, he wanted to have a full assessment of the situation without providing both stakeholders and the public with inaccurate information. According to Coombs, "silence is a very passive response and reflects uncertainty and passivity"[131]. By not giving out a public statement, the CEO managed to negatively affect stakeholders and victims' impression on how the company is handling the data crisis.

Moreover, the CEO stated that Facebook planned to provide its users with a tool that would let them disconnect from applications and would verify that applications would not have access to data without the user's permission. Additionally, he stated that Facebook would notify all users whose data were affected by the leak. This statement can be characterized as a sign of expressing concern and compassion for the victims of the crisis. For Coombs, expressing concern for the victims adds great value to the organization undergoing a crisis[132]. In this case, the CEO's concern towards the victims is a way of reassuring them, according to the SCCT theory, that there will be actions taken to prevent a recurrence of the crisis. Although, expressing

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[127] Ibid.
[128] Coombs W.T., *Ongoing crisis communication: planning, managing and responding*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007, pg. 141
[129] Roose K., & Frenkel S., *Mark Zuckerberg's Reckoning: 'This Is a Major Trust Issue",* available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/21/technology/mark-zuckerberg-q-and-a.html, accessed on: 26-11-2019
[130] Wong C.J., *Where's Zuck? Facebook CEO silent as data harvesting scandal unfolds,* The Guardian, March 19, 2018, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/19/where-is-mark-zuckerberg-facebook-ceo-cambridge-analytica-scandal, accessed on: 20-12-2019
[131] Ibid., pg. 129
[132] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *The handbook of crisis communication*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pg. 29

concern can be categorized in the rebuild crisis response strategy by SCCT theory, no statement was made to give compensation to the victims, an action that is part of the rebuild strategy.

The CEO also made statements upon improving Facebook's security in his company because of the data crisis. More specifically, Mark Zuckerberg stated that Facebook "should coordinate their efforts a lot better across the whole company"[133]. To further address this point, the CEO argued that the company would hire more than 20,000 employees working on security and community operations by the end of 2018[134]. This argument is also a sign of a rebuild crisis response strategy, since the CEO is naming another measure that will be taken on behalf of Facebook to improve security operations in the company.

4.2. Issuing an Apology for the data crisis

Mark Zuckerberg gave a last interview on the 21st of March to CNN's Laurie Segall in an exclusive TV interview, concerning the Cambridge Analytica data crisis. The CEO opened his interview by stating that "this was a major breach of trust an I'm really sorry that this happened"[135]. With this statement, the CEO explicitly apologized, for the first time, for the data leak. In addition to this, he pointed out, for one more time, Facebook's responsibility for preventing such a crisis from occurring again. He also repeated the fact that the company would notify all users affected by the data leak, stating that: "we regret we did not do it on time and I think we got that wrong, and we are committed to get that right going forward"[136]. By making this statement, the CEO used elements from the rebuilding crisis response strategy, since he showed regret for not informing the users earlier and he promised that the company would take corrective measures to change the things they had done wrong.

However, for the very first time, Mark Zuckerberg was questioned on whether Facebook would take legal action against Cambridge Analytica for the data leak. In his response, he mentioned that, Facebook, would first investigate whether Cambridge Analytica still had users' data, since Facebook had only accusations from the media arguing that "Cambridge Analytica

[133] Roose K., & Frenkel S., *Mark Zuckerberg's Reckoning: 'This Is a Major Trust Issue",* available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/21/technology/mark-zuckerberg-q-and-a.html, accessed on: 26-11-2019
[134] Ibid.
[135] Transcript from Mark Zuckerberg's interview with CNN, March 21, 2018, interview available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6DOhioBfyY, accessed on: 27-11-2019
[136] Ibid.

might have access to data still"[137]. It can be stated that this is a statement aimed on denying that the crisis existed, since the company was still doubting whether Cambridge Analytica had Facebook users' personal data. According to the SCCT theory, "deny strategies attempt to prove the organization had no responsibility for the crisis"[138]. Therefore, Facebook was trying to evade its responsibility for the crisis, since they were arguing upon the possibility of the inexistence of the data leak.

A few days after the CEO's interviews, on the 25th of March, Mark Zuckerberg took out full page-ads in several American and British newspapers Sunday Edition, in order to apologize for the data crisis[139]. In the announcement, bearing the signature of Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO personally apologized on behalf of Facebook for not proactively preventing such an incident from occurring. The CEO also pointed out that the company was going to take all necessary measures to correct the incident and investigate any other applications that are misusing users' personal data, by promising "to do better"[140]. It should be stated that the CEO responded by using the rebuild crisis response strategy of the SCCT theory, by apologizing for the incident and promising that Facebook would work on correcting all of its past mistakes.

In addition to this, Facebook continued on using rebuild strategies by showing more corrective actions with another announcement in Facebook's blogpost on March 28th, 2018[141]. Through this announcement, Facebook published all additional steps taken to reinforce data security. These actions include: (i) redesign Facebook's settings menu so it is easier for users to find security settings, (ii) new privacy shortcut menu in order for the user to control personal information, (iii) tools to find and delete Facebook data, and (iv) tool for users to download their personal data in order to make a secure copy of those to a different device. The organization also promised to take future corrective steps regarding the terms of service and data policy, so it would be easier for users to read them and understand what kind of data and how these are collected by Facebook. All these proposed measures are part of the rebuilding response strategy in the SCCT and the corrective action the organization was willing to take, in order to prevent the repetition of similar crises.

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[137] Ibid.
[138] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *The handbook of crisis communication*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pg. 40
[139] McKenzie S., *Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg says sorry in full-page newspaper ads,* The CNN, March 25, 2018, available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/25/europe/facebook-zuckerberg-cambridge-analytica-sorry-ads-newspapers-intl/index.html, accessed on: 05-10-2019
[140] Ibid.
[141] Egan E., & Beringer A., *It's Time to Make Our Privacy Tools Easier to Find,* Facebook Newsroom, March 28, 2018, available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/03/privacy-shortcuts/, accessed on: 27-11-2019

More rebuilding strategy and corrective actions was also illustrated with the CEO's post on his personal Facebook page on the same day[142]. In his personal post, Mark Zuckerberg explained Facebook's new tool, called 'Privacy Shortcuts', which would enable people to have more control over their personal data, by being able to remove their personal information from the platform.

To fulfil the promises made for corrective action, Facebook announced on the 4th of April, some examples of the proposed updates to the company's terms and services and data policy[143]. More specifically, the announced changes concerned the following domains: the data policy, the use of personal data, the control of advertisements, information sharing between Facebook and other platforms owned by the same corporate entity, the collection of device information, and the address of inappropriate behaviour in Facebook. Additionally, in the same announcement, was also pointed out that Facebook was not selling personal data to other companies since it is Facebook's "responsibility to keep people's information safe and secure"[144]. This is also a statement trying to show to the victims, that Facebook did not sell the data to CA, and therefore, responsibility should be held outside Facebook's services.

Rebuilding crisis response strategy is also evident in another announcement that was made in Facebook Newsroom on the same day, regarding the corporation's plans to restrict data access on Facebook and ensure better data protection[145]. The announcement stated that Facebook changed its Groups and Pages API (Application Programming Interface) so that applications and third parties would first request permission from Facebook in order to be able to have access to Facebook public pages and groups. Facebook would also give approval to applications that request access to users' personal information such as check-ins, likes, photos and videos. An additional corrective action was illustrated as Facebook users would be able, through a link at the top of their News Feed, to view which applications they are using, and what kind of personal information have been shared with these applications. This app control would also enable users to view if their information has been shared and improperly used by

[142] Zuckerberg M., Facebook Post, March 28, 2018, available at: https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104747087565261, accessed on: 27-11-2019

[143] Egan E., & Beringer A., *We're Making Our Terms and Data Policy Clearer, Without New Rights to Use Your Data on Facebook*, Facebook Newsroom, April 4, 2018, available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/04/terms-and-data-policy/, accessed on: 27-11-2019

[144] Ibid.

[145] Schroepfer M., *An Update on Our Plans to Restrict Data Access on Facebook*, Facebook Newsroom, April 4, 2018, available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/04/restricting-data-access/, accessed on: 28-11-2019

Cambridge Analytica. It was promised that this tool would be launched on April 9th, showing this way that corrective action would be indeed implemented.

On April 4th 2018, Mark Zuckerberg talked again with press reporters in a conference call with Q&A, about data privacy after the Cambridge Analytica data scandal[146]. As he had also stated in his first interviews, the CEO pointed out that what happened "was a huge mistake. It was my mistake"[147]. This time, though, Mark Zuckerberg publicly claimed that it was his own mistake that the company did not act proactively on preventing Facebook users' data abuse. This is another statement of rebuild crisis response strategy in the SCCT theory, since the CEO was issuing personal responsibility for the crisis.

Moreover, Mark Zuckerberg added to his statement by explaining why Facebook had not taken all the proposed measures before the occurrence of the data leak; he explained that the company was providing tools and services, with its users being responsible for how they are going to use these tools. Contrary to his previous rebuilding approaches, this statement can be characterized as one of a diminish response strategy, since the CEO implied that responsibility is laying with the users when choosing which applications, they are going to use. To add on this argument, the CEO stated "people chose to share their data with Kogan"[148]. By placing responsibility for the data leak indirectly outside of Facebook, the corporation is, therefore, employing a diminishing strategy.

In addition to this, Mark Zuckerberg was also asked whether he was going to step down as Facebook's chairman. As a response, and in order to further support his rebuilding response strategy, the CEO expressed that he doesn't think anyone is going to be perfect, and therefore, he would learn from the company's mistakes in order to provide better and safer services for the users. This is the reason why the company would take a broader view of its responsibilities. The CEO also stated that Facebook has not fired any employee that might had been related to the Cambridge Analytica data scandal. He backed up his argument by saying that: "I started this place. I run it. And I am responsible for what happens here"[149]. In this way, the CEO showed for one more time, that as the leader of the social media platform, he will be held responsible for whatever comes along the way in the future.

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[146] Facebook Newsroom, *Hard Questions: Q&A With Mark Zuckerberg on Protecting People's Information,* April 4, 2018, available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/04/hard-questions-protecting-peoples-information/, accessed on: 28-11-2019

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Ibid.

One week after this Q&A, Facebook made a new announcement in the company's blogpost on the 10th of April, issuing the Data Abuse Bounty program[150]. As explained in their post, the company introduced this program that would allow Facebook users to report any suspicious activity that violates the company's terms of policy. The program will then reward the people who report data privacy abuses, based on the impact of each report. Also, in a case of a proved abuse, Facebook would then close down the application and notify the affected users. This new program is also part of Facebook's rebuilding strategy, since the company was indeed starting to initiate all promised measures.

4.3. From apologizing to taking corrective action for the future

On the 10th of April, and as Mark Zuckerberg personally posted on his Facebook profile, the CEO testified in front of the U.S. Senate in response to the Cambridge Analytica data crisis[151]. More specifically, the Senate Committee on the Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley and Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee Chairman John Thune convened a joined Committee hearing titled "Facebook, Social Media Privacy, and the Use and Abuse of Data" on April 10th, with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg as the only witness[152]. As stated by Chairman Grassley and Chairman Thune, the purpose of this hearing aimed on exploring how Facebook was approaching data privacy and data security in order to guarantee that people's personal information remain secure.

In the beginning of the hearing on April 10th, Mark Zuckerberg opened his testimony by first, pointing out the goals of Facebook as a platform that connects people, and then, he apologised for his company for not taking a broad enough view of its responsibility. The CEO with these comments used the rebuild crisis response strategy and stated that "it is not enough to just give people control over their information. We need to make sure that the developers they share it with, protect their information, too"[153]. With this statement, Mark Zuckerberg

[150] Greene C., *Data Abuse Bounty: Facebook Now Rewards for Reports of Data Abuse*, Facebook Newsroom, April 10, 2018, available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/04/data-abuse-bounty/, accessed on: 30-11-2019

[151] Zuckerberg M., Facebook Post, April 10, 2018, available at: https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104804714814791, accessed on: 30-11-2019

[152] Committee on the Judiciary, *Senate Judiciary and Commerce Committees Announce Joint Hearing with Facebook CEO*, April 4, 2018, available at: https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/press/rep/releases/senate-judiciary-and-commerce-committees-announce-joint-hearing-with-facebook-ceo, accessed on 01-12-2019

[153] Mark Zuckerberg's Testimony in the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary and Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, April 10, 2018, available at: https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/04-10-18%20Zuckerberg%20Testimony.pdf, accessed on: 01-12-2019

wanted to point out that Facebook was taking the responsibility for the Cambridge Analytica data leak, and would make sure that all developers protect users' personal information. After the first remarks in his testimony, the CEO continued on naming again the measures that the corporation had already taken in order to make sure that such an incident would not occur again. It can be stated that Zuckerberg's opening comments refer to the rebuild crisis response strategy.

During the CEO's hearing, there are a few remarks that can be extracted and added to the company's rebuild crisis response strategy[154]. It was often repeated by the CEO that Facebook would shift towards a broader view of its responsibilities and a more proactive approach regarding data protection. He also mentioned that the company did a mistake by considering the Cambridge Analytica a 'closed case' when in 2015 they took for granted the written certifications and did not notify the users, but only took down Aleksander Kogan's application. The CEO specified that Facebook aimed on verifying that applications developers do not have any more access to a large amount of information. In the case the company discovered any data misuse from developers and other third-parties, they would immediately ban those from Facebook.

Furthermore, Mark Zuckerberg was also questioned by Senator Thune why people should trust that Facebook would now fix the problem, since the company had already known that data were acquired in 2014. As a response, the CEO said that the company made a mistake that was going to fix by ensuring that all platform's tools are used only for good purposes. Specifically, the CEO promised that: "It will take some time to work through all the changes we need to make across the company, but I am committed to getting this right"[155]. The CEO admitted that the victims of the data leak were up to 87 million users; however, he stated that although the leak did not occur from a company's mistake, they could have taken preventable measures.

In addition, Mark Zuckerberg was questioned by Senator Hutch whether legislative changes would be beneficial for data privacy issues. The CEO responded by naming a number of legislative changes that could be potentially posed to Facebook. To add more information to his statement about regulations, Zuckerberg pointed out that Facebook would implement the new European General Data Privacy Regulation applicable as from May 25th 2018, and stated

[154] Transcript from Mark Zuckerberg's Testimony in the joint hearing of Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, hearing available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZaec_mlq9M
[155] Ibid.

that these regulations will apply equally to all Facebook users[156]. Especially, and in contrary of what Facebook did in the case of the data leak with not immediately notifying the affected users, Mark Zuckerberg stated that for him "it makes sense" implementing the regulation of notifying users of a personal data breach within 72 hours from the time the incident occurred according to Article 33 of the GDPR regulation[157].

However, it should be stated the fact that during his hearing, there were a number of questions regarding the Cambridge Analytica data leak, that Mark Zuckerberg was unable to address them adequately on the spot. More specifically, the CEO was not aware of the following elements: (i) the specific number of applications that Facebook had previously banned, (ii) the total number of applications' audits that Facebook had conducted, (iii) whether any Facebook employees worked with Cambridge Analytica, (iv) whether Cambridge Analytica stored the stolen data in Russia, (v) a list of other companies that also misused Facebook user data that Aleksander Kogan collected. In addition, when he was asked by Senator Harris whether he was part of the decision in 2015 to not notify the users for the misused data, the CEO responded: "I don't remember a conversation like that. I am not sure what other people discussed", and stated that the decision was made on the basis that the case was regarded as a closed case[158].

Apart from the CEO's rebuild crisis response approach, there were also a few responses that can be categorised as part of a diminish strategy. Specifically, Mark Zuckerberg again specified that Facebook users', when downloaded Aleksander Kogan's application, gave their consent to the application for collecting part of their personal information and their Facebook friends' information. Also, when asked why Facebook did not ban Cambridge Analytica in 2015, Mark Zuckerberg replied by stating that the company was not using CA services and that "we actually had nothing to ban"[159]. However, the CEO continued on correcting himself by saying that Cambridge Analytica became an advertiser later in 2015 and Facebook should had banned them at that time. Also, when asked whether Facebook had banned Aleksander Kogan from its platform, the CEO replied that Facebook had banned the 'thisisyourdigitallife'

[156] General Data Protection Regulation, available at: https://gdpr-info.eu/, accessed on: 02-12-2019
[157] General Data Protection Regulation, Article 33, available at: https://gdpr-info.eu/art-33-gdpr/, accessed on: 02-02-2019
[158] Mark Zuckerberg's Testimony in the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary and Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, April 10, 2018, available at: https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/04-10-18%20Zuckerberg%20Testimony.pdf, accessed on: 01-12-2019
[159] Ibid.

application and concerning Kogan's personal profile he stated that "my understanding is he has been banned. I believe we are preventing him from building any more apps"[160].

On April 11th 2018, Mark Zuckerberg had his second hearing on "Facebook: Transparency and Use of Costumer Data", before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce[161]. In his opening statement, the CEO repeated the same arguments with his first hearing, by apologizing for the crisis and talking about a greater view of Facebook's responsibility. It can be stated that the CEO remained focused on pointing out Facebook's good purposes of bringing people together, and rebuilding Facebook's image by taking responsibility for the Cambridge Analytica data leak and naming all the measures taken to prevent recurrence of the crisis.

During this second hearing, the CEO was questioned about the data that Facebook collects and uses. The CEO specified that Facebook was limiting the amount of personal data that the company collects and uses, and that third-parties would not have access to a large amount of personal information anymore. Additionally, and as already stated in the first hearing by the U.S. Senate, Zuckerberg also clarified that with the new GDPR regulations, Facebook would impose "all the same controls around the world"[162]. Facebook would also put forward in a clear and concise way its terms of policy and a tool via which the user can easily have access to the privacy options. These are all statements that are part of the CEO's rebuild crisis response strategy approach.

However, the CEO also had some flaws of information in his second hearing. More specifically, he mentioned again the fact that he was unaware whether and how many third-parties had collected and misused users' data. To back up his argument, he stated: "I don't believe it is a large number", but they would only know after they have completed all the audits[163]. In addition, when being asked whether Facebook was intending to sue Aleksander Kogan or Cambridge Analytica about the data leak, the CEO did not clearly respond. Instead, he justified his response by mentioning that they had already banned his application, and after completing the applications' investigations, they would proceed forward, by taking all the

[160] Ibid.
[161] House Committee on Energy & Commerce, *Facebook: Transparency and Use of Consumer Data*, April 11, 2018, available at: https://energycommerce.house.gov/committee-activity/hearings/hearing-on-facebook-transparency-and-use-of-consumer-data-full-committee, accessed on: 03-12-2019
[162] Transcript from Mark Zuckerberg's Testimony in the House Committee on Energy & Commerce, hearing available at: https://energycommerce.house.gov/committee-activity/hearings/hearing-on-facebook-transparency-and-use-of-consumer-data-full-committee, accessed on: 03-12-2019
[163] Ibid.

appropriate measures to make sure this will not occur. Moreover, trying to diminish Facebook's responsibility for the data leak, he pointed out that Facebook reviewed applications every year, and therefore, the company had already banned enough applications of malicious activity, but in the case of Aleksander Kogan's application, he said that "our process was not enough to catch a developer who sold data"[164].

On the 17th of April 2018, Facebook made a new announcement in their official blogpost, following up Mark Zuckerberg' hearings by pointing out all new changes that Facebook would take concerning data privacy and security[165]. More specifically, the announcement stated that the company would give more privacy control to Facebook users by letting them making choices about: advertisements based on data from partners, information in their personal profile, allowing face recognition technology, and agreeing with Facebook's updated terms of service and data policy. In addition to this, the Settings and Privacy Shortcuts that Facebook had already promised to implement, would start being available from that week and on; especially, these settings would allow people to see their data, download it, delete and export it. All these measures are part of the corrective action based on the SCCT theory, since the corporation keeps on restoring the situation and keeps on promising more changes to come. As stated in the end of their announcement, "we'll keep improving. We're committed to making sure people understand how we use their information and how they can control it"[166].

One week later, on April 25th, Mark Zuckerberg shared a post on his Facebook personal profile, making a comment about his company's approach towards security[167]. With this post, the CEO pointed out, for one more time, that the company has changed its view of responsibility by taking a broader approach of security and data privacy. To do so, he repeated the fact that Facebook would need to make sure that all tools are only used for good purposes. In his attempt to rebuild the company's approach towards changing their views by doing more initiative more privacy and security he also stated: "our focus in 2018 is to keep people safe, and to keep building the experiences people expect from us"[168].

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[164] Ibid.

[165] Egan E., & Beringer A., *Complying With New Privacy Laws and Offering New Privacy Protections to Everyone, No Matter Where You Lice,* Facebook Newsroom, April 17, 2018, available at: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/04/new-privacy-protections/, accessed on: 03-12-2019

[166] Ibid.

[167] Zuckerberg M., Facebook Post, April 25, 2018, available at: https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104878807622211, accessed on: 03-12-2019

[168] Ibid.

Chapter V: Conclusions

5.1. Concluding Remarks on the 2018 Facebook-Cambridge Analytica case

The 2018 Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data crisis represents an example of a data incident that can be a litmus test to a company's crisis response strategy plan. The importance of being prepared for an unexpected crisis and having in place a clear crisis response strategy is demonstrated in this case. More specifically, evidence showed that, at all times, Facebook managed to give a response to the issues raised by the crisis, but, it did not have consistency through the chosen crisis response strategies since all four types of crisis response strategies were present in the analysis, while rebuild and diminish crisis response strategies were used in combination with one another, that being, however, allowed by the SCCT theory[169].

In many ways, Facebook's crisis response strategy during the one-month period that followed the outbreak by the media of the 2018 Cambridge Analytica data crisis, put up the company's commitment to take a broader view of its responsibility. Throughout the analysis, Facebook's responses primarily focused on showing that the company would engage in broadening its responsibility towards the billions of users, by determining that all Facebook's services and applications are only used for good purposes and personal data are always secured. In addition to this, the statements made by Facebook displayed reassurance, since the company was constantly promising that such a data incident would not occur again.

When reviewing Facebook's crisis response strategies after the Cambridge Analytica data crisis, it is observed that Facebook employed all four crisis response strategies outlined by SCCT: deny, diminish, rebuild, and reinforce. However, based on the analysis, the most frequent used strategy by Facebook in its crisis response, was rebuild strategy. More specifically, the organization apologized and accepted responsibility for the crisis, while providing a number of corrective measures that was willing to take in order to prevent the recurrence of a data crisis. A verbal public apology came by the CEO Mark Zuckerberg, during his interview with CNN reporter on the 21st of March 2018, while a few days later the company issued an apology with a full-page advertisement in several newspapers. After publicly apologizing, Facebook started responding by providing the public with all the corrective

[169] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *The handbook of crisis communication*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pg. 104

measures that the company would take to overcome the crisis. According to the SCCT theory, Coombs states that "rebuilding strategy is most appropriate for organizations responding to preventable crises"[170]. The fact that, throughout Facebook's responses, the company was expressing its regrets for not taking measures to prevent the crisis, shows that Facebook, by accepting responsibility for the crisis, aimed on using the rebuild strategy as the most suitable crisis response strategy implemented to respond to the data crisis.

The second most frequently used response strategy was diminish; in the first announcements made by Facebook, the company tried to reduce its responsibility for what caused the data leak, by explaining all measures that were already taken to ensure data protection in 2014, the year when the company first acknowledged that Aleksander Kogan's application had illegally acquired users' data. Additionally, the company also diminished its responsibility when referring to the crisis as an incident that was not able to be avoided, by placing the responsibility to the users who chose to connect with Kogan's application. Minimization of the organization's crisis responsibility falls in the diminish strategy, which according to the SCCT theory, aims on diminishing any damage that a crisis can create for the organizational reputation[171].

Moreover, the third present crisis response strategy was the reinforce strategy. As stated by the SCCT theory, "reinforce strategies should be seen as secondary crisis response strategies and should be supplementary to one of the other three ones"[172]. In fact, Facebook implemented reinforce strategy when aiming on rebuilding the organizational image, by proposing all the corrective measures, while at the same time, praising all Facebook's good achievements from the past. Especially, Facebook often made statements regarding the company's commitment on improving its safety and security services.

Lastly, the least present crisis response strategy was the deny strategy. This type of crisis response strategy was employed by the social media platform, during its first announcements, when Facebook was opposed to the media's accusations that the incident was a data breach and that personal information was acquired via hacking in Facebook's system. In addition to this, among the indicators that fall under deny strategy, Facebook also tried to deny the existence of the data leak by not admitting directly that the data leak did occur, but on the contrary, the company was stating that it was uncertain that the accusations were real, and that, Cambridge

[170] Coombs W.T., & Holladay S.J., *The handbook of crisis communication*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pg. 351
[171] Ibid., pg. 650
[172] Ibid., pg. 166

Analytica was in possession of users' personal data. According to the SCCT theory, "denial strategies are best used only for combating rumors"[173].

As stated in the introduction, the findings of this thesis aimed on providing an answer to the following research question:

"How do social media corporations respond to crises, as data leaks, based on the Crisis Response Strategies of the SCCT theory by Timothy W. Coombs?"

In the case of crisis as data leaks, social media corporations respond by using the rebuild crisis response strategy from the SCCT theory by Timothy W. Coombs. Social media corporations undergoing a data crisis, during which personal data are at stake and their reputational image is affected, choose to apologize for the incident, show regret and accept full responsibility for the crisis. According to the SCCT theory, by using the rebuild crisis response strategy, the corporation seeks to improve organizational perceptions from the public and other stakeholders[174]. The organization, will therefore, choose to protect its reputation by counterbalancing all the negative aspects of the crisis through initiating ways to show how the organization is going to overcome the crisis. After accepting responsibility for the crisis, the organization continues on suggesting all corrective measures that the company will take in order to prevent the recurrence of future crises. The organization will choose to provide the public with corrective action since it is necessary to show that the crisis will be resolved and will not occur again.

5.2. Generalization of the findings and Limitations of the study

The research has provided the readers with evidence on how social media corporations respond to data crises based on the single case study of the 2018 Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data crisis. The analysis of the response strategy employed by Facebook to respond to the 2018 Cambridge Analytica data crisis, has given an adequate image of the strategies that social media corporations will choose to respond to a data crisis. Therefore, the findings of this thesis will be beneficial for social media corporations for future purposes and can be generalized in the case of relevant data leak and abuse incidents.

[173] Ibid., pg. 42
[174] Ibid., pg. 41

According to Yin, the research goal of a single case study is to expand and generalize theories into different cases[175]. The case sheds empirical light on the theoretical concept of the crisis response strategies of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, used in an organizational type of crisis, as the data crisis. Indeed, the findings of this thesis can be used as generalizable lessons learned for other cases of a similar situation where the same theoretical research tool can be applied.

However, it should be acknowledged that this thesis is prone to several limitations that suggest directions for future research on this topic. This research has focused on Facebook as the organization finding itself in a crisis, examining how Facebook responded to the crisis, taking also into consideration the CEO's Mark Zuckerberg's responses. Therefore, other actors, including key stakeholders, co-founders or investors, were not separately involved in the research of this thesis , and their responses were not taken into consideration. As a result, there is always a risk of missing valuable data coming from different sources, which might then alter the findings of this research.

Another limitation of the study is the use of the available data on the crisis response strategies employed by Facebook to respond to the crisis. While the achieved sample of gathered sources covers the public responses made by Facebook, and its CEO, during the chosen timeframe, the findings would have been different if the research was based on a broader sample of data. Also, if the data had been extracted by conducting, for example, interviews, the researcher would have control on the findings of the data, since, as stated by Yin, in case study designs, the researcher does not have control over the data collection environment[176].

Moreover, an additional limitation of this thesis is the fact that the research was based on the collection and analysis of pre-existing data, such as documents released by the company under investigation, meaning that the study is prone to bias. More specifically, the information derived from the research could be biased since most of it comes from announcements that Facebook released by itself and all information contained in these announcements were taken as face value. Therefore, the information inside the collected documents was not independently examined.

[175] Yin K.R., *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, SAGE Publications, 6th Edition, 2018
[176] Yin K.R., *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th Edition, SAGE Publications, 2018

5.3. Suggestions for Future Research

In conclusion, this research stands as a milestone for research concerning the crisis response strategies that social media corporations choose to use in the case of data crises. Therefore, future research can be conducted based on the findings of this thesis.

To begin with, future research can examine the post-crisis phase of communication, during which the company under investigation, Facebook, is expected to implement all proposed changes announced in the crisis-response phase. Research can be conducted upon this matter, by examining whether and how Facebook actually changed its Privacy and Data Policy in order to ensure users' personal data protection.

In addition to this, it would be also interesting for another future research to examine, by using the Situational Crisis Communication Theory of Timothy W. Coombs, the effects that the implemented crisis response strategy by Facebook, have on the public's perceptions towards organizational responsibility. Also, another research might concern the effects that the chosen crisis response strategies during a data crisis, can have on post-crisis organizational reputation.

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APPENDIX
Analysis Documents Overview

Total number of documents analysed: 20

List of Documents

Facebook Newsroom Press Releases:

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13. Zuckerberg M., Facebook Post, April 10, 2018, available at: https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104804714814791, accessed on: 30-11-2019
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16. Thompson N., *Mark Zuckerberg Talks to WIRED About Facebook's Privacy Problem,* March 21, 2018, available at: https://www.wired.com/story/mark-zuckerberg-talks-to-wired-about-facebooks-privacy-problem/

17. Transcript from Mark Zuckerberg's interview with CNN, March 21, 2018, interview available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6DOhioBfyY
18. Roose K., & Frenkel S., *Mark Zuckerberg's Reckoning: 'This Is a Major Trust Issue",* available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/21/technology/mark-zuckerberg-q-and-a.html

Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg Testimonies:

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20. Transcript from Mark Zuckerberg's Testimony in the joint hearing of Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, hearing available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZaec_mlq9M