A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT'S CRISIS COMMUNICATION EFFORTS DURING TWO PLAYSTATION NETWORK CRISES.

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

This study is about the crisis communication efforts of Sony Computer Entertainment (SCE) during two crises. Their PlayStation Network online service was hacked in 2011 and crashed by artificially high traffic in 2014.

The purpose of the study is to examine the communication strategies of SCE and the development those strategies underwent between the two crises. This is done by comparing their crisis communication strategies with the Contingency Theory of strategic conflict management. This is done by a comparative case study methodology, utilising content analysis and gauging the impact of the crisis communication efforts through select media reactions.

The study is significant in that it examines a severe data theft from a major international company, the like of which are more than likely to happen in the future. This study can be used as reference to build best practices for crisis communication strategies in crises involving online services and private data. The study results also support Contingency Theory's views of flexible crisis communication strategies to be received better by the publics.

Muita tietoja – Additional information

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Tämä tutkielma käsittelee Sony Computer Entertainmentin (SCE) kriisiviestintätoimia kahden kriisin aikana. SCE:n PlayStation Network -verkkopalvelu hakkeroitiin vuonna 2011 ja kaadettiin keinotekoisella nettiliikenteellä vuonna 2014.

Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tarkastella SCE:n viestintästrategiaa ja sen kehitystä kahden kriisin välillä. Tämä toteutetaan vertaamalla kahden kriisin viestintätoimia Strategisen konfliktihallinnan kontingenssiteoriaan. Tämä toteutetaan vertailevan tapaustutkimuksen metodilla sisältöanalyysin keinoja soveltaen mittaamalla kriisiviestinnän vaikutuksia valikoiduin mediareaktion.

Tutkimus on merkittävä, koska se tarkastelee laajaa tietomurtoa kansainvälisen yrityksen verkkopalveluun, jollaisia tullaan todennäköisesti tulevaisuudessakin näkemään. Tätä tutkimusta voi käyttää viitekehyksenä hyvien käytäntöjen kehittämiseen kriisiviestintästrategioissa jotka koskevat verkkopalveluita ja yksityisiä käyttäjätietoja. Tutkielman tulokset tukevat teorian näkemystä joustavien kriisiviestintästrategioiden paremmasta julkisesta vaikutuksesta.

Asiasanat – Keyword Kriisiviestintä, Kontingenssiteoria, PlayStation, organisaatiokulttuuri, kulttuurienvälinen viestintä
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1. Introduction

Since the internet has become an easily accessible frontier for information, as argued by Mei et al. (2010), and overall the internet is breaking new ground through becoming a must-have feature in gaming consoles, the risks of being a target for hackers also increases. The risk is even greater for large organisations and thus it is arguably good practice for organisations in the modern, digital world to be prepared for such events. The current decade already has precedents to offer in terms of an organisation falling under attack from a hacker or group of hackers, and those precedents are a largely untapped resource for crisis communication practitioners to delve into and dissect in order to devise contingencies for the future.

Therefore, a case study of a precedent would be an ideal approach in recognising possible future threats and devising contingency strategies for those threats. One of the largest hacking incidents so far occurred in April 2011 when Sony Computer Entertainment's PlayStation Network was hacked and 77 million users' personal information, along with the billing information of some of the users, were stolen from the network (Stuart & Arthur, 2011). Following the information breach, Sony closed their network in nigh-complete media silence and only issued a statement a full seven days after the incident. Unsurprisingly, the fact that the public were left out of the loop and the details of the hacking were disclosed so late caused somewhat of a furore amongst the afflicted and even the media discussed the incident widely. However, aside from public statements made by Sony Computer Entertainment, how the company reacted to the crisis at hand remains a mystery to the public.

August 2014 saw another attack on Sony's PSN service, this time in the form of a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack, a way of jamming a network by directing artificial traffic to it thus slowing it down or possibly even crashing it, instigated by a hacker group called the Lizard Squad. By targeting the server with artificially high amount of traffic, thus crippling online functions, the service was taken offline (Stuart, 2014) and Sony issued a

statement regarding the service's downtime the very same day. The service was made available the next day, but problems with connecting to the service could occur for a few days post-attack depending on the user's location. The company faced accusations of the 2011 incident repeating itself, however this idea subsided due to the service being available in less than a day.

In short brief of the two cases above, differences in communication already can be established. This case study aims to compare these two cases and the communication strategies involved based on Sony Computer Entertainment's communication efforts on press releases, official blogs and on Twitter. These efforts are then compared with the Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management to establish any possible differences in communication strategy that emerge. The results of this kind of study can then be used to birth new best practices - which Coombs (2008) argues to be futile without being subjected to scholarly rigour - that in turn could benefit businesses far and wide since as Atkins (2010), argues the effects of a crisis or disaster to rarely limit to one organisation or entity. This study also enables us to observe the cultural and intercultural aspects of Sony Computer Entertainment's communication, and most importantly, whether there are any since Sony Corporation and Sony Computer Entertainment are companies with Japanese origins (Sony Computer Entertainment, n.d.) operating in an international market.

A study in which cases of crisis communication in the 2010s relating to the Internet and handled over the Internet is justified in order to analyse whether an organisation operating in the current globalised and social-media-fied business climate has accounted for the paradigm shift crisis communication has underwent, and is undergoing, to incorporate the new media in their crisis communication strategies and whether or not these strategies have evolved.

In light of this need for evolution of crisis communication, by choosing the two cases for this study that I have - the hacking of Sony Computer Entertainment's (SCE) PlayStation Network (PSN) service in 2011, and crashing of the same service by Distributed Denial of Service attacks, both of which are elaborated on in their own sections (Chapters 4.1 and 4.2) - we have a possibility to analyse the crisis communication strategy of an established, international company facing a very modern crisis. The 2011 hacking incident was significant in its time in numbers of inflicted (Chung, 2011) as well as damages inflicted on the company (Tassi, 2011) and even more recent hacking incidents on other organisations are left in the shadow of the PSN hack if gauged on the number of credit card numbers and billing information stolen (Arthur & Quinn, 2011; d'Innocenzio & Chapman, 2014), thus making for an exemplary crisis a modern organisation may face, with new media and online services becoming ever more prevalent, and ripe with possibilities on which to base new best practices. The study topic itself is nothing if not topical - during the course of finishing the study, Valve Corporation's Steam service, very similar to that of Sony's PlayStation Network, has had security concerns over an unearthed security flaw which allowed for unauthorised people to gain access to users' accounts (Crossley, 2015). At the time of writing the number of inflicted accounts and users remains undisclosed, but even a high profile professional eSport player has reported to have been hacked among numerous other users.

As previously established, this study aims to look at intercultural communication and cultural aspects of crisis communication. SCE is a subsidiary of Sony Corporation and Sony Music Entertainment Japan (Sony Computer Entertainment, n.d.), thus making it a company with Japanese origins albeit operating on an international market. Operating on an international market also means using a language that is universally understood, and English is regarded as a language spoken throughout the world and the language of business (Fromkin et al., 2007; Gannon, 2008), historically as the result of British colonialism in the 19th

century and later in the 20th century due to the United States emerging as the leading economic power, which can be seen in the entertainment industry as English has become the language of choice for it and science for example (Crystal, 1995).

This is evident in the case of the video games industry - a combined 81.5 billion dollars in revenue in 2014 - where, as a single regional market, the Asian market is by far the largest with a 36.8 billion dollar revenue in 2014 while North America's revenue was 22.2 billion dollars and the European markets had a combined revenue of 17.7 billion dollars. Nevertheless, if the North American and European markets were regarded as a single, Western - thus an English speaking - market, then it towers over the Asian market's share with almost 40 billion dollars in revenue, nigh-half of the overall revenue of the industry globally. This dictates that English is indeed the language of the business since a larger market share allows for more leverage in comparison to the Asian market. The market shares and industry altogether may be on the verge of the tipping of the scales, however, since in July 2015 China lifted its 15-year-ban on foreign companies manufacturing and sales of consoles in the country (Chew, 2015). This however can only be speculated on at this point in time and is better left for other studies. Regardless, English's status as the commanding language in the industry has the power to dictate business culture, but the extent to which it does remains ambiguous.

The choice of cases also has connotations of being a study about crisis communication for the so-called social media generation. Social media, a term used as defined by Pew Internet & American Life Project, as cited by Jin et al. (2014), covers a wide range of Internet-related applications and platforms, such as wikis, blogs and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Pew Internet & American Life Project, as cited by Jin et al. (2014), and Sellnow and Seeger (2013) both have found the publics' already diligent use of social media to increase during crises and disasters, and as established above,

that usage accounts for the majority of crisis related messages on social media. Thus it would be in organisations and companies' best interests to prepare to communicate with the social-media-following masses and plan their contingencies according to the public's needs.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Theorising crisis communication

As established above, crisis communication is a complex phenomenon and has many aspects to it. The addition of culture into the research topic increases the complexity of the research. Thus this chapter aims to theorise, clarify and discuss crisis communication, define related concepts (e.g. social media as part of crisis communication) along with culture as discussed in this study.

2.1.1. Communication and crises

As acknowledged by Bentley, Stein and Wanta (n.d.), communication is a part of any organisation's daily operations in one form or another. When daily routines go according to plan, public relations officials are going to have a field day since it is always easier to publicise good occurrences rather than bad ones.

However, things do not always go according to plan and turbulent times are to be expected. As crises are unexpected, dealing with them can be a dire strait since they can be detrimental to an organisation. That is what Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management tries to tackle, and the theory has gone through over a decade of theory development. At first, this time span seems significantly long, but as Cameron, Jin and Pang (2012) stated, it is essentially paradoxical to try and prepare for and predict a phenomenon that is context dependent and commonly unpredictable. As Bedi and Shapiro (2007) eloquently phrased this, "at its starkest, contingency challenges the very possibility of science...Contingency's challenge is thus about the nature of reality, not just about the limits to our grasp of that reality" (p. 1).

2.1.2. The Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management

The Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management was introduced in the 1990s by Cancel et al., (1997) and it was devised to challenge existing notions of crisis communication that were "pigeon-holing public relations practices and techniques into rigid and inflexible models" (Jin, Pang & Cameron, 2006, p.83), and to do this Cancel, Cameron, Pang and other scholars devised and further developed a continuum representing crisis communication and various stances within crisis communication. On one end of the continuum is advocacy, and accommodation on the other end (Jin, Pang & Cameron, 2006), leaving the organisation free to move on the continuum at will depending on the circumstances of the crisis.

The Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management may not have been conceived under the most conventional of circumstances. A sizeable portion of the scholarship in crisis communication is based on case studies - a trend that is continued in this thesis - and crisis communication know-how is increasingly sought after. Despite this fact, crisis communication was, for a time, mostly formed around Grunig and Grunig's, and Grunig and Hunt's Excellence theory. The theory is based on positioning "two-way symmetrical communication as a normative theory on how organizations should be practicing public relations that was regarded as the most ethical and effective" (as cited in Cameron et al., 2012, p. 531). Kuhn, as cited by Cameron et al. (2012), suggested that in theory development

> for a paradigmatic theoretical shift to emerge...it must satisfy three conditions. First, it builds upon "pre-established theory" (p.16). Second, it receives the "assent of the relevant community" (p. 20), and this same community agrees to commit to the "same rules and standards for scientific practice" (p. 11). Third, it represents a "sign of maturity" in the development pattern of the field (p. 11). (p. 529).

This paradigmatic theoretical shift is what was behind the emergence of Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management, as a challenge to the Excellence Theory. According to Cameron et al.'s (2012) research, the Contingency Theory is satisfactory on virtually all of Kuhn's criteria. They argue, strategic communication is so complex that it cannot be just Grunig and Grunig or Grunig and Hunt's models of excellence, and instead strategic communication should be thought of in terms of a continuum on which an organisation's stance on their communication approach can vary according to the circumstances instead of relying on a model or two, or a hybrid of two models. They pose a question about why organisations and practitioners stick to a mindset that there is only a set way or ways in which to communicate in a crisis, thus again challenging the Excellence Theory. The emergence of Contingency Theory could be timed to Cameron's study that symmetrical and asymmetrical models can include a form of unobtrusive control (as cited in Cameron et al., 2012).

This review of literature will look at a variety of studies regarding the Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management and different fields to which it has been applied. These include, for example, healthcare, advocating better health and reacting to pandemic crises. The way social media challenges crisis communication, as well as how crisis communication theory can be applied into intercultural contexts will be reviewed through select examples of studies. The application of the theory in intercultural contexts has been very sparse, so suggestions will be discussed based on existing literature. In addition, the selection of studies also showcases how the theory's premise can be used to react to crises as well as how to provoke them to further certain goals.

Cameron et al. (2012), argued public relations, within which conflict management and crisis communication can occur, is complex and subtle and thus the response to crises or conflict cannot constrict itself to a set ways of communication that are predetermined and

unchangeable. Sticking to predetermined ways of communication then, in essence, implies

that people are infallible and it is possible to predict crises to an extent that allows for this.

Contingency theory does not support this approach and instead advocates fluidity. Cameron

and Qiu (2007) stated, "contingency theory attempts to explain and predict how public

relations practitioners will relate to various stakeholders in response to a matrix of factors

emerging during conflict" (p. 4) that as its core concept depicts crisis communication as a

continuum. The advocacy-accommodation continuum, according to the theory, allows for the

organisation to respond "to the public relations dilemma at hand..."it depends" " (Cameron et

al., 2012; p. 533). This essentially allows an organisation's stance to be represented as a point

on the continuum at any given time that can change over time (Cameron & Qiu, 2007).

2.1.3. Contingency Theory and its applications

The benefits of Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management lie in its multi-

purposefulness. Due to the flexible nature of its approach to communicative stances,

Cameron et al. (2012) found the theory has been applied in "diverse organizational, national

and international settings, on a wide range of interdisciplinary issues, like health crises,

political crises, public diplomacy, crisis communications, and mergers and acquisitions" (p.

529). Some of the various applications of the theory will be touched upon in this literature

review. Their study also sets a goal of propositioning new directions in which crisis

communication can be taken through the development of the contingency theory of strategic

conflict management.

Cameron, who has been cited time and again in this review, seems to specialise in

the study of Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management in healthcare issues.

Healthcare in America, at the time of writing this paper, is in turmoil due to Obama's

healthcare bill that has been widely discussed. Predating Obama's presidency, Cameron and

Qiu (2007) spoke of how increasingly conflict oriented health is - "manifest in issues from

insurance and medical coverage, to international sales of prescription drugs, to personal issues such as right to life and death" (p. 1). They also go on to dissect, retrospectively using conflict theory and contingency theory, the crisis that was China's SARS epidemic in 2002, which then spread to 20 different countries and had the World Health Organization (WHO) issue its strictest travel advisories by that time.

Cameron and Qiu (2007) argued the handling of the epidemic offers a unique chance to "analyze the conflict management strategy involved, as well as to probe the efficacy of social conflict theory and contingency theory of conflict management" (p. 11) since the epidemic grew to be a full-blown crisis and global scare. What they found was that, according to Contingency Theory, accommodation in communication "may not be inherently ethical in certain situations" (p. 12). In addition the media, particularly the US media, played a role in painting a grim picture of the Chinese government and their officials' lack of accountability to the public. Cameron and Qiu (2007) determined from this, "the investigative media thus could be integrated into the dynamics of social conflict and strategic conflict management" (p. 12).

Cameron seems to have taken this notion to heart, since his later study (Bae, Cameron & Lumpkins, 2010) concerned itself with the potential application of strategic conflict management as a tool to advocate better health in US African-American and mainstream newspapers. However, the approach in this study was reversed from the SARS example in that Bae et al. looked at escalating conflict to increase effectiveness of health-related news releases. The argument they made was that culturally oriented and alternative newspapers have a dedicated following and thus are influential voices amongst their followers. Following that, Bae et al.'s paper (2010):

> proposes that incorporating "conflictual" language, a tactic contingency theory
>
> suggests when escalating a conflict furthers worthy goals of an organization,

could guide media relations personnel in health public relations to effectively reach and impact behavior among the intended target audience via cultural news outlets such as the African American newspaper. (p. 74)

As cancer is the second highest cause of death among African Americans, Bae et al. (2010) argued - following contingency theory's suggestion - that as conflict escalation can advocate the issues being raised, it would be commendable for reporters to shed light on cancer news in a conflict-inducing manner to capture attention. This attention could then lead to raised awareness, concern and eventually mobilisation of readers to take action.

Bae et al.'s (2010) findings suggested that indeed, the escalation of conflict enhanced coverage, thus justifying the conflict incitement. The enhanced coverage was more apparent in Black newspapers than mainstream media, and since Black newspapers are culturally oriented, Bae et al.'s original statement that culturally oriented newspapers are influential over their followers, escalating conflict is righteously a force for greater good in their study. Bae et al. (2010) thus tie in with the sentiment Cameron and Qiu (2007) raised earlier for the inclusion of media in the workings of contingency theory of strategic conflict management.

2.2. Social media challenging crisis communication

In an era of globalisation - as defined by Gannon (2008) as "increasing interdependence among national governments, business firms, nonprofit organizations, and individual citizens" (p.4) - international corporations face the prospect of communicating with an international and in many ways intercultural audience, consisting especially of customers and other stakeholders. Communication can happen face-to-face or through a medium or media, e.g. email, telephone or the Internet. Gannon states the latter to be the choice medium for corporations to communicate with their stakeholders.

The reasoning behind the Internet being the go-to medium for communication in the globalised world varies from person to person, or business to business, but arguments for the Internet are the elimination of time zones and distances, expanding the audience and minimising gender bias. However, there are arguments against the Internet such as, according to Gannon, a " "take it or leave it" stance...and decreased trust levels" (2008, p. 91). Trust is arguably an invaluable attribute in any communication endeavours, be it face-to-face or mediated communication and, according to Bucher (2002), trust is built through communication and is used as a means to reduce uncertainty.

Regarding the Internet as a medium of communication, trust becomes essential to communication since the Internet enables anonymity to a varying extent as, Ruff and Aziz argue (2003), the Internet is largely unregulated. Wallace, as cited by Gannon (2008), argues that while the Internet has enabled the global world to integrate, it also has enabled differentiation to an equal degree. However, Gannon himself proposes that whether integration out-influences differentiation is still up for debate. Regardless, trust is an issue that strongly relates to communication, and especially so in crisis communication.

Crisis communication is what communication and public relations practitioners in organisations need to practice in order to deal with the crisis itself but also to keep customers, the public or any stakeholders involved or those inflicted up to speed with the situation regarding or instigating the crisis at hand. Crises are variables that at worst are completely unforeseeable, and even foreseeable crises can have unpredictable trajectories and outcomes (Cameron et al., 2012), as not all crises even are tangible (Ruff & Aziz, 2003). However, understanding the events leading to and resulting from crises is fundamental, and according to Sellnow and Seeger (2013) understanding follows the clarification of communication processes throughout a crisis - essentially crisis communication, which according to Cameron et al. (2012) is derived from previous experiences of dealing with uncertainty.

Thus, while the jury is out on the Internet's integration-differentiation debate, especially those who are differentiated because of the Internet need to trust the communication that the Internet mediates to them. Crises, according to Sellnow and Seeger (2013), in and of themselves have the potential to be immensely harmful, and a lack of trust in an organisation's crisis communication can amplify the harm in the aftermath of a crisis. After all, crises "arguably create more change more quickly than any other single phenomenon" (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013; p.1).

While crises are by their very nature unpredictable (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013), and thus preparing for crises becomes by definition paradoxical, organisations should not just rest on their laurels and wait for the looming crisis. As Sellnow and Seeger (2013) denote, crises are becoming an ever more frequent occurrence, hence it would be a good practice to adopt a mindset which is that of anticipating crisis situations to arise and dealing with them according to the context. It is arguable that the increased frequency of crises has to do with the rise of new media, and the Internet in particular. Pang (2013) argues that in the event of a crisis, social media is more influential to the public's opinion of the crisis and the organisation than traditional news platforms, especially the negative messages shared on social media. He also cites Mendoza, Poblete and Castillo, as well as Doer, Fouz and Friedrich, who have studied the spread of rumours and misinformation on social media in relation to crises, both who found rumours to spread quickly backing up Qualman's, as cited by Pang (2013), idea that "interactivity instantly creates a one-to-many discourse" (p. 312).

Thus the study of crisis communication in times of crises, especially those relating to the Internet, and preparing for those crises should be high on any organisation's list of priorities. As Pang (2013) states, "as netizens increasingly take to social media, organizations must recognize the implications and respond to it in an appropriate manner to maintain their reputations" (p.310). Sellnow and Seeger (2013) go as far as to claim the social

media utilising publics are placed at the centre of crises due to utilising social media as a means to mediate information and response needs. This is evident in Vultee and Vultee's study, as cited by Sellnow and Seeger (2013), according to which the public's output of post-crisis messages on social media amounts to over 90 percent whereas government agencies' messages amount to only three percent.

While common sense dictates that, in the case of a crisis involving one organisation and its stakeholders and/or public, the amount of individuals in the public and stakeholders creating messages surmounts those of the organisation's and that it would not be feasible to even attempt to even the numbers, organisations would do well to include social media in their crisis communication strategies and not by just reusing existing content and strategies for new channels, but repurposing strategies to fit new mediums as well. Sellnow and Seeger (2013), citing Pechta, Brandenburg and Seeger, argue for a paradigm shift of crisis communication in accordance with the advent of digital communication technologies since these technologies, such as social media, have created active sources and senders of information out of what once were regarded as passive receivers - members of the public.

2.3. Intercultural applications of Contingency Theory

2.3.1. Contingency Theory and intercultural communication

As it has already been established in this paper, the Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management emerged as an effort to give practitioners room in which to manoeuvre in the event of a crisis (Cameron et al., 2012). The train of thought to maintain a model or a hybrid of models in place for crises was and is thought of as rigid and inflexible. This is supported by Li, Cropp and Jin's (2010) study of Chinese PR practitioners and their key influencers in strategic conflict management, wherein they argue, "contingency theory was developed to reflect the reality of practice. Its insights can be used to describe and inform public relations practice in the United States but also in other countries and regions" (p. 253), which supports

the theory's universal validity. Therefore it could be argued that the theory is ripe for applying to intercultural contexts as well.

The internet has brought with it a whole new aspect in planning communication for organisations in that it allows for a far wider reach for messages to be mediated. However, it also has changed the mediation of messages in organisational communication fundamentally in that before the internet, communication was considered to be unidirectional whereas in the modern society, communication via the internet has turned it into a medium which allows for messages to be sent and received in both directions. Mei, Bansal and Pang (2010) state " traditional media are typically one-way communication and do not allow for much participation. This is not the case online" (p. 148). Mei et al. also argue, the internet has effectively removed the traditional spatial boundaries by which communication through traditional media were limited, which makes it nigh-impossible to control what is perpetuated online. Wheeler, as cited by Mei et al. (2010), states, "in times of crisis, the internet signifies the loss of a certain amount of control organisations have over their communication channels" (p. 145).

Both the eradication of traditional spatial boundaries and loss of control are magnified by the fact that "the internet...is available almost everywhere today. There are relatively low-entry barriers in gaining access to the internet, and this has made it a very accessible realm for all" (Mei et al., 2010; p. 149). Consequently, a message conveyed through new media has a far greater audience than traditional media and messages are also easier to forward and repeat, as well as distort. Cancel, as cited by Li et al. (2010), offers in the Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management 87 contingent variables that are arranged thematically. He accounts for the situational factors in such a way that, arguably, allows for culture to be taken into consideration. His situational factors include "characteristics of the other public" (p. 250), which can be understood to mean other cultures

as well, and these other cultures are well within reach through new media and the internet especially.

This intercultural receiving of messages ties into, for example, Lung Cancer Alliance's public service announcement campaign in 2012 that raised controversy due to the harsh messages it had, despite the fact that they were trying to promote awareness of lung cancer and its connection to smoking. The campaign appeared on Time magazine's list of controversial ad campaigns as number four (White, 2012). The point of the advertisements was that no one deserves to die, which one of the posters states, but the message was lost due to its blunt style. The pictures depict people of various countenances and ethnic backgrounds, just like all the people are who see the ads. The problem is, that outside their own cultural context, the ads can be very misleading and even racist to an extent, for example regarding the "Hipsters deserve to die" poster, which depicts an African American male as a hipster. The campaign posters are easy to misunderstand even in a shared cultural context, and it could be argued that the controversy would escalate if the campaign is not looked at critically.

Although the Lung Cancer Alliance did eventually modify their campaign, perhaps in response to the controversy, it highlights the issue of losing control that Wheeler, as cited by Mei et al. (2010), discusses. This is what Mei et al. argue to be an important contingent factor to be addressed in conflict management.

> There is a need to harness new media. Organisations have to acknowledge the importance of new media in order to combat threats posed by the same medium...and a company besieged by crises...ought to be proactive and show the public that efforts are in place to rectify the problem. When these efforts are made as transparent and as accessible as possible on online channels and traditional means, this could help restore stakeholder confidence. (p. 150)

It could be argued that especially for international organisations it is of great importance to react to crises quickly and to gauge the publics' reactions to redeem themselves in the event of a crisis according to Cameron et al.'s (2012) proposed "it depends" response to crises.

The most prevalent example of the use of Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management's usability in intercultural and international contexts is the aforementioned Cameron and Qiu's (2007) dissection of the SARS epidemic and the conflict the Chinese government faced. The Chinese media at first were ordered to avoid reporting on the epidemic, but their non-communicative stand was forced to change by the involvement of the WHO, particularly because of their issuing travel advisories in a response to the epidemic. It is arguably rare to have such a globally impactful crisis at hand, and Chinese PR practitioners were more than likely hard pressed to react in a satisfactory manner. The involvement of WHO in the communication of the crisis ties in with Li et al.'s (2010) findings that

> the contingency theory of strategic conflict management serves a valuable role
> in continually reflecting the complex reality of public relations practice in
> different countries and regions as well as informing practitioners on effective
> strategic conflict management based on a solid understanding of internal and
> external influences (p. 253).

2.3.2. The many facets of culture utilised in this study

As the discipline for which this thesis is made, and the context to which the theory is fitted above is intercultural communication, the theoretical framework needs to able to work in a cultural context. Additionally, culture, as studied in this thesis, needs to be defined. Defining culture for a study which, instead of studying nations, nationalities or representatives of national cultures, looks at an organisation, and how, if at all, culture relates to its

communication can be cumbersome. Douglas, as cited by Simpson and Mayr (2010) defines

culture as something social groups have imposed meanings on in their world, be it through

classification systems or by symbolic boundaries, an idea shared by Baylis and Smith (2008)

who argue culture to originate from the formation of communities. Neither of those

definitions quite fit the definition of corporate culture, but arguably there are facets to those

definitions that do fit, mainly the idea of communities forming cultures. And what is an

organisation if not a community.

Communities can also be considered social groups. Thus Ogbonna and Harris's,

and Pettigrew's, as cited by Smith and Stewart (2011), definitions of culture as a collection of

fundamental values and attitudes that members of a social group share between themselves

inches closer to a definition that is viable in an organisational setting. Triandis however, as

cited by Gannon (2008), hits closer to home by defining culture as a shared meaning system.

A shared meaning system is at the heart of technology, gaming and the gaming industry.

Gamers talk about features in games, and services like the PlayStation Network, that would

not necessarily signify the same things to a non-gamer and even in-game communication

between players has its own lingo which will not be clear immediately to one wading through

their first game. Even hackers, part of this study's topic, have their own derivative definition

that refers to those who take advantage of gameplay features and programming bugs to get an

edge over the other players (Urban Dictionary, n.d.).

However, even with the gaming culture being its own entity, and related to the

gaming industry by affiliation, it does not equate corporate culture. Anderson et al.'s (2015)

definition of corporate culture is a distant cousin of Simpson and Mayr, and Triandis', as well

as Ogbonna and Harris' and Pettigrew's, definitions of culture. Anderson et al. argue culture

to be "the culmination of the shared values, beliefs, and assumptions that shape the behavior

of the organization...the "unwritten rules" that guide the thousands of decisions employees

make throughout the company every day" (p.37). These unwritten rules are arguably what are behind Sony Computer Entertainment's organisation as well, and the employees working there, including the employees working in communications, be it crisis communication or any other kind of communication.

However, delving even deeper into the shared values and beliefs, both Golden and Smircich, as cited by Detert et al. (2000), argue these shared conceptions to essentially form a social glue, binding the organisation's employees together. However, where glue as a general term might imply a stagnant state of being, neither Golden nor Smircich believe it only to be a binding agent, but that social glue formed from organisational culture also guides behaviour. Detert et al. also argue that regardless of the fact that there is no consensus on a definition of culture, organisational culture builds upon the organisation's history, thus making it a holistic social construct.

Several scholars have also linked motivation to organisational culture (Detert et al., 2000). Motivation is central to an individual's work effort and accomplishments and according to Beyer and Schein, as cited by Detert et al., motivation is central to the human state of being. Dyer, as cited by Detert et al., for example argues motivation to tie with the question of inherent good and bad in people by the way of internal and external forces as sources of motivation. Detert et al. argue organisational culture to affect motivation, e.g. misunderstandings about requirements, misinformation caused by poor management or hierarchical problems can lead to poor performance, and whether errors or poor work performance is considered to be due to employees themselves or aforementioned conditions can be either detrimental or motivational. A recent example of detrimental organisational culture can be found from the Japanese publisher Konami's treatment of its workers, with an exposé detailing the highly monitored employee performance management practices and unusual punishments (Te, 2015).

Organisational cultures differ from one organisation to another, and while there have been similar accounts of ruling with terror about Apple (Edwards, 2013), the Konami example seems quite extreme. Regardless of the tactics associated with an organisation's culture, in branched organisations like Sony Corporation, a subsidiary of which Sony Computer Entertainment is, there exists a need for cross-organisational communication where messages and information needs to pass from one organisation to another. Despite being parts of essentially the same organisation, the organisational culture can vary from one branch or subsidiary to the next, especially in an organisation such as Sony since there are different subsidiaries and different branches for different continents, e.g. Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, Sony Music Entertainment Japan, etc. Thus studying communication practices between branches or subsidiaries becomes the study of intercultural communication.

2.4. Conclusion

Observing the literature found on Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management it becomes apparent Cameron et al. (2012) were correct in their appraisal of Contingency Theory's flexibility and multi-purposefulness. On the surface, the name of the theory evokes imagery of preparing and reacting to crises, but below the surface it can be observed that Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management can be used as a tool to raise awareness of certain issues through conflict escalation. It is also an effective model to use in intercultural contexts, such as in the SARS epidemic.

However, it is not only the practitioners' privilege to escalate conflict. The emergence of new media, especially the internet, has created the public's more prominent ability to escalate conflict in a crisis. As Mei et al. (2010) observe, "as the internet becomes a powerful platform, a concomitant effect is the rise of citizen journalism online" (p. 148), which is not regulated by a standardised ethical code, such as the British press which is regulated by the Press Complaints Commission's code of practice (Press Complaints

Commission, n.d.). As a consequence, the public now has different media through which they are able to voice their opinions and views, and which "could be detrimental to individuals and organisations as they could fall victim to malicious slander and sabotage" (Mei et al., 2010; p. 148).

In addition to the ease of voicing one's opinion, the internet has changed the nature of information into virtually permanent. As Mei et al. (2010) point out, the crises remain online indefinitely even when the actual coverage of the issue has stopped, "as if the crises are constantly perpetuated as long as they have made their ignominious mention online" (p. 150).

Despite its flexibility, Contingency Theory is still a relatively new theory and thus it still has potential to be elaborated on. Cameron et al.'s (2012) article already took steps to "streamline and redefine the influence of factors into a more parsimonious form by examining which are the more pertinent factors and how they are relevant to crisis communication" (p. 530). Since the challenges facing communication and public relations personnel worldwide are varied and, as aforementioned, paradoxical by nature, they should be approached with an open mind.

> Medical doctors do not insist that cancer conforms to a small handful of factors...embracing complexity has led to more powerful diagnoses and treatment, flying in the face of easy closure or "cubist" depictions of social reality - the offering of facets of a complete image that must then be pieced back together intuitively. (Cameron et al., 2012; p. 543)

Why not approach crisis communication with a mindset as presented above? Already the use of Contingency Theory is not only limited to preparing for conflict but for creating it to advocate change.

Even though it has been established in the reviewed literature that the Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management is a viable strategy due to its flexibility, the theory has not been taken advantage of fully, at least in terms of intercultural contexts evident by the noticeable lack of literature on intercultural applications. This is supported by Li et al.'s (2010) statement, that "while most of the public relations theoretical frameworks have been tested in multicultural contexts, the contingency theory of strategic conflict management has yet to be fully explored" (p. 249).

Regardless of whether culture is understood as Smircich's social glue (Detert et al., 2000), Douglas' culture as meanings bestowed on by social groups (Simpson & Mayr, 2010), or Baylis and Smith's formation of communities as the origin of culture (2008), it is indeed the intercultural communication of those communities, social groups or cultures that is studied here. Indeed, Sony Corporation and Sony Computer Entertainment operating on an international and multicultural market makes their communication efforts intercultural communication by definition. The question remains however, that whether these matter in the context as described above? Is the gamer mentality, consumerism or gamer community what overrides, for example, the differences in shared meanings of a national culture? This differentiation between subcultures and culture at large can make a world of difference in applying a correct strategy in communication, whether in times of crisis or not. The meaningfulness of national cultures and subcultures to communication strategies is best left for another study.

Arguably, then, it would be in organisations' advantage to explore the theory's applicability in intercultural contexts. Thus, these case studies are one approach to the theory's applicability and aim to review Sony Computer Entertainment's communication strategy and actions during a crisis and determine whether their crisis communication

strategies align with the principles of the Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict

Management.

3. Methodology

Since the theoretical perspective of the study has been established, this section aims to clarify the methodological aspects of the study - aim of the study, method used for the study, and data collection and analysis methods.

3.1. The aim of the study

This study aims at describing and understanding communication practices of a globally operating business by looking at Sony Corporation and Sony Computer Entertainment's crisis communication in 2011 and 2014, compare the cases in terms of possible differences between them, and examine how the strategies utilised relate to the Contingency Theory. Thus, in order to reach these goals, the following research questions are presented:

RQ1   How did Sony react to the two crises in 2011 and in 2014?

RQ2   If there were differences in reaction, are they explainable through a theoretical approach?

Although the reactions to Sony and SCE's crisis communication are not studied, some reactions to the events in media are discussed, and included in the discussion are a globally acknowledged daily newspaper, The Guardian, and a globally acknowledged game news site, GameSpot. These were selected as they are both mainstream media outlets, globally recognised and during both crises they published news items regarding those crises. This is done in order to gain a better understanding about the crises and how the public reacted to them. Whether culture is relevant and whether there are intercultural connotations in Sony's communication is not readily apparent and will be discovered in the analysis. Thus the third research question is as follows:

RQ3   Are there cultural or intercultural dimensions to the crisis communication practiced by Sony in either crisis?

As a member of the public, the company's reactions were only visible in their actions that were aimed to the public. This however does not represent the complete picture, and for a public relations or crisis communication practitioner does not suffice, if one was to learn from the situation. After all, Gagnon (2010) argues organisations, from a constructionist point of view, are so complex social structures that in order "to understand them, we need detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions and behaviours. We must understand how things happen before considering why" (p. 13-14). The 'how' in this study will be explained through Sony Computer Entertainment's crisis communication actions in the cases studied here, and from the analysis, the 'why' can be extrapolated. The results could then be used to create contingencies for similar crises for other organisations and for Sony Computer Entertainment.

3.2. Case study methodology

This thesis is conducted as a case study by examining the press releases, blog posts and Twitter messages from Sony Corporation and Sony Computer Entertainment, along with select media responses, described in Chapter 3.3. in detail. The selection of two crises involving an organisation and its subsidiaries is deliberate in order for the analysis and findings to be meaningful and relevant, definitions of validity which Gast and Ledford (2014) chose from The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary to ground case study validity. The amount of data gathered from these cases may not be vast, but the official communication channels were put to good account.

This is in accordance with Blaxter's (2010) description of case studies as "ideally suited to the needs and resources of the small-scale researcher. It allows, indeed endorses, a focus on just one example, or perhaps two or three...institution or organization with which they have a connection" (p. 72). Since I am working on my master's thesis on my own, a large

scale study would be too big of an undertaking, thus focusing on one company and two crises is ideal for the resources I am able to allocate to the thesis.

The findings of this thesis could be of use to organisational communications practitioners, especially in companies that utilise online systems or networks that contain customer data and thus may be subject to information thefts. This is supported by Blaxter's list of case study advantages adapted from Cohen, as cited by Blaxter (2010), according to which case studies' advantage is the possibility of generalising from a specific issue into a general one. Online information thefts are unarguably a general issue, and the contingencies that could be developed based on the particular cases examined here would be generalised from a specific case. However, in analysing the results I should tread carefully in order to steer clear from over-generalising and making the study too complex for the resources at my disposal, as Blaxter (2010) warns.

3.3. Data collection & analysis

The issue with a case studies like this, of infamous organisational crises, is that of access - does the company wish to share data on the crisis they faced which embarrassed the company and placed them under public scrutiny. My attempts to acquire access within the company and to interview employees of the company were disregarded, and thus the study had to be conducted by examining the public records of the crises.

The data collected for the crisis in 2011 includes material released from the beginning of the outage on April 20 until May 31 - the announcement of the full restoration - and consists of official press releases Sony Computer Entertainment released relating to the crisis (six items), related blog posts from the Official PlayStation Blog (24 items) and related official Twitter messages (18 items from PlayStation, 15 from Sony). In addition, two related articles released during the crisis from both GameSpot and The Guardian are included in the data. For the 2014 crisis, the data includes relevant Official PlayStation Blog posts (one

item), related official Twitter messages (five items) and one Twitter message from John Smedley, the president of Sony Entertainment Online. In addition, one related article released during the crisis from both GameSpot and The Guardian are included in the data.

The data is analysed and both cases are compared to the Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management and Excellence Theory to determine whether Sony Computer Entertainment's communication strategy or strategies persist under scrutiny against a theoretical framework. The key issue in the first crisis is the company's reaction to the data breach and the decision to withhold releasing information to the public until seven days after the incident. To appease their customers, the company promised all afflicted users a free month of their paid subscription service, PlayStation Network Plus, and two free games to download from their online store. It will be of interest whether this fits into either theory regarding crisis resolution.

4. Case analysis

In this section of the study, the cases from 2011 and 2014 are broken down and examined in detail. This is achieved by taking the research data (press releases, tweets, blogs), along with explanatory and reactionary news items from the media following the crises, via which the crises are detailed. Timelines for both crises are also provided in their relevant sections.
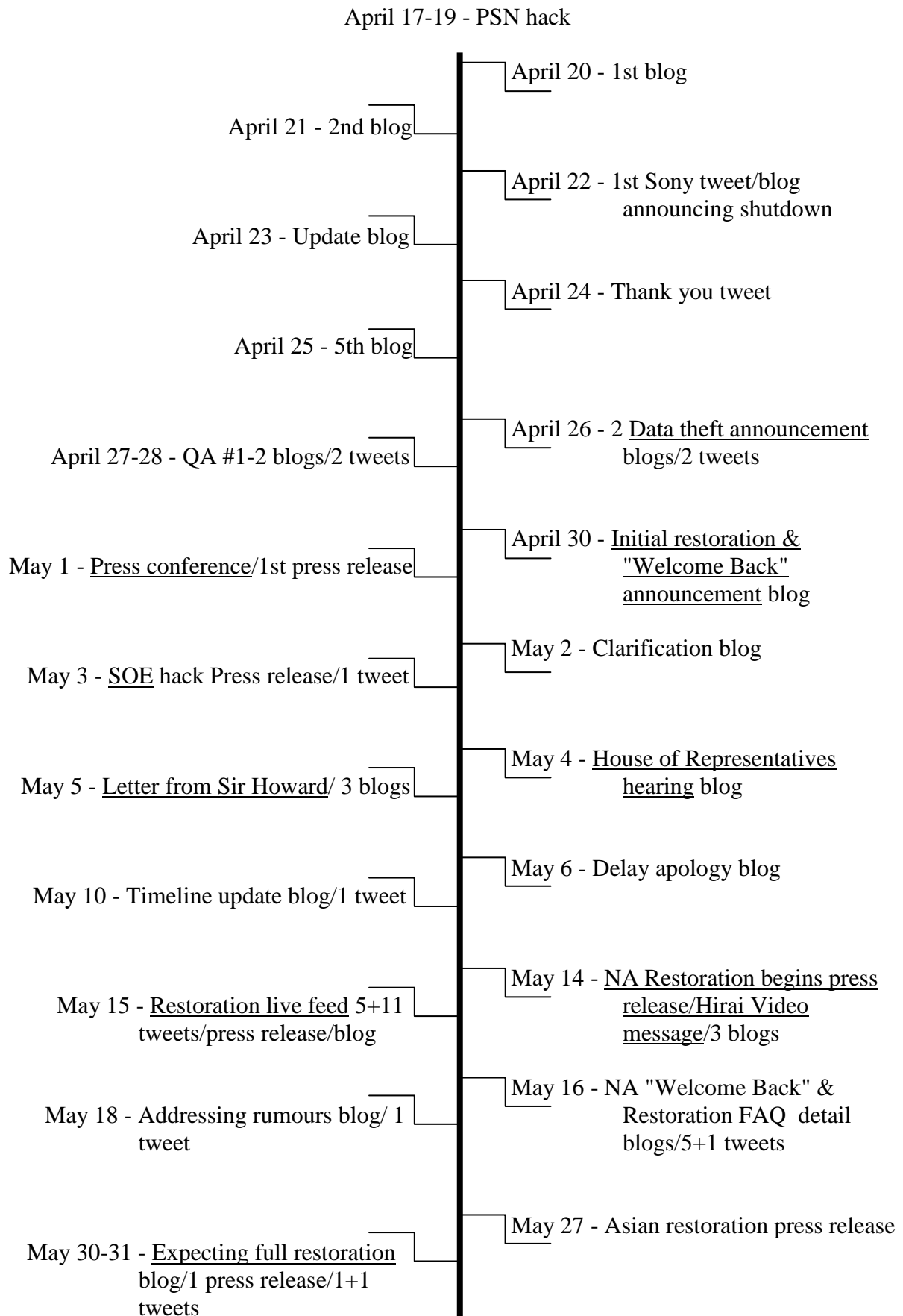
4.1. April 2011 case

Service description and onset of crisis

Sony Computer Entertainment's (SCE) PlayStation Network (PSN) - a service which allows users of PlayStation 3, PlayStation Portable and later PlayStation Vita and PlayStation 4 to access the console's network functions such as online gaming, messaging and the PlayStation Store online marketplace - was hacked between April 17 and 19 (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 3) by an unidentified hacker or hackers (Seybold, 2011 April 26a). This prompted the company to shut down the PSN service on April 20 to investigate the breach and improve their network infrastructure (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 15). Altogether, the service was shut down for 23 days.

Sony's public relations reaction to taking the service offline on April 20 was prompt on the blog front. The first post was online on the same day as the service was taken offline, albeit with somewhat misleading information - a matter that will be returned to briefly. A theme running through the most of the blog posts from beginning to the end was that of the company expressing their gratitude, whether it be for the users' patience for waiting (Seybold, 2011 April 20) or the questions they have submitted regarding the outage (Seybold, 2011 April 27).

Figure 1: PlayStation Network hack timeline 2011

April 17-19 - PSN hack

April 20 - 1st blog

April 21 - 2nd blog

April 22 - 1st Sony tweet/blog
announcing shutdown

April 23 - Update blog

April 24 - Thank you tweet

April 25 - 5th blog

April 26 - 2 Data theft announcement
blogs/2 tweets

April 27-28 - QA #1-2 blogs/2 tweets

April 30 - Initial restoration &
"Welcome Back"
announcement blog

May 1 - Press conference/1st press release

May 2 - Clarification blog

May 3 - SOE hack Press release/1 tweet

May 4 - House of Representatives
hearing blog

May 5 - Letter from Sir Howard/ 3 blogs

May 6 - Delay apology blog

May 10 - Timeline update blog/1 tweet

May 14 - NA Restoration begins press
release/Hirai Video
message/3 blogs

May 15 - Restoration live feed 5+11
tweets/press release/blog

May 16 - NA "Welcome Back" &
Restoration FAQ detail
blogs/5+1 tweets

May 18 - Addressing rumours blog/ 1
tweet

May 27 - Asian restoration press release

May 30-31 - Expecting full restoration
blog/1 press release/1+1
tweets

During the offline period of the service, SCE shared information on the PSN's downtime on the PlayStation Blog quite frequently. On Twitter however, the companies were not as active initially. Their first tweet regarding the PSN downtime was posted by Sony two days after the service was taken offline (Sony, 2011 April 22), urging people to follow the @PlayStation account and the PlayStation Blog for updates on the situation.

While the blog updates on the PSN outage were quite frequent and informative, SCE's PlayStation Twitter account was very quiet. Over the duration of the crisis the PlayStation Twitter account, urged by the company to be followed for updates (Sony, 2011 April 22), remained silent and only started posting on May 15 when they announced a PlayStation software update (PlayStation, 2011 May 15a). Sony Corporation's Twitter account however urged in their first tweet to follow the PlayStation blog for updates on the situation and to follow the PlayStation Twitter account. Two days later Sony's account posted a thank you tweet for the users' continued patience and a link to a blog post which reinforced that the company is working on amplifying the system security measures, reiterating that they are working around the clock to get the system back online as soon as possible (Sony, 2011 April 23; Seybold, 2011 April 23).

Correcting earlier misinformation - confusion continues

In the beginning of the service shutdown, Sony's take on the situation was that they were investigating the cause of the outage and that they were aware of some functions of the service being unavailable (Seybold, 2011 April 20; Seybold, 2011 April 21). However, on April 22 - two days after the service shutdown - the PlayStation Blog informed readers that the service was shut down following an external intrusion, and that it was done to enable SCE to investigate the intrusion thoroughly (Seybold, 2011 April 22). At this point the media coverage was concise, with GameSpot mainly reporting the main points of communication thus far, such as it possibly taking a few days to get services back running and that the

company is investigating the cause (Sinclair, 2011). The article also referred to earlier

Distributed Denial of Service Attacks on the PlayStation Network and a settled lawsuit over a

hacker distributing a so-called 'master key' into the software online. The Guardian ran an

article on the fifth day of the outage, claiming "hackers have kept Sony's lucrative

PlayStation Network offline...while engineers scramble to overhaul the system to make it

more secure" (Kiss, 2011), making it seem as if the outage was due to the hacking - a point

clarified by Sony Corporation and SCE earlier (Seybold, 2011 April 22). The article also

made a point of how indistinct and scarce the details on the situation were at that time. Like

the GameSpot article, the Guardian also pointed out Sony's clashing with hackers earlier that

year.

       In a blog post on April 22, the company admits to having shut down the service

voluntarily in order to investigate the intrusion they had detected to have been carried out on

their service (Seybold, 2011 April 22). These actions seem to be akin to what Sellnow and

Seeger (2013) refer to as strategic ambiguity, or the withholding of information due to

external pressure. The significance and effects of strategic ambiguity will be examined in-

depth in the discussion section (Chapter 5).

       A day before Sony could or wanted to tell its stakeholders about the gravity of the

situation, the company posted on the PlayStation blog that at that point in time there was not

a timeframe for the restoration of the service, before making a point about how time intensive

the process of restoration is (Seybold, 2011 April 25).

Breaking the news about data theft possibility

On April 26, a blog post on the PlayStation Blog informed readers of PSN user account

information being compromised in the network breach (Seybold, 2011 April 26a) - almost a

week after shutting down the PSN service. SCE maintained in their following blog posts that

while they detected the breach itself early on, they had not learned of the consumer data

being compromised until at a later date (Seybold, 2011 April 26b). In the cyber attack, the perpetrators got hold of the personal data of over 77 million users of the service, as the Guardian reported (Arthur & Quinn, 2011).

Towards the revelation of the data theft and from there onwards, Sony started to utilise more channels for communicating with stakeholders about the PSN outage. The PlayStation blog was used to break the news about the data theft on April 26, six days after shutting down the service. That same day the previous tweets were published from Sony regarding reading received messages as well as them working to get the service back online quickly (Sony, 2011 April 26a; 2011 April 26b), and in May the first corporate press release was issued (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 1). The blog post itself referred to the outage being caused by the hack, whereas the email that was to be sent to PSN users correctly referred to the service having been shut down in order to investigate (Seybold, 2011 April 26a).

A follow-up blog post maintains that the company did not know their customers' data had been compromised until at a later date than the service shutdown. The post specifically states that after learning of the intrusion they "subsequently shut the services down", and according to the post it took until April 25 for them to "understand the scope of the breach" (Seybold, 2011 April 26b).

Instead of referring to an external intrusion, the post used terms such as "illegal and unauthorised intrusion", and "malicious actions" (Seybold, 2011 April 26a). There also was an added stress on Sony's reactions to working around the clock and the quick steps they had taken to "enhance security and strengthen...network infrastructure" to award "greater protection" for the users' personal information (Seybold, 2011 April 26a). The description on whether or not the users' credit card data was compromised however remained vague, with descriptions ranging from a belief of obtaining information to there being no evidence at that time of credit card data theft having taken place.

The revelation of a hack and data theft having taken place attracted some media interest as well, and again both GameSpot and the Guardian ran articles on the revelation (Thorsen, 2011; Arthur & Quinn, 2011). GameSpot's approach was more lenient, detailing both the announcement of the hack and what data had possibly been compromised, but also described the announced security upgrades to their systems that the company had discussed in the blogs released so far, calling Sony's actions "a three-pronged approach to addressing the situation" (Thorsen, 2011). The article maintains a positive outlook at the situation by quoting an earlier blog stating the company to expect some services to be up within a week.

The Guardian on the other hand took a more negative stance towards the situation, describing the intrusion as "one of the biggest ever into a store of credit cards" (Arthur & Quinn, 2011). It also cautiously states that "it may be up to a week before it is operational again" (Arthur & Quinn, 2011). Albeit focusing more on the hack and its consequences, the Guardian also does report that the company state to be working on ensuring quick restoration and that they are taking aggressive action to have the responsible party or parties brought to justice. The article however ends on a security consultant's quote regarding the situation stating it to be "a big one" (Arthur & Quinn, 2011).

The following days the blog posts were turned into a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section, as the next two blog posts were FAQ answers for the public (Seybold, 2011 April 27; 2011 April 28). The latter FAQ was even tweeted about by Sony, again referring to the @PlayStation Twitter account (Sony, 2011 April 29). Sony did reveal to be evaluating if and how to reward the users for their patience and inability to use all the features of their consoles (Seybold, 2011 April 28).

Initial restoration announcement

On May 1, the phased restoration of the PSN game service was announced to begin shortly by Sony Online Entertainment, having "worked with several outside respected security firms"

to implement significantly strengthened security measures in addition to moving their data centre to a new location. (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 1). While this information was first posted to the PlayStation blog (Seybold, 2011 April 30), this marked the first time the company issued an official press release about the incident on their corporate website.

The crisis was apparently deemed to be influential enough to involve the parent company, Sony Corporation. However, the corporate press releases were timed to disclose the planned restoration of the PlayStation Network, and to disclose the first details of the Welcome Back programme to appease the users (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 1). The PlayStation blog predated the reveal by releasing the exact same press release the day before (Seybold, 2011 April 30). With the added prestige of a corporate press release, the aggressiveness of accusations increased by describing the data theft and breach as "illegal attacks" and a "criminal cyber-attack" (Seybold, 2011 April 30; Sony Corporation, 2011 May 1).

In the press release, Sony Corporation attempted to shift the focus out of their shortcomings to the industry at large. Sony's corporate press release states that the data theft and hack had "a significant impact not only on our consumers, but our entire industry" and they "highlight the widespread problem with cyber-security" (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 1). What that problem is was not elaborated upon, but the company claims to have learned their lessons, and what they have learned they are making use of in their "Welcome Back" programme as a means to restore trust in them in the eyes of the users.

Restoration press conference

The press release was timed to coincide with Sony Corporation's press conference about the incident. The press conference was held in Tokyo, Japan and began with Executive Vice President Kazuo Hirai addressing the attendees in Japanese to apologise to the users:

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, my name is Kazuo Hirai. Thank you for coming to this press conference during Golden Week holidays and during Sunday with such short notice. First we'd like to extend our apologies to the many PlayStation network and Qriocity service users who we inconvenienced and worried because we potentially compromised their customer data. We offer our sincerest apologies. (Sony Corporation, n.d.; Greenberg, 2011)

After the initial address, Hirai and his fellow executives, Shinji Hasejima and Shiro Kambe, took a deep bow in front of the audience and the cameras to express their shame, a very traditionally Japanese gesture. In addition to the Japanese gesture, the press conference was held in Japanese with simultaneous interpreting and the slides used in the conference were in Japanese. This stood out in contrast to all the other major communication efforts during the crisis, which had so far been conducted in English, and continued to be conducted in English (Sony Corporation, n.d.).

Regardless of the scope of the hack, personal information theft is a serious blow to a company's image. In relation to that, Seybold clarified on May 2 that while the passwords for the service were not encrypted, they had not been stored in Cleartext form, having been transformed by a cryptographic hash function. He wished to clarify this in order to assuage stakeholder worries regarding the privacy policies of SCE after reports of an unidentified group trying to sell credit card numbers back to Sony (Seybold, May 2).

On May 3 Sony Corporation announced via a corporate press release that their other subsidiary, Sony Online Entertainment's (SOE) data centre had been hacked and customer data from that centre also may have been stolen. This attack was revealed to have happened in the same time period as the PSN hack, between April 16 and 17 (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 3; Seybold, 2011 April 26a). The press release details the amount of accounts and credit card numbers to have been possibly affected, and informs of SOE's

investigation into the theft. The press release also mentions SOE to strengthen their security systems in light of what the company calls "unprecedented cyber-attacks" (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 3). The publication of this press release was also announced on Twitter by Sony's account (Sony, 2011 May 3), notifying followers of an update regarding SOE's status.

According to the release, the company was working with the FBI to investigate the breaches and restore the services as soon as possible. In addition, SOE promised its customers 30 days of additional subscription time for their service, but the company also announced to be working on a "make good" plan, in a very similar gesture to what Sony Corporation announced earlier, for its users with more information to follow. The company also commits to helping its customers in a complimentary offering to ensure the safety of their customers' data (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 3).

U.S. House of Representatives hearing

While it had been left out of corporate press releases and blog posts thus far, on May 4 the PlayStation Blog posted about the company's response to the U.S. House of Representatives, who had organised a hearing on "The Threat of Data Theft to American Consumers" (Seybold, May 4). Kazuo Hirai had submitted written answers to the House of Representatives' questions about "the large-scale, criminal cyber-attack we have experienced" (Seybold, 2011 May 4) and the company wished to share the main points of those answers:

In summary, we told the subcommittee that in dealing with this cyber attack we followed four key principles:

1. Act with care and caution.

2. Provide relevant information to the public when it has been verified.

3. Take responsibility for our obligations to our customers.

4. Work with law enforcement authorities.

We also informed the subcommittee of the following:

- Sony has been the victim of a very carefully planned, very professional, highly sophisticated criminal cyber attack.

- We discovered that the intruders had planted a file on one of our Sony Online Entertainment servers named "Anonymous" with the words "We are Legion."

- By April 25, forensic teams were able to confirm the scope of the personal data they believed had been taken, and could not rule out whether credit card information had been accessed. On April 26, we notified customers of those facts.

- As of today, the major credit card companies have not reported any fraudulent transactions that they believe are the direct result of this cyber attack. (Seybold, 2011 May 4)

This was the first time that Sony had implied Anonymous' involvement in the data theft. The answers also try to soften the consequences of the attack by referring to the minimal damage the company's customers had endured and how they had taken responsibility and were aware of their obligations. The blog post itself ended with a reminder that the company is working around the clock on the service's restoration (Seybold, 2011 May 4).

Executive involvement

While the service was still undergoing phased restoration and after Sony Corporation's EVP Hirai had addressed the outages in a press conference, the PlayStation Blog published a letter from then-president and CEO of Sony Corporation, Sir Howard Stringer. He wanted to assure readers that the company extended all its resources to investigate and fix the repercussions of the cyber-attack. He also pointed out that no evidence had occurred of credit card or personal information being misused, and to help potential future misuse victims the company had launched an identity theft insurance policy. Sir Howard also wished to apologise on behalf of

the company and himself for the inconvenience and concern the service users had had to endure because of the incident (Seybold, 2011 May 5a).

Sir Howard elaborated on fixing and investigating the repercussions of the attack as being the solving of the identity of the perpetrator or perpetrators and making the service safe to use again. The reassurance that no information had been misused was based on the information the company had at the time of writing. Sir Howard also addressed the issue of notifying the users of the data theft sooner, and went on to justify their actions by stating the forensic analysis to have been a complex process and only alerted the public about the theft upon discovery (Seybold, 2011 May 5a).

Coinciding with Sir Howard's letter was an announcement on the PlayStation blog of PlayStation Network's internal testing entering its final stages (Seybold, 2011 May 5b). The blog post was followed with an explanatory blog post the following day that, while referring to the important step that had been taken, concluded it to have taken more time than expected. At the time of the press conference (Sony Corporation, n.d.), SCE and Sony Corporation were expecting to have the service running again within a week, and thus wanted to apologise via the blog post for the further delay and inconvenience it causes to their customers (Seybold, 2011 May 6). Another apology was issued via the PlayStation Blog the following week with the announcement that an exact date for service restoration could not be projected at that time (Seybold, 2011 May 10). While Sony did tweet about the release of the blog, and is preceded with 'RT' and @PlayStation, indicating it to be a retweet from PlayStation's account (Sony, 2011 May 10), the original tweet could not be retrieved at the time this study was conducted.

In addition, the complimentary offering for securing the customers' data that Sony Corporation and SCE announced earlier was detailed in a blog post (Seybold, 2011 May 5c). While the customer base of the PlayStation Network service is global, the only customers

eligible were those living in the United States for the time being, and further informed on local websites if other countries were to become eligible. Sony had taken on itself to grant the North American users 12 months of free service from Debix to those who enrolled as a way of appeasing PSN users.

The following week Sony Corporation announced both the restoration of Sony Online Entertainment's game service (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 14; Sony, 2011 May 14b) and the beginning of PlayStation Network services' restoration (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 15; Seybold, 2011 May 14b; PlayStation, 2011 May 15c). Regarding the SOE service restoration, Kazuo Hirai stated in the press release the company's main priority to have been the "safety and security of our customers' personal information", and that the company's strategy had been updated to include data protection as a full-time commitment throughout the company through enhancing their security technologies (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 14).

The latter press release detailed the beginning of the phased restoration of PSN services, starting with the Americas, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Middle East. Since usernames and passwords were a part of the data that had been compromised, the service restoration necessitated an updated firmware - the software running the PlayStation 3 console itself - and the resetting of all user passwords, essentially invalidating some of the data that had been compromised as a counter-measure for the misuse of stolen data (Lempel, 2011). Additionally, Kazuo Hirai stressed that the company is taking "aggressive action at all levels to address the concerns that were raised by this incident" (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 15). The press release also referenced an increase in the volume of cyber-attacks in the industry in the past 18 months, and cyber security expert Francis deSouza mentioned the need for an evolutionary approach to cyber security in order to thwart modern cyber crime (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 15).

Along with the blog and press release, a video message from Kazuo Hirai was posted on the PlayStation Blog on May 14. Hirai wanted to apologise to the users of the service for the service downtime and reiterated many of the points that had been covered by previous and upcoming blog posts and press releases from the company regarding the attack, their actions to get the service running as soon as possible and to increase the security of the service (Seybold, 2011 May 14a). The details of the restoration were fleshed out in the corporate press release that was released the following day (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 15).

Ulmer and Sellnow, as cited by Sellnow and Seeger (2013), argue accepting responsibility for the consequences, possibly providing help or support for victims - which Sony Corporation and SCE attempted with their announced offering to help their customers in keeping their data safe - to be considered ethical. By announcing these gestures of good will towards their customers by top executives, Sony likely attempted to give the gesture increased gravitas that a CEO or Vice President brings to the table. While it is hard to determine whether it was this added gravitas or the actions the company was taking to make good, the response to their planned "Welcome Back" programme was mostly positive (Greenberg, 2011).

Communication activity spike as service restoration begins

Sony Corporation and SCE were most active communication-wise on May 15 during the North American restoration of PSN services. The aforementioned press release announced the restoration, and was followed by a barrage of Twitter messages from both Sony and PlayStation. PlayStation Twitter channel broke its silence by announcing the mandatory software update for the PS3 (PlayStation, 2011 May 15a) which Sony encouraged to install in preparation of the restoration (Sony, 2011 May 15a), and for which PlayStation provided an alternate install option (PlayStation, 2011 May 15d). The restoration did not go without

bumps in the road, and the service was overloaded with password reset requests and had to be turned off momentarily (Seybold, 2011 May 15; PlayStation, 2011 May 16b). This occurred despite the fact both Sony and PlayStation Twitter accounts instructed users to be patient and that the restoration would take time (Sony, 2011 May 15c; 2011 May 15g), and not only for reasons dependent on Sony or SCE (PlayStation, 2011 May 16a; 2011 May 16c). Mostly however the Twitter feed functioned as a live blog of areas where the PSN services had been restored (PlayStation, 2011 May 15e; 2011 May 15f; 2011 May 15h; 2011 May 15i; 2011 May 15j; 2011 May 15k), concluding with a thank you and an announcement from Sony that the service had been restored in all U.S. states and Canada (Sony, 2011 May 15d; 2011 May 15e; PlayStation, 2011 May 15k).

Following the restoration, the PlayStation Blog was yet again turned into a FAQ section for post-restoration questions users had at the time (Rubenstein, 2011 May 16). The reason behind the numerous questions regarding the different functions, store and game releases was probably down to the fact that the information regarding the different services was only released in the form of a corporate press release - content which, arguably, the average PlayStation Network user will not have probably read. The blog was most likely intended to attract a wider audience, aided by the fact that it was also tweeted about (PlayStation, 2011 May 16d). This seemed to be the trend for Sony and SCE, that towards the end of the crisis the use of Twitter as a communication channel increased significantly.

The PlayStation Blog was the platform which announced the details of the "Welcome Back" programme in North America (Seybold, 2011 May 16). The programme was intended as a token of appreciation for the customers, and the programme was rolled out regionally, beginning in North America after the service's full restoration (Seybold, 2011 May 16), and ending in Japan and Asian countries and regions (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 27).

The blog post focused on positive messages, from the customers being able to enjoy online gaming to the company being delighted to announce the details of the "Welcome Back" programme and thanking the partners who had contributed to the programme to make it possible, and a thanks for the support given (Seybold, 2011 May 16). The programme itself, as revealed for North America, included two free digital PlayStation 3 games that a user was free to choose from a selection of five games, and another two for PlayStation Portable out of four games. In addition, there were selected free movie rentals over one weekend, 30 days of free PlayStation Plus subscription for all users and existing Plus users received 60 additional days of subscription. Also included was 30 days of Music Unlimited subscription and free items on PlayStation Home service for its users. The blog post concluded with the assurance that the content would be available shortly after full restoration and that users from other regions should visit their respective regions' blogs for details on their programmes.

Perhaps as an indication of 'lessons learned' from the crisis Sony and SCE had underwent, the details of the "Welcome Back" programme were released in a blog post that was accompanied by tweets from both companies as well (Sony, 2011 May 16; PlayStation, 2011 May 16e). The use of both Twitter accounts also reveals the fact that while both Sony and PlayStation are established brands as individuals, Sony also encompasses many other fields of technology besides gaming, thus arguably making it less interesting for gamers. At the time that the study was conducted, the PlayStation Twitter channel had 7.98 million followers (PlayStation, 2007) whereas Sony's Twitter channel had 3.82 million (Sony, 2009). This figure, while surely different from the numbers in 2011, correspond with the fact that the tweet regarding the "Welcome Back" programme details on their respective channels got different numbers of retweets. PlayStation's tweet has to date garnered 878 retweets

(PlayStation, 2011 May 16e) while Sony's corresponding tweet has 54 retweets to date (Sony, 2011 May 16).

Post-restoration troubleshooting and conclusion

As service restoration on the scale that Sony and SCE were executing is a tall order, it is understandable that troubles may evoke negative responses from stakeholders and the public, and rumours may surface. This was what happened with the PlayStation Network restoration, and the PlayStation Blog had to quell rumours of another hack (Seybold, 2011 May 18). The temporarily disabled PSN password reset page sparked those rumours, and a related URL exploit was subsequently fixed. The disabled website was announced not to affect resetting the password through a PlayStation 3 system however. Again, probably to reach a wider audience, the blog post was tweeted about by the PlayStation Twitter account (PlayStation, 2011 May 18).

Next, Sony Corporation released a press release about commencing the phased restoration of PlayStation Network service in Japan and Asian countries and region (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 27). The contents of this press release was essentially the same as the announcement of the phased restoration in the Americas (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 15). However, the details of the "Welcome Back" programme for each region, although referred to and detailed for Japan as an annex in the press release, were to be announced at a later date.

On May 30 a blog post announced that by the end of the week, the PSN service will have been fully restored. In the blog post and press release, EVP Hirai reassures users that their safety is a prime concern for the company, and have thus conducted additional testing and security verification. Also, the press release reiterated that the details of the "Welcome Back" programme will be detailed regionally in the future. (Rubenstein, 2011 May 30; Sony Corporation, 2011 May 31).

Since the full restoration is a major announcement for users and various other stakeholders, the announcement was made on both the blog and as a press release since other stakeholders may not be aware or interested of the blog since it is used mostly as a marketing channel for game releases. This announcement was again made on Twitter and on both accounts (Sony, 2011 May 31; PlayStation, 2011 May 31), in an attempt to inform as many users and stakeholders as possible. Despite the good news, and as with the previous announcement, there was a similar and significant difference in numbers of retweets between the two accounts - Sony's tweet has received 95 retweets to date (Sony, 2011 May 31) and PlayStation's tweet has been retweeted 1,702 times to date (PlayStation, 2011 May 31).

The PSN outage remains a significant data security breach in information technology history, deemed to be in the top five ever by cyber-security training expert Alan Paller (Chung, 2011). Even to this date, major data hacks fail to rival the scope of the PSN hack, an example of which is the Target department store data theft in 2013, an attack that saw over 40 million customers' credit card details stolen (d'Innocenzio & Chapman, 2014). The overall cultural significance is apparent - in comparison to the Target hack - in that the PSN outage has its own Wikipedia article (Wikipedia, n.d.a), whereas the Target hack is only a chapter in the article about the history of Target Corporation (Wikipedia, n.d.b).

4.2. August 2014 case

August 24, 2014 saw the PSN service malfunctioning with the users, leaving many struggling to connect to the service. SCE was quick to get on top of the situation, and at 15:18 UTC tweeted from the official PlayStation account that their engineers are aware of the issue and are working to resolve them, apologising for the inconvenience and promising to keep followers posted (PlayStation, 2014 Aug 24a).

Unlike the incident in 2011, PlayStation took to Twitter to announce awareness of problems with their service as soon as they became aware of the situation, not two days after

shutting down the service like in 2011 (Sony, 2011 April 22). This was likely done in order to stay on top of the situation and take action instead of reacting to others' actions.
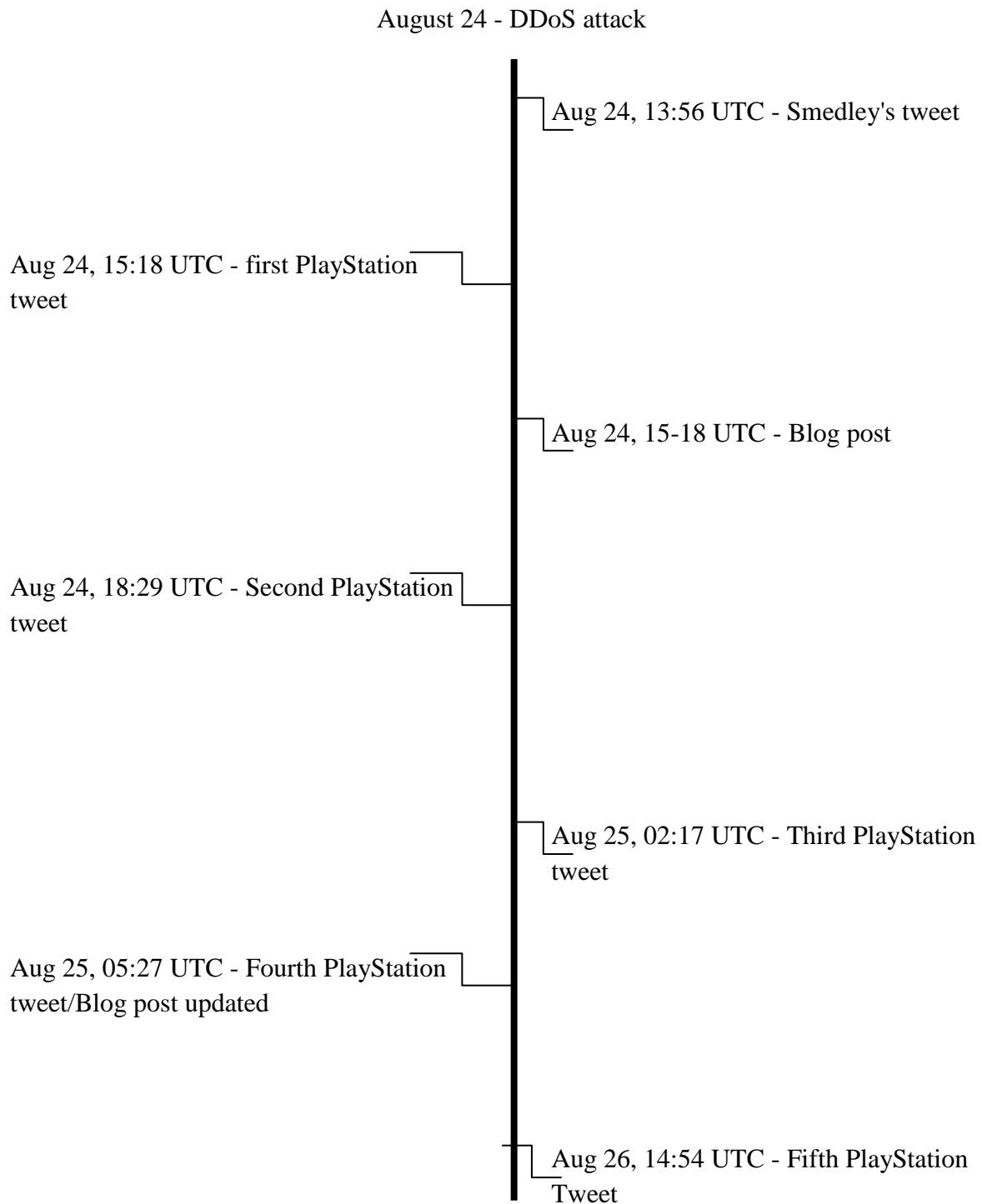
Later during the same day, the PlayStation Twitter account tweeted a link (PlayStation, 2014 Aug 24b) to the PlayStation Blog which had published a blog post regarding the service problems. There it was reported that many networks around the world had been subjected to artificially high traffic in an attempt to overwhelm networks, and PSN and Sony Entertainment Network were no exceptions. The blog post was quick to dissolve any rumours about personal information being accessed (Shuman, 2014), a point then-president of Sony Entertainment Online (SEO) John Smedley's tweet wished to make as well (Smedley, J., 2014 August 24). In the blog post the company also regretted any inconvenience the service outage may have caused.

Arguably as an attempt to dissuade the public of pointing a finger solely at SCE and their PlayStation Network, the blog post referred to other networks suffering of the same problems at the time. The company did not wish to be singled out as the scapegoat for this crisis, and even the Guardian and GameSpot reported PSN to not be the sole casualty (Makuch, 2014; Stuart, 2014). However, somewhat akin to the crisis in 2011, the Guardian article noted there to initially have been an onscreen message claiming service maintenance instead of outage, only for the company to tweet later it to be dealing with the issue, before announcing the DDoS attack (Stuart, 2014).

The service outage took new forms after a hacker group known as the Lizard Squad had claimed responsibility for the artificial traffic jamming the networks. Aforementioned SEO president Smedley was flying from Dallas to San Diego that day, and soon after the plane took off, the Lizard Squad tweeted about the possibility of a bomb being aboard said flight. The flight was diverted to Phoenix as a result. Lizard Squad also seemingly referred to be targeting Microsoft's Xbox Live service, which is Microsoft's

equivalent of Sony's PlayStation Network. The Lizard Squad also made reference to Jihadist

sympathies by tweeting to have planted the ISIS flag on Sony's servers but whether they were

made in spite or to attract attention is open to question (Stuart, 2014).

Figure 2: PlayStation Network DDoS attack 2014 timeline

August 24 - DDoS attack

Aug 24, 13:56 UTC - Smedley's tweet

Aug 24, 15:18 UTC - first PlayStation
tweet

Aug 24, 15-18 UTC - Blog post

Aug 24, 18:29 UTC - Second PlayStation
tweet

Aug 25, 02:17 UTC - Third PlayStation
tweet

Aug 25, 05:27 UTC - Fourth PlayStation
tweet/Blog post updated

Aug 26, 14:54 UTC - Fifth PlayStation
Tweet

While both the GameSpot and the Guardian articles referenced the bomb threat, the two articles differed significantly in coverage of the issue. GameSpot's main focus was on the service problems, the fact that it was now back online and how Sony responded to claims of personal information having been compromised. The article also referenced other networks having been targeted, and adding that the hackers had claimed responsibility for a bomb threat, made on an airplane carrying Smedley, which the FBI investigated. The article concluded with a pledge to monitor the story and its developments (Makuch, 2014).

The Guardian also ran with the news that PSN had been attacked but was not the only network to be targeted, in addition to further plans to attack Xbox Live. However, a lot more focus was placed on Sony and PlayStation rather than the other networks, as well as the bomb threat that the Lizard Squad had made on Smedley's flight. The focus on PlayStation was justified by referring to the 2011 hack, describing it as "one of the biggest corporate hacks so far recorded" (Stuart, 2014), which resulted in Sony being fined £250,000 by the Information Commissioner's Office in January 2014 (Stuart, 2014). The Guardian reflected Sony Corporation's sentiments of such attacks becoming the norm in the business and in the information society in general (Sony Corporation, 2011 May 1; 2011 May 15), albeit three years after the company's statements.

The following day, PlayStation Twitter account first tweeted the service to be returning albeit with login issues and occasional slowness (PlayStation, 2014 August 25a), then that the network is back online with a link to the earlier blog post that had been updated with the current state of the network (PlayStation, 2014 August 25b; Shuman, 2014) and finally thanking the followers of their patience and announcing that the network was being restored (PlayStation, 2014 August 25c). It was also clarified that the networks were taken offline due to being subjected to Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks. An attack like this is external and does not technically constitute hacking.

In the aftermath of the DDoS attack and mid-flight bomb scare, the FBI started investigating the case. SEO president Smedley refused to comment on the case at the time, only stating through his Twitter account that it is left for the investigators to find the perpetrators (Makuch, 2014). The media also made reference to Sony, along with other companies, being subject to similar attacks in recent times, and also making explicit references to the 2011 hacking incident (Stuart, 2014).

The DDoS attack the Lizard Squad conducted on PSN was not in itself a major attack, only crippling the service for the duration of a couple to a few days, but the bomb threat made the incident more severe. The Lizard Squad also conducted similar attacks on Sony and Microsoft in December 2014 as well, along with similar attacks on other services and networks. An article listing these attacks on Wikipedia has a separate chapter relating to the DDoS attack on PSN in August as well as a separate section for the false bomb threat on the American Airlines flight carrying John Smedley (Wikipedia, n.d.c).

Due to the bomb threat and further cyber attacks, the group is apparently still under FBI investigation (Maity, 2015), and as recently as July 2015, Finnish citizen and member of Lizard Squad Julius Kivimäki was convicted for over 50,000 charges, some relating to the August DDoS attack, and received a two-year suspended sentence. In reaction to the verdict, John Smedley has stated he may pursue further legal action against Kivimäki in relation to the bomb threat and other crimes committed against Smedley (Hussain, 2015).

5. Discussion

In this chapter, the data presented in Chapter 4 is discussed in relation to the research questions presented in Chapter 3. Different viewpoints regarding the research questions are taken into account in interpreting the data.

As proposed in the methodology section (Chapter 3), this study is based on three research question, which were as follows:

RQ1   How did Sony react to the two crises in 2011 and in 2014?

RQ2   If there were differences in reaction, are they explainable through a theoretical approach?

RQ3   Are there cultural or intercultural dimensions to the crisis communication practiced by Sony in either crisis?

The reactions to the crises Sony faced in 2011 and 2014, in relation to Research question 1, were detailed in the Data analysis section (Chapter 4).

To summarise, it can be stated that in 2011, Sony and Sony Computer Entertainment were slow to react publicly and scarcely shared information with the public and stakeholders regarding what had occurred between April 17-19. Not only were they tight-lipped about the matter, but they even released misleading information initially, suggesting the outage to have occurred spontaneously with the company having no part in it (Seybold, 2011 April 20; 2011 April 21). In comparison, by 2014 Sony were quick to respond to queries regarding the service outage and get on top of the situation by releasing a blog and tweeting about the outage on the same day, also dispelling rumours regarding compromised personal information (PlayStation, 2014 August 24a; 2014 August 24b; Shuman, 2014; Smedley, 2014).

While the long-term differences cannot be analysed since the crises were drastically different from one another in length, they are viable to be compared due to the

allegations of personal data being compromised in both cases. Moreover, the early handling of the crises is very different between the two cases and that already makes it fruitful grounds to study, since the target of both attacks is the same service, and the initial effect on users was virtually identical - the inability to use services that they are accustomed to having.

Despite the differences in reaction speed and amount of disclosure in their initial communications efforts, seemingly of two different companies, the tone with which communication was initiated is very similar. Both crises' blog posts are wary and apologetic in tone, with one regretting the inconvenience caused (Shuman, 2014) and the other thanking users for their patience (Seybold, 2011 April 20). Both crises' communication efforts' apologetic tone could arguably be an indication of the Sony Corporation and Sony Computer Entertainment's Japanese roots - tying to Research question 3 - as Sugimoto, as cited by Brown, Hayashi and Yamamoto (2012), found Japanese to favour the repetition of apology markers whereas Americans favour originality over repetition. Based on Sugimoto's findings, the communication in both crises observed also has markers of westernised communication practices. Sugimoto's findings suggest Americans to utilise more adverbs in comparison to Japanese - observable in the PlayStation Blog posts (Seybold, 2011 April 23; 2011 April 26; Shuman, 2014).

However, the information included in those game openers marks the significant difference between 2011 and 2014 for Sony and SCE. In 2011, Sony only announced to be aware of the system outage and promised further information as it becomes available, whereas in 2014 Sony announced its network to be under attack from the outside, but reported at the same time that they were not the only one to fall under fire, and that the users' personal information was safe. Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2007) argue immediate contact with stakeholders to be fundamental to crisis communication, and argue it to be the downfall of many organisations - to fail in communicating by making themselves unavailable. In

situations where information is lacking, such as in Sony and SCE's case in 2011, Ulmer et al.

argue it to be better to listen and answer questions than to stonewall the publics - listening

and answering being what SCE did in 2014 by reacting early to the crisis, and essentially

stonewalling one audience with the inactivity of the PlayStation Twitter account in 2011.

By making it seem initially that the outage was due to external factors instead of

internal, thus attempting to spin the story to their advantage in 2011, Sony and SCE arguably

did themselves their greatest disservice. Ulmer et al. (2007) claim favourable spin attempts to

affect an organisation's credibility negatively due to the defensiveness of the actions leading

to public speculation on the events and the damage done - evident in how the Guardian

reported on the breadth of the hack in 2011 (Arthur & Quinn, 2011). Ulmer et al. also argue

for accurate communication, however vague the situation may be at the time, and for

organisations to communicate what they know regardless of how little that may be - this

being what SCE did in 2014 by letting the public to know they had been experiencing

artificial traffic.

From these differences it is possible to conjecture Sony and SCE to have

amended their crisis communications strategies towards a leaner and more adaptive direction.

The purpose of Research question 2 is to evaluate the crisis communication

approaches from 2011 and 2014 from a theoretical perspective. The differences in reaction to

crisis discussed above are what Cameron et al. (2012) argue Contingency Theory to be about

- a move from rigid models in public relations to a continuum that allows for more stances to

react to a given crisis. After all, Seeger, as cited by Cameron et al. states "crises are

"dynamic" " (p. 530) and thus Cameron et al. argue the reactions to crises should be equally

dynamic, thus the idea of a continuum instead of models for crisis communication. Cancel et

al., as cited by Cameron et al., argues a continuum to be a "more effective and realistic

illustration of public relations and organization behavior than a conceptualization of four

models" (p.532). In regards to the two-way symmetrical model, one of the four models Cameron et al. refer to, they discuss the possibilities for misusing an approach to manipulate a situation - "instead of a rigid transference of information, the organization uses surveys and polls to persuade the publics to accepts its point of view" (p. 531) - pointing to instances having occurred where an organisation would refuse dialogue due to unreasonable demands.

Cameron et al. (2012) even pose a question to organisations as to why stonewall the public when they could rely on more finessed options, such as admitting not having all the facts at the time or stating the situation to be still in flux. Seeger, as cited by Cameron et al., reflects this position of acknowledging uncertainty and calls it a best practice of crisis communication. By acknowledging the fluidity of the situation, the refinement of the messages as the crisis evolves is less likely damaging or to seen as backtracking - indeed what happened to SCE in 2011 on their initial claims of investigating the cause of the outage instead of admitting to have shut down the service willingly. Instead it might have been wiser to admit to closing the service for investigation and admitting to not having all the facts at the time.

It is also worth remarking that while in 2011 at the crisis' onset Sony directed their Twitter followers to look to PlayStation's Twitter for updates on the situation, in 2014 Sony's own Twitter account chose to neglect tweeting about the situation and the communication was handled strictly through PlayStation-related channels. And yet, despite directing followers to the PlayStation Twitter account in 2011, Sony continued tweeting regarding the crisis over the course of the events. These differences would seemingly indicate a revised strategy regarding crisis communication involving the game service since, as observed from the outside, Sony remained uninvolved with the events despite an apparent bomb threat being made toward a key executive of one of the company's subsidiaries. It is

arguable however whether Sony should have become involved in the communication at the news of the particular development.

Since the data available cannot either confirm or deny Sony and SCE's preparedness for a crisis of the scope that in 2011 occurred, it can only be hypothesised one way or the other based on differences in crisis communication strategies between the two crises. However, I would assume that they were prepared for hacking attempts and some form of information theft from an outside party, albeit not on the scale of the actual incident. Thus, I would expect SCE to have created contingencies for future crises of the scale and for different scenarios as well, with focus on online conflict management based on their experiences in 2011. This new approach to crisis communication is apparent in their handling of the 2014 crisis.

Comparing the incidents of 2011 and 2014, there appears to be an increased attempt at transparency throughout Sony Computer Entertainment's communication efforts in 2014, whereas in 2011 the communication seemed more regulated. In 2011, at the beginning of the crisis they initially did not disclose the true nature of the outage - that the company had shut down the service instead of having suffered an outage - while in 2014 SCE came forward with the artificial nature of the traffic their servers were experiencing, and that they had not indeed been hacked. Sellnow and Seeger (2013) argue withholding information to be ethically justifiable due to external pressure for openness, no matter whether the information is adequate enough with which to be coming forward. Some scholars have thus argued it to be a viable strategy to be ambiguous, or to "acknowledge that the information is not available" (p.227).

Despite some scholars' rooting for strategic ambiguity, Benoit, as cited by Sellnow and Seeger (2013), has argued dishonesty and withholding information to be detrimental for an organisation by increasing perceptions of dishonesty, thus increasing a

crisis' severity. This ties to Bucher's (2002) notion of building trust through communication - if an organisation is regarded to be dishonest through their communication, can their communication efforts be trusted? While it is impossible to ascertain whether this has been the reasoning behind a change in strategy, it is arguable that the negative public response to SCE's crisis communication efforts in 2011 caused them to strive for increased transparency and speed in their communication.

During the 2011 crisis, the inception of the idea that the users should be compensated for the time that they were unable to access the full features of their consoles which eventually matured to become the Welcome Back programme is what Sellnow and Seeger (2013) refer to as image repair. According to them image repair is a crisis resolution strategy, meaning an attempt to shift the focus from the harm done to "a more secure future" (p.170), which Sony kept reiterating to be their plan throughout their communication efforts (Seybold, 2011 April 27; 2011 April 30; 2011 May 2; Sony Corporation, 2011 May 1; 2011 May 14).

As for the cultural and intercultural aspects of the study - posed in Research question 3 - culture itself may not be readily apparent in SCE's communication efforts. However, since Sony Computer Entertainment originates from Japan, it was a possibility that the Japanese branch of the company would have been calling the shots on how to approach the situations and thus the traditionally hierarchical culture could shine through the company's communication efforts. This is seemingly supported by the fact that the actual press conference detailing the situation during the crisis in 2011 was held in Japanese, and the company executives who were briefing the press and the public bowed down at the beginning in order to express their shame, as is customary to Japanese culture. The choice of language is peculiar and noteworthy in a time in which cross-cultural business is predominantly conducted in English, a modern trade language (Hooker, 2012).

Additionally, despite the fact that Sony Computer Entertainment claimed the cause for the media silence in the 2011 crisis was to first determine the gravity of the situation, it is not, arguably, good practice to keep customers in the dark about breaks in service, whether or not the consequences are clear yet. As the Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management presupposes, the approach to communication should ideally be 'it depends' (Cameron et al., 2012), and had Sony's reaction been according to the Contingency Theory, they would have adapted and issued a statement sooner since their customers were demanding information.

This silence also has cultural aspects that can be considered. Nakane, as cited by Brown et al. (2012) argue silence to be a communication strategy for Japanese people that conveys meaning, especially disagreement or request refusal, whereas Hasegawa and Gudykunst, as cited by Brown et al., found Japanese to find silence more negative than Americans. This could indicate Sony Corporation and Sony Computer Entertainment's strategic denial to shed light on negative issues to well from the companies' Japanese roots. However, if the crisis communication strategies at Sony Computer Entertainment have evolved between the two cases studied - which they have, as argued above - it could mean that a paradigm shift in the organisational culture has also taken place.

Since culture is a multidimensional concept, and as it was defined in Chapter 3, intercultural communication can happen across different branches of an organisation - which can have differing organisational cultures - and it seems intercultural communication issues of the organisational culture variety are at play in the 2011 crisis. Zaremba (2010) touches upon this and related issues in stating it to be an assumption by the public at large that crisis communication is an activity only for external audiences. Zaremba finds it to be of great importance to communicate with internal audiences - the organisation itself - along with the publics. An organisation must know what is being communicated to the external audiences.

In Sony and SCE's case it seems to have been lost in translation for it to be SCE's responsibility to keep the publics up-to-date on the crisis in 2011, thus failing to do so despite Sony's behest to its Twitter followers to keep an eye out for PlayStation's Twitter account is an indication of intercultural communication gone awry, meaning a gap in the communication between the two organisations occurred. Common sense would seemingly dictate that in the case of a conglomerate parent and subsidiary company communication, the parent company's messages would be considered high information value messages and would be high on a subsidiary's priority list. However, in the case of the 2011 crisis, Sony Corporation and Sony Computer Entertainment's communication efforts suffered a breakdown. While the parent company's Twitter forwarded followers to the subsidiary's Twitter for more information, the message seems to have gotten lost. This is evident in Sony Corporation's tweet urging the public to follow Sony Computer Entertainment's PlayStation Twitter feed for updates (Sony, 2011 April 22), yet despite the guidance, the PlayStation Twitter feed remained quiet until May 15 (PlayStation, 2011 May 15).

These issues discussed above do not surface when examining the crisis in 2014. As it has been argued previously, Sony and SCE's crisis communication strategies developed between 2011 and 2014, and with those developments the organisational cultures at the companies developed as well. In 2014, SCE and its PlayStation Twitter account take immediate control of the situation and Sony Corporation remains uninvolved throughout the crisis. It is impossible to determine whether the parent and subsidiary companies communicated behind the curtains at the crisis' onset, but to an external observer, it appears to have been a strategic choice for Sony Corporation to stand clear of their PlayStation Network's crises lest, as argued previously, it may have been appropriate for the company to give a statement regarding the FBI investigation toward the bomb threat.

Overall, with the exclusion of corporate communication channels that characterised the 2011 crisis, the crisis communication approach Sony Computer Entertainment demonstrated facing a crisis in 2014 seemed leaner and more organic than its 2011 counterpart. The most prominent signifiers of this are the speed at which SCE's PlayStation Twitter account (PlayStation, 2014 August 24a; 2014 August 24b) and PlayStation Blogs were posting their first updates, along with the fact that the PlayStation Blog was updated with the latest developments as the crisis progressed and settled (Shuman, 2014).

Arguably, if by 2014 Sony and SCE had agreed upon letting SCE handle the crisis communication upon the event that a crisis involving the PSN service might occur again, possibly indicating an agreed upon and premeditated crisis communication stance, it would be somewhat of an antithesis to what the Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management would suggest. However, SCE were willing to divulge information at their disposal at the time indicates a reformed strategy towards crisis communication and willingness to meet, to an extent, the demands of the public according to what Bucher (2002) and Benoit, as cited by Sellnow and Seeger (2013), suggest to be best at the onset of a crisis. This marks a significant change in immediacy of communication compared to 2011, and in a direction Ulmer et al. (2007) would approve.

6. Evaluation of the study

As this study consists of two cases studied qualitatively, the validity of the study can be questioned by scholars and researchers on grounds of objectivity for example. Gast and Ledford (2014) describe qualitative research's common characteristics to include in-depth description or descriptions of the case or cases under study, and data collection methods can range from observing, observing through participation to audio and video recordings and other data. The data of this study is a collection of press and public relations material released by the company in question, Sony Computer Entertainment, in the time of crises studied thus making the data accessible to anyone.

Brantlinger et al., as cited by Gast and Ledford (2014), state "qualitative research is not done for the purposes of generalization but rather to produce evidence based on the exploration of specific contexts and particular individuals" (p. 11), and as described by Gast and Ledford, qualitative research approaches are appropriate for those interested in in-depth descriptive reports of activities or events. While the purpose of this study is not to generalise the findings of the study to other cases of crisis communication by SCE, or any other company or organisation for that matter, the findings may be used as basis for inducing contingency planning or practices for crisis communication. This is enabled by the Contingency Theory, with which Cameron et al. (2012) argue it to be achievable to distil "insights on how organizations and practitioners can review and reassess their own practice of communication" (p.530).

7. Conclusion

Broom, as cited by Cameron et al. (2012, p. 541) believes public relations theory construction to begin with a concept "derived from practice and viewed by practitioners as important". While I do not even aim to pioneer a new theoretical approach to public relations nor crisis communication, yet I believe a similar ideology applies to public relations practice as well. Thus I argue that the research I have conducted in this thesis could be used as a 'playbook' of crisis communication, to guide public relations and communication practitioners in planning and conducting their strategies, especially regarding online crises. While this research may not be adequate in scope, I stand behind the interpretations of the crisis communication strategies that Sony have implemented in these crises and the value it has in the field of intercultural and crisis communication research.

What I think is important to imbibe from these cases is the significance of internal communication along with external communication at times of crises. The breakdown in communication that occurred between Sony and SCE in 2011 must have given rise to a great deal of confusion among those who went on to follow the PlayStation Twitter account as urged by Sony's Twitter account and to find it barren of any and all information whatsoever. A mishap of the scale evidenced here can be viewed by the public as a serious blunder and distract the target audience of an organisation's communication efforts from the message they are trying to mediate. After all trust, as argued by Bucher (2002) is built through communication, and if communication in a time of crisis starts off wavering, trust can be very hard to establish if communicating internally is posing a challenge.

Even without the confusion caused by instructions to follow a then-inactive Twitter account, the inactivity of said PlayStation Twitter account was a poor communication strategy. As presented in Chapter 2.2., Pang (2013) argued netizens to increasingly utilise social media, like Twitter, during crises to gather and spread information - probably even

more so when a public using gaming consoles with internet service capabilities are concerned - and for social media to be highly influential in the publics' opinion formation. Thus stonewalling a certain public - which may not even follow the Sony corporate Twitter - by inactivity speaks volumes to an audience used to instantaneous information and services. The lesson to be learned here, which Sony Corporation and Sony Computer Entertainment seemed to have learned by 2014, is to utilise social media channels as effectively and instantaneously as possible to retain some form of control over a situation that by definition is unpredictable.

As argued in Chapter 5, while Sony and SCE may have had contingencies in place for hacking attempts and crisis communication relating to hacking, both organisations may have been ill-prepared and thus were caught off-guard by the scale of what occurred in 2011. Thus it could be argued that Sony and SCE's communication efforts' placement toward the advocative end of the continuum proposed by the Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management (Chapter 2.1.2.) was caused by failing to prepare and, lacking an established strategy or guidelines, out of a natural self-preservation instinct opted for advocacy instead of accommodation, or a compromise between the two. As the situation prolonged and took turns for the worse, their options were limited and thus stuck to advocacy instead of accommodation for longer than they should have.

Moreover, having learned their lessons from the crisis in 2011, by 2014 Sony and SCE had devised coherent and sufficient strategies for crisis communication and conflict management to better cope with the crisis that occurred in 2014. Having prepared themselves as organisations, instead of advocacy, SCE took a more accommodative stance in its crisis communication efforts with the confidence of an organisation that has placed effective contingencies for crises involving their services and the data of its users. Having thus taken command of the situation and acting instead of reacting at a time of crisis, SCE was able to

contain the effects of the crisis and arguably come through with minor impact to its operations and image.

The above arguments then give rise to possibilities for further study. It could prove fruitful for crisis communication study to examine if an organisation is ill-equipped for a crisis, lacking completely or lacking proper crisis communication and conflict management strategies, organisations tend to drift toward an advocative stance in crisis communication. Further, if an organisation has endured a crisis or crises, they have the forethought to consider their options instead, and an organisation can opt for a more accommodative stance in crisis communication or be advocative. However, especially in the case of advocacy the choice is deliberate and supports the established crisis communication strategy instead of undermining it. As it is, the results of this study are insufficient due to sample size, the study being a case study by nature. As it is argued in chapter 6, this study can be used to create contingencies for organisations on the grounds of observing the failings and successes of the same organisation in two similar yet separate crises, yet it could prove useful for such endeavours to study a larger sample of organisations and their crisis communication strategies.

The incentive for organisations and companies to participate in such study would be the potential to counter further losses caused by bad PR during crises. Forbes' report on Sony Corporation's official earnings forecast for 2011 announced the company estimate the losses caused by the hackings to amount to $170 million (Tassi, 2011), and while not explicitly stated, it is justified to argue these losses to be partially caused by poor communication during the crisis. Ars Technica insinuates as much, claiming gamers to have been agitated by what appeared to them as Sony hiding the extent of the crisis they were undergoing (Kuchera, 2011) - a point supported by the findings of this study.

All in all, as internet services and online data storage become ever more prevalent, data thefts, hacks and other service disruptions become increasingly more fruitful

ground for outside parties with malicious intentions of which to take an advantage, all the while making it even more paramount for companies and organisations to protect themselves and their users as well as create communication strategies for the handling of crises that are caused by service disruptions and data theft. Increasing reward creates increasing incentive for cyber criminals to act. It is a prerogative for paying customers to be communicated to about the possible perils they could be exposed to, and have the option to vote with their wallets. Ergo, trustworthy crisis communication strategies are no slight matter for organisations, something to be taken seriously instead, a lesson Sony Corporation and Sony Computer Entertainment surely have learned.

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