A SLAP, A CRASH, AND CONTROVERSIAL REMARKS: ANALYZING CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSES IN PR CRISES OF 2022

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Abstrakti

Organisaatioiden navigoidessa kriisitilanteita ne usein hyödyntävät monipuolisia kriisiviestintästrategioita sidosryhmäviestinnässään ja narratiivien hallinnassa. Vaikka sosiaalisen median alustat tarjoavat työkaluja nopeaan ja tehokkaaseen viestintään sekä mahdollistavat suoran vuorovaikutuksen sidosryhmien kanssa organisaatiokriisin aikana, monet organisaatiot edelleen luottavat perinteisiin medioihin ja omiin verkkosivustoihinsa pääkanavinaan kriisiviestinnässä.

Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on tutkia PR-lausuntoja ja kriisiviestintästrategioita sekä niiden saamaa vastetta sosiaalisessa mediassa. Valitsemani sosiaalisen median alustat ovat TikTok ja X (aiemmin Twitter). Tähän tutkielmaan valitsin kolme merkittävää PR-kriisitilannetta kolmelta eri organisaatiolta vuodelta 2022: Ticketmasterin Taylor Swiftin Eras-kiertueen lippukaaos, Kanye West ja Adidas Westin antisemitismisten ulostulojen jälkeen, sekä paljon huomiota herättänyt Will Smithin läpsäys Oscar-gaalassa. Näitä kolmea tapausta käsiteltiin laajasti sekä uutismediassa että sosiaalisessa mediassa, ja niiden takana olevat organisaatiot ovat tunnettuja ja merkittäviä toimijoita omilla aloillaan, minkä takia ne on valittu tähän tutkimukseen.

Kaikki kolme organisaatiota omaksuivat erilaisia lähestymistapoja kriisiviestinnässään. Adidaksen lausunnossa hyödynnettiin kolmea kuudesta Cornelissenin (2017) kuvaamasta strategiasta, Akatemian lausunnossa viittä ja Ticketmasterin lausunnossa puolestaan kaikkia kuutta. Organisaatioiden lausuntoihin sosiaalisessa mediassa reagoitiin yhteisillä teemoilla, joista merkittävimpänä käyttäjät toimivat usein tiedonlähteinä raportoiden kriiseistä ja lausunnoista, joskin jokaisen tapauksen reaktioista löytyi myös omia tapauskohtaisia piirteitään.

Sosiaalisen median vuorovaikutustilanteiden analyysi tarjoaa organisaatioille työkalun tutkia, miten mahdolliset kuluttajat näkevät kyseisen organisaation, ja auttaa organisaatioita arvioimaan, kuinka tehokkaita niiden kriisiviestintästrategiat ja PR-lausunnot ovat olleet. Kuluttajien reaktioiden vertaaminen eri alustojen välillä voi auttaa organisaatioita kehittämään tehokkaampia alusta- ja yleisökohtaisia viestintästrategioita.

Säilytyspaikka Jyväskylän yliopiston julkaisuarkisto JYX

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1 Introduction

In navigating organizational crises, organizations often utilize diverse crisis communication strategies to address stakeholders and to control narratives. While social media platforms offer tools for fast and effective communication and make direct stakeholder engagement possible during an organizational crisis, many organizations still rely on traditional media and their own websites as their main channels for crisis communication.

I would argue that the role of social media has grown exponentially in the world of PR and crisis communication. Whether it be with the more negative aspects of social media, such as the mob justice mentality of social media communities and "cancel culture", or just the fact that social media platforms offer organizations more channels for reaching their stakeholders effectively, the role of social media cannot be ignored by communications specialists and PR-experts. According to Diers-Lawson (2020, p.14), the field of crisis communication has moved towards more stakeholder centered approaches that humanize crises, so the human element of stakeholder reactions should not be ignored by any PR professionals or communications experts.

The aim of this thesis is to study PR-statements and crisis communication strategies, and the response they receive on social media. The social media platforms I have chosen are TikTok and X (formerly Twitter). For this thesis, I have chosen three notable PR crisis moments from three organizations that took place in 2022: Ticketmaster's Taylor Swift crash, Kanye West and Adidas after West's antisemitic remarks, focusing on the statements Adidas put out after the remarks, and the infamous Will Smith slap in the Oscars, and more specifically, the statement the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences put out after the slap. These three instances were discussed widely on both news media and social media, and the organizations behind them are well-known, significant operators in their fields, which is why they were chosen for this study. All three organizations also had distinctive approaches to their crisis communication, which provided appropriate data for a comparative study.

The analysis of social media interactions offers organizations a tool to examine how possible consumers view said organization, and helps organizations evaluate how effective their crisis communication strategies and PR statements have been. Comparing consumer/audience

reactions between different platforms could be used to develop more effective, platform (and audience) specific communication strategies.

In this thesis, I shall analyze the crisis communication strategies chosen by the three organizations based on Cornelissen's (2017) framework where six different approaches to crisis communication, as well as their sub-tactics, are described. The study also utilizes the theoretical and analytic framework of critical discourse analysis for the analysis of both the statements put out by the organizations and the audience reactions on social media.

The study begins with an introduction to relevant background and theoretical framework (Chapter 2), where key concepts and theories, such as crisis, crisis communication and critical discourse studies are defined and discussed. Study aims and study design such as data collection and methodology are discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 then introduces the analysis case by case, and the findings of chapter 4 are then discussed in more detail in chapter 5. Chapter 6 then finishes the study with conclusions, implications and applications.

2 Background and theoretical framework

This chapter introduces key background and the theoretical framework for this thesis. The first part of this chapter focuses on the definition of *crisis* and discusses crisis communication. The second part then moves onto discussing crisis communication and social media, and the last section discusses critical discourse analysis as the theoretical framework for this study.

2.1 Crisis and crisis communication

As Diers-Lawson (2020, p. 4) mentions, as interest in crises, crisis management, and crisis communication has grown, our understanding of what constitutes a crisis has also evolved. Rather than viewing crises as rare, high-impact events with uncertain origins and consequences, we should, and have begun to, adopt a new perspective on crises. Millar and Heath (2003, p. 2) define crisis as "an untimely but predictable event that has actual or potential consequences for stakeholders' interests as well as the reputation of the organization. That means a crisis can harm stakeholders and damage the organization's relationship with them." Cornelissen (2017, p. 212) defines crisis as an event or an issue that demands immediate action from the organization facing the crisis. This definition for crisis is also the one used in this

thesis.

Cornelissen (2017, p. 212) explains that the need for immediate action often comes from growing public pressure, acute media attention or direct danger to members of the organization or general public, among other things. According to Diers-Lawson (2020, p. 4), the emergence of modern crises in our information rich world has notably increased the research interests in crisis communication. Causes to crises nowadays can range from external circumstances beyond an organization's control, to careless individual errors within the organization, or even systematic breakdowns and inefficiencies. Diers-Lawson (2020, p. 5) breaks crisis communication down to three elements, which they point out to be equally important:

1. "Stakeholder relationship management: Managing, building, or rebuilding stakeholder relationships."
2. "Narrating the crisis: Media engagement and direct stakeholder engagement across different platforms of communication - from face to face to social media."
3. "Communication strategy development and implementation: A campaign-based approach using measurable objectives, good intelligence, and continual evaluation of the effectiveness of the approach."

Most crisis communication statements focus on the first two elements. Crisis communication, more so the statements, aim to both save existing stakeholder relationships and also offer an explanation of the crisis that best suits the organization's narrational goals and lessens the reputational damage the organization could face. The third element, communication strategy development and implementation happen both before and after the statement is released, and in an ideal setting, even before the crisis event even occurs. Crisis communication statements are carefully thought out, and their effectiveness is continuously observed and evaluated, allowing the organization to adjust their strategy based on the responses they receive.

Crises have a direct impact on people, be those individuals within the organization, the community or country the organization resides in, or the regions in which it operates. Crisis management and crisis communication is understood to be an important corporate strategy for dealing with notable business interruptions (Millar & Heath, 2003, p .4) as crises tend to interrupt day-to-day business functions. It could be, for example, because the crisis itself impairs necessary work functions or because most, if not all, the focus of the company has to be shifted quickly to assess and manage the crisis. The main objective of crisis management and crisis communication is to communicatively take control over organizational activities or events in ways that convince stakeholders and consumers that the organization deals in their businesses in such ways that comply with environmental, social and safety standards

(Cornelissen, 2017, p. 211).

Often, communicative control is taken over the crisis so that the organization has both control over which information is provided to the public and which is not, as well as over the way the crisis is framed. The framing may include aspects of blame placing or blame accepting in hopes that utilizing these strategies might exonerate the organization "of the larger responsibility for the crisis" (Millar & Heath, 2003, p. 7). Communicative strategies and framing postcrisis often focus on demonstrating what actions the organization has taken to right things, and how they plan to prevent similar crises in the future (Millar & Heath, 2003, p. 8).

Altogether, the statements put out by the organization should comprehensively define and explain the crisis, as well as the actions that have been taken or should and will be taken. They should also include information that is seen to be crucial for the public and shareholders in order for them to be able to take actions that reduce the possible impacts of the crisis on them, as well as being able to form suitable attitudes towards the crisis and organization behind it (Millar & Heath, 2003, p. 9).

Many communication experts focusing on crisis communication argue that at the core of a crisis, the biggest risk lies in the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders. If the relationship were to fail, it could lead to reputational damage, or even to the failure of the organization or its mission. If the relationship is fortified, the organization might thrive despite the crisis (Diers-Lawson, 2020, p. 4-5). Because of this, "crisis management and crisis communication should always be focused on the people and groups with an interest in the organization and its activities, that is, its stakeholders." (Diers-Lawson, 2020, p. 4). Social media can be an important tool in managing those important stakeholder relationships, as the platforms allow for more interpersonal communication, than, say, traditional print media or statements broadcasted in the evening news.

This goes in line with Young et al's. (2016, p. 25) explanation that the increased social media use by consumers has forced companies and organizations into the realm of user-created content, and into more of a two-way communication with consumers. I would argue that the parasocial relationship between companies and consumers has shifted towards a more interpersonal level (though, in the end it is very much still parasocial in its nature), where instead of PR statements being just one big statement put out by a company or an organization, nowadays they tend to also be the smaller statements written in response to consumers' social media comments.

As Cornelissen (2017, p. 211) points out, this shift together with the current information age has brought on new challenges for a number of organizations, as the public has become more aware of the possible risks or issues associated with certain industries and the organizations in those industries. Social media together with modern communication technology has made it easier for consumers and stakeholders to voice their opinions on industry or organization specific issues. Thus, the role of social media in the field of crisis communication and PR cannot be ignored, and the topic has to be studied more.

2.2 Crisis communication and social media

When an organizational crisis occurs, timely communication with consumers and other stakeholders is extremely important. Social media offers organizations plenty of tools and channels for fast communication with large audiences. Disinformation and misinformation are also often spread quickly through social media, which is why it is also necessary for organizations to react and respond to social media communication (Civelek et al., 2016, p. 118). However, many organizations still struggle with using these channels effectively. As is seen with the cases in this thesis, both Adidas and the Academy opted for using channels other than social media as their main forms of communication, whereas Ticketmaster was the only company to share their statement on social media as well.

Previous studies in the field of social media communication have found that in a crisis event, users of both of social and traditional media prioritized information that was conveniently available, that involved them and that was based on personal recommendations (Cheng, 2018, p. 7). Information overload or viewed low credibility discouraged users from social media use. It has also been argued that the type of the crisis has less of an impact on the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies than the communication channels used, be that certain social media platforms or traditional print media. Traditional print media was seen as a credible tool to present issues, while social media sites such as Twitter (nowadays known as X) had more positive effects on secondary crisis communication. Secondary crisis communication here meaning the way people, more so stakeholders, communicate during a crisis. Presenting information on social media is argued to lead to fewer negative reactions than relying on just traditional print media (Cheng, 2018, p. 7).

Previous studies both play down and highlight the importance of social media in crisis communication. Most studies view traditional media as the more credible information source,

and public events, radio and television are viewed as the most effective tools in crisis communication (Eriksson, 2018, p. 536-537). Eriksson argues that in most studies and crisis communication guidelines social media platforms are not seen to be on the same level of effectiveness as the communication channels that were previously mentioned, "especially when it comes to crisis communication with diversified groups of citizens, and groups with different crisis information needs" (Eriksson, 2018, p. 537). However, it could also be argued that organizations cannot afford to ignore the role of social media in crisis communication, as it can still serve as an effective and crucial communication channel in a crisis event (Cheng, 2018, p. 7).

Even though not viewed as effective as some other channels for communication by a number of scholars, social media can be a critical information source in the event of a crisis. As was noticed in one of the previous critical discourse studies examining stakeholder responses to crisis communication (Vistbacka, 2017, p. 38), social media users do notice the lack of information on social media platforms if organizations fail to put out a statement in an ongoing crisis situation. Users would even try to fill the information gap by putting out their own explanations of the events: "one of the main attributes of social media was that the users have become the producers of information and if this information is not available, some other user will be guiding the information to you" (Vistbacka, 2017, p. 38). Social media is recognized as a tool that offers plenty of communication possibilities that can enforce effective crisis communication and crisis management, such as the possibility for fast reaction and direct communication with consumers and stakeholders (Eriksson, 2018, p. 539).

2.3 Critical discourse analysis

As critical discourse analysis offers both theoretical and methodological frameworks to linguistic studies, the framework of CDA will be discussed in both the chapters examining theory and methodology. In this chapter, I shall discuss critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a theoretical framework. The *how* of CDA will be discussed later, in the Chapter 3.4.

The term *discourse* is not an easy one to explain. This is most likely due to the fact that it is near impossible to find one, all-encompassing explanation for a term that holds so much in itself. However, in this thesis, I have opted to use the definition for *discourse* that Pynnönen (2013, p. 6) uses in her publication; "the term discourse refers to both linguistic entities larger than sentences as well as to the actual use of language in a certain situation. Discourse can be

defined as texts related to each other, as well as the producing, circulating, and receiving of them".

As Pynnönen (2013, p. 6) and many other linguists (such as Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2009, Fairclough, 1992) utilizing CDA point out, in addition to the concepts of *context* and *text* the term also includes the idea of social constructionism, because social reality is thought to be produced by structured textual entities, instead of individual texts. Texts become meaningful through and in relation to other texts, and of course in relation to the socially constructed world in which they are produced (Pynnönen, 2013, p. 7). Fairclough (1992, p.63-65) argues that texts are not just isolated entities but rather they are intricately connected to the social contexts and realities in which they are produced. Fairclough thus suggests that social reality is constructed though structured textual entities rather than being just the product of individual texts.

In critical discourse studies, the term discourse can be thought to have two different definitions. The terms *a discourse*, or *discourses*, usually means the way of meaning making widely recognized by a language community. In the same way, *discourse* as a general, individual concept refers to all semiotic and linguistic activity that has different communicative and social conditions and consequences (Pynnönen, 2013, p. 7).

Discourse studies study the linguistic processes, productions, and systems through which we built our social realities. Social reality, or realities, are seen as being produced by and becoming visible through discourses and discursive practices (Pynnönen, 2013, p. 9-10). Language use and linguistic choices are examined as the type of doing and being that both shapes and is being shaped by social processes, that produces and structures our social realities. Language use can build belief and knowledge systems, social relationships, and different identities. Discourse analysis and CDA examine the accounts or descriptions that we produce and through which we make our world and ourselves understood (Pynnönen, 2013, p. 9-10).

According to Pynnönen (2013, p. 10), these accounts maintain culture and support its continuity in three different ways: 1) by upholding those conventional structures they justify either following or deviating from, 2) upholding discourses the refer to or appeal to convince their audience, and 3) by producing different symbolic and material consequences. These accounts can also be used to justify, oppose, or resist the use of social power. In the context of crisis communication, these accounts can be used by organizations as a tool to avoid or place blame, accept responsibility or to frame a crisis situation a certain way. In turn, the public can also use

these accounts to hold organizations responsible for their actions or to, so to speak, absolve them of any blame.

Critical discourse analysis is interested in the process of producing, receiving and interpreting texts, as well as examining the sociocultural aspects of texts and the general organization of the language (Pietikäinen, 2008, p. 192). In CDA specific ideas, practices, identities, and values are thought to become naturalized through linguistic functions (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 3). Foucauldian way of thinking and more precisely the Foucauldian idea of social constructionism is at the center of CDA, as it is generally thought that linguistic variations are structured and have a notable impact on our social realities. In Foucault's literature, discourses refer to those culturally shared and established ways of meaning and signifying that shape the subject of speech (Pynnönen, 2013, p. 7).

The majority of scholars utilizing CDA perceive language as a means for social construction that molds society while simultaneously it is being molded by society (Machin & Mayr, 2012 p. 4). Critical discourse analysis is not concerned with how language is being used, but rather in the "linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 4). Critical discourse analysis is seen as a form of social analysis, with social elements such as power and ideologies being its main focus (Fairclough, 2017, p. 13). Critical discourse analysis aims to explain and deepen our understanding of the relationship between discourse and other features of cultural and social structures while offering critiques of discourses as a way "into wider critique of social reality" (Fairclough, 2017, p. 13).

As Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 4) mention, many, if not most, researchers advocating for and utilizing critical discourse analysis have been openly committed to the promotion political intervention and social change and tend to work actively towards dismantling racist stereotypes and ideologies in, for example, many different institutional discourses. The other main focus of CDA has been in how power relations are negotiated, upheld, or challenged discursively. In many crisis communication strategies, it is precisely power relations that are at the center of the statements that organizations publish; whether they portray themselves, the organizations, as powerless bystanders and victims of the crisis, the heroes surviving the reputational damage and financial loss inflicted upon them by the crisis, or if they take responsibility and admit that they have been the ones to cause the crisis, it all comes back to how they portray the power they hold as organizational operators.

3 Present study

This chapter introduces the current study by presenting the research aim and research questions, as well as discussing the selection and collection of data. It also introduces the methods of analysis used in this study.

3.1 Research aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis was to examine the effectiveness of certain crisis communication strategies by comparing the strategies of the selected organizations and the response they have received on social media. As mentioned, the organizations chosen for this thesis were Ticketmaster, Adidas and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (in this thesis, referred to as the Academy). The organizations, or more specifically, their PR crises were chosen as they are well known organizations with large audiences and consumer bases. The crises they had in 2022 were also widely discussed in both social and traditional media, so the data necessary for this study was easily available.

The study examined the following questions:

1. Which crisis communication strategies were used?

2. What was the audience reaction to these statements on social media?

3. What kinds of differences and similarities were there in audience reactions between the three cases?

The purpose of this study was to offer us a better understanding of the effectiveness of different crisis communication strategies, as well as the role social media plays in these types of PR crises. The organizations had chosen rather distinctive approaches to crisis communication. In their statement, Adidas highlighted the monetary loss over the decision to cut ties with Kanye West. Ticketmaster opted for a rather detailed explanation of what happened and why it happened, even utilizing graphics in their explanation. The Academy, in their statement, highlighted how unexpected the slap was. The social media platforms used for the analysis are TikTok and X. Some differences in the audience reactions between different platforms were to be expected, as the user groups are rather diverse and different from each other.

The analysis of both the statements and the social media posts provide important insight into the effectiveness of the communication strategies the organizations have chosen. It was also

examined whether or not we might see different audience responses from different platforms. Attention was also paid to see whether or not I would be able to observe the phenomena Vistbacka (2017) observed in their thesis of social media users attempting to fill in the information gaps left by organizations on social media.

3.2 Selection and collection of data

The data consisted of two types of data material: 1) PR-crisis statements put out by the organizations; and 2) social media posts discussing the statements. All three organizations had released a statement in some form: Ticketmaster and Adidas released statements on their websites (Adidas included a downloadable press release on their website as well), and the Academy released a statement straight to the press (see Primary sources). The Academy put out a short statement on X right after the slap incident occurred, before the actual press release, though they did not share the longer statement on any of their social media profiles. Ticketmaster was the only organization to also release a link to the statement on their X-profile. None of the organizations released any material discussing the incidents on TikTok.

The original idea was to use comments under the organizations' social media posts, but since most of them had not posted their statements to their social medias, I opted for using public posts by social media users that discuss the statements that were put out by the organizations. The specific posts chosen for the analysis were chosen for a few reasons; they were all posted soon after the statements were published and discussed at least some aspect of the statements, and they were also chosen based on their popularity. I opted for using posts with a high number of likes, comments, and views.

It should be noted that even though these organizations have not shared those same statements on their social media sites, it is possible to find popular TikToks and X posts by social media users that discuss the statements put out by the organizations soon after they were released to the public. As most TikToks and some X posts tend to be multimodal, containing videos, pictures, music, written and spoken words, in the analysis attention was paid to all possible modalities in the posts when necessary, though written and spoken discourses were the main focus. I chose eight posts per platform, and per organization, so forty-eight posts all together for the analysis.

As the organizations have shared their statements publicly, and as they discuss public figures where specific people are mentioned, there was no need to anonymize or censor them in any

way to protect anyone's privacy. The posts made by social media users mention no user names or include screenshots of the posts. Even though the posts I use for the analysis are public and could be read by anyone, I did not want to risk including any private information of the users.

3.3 TikTok and X as platforms

TikTok is a social media platform known for its short-form video content. It was originally released in 2016, though during that time it was released in China and India only. Following its wider release in 2017, it has become one of the most popular platforms, being ranked the most popular website in 2021, by Cloudflare. As of March 2024, the platform has around 1 billion monthly active users (according to Search Logistics). Most of the active users are aged 10-19 years old (25%), and 20-29 years old (22,4%). Users aged 30-39 years and 40-49 years respectively make up around 21,7% and 20,3% of the users. Around 60% of the users are female, and 40% male.

The content on the platform consists of short videos made by users. In addition to users posting their own content, they can also 'stich' other users' videos, where they share parts of an other user's video before continuing with their own content, or 'duet' them, where their own video is played alongside the other user's video. Users can also comment, share, save, and like videos.

X, formerly known as Twitter (until July 2023), is a social media platform founded in 2006. The platform has 368 million monthly active users (as of March 2024, according to Search Logistics). Users of the platform can share text posts or 'tweets', that can also include videos and pictures. Users can also share, like, bookmark and comment on posts.

The biggest user group of X is users aged 25-34 years, making up 38,5% of the users. The second biggest group is users aged 35-49 years (20,7%). On the platform, 68% of users are male, and 32% female. Since Elon Musk took over the platform in 2022, around 32 million users have left the platform.

The main difference between the two platforms lies in their formats, user demographics and features. As mentioned, the content on TikTok is mainly based on short-form video, whereas X is more written text based. TikTok's user demographic is younger than X's, and the split between the gender of the users is a bit more even than X's, though the majority of the users are female. X's users are slightly older than TikTok's, and it has notably more male users than female.

I would assume that the organizations not posting anything related to their crisis or crisis communication on TikTok was based on two factors: the organizations might find it awkward or difficult to translate their text-based statements to video format, especially since including links to their actual statements on the specific posts would not be possible. The second factor might be the younger user demographic: perhaps the companies assumed that younger audiences (that being the user group of 10-19 year olds), might not be interested in the organizations or their crisis statements. Though please note that this is simply based on my own speculation. One would have to ask the organizations' communication teams about this to unveil the actual answer.

3.4 Methods of analysis

The statements have been analyzed combining critical discourse analysis and Cornelissen's 2017 framework, where six different main strategies and their sub-tactics to crisis communication are described (see Table 1 below). It was first crucial to identify the crisis communication strategies the organizations chose to use in their statements, and after that, the reactions - more specifically the posts - of social media users were analyzed using critical discourse analysis.

TABLE 1   Crisis communication strategies according to Cornelissen (2017, p.219) and the level of perceived responsibility associated with them.

Non-existence strategies	Distance strategies	Association strategies	Suffering strategy	Acceptance strategy	Accommodative strategy
Denial Denying the existence of a crisis **Clarification** Attempt to explain why there was no crisis **Attack and intimidation** Confronting person or group who claim the existence of a crisis	**Excuse** Denying intention or volition (by scapegoating) **Downplay** Convincing stakeholders or public that the situation in itself is not bad	**Bolstering** Reminding stakeholders or public of positive aspects of the organization **Transcendence** Associating negatives or loss with a desirable higher goal	**Victimization** Portraying the organization as a victim	**Full apology** Accepting blame and apologizing **Remediation** Announcing some form of compensation	**Rectification** Taking corrective action to prevent future crisis
Perception of low level of responsibility←					→Perception of high level of responsibility

According to Cornelissen (2017, p. 219), organizations can either use the *non-existence strategies,* which could mean strictly denying the existence of the crisis, or more so "explaining the crisis away". The organization could even confront those that claim the existence of the crisis, by attacking and intimidating them. They could also *distance the organization from the crisis* by denying the part the organization had in the crisis or by downplaying the crisis.

They could also utilize the *association strategies,* where they associate the organization with matters and affairs the stakeholders view more positively, or *the suffering strategy* where the organization is the one that suffers from the crisis; in this, the organization is portrayed as the victim rather than the culprit of the crisis. The organization could also *accept their responsibility* over the crisis and then either compensate or atone for the crisis, and with that, they might *accommodate* by making sure that this type of crisis is not repeated (Cornelissen, 2017, p. 219).

The way the organizations position themselves in the crisis, and the chosen strategy is not usually, if ever, stated upfront. The statements organizations release might also utilize a combination of these communication strategies. These aspects can be found in the text through critical analysis – this is why I also used critical discourse analysis to analyze the statements, and then compare them to Cornelissen's framework. Attention was given to how the organizations portray themselves in relation to the power structures of the crisis, as well. I also examined whether these portrayals of power are also repeated and upheld, or in turn, questioned and challenged, in the social media posts discussing the statements.

As was mentioned in the chapter discussing critical discourse analysis as theoretical framework, discourse analysis and especially CDA examine language use in its context, as well as the relationship between language and social constructions or social structures, but this examination is done from a specific, critical perspective. The main focus of the research is on the intertwined relationships of power relations, ideologies, and discourses (Pietikäinen, 2008, p. 193). CDA recognizes the ever-growing importance of language in society, where language use plays a central role in, for example, political decision making.

For the *how* of critical discourse analysis, or the more methodological aspect of CDA, the analytic process was largely based on Pietikäinen's (2008, p. 208-212) description of the process. In this process, the analytic focus is on the linguistic choices in the texts: aspects such as grammar, cohesion, tone, and word choices are examined to determine how meaning is created in the data. The chosen aspects depend on the nature, focus, and scope of the analysis.

In the context of this study, the main focus was placed on word choices, metaphors, participants, and tone.

Discourse as social practice was also analyzed, examining how ideologies and power relations are produced, upheld, challenged, or questioned in the texts. The analytic aim was thus to systematically examine the relationship between social phenomena and discursive practices in the text, as well as to examine how discursive practices are shaped by power relations and how they act ideologically (Pietikäinen, 2008, p. 208).

The analysis consists of linguistic description of the data texts, the analysis of the practices related to the production and reception of discourse, and then the examination of their larger societal connections. The text is analyzed as a linguistic realization that acts as part of discursive practices and part of social practices (Pietikäinen, 2008, p. 209). As Pietikäinen (2008, p. 209) suggests, during the analytic process I have constructed my own interpretation of the discourses in the texts based on the results of the analysis together with background theories, considering how different levels of analysis are related to each other and the phenomena being studied.

When analyzing the statements put out by the organizations, special attention was paid to how the public and stakeholders were referred to as in the texts, and how the perceived culprits of the crises were portrayed in the texts. As for the social media side of the analysis, the analysis focused on which word choices were used when the users discussed the organizations and the people (West, Swift, and Smith) related to the crises. The analysis also focused on how the audience viewed the organizations in relation to the crisis, or more specifically, who the users viewed as the party responsible for the crisis. Attention was also paid to repeating discursive themes.

4 Analysis

In this chapter, the three companies and their crisis cases are introduced, discussed, and analyzed. Each section begins with a brief overview of the company, and then a short summary of the crisis they have faced. Following that, the statements put out by the organizations are discussed and analyzed, followed by the analysis of the social media reactions the statements have evoked. The analysis begins with a section dedicated to Ticketmaster, the second section then discusses Adidas and its crisis, and the third and last section is reserved for the Academy.

4.1 Ticketmaster

Ticketmaster Entertainment is an American ticket sales and distribution company that operates globally. The company was founded in 1976 in Phoenix, Arizona, though its headquarters reside in Beverly Hills, California. The company currently employs around 6680 people, and its yearly revenues from 2014 till 2022 average around 8.26 billion dollars per year, with around 500 million annual ticket bookings and 115,900,00 monthly active users on the company website (according to the statistics from SignHouse, 2024). The company was merged with Live Nation in 2010, under the name Live Nation Entertainment.

4.1.1 Description of the crisis

On November 15th, 2022, the Ticketmaster website crashed about an hour after the pre-sale for tickets for Taylor Swift's Eras tour started. According to Variety's article (published November 17th, 2022) describing the crash, over 3.5 million fans had registered for a program that allowed them to participate in the pre-sale of the tour tickets. The purpose of these types of programs is to help manage high demand sales by identifying real human consumers and eliminating any possible bots. Users rushing to buy tickets for the tour were logged out or frozen in online queues, and many complained of poor customer service when reaching out to Ticketmaster for help. Despite the crash, approximately 2.4 million tickets were sold. Following the crash, the company decided to cancel the general sale for the tour tickets.

Allegedly, 'scalpers' had purchased a notable number of tickets, that were then put on ticket resale websites for unreasonable prices. Consumer groups and fans called into question the reliability of Ticketmaster and the parent company Live Nation Entertainment. This led to U.S. Congress members suggesting that the 2010 merger of the two companies should be reverted, citing the alleged monopoly position of the company. After the initial crash, Ticketmaster released a statement (see Figure 1 below) that detailed the crash and what had caused the issues they experienced. The statement is discussed and analyzed next, and the social media responses to the statement will be discussed and analyzed in Chapter 4.1.3.
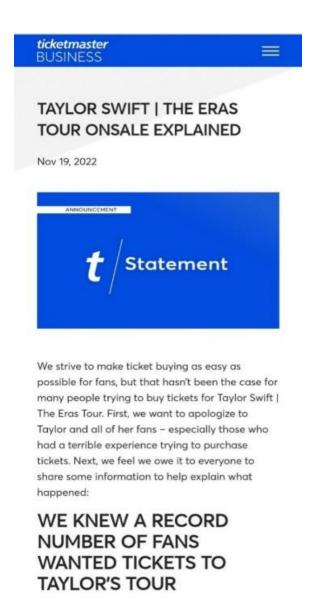
FIGURE 1   Screenshot of Ticketmaster's statement, retrieved 07.12.2023

4.1.2 Ticketmaster's statement

The statement begins with Ticketmaster acknowledging that the experience of buying tickets has not been as easy for many fans as it should have been, and they continue by apologizing both to the artist and her fans. The beginning of the statement thus would suggest that the organization has chosen the acceptance strategy and more so the tactic of full apology. However, the statement then moves on to give a rather detailed explanation of what had happened according to them, and multiple other chosen strategies and tactics used to control the narrative can be observed in the text.

The statement consists of a few different elements. It has a few short, highlighted main points that are written out in a bigger font and fully capitalized, acting as headlines. Below these

headlines, four bullet lists consisting of four points then offer a more detailed explanation of the events that took place. The statement also includes a graph depicting the site's traffic volumes throughout the year, with a clear spike on November 15th. The statement then finishes with a few paragraphs explaining what the company intends to do in the future to better manage high demand shows. Even if one were to just quickly skim the text without reading it in detail, the headlines would give the reader an idea of the organization has decided to frame the crisis. I shall start by discussing the highlighted headlines in more detail, and following that, I shall move on to discuss the explanations offered by Ticketmaster.

The first headline reads "We knew a record number of fans wanted tickets to Taylor's tour", implying that the company did their best to prepare for the high demand of the tickets and the increased traffic their websites would receive the moment the sale started. The next headline reads "the demand for tickets to Taylor's tour broke records – and parts of our website", a statement that both highlights the impressive feat of breaking sales records, and the damage the company's websites faced, almost inconspicuously making the company the victim of the crisis. The word choice 'broke' is figuratively a strong one; a webpage of course cannot physically break, though that is implied by the phrase. Suffering strategy with victimization tactic is used here together with the downplay tactic (that falls under distance strategies) to both highlight the record sales numbers and the struggles the company itself faced because of said records.

The last headline reads "despite the disruptions a new sales record was set", highlighting Ticketmasters impressive victory over any struggles they faced with the sale. All these headlines also work to give the impression that both Taylor Swift as an artist and her fanbase are something never before seen, something so extraordinary, that even despite the company's best efforts to prepare, the sale still broke all expectations and led to such chaos that the company could never have adequately prepared for the number of fans that would show up for the sale. This again shows the use of distance strategy, with both the excuse and downplay tactics being used to scapegoat Swift and her fans, and to again highlight that the crisis was not as bad as was thought. It thus shows the use of association strategy with transcendence tactic, where the negatives are associated with a higher goal. After all, a great number of tickets were sold.

The four bullet pointed paragraphs following the first headline focus on explaining the background of the sale and the Verified Fan program. The company explains that registration is required so that they can manage high demand sales by avoiding overcrowding and identifying real humans while "weeding out bots". Similarly to the headlines, the explanations

also highlight that the company was preparing for a massive, high traffic sale, mentioning that based on the high number of fans that had pre-registered for the sale (over 3.5 million), the company knew the sale would be big. This, again, shifts some of the responsibility on Swift and her great number of fans.

The next four bullet points after the second headline explain that despite Ticketmaster's previous success in managing high demand shows, this time the "staggering number of bot attacks as well as fans who didn't have codes" resulted to traffic four times higher than ever before seen on their website. This subtly shifts the blame from just the company to other parties, such as the alleged bots and the fanbase. The statement then mentions "We handle onsales for countless top tours, some of the biggest sporting events, and more. Never before has a Verified Fan onsale sparked so much attention – or traffic. This disrupted the predictability and reliability that is the hallmark of our Verified Fan platform". This works to both associate the company with previous positive feats as well as to highlight how unpredictable the actual amount of traffic the sales received was, even with all the preparation from Ticketmaster.

The statement then briefly explains what was done during the sale to control the issues and stabilize the system, as well as their estimation of the percentage of fans that experienced issues during the sale; the phrase "we estimate about 15% of interactions across the site experienced issues, and that's 15% too many" both explains that it was not in fact the entire customer base that faced issues, and by implying that the company then explains the crisis away a bit, but also at the same time takes accountability by mentioning that even the 15% was too many.

The last four bullet points highlight the record number of tickets sold despite the struggles. It is also explained that only fans that were verified were able to get the tickets, and that just a rather small percentage of tickets ended up on resale sites, giving the impression that despite any issues the Verified Fan program worked as indented. This shows the use of non-existence strategies, more precisely the clarification tactic, where there is an attempt to explain why there was in fact no crisis. After the last bullet points, there are a few paragraphs explaining Ticketmaster's plan to use what they had learned from this sale to fix any future issues.

They also mention that "Even when a high demand onsale goes flawlessly from a tech perspective, many fans are left empty handed. For example: based on the volume of traffic to our site, Taylor would need to perform over 900 stadium shows (almost 20x the number of shows she is doing) that's a stadium show every single night for the next 2.5 years.", again shifting some of the blame for the crisis on Swift and her fans; with their high demand they flooded the pages, and it was indeed Swift that could not meet the demand, not Ticketmaster.

The statement ends in a phrase that is somewhat conciliating, showing the company's use of the rectification tactic: "While it's impossible for everyone to get tickets to these shows, we know we can do more to improve the experience and that's what we're focused on."

4.1.3 Ticketmaster social media

As for the social media reactions to Ticketmaster's statement, five repeating discourses and discursive themes emerge (see Table 2). Social media users on both X and TikTok worked as information sources reporting on both the crisis and the statement the company had published, informing other users of the published statement and the crisis event itself. Half of the posts on both platforms questioned the statement (four out of the eight posts), and those same posts implied that Ticketmaster was solely responsible for the crisis. Three posts highlighted the record sales numbers in a similar fashion to Ticketmaster's statement, and also thus placed some of the responsibility on both Swift and her fanbase. On both platforms, one post was made going over the crisis communication aspects of the statement, posted by unrelated users.

TABLE 2　　　　Repeating discourses and discursive themes that could be observed in the posts, and the number of posts including them.

Platform	Informing others, explaining the crisis	Questioning the statement	Highlighting the record sales numbers	Placing responsibility on Ticketmaster	Placing responsibility on Swift and fans
X	3	4	1	4	1
TikTok	5	4	2	4	1
Total	8	8	3	8	2

The only two posts implying that Swift and, more specifically her fan base, caused the crash focused on the high demand for the tickets. As can be seen in examples 1 and 2 (see below), the posts echoed the points brought up by Ticketmaster in their statement. Though it should be noted that no post repeated the idea that Ticketmaster had been the victim of the crisis, unlike the company itself had implied in its statement, and no posts attributed the record sales numbers to the company's actions, but rather Swift's popularity. As can be seen in example 1, some users even found the statement somewhat impressive and amusing.

Example 1, X: "the ticketmaster statement was a low key serve i fear, they said verified fans are selling on stubhub, only 5% of the tickets are for resale, and that Taylor would have to perform 900 shows to satisfy her demand. They said this YOUR fault"

Example 2, TikTok: "To give an example of the demand for this tour, listen to this, Ticketmaster says it: based on the volume of traffic to the site on the first day alone, Taylor would need to perform more than 900 stadium shows. Wow, what does it translate to, a stadium show every single night for the next two and a half years? People love Taylor Swift."

Example 3 seen below uses the "babe wake up new [thing] just dropped" meme format to showcase the statement. Said meme format is usually used to inform or notify other users of new content, such as a new post, song or in some cases, even a product. Overall, on TikTok, over half the posts (see Table 2) focused on both informing other users of the statement that had been released as well as explaining what happened and what caused the crisis. Some users just shared the statement, like example 3, and others discussed the statement in more detail, offering explanations of the statement and the crisis, such as example 4.

Example 3, X: "babe wake up new ticketmaster statement just dropped" on a repost of Ticketmaster's post linking to their statement

Example 4, TikTok: "Ticketmaster just released a huge statement about what happened this week with Taylor Swift's tour, so let me explain some of what they said..." goes over the statement. "What do you all think?"

As for X, this could be observed in almost half the posts, though the manner was different. On TikTok, where the company had not published a statement, users worked to inform the public on behalf of the company, including clips and quotes of the statement and an interview with the company CEO, whereas on X all the posts reporting on the statement also included either a link to the statement or a retweet of Ticketmaster's post linking to the statement. The TikToks also called for more discussion in the comment sections. Many also questioned the numbers presented by Ticketmaster, as can be seen in examples 5 and 6.

Example 5, TikTok: "Five percent? Go to StubHub, go to any secondary market sites, that's really only five percent? Where are they getting their numbers? Please, let us know"

Example 6, X: "emailed Ticketmaster and they sent me this statement which… mostly praises taylor for breaking records, but does not explain why presale wasn't capped so tickets would be left for general public, and also claims just 15% of people faced glitches?? "

Altogether, the posts could be divided into a few different categories: those that questioned the statement and called for corporate responsibility (such as examples 5, 6 and 7), posts that aimed

to explain the crisis and generate more discussion (such as example 2 and 4), and those that saw the crash as an impressive feat by the fanbase rather than a crisis (such as examples 1 and 2). Interestingly, many of the posts that portrayed Ticketmaster as the sole culprit for the crisis also questioned why the company failed at taking adequate measures to control the sale before it started, like example 7.

> Example 7, TikTok: "I'm confused as to why they didn't think this was gonna happen? Why there was no backup plan? And also, why is there no other site that the tickets could have been purchased on? I'm confused".

The tone of the discussion on both sites ranges from almost news-like reporting to amused, as well as to displeased, frustrated, and disgruntled. The language used in the posts also fluctuates based on the contents. The two posts that discuss the crisis communication aspects use more grammatically correct, almost academic language in their posts, though colored by some phrases that are more casual and relaxed than just the strict academic language (such as stating that Ticketmaster tweeting their statement was "very meta"). They also steer away from using any strongly negative terms to describe the crisis or the statement.

The posts that inform other users of the statement's release and explain the crisis are more casual and conversational, and more non-neutral word choices can be observed in them. The crisis event is described as a "fiasco" and "drama", and the statement was even called a "long-ass-post" by one user. The posts that criticized Ticketmaster's statement and their actions during and after the sale used the most negative words, even calling the company "Ticketmonster" instead of Ticketmaster.

4.2 Adidas

Adidas AG is a German athletic apparel and footwear company that was founded in 1924. The company was called Gebrüder Dassler Schuhfabrik until 1949, when it was then renamed Adidas. Adidas operates worldwide, expect for North Korea, Russia, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Chad and Palestine. It employes around 57,016 people, and its yearly revenues from 2009 till 2022 average around 20,89 billion dollars (according to companiesmarketcap.com).

4.2.1 Description of the crisis

On October 7th, 2022, Adidas placed its partnership with Ye (Kanye West) under review after the rapper had worn a "White Lives Matter" shirt at his Paris fashion show October 3rd, 2022. The shirt sparked a social media campaign demanding that Adidas end its partnership with West. After the shirt incident, West had also made several antisemitic remarks, first on his social media accounts, then with Fox News host Tucker Carlson, and then on a show called InfoWars. InfoWars is hosted by far-right radio host and conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, and it also featured a far-right political commentator and white supremacist Nick Fuentes.

West threatened violence against Jewish people, exalted Adolf Hitler and spread antisemitic conspiracy theories. On October 25th, 2022, Adidas released a statement (see Figure 2 below) stating that the company had cut ties with the rapper, with whom they had been working together since 2015. The statement is discussed and analyzed in the next section, and following that, the social media response to the statement will be discussed and analyzed.

FIGURE 2   Screenshot of Adidas' statement, retrieved 07.12.2023

4.2.2 Adidas' statement

The statement begins with the rather straightforward headline "adidas terminates partnership with Ye immediately", making it very clear that at this point, the company is taking immediate action to distance themselves from West. The bold headline summarizes the main point of the statement, making it instantly clear to the reader that the company does not want to be associated with the artist, or his comments, further on. Using active voice in this phrase also highlights the fact that the decision to end the collaboration comes from the company itself, that they are the ones ending the partnership. The urgency of the statement is highlighted by the press release's bolded tag "for immediate release" in the upper corner of the page. The statement is quite short and bold, making it clear that the company is taking the situation seriously.

The first paragraph of the statement highlights the company's positive values and the way West's comments are in contradiction with them. The first line of the statement states very clearly that the company does not tolerate antisemitism, and the next sentence strongly condemns the actions of the artist, calling them "unacceptable, hateful and dangerous", and stating that they "violate" the company's values. Here the use of distance strategies works to both place the blame of the crisis solely on West, and to distance the company from the artist and his comments. It also associates the company with more positive aspects, such as the company's values of inclusion and diversity. This subtly shows the company's use of association strategy and bolstering tactic, where the audience is reminded of the more positive aspects of the company.

The next paragraph states that the company has decided to terminate the partnership immediately and to end the production of products under the Yeezy brand owned by West as well as any payments to West and companies owned by him. The paragraph ends with the statement "adidas will stop the adidas Yeezy business with immediate effect", again highlighting how seriously the company is taking the situation. The repeated use of the word "immediate" also highlights the perceived urgency of the situation and the actions the company has decided to take. The reader can almost imagine the CEO of the company slamming their fist on a meeting room table demanding the company take immediate action while the other people in the room scuttle around and jump into action.

The next paragraph consists of just one sentence: "This is expected to have a short-term negative impact of up to €250 million on the company's net income in 2022 given the high seasonality of the fourth quarter", effectively making the company the victim of the crisis,

sacrificing their profit in order to do the right thing. They do, however, mention that the negative impact will be short-term, so no potential investor should be too worried. This shows the use of suffering strategy, as the company highlights the damage they have ensued because of the crisis.

The last paragraph states that Adidas is the sole owner of all design rights of existing products, effectively giving an explanation as to why the company might continue selling any existing inventory of Yeezy branded products even after the partnership has been terminated. The statement ends with a general advice on when the company will be providing more information about the situation.

4.2.3 Adidas social media

As with Ticketmaster's social media reactions, five discursive themes emerged rather quickly with the social media posts discussing Adidas' statement as shown in Table 3. On both platforms, the majority of the posts reported on the company ending its collaboration with West, almost as if the users were releasing the statement on behalf of the company, though many of the posts also invited other users to post their thoughts on the matter in the comments, thus inviting conversation around the topic.

TABLE 3   Repeating discourses and discursive themes that could be observed in the posts, and the number of posts including them.

Platform	Informing others, explaining the crisis	Mentioning West's ended partnerships with multiple companies	Making fun of West stating that Adidas cannot drop him	Placing responsibility on Adidas	Placing responsibility on West
X	5	2	2	2	8
TikTok	6	3	4	1	8
Total	11	5	6	3	16

The first TikTok (see example 8) highlights one of the main trends rather well; the video begins with an interview clip of West stating "I can say antisemitic things and Adidas can't drop me",

and the video then cuts to a screenshot of a Rolling Stone article titled "Adidas finally drops Kanye West", with Taylor Swift's song 'Karma' playing in the background. Altogether four of the eight TikTok posts and two X posts referenced that same interview clip. Social media users were rather quick to point out the irony of the artist stating that days before Adidas released a statement that they would be ending their collaboration with West due to his antisemitic tirades.

> Example 8, TikTok:
> U: "The attention turned to Adidas after this video of Ye racked up more than 4 million views a few day ago"
> [The clip of West stating "I can say antisemitic things and Adidas can't drop me" is played.]
> U: "No you can't"

Most of the users informing others of the company ending its collaboration with the artist viewed the decision positively, and in some posts, the company was even hailed for its decision. The decision was seen as one-sided, coming solely from the company, as users chose words such as "dumps", "cut ties" and "dropped" to explain that the collaboration had been ended, as can be seen in example 9.

> Example 9, X: "BREAKING – Adidas dumps Kanye West, saying in a statement: "Adidas does not tolerate antisemitism and any other sort of hate speech.""

Many of the posts on both platforms also brought up and highlighted other collaborations West had lost recently due to the same comments, such as Gap, Balenciaga, and Vogue. Some of those posts also mentioned that the artist had lost his billionaire status because of the ended collaborations. As Table 3 shows, all the posts used for this study seemed to place most, if not all, responsibility of the crisis on West, though a few did also call for more corporate responsibility. Some questioned whether the company should have acted sooner, and others called out the company for somewhat unrelated ethical issues, as can be seen in examples 10 and 11.

> Example 10, TikTok: "Adidas Yeezy is no more. The company has ended its collaboration with Kanye with immediate effect, saying it doesn't tolerate antisemitism or any other kind of hate speech, and they said his recent comments were unacceptable, hateful and dangerous. Should they have done it sooner?"

> Example 11, X: "Adidas cut ties with Kanye West over his antisemitic remarks. That's great news. Now, Adidas should cut off ties with Chinese companies in their supply chain that enslave Uyghur Muslims and capitalize on Genocide."

The social media discussion around Adidas' statement revealed a few key discursive themes,

or categories, the posts followed. On both platforms, the most prominent theme was posts reporting on the company's decision to end their collaboration with West. Many posts also referenced a particular interview clip where West discussed antisemitism and its possible repercussions for his collaboration with the company, highlighting the irony of the clip after the collaboration was indeed ended by Adidas. Responsibility of the crisis was placed on West himself in a clear majority of the posts. As with Ticketmaster, the tone of the posts discussing Adidas' statement ranged from casual, amused, and humorous to ironic and sarcastic. Some posts used a tone that was more serious, almost reporter-like.

4.3 The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, or The Academy, is a professional honorary organization based in Beverly Hills, California. It was founded in 1927. It employs around 255 employees and around 632 volunteers, and its revenue for 2022 was around 157 million dollars (Propublica). The 2022 Oscars were viewed by 16,6 million people, and the 2023 ceremony was viewed by 18,7 million people (BBC, March 2023). Membership of the Academy is by invitation only. Just five people have been known to have been expelled from the Academy, including producer Harvey Weinstein and director Roman Polanski. Three members have voluntarily resigned from the organization, one of them being Will Smith following the 2022 Oscars slap incident.

4.3.1 Description of the crisis

During the 94th Academy Awards ceremony, as comedian Chris Rock was hosting the show, actor Will Smith walked onstage and slapped the comedian across the face. After Smith had returned to his seat, he continued to shout profanity at Rock, who after briefly responding continued hosting the show without further interruption. The slap came following a joke Rock had made about Jada Pinkett Smith, Will Smith's wife. Later that evening, in his speech for winning Best Actor, Smith apologized to the Academy and the other nominees, though no apology was issued to Rock during the speech. Clips of the incident quickly went viral.

Smith announced his resignation from the Academy on April 1st, and he was banned from attending the Academy related events for ten years. The evening of the 94th ceremony, the Academy released a short tweet condemning any violence at their events. A longer statement (see figure 3 below) was released a few days after Smith's resignation, stating that the actor

had been banned from Academy events for ten years. This statement is discussed and analyzed in the next section. Social media reactions are then again discussed and analyzed in the section following that.

Read the Academy's full statement on Will Smith's ban:

The 94th Oscars were meant to be a celebration of the many individuals in our community who did incredible work this past year; however, those moments were overshadowed by the unacceptable and harmful behavior we saw Mr. Smith exhibit on stage.

During our telecast, we did not adequately address the situation in the room. For this, we are sorry. This was an opportunity for us to set an example for our guests, viewers and our Academy family around the world, and we fell short — unprepared for the unprecedented.

FIGURE 3   Part of the Academy's statement in Town & Country, retrieved 07.12.2023

4.3.2 The Academy's statement

The Academy released their statement straight to the press, and unlike the other two companies, their statement was not posted on their own website. Unlike the two previous statements from the other organizations, this statement did not come with its own headline. Rather the headline seen in Figure 3 is one given to it by the paper in which it was published in, so it is not the way the organization itself has decided to headline their statement. The decision to mention Smith's ban from the Oscars straight in the headline thus came from the writers of the magazine, not the organization.

The organization's statement utilizes five of the six possible strategies for crisis communication. The first sentence of the statement works to associate the organization and the 94th Oscars with more positive aspects, such as "the many individuals in our community who did incredible work this past year". This same association strategy comes up later as well, when the hosts, nominees and other participants of the event are brought up in a positive manner and thanked for their poise, reminding the reader of the more positive aspects of the Oscars ceremonies.

The statement begins with a somber toned apology, where the unexpectedness of the situation during the Oscars ceremony is highlighted. The statement reads the Academy was "unprepared for the unprecedented", a sentence that both places the responsibility on the Academy, as they were unprepared and failed to react adequately, as well as Smith as he acted in a way that could not have been foreseen. This shows the use of distance strategies, as the excuse tactic places the blame on Smith, as well as the use of acceptance strategy as the company accepts their blame as well.

The statement also makes it rather clear that even though the Academy is apologizing and conciliating for the crisis, the main culprit of the event is Smith. Smith's behavior is called unacceptable and harmful, and the statement mentions that the action is taken "in response to Will Smith's behavior". This highlights the idea that the Academy views Smith's behavior as the main cause for the crisis, even if they are viewed as partially responsible. It also uses victimization strategy to portray the organization as the victim: their beautiful ceremony was overshadowed by someone else's bad behavior.

As for the apologizing and conciliating for the crisis, those aspects are rather straightforward. The last paragraph shows the use of acceptance strategy, as well as accommodative strategy, where the company plans to take corrective action to prevent a future crisis. The Academy does apologize for not adequately addressing the situation, and they explain that actions will be taken to compensate for the crisis. The organization explains that banning Smith is a step toward protecting the safety of their guests and performers, and even though it is thus implied that further step towards this goal will be taken, those steps are not actually stated or explained.

4.3.3 The Academy social media

As with the two other organizations, four distinct trends emerged when the social media posts

were analyzed. Most of the posts reported on the Academy's decision to ban Smith (see Table 4). Other discursive themes included questioning why other celebrities had not been banned, suggesting that Smith should not have been banned and suggesting that the ban was not that severe of a punishment.

TABLE 4   Repeating discourses and discursive themes that could be observed in the posts, and the number of posts including them.

Platform	Informing others, explaining the crisis	Questioning why certain other, unrelated celebrities are not banned	Suggesting that Smith should not have been banned	Suggesting that the ban is not that severe a punishment
X	4	3	3	2
TikTok	8	0	1	0
Total	12	3	4	2

Remarkably, all eight TikTok posts focused on reporting that Smith has been banned from Academy events and programs, such as the Oscars. Many of the posts also discussed what the ban meant in practice (see example 12). Half of the posts collected from X also focused on reporting the ban (see example 13). Though both of the posts seen in the examples below report on the ban, the tone of the posts is rather different. The TikTok post in example 12 represents well the more frequently observed tone on TikTok where the tone used is conversational and rather news-like, whereas the posts on X, as seen in example 13 often used a word or a phrase to grab the attention of other users at the beginning of the post, such as the "BANNED" seen in the example.

> Example 12, TikTok: "Let's get right into it. Will Smith has been banned from the Oscars for 10 years now. This all took place this morning on Friday, April 8th, where the Board of Governors for the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences met to discuss the situation between Will Smith and Chris Rock and to determine a consequence."

> Example 13, X: "BANNED – Will Smith will not be allowed to attend the Academy Awards for 10 years – a result of his slapping comedian Chris Rock on stage during this year's Oscar ceremony – The academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences announced in a statement obtained by CNN #celebrity #news #writer"

While the majority of posts on TikTok focused on reporting on the ban, on X some users discussed whether or not Smith should have been banned at all, and other wondered whether

the punishment was that severe (such as example 14). Some users also invited others to comment on whether or not they felt the punishment was too harsh, or whether they viewed it as justifiable. One user on TikTok questioned the ban, as can be seen in example 15. Again, the tone in these two posts are rather different, with the example from TikTok is more conciliatory though strict in their view, whereas the example from X is notably more sarcastic. The post on TikTok also invites discussion around the topic, whereas the X post just states the user's opinion on the matter.

> Example 14, X: "Will Smith banned from attending Oscars for 10 years. A full decade being denied every single minute of a 4 hour show, forced to fast forward through it in the comfort of your multi-million home on a state-of-the-art-big-screen TV. That is harsh, man."

> Example 15, TikTok: "Should he have slapped him? No. Essentially, as the equivalent of a comedy show, you don't do that. You have a conversation after the fact, but putting this man in jail, essentially a Hollywood jail, for 10 years seems like a stretch. What are your thoughts? Do you think this is justified? Too much? Too little?

All in all, on TikTok, most of the videos were rather neutral, excluding the one in example 15. As can be seen in the example, the user calls the ban the equivalent of "Hollywood jail" and a "stretch", highlighting how severe they view the punishment, and making it clear that they think the ban lasting ten years is too harsh. Interestingly, the example above (example 14) is almost the opposite, as it questions the severity of the ban by making the event seem dull and meaningless, giving the impression that not being able to attend the Oscars ceremony in person could even be a relief.

As mentioned, the posts on TikTok mainly focused on reporting the decision of the Academy, though a few did invite other users to discuss whether or not they viewed the ban as an adequate punishment. Many of the videos had the user read either the whole statement or parts of it, without offering too much commentary. On X, the posts were less neutral, and some users even questioned why Smith was banned when some other celebrities, such as Roman Polanski and Woody Allen, had not been, as in examples 16 and 17.

> Example 16, X: "Call me crazy but I don't think Will Smith should be banned from anything that convicted pedophiles are allowed to attend. Fuck you Woody Allen and Roman Polanski. And fuck the Oscars if you don't publicly shame and ban the pedophiles that are proven guilty."

> Example 17, X: "u mean to tell me will smith is banned from the oscars for a decade over one slap meanwhile ezra terrorizes an entire island multiple times with no repercussions??"

Analyzing the social media posts discussing the Academy's statement revealed a few distinct

categories the posts could be divided into; those that focused on reporting on the ban and its implications (such as examples 12, 13 and 15), those debating whether or not Smith should have been banned and comparing his case to other celebrities (examples 15, 16 and 17), and those that wondered whether the ban was an adequate punishment (examples 14 and 15). Overall, unlike with the two other organizations, in the case of the Academy, TikTok posts tended to be more neutral than the posts on X.

5 Discussion

In this chapter, I shall discuss the findings of the analysis and compare them to findings from previous studies. First, the chosen crisis communication strategies will be discussed. The second part then discusses audience reactions on social media.

5.1 Crisis communication strategies

The three organizations had rather different approaches to their crisis communication strategies and their statements. Of the six strategies suggested by Cornelissen (2017), all were found in the statements. All of the organizations used a combination of the different strategies, with Adidas using three of them, the Academy using five and Ticketmaster utilizing all six.

TABLE 5   Organizations and the strategies present in their statements

Organization	Non-existence	Distance	Association	Suffering	Acceptance	Accommodative
Ticketmaster	x	x	x	x	x	x
Adidas		x	x	x		
The Academy		x	x	x	x	x

In their statement, Ticketmaster of course did not outright deny the existence of the crisis, but rather it was implied that since sales records were broken and many excited fans showed up for the sale and were able to score tickets for the tour, the crisis was in fact minimal. This strategy is an extension of the denial tactic, with which the organization attempts to explain why there was no crisis (Cornelissen, 2017, p. 219). Neither Adidas nor the Academy attempted to deny the existence of a crisis.

As for distance strategies, all statements included some aspects of it. All three organizations denied intention, and named an outside culprit for the crisis, be those culprits Kanye West, Will Smith or the fanbase of Swift. Ticketmaster's statement also included elements of downplaying, where the organization aims to convince "stakeholders or the general public that the situation is not that bad in itself" (Cornelissen 2017, p. 219), a tactic that falls under distance strategies and that often walks hand-in-hand with denying the crisis.

Association strategies were also used by all three organizations. Ticketmaster aimed to associate itself with previous positive feats and successes, Adidas highlighted their positive values, and the Academy mentioned the more positive aspects of the Oscars ceremonies. All statements utilized "bolstering", where the aim is to remind both the public and stakeholders of existing positive feats and aspects of an organization (Cornelissen, 2017, p. 219). Ticketmaster and Adidas both also utilized transcendence, a tactic that associates any negative aspects and possible losses resulting from the crisis with a more desirable, higher goal (Cornelissen, 2017, p. 219).

The suffering, or victimization, strategy was also used by Ticketmaster, Adidas, and the Academy. All three organizations highlighted some type of loss in their statements, with Ticketmaster mentioning how the record sales broke parts of their website, Adidas explaining how much the ended collaboration would cost them, and the Academy mentioning how their event was overshadowed by Smith's behavior. The acceptance and accommodation strategies were used by Ticketmaster and the Academy. Both organizations apologized, if not for the whole crisis, at least for some parts of it. Both also promised to take further steps to prevent such crises in the future.

The strategies utilized by Ticketmaster, Adidas and the Academy align closely with Millar and Heath's (2003, p. 7) theory about post-crisis framing. The three organizations aimed to strategically control the narrative surrounding their crises, framing the events in ways that might exonerate the organizations of the greater responsibility for their crises. They also focused on demonstrating that certain actions were taken or would be taken to prevent similar crises in the future, something that Millar and Heath (2003, p. 8) mention as the main focus of crisis communication strategies and post-crisis framing.

As was mentioned during the background chapter, at the core of a crisis the biggest risk lies in the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders. As Diers-Lawson (2020, p. 4) points out, crisis communication should be focused on the stakeholders, which is something that can be seen in the three organizations' statements. They aim to communicate to their

stakeholders that despite the crisis, the organization still stands for everything its stakeholders thought it to stand for.

5.2 Audience reactions on social media

The social media reactions to the statements from Ticketmaster, Adidas and the Academy had some common discursive themes. Most notably, on both platforms, most users acted as information sources, reporting on the crises and the statements. While TikTok posts tended to be more neutral, X posts showed more varied opinions, with some questioning the decisions made and comparing them to other cases (such as in examples 11, 16 and 17).

Many of the posts discussing both Adidas and the Academy's statements focused on reporting on the decisions made by the companies, as well as the possible repercussions of them. Where Adidas and the Academy were not seen as responsible for their crises, Ticketmaster was seen as the cause and culprit for their crisis by most users. Ticketmaster's statement provoked responses that questioned the company's role in the crisis and emphasized corporate responsibility, though some users even framed the event as an impressive feat by Swift's fanbase.

The reactions to Adidas' statement mostly focused on reporting the company's decision to end its collaboration with West, and similarly, discussions surrounding the Academy's statement mainly revolved around reporting the ban on Will Smith from Academy events. Though in the latter case, opinions were more varied, with some users questioning the ban's severity and comparing Smith's case to other celebrities, whereas Adidas' decision was met with less scrutiny.

As was observed in an earlier thesis by Vistbacka (2017, p. 38), social media users tended to act as information sources, filling in the information gaps left by the organizations on both platforms. Even though social media is recognized for its ability to be an effective communication tool in crisis communication and crisis management, as it offers possibilities for fast reaction and direct communication with stakeholders (Eriksson, 2018, p. 539), the organizations did not really utilize it. Rather, the social media posts were made by stakeholders or the general public, and in them the public communicated amongst themselves and informed each other of the events.

Though social media users spreading the statements on behalf of the organizations makes it

possible for the statements to reach a wider audience, I would argue that it gives the organizations a lot less control over how the information is presented. While traditional media is often perceived as more credible, social media platforms like X and TikTok can play a crucial role in secondary crisis communication, especially in engaging diverse groups with different information needs (Eriksson, 2018, p. 537).

Cheng (2018, p. 7) argues that presenting information on social media can lead to fewer negative reactions than relying on just traditional print media, though no aspect of the social media data used in this thesis supported this. However, it should be noted that the amount of data used for this thesis was rather small, thus I would not go denying Cheng's claim based on just this data set.

6 Conclusion

It should be noted that this study was rather limited in its data scope. The amount of data collected and analyzed for this study was small, so no generally applicable conclusions can be drawn from it. However, the study does offer some implications to the role of social media in crisis communication and the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies, which in the future could be studied in a larger scale.

Though research questions 1 and 2 were answered rather effectively by the data, research question 3 would have required a larger data set for a more comprehensive answer. Especially if more clear differences between the two platforms were to be observed. In the end, no clear differences in audience responses between the two platforms could be observed in two of the three cases. The only case in which there was an observable difference was with the social media reactions to the Academy's statement, in which the posts on TikTok were much more neutral than those on X.

The crisis communication strategies utilized by Ticketmaster, Adidas and the Academy showcased a variety of approaches, with each using a combination of the strategies outlined by Cornelissen (2017). In their statements, the three organizations used all six possible strategies to varying degrees, with Ticketmaster's statement having aspects from all of them, Adidas' statement having aspects of three possible strategies, and the Academy's statement using five of the six strategies. These strategies also closely aligned with Millar and Heath's (2003) theory on post-crisis framing, emphasizing the importance of organizations controlling the narratives

surrounding crises, and maintaining stakeholder relationships.

While social media platforms offer plenty of opportunities for fast communication and direct engagement with stakeholders during crises, the three organizations chosen for this study relied on other communication channels, such as traditional media and their own websites. Social media users, however, played an active role in circulating information and engaging in discussions surrounding the crises and the organizations' responses. This is in line with previous research highlighting the role of social media users as information sources during crises (Vistbacka, 2017).

Despite the potential benefits of utilizing social media for crisis communication, two of the three organizations in this study did not use X as a platform to their advantage, and none of the three organizations used TikTok. Instead, social media served as a platform for stakeholders and the public to communicate amongst themselves, often filling in information gaps left by the organizations. While social media may offer opportunities for more positive reactions compared to traditional media (Cheng, 2018), the findings of this study did not fully support this assertion, most likely due to the limited dataset.

In conclusion, while social media platforms like X and TikTok could play a crucial role in engaging diverse stakeholders and filling information gaps during crises, organizations should be mindful of their approach to social media communication to effectively manage crises, and to maintain stakeholder relationships. While traditional media still remains perhaps a more credible information source, organizations cannot afford to ignore the role of social media in engaging more diverse audiences and shaping stakeholder perceptions during times of crisis.

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